

## VITA

Shawn A. Smith

### EDUCATION

- 1990            Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana  
B.S. in Secondary Education and Social Studies
- 1996            Indiana University, Indianapolis, Indiana  
M.S. in Secondary Administration and Supervision
- 2006            Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana  
Ed.S. in Educational Administration
- 2010            Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana  
Ph.D. in Educational Administration

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2008 -            Metropolitan School District of Pike Township, Indianapolis, Indiana  
Director of Student/Community Services
- 2003-2008        Metropolitan School District of Pike Township, Indianapolis, Indiana  
Principal, Pike High School Freshman Center
- 1999-2003        Metropolitan School District of Washington Township, Indianapolis, Indiana  
Principal, Eastwood Middle School
- 1998-1999        Metropolitan School District of Washington Township, Indianapolis, Indiana  
Assistant Principal, Eastwood Middle School
- 1994-1998        Metropolitan School District of Washington Township, Indianapolis, Indiana  
Assistant Principal, Northview Middle School
- 1991-1994        Metropolitan School District of Washington Township, Indianapolis, Indiana  
Social Studies Teacher, Northview Middle School
- 1990-1991        Indianapolis Public Schools, Indianapolis, Indiana  
Social Studies Teacher, John Marshall Junior High School

A STUDY OF HOW PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER  
EDUCATION IN INDIANA ADDRESS RETENTION AND GRADUATION  
RATES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

---

A dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

Shawn A. Smith

December 2010

Keywords: Retention, Graduation Rates, Higher Education, African American Students

## **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Committee Chair: Steve Gruenert, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Todd Whitaker, Ph.D.

Professor, Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundations

Indiana State University

Committee Member: Jason Winkle, Ph.D.

Associate Dean, College of Nursing and Human Health Services

Indiana State University

## ABSTRACT

This primary purpose of this study was to examine practices of Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) of higher education in Indiana that focus on the retention and graduation of African American students. This study was guided by the following research question, are there effective practices found in the K-12 and HBCU literature that can be identified in PWIs in Indiana that positively affect the retention and graduation of African American students?

For this study, a qualitative method was used. A review of the literature on K-12 and HBCUs strategies assisted the researcher in developing interview questions that were used to identify practices in retaining and graduating African American students in PWIs in the Midwest. Ten participants from PWIs participated in the telephone interviews to identify common and /or unique practices as compared to the literature.

Based on the interviews the following themes were identified:

1. Supportive Environment – All attempt to provide supportive environments.
2. Remediation - The ability to remediate and support students in need of academic help.
3. Faculty - Caring faculty members who are committed to teaching.
4. The Presence of a Racially Diverse Staff - An environment that does not shout “White”.

After careful review of the literature and data from this research, it was clear that hiring a caring, diverse staff may be the major difference between HBCUs and PWIs. It must be noted

that differences among PWIs also exist as it relates to the retention and graduation rates of African American students.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express sincere appreciation and gratitude to the many individuals that have assisted me with the completion of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership from Indiana State University.

First, I would like to thank God for his grace allowing me the strength to complete this dissertation. I received a lot of encouragement from numerous educators who believed in me. A special thank you to all of my public school teachers who prepare me for this challenge.

I wish to give thanks to my chairperson, Dr. Steve Gruenert who is a brilliant educator. He challenged me to look beyond the surface. He taught me to challenge research and to reach beyond printed text. I would like to express great appreciation to Dr. Todd Whitaker and Dr. Jason Winkle for their support and contributions to my study. A special thank you to other members of the Educational Leadership Department who gave me feedback on my work, Dr. Mary Howard-Hamilton and Dr. Will Barratt. A very special thank you to Judy Barnes for her help with formatting this document.

The Wednesday Residency cohort will always hold a special place in my heart. I gained a lot of friends in education. The professors must also be commended, Dr. Terry McDaniel and Dr. Robert Watts, thank you for sharing your knowledge. Also, a very special thank you to Dr. Robert Boyd for his wisdom and great stories that inspired my beliefs about leadership.

This dissertation could not have been completed without the support of the Superintendent of the Metropolitan School District of Pike Township, Nathaniel Jones. He has

served as a mentor and friend. His encouragement and guidance gave me strength to complete this study. I must also thank Dr. Rudy Wilson who inspired me to complete a doctoral degree.

My deepest appreciation and love is given to my wife Tabettha, who supported me spiritually and mentally through this long journey. Without her support this would not be possible. A special thank you to my children who gave me strength each day to achieve. Olivia, Maya and Jordan waited patiently many nights until I completed this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother Genice Childs. Thank you for encouraging me to use my talents, you always believed I could complete my dissertation. My family is truly special to me and very supportive.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandparents whose spirits live in me. Your vision and sacrifices have allowed me to achieve at the highest level.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMITTEE MEMBERS .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
DEDICATION .....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Statement of Purpose .....	5
Research Question .....	6
Significance of Study.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	7
Summary and Organization of the Study.....	8
A Review of Related Literature and Research.....	9
The Beginning of the Achievement Gap .....	10
What Works in Counteracting the Achievement Gap in K-12 Schools.....	15
School Culture .....	19
Historically Black Colleges “A History of Achievement” .....	27
Historically Black Colleges Success.....	28
Predominantly White Colleges Success or Failure.....	31
Conclusion .....	34

Research Methods and Procedures .....	35
Research Question .....	35
Research Design.....	35
Data Collection .....	36
Interview Questions .....	36
Data Analysis .....	37
Conclusion .....	38
Findings.....	39
Purpose of the Study .....	39
Why a Qualitative Method? .....	39
Establishing Trustworthiness .....	41
Interviews.....	41
Description of Each Participant and School .....	42
Themes .....	48
Conclusion .....	61
Conclusion .....	62
Summary of Findings.....	62
Supportive Environment.....	64
Remediation .....	67
Faculty.....	69
A Difference between HBCUs and PWIs .....	73
Discussion.....	73
Implications for Higher Education.....	75

Implications for K-12 School Leaders .....	76
My Experience .....	79
Study Limitations.....	80
Recommendations for Future Study .....	81
Concluding Thoughts.....	83
References.....	84
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS.....	92
APPENDIX B: TELEPHONE SURVEY SCRIPT .....	94
APPENDIX C: HBCU BY ENROLLMENT WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATE .....	95
APPENDIX D: HBCU’S BY STATE WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATE .....	98
APPENDIX E: GRADUATION RATE .....	101
APPENDIX F: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW .....	103

## CHAPTER 1

### **Introduction**

The 1980s was the beginning for the National School Reform movement in the United States. This movement was assisted by the 1983 publication *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, a study by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which was established by U.S. Secretary of Education Bell (Jackson, 2001). The study found that education in our country was “inadequate and characterized it as mediocre and noncompetitive” (Jackson, 2001, p. 10). This finding was based on comparing U.S. student achievement to other industrialized countries. As a result the commission made seven recommendations:

1. Increase high school graduation requirements.
2. Increase college graduation rates.
3. Increase testing to measure achievement.
4. Establish more rigorous admissions requirements for college.
5. Spend more time on teaching the basics. If necessary have a longer school day or year.
6. Improve preparation of teachers.
7. Increase accountability of educators and elected officials in school outcomes.

(Jackson, 2010, p. 10)

These recommendations provided the groundwork for high standards and today's focus on increased graduation rates both in high schools and college campuses. African American student achievement lags behind White student achievement in the area of college graduation rates. Specifically, African Americans graduated in 2007 nationally at a rate of 43% as compared to an overall national average of 63% of White students (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009). A deeper search for potential causes along with solutions is necessary regarding the college graduation rates of African American students.

An understanding of the overall context of African American academic achievement is important. Over the last 20 years, African American academic achievement has had mixed results. Although African Americans have increased their overall test results on most standardized tests in high school, there is still an achievement gap as compared to Whites (Jackson, 2001). Some would say the academic increases for African Americans is due to increased federal programs, but overall, African American students still lag far behind White students. The College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) Program is considered one measure of high achievement (Jackson, 2001) in high school. The College Board reported in 1999 that African American students participating in the AP program are less likely to receive college credit than their White counterparts (Jackson, 2001). This lends to the belief that African American students are less likely to enter college as prepared as White students.

The overall racial climate at some colleges and Universities could have an impact on the college graduation rates. The *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* point to the fact that some schools have a nurturing environment (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009). Students may feel unsupported in places that do not somehow address their culture or interest. Some schools have created special orientation and retention programs that are designed to help African

Americans adapt to the culture of their campus. These plans have been used on both Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWI).

The achievement of African Americans has been debated as early as the late 1800s and early 1900s (Morgan, 1995). Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Du Bois were champions for the education of the African American race. They held strong beliefs that education was the only means for uplifting the entire race of people. However, Washington and Du Bois' beliefs were different in how to educate African Americans. Washington believed that the race would be uplifted if African Americans had a strong foundation in the trades and vocational skills (Morgan, 1995). Du Bois on the other hand believed that African Americans would benefit as a race if the top 10% of the race were educated as academic scholars (Morgan, 1995). Du Bois used the term *Talented Tenth* to describe the group of African Americans that would lead the education revolution (Morgan, 1995).

Both men set the education agenda for African Americans for the next 100 years. Today this debate has continued among African American scholars. Both Washington and Du Bois founded colleges and influenced all Black schools, not only at the college level but elementary and secondary schools as well (Morgan, 1995).

Educators have argued that the achievement gap begins before students enter school and increases over the course of time (Levitt & Fryer, 2004). Levitt and Fryer claim that over time the gap widens. Levitt and Fryer also believed that African Americans are losing ground relative to Whites in school because they attend lower-quality schools that are less maintained and managed.

One study found similar concerns with decreasing student achievement of African American students. Ferguson (2002) of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard

University analyzed data collected by the Minority Student Achievement Network in 2002. The study consisted of 15 districts throughout the United States (Ferguson, 2002). In this study, it was found that “White students come to school with more of the educational resources identified with higher academic achievement (books and computers) than their African American peers” (Ferguson, 2002, p. 87).

It was the purpose of this study to look for the practices that may contribute to the retention and graduation of African American students, looking through the lens of K-12 public schools and higher education practices at HBCUs. Many have studied the issue of minority student achievement (Jackson, 2001). Further research is needed to understand the nexus between African Americans’ performance and the retention and graduation. Thompson (2007) introduced a critical approach to studying the African American’s that focused on the questioning and interviewing of teachers and students on their views of achievement tests. It was this researcher’s goal to interview individuals who were directly involved in the struggle to achieve, to determine what practices exist at PWIs that align or differ with those found in the K-12 level and at HBCUs regarding African American retention and graduation.

Graduation and retention rates may contribute to African Americans perceptions of education and how it relates to greater opportunity (Ogbu, 2003). Therefore, it is believed that a family’s beliefs about education have a great impact on student achievement (Ogbu, 2003). It is not that African American families do not value education; it could be there is a greater dependence on school to educate students than in the past. It was found “that culturally African American’s believed that it was the role of the school and teachers to make their children learn and perform successfully” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 118). African American families could be depending

too much on schools and teachers to assist with educating their children. Yet some schools seem to be doing an effective job.

A critical look at HBCUs will find a rich history educating African American students, and until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than 90% of African American students were enrolled in HBCUs (Kim & Conrad, 2006). Today, fewer African American's attend HBCUs due to integration. Yet HBCUs produce over 30% of bachelor degrees awarded out of 103 four-year schools in this country (Kim & Conrad, 2006). A high percentage of African American political leaders, lawyers, doctors, and doctorate recipients have graduated from HBCUs (Gray, 1998). The success of these schools may inform educator and researchers with practices that might work with African American students at all levels of education. It was the hope of this study to identify those practices at all levels that make a difference.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nationwide, the Black student college graduation rate remains low, at 43% (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009). Today, African American enrollment in higher education is at an all time high. Although African American attendance is at an all time high, there is still a 20-point gap in graduation as compared to Whites at 63% (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009). This gap has enormous economic and societal implications. Houston best described the importance of educating African Americans as follows, "Without education, there is no hope for our people and without hope, our future is lost," (as cited in The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009, p. 1).

### **Statement of Purpose**

While HBCUs represent only 3% of all American colleges and Universities and enroll only 14% of all African American college students, they have produced the following:

1. 70% of all African American dentist and physicians.
2. 50% of all African American engineers.
3. 50% of all African American public school teachers.
4. 35% of all African American attorneys. (Jackson, 2001, p. 25)

In light of this success record, this study sought to examine current practices at HBCUs regarding retaining and graduating African American students, as found in the literature, and compare those findings to practices reported at PWIs. Along with HBCU practices, this study included those practices found at the K-12 level as that information also seemed relevant to apply to this inquiry.

This study sought to identify practices that may be successful in retaining and graduating African Americans from PWIs. Educators across the country are searching for ways to work with African American students to improve their college success rates. The implications of the findings from this study are addressed in Chapter 5.

The disparity of graduation rates is one of the greatest challenges facing all colleges and Universities. Educators need better tools to work successfully with this growing student population. Educators must challenge the long term societal norm of low graduation rates from African American students. Hopefully this study can benefit educators in their quest to close the college graduation rate between White and African American students.

### **Research Question**

This study was guided by the following research question.

1. Are there practices found in the K-12 and HBCU literature that can be identified in PWIs in Indiana designed to improve the retention and graduation of African American students?

## **Significance of Study**

Today most educators are inundated with a view of African American students and the urban communities in which they live that emphasizes a deficit paradigm, placing blame for urban school failures with students, their families and their culture (Thompson, 2007). This study is significant because it sought to minimize the deficit paradigm by finding specific practices that work with increasing African American retention and graduation.

It is important to understand that in the last 20 years, the college enrollment rates of African Americans have steadily increased (The Education Trust, 2003). However, African American college completion rates have not increased at the same pace, and a gap in college attainment remains (The Education Trust, 2003). Ultimately the practices identified in this study could contribute not only to college but to all schools that educate African Americans across the country.

## **Definition of Terms**

To provide consistency and assist with understanding this study, the following terms and definitions apply to this research:

*Achievement gap* is a term used to identify the consistent difference of academic performance between African Americans and Whites in America, whereas Whites tend to outperform African Americans.

*Retention* is a term used in K-12 schools as a measure of how many students matriculate from ninth-grade to graduation. In higher education the term is more specific in that there are measures for each year.

*Graduation* is a term that refers to students who have completed all requirements and have received a diploma or degree. High schools tend to look at four-year completion rates, higher education tends to look at the rates from a six-year perspective.

*Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (HBCUs) are higher education institutions specifically established to educate African Americans.

*Predominantly White Institutions* (PWI) are colleges or Universities where the student population is primarily White.

### **Summary and Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 provided an introduction and overview of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of current and past literature regarding K-12 public schools, HBCUs, and PWIs. Chapter 3 describes the methods that were used to determine practices used at PWIs. Chapter 4 provides the findings of this study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion along with implications.

## CHAPTER 2

### **A Review of Related Literature and Research**

HBCUs have played a major role in educating African American students in large numbers, producing the majority of scholars and Black professionals. The search to discover what is working in HBCUs could be used as a model for improving the practices of PWIs across America that are challenged with educating African American students. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of African American educational success in the K-12 setting and the HBCU impact on retention and graduation rates in higher education.

The problem of the African American student achievement gap, which persists as a national problem, continues in college and universities but some institutions of higher education are finding a way of overcoming the gap, which has an impact on retaining and graduating African American students. As Fischer (2007) wrote in her article about HBCUs success, the schools "...try to surround students with the support they need. There is no excuse. Failure is not an option" (p. 1). While the original purpose of this study was to look at HBCU practices, it was deemed important to review literature that represents the K-12 context as well, as this is where many strategies have been introduced. We must try to understand the context of how students are prepared for college at the K-12 level to gain context for the higher education setting.

