

2020

Factors that Influence African American Male Retention in Public Four-Year Institutions

Shantya V. Plater
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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Shantya V. Plater

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Factors that Influence African American Male Retention in Public Four-Year Institutions

by

Shantya V. Plater

MA, Norfolk State University, 2011

BS, Norfolk State University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2020

Abstract

Due to the lack of policies at the federal and state level, 4-year public colleges and universities across the United States are left to develop retention policies at the institutional level to support their diverse populations. Retention rates for minority students lag behind their peers, especially African American male students. This study identified the factors that influence retention amongst African American male students at 4-year public colleges and universities. The theoretical framework used in this study was the Tinto model of academic and social integration. The data identified that financial resources, family support, and academic and social engagement influence the retention of 94 African American male students through a case study of 4-year public institutions in the state of North Carolina. Males were surveyed who were enrolled in or who attended a 4-year public college or university in North Carolina. Results indicated that financial resources were the most common theme to influence male student retention. The data collected from this study may be used to guide development of strategies and initiatives geared towards retaining African American male students.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to little brown girls and boys to encourage them to strive for their dreams and aspirations, to use their education as a steppingstone to overcome obstacles and to unlock the door to success. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends that remained loyal and by my side throughout this journey called life, filled with ups and downs. To my mom, pops, grandmother, grandfather, aunts, siblings, nephews, niece and extended family members, we made it!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Study

As colleges and universities across the United States (U.S.) aim to fulfill their mission to educate students towards degree completion in their selected fields of study, these institutions face several challenges. Student retention and graduation rates have become popular topics in higher education in recent years due to former President of the United States Barack Obama's efforts to increase the graduation rate in the U.S. colleges by the year 2020. Policymakers at the federal and state levels require institutions to report retention and graduation rates to the United States Department of Education (ED) as a means by which to measure institutional quality and effectiveness. Despite this mandatory reporting, these legislators have failed to implement policies and procedures intended to support institutions' retention efforts.

According to Ewell (2002), student retention is considered a key indicator of student performance, and it allows institutions to demonstrate the quality of their academic programs and support units to both internal and external stakeholders. Stakeholders such as accrediting agencies, the ED, state governments, and institutions' boards of visitors use retention rates as measures of accountability to determine whether institutions are capable of making informed decisions regarding policies, programs, and personnel when attempting to bolster student success (Bogue, 1998). Due to the lack of policies and procedures focused on student retention at the federal and state levels, colleges and universities are left to develop their own. However, to develop effective and

efficient retention plans, institutions require empirical research to help guide the development of institutional policies and practices in this area (Brown, 2015).

Given that student enrollment has consistently increased, improving student retention is a top priority in higher education at institutions across the United States. The decline in student retention rates may not be directly related to students' ability to succeed academically, but instead institutions' inability to provide accessible support systems to aid students in achieving their academic goals (Harper, 2012). To improve such support systems at colleges and universities, administrators should examine the factors that influence student retention. Tinto's model of student retention and departure has laid the framework for several further studies on this subject over the past 2 decades, beginning in the mid-2000s. There are hundreds of articles on student retention and minority students; however, there is little research that uses Tinto's framework regarding student retention by race and gender.

U.S. colleges and universities have developed diverse student bodies. In order to meet the demands of these diverse student bodies, institutions must be able to tailor their policies and procedures to be inclusive of minority students. African American male students have the lowest academic achievement rates among all ethnic groups (College Board, 2010; Harper, 2012). Even though African American male student enrollment has increased in recent years, the rate of degree completion among this demographic is low. Data from the ED indicates that only 16% of African American male students attain college degrees (Harper, 2012).

Educators and policymakers are concerned that the low rate of degree completion among African American male students may impact the economic stability of the future workforce. To increase retention and graduation rates of African American male students, key departments such as financial aid, faculty, academic support units, and student affairs should implement policies that improve the overall student experience. These departments are vital in influencing student retention because of their daily interactions with students (Mustiful, 1995). Campuses must put forth efforts across these departments to mentor African American male freshmen from orientation through their senior years to support their progress through college (Booker & Brevard, 2017). This solution requires educators to continuously improve retention procedures to sustain students throughout their academic career (Cuyjet, 2006).

College and University administrators must determine causes of poor retention rates in order to increase the degree completion rate of African American male students. Griffin (2013) argued that differential treatment of minority students, in particular African American males by campus staff has had the greatest negative impact on academic performance. Differential treatment creates negative perceptions of campus faculty, staff, and administrations by causing students to feel unwanted on campus and hinders their academic development. Negative first interactions on campus during which African American male students are made to feel inferior by staff may contribute to poor academic performance and deter students from continuing with their college education (Johnson, 2013). Racial stereotypes and American society's treatment of African

American men are directly correlated with lack of persistence toward degree attainment among African American male students at many institutions across the nation.

Institutions should identify the factors that influence retention among African American male students to guide the creation of institutional retention policies and procedures that are inclusive of all students. The objective of this study was to analyze factors that influence retention among African American male students in four-year public colleges and universities. To this end, this phenomenological study examines elements of Tinto's model of student retention, such as financial resources, family income, and academic and social engagement to analyze students who attend or attended a four-year public institution in the state of North Carolina as the target research population. This study is valuable to higher education legislators, institutional administrators, and faculty by providing guidance to stakeholders in terms of developing and implementing policies and processes aimed at increasing the retention of African American male students.

African American male students have the lowest retention rates at U.S. colleges and universities compared to all other demographic groups by race and gender. Retaining African American male students will promote success by providing them with skills to prepare them for the workplace. Improving retention for this demographic group will have significant social implications for African American communities. These young men are potential future leaders who in time will give back to their communities by driving economic growth and taking on roles as mentors and policymakers.

Problem Statement

In the 21st century, education provides access to career advancement and financial freedom. The retention of minority students is a challenging issue for higher education professionals across the country. The national average retention rate of African American students is 45%, and only 16% of African American male students attain college degrees (McGill, 2015). Furthermore, African American males are the most underrepresented racial minority group in higher education degree attainment by number (Harper, 2006). African American males who earn a four-year college degree earn twice as much as those who have only some college experience or do not have a degree (Ross, 2014). This suggests the importance of studying the factors that influence retention among African American male students.

African American males quitting college prior to graduation is a controversial topic among higher education professionals. According to the ED (2012), the college graduation rate for African American men is 33%, whereas the graduation rate for African American women is higher at 45%. African American men represent 8% of people between the ages of 18 and 24 in the United States but only 3% of undergraduates at public flagship universities (Valbrun, 2013). These statistics highlight the necessity for policymakers to conduct in-depth research intended to guide the implementation of retention policies and procedures that are culturally inclusive of diverse student bodies.

Retention refers to institutions' ability to maintain students from one year to the next. Student retention policies set standards and guidance for postsecondary institutions to retain their student body. Due to the lack of retention policies at federal government

and state government levels, colleges and universities are left to develop best practices and implement policies intended to foster student success and thus increase retention rates. Academic and social engagement is an important factor that influences the college experience of students and plays a large role in retaining students. According to Tinto (1993), integrating academic and social engagement into the student experience helps to promote student involvement in campus life and thereby improves their college experience. Students who are more socially involved in campus life are more likely to persist and graduate (Hinton, 2014). Tinto's model of academic and social integration has rarely been applied to research focused on minority students, in particular African American males.