## **The Beginning of the Achievement Gap**

Today most research focuses on the achievement gap between African American and White student achievement on standardized tests in public schools. Nationwide, educators are asking themselves why a significant gap between Whites and African Americans in school achievement exists. The focus on the achievement gap has recently increased due to the federal legislation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act which requires schools to report data by ethnic subgroups on standardized tests. The following studies report on the impact of the achievement gap and some inquiry to potential solutions. Denbo's (2002a) research uncovered that unequal funding and lack of comparable resources had an impact on student achievement. In addition the inaccurate and misuse of assessments in determining the success of African American students did as well. African American students are taught by less qualified and less experienced teachers which impacts student academic success and graduation rates. The lack of a rigorous school curriculum and lower teacher expectations also contributed to the low graduation rates.

Denbo (2002b) argued that these institutional practices discourage achievement of African American students. Unequal funding and lack of comparable resources has been an argument since 1954 with the *Brown vs. Board of Education* landmark court order that integrated United States schools. While funding is a major issue in schools throughout the country, urban districts spends more per student than other districts. For example, in Indiana, the Gary School Corporation (GSC) has the fifth highest teachers' salaries in the state, according to the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE). In addition GSC has the fifth highest per public expenditures, yet has some of the lowest student achievement in the state. Funding is a major issue but it must be noted that money may not solve many problems without caring adults (IDOE, 2008a).

Inaccurate and misused assessments as well as standardized assessments do not provide a complete picture of student performances, particularly for those students whose knowledge and abilities are not accurately measured by a test (Denbo, 2002b). The achievement gap could be created by assessments that are used to track students. Denbo argued that due to tracking, African American students are channeled into lower performance tracks, therefore limiting their ability to take higher-level courses, which creates an achievement gap. Denbo's point is made all the more tragic given the fact that the majority of African American students are taught by less-qualified and experienced teachers. Many poor urban and rural schools have trouble finding qualified teachers to teach African American students. In addition, a decreasing number of African American educators and administrators are teaching and/or managing public schools (Williams, 2002).

Students in schools with large numbers of low-income students and students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds are taught through curricula that are geared to 'slow' learners and are repetitious and boring, based on the presumed lesser abilities of these students (Denbo, 2002a). In addition, students tend to take fewer and less rigorous academic courses and tend to receive water-downed instruction. African American students tracked into lower groups and special education programs receive dumbed-down curricula and do not have access to the curriculum and instruction that supports high achievement that leads to on-time graduation (Denbo).

Low expectations and less challenging courses seem to have contributed to the achievement gap. In addition, a higher percentage of African American students are being retained which leads to a higher dropout rate (Thompson, 2002). Denbo argued that expulsions and suspensions have contributed to the achievement gap. Nationally, African American made

up about 17% of all students in 1998-99, but accounted for 33% of all students suspended (Denbo, 2002a). Lost instruction has a great impact on African American students and increasing the achievement gap.

Levitt and Fryer's (2004) research in the area of African American achievement claims that African American students scored one standard deviation below White students on standardized tests. In their study, Levitt and Fryer studied student test scores using a control group of students over a five-year period. Their research found that when entering kindergarten, African American students had similar test scores to White students. However, over the five-year period, test scores widened significantly. In addition, the study presented a need for educators to focus on the lack of resources provided to African American students. According to Levitt and Fryer, African American school facilities are poor compared to White schools. A major theme of their research was that African American achievement decreases (i.e., the gap widens) the longer an African American student is in school, relative to non-minority students.

While some researchers focused on standardize test scores, Ferguson (2002) focused on encouragement and its influence on student achievement in schools. Ferguson argued that resources (i.e. books and computers), do very little to boost achievement among African American and Hispanic students. Ferguson's goal was to provide teachers with a different approach needed to work with minority students. He claimed that African American students benefit from teachers' encouragement as a motivating effort (Ferguson, 2002). Ferguson further claimed that teachers' behaviors in the classroom affect academic performance. He pointed to three significant behaviors that could help close the achievement gap:

1. Because students value and respond to encouragement, teachers need to provide it routinely.

2. Because there are observable racial and ethnic group gaps in standardized achievement test scores and self-reported differences in comprehension of the content and lessons, schools should identify and respond to specific skills and knowledge deficit problems of particular groups.
3. Schools need to provide more hands-on learning experiences because of student differences in advantages due to their family background. (Ferguson, 2002, p. 3)

Ferguson confirmed the importance of studying what works with African American students and the need to find solutions to the educational achievement gap.

McMillian (2002) took the achievement gap argument to a new level. She argued that in order to improve the achievement gap one must pay special attention to African American male achievement and reframe the academic achievement gap as a treatment gap. Engagement studies suggest that African American students and African American boys are susceptible to academic disengagement (McMillian, 2002). Specifically, this research suggested that education professionals will ‘stereotype about ability’, and are partly responsible for the disengagement and lagging achievement of African American male students (McMillian, 2002). In a study of 452 fourth through sixth grade students, McMillan studied popular boys who were labeled by their peers as tough or model. Peers identified model boys as cool, athletic, and unaggressive; peers identified tough boys as popular, aggressive, and physically competent. Teachers evaluated model boys as being more academic than were the tough boys. McMillan found that African American boys disproportionately nominated tough boys as popular, especially when the respondents were a numerical minority in the classroom.

The presence of an achievement gap notwithstanding, academic achievement for African Americans has improved significantly in recent decades as measured by elementary and

secondary school performance, standardized test scores, and higher education degree attainment (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 1999). But, according to these data, the actual ethnic achievement gap has improved only slightly. A deeper look at data revealed that African American students from high-income and well-educated families tend to have lower Advanced Placement scores than their European-American and Asian-American counterparts (McMillian, 2002). African American students drop out of college at substantially higher rates than European Americans (McMillan, 2002). Steele and Aronson (1995) noted that 18-33% of African American students with SAT scores of 1400 or above leave colleges early, but only 2-11% of European American students drop out.

McMillian (2002) challenged researchers and educators to confront the achievement gap and gave specific recommendations. First, she suggested as a means to improve achievement among African American students, education professions must pay special attention to African American male achievement (McMillian, 2002). Secondly, to improve African American achievement, educational professionals cannot frame African American achievement within the context of the racial gap (McMillian, 2002). Thirdly, focus must be placed on other ways of measuring student achievement other than standardized test scores.

In Montgomery County, Maryland, a school tried to address the achievement gap with retrained principals and teachers, increased class time, and by hiring more teachers to reduce class size. As a result, the proportion of African American second graders who were reading at grade level rose from 45% to 68% between February and June of 1999, narrowing the gap between Black and White reading levels from 17 percentage points to 10 in five months (Viadero, 2000).

## **What Works in Counteracting the Achievement Gap in K-12 Schools**

The literature regarding K-12 educational practices is robust. Much has been written on the subject of counteracting the achievement gap. This section addresses the findings of authors writing on the subject of what works with African American students.

One stream of research focuses on the belief system of African Americans as it relates to education. A study by Ogbu (2003) found an impact of African American beliefs related to teachers' behaviors and student learning. In Ogbu's work, he argued that African American students do not perceive schooling to be a preparation for future success in the job market. He continued to argue that they do not understand how their academic performance at one level affects the courses they will be able to take at a higher level of schooling. In this study, Ogbu focused on two areas significant to African Americans; a) race relations and schooling and, b) identity and culture. Ogbu found that African Americans believed that the achievement gap was the result of racism.

This is significant when researching African American as groups. As a group, they have strong feelings regarding race that could affect success. Secondly, this study found that African American students' disengaged attitudes and behaviors affected student achievement. The belief among African American students was that earning good grades could be perceived by the collective group as "acting White" (Ogbu, 2003, p. 5). He provided specific recommendations that could be significant to counteract this perception. They are as follows:

1. To increase African American students' academic orientation and performance, communities need to provide supplementary education programs using the resources from for-profit and non-profit community-based organizations to create a parallel educational system.

2. The community needs to provide academically successful role models, publicly recognize achievement, and encourage schools to infuse multicultural perspectives into the academic curriculum to counter student's idea that to achieve is to act White and to help students develop a sound self-concept and identity.
3. The schools need to develop strategies to help parents take a greater role in the academic life of their children, and to help them learn to be academically self-motivated and persistent.
4. Students need help to learn how to distinguish between short-term and long-term educational goals. They should also help students to develop study habits and study skills and to resist anti-academic peer pressure.
5. Teachers need to recognize that their expectations have an effect on their students' concept of themselves as learners and achievers and the internalization of negative or positive beliefs about their intelligence.
6. Schools need to provide parents information on tracking practices, and about differences between honors and Advanced Placement classes, regular classroom placement, and remedial classes.
7. Parents also need to help in working with teachers to monitor and effectively enhance their children's academic progress. (Ogbu, 2003, p. 4)

Stewart (2007) published research that focused on the effects of individual and school structural effects on African American high school students' academic achievement. Stewart wrote that school attachment and school commitment were significantly associated with academic achievement which suggests that as students feel a sense of attachment and show signs of commitment to school and schoolwork, it results in a higher grade point average (GPA).

Stewart's research found that African American students who care about and feel supported by their teachers and friends are also more likely to develop affective ties to school and display socially acceptable behavior.

Stewart (2007) further pointed to peer association as significantly associated with academic achievement. Stewart claimed that as adolescents associate with friends who value education and are committed to academic pursuits, they create attachments to school and conform to the ideals associated with it. Further, parents' discussions were found to be significantly associated with academic achievement. These are clear examples of support that lead to increased students achievement.

In a Texas A&M University study of the best programs for educating African Americans in their state, researchers found that solid, consistent implementation (implementation fidelity) of curricular programs were more important than the programs themselves (Denbo, 2002a). Denbo clarified that a plan must be developed to improved African American achievement. In addition, researchers noted that long-term leadership that focused on quality with high expectations of both teachers and students made a difference. Denbo (2002a) stated, "At the low end, districts give up and blame the environment" (p. 56). Viadero (2000) summed up excellence for a school district, "You never see blame in a good district. Their attitude is we can teach anybody to learn" (p. 83). The attitude of school personnel is critical to the success of African American students, or any students. If the staff does not really care about students, retention rates may suffer.

Solving the problems of poor schools must be a national priority. America's goal of competitiveness is dependent on how we solve the problem of poor schools. According to Levin (as cited in Boyd, 1991), "estimates derived from the various demographic analyses suggest that

upwards of 30% of students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade are educationally disadvantaged or at risk” (p. 332). Most of the problems are found in our big cities in inner-city schools. Boyd argued that we too often focus on what can be done to improve schools and neglect vital out-of-school factors that influence outcomes of schooling. Families must be included in the school achievement process. Truly effective schools capable of helping the most disadvantaged can flourish only in the context of more socially effective communities and more effective society.

A study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation entitled *The Silent Epidemic Perspectives of High School Dropouts* addressed the problem with detailed strategies and practices. This study used a unique practice of interviewing young people aged 16 to 25 who identified themselves as high school drops in 25 locations throughout the United States (Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006). This study interviewed over 467 ethnically diverse young adults. This study provided schools across the country with a framework of what is needed to address the retention and graduation of students.

The study found what might help students stay in school based on the interviews. These items were:

1. Improve teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging and enhance the connection between school and work.
2. Improve instruction and access to supports for struggling students.
3. Build a school climate that fosters academics.
4. Ensure that students have strong relationships with at least one adult in the school.
5. Improve the communication between parents and schools. (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p.12-13)

This list serves as a potential framework for schools across the country. Nationally, research puts the graduation rate of high school students between 68% and 71%, which means that almost one-third of all public school students in American fail to graduate (Swanson, 2004). The rate for African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans declines to about 50%. This gap increases the dilemma for K-12 schools on how to address the graduation issue. As a result a rush of studies and school reforms have guided some changes. There are studies that suggest smaller schools are more likely to promote the engagement of both students and staff that is reducing the dropout rate (Rumberger, 1995). There is also a body of literature that reveals small learning communities and interdisciplinary teaming are associated with lower dropout rates (Kerr & Legters, 2004; Dufour, 2007).

We cannot avoid the need for quality teachers. Studies have shown that if students perceive their teachers to be of a higher quality there is a lower likelihood that the students will drop out (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). Schools today focus on improving the quality of teachers. New reforms allowing better preparation of teachers are connecting K-12 schools to higher education. Programs that allow students in college to visit classrooms more frequently are found all over the country. The connection between higher education and K-12 is clearly found in the area of retention and graduation of students. Each level is faced with the dilemma of how to graduate a more diverse student population. Research is needed in this area to solve the dilemma.

### **School Culture**

School culture is a concept that takes the educational leadership discussions to a new level. The idea that the values and beliefs of the employees can affect the performance of the

students is a complex undertaking. This section of the review looks at the *soft* areas of educational practice, areas difficult to measure.

According to Denbo (2002a) one of the still prevalent underlying erroneous and harmful beliefs among both teachers and students in today's school is that African American children come to school with cultural deficits. Denbo further argued that "to create environments that support the high achievement of African American students, schools must transform their cultures in ways that results in the elimination of harmful institutional practices" (p. 55). The school must create a school culture that believes that African American students like all other student can achieve. Denbo points out that although student diversity in the United States is increasing, diversity within the ranks of the teaching workforce is declining.

Approximately 95% of the teachers in the state of Indiana are White (IDOE, 2008b). It will be difficult for Whites to truly understand African American without assistance. Bernard (1991) wrote "To cultivate success and achievement among African American students in these circumstances, educators must begin to look beyond risk factors and learn how they can create schools and classrooms that help students gain 'resilience' to succeed" (p. 146). He further outlined several points that are needed in building a strong school culture. Those points are:

1. Promote close bonds with students.
2. Value and encourage education.
3. Use high-warmth, low criticism style of interaction.
4. Set and enforce clear boundaries (rules, norms, and laws).
5. Encourage supportive relationships with many caring others.
6. Promote sharing of responsibilities, service to others, 'required helpfulness.'

7. Provide access to resources for meeting basic needs of housing, nutrition, employment, health care, and recreation.
8. Set high and realistic expectations for success.
9. Encourage goal setting and mastery.
10. Encourage development of pro-social values and life skills.
11. Provide opportunities for leadership, decision making, and other meaningful ways to participate.
12. Support the unique talents of each individual. (p. 146)

The literature also points to the importance of school administrators in transforming school culture (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Denbo (2002b) argued that teachers must be encouraged to assume leadership roles. In order for the school culture to work for all students the teachers must take ownership of the achievement of all students, including African American students. Ownership for the culture must not only be taught to students but to teachers (Denbo, 2002b). Transforming a school culture requires a collective vision for not only improving achievement of all students but also closing the achievement gap between groups of students (Denbo, 2002b).

Improving achievement of African American students needs a strong culture that goes beyond just words but impacts actions. Williams (2002) promoted this belief in her study of practices that are effective in working with African American students. In her research, Williams found practices that work with low income children of color. Williams also found that professional development of teachers must go beyond superficial words that all students can learn, to more specific actions. She argued that professional development must be more than words but teachers must develop specific actions that promote excellence. This is hard work to truly mean that students must achieve with no-excuses. She pointed to “school environments

that promote success and teachers who are seeking new strategies that work with African American students. Learning is a part of the school culture, teachers share and talk about the need for change to assist students” (p. 77).

Ortman and Thandiwe (2000) clearly challenged current literature in education when they stated, “We already know more than enough to successfully educate all students. The question is whether we want to teach all students” (p. 235). If middle schools are the crucial crossroads between academic success and failure, high school often becomes the dead end (Ortman & Thandiwe, 2000). Even African American students with socioeconomic advantages that would seemingly exclude them from the *at-risk* category who attend otherwise effective high schools frequently do not do as well academically as their White and Asian peers (Ortman & Thandiwe, 2000). The literature clearly points to the creation of smaller learning communities within bigger schools and yet some are not getting it right (Dufour, 2007). High schools tend to be large and impersonal. African American students could benefit from a more personalized environment. For poor children, a small school, in and of itself, seems to mitigate the effects of poverty on test scores by 20-70% (Mitchell, 2000). Mitchell (2000) pointed to Central Park and the Urban Academy, two small public high schools in two of New York City’s poorest areas that provided dramatic evidence for improving achievement. These schools create ‘schools within a school’ that center on a specific career interest.