Public higher education in the state of North Carolina is controlled by the University of North Carolina General Administration (UNC GA). The UNC system is a multi-campus university system composed of 16 institutions in North Carolina. The UNC system prides itself on offering its student population a diverse profile of high-quality and internationally recognized academic programs. To serve diverse student bodies, the UNC GA aims to ensure that all students receive a quality education at their institutions to encourage persistence toward degree completion. Even though the UNC GA requires its institutions to report their retention, persistence, and graduation rates annually, it offers little to no guidance on policies and procedures that they should implement to achieve adequate rates. Due to lack of guidance from the UNC GA, institutions are struggling to retain minority students, particularly African American males. In recent years, colleges

and universities under the UNC GA umbrella have reported a decline in the retention of African American male students.

The UNC system has a diverse portfolio of institutions, each of which has its own campus demographics, which are influenced by their geographic locations. As a result of this, institutions must offer a welcoming and supportive environment with quality academic programs and amenities in order to attract and retain students. Retention data collected by the UNC system revealed that its historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have maintained a stable retention rate of African American male students despite slight fluctuations from year to year (Wade, 2014). By contrast, other institutions in the UNC system are struggling to retain African American male students between their freshman and sophomore years.

Data from this study can be used to guide four-year public institutions in creating and implementing retention policies and procedures that are inclusive of all students. Implementing inclusive policies demonstrates an institution's commitment to serving students from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. Increasing the rate of degree attainment among African American males helps to improve employment rates and the economic state of African American communities.

Mettler (2014) stated that if African Americans do not graduate from institutions of higher education in adequate numbers, the United States will find that a large segment of its population is unqualified to meet the growing needs of its workforce. Studying the factors that influence retention among African American male students can foster social change by helping administrators, faculty, and other stakeholders develop realistic

policies intended to close the achievement gap in higher education. Creating policies that aid in retaining African American male students will also have a positive impact on social change. In recent years, African American males represent half of the prison population in the United States and now constitute nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated population ([NAACP], 2013). Equipping higher education professionals with the tools required to develop effective and efficient retention policies will lead to an increase in African American male college graduates. Retaining students in this demographic group in college should help to decrease the number of incarcerated African American males.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence academic retention among African American male students in four-year public institutions. This study adopted a phenomenological research approach to study African American male students who are currently enrolled in or have attended a four-year public institution in the state of North Carolina. This work employed Tinto's academic and social integration model as the framework for investigating student experiences and retention at public four-year public institutions. Tinto's model suggests that the involvement of students in activities both inside and outside of the classroom impacts their campus experience. In order to guide the development of diverse student retention policies, this study expands on Tinto's model to expand it to be more inclusive of minority students by analyzing retention among African American male students.

Research Questions

Currently, retention policies for U.S. postsecondary institutions are developed at the institutional level. These policies drive the development of student retention initiatives. Student retention initiatives are activities or strategies proposed to support student success in order to aid in student retention. This study includes the following research questions derived from the theoretical framework:

RQ: How do retention policies and initiatives that integrate academic and social engagement at the federal and state level influence the retention of minority male students at four-year public colleges and universities?

Sub questions

SQ1: How do policies and initiatives at the institutional level influence the retention of minority male students?

SQ2: How do retention policies affect other minority male students compared to African American male students?

Theoretical Framework

Several theories in higher education focus directly on student retention. One of the most significant student retention theories is Tinto's model. According to this model, social and academic experiences affect a student's commitment to college and can drive his or her decision to remain in or depart from an institution (Deil-Amen, 2011). Tinto used the concepts of academic and social integration of college activities to promote academic success. Tinto's model provides institutions with strategies with which to

incorporate both formal and informal academic and social processes and systems to promote student retention.

The framework for the model explains that both formal and informal indicators of academic and social integration are influenced by students' interactions with faculty and staff and participation in extracurricular activities (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's model has been used in numerous studies to guide student retention policies at the institutional level. These policies help foster student success and can be measured as a commitment of an institution's ability to graduate students. Tinto (1993) noted that institutions should encourage students to identify goals that they wish to accomplish for students when attempting to promote retention. Tinto's model explores attribution as a factor affecting students' ability to socially and academically adapt to college environments. Attribution connects one's life experiences and events as factors that influence departure before degree completion.

Tinto's model elaborates on the key point that students who fully adapt both academically and socially to campus life will more likely persist to degree completion. In terms of social and academic engagement as a driving force for student retention, Tinto (1993) argued that family background/structure and financial resources play an enormous role in students' decisions to remain in enrolled in college. Tinto's (1993, 2006) research attributes family support and structure as an influence on student persistence and retention. Students who have families that provide their continuous support throughout the college experience are more likely to be retained than students without family support (Tinto, 2006). Once students arrive on campus and begin to engage and form a bond with

faculty and peers, they become less attached to their family (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's research does not focus on specific study populations, however, the research touches on a broad-based student population. Current literature using Tinto's model to explore factors that influence retention of African American male students is little or nonexistent.

This study used Tinto's model to examine the key factors that influence the retention of African American male students. Tinto's model of student retention offers guidance for the development and implementation of diverse student retention policies at the institutional level. This model is heavily derived from concepts of academic and social integration in order to foster implementation of inclusive student retention policies and procedures at the federal and state levels. This paper discussed Tinto's model of student retention extensively in Chapter 2.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the field of public policy and administration for several reasons. It sought to identify factors that influence student retention to guide the development and implementation of policies and procedures intended to support the retention of underrepresented student populations. Due to the lack of student retention policies at the federal and state levels, higher education leaders are left to develop retention policies and procedures at the institutional level. The findings of this study offer higher education faculty, staff, and administrators' evidence-based research upon which to base institutional policies intended to retain African American male students from point of entry to degree completion.

This study expands on prior retention research by addressing a gap in the literature regarding factors that support the retention of African American male students specifically. This study offers universities and colleges insight into the variables that influence African American male students' progress through higher education, which will in turn help these institutions boost or maintain enrollment numbers and increase graduation rates among this demographic group. Education in the 21st century is a driver of social change. Addressing retention among African American males in colleges and universities will help solve disparity issues in African American communities throughout the U.S.

Assumptions

This study assumed that African American males enrolled or who attended a public higher education institution share similar experiences with one another and the retention strategies, models, and theories that are applied to predominantly White institutions can also be applied to HBCUs. This study also assumed that data regarding retention, persistence, and graduation with respect to African American males was accurately reported to the ED.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This qualitative study identified the factors that influence retention among African American male students in four-year public colleges and universities. The study's sample group is limited to males who attended or are currently enrolled in a public higher education institution in the state of North Carolina. The UNC system is a multi-campus system of 16 higher education institutions authorized to grant two-year, four-year, and

postgraduate degrees. This study targeted only participants who entered these 16 institutions for a four-year degree.

Limitations of the Study

The analysis conducted in this study focused only on minority male students in the state of North Carolina. The research is limited to undergraduate minority male students at public institutions and does not consider graduate-level students or students enrolled in community colleges or four-year private colleges and universities in North Carolina. The study excluded female students in the state of North Carolina. Another limitation of the study was that it excluded males from private institutions.