Secondly, support systems must be in place within the schools. Ortman and Thandiwe (2000) pointed to the importance of addressing basic human needs, providing students with opportunities for meaningful relationships with caring adults and groups of peers and fostering connections between schools, families and the community. At the Urban Academy High School in New York City, 39% of its students are African American, yet 97% of its graduates pursue

post secondary education (Ortman & Thandiwe, 2000). The John Dewey High School in Brooklyn, New York has 94% of it African American students attending continuing a post secondary education (Ortman & Thandiwe, 2000). It is clear that African American students can achieve, but it is important that educators go beyond just reviewing data and putting programs into action. It is important to find adults who care for students.

The literature also addresses the concept of teaching of African American students. There is a great deal that can be done to improve the quality of teaching of African American students. Darling-Hammond (1999) presented an agenda that explained how school boards, superintendents, governors, state legislators, state boards of education, and state educational agencies can improve the quality of teaching in schools with African American. These practices are:

1. End the practice of assigning the most inexperienced teachers to teach the most disadvantaged students with the heavier loads and the fewest supports.
2. Place beginning teachers with mentors and give them reduced loads.
3. End the practice of hiring under-qualified teachers and placing teachers outside their field.
4. Work with universities to create pathways into teaching for paraprofessionals and mid-careers teachers and to create internships and student teaching assignments that provide students a cultural immersion experience that has adequate and appropriate supervision by the most successful teachers working with children of color. (p. 74)

Creating a school that supports the high achievement of African American students requires cultural transformations. Schools that are successful match teachers to students needs (Denbo, 2002a). The teacher's abilities to meet student need can be enhanced by the kind of

professional development that assist teachers to effectively use a student's cultural identity to support his or her cognitive and affective growth. The literature confirms the importance of recruiting and hiring a highly qualified, culturally competent, and diverse teaching staff (Denbo, 2002a).

The transformation of school culture requires administrators to encourage teachers to assume leadership roles (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Denbo, 2002a). Administrators and teachers must challenge their assumptions about themselves, their students and their schools. Denbo argued that teachers, principals and parents must advocate for African American students by helping them to believe in themselves. The culture of a school is a significant factor in the success of African American students.

Ladson-Billings (1995) studied excellent teachers of African American students. She found that African American students benefit from culturally relevant pedagogy. She defined cultural pedagogy as cultural relevant teaching that focuses on three areas: a) students must experience academic success, b) students must develop and maintain cultural competence, and c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order.

Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that African American academic skills must be developed to improve academic success. In one class, a teacher focused a great deal of positive attention toward African American boys rather than allowing the boys to influence their peers in negative ways. The teacher challenged the boys to demonstrate academic power by drawing on issues and ideas they found meaningful. The boys began to take on academic leadership; the other students saw this as a positive trait and developed similar behavior. Challenging the students to learn will

develop the skills of African American students. Failure to challenge the student leads to increasing the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally relevant teaching requires that students maintain some cultural integrity as well as academic excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning. Ladson-Billings described a powerful example such as a White teacher who would create an artist or draftsman in-residence program so that her students could learn from each other's parents and also to affirm cultural knowledge. This is a teacher who can clearly develop a great rapport with her students and parents but most importantly validate the cultural and greatest of these families.

The critical consciousness concept must be taught to students. If schools are about preparing students for active citizenship, what better citizenship tool than the ability to critically analyze the society (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Rather than giving facts, teach students how to challenge society norms. Ladson-Billings shared how groups of African American middle school students were involved in community problem solving. This type of teaching allowed the students to become part of learning. She argued that teachers must demonstrate a passion about what they are teaching by showing enthusiasm. Teachers that practice academic success for all students, cultural competence and critical consciousness, Ladson-Billings believed, will become good teachers. Good teachers as she described, are critical to the success of African American students.

To reveal what works best with increasing African American student achievement actually asking students is appropriate. Thompson (2002) studied 271 California students about their experiences in school. She concluded that most of the students in the study did not express contempt for their teachers or for the educational system. The African American students

wanted more from the educational system, their teachers, and the curriculum. Thompson gave specific recommendations to teachers based on the research of the students. These recommendations were:

1. Get to know your students on a personal basis.
2. Have high expectations for all students.
3. Make the curriculum relevant to students.
4. Use clear comprehensible communication.
5. Teach students the “hidden rules” of mainstream society.
6. Create a collaborative versus competitive classroom.
7. Find students’ gifts and talents.
8. Educate yourself about African American culture and use this knowledge to design lesson plans.
9. Be willing to offer extra assistance to students.
10. Continue professional development
11. Make coursework interesting by inviting students to assist you and make suggestions as you design lessons.
12. Give students opportunities to do hands-on activities.
13. Use multicultural texts in your curriculum and stock your classroom library with a diverse selection of books.
14. Find ways to convince African American parents that you value their input and that they are welcome in your classroom.
15. Strengthen your own reading, writing and math skills. ( p. 167)

## **Historically Black Colleges “A History of Achievement”**

Historically, 75% of the HBCUs currently open were established between 1865 and 1899 (Jackson, 2001). Over 90% were founded in the southern states. Many were founded for technical and industrial training. But over the year liberal arts education became a part of many school's curriculum. By 1991, HBCUs had produced 70% of all African Americans holding a baccalaureate degree (Jackson, 2001). By 1995, 60% of African Americans with a doctorate received their baccalaureate degree from an HBCU (Jackson, 2001). The HBCUs have traditionally created environments that are supportive and free of racial tension. This could be the reason for the success of many African Americans that attend these campuses.

The basic definition of an HBCU is a college or University specifically established to educate African Americans (Jackson, 2001). Eighty-nine HBCUs offer four-year degrees or higher in the United States. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (1991) reported that since their inception, HBCUs have:

1. Produced more than 80% of all degrees conferred to African Americans in medicine and dentistry. The two institutions that conferred these degrees were Howard University and Meharry Medical College. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 20% of the medical and dentistry degrees awarded to African Americans were from these two institutions.
2. Provided undergraduate training for three-fourths of all African Americans holding a doctorate degree, three-fourths of all Black officers in the armed forces, and four-fifths of all Black federal judges.
3. Led in institutions awarding baccalaureate degrees to Black students in the life sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

4. Continued to rank high in terms of the proportion of graduates who pursue and complete graduate and professional training.
5. Accounted for 50% of Black faculty in PWIs. (p. 3)

HBCUs have a higher student retention rate than PWIs (Constantine, 1994). The high retention rate generally is attributed to two factors; a supportive environment and the readiness of HBCUs to provide remediation for students who need it. Constantine conducted a study of the long term wage level of African Americans who received their baccalaureate degrees during the 1970s. The researcher found that students who attended HBCUs in the 1970s apparently later enjoyed substantially higher value added to wages than Black students who attended PWIs. This study was significant to the overall history of HBCUs in educating African Americans. This historical context gives the foundation of what HBCUs have accomplished since 1865.

### **Historically Black Colleges Success**

Research suggests that HBCUs provide campus environments designed to nurture Black students (Bennett & Xie, 2003). Many believe that African American students benefit at HBCUs because there are African American faculty there. According to the 2004 *Fall Staff Survey* of the National Center for Education Statistics, 57.9% of the full-time faculty at HBCUs in fall 2003 were African American (Hubbard, 2006). HBCUs practice a pedagogy of success, instilling in their students an intellectual toughness that in the words of a well-known spiritualist, invest them with the determination not to “let nobody turn me ‘round” (p. 27).

Hubbard (2006) focused on significant successes of student achievement at HBCUs. Hubbard described how HBCUs enroll 28% of all African American students in higher education and educate 40% of all Black Americans who earn doctorates or first professional degrees. Hubbard affirmed the energy African American faculty at Black colleges put into developing

students. This article did not say that African Americans should only teach African Americans but that the HBCU faculty members have great pride in their schools. In addition, the faculty should go beyond the minimum to assist each student with career paths (Hubbard, 2006).

Expanding on the success of Black colleges was also researched by Bennett and Xie (2003). Their work pointed out that HBCUs' ability to retain and graduate Black students must be noted. Yet, about 30% of BA degrees awarded to African Americans annually are produced by the 89 HBCUs (Bennett & Xie, 2003). These schools have a higher graduation rate of African American students than predominantly White colleges (Bennett & Xie, 2003). Bennett and Xie argued that the history, positive campus environment and opportunities attract and maintain African American students. Unfortunately, their study found it difficult to isolate exact reasons for this success. However, they stated that relationships between students and faculty members have an impact on student achievement at HBCUs. HBCUs seem to make up for what they lack in resources by providing a more collegial and supportive learning environment for students. Allen (1992), Ross (1998), and Wells-Lawson (1994) reported that African American students have more frequent and meaningful interactions with African American and White faculty at HBCUs.

In terms of retention and graduation from college, Cross and Astin (1981) and Pascarella, Smart, Ethington, and Nettles (1987) reported that attending HBCUs is positively associated with students' remaining in college and earning a bachelor's degree. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of High School Class of 1972, Ehrenberg and Rothstein (1993) also found that Black students who attended HBCUs were more likely than Black students at PWIs to receive a bachelor's degree.

Fischer (2007) pointed to the importance HBCUs place on student-teacher relationships. In her research, Fischer described the work at Fisk University, an HBCU, which put in place a mandatory program to support first generation students. The result of the program is that Fisk's graduation rate is more than 10% above the national average of four-year institutions. Significant to this study is that the school placed great pride in faculty members mentoring students.

Kim and Conrad's (2006) research provided findings that student-faculty contact is correlated to student's academic growth at HBCUs. They argued that the student-teacher relationship at these schools played a significant part in the success of students. This study used a control group of 900 students and tracked their success from high school to graduation, 63% of which graduated.

HBCUs have displayed success with African American students. An example of success is Wilberforce University, a small rural HBCU in Ohio, founded in 1863. Roach (2006) pointed out that "it's not unusual to see the college president winding his way through campus buildings, dispensing hugs and high-fives, teasing some students, and urging others to make appointments with him to discuss a serious matter" (p. 1). One student described that the personal caring spirit of faculty and other administrators has encouraged his own intellectual and social growth while also easing the transition from California to life in isolated, rural Ohio (Roach, 2006). Kinzie (as cited in Kamara, 2007), associate director of postsecondary research at the National Survey of Student Engagement, stated that "research shows that students who attend an HBCU are more engaged with their faculty, community and giving back, not necessarily in monetary ways but through deeper investment" (p. 2).

The literature is clear that Black colleges provide more than an education to its students. HBCUs have striven to provide a positive and comfortable campus culture for minority students, within a caring environment that ensures students success in completing four-year degrees (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2006). A caring environment is a key concept that must be studied. A K-12 study complemented this finding. Thompson's (2002) study interviewed 271 African American high school students and concluded that the best teachers gave students much more than knowledge. The author pointed to several key factors - teachers wanted the students to succeed, went out of their way to be helpful, had high expectations, pushed students to excel, and made the course work fun and interesting. It seems some K-12 settings and HBCUs have built their institutions around creating environments where there is caring, along with high expectations.

HBCUs recognize the importance of meeting student's needs and interests and responding positively in order to lead students toward self-actualization (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2006). Demaris and Kritsonis (2006) believed that the classroom experiences, faculty and student interactions, and intellectual growth experiences are powerful predictors of student commitment and success.

### **Predominantly White Colleges Success or Failure**

As mentioned earlier, only 28% of African Americans attend HBCUs. The overwhelming majority of African Americans attend PWIs in the United States. In other words, the 72% of African Americans attend institutions with majority White students (Hubbard, 2006). PWIs are faced with the same challenge of graduating African American students as their HBCU counterparts. Yet, at PWIs, 57% of White students finished their degrees, compared to 39% of African Americans in 2005.

Many PWIs have developed programs to specifically increase the graduation and retention rate of African American students. The literature points to fewer than half of African American students who enroll in college graduate from four-year institutions within six years, according to the report *Graduation Rate Watch: Making Minority Student Success a Priority* (Graves, 2008). In 2000, of the roughly 120,000 Black students attending four-year institutions as full-time freshman, half were enrolled in an institution that graduated fewer than 40% of its Black students, and 1 in 10 attended an institution with an African American graduation rate below 20% (Graves, 2008).

PWIs that focus on the social, academic support, and financial support are experiencing success in retaining and graduating African American students. As more focus on the retention and graduation of all students, PWIs have committed resources to assist all students. These increases in resources are benefiting African Americans who typically come from poor and first generation families. Florida State University has a comprehensive support program for African American students who are low-income and first-generation college students. The program is called CARE, the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (Graves, 2008). Most programs across the country are concerned with increasing enrollments of African American students, but the CARE program is focused on what happens to students once they arrive on campus. Florida State recognizes that outreach to African American students begins early. The CARE program begins in middle and high school by connecting University resources to identified students by first meeting with parents to provide information and resources on college admissions. Secondly once the students are accepted and attend the university, the program provides a tutorial lab that students are required to attend, at least eight hours per week, if their grades slip. The program also requires African American students to take math courses in

smaller sections in order to receive more individualized attention. This program does not come without costs, however. Florida State has committed substantial financial resources to graduating African American students.

The University of Maryland put in place an intensive program to raise the graduation rates of African Americans. The university put in place smaller classes for freshman versus the traditional large lecture classes for underclassmen (Leonhardt, 2009). The University of Maryland also understood the importance of financial aid for African Americans along with low income students by putting in place a program which focuses on maximizing aid to these students.

The University of North Carolina focused on personal attention to increase African American graduation rates. The University addressed: “(a) involvement with faculty and academic departments, (b) individual attention, (c) freshman seminar, (d) required liberal arts courses, and (e) mandatory attendance” (Santovec, 2004, p. 24). North Carolina focused on increasing its African American graduation rates which increased to 54% in four years. The individual attention and support from faculty mentors and required attendance in classes expresses a commitment from the University. Many PWIs are realizing the need to support African American students beyond just admittance to the University.

Some PWIs are not just focused on test scores but are concerned with how to improve the campus environment of its students. Are PWIs learning from HBCUs? This could be the case but some PWIs are having success graduating and retaining African American students while others seem to struggle. This study seeks to explore that phenomenon.

**Conclusion**

Schools across America seem more focused on test scores, but if they focus on the student and their needs, increased achievement may take care of itself. Ignoring this aspect of the student has contributed to graduation rates of African American students below their White counterparts. What do K-12 schools and HBCUs do to get better retention and graduation rates? As mentioned previously, the teaching and learning environment must be nurturing. HBCUs focus on nurturing students, but they have also accomplished more in other areas (Henderson & Kristonis, 2007).

There is an enormous amount of literature on the achievement gap. However, research is not as strong regarding institutions that have been successful in retaining and graduating African American students. The practices of these institutions could serve as a template for all schools that are fighting the challenge of increasing achievement among all African Americans.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Research Methods and Procedures**

This study reviewed the literature on the strategies used by K-12 public schools and HBCUs that focus on the retention and graduation of African American students. The review also examined practices, and then compared those with practices of Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) of higher education in Indiana. In this chapter, the research methodology is presented.

#### **Research Question**

This study was guided by the following research question.

1. Are there effective practices found in the K-12 and HBCU literature that can be identified in PWIs in Indiana designed to improve the retention and graduation rates of African American students?

#### **Research Design**

For this study, the researcher used a qualitative method. A review of the literature on strategies used by successful K-12 public schools and HBCUs assisted the researcher in developing interview questions that were used to identify practices in PWIs regarding the retention and graduation rates of African American students in higher education settings in the United States. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) suggested participants from across the state of Indiana in PWIs should be invited to participate in phone interviews to potentially identify

common and unique practices as compared to the literature on K-12 and HBCU student success practices.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher chose a qualitative approach to collect and analyze data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A survey could have been developed to assess the degree to which each institution uses a particular strategy, however that method would not have provided the depth of understanding for how these strategies are used or the degree to which they are engaged by the community. To gather information, the researcher utilized a telephone interview approach to data collection in order to gain a better understanding of the problem and successful practices (Bogdan & Billken, 1982).