Definition of Terms

This section provides operational definition of key terms used in this study. This paper's definitions of racial and ethnic groups are derived from the United States Census Bureau's official definitions of American ethnic groups, which include American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, African American (not of Hispanic origin), Caucasian (not of Hispanic origin), and Hispanic.

Academic socialization: The process that formally prepares students to effectively learn in a college environment; it includes teaching students social skills required for success in the classroom and developing their ability to integrate academic learning and social activities.

African American male (African American male): Males who have origins in any African American racial group (United States Census Bureau, 2010). This study

considers students of African American descent as students who were born in the United States, moved to the United States, or entered the United States on a student visa. African American and Black are used interchangeably in this study.

Attrition: Delay in completing or departure from a degree program.

College graduate: Students who have earned a bachelor's degree or professional advanced degree from a college or university.

Enrollment: The act of registering for courses at a college or university.

Financial aid: any need-based grant, scholarship, work study placement or loan from federal, state or private entities intended to help students with college expenses.

Freshman: A student entering any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level.

Graduation rate: The percentage of schools' first-year undergraduate students who complete their program. For a four-year degree program, students who complete the degree within six years of entering the program count as graduates.

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs): Colleges or universities established before 1964 with the principal mission of educating African American communities that are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary of Education to be a reliable authority on the quality of training offered, or are, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation (Higher Education Act, 1965).

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS): The primary postsecondary education data management system for institutions in the United States and U.S. territories.

Institution of higher education: Postsecondary institutions that award two-year, four-year, and certificate degrees, including public and private colleges and universities.

Persistence: Students' ability to remain at an institution of higher education until degree attainment.

Predominantly white institution (PWI): Colleges or universities serving a majority of students who are of European decent or are racially classified as Caucasian (White) and non-Hispanic.

Retention: Institutions' ability to retain students from entry (admission) to degree completion (graduation).

Social integration: Students' ability to socially adapt to a campus environment or climate outside of the traditional classroom setting.

Undergraduate program: An academic instructional program in which students earn credits toward a bachelor's degree.

Summary and Transition

This qualitative study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 presented the study's historical background, problem statement, purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, significance, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 presents the literature review; it consists of sections that discuss the evolution of public higher education, perceptions of African American male

students, the social and academic integration of African American males, public higher education policies in North Carolina, and models and theories involving student retention. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and explains the study's research setting, sample selection, data collection, analysis, and validity and reliability. Chapter 4 presents findings regarding factors that influence retention among African American male students in four-year public colleges and universities; this chapter addresses demographic profiles of institutions and variables that influence the social and academic integration of African American male students. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, a discussion of its findings, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the 21st century, higher education institutions have become a diverse and multicultural environment with a large mix of ethnicities. Student enrollment in four-year public and private universities and colleges in the US has increased dramatically in the past two decades. The growth in the number of students at higher education institutions has caused problems in terms of students' retention, specifically the retention of minority, first-generation, and low-income students. Diverse student populations, practices, and policies that affect retention, persistence, and graduation must be culturally inclusive to retain minority students. The shift in demographics on campuses has prompted higher education administrators to examine research and literature on retention to assist in guiding the implementation and development of policies and procedures to support the learning and success of minority students.

The path toward college completion for many students can be complicated with numerous barriers. One particular hindrance involves adjustments to academic and social demands of campus life. In higher education, the capacity to retain students from entry point through degree completion is a key measure of an institution's quality and effectiveness. In recent years, African American men are enrolling in college in record numbers to earn their degrees (Cuyjet, 2006; Floyd, 2005; Seidman, 2005; Seidman, 2007). Although African American men are enrolling in college in growing numbers, those same young individuals are dropping out of college prior to graduation at an alarming rate (Spurgeon & Myers, 2010).

African American male students lag behind White male students in terms of postsecondary education retention and graduation rates (Hyatt, 2003). Many higher education faculty and administrators believe that inadequate preparation in basic areas such as reading, writing, and critical thinking skills contributes to retention rates in postsecondary education by not preparing student for college level coursework. High enrollment and low graduation rates among minority students create major retention and persistence problems for institutions. African American students from inner city neighborhoods are disadvantaged in terms of higher education due to lack of resources and preparation. Attrition rates over time have indicated that underrepresented minority students are likelier to be at risk of attrition than their White or Asian counterparts (Lemire & Snyder, 2006; Hunt & Carruthers, 2004).

Numerous factors influence student retention. However, two factors directly influence student retention: academic and social integration. Direct personal events such as financial challenges, children and family structure changes can also affect students' educational progress. Both factors determine whether students will have smooth transitions between academic levels to persist toward degree completion. For an institution to be successful, it needs to follow freshmen throughout their academic career to understand issues of retention and help the students remain in school. Minority students on PWI campuses feel that they are treated differently than majority students.

Negative student impressions of campus environments generally affect student performance, but these impressions particularly influence the academic performance of minority students, especially African American men (Hutto & Fenwick, 2003). The

ineffectiveness of the U.S. higher education system in terms of understanding and developing policies and strategies for retaining minority students is the catalyst for many minority students' lack of persistence and noncompletion of their college degrees (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). High student enrollment and low graduation rates among minority students create major retention and persistence problems for institutions. This chapter presents a comprehensive review of literature regarding factors that influence the retention of minority students, particularly African American men.

Higher Education in the United States

At the outset, higher education in the US was created to educate White men through colonial colleges. As higher education expanded to meet the needs of the American people, the organizational structure of higher education grew to be shaped by demands of the public. Higher education institutions, also known as post-secondary institutions, shifted to be heavily influenced by the federal and state governments, local demographics, and social change to help everyone to access quality education. Higher education in the U.S. over time has evolved into an apparatus for economic development by preparing citizens for the workforce (Spellings, 2006). The postsecondary education system in the U.S. was developed from an independent institution model, whereas the higher education systems in other countries were derived from a central government-supported model.

The U.S. postsecondary education system comprises two types of institutions: public and private. Public institutions are funded by state and federal resources allocated to institutions through student financial aid based on monetary need. They also obtain

support from the state government through an annual allocation based on the state's budget. Furthermore, public institutions receive a majority of support from the government. By contrast, private institutions are self-regulated, and they secure a majority of their funding outside of tuition and fees from grants and private donors. Public and private colleges and universities both aim to educate students for the workforce, but their missions can vary depending on the types of degrees they are authorized to grant. Institutions are classified into three categories: universities, colleges, and community colleges. Community colleges are two-year institutions that grant associate degrees and vocational/technical training or provide preparation for students to transfer to four-year institutions. Colleges are authorized to award bachelors or four-year degrees. Universities are authorized for four-year undergraduates and graduate education leading to master's and doctoral degrees. Higher education was first established to educate White males. Over time, legislation expanded access to higher education for women and eventually African Americans and other minorities. Access to higher education was initially granted to minority student institutions such as HBCUs, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges, and women's institutions, which were all created to serve underrepresented populations.

Although particular types of institutions served minority students separately from students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), their relative quality was unequal. Legislation such as the Morrill Act of 1862 was developed to federally fund institutions that were open to all students, including women, minorities, and low-income students. The U.S. higher education system evolved into public and private institutions of learning,

with the aim of providing quality education to populations that they serve. Public institutions provide access to a broad range of students due the accessibility of federal and state funding and affordability set by the state government. Higher education systems at many states consist of institutions and campuses that are coordinated by a state-level administration. Statewide public systems may include two-year, four-year, and postgraduate education institutions. This study focuses on four-year public colleges and universities due to their accessibility to diverse individuals because of the affordability of public education. The next section provides an overview of public higher education in the state of North Carolina.

Public Higher Education in North Carolina

Public institutions of higher education in the state of North Carolina were chartered in 1789. The UNC was the first public university in the U.S. and the only one to graduate students in the 18th century. North Carolina is committed to overseeing an organized post-secondary educational environment to serve its residents. According to Wade (2014), North Carolina “shall maintain a public system of higher education, comprising The University of North Carolina and such other institutions of higher education as the General Assembly may deem wise” (p. 8), thereby affirming the state commitment to higher education. The UNC system uses data analysis to assess its goals and progress toward meeting the priorities of the population it serves by developing policies that align with the U.S. Department of Education and the institutions’ regional accrediting body. The North Carolina General Assembly ensures that the UNC system is accountable to the citizens and students by holding the UNC system fiscally responsible

for the budget of all the public institutions and performing a checks and balances function, along with the Board of Trustees.

African American Males in Higher Education

The higher education system sets the tone for the economic prosperity of citizens in the US. Individuals with a college degree are likely to earn twice as much those people without a college degree. Educators and community leaders believe in the importance of affording everyone a quality education free from roadblocks to allow communities and the country to thrive. However, numerous minorities have encountered barriers in their quest for education, especially African Americans. Nevertheless, African American college enrollment has increased over the past decade, and African American women earn the most degrees out of all the ethnicities in the US.

Data indicate that retaining African American male students in colleges and universities constitutes a challenge in higher education. Numerous studies have explored the factors that influence African American men's experience in higher education. Academic problems impeding the progress of African American men in higher education range from challenges such as the lack of financial support, improper academic preparation, and absence of institutional student support. A large number of African American students in the US enroll at publicly funded state universities and colleges. Public universities and colleges have lower tuition rates and more diverse academic programs than privately controlled institutions of higher education.

Given the affordability of publicly funded institutions, African American college students in the US are more likely to attend such institutions than private institutions.

African American men comprise 3.6% of undergraduate students (Harper, 2012). They account for less than 5% of the total enrollment of four-year higher education institutions in the US (Horn, Berger, & Carroll, 2004). Of that figure 3.6% of African American male students in four-year college complete their education, which is behind the completion rate of African American female students (Harper, 2006; Strayhorn, 2010). Up to 30% of African American male students graduate within six years, which is 18% lower than the overall student average of 48.1% (Harper, 2012). Post-baccalaureate degree completion for African American men has vastly (Harper & Davis, 2012). The post-baccalaureate degree completion and college enrollment rates of African American men have increased, but two-thirds of these students did not graduate with at least a bachelor's degree within six years (Ryu, 2010). These issues have caused a major concern among scholars, administrators, policy makers, and academicians (Jackson & Moore, 2006).

Labeling and perceptions of African American male students' academic abilities impede their success. In many cases, instructors characterize African American students, especially the male ones, as having a low expectation of academic success (Tatum, 1997). As such labels are embraced at institutions, the retention of African American male students is likely to decrease. However, as educators create, design, and implement plans to develop strong student learning across the campus, integrating the success indicators for retaining students, especially low performing African American male students, the institutions' commitment to the success of their students generally increases retention.

Minority students are often inadequately prepared for college due to a lack of preparation or a sense of a strong connection with the college or institution (Zimmerman, 2003).

African American male students who entered college academically underprepared usually find minimal support, which causes a vast majority of African American male students to lag behind the more affluent students (Enstrom & Tinto, 2008). The need to analyze the African American men's challenges in earning degree in higher education has triggered a high-level discussion on attrition and retention for African American male students. Determining the factors and solutions to promote academic success and retention among African American male students is vital for advancing the economic levels in the African American community. Research indicates that several early community and educational influences affect African American men's progress in higher education. According to Davis and Jordan (1994), African American men in elementary and secondary school are more likely to be discouraged by educators and counselors to attend college compared to their white counterparts.

African American men in the K–12 education system are labeled as special education students without a proper assessment of their academic abilities at an early age, and they are therefore disproportionately placed into low academic ability classrooms (Epps, 1995).

Research on African American men in higher education uses indicators such as enrollment and attrition to quantitatively explore student achievement. However, several factors beyond numbers contribute to the student population's lack of achievement on college campuses. Social and economic experiences at school directly influence the

African American male students' perception and ability to adjust to the stress, culture, or environment of campus life. Campus social environments are specifically related to different educational outcomes for African American college students (Allen, 1991). As stated earlier, African American men constitute 3.6% of the total enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities; of this number, 20% withdraw from school due to low academic performance, affordability, or negative experiences on campus (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991).

However, African American men who attend HBCUs have better learning experiences and higher achievement scores than those who attend PWIs (Seifert, Drummond, & Pascarella, 2006). Roebuck and Murty (1993) stated that African American students persisted at considerably higher rates on African American campuses than on white campuses. Moreover, African American students on white campuses had lower persistence rates between the freshman and senior years, lower academic achievement levels, lower likelihood of enrolling in an advanced degree program, and lower post-graduation rates and earnings (Allen, 1992). Lack of preparation and integration are not the only variables that affect retention among African American male students. Financial need also has a direct influence on student retention (Boume-Bowie, 2000).

A large number of African American male students depend on and receive financial aid in some form from the state and federal governments and family, if applicable. Any disruption to these financial resources can throw these students off track for graduation. According to Moline (1987), African American students depend on

grants, scholarships, and work–study programs to persist toward degree completion. By contrast, financial aid is directly related to retention, and the support system of finding these resources on campus has a significant effect on student success. Discontinuance among African American students is extremely high in underrepresented institutions and those individuals pursuing post-graduate studies, especially African American male students.

African American students experience a higher level of stress from assimilating to the culture of large campuses and receive less attention than their white peers. The themes emerging from this topic suggest that African American students have a sizable disadvantage on the nation’s college campuses. Engle and Tinto (2011) suggested that strengthening the structure of first-year advisement to bridge throughout the students’ academic career would provide them with access to services, thus helping to overcome barriers and maintain additional financial support through grants and work–study programs.

A strong connection between students and campus faculty helps to initiate a bond within the community campus, which is vital for student retention (Andrade, 2008). Accommodating African American male students by providing environments that encourage social involvement and academic enrichment could enhance their college experience (Davis, 1995; Taylor & Olswang, 1997). The next section explores the theoretical perspective and conceptual framework that underpins student retention and success.

Factors Contributing to African American Male Students' Retention

Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept involves students' perceptions of their abilities or competence in terms of academics (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Academic self-concept can be either global- or domain-specific. Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) examined the role of student–faculty interactions in the development of academic self-concept among college students. Student–faculty interaction positively influences student development (Chickering, 1969) and undergraduate retention (Tinto, 1975); however, not all types of student–faculty interaction are equally beneficial (Eli & Bowen, 2002). Komarraju and colleagues (2010) suggest that student–faculty interaction supports the development of academic self-concept when students perceive faculty as respectful, approachable, and available outside of the classroom. Furthermore, students who perceive faculty as respectful, approachable, and available outside of the classroom are more likely to feel confident about their academic skills and to be academically motivated. Students who engage in informal conversations with faculty members are also more likely to enjoy learning.