Participants from PWIs in Indiana were invited to participate in the study. The questions were asked of the chief Academic Affairs officer on each campus. If this individual was not available an attempt was made to contact an academic deans or academic services staff member given their role in understanding the academic strengths and weaknesses of their college and /or university.

### **Interview Questions**

The interview questions were used to gain knowledge concerning what practices accounted for student retention and graduation at PWIs and to open a conversation regarding the effectiveness of the practices. The questions were developed from practices described in the current literature that are supported by successful K-12 and HBCUs practices. The questions were piloted among a small number of current practicing public school administrators in Indiana to ensure that the questions made practical sense. A list of those questions appears in Appendix A.

## **Data Analysis**

A process proposed by Creswell (2003) was followed. First, all interview data was organized and prepared for analysis by transcribing the responses from recorded interviews. Then, the researcher read through the data to obtain an overall sense of the transcribed information. Next, the researcher began a detailed analysis using a coding process of capturing main points within small frames (i.e., a one-word or phrase that describes each sentence or cluster of sentences). The intent of the coding process was to compress details into larger categories, leading eventually into a set of manageable themes.

To determine trustworthiness of the data, member checking occurred as each participant was given the opportunity to review what was recorded. Member checking is a technique used to validate the findings in qualitative methodology. Each participant was contacted via telephone and asked to respond to what the researcher recorded. Follow-up questions were asked as needed to clarify or expand upon points made.

The next step was to provide a narrative passage to clarify and support the findings and is found in Chapter 4. The final step was to make meaning of the data by providing an interpretation of the data through the researchers' perspective (Creswell, 2003). This is presented in Chapter 5. Theoretical sensitivity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) allowed the researcher to interpret the data from the interviews and to make meaning from it. The interpretation compared findings to the literature review, raising new questions and presenting recommendations for future consideration (Creswell, 2003).

**Conclusion**

Chapter 3 addressed the methodology used for this study. In order to examine how strategies used by PWIs in Indiana compare to those strategies found in the literature, a qualitative research method was employed. This chapter discussed the research questions, research design, data collection, data design, and analyses performed. The findings are presented in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine the practices of retention and graduation of African American students at PWIs and compare those to best practices found in the K-12 and HBCU literature. Chapter 4 provides a purpose of the study, why a qualitative method study was chosen, a review of each participant's background along with themes that emerged after interviewing 10 PWI Academic Affairs staff and deans.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study attempted to identify best practices used in K-12 settings and HBCUs through a review of the literature. This information was compared to that of the current practices used by PWIs in retaining and graduating African American students from colleges and universities. The researcher asked PWI leaders to reflect on their practices. The researcher then determined whether those practices were similar or different from those found in the literature. This chapter presents the findings from interviews with PWI leaders.

### **Why a Qualitative Method?**

In order to complete a rich study, the qualitative research method was utilized. Creswell (2003) described qualitative research as one that focuses on naturalistic inquiry:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social and human problem. The

research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducted the study in the natural settings. (p. 15)

Qualitative research can be classified as interactive or non-interactive. This research study used an interactive technique collecting data directly from the participants in their natural settings. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the phenomena at a particular point in time and in a particular context (Howard, 1985). Learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them is considered an interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam, 2002). This study attempted to understand and make sense of the phenomena from the perspective of administrators in higher education.

The use of this type of qualitative research methodology focuses on subjective data and is not easily coded into numbers. Researchers utilizing a qualitative research approach can focus on different sources of data via one's own immediate experience or others' experiences.

Qualitative researchers look for involvement of their participants in data collection and seek to build rapport and credibility with the individuals in the study. In addition, the actual method of data collection is traditionally based on open-ended observations and interviews. (Creswell, 2003, p. 181)

“Generally speaking, qualitative researchers attempt to describe and interpret some human phenomenon” (Heath, 1997, p. 1) where the emphasis is on words and feelings rather than numbers. Qualitative research tends to work with fewer participants or cases but the analysis of each case is taken to a deeper level. The results are descriptive rather than predictive. “Qualitative research relies on narratives, which are meaning made into acts” (Jack, 1999, p. 91). The ultimate purpose of qualitative research is the process and secondarily the outcomes (Merriam, 1991).

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

First the researcher utilized peer-debriefing which served as a tool for validating the interview questions. School leaders situated in a course on a college campus were asked to review the substance of the interview questions. Research method texts advocate peer-debriefing as a process to enhance the credibility and validity of qualitative research (Creswell, 2003, Ely, Anzul, Freidman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 2002). To insure verification of the data collected from participants, the researcher utilized member-checking. The responses to the interview questions were sent to the participants for feedback and the collected data was put into a narrative format and submitted back to interviewees to validate what they had said. This method allowed for verification of the researcher's written notes and comments.

### **Interviews**

The interview instrument was submitted to 40 PWI administrators in the Midwest with ten responding. The participants contacted the researcher to establish a meeting time that was convenient. Each interview was conducted via telephone. The researcher contacted the participants in their offices at the universities or colleges. After making contact with each participant, it was decided that the interview would take place at a time that was most convenient for the interviewee. All of the interviews were very positive. The researcher's approach to each interview was to remain calm without providing feedback as to whether the researcher agreed or disagreed with what was being said. The interviewees appeared very interested in the topic and willing to share information. The length of each interview lasted 30 – 60 minutes as determined by the participants. The interview data was collected by the researcher on a script form detailing all comments. The interview questions are contained in Appendix A.

Each interview opened with the researcher sharing the goal of the study. The interviewees were also given the interview protocol. Since each of the participants held doctoral degrees, they were very understanding of the protocol. As a result there was ownership in the process and an openness to elaborate.

The researcher followed up with each participant providing a letter explaining the findings and two follow-up questions. The two questions are contained in Chapter 5 as well as Appendix F. The comments related to the follow-up are discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Description of Each Participant and School**

The university and college administrators who participated in this study were all located in the Midwest. The schools were labeled numerically for organization purposes. A description of each school was provided to understand the context relevant to how they addressed the retention and graduation of African American students, which included description of the enrollment, location of schools, graduation rate of African American students compared with the overall school graduation rate. In addition, a description of each participant interviewed, including title, race, gender, and educational attainment was provided.

**Midwestern University/College 1.** The 1<sup>st</sup> Midwestern University had an enrollment of 1,091 undergraduate students and is located in an industrial city serving an urban population near one of the United States' largest cities. This school currently has six-year graduation rate for African American students at 11% according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (College Results, 2010). The school's overall graduation rate for all students is 18%.

The interview was initiated with the Director of Student Support Services. This leader is a female middle-aged, African American leader who holds a Ph.D. She is responsible for the support of all academic programs and students on that campus. She has direct interaction with

the University's professors and students. She stated that she has taught both undergraduate and graduate students and was very interested in the retention and graduation rates of African American students on her campus.

**Midwestern University/College 2.** The 2<sup>nd</sup> University has an enrollment of 3,653 students and is located in a major urban city serving an elite private school community. As a child, this researcher grew up just blocks away from this four-year University which was adjacent to a predominately African American community. The school has the highest college graduation rate of African American students in the Midwest. This school currently has a six-year graduation rate for African American students at 74% according to the National Center for Education Statistics (College Results, 2010). This graduation rate was unique in that African American's on this college campus graduated at a higher rate than the average student at 73%.

The interview was conducted with the school's Provost for Student Affairs. This middle-aged White female holds a Ph.D. degree. Her job is to support all students on campus with academic and social support. She has direct knowledge of programs and information concerning the retention of African American students on her campus. Although she did not mention whether she had taught at the college level, she did have interaction and contact with the school's teaching staff.

**Midwestern University/College 3.** The 3<sup>rd</sup> Midwestern school has an enrollment of over 30,000 undergraduate students and is part of a massive statewide University system. The main campus is located in a mid-size city. This University is a vital part of this city's economy, employing most of the city's population. The school has a six-year graduation rate for African American students at 50%, compared to an overall rate of 72%, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (College Results, 2010). Although there is still a 20-point graduation

gap between Whites and African Americans, this large University has found a way to graduate large numbers of African American students.

The interview was conducted with the Dean of one of the University's colleges. This leader has served the University for over a decade. This middle-aged Hispanic male holds an Ed.D. degree. He is Dean of the University's two colleges of education housed on two separate campuses. He has direct knowledge of his school's work with retaining and graduation of African American students. His career has allowed him to teach and serve as a University administrator.

**Midwestern University/College 4.** The 4<sup>th</sup> Midwestern school is a regional campus for the state's largest University with an enrollment of 2,200 undergraduate students. The campus is located in an older industrial city. The major industry of the city was the automobile industry. This city had been hit severely by the recent economic downturn and has increased its local enrollment as autoworkers sought new careers. The campus primarily serves as a commuter campus with most students attending part time. This school has a six-year graduation rate for African American students at 10% compared to an overall rate of 27% (College Results, 2010). Although this city does not have a large African American community it does have a significant portion of the community that is diverse, thus the University needs to address the retention and graduation of those students.

The interview was conducted with the Director of the University's MBA program who is an associate professor. This leader was a middle-aged, White female who holds a Ph.D. She works directly with recruiting and retention of minority students on her campus and the business school. She has knowledge of both business and higher education affairs. She has continued to teach and served the University as an administrator.

**Midwestern University/College 5.** The 5<sup>th</sup> University has an enrollment of over 2,600 students and is a part of a massive state-wide university system. This regional campus is located in an old industrial city that once was a major player in the steel industry. Today, it is one of the most diverse cities in this Midwestern state, primarily African American. Most of the students attending this campus work full-time as well as attend school. The graduation rate for African American students is 16% compared to its overall campus rate of 32%. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, although the city is primarily African Americans, the college is 62% White (College Results, 2010).

The interview was conducted with the Director of School Support Services. This leader was a middle-aged, African American female, who holds a Ph.D. She is directly responsible for supporting students with academic assistance. She also has some interaction with the school's teaching staff and university operations.

**Midwestern University/College 6.** The 6<sup>th</sup> University is located in a large Midwestern metropolitan serving both a commuter and residential student population. It has an enrollment of over 22,000 students with a major medical and law school. This school has an African American graduation rate of 26%, compared to its overall graduation rate of 31% (College Results, 2010). African Americans have a similar six-year graduation rate to Whites on this campus. This school is located in an area that has a sizeable African American population over 350,000.

The interview was conducted with an Associate Dean of the college of education. This leader was an older, White female, who holds a Ph.D. She has served in major roles within the University including the undergraduate teacher education and school administrator programs. She mentioned her commitment to developing future teachers which included working with

several students of color. She works directly with the admittance and retention of students within her college of education.

**Midwestern University/College 7.** The 7<sup>th</sup> University is one the fastest growing private schools in a Midwestern state. This University serves both a traditional campus and regional campus system. This private, religious university serves over 9,300 students with one main campus and several regional meeting sites throughout the state. The main campus is located in a midsize city that has also been impacted by the economic downturn. This city was once a major employer of General Motors autoworkers. Today it has one of the highest unemployment rates in this Midwestern state. The regional meeting sites across the state were primarily within the state's largest city suburban areas. This school has a graduation rate for African Americans at 73% compared to an overall rate of 90% (College Results, 2010).

The interview was conducted with a professor and supervisor of education majors of one the school's growing undergraduate programs. This leader is an older, African American male, who holds a Ph.D. in education. He is also a retired public school educator. This educator works directly with undergraduate and graduate students in a teaching role and mentor with the university. This individual is not an administrator; however he has extensive knowledge of the efforts this University has put forth in the retention and graduation of African Americans.

**Midwestern University/College 8.** The 8<sup>th</sup> University is located in a small city near a major metropolitan city, with a student's enrollment of 8,400 students. Most of the students commute to this regional campus. This school has an African American six-year graduation rate of 7% compared to an overall rate of 20% (College Results, 2010). This University also has experienced a growing population as more unemployed workers have sought higher education training.

This interview was conducted with the school's Admission Director who is responsible for recruiting and retaining students. This middle aged, White male, holds a Ph.D. and served the campus in an administrative capacity. He had also done research in the area of retention and graduation of undergraduate students.

**Midwestern University/College 9.** The 9<sup>th</sup> Midwestern University is located in a midsize city serving over 33,000 students in a traditional college campus. This large research university has a six-year African American graduation rate of 54% compared to an overall rate of 69% (College Results, 2010).

The interview was conducted with the University's Dean of Admissions who is directly responsible for all admissions to the University. This middle-aged, White female, holds a Ph.D. and has served as a professor. She also has experience at another Midwestern University system and, therefore, has a more diverse understanding of the retention and graduation of African American students. This interviewee has served on numerous state committees that were addressing the overall graduation rates for this Midwestern state.

**Midwestern University/College 10.** The 10<sup>th</sup> Midwestern University is located in a large metropolitan city and is a part of a large national network of college campuses. The school enrollment is over 2,000 students and spans two campuses. The school currently has a six-year graduation rate of 25% compared with an overall rate of 50% (College, 2010). This commuter college has numerous students who were making career changes. This school specializes in providing fast track degree programs on campus and online.

The interview was conducted with the school's Academic Affairs Dean. This middle-aged, White female, holds a Ph.D. in education. She serves as a professor and mentioned she has worked at several large college campuses. She is directly responsible for the School of

Education program at this University. She works directly with hiring of faculty and oversees undergraduate and graduate education programs.

### **Themes**

The strength of this study was the rich detail given by the University and college officials interviewed. It was clear after interviewing the PWI staff persons that all had practices that they believed were having a positive impact on the retention and graduation of African American students. However, it seemed that some participants (#2, #3, #7, and #9) are having more success than others. The detailed information shared by the school officials led to the following themes emerging:

1. Effective Teaching Practices and/or Strategies Teachers Use – what are teachers doing in the classroom to help students feel comfortable?
2. Faculty-Student Relationship or Rapport - Are teachers available away from class?
3. Social Support – Are there places to ‘hang out’ with other minorities and places to ‘hang out’ with Whites?
4. The Presence of a Racially Diverse Staff - An environment that does not shout “White.”

Each theme was represented with a sampling of representative statements from participants that helped to identify the theme. Additional statements were also included to demonstrate how the more effective participants’ schools compared to others in the study.

**Theme 1. Effective Teaching Practices and/or Strategies Teachers Use to Retain African Americans at PWI s– What are teachers doing in the classroom to make students comfortable?** All 10 interviewees stressed that effective teaching practices and or strategies were an important strategy in recruiting and retaining African American students at PWIs. In

order to keep African American students on their campuses they agreed that what happens in classrooms with students is significant. It was stressed in their comments the importance for positive student-faculty relationships. One of the interviewees stated that this was an area that needed improvement in their setting. Without improvement they believed that African American students would leave their campuses. Interviewee one stated:

Many old fogies are stuck in their old ways and are not willing to use innovative approaches to instructing today's students. Most students do not learn well with just lecture only. A hands-on approach works well with African American students.

Interviewee number two, agreed that;

We expect our faculty to use interactive and engaging activities in the each classroom. We use an Internet platform to encourage communication to extend among all students and the instructor outside the classroom. Teachers can post interactive lecture notes. Not just lecture, leave, and expect students to learn. But, learning can become interactive which is good for the African American student. No student should feel isolated in a classroom.

Interviewee number nine added her opinion and explained what was taking place on her campus:

We are pushing for more discussion and hands-on activities versus lectures. Our school has created a Center for Instructional Excellence which has been created to support professors. Many of our science and technology programs require hands-on work in the field. It is my belief that African American students, as well as all students, benefit from real work experiences versus sitting in a classroom learning numbers. The students see how the learning applies to the real work.

Additionally, this interviewee felt that what a teacher did in the classroom to make a student feel comfortable did have an impact on whether a student would continue in school. Further stating that most African American students on Midwestern college campuses are the minority therefore isolation is an issue. But, some schools recognize this problem and have made adjustments.

Interviewee number two mentioned success with African American student's retention and graduation as a result of a smaller campus that stresses teaching.