Family Support and Structure

Researchers argue that race affects the students' experience and completion of their university degree (Herndon & Moore, 2002; Tierney, 1999). The transition from high school to college for many students can be extremely difficult. Family support and structure plays a major role in the students' ability to persist toward degree attainment. According to U.S. Census data, 43.5% of African American children live in two-parent,

married households, whereas 29.3% of African American children live in single-mother or single-parent African American homes (U.S. Census, 2010). Socioeconomic status, academic preparedness, college administration, and racial tension affect attrition rates at institutions (Barnett, 2004). According to McCarron and Inkelas (2006), the majority of African Americans are first-generation students and come from low-income families.

Students with a strong family support and a high socioeconomic status can easily gain financial support from immediate and extended family members when faced with financial problems. On the contrary, many college students with a low socioeconomic status experience difficulty in obtaining financial resources when faced with financial concerns, and they frequently find themselves assisting with personal and family obligations, thus increasing the stress of the college experience. Students from families with more education tend to have a higher level of academic achievement than those students from families with less education (Stewart, 2006). Aided by emotional, financial, and academic support, minority students, especially African American men, have a better chance of persisting toward degree attainment due to the ability to rely on parents and extended family members in the early transition stages to college life. Research indicates that family support is effective in retaining African American male students (Heiss, 1996; Gilford & Reynolds, 2010).

Families that are heavily involved in students' academic progress directly affect how students feel about their studies and campus social life (Stewart, 2006). One's family structure guides the values and life decisions that students make in their educational career. Research suggests that African American students who are prepared or have

discussed with their families racial and discriminatory issues in society tend to be equipped to combat difficult events on college campuses. Students rely on family encouragement during periods of success, failure, or apprehension (Middleton & Loughead, 1993; Herndon & Moore, 2002).

African American students at PWIs tend to lean on family support more than black students at historically black colleges or universities. Researchers believe that it is vital for African American students to have consistent interaction with families while attending majority institutions (O'Leary, Boatwright, & Sauer, 1996). Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif (1998, 2006) indicate that strong family support is generally distinguished by the expectation of high academic achievement, positive male and racial identification, strong limit setting, and modeling how to deal with challenging situations as a person of color.

Financial Resources

Higher education represents a major expense for students. According to Pan and Bai (2009), securing financial aid influences the rate of students' persistence in colleges and universities. Financing college for many students is an expense that helps them to secure a better economic future. Financial aid is considered a main determining factor for African American men in their decision to continue college (Cho, Hudley, Lee, Barry, & Kelly, 2008; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). The underrepresentation of African American students in the US probably reflects the lack of funding available to academically and intellectually capable students (Freeman, 1980). Brown and Saks (1985) argue that one-half of African American students attending college come from

families with incomes below the poverty level. The challenge for minority students coming from such families lies in their reduced likelihood to pay for college (Brown & Saks, 1985).

Research suggests that financial aid is directly related to the students' academic achievement, educational commitment, engagement, and persistence to graduation (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2006). The dropout rate for blacks who did not obtain financial aid was 46% compared to 29% for whites (Cole, 1982). Many African American students heavily rely on financial aid because the cost of higher education has increased. Financial aid accessibility is a major factor that influences students' decision to persist in attaining their degrees (Dowd, 2004). Financial aid is driven by federal and state government regulations. As federal and state regulation can change at any time, numerous students from low- and middle-income families drop out of institutions at the end of or even before the completion of their first year of study (Berg, 2012).

Minority students who received some financial aid are more likely to persist than those students who received no aid, as financial aid allows students to dedicate their efforts to academic and social activities (Wade, 2014). Tinto (1993) suggests that academic and social integration are directly related to financial aid and academic performance. The stability of the source of funding that students rely on affects the probability of their retention and their ability to persist to complete their courses (Jones, 2001). Financial resources such as savings, work salaries, parent assistance, and financial aid influence the rate of student retention.

Retention Policies

Higher education institutions recognize that establishing initiatives to retain minority students helps to build a campus culture that socially and academically integrates minority students into the campus environment. Institutions such as the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC-G), Purdue, Boston College, and Penn State have developed policies to emphasize the retention of minority students. For example, UNC-G has incorporated into its mission and plan several goals that explicitly focus on serving and retaining the minority population of North Carolina. Purdue's Schools of Engineering launched an initiative that established affirmative action goals and procedures for retaining and ensuring the graduation of minority students. The attrition of minority students in post-secondary education is a major concern and obstacle, which policy makers believe embodies the inequality of educational opportunity and attainment in the nation's higher education system. The admission policy for institutions has boosted the enrollment of minority students over the past decade. However, without the proper initiatives, procedures, and policies, attrition rates and retention issues tend to increase as enrollment grows.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The Tinto model is one of the first frameworks that directly focus on student retention and persistence. This model underscores that the integration of social and academic activities on campus helps students to adjust to the campus environment. The concept of combining academic and social activities using academic classroom learning techniques and student engagement models maximizes students' interest in maintaining

their engagement in campus life. Tinto called his model the social integration of student success. In their investigation of student departure, several researchers have indicated that students require support programs to become successful in higher education.

Tinto adapted the platform for his model from the Spradley model to examine the centralization of the student engagement on campus. The Spradley model refers to the merging of the interactions between student demographics and campus environments, resulting in Tinto's study of attrition issues in post-secondary education relating to the success of student integration (Tinto, 1975). At the time, higher education researchers extensively used Tinto's framework to examine student attrition and college retention because of the model's applicability to students of diverse cultural backgrounds (Seidman, 2005). Over time, many researchers have employed the Tinto model of student success as a platform for modern conceptual models of social integration and college attrition, prompting the development of initiatives that allow students and faculty members to engage in structured interactions for building relationships.

Several proposed models of student persistence and attrition use shared common themes with numerous characteristics. Among these characteristics are experiences; commitment to college entry, including academic preparedness level; parents' educational attainment and aspirations for their children; socioeconomic status; objectives for learning; and students' degree attainment to gain a level of commitment to complete college upon entry. Furthermore, numerous models of student retention describe the manner by which higher education institutions interact with students to guide and re-form the latter's attitudes, behaviors, and commitment to the campus environment.

Several factors, drivers, characteristics, and attributes contribute to student departure from universities (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Some researchers suggest that the lack of policies at the institutional level reduces student engagement outside of the classroom. Thus, institutions must incorporate the components of structure interaction, involvement, and academic experiences to address student retention issues.

Researchers have identified a range of issues that affect student retention, such as lack of financial resources; dearth of knowledge about the campus environment, its academic expectations, and bureaucratic operations; inadequate academic preparation; and absence of family support. Transitioning to college life can be a total cultural shock for some students. Implementing effective strategies that focus on resolving the multifaceted retention and attrition issues can increase student retention rates. Rather than exclusively highlighting social adjustment or academic issues, such strategies promote the development of supportive social communities with a strong academic focus (Tinto, 1993). Research suggests that the adoption of retention models that enable the students' use of campus facilities, create on-campus job opportunities, and facilitate informal interactions between teachers and students outside the classroom assists in boosting the persistence rates of institutions (Churchill & Iwai, 1981). Initiating high engagement measures with minority students helps them to eliminate the feelings of alienation on campus, which may contribute to student withdrawal.