Facebook™ is a powerful tool, two-way communication is encouraged by our school.

Teachers are encouraged to carry the classroom home. Learning never stops.

Engagement within the classroom starts with a positive experience between the teacher and student. With the idea of 'learning never stops,' students buy into the goals of the school. The students take ownership with the teachers serving as a guide.

Interviewee number three stated:

Yes, we have multiple initiatives to encourage innovative teaching practices, including a fully staffed office of instructional support in the school of education and on the campus. The school has also placed a great deal of emphasis on development of quality distance education programs as well. The dean's office recently provided \$750,000 for a new program titled "New Idea Project" designed to provide incentives for development of innovative teaching in the classroom.

On some college campuses the idea of teaching being more important than research was stressed. Interviewee number nine stated that her college did the following to ensure quality teaching:

We control our graduate assistants whom teach many undergraduate classes. They must have a commitment to teaching first! This has a direct impact on the retention of African American students who drop out when they have bad experiences with teachers in undergraduate programs. We also use a Signals program which measures student's academic performance and attendance. This helps professors assist students who are struggling. This forces a professor to send signals to all students forcing interaction between the student and teachers. A red light will indicate that a student must see a professor for assistance. This works well with all students but African American students now have a connection with the professor.

**Theme 2. Faculty-Student Relationship or Rapport - Are teachers available away from class?** Faculty and student relationship is an essential element to college success. Having a positive relationship with faculty seems to be true at PWIs. As mentioned in the literature this was an essential element to the success in graduating African Americans. All of the interviewees stressed this as an important element in the success of African American students on PWIs. But it must be mentioned that these schools did not have a common practice for the entire University. The interviewees mentioned that some colleges within the University do better than others. It must be noted that each interviewee pointed to the need for improvement in the area of teacher student rapport. Interviewee one stressed, "Yes, professors do establish relationships with students but it varies by department. At our commuter college it is troubling since many of our students work yet need to connect with the professor outside of the classroom for help." Interviewee nine explained, "Faculty at our school are okay with establishing a relationship with students, but, most research institutions, No! Therefore, this could have a negative impact on minority students." Interviewee four explained:

A major part of our strategic plan is faculty connecting with students. The University has found that a positive relationship with students does impact learning and their willingness to stay on our campus. African Americans leaving campus is related to money and a sense of no connection to the college professors and campus.

Interviewee five explained:

We see a strong relationship between faculty and students in upper level classes, but hit or miss in underclassmen. We are training faculty to use ice breakers to break down barriers. African American students do respond well to positive relationships with faculty.

Interviewee ten explained:

Learning our system helps to establish rapport with students. In addition, faculty are trained to use ice breakers at the beginning of each course to establish rapport. Being available before and after each class is also stressed since most of our students have full time jobs.

When interviewing participant number six, she had a unique observation related to African American students, who are typically first generation college students. She explained;

First generation African American students struggle with the faculty-student relationship because they find teachers to be distant and not able to connect with students. We have made it a priority to train our staff in the importance of learning about students. An open dialogue with students does make a difference in the comfort level of all students.

Interviewee three stressed that his University has had success with African Americans and all students using the following:

Our University has a long tradition of strong mentoring activities. Among other things, the school of education provides several awards, including monetary awards, to encourage faculty to establish strong rapport with students. The school, for example, provides the Faculty Mentoring Award and supports the Student Choice Award. Several other awards for outstanding teaching, which includes students mentoring components, are also awarded each year.

Interviewee seven pointed to the importance of small groups when helping students, “Small groups and team learning is encouraged by our school. We believe that if students are supported by the group there is a sense of belonging.”

Interviewee number five pointed to the following as a reason for improved results with African American students on her campus:

Professors have more of a connection with students due to technology - email and blackboard have forced students and professors closer as learning takes place all the time. African American students benefit from technology and being able to have access to professors.

Additionally, all of the interviewees understood the importance of faculty-student relationships. The need, however, was how to create positive relationships both in and out of the classroom? As interviewee nine stated:

We must do more than talk about the subject of faculty relationship; we must make it a part of the school’s culture by creating a plan. We have made this a part of our strategic plan. Faculty connecting with students is one of our long range plans. This is the key to not only the graduation rate of African American but all students.

This comment represented a trend among all of the PWIs officials. A commitment to building relationships was a priority for these schools. Interviewee number nine pointed out that her University had gone as far as hiring a new Vice Provost for Diversity to address practices that would assist a growing diverse population of students at their institution.

**Theme 3. Social Support – Are there places to ‘hang out’ with other minorities and places to ‘hang out’ with Whites?** The theme of Social Support focuses on how the University supports the social well being of students akin to Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs model. Abraham Maslow, in his 1943 paper *A Theory of Human Motivation*, described five basic needs; self-actualization, esteem, love/belonging, safety, and physiological. Once a person has realized the physiological and safety needs, they then seek out to belong. He described this as all humans need to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, whether it comes from a large social group, such as clubs, office culture, religious groups, professional organizations, sport team or family connection (Maslow, 1943). This need should be met before the student is able to focus on academic affairs.

The researcher focused on the understanding of the African American culture and how that knowledge supports these students. While some participants in the study focused on specific programs that assist African American students in and outside of the classroom, many of the officials at these PWIs Midwestern colleges recognized the difficulty African American students have adjusting to a predominantly White campus. The focus on social support, they believe, was very important to success of African American students. Maslow’s (1943) theory of *love and belonging* helped frame this orientation to social support.

In order to truly understand how the study participants understood social support, the researcher probed whether or not faculty members at their schools were encouraged to learn

about African American culture. Interviewee one stated, “Yes, but the quality of the understanding depends on the school or department. Areas that study African American culture, yes! But, the math and science areas need help.” Interviewee two stated:

Multicultural training is required. We found that professors lack knowledge of our diverse student population. African American culture is stressed. We sponsor top African American speakers to speak with students and faculty in hopes of improving our understanding of the cultural difference.

Interview three stated:

Our University has a constitutionally mandated standing committee on diversity. The committee sponsors many programs including speakers, research programs, seminars and the like, designed to increase awareness of African American culture. A standing feature of every Policy Council this year was a presentation on ways to promote diversity.

Interview four stated, “Hit or miss in some departments. Not good overall!” Interviewee five stated, “We have a multicultural coordinator in each department to address our need to understand diversity within all departments.” Interviewee six stated, “We are required to participate in a mandatory Diversity Workshop each year. We are trying to eliminate negative comments about African American students.” Interviewee seven stated, “We have a religious base to our campus and are required to have age, gender, and race workshops for all faculty members.” Interviewee eight stated, “None! We are not ready for African American students, or the growing Hispanic population. Social support of students is important. Black History month is celebrated but more training is needed.” Interviewee nine pointed to a strategic plan, with changes on her campus, but pointed to the staffing changes to address the needs for diversity:

We have hired our first Vice-Provost for Diversity. We understand the long term need to prepare our staff to deal with a student population that will be more diversity. We have a long history of African American students on our campus and understand the importance of supporting the social well being of this population of students.

Interviewee ten stated, “We have mandatory diversity training for all faculty not to just address African American students but all aspects of diversity.”

All of the Universities in the study had created programs to support the social needs of African American students. This was an area in which the researcher was overwhelmed with the available resources. The participants were very proud and clearly understood the importance of social support for African American students. Each participant gave feedback on specific programs that were in place to support the achievement of African American students.

Interviewee nine pointed to her University as having one of the top Minority Engineering programs in the country. She stated:

The Black Engineering Program is one of the elite programs of its kind in the country.

This program serves as an academic support network for African American students. The program provides tutors and a wealth of past alumni that visit the campus, provide internships, and support for African American students.

Interviewee one described support on her campus for African American students, “The SAAB Chapter is specifically set up to support African American students. This program sponsors meetings and forums for students to discuss campus wide issues. We address needs and provide a club for African American students on campus.” Interviewee six pointed to her University reaching beyond the school and into the community to support African American students. She described her connection with local school districts:

We work with the local school district to bring African American students to our campus to give the student a sense of our call and campus life. We try to expose the students to the entire campus - what we have to offer. If the students understand what the University has to offer we believe African American students will feel more comfortable and less likely to leave our campus.

Interviewee number three explained:

Yes, we specifically target African American students who are underserved to encourage involvement in our schools many offerings. We do this through our advisors. Advisors will sponsor an African American teachers' network on campus to discuss issues facing African American education majors. She creates a social network among the students.

Interviewee two was proud of her University creating a culture center on campus. She described it as following:

We are very proud that the University has a new Culture Center to support all cultures on campus. It serves as a resource center and a social network for students on campus. It gives minority students a sense of belonging on campus.

Although several of the interviewees provided feedback on the need for social support on their campus for African American students, many were honest that their schools have failed to provide support. Interview number five described it as follows:

No! We have not provided programs to support the social well being of African American students and there is nothing in place. This is a serious problem that must be addressed. Not only do my African American students feel isolated but other groups do too. As Whites, we take for grant the need to feel a sense of belonging to the campus and

larger community. We must find a way to make all students feel a part of the campus community.

All participants mentioned that students are offered academic assistance. The programs discussed were (a) Academic Centers, (b) Math/Writing Learning Centers, (c) Trees Program focusing on financial support for students with families making less than \$40,000 per year, (d) Financial aid tied to academic support – requiring 12 hours a week of academic assistance, and (e) Praxis test preparation, special advising and mentors. After interviewing all of the college officials, it was apparent that every PWI was providing some form of social support to its African American students.

**Theme 4. The Presence of a Racially Diverse Staff - An environment that does not shout “White”.** Focusing on who is teaching African American students could be associated with success of the students on a PWI campus. The school officials all stressed the need for a diverse faculty on PWI campuses. They were very open and honest about the challenges of hiring a diverse staff. All have been involved in hiring diverse staff members on their campuses and had knowledge of the campus practices. Their deep understanding of hiring a diverse staff clearly helped this theme to be of importance to this study. Interviewee number nine described her school’s 10-year commitment to this theme, “The University has made hiring a diverse staff a part of our strategic plan. We plan to hire 300 new faculty member over 10 years who are racially and gender balanced.” Interviewee number eight pointed to a bigger problem:

Faculty referrals play a big part in the hiring process. If professors are White only, there will be few minority candidates. We must get past hiring people who look like ourselves. We must use diverse hiring committees to hire diverse staff. The diverse committees will keep everyone focused on truly hiring quality minority applicants.

Interviewee number three stated the following:

Diversity makes a difference to African American students. We work closely with search committees to make sure that every effort is made to identify candidates of color. In addition the campus offers programs of strategic hires that provide special funds for this purpose.

Interviewee number six stated:

Hiring a diverse staff is often difficult because it depends on who applies during the recruiting process and who can qualify to teach the courses we offer. We currently have within the College of Education about 20% racially diverse faculty.

All of the PWIs view the need for hiring African Americans as a problem that is deeper than just numbers. Schools must work to help current minority faculty members feel comfortable on their campus and community. Interviewee number five stated, “We hire minority faculty members and clustered them with other minorities to help with the transition to our community.” Not only is there a fear of isolation for minority students but also minority faculty members. The PWIs have found that hiring a diverse staff can serve as an effective way to support African American students. African Americans and minority teachers serve as mentors and role models. Interview number four pointed to the importance of coaching, “A diverse group of faculty members on our campus serve as coaches to students and other faculty members, serving as mentors and advisors to minority students whom many times get lost with the lack of support.” Interviewee number nine pointed to an innovative method that had attracted African American graduate students and faculty members.

We have partnered with HBCUs to recruit African American graduate students who then have become minority teachers on our campus. This pipeline has provided us with

outstanding graduate students and faculty. We got this practice from the University of Iowa who has been a leader in hiring African American faculty members. Minority teachers do make a difference in the retention of African American students. The more role models and support the likelihood these students will stay on our campuses.

Money is a barrier. Some indicated that minority applicants are attracted to schools that pay higher salaries. Some PWI school officials noted that they have not done enough to hire African American and minority teachers. Interviewee one stated:

We have done nothing! Not a strength! Our campus is becoming more diverse and we are behind in hiring a diverse group of professors. We now understand the importance of a diverse faculty, and it will take years to change this practice.

Interviewee ten stated that she is facing not only a need for more minority teachers but teachers that can teach students with more needs. She described:

The challenge we have is improving the deficit skills which students often have while raising high expectations for learning and demonstration of performance objectives. Further, students as adult learners often come with a myriad of issues and obligations outside of their education. Helping them find a balance is a challenge.

This statement points to not only do we need to hire a diverse faculty but people that understand the challenges of today's students who are more diverse and faced with the challenges of working and attending school. Interviewee number seven pointed to the "importance of Whites having a direct understanding for the need to provide students with positive experiences." This was stressed often by the White officials interviewed. All interviewees pointed to the need for a more diverse faculty and gave ways to increase numbers. But, interviewee number nine stated, "Our Director of Affirmative Action keeps the campus

balanced by challenging the schools with data that shows the lack of diversity among our colleges.” Perhaps without direct oversight many schools would neglect the need to hire a diverse faculty. Yet, all believed that diverse faculty members have assisted with the retention and graduation of African American students on their campuses.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 4 provided a review of each interviewee, the school’s background, and the community they serve. This chapter also presented the four themes that emerged after interviewing and coding the data of the ten PWI school officials. These themes were:

1. Effective Teaching Practices and/or strategies they use to retain African Americans at PWIs – what are teachers doing in the classroom to make students comfortable?
2. Faculty-Student Relationship or Rapport - Are teachers available away from class?
3. Social Support – Are there places to hang out with other minorities and places to hang with Whites (connecting Maslow’s Hierarchy).
4. The Presence of a Racially Diverse Staff - An environment that does not shout ‘White.’

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings and commonalities shared by all of the PWIs which assisted them with the retention and graduation of African American students, along with those aspects that seem to differentiate their efforts. Study limitations are presented along with recommendations for future research. Finally, implications from this study for colleges and Universities as well as K-12 schools is offered.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

#### Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify the effective practices used in both the K-12 school and HBCU settings from the literature, and to compare those findings with the practices PWIs use to increase retention and graduation rates of African American students. An analysis of interview data revealed that PWIs illustrated more commonalities than differences to the extent to which they participate in practices to positively affect the retention and graduation of African American students. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings of the study describing the commonalities and differences among these settings. The researcher shares personal experiences as a graduate of a PWI and as a first-generation college graduate and how that may have influenced this study. Finally, implications for leaders of schools regarding what were discovered from the research and future research is shared.

The ultimate intent of this study was to seek specific practices that work with increasing African American retention and graduation. The literature related to both K-12 schools and HBCUs presented practices that should have an impact at all levels. By interviewing school officials at PWIs in the Midwest it was found that these schools had many commonalities to HBCUs. The school officials at PWIs provided data based on the depth of their experiences and knowledge. The interviewee's age, experiences and understanding of the University's teaching

practices and structure gave the data more meaning. Information related to the community setting also provided additional insight regarding the struggles each University had to address locally.

HBCUs have a higher retention rate of African American students than PWIs (Constantine, 1994). Practices found at the K-12 level provided additional, if not complementary, practices to that of the HBCU knowledge base. From the convergence of those two perspectives, an ideal setting might be imagined. It was from this imaginary, ideal setting that this study chose to address the practices of PWIs.

A major aspect of HBCUs is that they provide supportive environments and remediation for African American students. Due to the purpose of HBCUs being created, to separate the races, it seems obvious that these settings would have an advantage in educating African Americans. Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) research supports the fact that HBCUs provide supportive environments and that the experiences at these universities enhance the career aspirations of African Americans. However, this study found that PWIs have similar practices to HBCUs when working with African American students. The commonalities found in this study were:

1. Supportive Environment - PWIs seem to feel it is important and have invested some resources toward providing supportive environments based on caring.
2. Remediation - The ability to remediate and support students in need of academic help.
3. Faculty members who are committed to teaching all students.

This leads one to ask: Is this all that needs to be done, or, is there a right/wrong way to implement these strategies? The following discussion attempts to elaborate on how these commonalities may not be so common.