Braddock (1981) used the Tinto (1975) model and revealed that student characteristics constituted a small proportion of the variance in the dropout propensity among African American students at PWIs, whereas low environmental congruence

comprised a large proportion. According to Tinto (1975), students apply exchange theory in determining their academic and social integration, which is interpreted as the goals and levels of institutional commitment. Exchange theory examines the concept that humans avoid costly behavior and seek rewarding statuses, relationships, interactions, and emotional states (Nye, 1979). If the perceived benefits of college are higher than the costs, then the student remains in school. However, if other activities are viewed as having higher rewards and less cost, the student subsequently decides to drop out. Several variables influence the strength of the student–institution connection as the student proceeds through post-secondary education (i.e., students enter university with a set of background characteristics that affect their higher education experiences). These variables include family background (socioeconomic status, parental values), individual attributes (race, gender), and pre-university schooling (secondary school grades, course of study).

To fill the gap in Tinto’s model that retention depends on the student’s ability to integrate and assimilate into the institution, Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2004) explored the concept of dual socialization. Dual socialization focuses on the institution’s sharing the responsibility for the successful cultural and social integration of students into college. The concept of dual responsibility takes the sole obligation from the student. However, having the institution play a major role in helping students to integrate themselves into the culture of college life assists in overcoming retention barriers. Current theoretical frameworks for student retention place more responsibility on institutions than on students to eliminate obstacles to college completion.

Barriers to the retention of minority students, particularly financial, academic, cultural, and social hindrances, should be adequately addressed to promote college success and boost persistence toward degree completion. Katz and Kahn's (1978) theory of social psychology states that organizational behavior affects social learning of normative attitudes and values is strongly influences academic performance; and, social-psychological and environmental factors influence socialization and selection factors such as college grades, institutional fit, and institutional commitment. Moreover, environmental factors such as finances, opportunities to transfer, and outside friends can induce either dropout or institutional commitment.

Higher education administrators have recognized that recruiting and retaining African American students at PWIs can be a key factor in increasing enrollment and graduation rates. The successful recruitment and retention of students must be a strategic institution-wide effort. Institutions should model their strategies after the theoretical work of theorists such as Tinto, Spradley, and Bean; practitioners can broadly utilize such strategies to engage minority students, especially African American men. Measures such as assessing the institution's capacity to engage African American students academically and socially should be analyzed to effectively integrate this student population into the campus culture. The establishment of strong rapport with African American students helps faculty, staff, and administrators to communicate the organizational structure, develop ongoing mentoring programs, engage beyond the classroom setting, and thus boost retention efforts.

Universities should offer orientation programs for faculty and staff to assist in effectively engaging with students from diverse backgrounds, focusing on support initiatives for students from low-income families. One method of improving the quality of student retention efforts is to identify the motivators and causes of student retention and attrition. Engaging students in their studies is vital for retaining students and stemming attrition. Moreover, institutions have a shared responsibility to facilitate student engagement.

Tinto's (1987) model has been expanded to include attrition as a focal point of his model of academic and social integration. Researchers such as Tinto consider various elements as the attributes that influence student retention and development. In addition to institutional factors, Tinto included pre-college schooling in his model. Attrition is more common in individuals with a low socioeconomic status. Students' adjustment to college is a complex and challenging activity that requires the combination of emotional, academic, and social support (Chickering, 1969).

To contribute to the Tinto model of academic and social engagement, Lenning, Beal, and Sauer (1980) added financial difficulties, motivational and personal considerations, and general dissatisfaction with college as the causes of student attrition. Moreover, Bennett (2003) believes that factors such as teaching quality, relationships, and discontent with the course can cause attrition. The Tinto model of academic and social integration is founded on the notion that students are more effective when academic standards and social engagement on campus promote positive interactions between students and faculty. For students, academic success is directly related to a

healthy academic environment. Engstrom and Tinto (2007) argued that institutions that create positive learning environments for students enhance their opportunity to obtain high retention rates for all the students. Meanwhile, students reported that they also require support geared toward minority students in the campus environment. Retention and attrition are major concerns among higher education professionals; hence, examining the factors that contribute to these issues is critically important.

Literature Related to the Study Method

This research adopted a qualitative phenomenological study approach that used a survey of a sample population to examine its variables. Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data retrieved from a previous experimental study to build a case for the cause of a phenomenon. This qualitative research sought to understand why African American male students have low levels of retention and persistence toward graduation in four-year public institutions. According to Creswell (2008), qualitative studies primarily explore social or human problems, requiring researchers to build a complex, holistic analysis of a study set in a natural setting.

This research appeals to higher education administrators across the US, who intend to use retention strategies for boosting enrollment and graduation rates at their institutions through the retention of minority male students. As a researcher, one must phenomenologically examine a specific phenomenon that conveys significant statements through themes with an exhaustive description of the incident (Moustakas, 1994). The current study incorporated a thorough review of Tinto's model as a platform for explaining the academic and social integration of college students.

Summary

Chapter 2 presented a review of literature, focusing on the factors, characteristics, and theories that influence the retention of African American male students in four-year colleges and universities. The literature in this chapter also analyzed several research methodologies to provide an in-depth overview of the method selected in this study.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology. Chapter 4 discusses the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 describes the implications of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology that was used in the study. The chapter is organized into five sections: research design and approach, study setting and sample, instrumentation and material, data collection and analysis, and dissemination of findings.

Research Design and Approach

This qualitative study used an online survey to examine its variables. Through assessing several variables, such as academic and social integration, engagement, and family structure this study sought to examine the factors that influence African American male student retention and persistence at four-year public institutions in North Carolina. The primary focus of this dissertation will be to appeal to higher education administrators tasked with formulating retention policies and procedures that are inclusive of minority students, especially African American males. The researcher designed and administered a 25-question survey to find variables that affect the retention of African American males at four-year public institutions by comparing these to other minority male students who have equivalent demographics in the same region. Relationships between variables are presented through descriptive statistics and correlations.

Using data from this study, researchers will be able to develop models and strategies to guide policy development by incorporating theoretical practices such as academic and social engagement between faculty and students. The study examined undergraduate African American male students and their non- black counterparts who

attended or are currently enrolled at institutions within the public university system in North Carolina. The findings from this study adds to existing research by identifying the factors that affect African American male student retention, such as academic and social engagement, financial resources, and family structure.

This study methodology allowed the researcher to conduct an examination of characteristics of African American male students to be compared to their minority counterparts who attained at least a bachelor's degree, as well as students who dropped out before earning a bachelor's degree. Using a qualitative research approach allows the researcher to understand participants' thought processes, record their reactions, and discover their motives and opinions. Qualitative methods are used to study how the participant populations feel and perceive a topic; however, it does not involve generalizing research findings in a quantifiable manner (Babbie, 2007; McNabb, 2002). This study used a qualitative research approach involving a mixture of open-ended and close-ended questions which allowed the researcher to collect comments, feedback, and suggestions that are required to analyze variables; the researcher would not be able to attain this information using a quantitative research approach.