## Supportive Environment

All of the interviewees that participated in this study pointed to the importance of a supportive environment to the well being of African American students on PWI campuses. If African American students have a sense of love and belonging on a college campus the likelihood of achieving the next levels of self-esteem and self-actualization becomes possible. Work by Flowers (2004) also supports the importance of understanding the idea of supporting diversity on college campuses. Flowers stated “diversity is the complex interaction of constructs, issues and experiences related to race/ethnicity, religious differences, regional differences, social class differences, sexual orientation, gender differences and disabilities” (p. 7). All of the interviewees pointed to the importance of the schools providing the basic need of feeling supported at PWIs which translates into a sense of belonging. All of the PWI interviewees mentioned the difficulty of African Americans having to adjust to a predominantly White campus. They believe the support given to African American students was very important to graduation and retention. This was not just in words as some gave details about what their schools were doing to support these students.

Respondents from PWIs pointed to the creation of cultural centers and minority groups on campus as places for supporting African American students, i.e. helping them feel like they belong. This is called *counterspace* according to the Critical Race Theory (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). Critical Race Theory is built on the foundation that race must be taught in order for one to have a better understanding of the world. Providing *counterspace* is a way to break down barriers by giving others an opportunity to have places to attend for support and to give other races a place to seek information. One PWI discussed its premiere Black engineering program and its long term impact on recruiting and retaining African American students. Recognizing that African

American students can be disconnected to the campus, schools are seeking ways to keep them connected through social groups. Several respondents discussed minority-led groups within departments and schools that serve as a support network for students on campus.

A supportive environment goes beyond just a club or social group, however; it is the direct interaction between the faculty member and the students and has been found to be critical to the success of African American students. The quality of the people involved along with their desire to make a difference is necessary, not just having a program. We can imagine that most Universities have something in place that they call an effort to help African Americans be successful. Perhaps one difference among those that indicate they have a *program* is that some do not have the right people running the program.

All of the PWIs respondents agreed that the teachers' rapport or interaction with African American students was critical to their retention and graduation. It was overwhelming in the description and details of comments given by the PWI school officials. The following three statements capture this belief:

A major part of our strategic plan is faculty connecting with students. The University has found that a positive relationship with students does impact learning and their willingness to stay on our campus. African Americans leaving campus is related to money and a sense of no connection to the college professors and campus.

We have made it a priority to train our staff in the importance of learning about students. An open dialogue with students does make a difference in the comfort level of all students.

Faculty connecting with students is one of our long range plans. This is the key to not only the graduation rate of African American but all students.

All of these schools used technology to connect with today's students. Professors using online environments allowed for the classroom to extend to the students. Students have more access to professors for assistance and conversations outside the classroom. Blogs, email, twitter, Facebook™ and other media have made communication easier. The creation of group learning communities to support students was found at some PWIs. More PWIs encouraged a group or cohort approach to learning. Groups of students supporting one another were found to be helpful in supporting a positive environment on PWI campuses. This was especially true on campuses that were mainly commuter campuses.

All of the PWI respondents described some form of diversity workshops or training with staff on communicating effectively with African American students. The policy structure was clearly a part of most PWIs campuses in supporting diversity. Training of staff was clearly a positive way to impact the campus environment by having staff that are aware of the needs of the students. Some of the interviewees agreed it was not enough and more was needed to achieve success. The literature on HBCUs supports a strong commitment to diversity training (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). Yet, it seems that some were not doing it effectively. Do some workshops have a better impact than others, and what do they do that makes a difference?

The literature connects a supportive environment as a factor to the success of African American students (Hubbard, 2006). Students find at HBCUs a culture of support from both students and faculty. PWI officials who were interviewed provided details that this also occurs on their campuses. However, to state that something is part of the culture is making a large statement. It implies that the organization as a whole has embraced a set of values and beliefs conducive to the support of African Americans, not that they have simply complied with a policy. Support is critical since many African Americans are first generation college graduates.

Many come from homes where there was a close bond among family members. PWIs are challenged to establish environments that make this separation from family and home less of a negative impact. How can a University close the gap between the student and their family while at the same time challenging them to become independent?

### **Remediation**

Constantine (1994) studied the long-term wage level of African Americans who received BA degrees in the 1970s. In that study, it was discovered that HBCUs provided remediation to students who needed it as one factor to the success of graduating African American students. HBCUs focus on helping the student succeed by not focusing on their deficiencies. This is significant in that students can find support and encouragement to strengthen skills necessary for rigorous course work without feeling like second-class citizens. This was supported in the literature as a necessary structure (Bennett & Xie, 2006). This research found that PWIs also have similar resources in place to remediate students. The interviewees pointed to specific programs in detail. The school officials understood if students have places on campus to support student's academic needs this will help retain African Americans, referring back to the concept of *counterspace*. All of the interviewees described the creation of academic centers as a great way to support African American students. Several PWIs had supports built into the specific schools and departments, such as math and writing centers that allow students who struggle to get help quickly. One interviewee described the following practice:

Each student has an academic counselor who touches base with each student monthly to monitor academic progress. In the College of Education, there is a field placement specialist who monitors progress towards requirements for student teaching.

Most of the PWIs had these centers open daily and free for all undergraduate students. Yet, we cannot guarantee the degree to which a deficit model is being used by those leading the effort. Remediation must not be looked upon as a negative stigma but as a true form of help for all students. Perhaps it is not the structure but rather the stigma attached to remedial centers that can make them non-facilitative to minority students. The culture of some PWIs might not realize the social implications of students telling their friends or family that they are in remediation.

Six of the PWIs described their nontraditional students as those whom have returned to school later in life or have made transitions back to school due to career changes. This is a common trend for many colleges and Universities. As a result many of these nontraditional students need extra support. All of the PWI officials interviewed have committed resources to support centers and remediation programs. Remediation can also involve the areas of advising and mentoring. Many of the PWIs have committed resources to providing additional advising to African American students. As found in the literature, more frequent contacts between advisors and minority students were mentioned as an important aspect to the retention of these students (Fischer, 2007). One school described their test preparation programs that are built into its program to help African American students pass rigorous test for teacher's certification. This was described by one participant interviewed:

We require assistance to all students with the Praxis exam. We don't assume that all students are prepared to pass the exam therefore we prep all students to take this important exam in the College of Education.

Remediation is an important part of the retention and graduation of African American students. Since many African American students lack the resources to support academic deficiencies it must be the schools' responsibility to support them in this area. It is not

uncommon for any student to struggle with some courses at college. One's ability to gain assistance and support through remediation, without feeling inferior, seems to be critical to the success of graduating African American students.

### **Faculty**

The third significant finding that supports the literature on effective practices was the quality of faculty members working with African American students on PWI campuses. All 10 of the interviewees stressed the importance of not only the faculty-student relationship but the importance of effective teaching strategies. Innovative teaching practices that focus on hands-on, real work activities were mentioned by these school officials repeatedly. Creating culturally responsive learning environments for African American students will assist with their achievement at PWIs (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). One participant stated:

We are pushing for more discussion and hands-on activities versus lectures. Our school has created a Center for Instructional Excellence which has been created to support professors. Many of our science and technology programs require hands on work in the field. It is my belief that African American as well as all students benefit from real work experiences versus sitting in a classroom taking notes. The students see how the learning applies to the real work.

The traditional approach of professors lecturing as a primary means for students gaining information is not always effective (Fischer, 2007). Engaging interaction between student and faculty, in the classroom, is not accomplished easily. According Kim and Conrad (2006), the importance of student-faculty contact in relation to the student's academic growth is crucial. Their study followed 900 students at HBCUs and tracked their success from high school to

college graduation, 63% graduated, attributing much of that success to the quality of the faculty taking the extra effort to engage the students (Kim & Conrad, 2006).

PWIs are realizing that classes that are engaging can make a difference with the success of students. But, a critical question is why African Americans may respond better to teaching practices where a stronger personal connection is made with the faculty member? Perhaps African American students seem to perform better when a connection is established between the teacher and the student. To step around from the podium and be within reach of the student as they engage in academic activities may lessen the dissonance that occurs in other settings. HBCUs have built a culture around caring and high expectations. Some may misinterpret this as expecting African American students to do less work. Many professors at HBCUs are alumni of those colleges, working long hours, and making themselves available to students outside the classroom. All ten PWIs encouraged faculty members to connect with students outside of the classroom but the question remains as to the degree to which this actually occurs.

All of the PWI officials stressed that the faculty members must have positive relationships with students and that this is a salient factor in retaining and graduating African American students. Yet as will be discussed later, the study participants noted that some faculty members do not embrace this practice. Some of the PWI participants admitted that the lack of connection to faculty members was a reason why some African American students are not connected with the school. HBCUs faculty members seem to go beyond the classroom in making a connection with students. If, for example, a student does not report to class, an HBCU faculty member would call or send an email. It is understood that college students are adults and are expected to perform. But as students take on more responsibilities a personal connection will

be needed. Faculty members do make a difference in how students connect to the schools. They also make a difference in recruiting.

**Social Support – Are there places to ‘hang out’ with other minorities and places to ‘hang’ with non-minority students?** The social well being of students is very important as they attend college. Most colleges and Universities will have student affairs programs that are designed to address the students’ experiences outside of the classroom. The idea is to capture the ‘noise’ from the students’ social life and transform it into a complementary factor, contributing to academic success (Demonris & Kritsonis, 2006). This may be understated in the lives and potential success of African American students on PWI campuses. Returning to Maslow’s Hierarchy as a framework by which one supports the notion of the need to belong, all humans benefit from a feeling of being loved and thus, a sense of belonging. This research found that although PWI colleges provide specific programs to assist African American students academically, many of the schools studied recognized the difficulty African American students have adjusting to predominantly White campuses. The participants in the study believed that social support was very important to the success of African American students. But, many of the participants found it difficult to discuss solutions. Perhaps this sentiment reflects a belief system that we are here to count student enrollment and graduation rates, forsaking the real world in between. A sense of belonging and love are meaningful to the experiences of African American students. Those aspects are difficult to realize in a classroom setting, especially if an instructor does not value it.

Programs that bring students together to socialize and that assist with the isolation that most African American students experience on PWI campuses are important. As one participant described:

The Black engineering program is one of the elite programs in the country. This program serves as an academic support network for African American students. The program provides tutors and a wealth of past alumni that visit the campus, provides internships and social support for African American students.

The support needs to go beyond the classroom. If students are isolated and are not interacting with others, they may choose to quit. Schools must account for social support and interaction among its students if they are serious about retention; this is very much true in K-12 settings as with Universities. Providing opportunities for students of all races to interact will build a support system on the campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The interviewees from this study believed that social support is an essential element for the success of African American students on PWI campuses. Yet few discussed the idea that those programs need to be staffed with people with a passionate belief in the mission of the program.

The issues of a supportive environment, remediation, social support, and having a quality faculty were themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes were well-supported by the literature as foundations of HBCUs along with some publications found relevant to the K-12 setting. While there were four themes, there was sufficient overlap among them to possibly identify a key theme of “caring”. While there may be commonalities between HBCUs and PWIs regarding what they say they do, this study may have begun to reveal some inequities among services that they provide. African American students benefit from these practices, only if they are used effectively, and the people charged with their administration have the passion to do it right.

### **A Difference between HBCUs and PWIs**

After careful review of the literature and data from this research, it is clear that hiring a diverse, caring staff may be a major difference between HBCUs and PWIs. Having a diverse staff does have an impact on the retention of African American students (Demaris & Kritsonis, 2006). HBCUs find it very easy to achieve faculty diversity on their campuses because of the strong African American alumni. They tend to hire their own alumni, thus it is taken for granted - the strong alumni support HBCUs retain. After interviewing PWI officials it was clear that every school has an espoused commitment to hiring diverse faculty members. But the reality is how they can attract and retain diverse faculty members. Today, the majority of African Americans attend PWIs campuses throughout this country, yet the majority of faculty members are White.

While faculty diversity is important on any college campus, it is the faculty members' attitudes, those who embrace and accept diversity, as the more important quality. Selection committees that are diverse can assist with breaking down some barriers. Recruitment of top African American faculty members must be a goal. Programs to develop existing graduates to return to teach on PWI campuses can serve as a model to reach this goal (Hubbard, 2006).

The instructor can make a difference (Graves, 2008). With the support and guidance of a caring faculty member some students can overcome many barriers they face to graduation and succeed. This dynamic can reach beyond the classroom as diverse instructors can also help to structure a positive social environment.

### **Discussion**

This study utilized a qualitative research method to gain knowledge concerning what practices account for student retention and graduation at PWIs. Interview questions were

developed from the literature. Interviews were conducted with PWI school officials rather than questionnaires or surveys due to the notion that it is the quality of people that make a difference, not an inventory of programs. From the interviews information was gathered and coded. The researcher read through the data, obtained an overall sense of the information, worked through a detailed analysis of the data using a coding process, capturing what seems to be the main points. This process filtered the details into coherent themes. A member checking of the findings was also used. The data collected was given back to the participants to check the facts collected. The themes were:

1. **Effective Teaching Practices** and/or strategies they use to retain African Americans at PWIs – what are teachers doing in the classroom to make students comfortable?
2. **Faculty-Student Relationships** or Rapport - Are teachers available away from class?
3. **Social Support** – Are there places to hang out with other minorities and places to hang with non-minority students?
4. The presence of a racially **diverse staff** and environment that does not shout “White.”

The topic of academic achievement of African American students in both K-12 and higher education can be found in the literature. The research in this study attempted to find similarities and differences among HBCUs and PWIs for the purpose of finding practices that work with retaining and graduating African American students in higher education. Although African American attendance is at an all time high, there is still a 20-point gap in graduation as compared to whites at 63% (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009). A similar gap can be found in K-12 schools. This gap has economic and social implications. As mentioned by Houston (as cited in The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2009, p. 1), “Without education, there is no hope for our people and without hope, our future is lost.” The discussion that follows

provides a connection between this researchers' own experiences and this research to provide some additional meaning to what was found, and provide insight toward potential limitations of the study.

### **Implications for Higher Education**

This study made clear that there are practices that are working to increase the retention and graduation rates of African American students. Most settings have in place programs, with some working better than others. Universities may assume more responsibility should be placed on the student but this should not be at the cost of less time with faculty members. The *College Student Experiences Questionnaire* (2007) and the *National Survey of Student Engagement* (2010) provide a more comprehensive assessment of student perceptions regarding the quality of their experiences and engagement in higher education.

Teachers have a great impact on the retention of African American students. School administrators need to understand how important it is for all students to be able to find a teacher who cares and is willing to assist them, especially at times away from the classroom. A focus on innovative teaching must be discussed and encouraged among faculty members. What happens in the classroom does impact African American students. With support, remediation, and faculty members who are committed to teaching African American students, more will achieve. When students are given high expectations, support, and caring adults, they will do better in whatever they choose to do.

Schools must give the message that the campus is a caring environment and that African American students are welcome and important. For example the following ideas were taken from the interviews and could be put in place on campus to support African American students:

1. Faculty members serving as mentors for students.

2. Connect African American students to other successful students on campus.
3. Shared places for students of different races to interact.
4. Meeting opportunities with school administration to ease the transition to the campus.
5. Monthly meeting with advisors to monitor progress.
6. Hire committed staff members who want to teach African Americans.

### **Implications for K-12 School Leaders**

As my primary role is in K-12 public school education, this topic has potential at all grade levels. Perhaps there are things K-12 settings could do better to prepare students for higher education. Potential solutions for the K-12 education issues of African American students can be found in the literature (Thompson, 2007). As mentioned earlier, many K-12 educators are inundated with a negative view of African American students, and the urban communities in which they live. This emphasizes a deficit paradigm, placing blame for failures with students, their families and their culture (Weiner, 2003). This study looked at what is working through the lens of higher education and the K-12 setting. There are practices that are working to achieve the retention and graduation of African American in HBCUs that might work with K-12 schools. Could the themes found in this study inform public schools regarding the efforts and resources they expend?

1. **Effective Teaching Practices** and/or strategies they use to retain African Americans at PWIs – what are teachers doing in the classroom to make students comfortable?
2. **Faculty-Student Relationships** or Rapport - Are teachers available away from class?

3. **Social Support** – Are there places to hang out with other minorities and places to hang with non-minority students?
4. The presence of a racially **diverse staff** and environment that does not shout “White.”

We must be honest with ourselves when it comes down to “having a heart” for all students at all levels. After conducting this research study, the structure put in place won’t work unless the people involved can direct the vision of meeting African American student needs. Perhaps people that have experienced these issues first hand may serve as point people for particular programs.

K-12 schools, specifically high schools, could focus more on what higher education schools are doing to support African American students. If support, remediation and excellent teaching are given to all students this could lead to more students attending higher education better prepared. Lessons can be learned from the practice used at HBCUs. They have for years educated African Americans with success. A careful study of school programs that are working can further expand our knowledge base of practices that really work. As our country becomes more diverse it will be imperative that educators have a broad base of resources to work with these populations.

As part of this qualitative study, an action research component was initiated, and the researcher sent additional questions to the 10 participants (while affirming the findings from the interviews) to gain a better understanding of what K-12 settings should be doing to prepare African American students. Two questions were given to the participants with the following comments from the four that responded:

**1. What do you believe that K-12 schools are doing to assist with the retention and graduation of African American students prior to attending your university?**

Because the state has focused on math and reading/writing skills for graduation, I believe the P-12 schools have been forced to do so as well; however, the level of expectation is far too low to be successful in higher education.

I believe that different schools are doing different things. Some school systems have developed special programs to retain students and encourage college participation.

An example would be the early college partnership between our school and the local University. Other schools, however, are limited in the number of special programs they offer.

**2. What do you believe that K-12 schools are doing to inhibit the retention and graduation of African American students prior to attending your university?**

I believe that P-12 schools should develop a faculty who is committed to being supportive of each individual, with teams of teachers to develop plans for assisting the underachieving student (including bringing parents or guardians in as partners in the process). Students need to be focused on their role in learning and accountability for that. And learning needs to be made engaging for students . . . in every class, all the time!

Creating an environment for high expectations (between and among parents, teachers and children) would lead to greater achievement, retention and higher graduation rates . . . and would assist students with the skills to be successful at the University level.

Fundamentally, schools with low graduation rates tend to have low expectations, especially of minority students. The curriculum is typically not aligned with expectations for success in entry-level college courses.

As a result of these comments both higher education and K-12 must work together to solve the problem of African American students not graduating from college. Curricular and extra-curricular school programs are many at the K-12 level, but, a careful analysis of who is teaching and how they teach must come to the forefront. Programs are not a sufficient answer to increasing student achievement, but the quality of interactions we have with students seems to be a key factor.

Teachers make a difference and the lessons learned are not just at K-12 but must be learned at all levels of education. Simple words of encouragement are just as important as a new laptop computer. The majority of educators will be White, but with training and examples, a road map can be created to end the low rates of African Americans graduating. Further discussions can also inform how to close the achievement gap at all levels of education.

### **My Experience**

At a PWI it is easy to lose your heritage. As an African American student, your culture is missing all over campus. Something simple as getting a haircut cannot be found on campus and often not in the community. Yet, the personal connection made with a few faculty members made the difference for me staying in college. During my sophomore year I met a wonderful advisor in the School of Education who took time with me. We met regularly and she was able to keep me connected. At the time the state was changing teacher licensing and therefore schools of education were increasing requirements for admissions. New tests were implemented making it more difficult to gain admission. We started a support group for all

African Americans in the School of Education to encourage support. My advisor requested other colleagues to join in this cause. This positive relationship motivated me and others to stay enrolled in our program.

As a first generation college student I did not have family members help to explain the process of attending college. My story is similar to many African American students attending PWI campuses. But, with a sense of purpose, social connections, and supportive faculty members, students can achieve success and graduate.

We must not forget that students who are born into poverty often do not have the same access to resources as more affluent students. Once I was given access to resources, my talent exploded and achievement came quickly. The University I attended did have cultural activities to help me feel connected to the campus. Many great speakers from Maya Angelou to Arthur Ashe gave talks on campus. These activities gave me hope and encouragement. The faculty members that connected with me played a significant role in my achievement also. On many occasions I was the only person of color in classes. The sense of isolation was ubiquitous. The teachers that would speak with me directly or give me time made the difference. One professor went as far as to ensuring I was connected to a specific school district, which eventually assisted me in becoming employed with that school district. He was honest and encouraging during my time with him in the school of education.

### **Study Limitations**

There were limitations to this study. One limitation was transferability, whether a reader is able to infer that the results of the research would be the same or similar in their own situation. All qualitative research will have this limitation (Creswell, 2003). This may be a limitation as

some people are unable to connect to the issue of race, but it is this researcher's goal to provide information that can help with the problem of retention and graduation of African Americans.

A second limitation would be this researcher's potential bias. The researcher took steps to ensure that the questions were fair and not biased and during the interviews. No attempt was made to respond subjectively toward any responses made by the participants. A peer review of the interview questions assisted with the content validity. Obviously the background of this researcher has been the impetus for the chosen topic. One should decide as to whether this passion helped or hindered the findings.

The third limitation involved the participants of this study. The interviews were conducted by telephone rather than in person, body language and/or the physical environment were not considered. Due to this possibility, the results could be affected; the participants in this study may not have been candid in their responses. However, the length of the interviews suggested that the participants wanted to fully share information. None of the interviews lasted less than half of an hour. The interviews were conducted by officials at PWI campuses only.

Regarding validity and alternative explanations, rival hypotheses can always be made in any qualitative study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The findings of this study were presented not only to participants but were made available to scholars with research backgrounds relative to this topic. "One must nevertheless critically assess where one's social location, political orientation, religious training, and attitudes on race fit into the research project" (Gallagher, 2010, p. 210).

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Many studies on the achievement of African Americans focus on what does not work. This study focused on practices that work as discussed by the participants and the literature.

This researcher offers the following recommendations to further this study on the retention and graduation of African American students:

1. A follow up study should be done with HBCU students to offer their perspectives on the specific practices that work with the retention and graduation of African Americans.
2. Further study should be done with all HBCUs and similar PWIs over a period of years to evaluate the effectiveness of the practices. Are the practices changing or evolving over time?
3. A detailed study of African American faculty members should be done to gain their perspective on the retention and graduation of African American students. Do they feel it takes a Black to teach a Black?
4. A study should be done with African American students who have attended both HBCU and PWI campuses to cross examine differences and similarities on experiences on their school's commitment to the retention and graduation of African American students.
5. A quantitative study should be done to further connect the effective practices at HBCUs to the K-12 setting. Are there similarities and differences in practices to graduating African American students from high school and college?
6. Since the size of schools and enrollment were not discussed, a study should be done analyzing whether these variables have an impact on the retention and graduation rates of African American students.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

An assumption has developed from this research that faculty members who interact with students do and can make a difference. The researcher's personal experiences have influenced this study and were listed as a potential limitation also. The interviewees presented support for the need for understanding the complexity of studying African American students at all levels, but most important is the notion of identifying people who care and put them in position to make a difference. This research is not about a deficit belief system but rather a deployment of practices that can assist with the retention and graduation of African American students today.

Each of the themes described in this study detailed practices that are being used to retain and graduate African American students. Appendix C, D and E contains graduation rates of HBCUs and PWIs used in this study. This study illustrates the practices PWIs use to assist with what seems to be the universal problem of African American students achieving in school. These practices were compared and contrasted with the literature. The implications for practice at the K-12 level were explored. By listening to educators at all levels we can gain knowledge from each other, in addition, we can end the negative thinking that African American cannot achieve.

## References

- Adams, M., Bell, L., & Griffin, P. (2007). *Teaching for diversity and social justice*. New York, NY: Taylor Francis.
- Allen, W. (1992). The color of success: African American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Education Review*, 62(1), 26-44.
- Bernard, B. (1991). *Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, school, and community*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities, Far West Laboratory.
- Bennett, P., & Xie, Y. (2003). Revisiting racial differences in college attendance: The role of historically Black colleges and universities. *American Sociological Review*, 68, 567-580.
- Bogden, L. & Biklen, R. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Boyd, W. L. (1991). What makes ghetto schools succeed or fail? *Teachers College Record*, 92, 331-362.
- Bridgeland, J., Dilulio, J. & Morison, K. (2006). *The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts*. Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.  
Retrieved from [www.civiccenrerespres.net](http://www.civiccenrerespres.net)
- College Results. (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.collegeresults.org>.

- The College Student Experiences Questionnaire Program. (2007). Indiana University.  
Bloomington, IN.
- Constantine, J. M. (1994). The added value of historically Black colleges. *Academe*, 80(3), 12.
- Cross, P., & Astin, H. (1981). Factors influencing Blacks' persistence in college. In G. Thomas (Ed.), *Black students in higher education* (pp. 76-90). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3) 124-131.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1999). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Deal, T., & Peterson, K. (2009). *Shaping school culture: Pitfalls, paradoxes, and promises*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Demaris, M., & Kritsonis, W. (2006). A philosophical approach to minority student persistence on a historically Black college and university campus. *Doctoral FORUM*, 3(1). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED493143).
- Denbo, S. (2002a). *Improving school for African American students*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Denbo, S. (2002b). *Why can't we close the achievement gap?* Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Ely, M., Anzul, M., Friedman, T., Garner, D., & Stienmetz, A. (1991). *Doing qualitative research: Circles within circles*. London, England: The Falmer Press.

- Dufour, R. (2007). Professional learning communities: A bandwagon, an idea worth considering, or our best hope for high levels of learning? *Middle School Journal*, 39(1), 4-8.
- Ehrenberg, R. G., & Rothstein, D. S. (1993). *Do historically Black institutions of higher education confer unique advantages on Black students: An initial analysis?* Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Ferguson, R. F. (2002). *What doesn't meet the eye: Understanding and addressing racial? Disparities in high-achieving suburban schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government.
- Fischer, K. (2007). A historically Black college takes a hands-on approach to student success. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53(29) A21.
- Flowers, L. (2004). *American colleges and universities: Case study for higher education and student affairs professional*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Gallagher, K. (2010). The World. *The Guardian*, 10(3), 210.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Graves, L. (2008). The gap in graduation rates. *U.S. News & World Report*, 144, 62-63.
- Gray, W. H. (1998, April 18). Leader lauds role of Black colleges. *Boston Globe*, B6.
- Heath, A. (1997, March). The proposal in qualitative research *The Qualitative Report*, 3(1).  
Retrieved May 10, 2010, from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-1/heath.html>
- Henderson III, F. T., & Kritsonis, W. A. (2007). Graduation rates at historically Black colleges and universities: A review of the literature. *Doctoral FORUM-National Journal for Publishing and Mentoring Doctoral Student Research*, 4(1).

- Howard, G. (1985). *Basic research methods in the social sciences*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Company.
- Hubbard, D. (2006). The color of our classroom, the color of our future. *Academe*, 92(6), 27-29.
- Indiana Department of Education. (2008a). *Teacher salary*. Retrieved from <http://mustang.doe.state.in.us/TRENDS/corp.cfm?corp=4690&var=sal>
- Indiana Department of Education. (2008b). *Minority teachers*. Retrieved from <http://mustang.doe.state.in.us/TRENDS/trends1.cfm?var=minteach>
- Indiana Department of Education. (2009). Retrieved from <http://www.doe.state.in.us/>
- Jack, D. (1999). Ways of listening to women in qualitative research: Interview techniques and analysis. *Canadian Psychology*, 40(2), 91-101.
- Jackson, C. (2001). *African American education: A reference book*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. (2009). Vital Statistics, 63. Retrieved from [http://www.jbhe.com/book\\_rev/index.html](http://www.jbhe.com/book_rev/index.html)
- Kamara, M. (2007). Are U.S. news rankings inherently biased against Black colleges? *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 24(10), 2-8.
- Kerr, K., & Legters, N. (2004). *Preventing dropout: Use and impact of organizational reforms designed to ease the transition to high school in dropouts in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Kim, M., & Conrad, C. (2006). The impact of historically Black colleges and universities on the academic success of African American students. *Research in Higher Education*, 47, 399-427.

- King, P., & Howard-Hamilton, M. (2000). Using student development theory to inform institutional research. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 10(1002), 19-36.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 159-165.
- Leonhardt, D. (2009). Colleges are failing in graduation gates. *New York Times*, Economic Scene. <http://nytimes.com/2009/09/09/business/economy/09leonhardt.html>
- Levitt, S., & Fryer, R. G. (2004). Falling behind: New evidence on the Black-White achievement gap. *Education Next*, 4(4), 64-71.
- Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation, *Psychological Review*, 50, 370-396.
- Maxwell, J. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McMillian, M. (2002). Is no child left behind “wise schooling” for African American male students? *High School Journal*, 87(2), 25-33.
- Merriam, S. (1991). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mitchell, S. (2000). *Jack and the giant school*. Minneapolis, MN: Institute for Self-Reliance.
- Morgan, H. (1995). *Historical perspectives on the education of Black children*. Westport, CT: London.
- National Survey of Student Engagement. (2010). *Major differences: Examining student engagement by field of study—annual results 2010*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

- Ogbu, J. U. (2003). *Black American students in an affluent suburb: A study of academic disengagement*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ortiz, L., & Jani, J. (2010). Critical race theory: A transformational model for teaching diversity. *Journal of Social Work Education, 46*(2), 175-193.
- Ortman, P. E., & Thandiwe, N. (2002). Making high schools work for African American students. In S. J. Denbo & L. M. Beaulieu (Eds.), *Improving schools for African American students: A reader for educational leaders* (pp. 235-245). Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Pasarella, E., Smart, J., Ethington, C., & Nettles, M. (1987). The influence of college on self-concept: A consideration of race and gender differences. *American Educational Research Journal, 24*(1), 49-77.
- Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (2005). *How college affects students*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rumberger, R. (1995). Dropping out of middle school: A multilevel analysis of students and schools. *American Educational Journal, 32*, 583-625.
- Rumberger, R. & Thomas, S. L. (2000). The distribution of dropout and turnover rates among urban and suburban high schools. *Sociology of Education, 73*, 55-56.
- Roach, R. (2006). An HBCU transformed. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education, 23*(9), 14-19.
- Ross, M. J. (1998). *Success factors of young African American males at a historically Black college*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

- Santovec, M. (2004). Personal Attention Boosts Black Graduation Rate. *National On-Campus Report*, 24(17), 1-3.
- Steele, C. M. & Aronson, J. (1995), Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, 797-811.
- Stewart, E. (2007). Individual and school structural effects on African American high school students' academic achievement. *High School Journal*, 91(2), 16-34.
- Swanson, C., & Hightower, S. (2008). Diplomas count 2008. *Education Week*, 1-36.
- Swanson, C. (2004). *Who graduates? Who doesn't? Statistical portrait of public high school graduation, class of 2001*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.
- The Education Trust. (2003). *African American achievement in America*. Retrieved from <http://www.edtrust.org>
- Thompson, G. (2002). *African American teens discuss their school experiences*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Thompson, G. (2007). The truth about Black students and standardized tests. What school leaders should know? *Leadership*, 36, 22-38.
- U.S. Department of Education. (1999). *Digest of education statistics 1998*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. (1991). *Historically Black colleges and universities and higher education desegregation*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Viadera, D. (2000). Lags in minority achievement defy traditional explanation. *Education Week*, 19(28), 5-11.

Weiner, L. (2003). Why is classroom management so vexing to urban teachers? *Theory Into Practice*, 42, 305-312.

Wells-Lawson, M. I. (1994, April 4-8). *The effects of race and type of institution on the college experiences of Black and White undergraduate students attending 30 predominantly Black and predominantly White colleges and universities*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Williams, B. (2002). *A no-excuses approach to closing the achievement gap*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

**APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS**

1. Are your professors encouraged to use innovative teaching practices? Describe.
2. Are your professors encouraged to establish a rapport with students? How?
3. Are your professors are encouraged to learn about African American culture? How?
4. Does your college or University provide programs that specifically focus on increasing African American achievement? Describe.
5. Are professors sharing instructional practices and data on student achievement with other faculty members? How?
6. Are students given an opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences at your college or university? Describe.
7. How often does your college or University set goals to increase African American overall retention and graduation?
8. Are student offered academic assistance? Describe.