Primary Research Question

RQ: How do retention policies and initiatives that integrate academic and social engagement at the federal and state level influence the retention of minority male students at four-year public colleges and universities?

Sub questions

SQ1: How do policies and initiatives at the institutional level influence the retention of minority male students?

SQ2: How do retention policies affect other minority male students compared to African American male students?

Setting and Sample**Data Collection Process**

The researcher surveyed African American males and other minority male students who attended or are currently attending at the time of the study one of the 16 four-year public institutions in North Carolina. UNC is a statewide multi-campus system comprised of 17 campuses. This study focused on 16 of the 17 campuses, since one of the UNC institutions, the North Carolina School of Science, is a public institution for gifted high school students. More than 220,000 students are enrolled at these 16 universities. To serve its diverse population of students from around the world, the UNC system has a diverse profile of over 200 academic degree programs.

For this study, the researcher aimed to recruit between 100 and 200 male students to participate in a 25-question survey, which was aimed to obtain participants' perspectives regarding factors that influenced their persistence in higher education. Participants eligible to participate in the study must have attended or be attending a four-year public institution in North Carolina to take part in the survey. Participants were recruited via social media to participate in this research. Participants were directed to complete an online survey by clicking the link in a social media advertisement.

Participants before beginning the survey were provided with an electronic consent letter explaining protection of their rights and asked to voluntarily click “Yes, I consent” to begin the survey. After electronic consent was obtained, participants proceeded to complete the survey. Participants did not receive any compensation for taking part in the study.

Sample Population

Public higher education institutions in North Carolina were chartered in 1789, and the University of North Carolina was the first public university in the United States and the only one in the country to graduate students in the 18th century. Wade (2014) said, “The General Assembly shall maintain a public system of higher education, comprising the University of North Carolina and such other institutions of higher education as the General Assembly may deem wise” (p. 8). The North Carolina General Assembly ensures that the UNC system is accountable to citizens and students by holding it responsible for the budgets of all campuses under its aegis, such that it forms one of the checks and balances of these institutions alongside boards of trustees.

Instrumentation and Material

This study used a self-administered survey created in Microsoft Word that consisted of questions based on key themes from the literature: academic engagement, social engagement, financial resources, student demographics, and campus involvement. The survey consisted of 25 open-ended and close-ended questions. Using a mixture of open-ended and close-ended questions allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth information regarding variables beyond quantitative data. Participants who met eligibility

criteria clicked the online link to receive more details about the survey and voluntarily consent to participate. An online survey was selected because of the location of the sample population and the number of institutions in the UNC system. Administering the survey online through a survey platform was most cost-effective, provided privacy for participants, and saved time. The survey link was sent in the body of an email or social media platforms with instructions for participation and confidentiality.

Protection of Human Participants

Each participant used a link to complete the survey through the survey system SurveyMonkey. This system allowed for participant results to remain anonymous and is password-protected so that only the researcher can access the results. The survey collected demographic information from participants such as age, gender, ethnicity, and education. Once surveys were completed, the information downloaded to the researcher's personal computer, which is protected by McAfee LiveSafe security software to minimize risks of being hacked. Therefore, additional measures for protection of participants were not needed for this research.

Dissemination of Findings

The findings will be disseminated through submission to peer-reviewed journals, with a plan to publish by 2019 after a thorough review by the dissertation committee. The research findings will also be presented at professional associations and national conferences. Furthermore, the study will be submitted to and made accessible through Walden University's database for dissertations.

Role of the Researcher

The study focused on retention of African American male students in four-year public institutions in the state of North Carolina. For students to be successful in higher education, they must be nurtured both academically and socially to adjust to the campus environment. These two components are necessary for students to successfully progress toward degree completion. The role of the researcher is to serve as a non-biased party and analyze the research sample through an exploratory lens. Since the research survey involved minimal interaction between the researcher and the sample population, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was notified of the research collection. The IRB approval #09-17-19-0351330 which expires on September 16,2020.

Methodology

This qualitative research employed a phenomenological approach to survey between 100 and 200 male students that attended or are currently students at one of the four-year public institutions in North Carolina. Phenomenological research studies examine participants that have experienced the event being studied (Rudestam et al., 2015). If the researcher were surveying a larger population, a quantitative research study would be suitable. However, due to the sample size and nature of the research participants, a qualitative research approach will be used for this study. Robert Yin (2016) believes that there is no standard method that a researcher should use in determining the sample size of a qualitative inquiry. A maximum cap for participants was set for this study. The sample size should be determined by what the researcher is attempting to discover and why the study is being conducted; a smaller sample size can

best meet the requirements of interpretative phenomenological analyses, since a larger sample size can overwhelm the researcher with data (Roberts, 2013).

Since the study is targeting minority males who attended or are currently attending a college or university in the UNC system, the sampling strategy employed for this qualitative study is purposive. According to Jones (2017), purposive sampling refers to cases in which researchers use their expertise on a certain population to select subjects who represent that population. Berg (2012) explains that in some instances, purposive samples are selected after field investigations on some group in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study.

When ensuring validity in case analysis research, social scientists must prove their data are plausible, credible, and trustworthy (Plater, 2011). To establish credibility and validity in this qualitative study, the researcher will collect demographic information, including age, education level, and race, as a foundation to support the criteria for participant eligibility.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used in this study to analyze each variable. Chapter 4 reports the results from the data analysis as they relate to the research questions. Chapter 5 summarizes findings and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research was to employ a phenomenological approach to study African American male students who attend or attended four-year public institutions in the state of North Carolina, in order to narrow down the factors that influence African American male student retention at four-year public institutions. The primary research question for this research study was: How do retention policies and initiatives that integrate academic and social engagement at the federal and state level influence the retention of minority male students at four-year public colleges and universities? The two sub questions used to assist in answering the primary research question were:

SQ1: How do policies and initiatives at the institutional level influence the retention of minority male students?

SQ2: How do retention policies affect other minority male students compared to African American male students?

This chapter discloses demographics of research participants, the number of research participants, and data collection methods. Chapter 4 also reviews how data were analyzed, results of the analysis, and how results are valid and trustworthy. Lastly, the researcher provides an analysis of the primary and secondary research questions.

Setting

The researcher used purposeful random sampling to collect data through self-administered survey of males 18 years of age or older who attend or attended a four-year

public college or university in the state of North Carolina. The survey was launched via SurveyMonkey on October 4, 2019 and closed on November 17, 2019. There were no organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experiences at the time of the study that may have influenced interpretations of study results.

Demographics

Ninety-four males responded to the advertised research study. Participants volunteered to take the online survey administered via SurveyMonkey. Participants answered advertisements posted on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The advertisement had a direct link to the survey for participants to take. Each participant considered themselves to be male and over the age of 18 and attended a four-year public college or university in the state of North Carolina. Of the 94 males, 16% were between the ages of 18 and 24, 23% were between the ages of 25 and 34, 26% were between the ages of 35 and 44, 21% were between the ages of 45 and 54, 10% were between the ages of 55 and 64, and 4% were 65 or older. Figure 1 displays the age demographics of survey participants.