9. How does your college or University seek to hire a racially diverse faculty?

10. Any additional thoughts regarding your successes with African American graduation rates?

## **APPENDIX B: TELEPHONE SURVEY SCRIPT**

Dear Academic Support Services and or Dean of Academic Affairs

You are being invited to participate in a research study about the Retention of African American students in college. This study is being conducted by Shawn A. Smith, PhD. Candidate, and Dr. Steve Gruenert, Sponsor, from the Educational Leadership, Administration, and Foundation Department at Indiana State University. This study is being conducted as part of the candidate's dissertation program.

Academic Support Services Staff and or Deans of Academic Affairs have been selected to participate in this endeavor to determine the characteristics of effective practices in retaining African American students in college. There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study. There are no costs to you for participating in the study. The information you provide will assist university educational leaders in determining the characteristics for retaining African American students. The telephone survey will take about ten minutes to complete. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but the information learned in this study provides more general benefits.

This telephone survey is anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Individuals from the Institutional Review Board may inspect these records. Should the data be published, no individual information will be disclosed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. By completing and submitting the survey you are voluntarily agreeing to participate.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact:

Student

Mr. Shawn A. Smith  
8534 Walden Trace Court  
Indianapolis, IN 46278

Sponsor

Dr. Steve Gruenert  
317A Bayh College of Education, ISU  
Terre Haute, IN 47809

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or if you feel you've been placed at risk, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**APPENDIX C: HBCU BY ENROLLMENT WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN SIX-YEAR  
GRADUATION RATE**

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>African- American Six-year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
University of District of Columbia	17.2%	Washington, DC	11,578
Southern University A&M College	29.8%	Louisiana	10,548
Howard University	69.3%	Washington, DC	10,105
Texas Southern University	11.6%	Texas	10,045
Florida A&M University	39.4%	Florida	9,912
Norfolk State University	30.8%	Virginia	8,652
North Carolina A&T State University	41.4%	North Carolina	7,973
Tennessee State University	40.2%	Tennessee	7,590
Grambling State University	30.4%	Louisiana	7,533
Jackson State University	36.3%	Mississippi	6,203
Prairie View A&M University	37.7%	Texas	5,849
Hampton University	54.1%	Virginia	5,759
North Carolina Central University	48.5%	North Carolina	5,635
Alabama A&M University	33.2%	Alabama	5,543
South Carolina State University	45.4%	South Carolina	5,071
Alabama State University	27.3%	Alabama	5,037
West Virginia State College	24.5%	West Virginia	4,896
Morgan State University	37.7%	Maryland	4,693
Southern University, New Orleans	8.2%	Louisiana	4,652
Clark Atlanta College	44.0%	Georgia	4,500
Bowie State University	36.5%	Maryland	4,189
Fayetteville State University	35.8%	North Carolina	4,032
Lincoln University	22.0%	Missouri	4,031
Virginia State University	42.2%	Virginia	3,996
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff	32.9%	Arkansas	3,616
Tuskegee University	49.0%	Alabama	3,598
Xavier University of Louisiana	46.3%	Louisiana	3,304
Central State University	20.9%	Ohio	3,261
Albany State College	41.4%	Georgia	3,106
Morehouse College	60.5%	Georgia	2,990

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>African-American Six-year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Delaware State University	37.3%	Delaware	2,935
Bluefield State College	15.8%	West Virginia	2,931
Alcorn State University	43.2%	Mississippi	2,919
Interdenominational Theological Center	100.0%	Georgia	2,900
Savannah State University	40.5%	Georgia	2,872
Winston Salem State University	45.1%	North Carolina	2,817
Coppin State College	18.9%	Maryland	2,578
Kentucky State University	24.6%	Kentucky	2,541
Fort Valley State College	32.4%	Georgia	2,537
Shaw University	35.8%	North Carolina	2,504
University of Maryland, Eastern Shore	37.3%	Maryland	2,400
Bethune Cookman College	34.4%	Florida	2,301
Mississippi Valley State College	36.0%	Mississippi	2,221
Elizabeth City State University	50.7%	North Carolina	2,130
Morris Brown College	NA	Georgia	2,030
Spellman College	78.0%	Georgia	2,026
Harris-Stowe State College	21.0%	Missouri	1,978
St. Augustine's College	31.5%	North Carolina	1,745
Dillard University	48.2%	Louisiana	1,625
Virginia Union University	25.1%	Virginia	1,548
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania	29.5%	Pennsylvania	1,519
Florida Memorial College	37.9%	Florida	1,500
Johnson C. Smith University	41.6%	North Carolina	1,391
Oakwood College	43.9%	Alabama	1,334
Lincoln University	37.6%	Pennsylvania	1,234
Benedict College	27.2%	South Carolina	1,234
Lemoyne-Owen College	21.6%	Tennessee	1,132
Tougaloo College	46.3%	Mississippi	1,131
Rust College	29.2%	Mississippi	1,129
Philander Smith College	27.8%	Arkansas	940
Talladega College	23.0%	Alabama	918
Claflin College	55.3%	South Carolina	907
Stillman College	22.7%	Alabama	888
Fisk University	53.4%	Tennessee	872
Morris College	38.1%	South Carolina	792
Meharry Medical College	NA	Tennessee	791
Miles College	10.9%	Alabama	751
Wilberforce University	31.8%	Ohio	750
Barber-Scotia College	NA	North Carolina	732
Livingstone College	32.4%	North Carolina	704
Paine College	31.1%	Georgia	686
Paul Quinn College	66.3%	Texas	683
Voorhees College	11.9%	South Carolina	665

---

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>African-American Six-year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Bennett College	35.3%	North Carolina	664
Saint Paul's College	24.8%	Virginia	644
Huston-Tillotson College	18.3%	Texas	611
Edward Waters College	8.9%	Florida	610
Lane College	24.5%	Tennessee	575
Wiley College	19.3%	Texas	575
Allen University	21.9%	South Carolina	450
Arkansas Baptist College	100.0%	Arkansas	412
Jarvis Christian College	10.2%	Texas	383
Langston University	39.7%	Oklahoma	380
Concordia College	35.3%	Alabama	350
University of the Virgin Islands	29.2%		

---

**APPENDIX D: HBCU'S BY STATE WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN SIX-YEAR  
GRADUATION RATE**

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>African- American Six-year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Alabama A&M University	33.2%	Alabama	5,543
Alabama State University	27.3%	Alabama	5,037
Tuskegee University	49.0%	Alabama	3,598
Oakwood College	43.9%	Alabama	1,334
Talladega College	23.0%	Alabama	918
Stillman College	22.7%	Alabama	888
Miles College	10.9%	Alabama	751
Concordia College	35.3%	Alabama	350
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff	32.9%	Arkansas	3,616
Philander Smith College	27.8%	Arkansas	940
Arkansas Baptist College	100.0%	Arkansas	412
Delaware State University	37.3%	Delaware	2,935
Florida A&M University	39.4%	Florida	9,912
Bethune Cookman College	34.4%	Florida	2,301
Florida Memorial College	37.9%	Florida	1,500
Edward Waters College	8.9%	Florida	610
Clark Atlanta College	44.0%	Georgia	4,500
Albany State College	41.4%	Georgia	3,106
Morehouse College	60.5%	Georgia	2,990
Interdenominational Theological Center	100.0%	Georgia	2,900
Savannah State University	40.5%	Georgia	2,872
Fort Valley State College	32.4%	Georgia	2,537
Morris Brown College	NA	Georgia	2,030
Spellman College	78.0%	Georgia	2,026
Paine College	31.1%	Georgia	686
Kentucky State University	24.6%	Kentucky	2,541
Southern University A&M College	29.8%	Louisiana	10,548
Grambling State University	30.4%	Louisiana	7,533
Southern University, New Orleans	8.2%	Louisiana	4,652
Xavier University of Louisiana	46.3%	Louisiana	3,304
Dillard University	48.2%	Louisiana	1,625
Morgan State University	37.7%	Maryland	4,693

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>African-American Six-year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Bowie State University	36.5%	Maryland	4,189
Coppin State College	18.9%	Maryland	2,578
University of Maryland, Eastern Shore	37.3%	Maryland	2,400
Jackson State University	36.3%	Mississippi	6,203
Alcorn State University	43.2%	Mississippi	2,919
Mississippi Valley State College	36.0%	Mississippi	2,221
Tougaloo College	46.3%	Mississippi	1,131
Rust College	29.2%	Mississippi	1,129
Lincoln University	22.0%	Missouri	4,031
Harris-Stowe State College	21.0%	Missouri	1,978
North Carolina A&T State University	41.4%	North Carolina	7,973
North Carolina Central University	48.5%	North Carolina	5,635
Fayetteville State University	35.8%	North Carolina	4,032
Winston Salem State University	45.1%	North Carolina	2,817
Shaw University	35.8%	North Carolina	2,504
Elizabeth City State University	50.7%	North Carolina	2,130
St. Augustine's College	31.5%	North Carolina	1,745
Johnson C. Smith University	41.6%	North Carolina	1,391
Barber-Scotia College	NA	North Carolina	732
Livingstone College	32.4%	North Carolina	704
Bennett College	35.3%	North Carolina	664
Central State University	20.9%	Ohio	3,261
Wilberforce University	31.8%	Ohio	750
Langston University	39.7%	Oklahoma	380
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania	29.5%	Pennsylvania	1,519
Lincoln University	37.6%	Pennsylvania	1,234
South Carolina State University	45.4%	South Carolina	5,071
Benedict College	27.2%	South Carolina	1,234
Clafin College	55.3%	South Carolina	907
Morris College	38.1%	South Carolina	792
Voorhees College	11.9%	South Carolina	665
Allen University	21.9%	South Carolina	450
Tennessee State University	40.2%	Tennessee	7,590
Lemoyne-Owen College	21.6%	Tennessee	1,132
Fisk University	53.4%	Tennessee	872
Meharry Medical College	NA	Tennessee	791
Lane College	24.5%	Tennessee	575
Texas Southern University	11.6%	Texas	10,045
Prairie View A&M University	37.7%	Texas	5,849
Paul Quinn College	66.3%	Texas	683
Huston-Tillotson College	18.3%	Texas	611
Wiley College	19.3%	Texas	575
Jarvis Christian College	10.2%	Texas	383

---

<b>Name of Institution</b>	<b>African-American Six-year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Norfolk State University	30.8%	Virginia	8,652
Hampton University	54.1%	Virginia	5,759
Virginia State University	42.2%	Virginia	3,996
Virginia Union University	25.1%	Virginia	1,548
Saint Paul's College	24.8%	Virginia	644
University of District of Columbia	17.2%	Washington, DC	11,578
Howard University	69.3%	Washington, DC	10,105
West Virginia State College	24.5%	West Virginia	4,896
Bluefield State College	15.8%	West Virginia	2,931
University of the Virgin Islands	29.2%		

---

**APPENDIX E: GRADUATION RATE**

<b>College/University</b>	<b>Overall 6th year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>African American 6 Year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Anderson University	53.5	28.6	Anderson	2199
Ball State University	57.7	28.6	Muncie	17082
Bethel College	61.9	NA	Mishawaka	1887
Butler University	73.6	73.1	Indianapolis	3653
Calumet College of Saint Joseph	18.2	11.1	Gary	1091
DePauw University	81.5	75	Greencastle	2326
Earlham College	74.5	60	Richmond	1248
Franklin College	57.7	NA	Franklin	1013
Goshen College	62.8	NA	Goshen	951
Grace College and Theological Seminary	58.6	NA	Winona Lake	1179
Hanover College	59.5	NA	Hanover	975
Huntington University	59.1	NA	Huntington	984
Indiana Institute of Technology	32.1	26.2	Fort Wayne	2831
Indiana State University	41.2	36.2	Terre Haute	8537
Indiana University- Bloomington	71.9	49.8	Bloomington	30,000
Indiana University-East	17.6	NA	Richmond	2194
Indiana University-Kokomo	27.2	10	Kokomo	2604
Indiana University- Northwest	31.8	16	Gary	4229
Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis	31.5	26.1	Indianapolis	22,000
Indiana University-Purdue University-Fort Wayne	23.1	9.4	Fort Wayne	10,890
Indiana University-South Bend	26.5	12.8	South Bend	6371
Indiana University-Southeast	29	18.2	New Albany	5365
Indiana Wesleyan University	73.3	90	Marion North	9300
Manchester College	54.2	33.3	Manchester	1056

<b>College/University</b>	<b>Overall 6th year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>African American 6 Year Graduation Rate</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Marian University	54.2	41.2	Indianapolis	1779
Martin University	13.6	16.7	Indianapolis	504
Oakland City University	23.6	NA	Oakland	1221
Purdue University-Calumet Campus	19.9	7.8	Calumet West	8385
Purdue University-Main Campus	69.1	53.7	Lafayette	32,668
Rose Hulman Institute of Technology	83.4	NA	Terre Haute	1862
Saint Mary of the Woods	30.6	NA	Rensseleer	1540
Saint Joseph Rensseleer	56.1	8.3	Rensseleer	
Taylor University	75.5	8.3	Upland	968
University of Evansville	62.2	23.1	Evansville	2330
University of Indiana	51.4	34	Indianapolis	3388
University of Notre Dame	95.5	93	South Bend	8352
University of Phoenix- Indianapolis Campus	30.9	25	Indianapolis	1318
University of Phoenix- Northwest Indiana Campus	30.9	20	Merryville	1000
University of Saint Frances	50.9	NA	Fort Wayne	1784
University of Southern Indiana	30.7	20	Evansville	
Valparaiso University	27.4	58.4	Valparaiso	9298
Wabash College	71	66.7	Crawfordsville	878

## APPENDIX F: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

Dear College Administrator:

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to assist my doctoral study on “How Predominately White Institutions of Higher Education in Indiana Address Retention and Graduation rates of African American students. As we conclude this study I would value having your input. As result of my findings I want to connect Higher Education and K-12 to my topic in the final chapter. Below are my findings as well as two additional questions which reflect my desire to make this meaningful to K-12 schools.

Study Findings:

The purpose of this study was to seek specific practices that work with increasing African American retention and graduation in higher education. As a result HBCUs and PWIs did have practices that could contribute not only to higher education but, in retrospect, to K-12 schools across the country. By interviewing school officials at PWIs in Indiana it was found that these schools had many commonalities to HBCUs. The literature on HBCUs points to positive practices that have worked with retaining and graduating African American students. The school officials at PWIs provided detailed data based on the depth of their experiences and knowledge. HBCUs have a higher retention rate of African American college than PWI (Constantine, 1994). Because of the historical context of HBCUs being created to separate the races it must noted that these schools would have an advantage in educating African Americans. However, my study found that PWIs have similar practices to HBCUs when working with African American students. The commonalities found that have an impact on the retention and graduations of African American students are as follows:

1. Supportive Environment - Both HBCUs and PWIs provide supportive environments based on caring.
2. Remediation - The ability to remediate and support students in need of academic help.
3. Faculty- Faculty members who are committed to teaching.

According to my data the major difference between HBCUs and PWIs in Indiana that had an impact on the retention and graduations of African American students is as following:

1. After careful review of the literature and data from the research it clear that hiring a diverse staff is the major difference between HBCUs and PWIs. A diverse staff from the literature does have an impact on the retention of African American students.

I would like to supplement the data from this study with a few thoughts from you regarding the following questions:

1. What do you believe that K-12 schools are doing to assist with the retention and graduation of African American students prior to attending your University?
2. What do you believe that K-12 schools are doing to inhibit the retention and graduation of African American students prior to attending your University?

I appreciate your response back in a simple email. If further input is needed I will contact you directly via telephone.

Thank you!