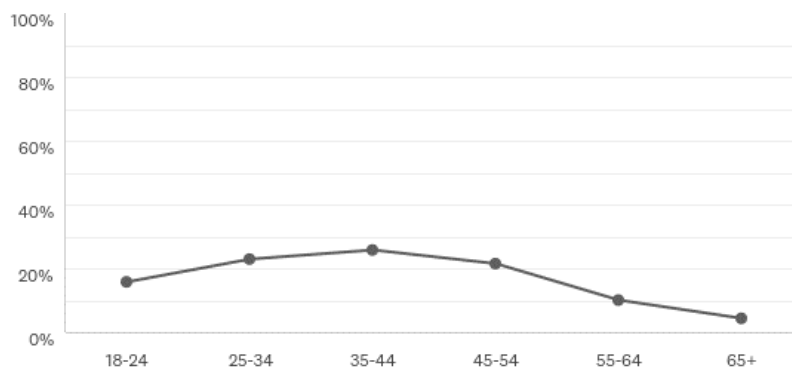


Figure 1. Age Makeup

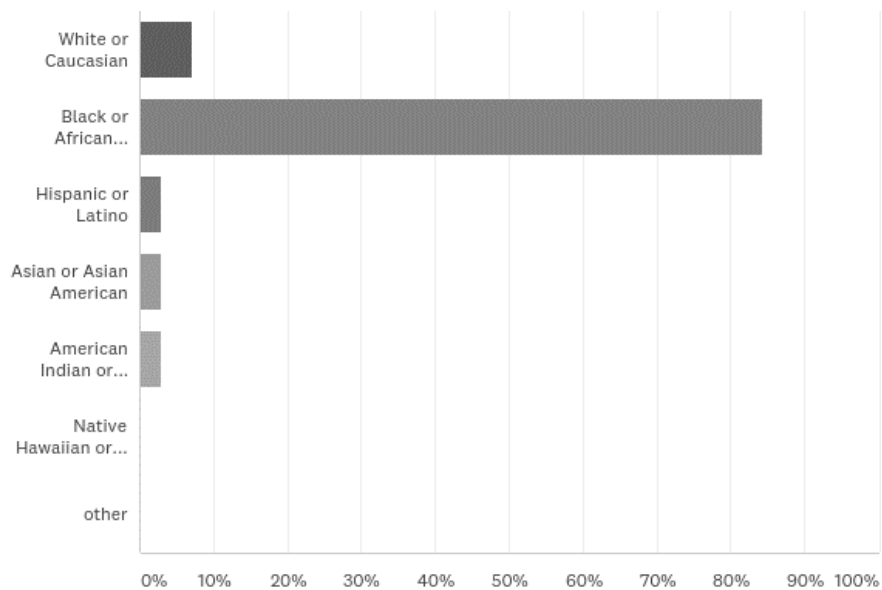


Figure 2: Participant Ethnicity

Survey participants were 7% White or Caucasian, 84% Black or African American, 3% Hispanic or Latino, 3% Asian or Asian American, and 3% American Indian or Alaska Native. Twenty-nine percent of respondents at the time of the study were enrolled in one of the 16 public institutions and 71% were not currently enrolled. Figure 2 outlines the overall ethnicity makeup of the survey pool.

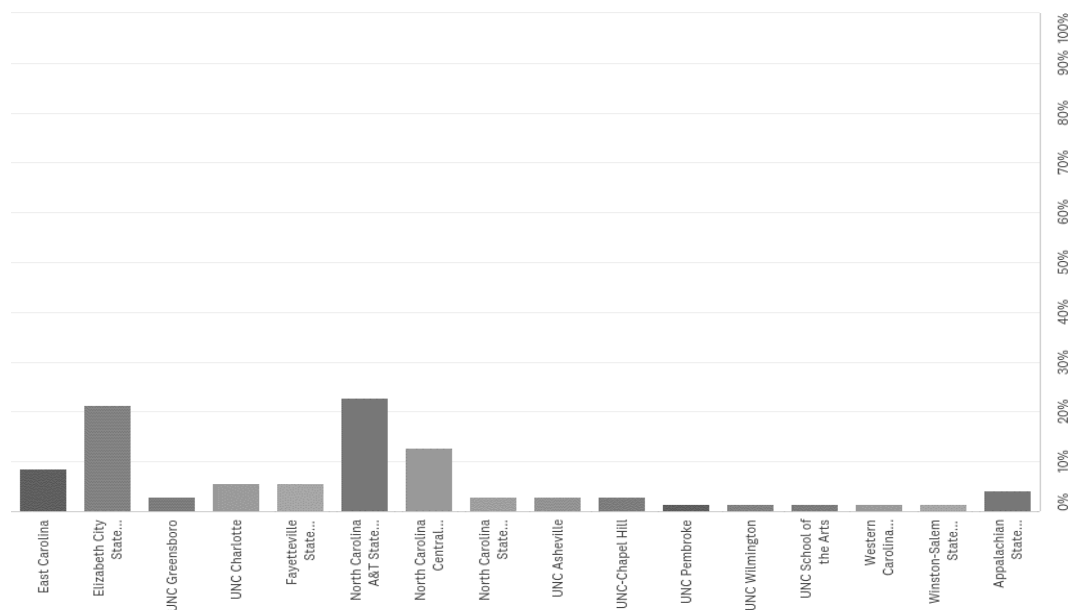


Figure 3: Participating Institutions

74% of participants graduated from an institution of higher education and 26% did not graduate. 9% of respondents attended East Carolina University, 21% of respondents attended Elizabeth City State University, 3% of respondents attended UNC Greensboro, 6% of respondents attended UNC Charlotte, 6% of respondents attended Fayetteville State University, 23% of respondents attended North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T) State University, 13% of respondents attended North Carolina Central University, 3% of respondents attended North Carolina State University, 3% of respondents attended UNC Asheville, 3% of respondents attended UNC-Chapel Hill, 1% of respondents attended UNC Pembroke, 1% of respondents

attended UNC Wilmington, 1% of respondents attended UNC School of the Arts, 1% of respondents attended Western Carolina University, 1% of respondents attended Winston-Salem State University, and 4% of respondents attended Appalachian State University. Eighty percent of participants identified as traditional/full-time students, 14% identified as nontraditional/part-time students, and 6% identified as transfer students. Forty-three percent of survey participants were first-generation college students. Figure 3 reveals the institutional demographics of individuals who participated in the survey.

Data Collection

A self-administered survey served as the instrument for this research study. The researcher used a self-developed survey that consisted of open ended with closed ended questions to retrieve demographic information about the survey participants. The survey took an average of 15 minutes for participants to complete. Ninety- four research participants participated in this research study. The survey questions were crafted to attain the participants' perception on (a) their college experience, (b) reason for remaining in higher education, (c) primary reason for disenrolling in college if applicable, (d) the campus culture of their institution, (e) faculty engagement inside and outside of the classroom, (f) the type of activities on campus geared towards male student retention, (g) family support of their educational endeavors, (h) obstacles students faced that impacted their college experience, (I) institutional initiatives that support academic progress, and (j) participation in federal or state programs to help them remain in college.

Participants were solicited via Facebook, Facebook ads, Instagram, twitter and email blasts. The survey remained accessible for six weeks for participants to click the online link on each platform. Each research participant gave electronic consent before beginning the survey and were given the specifics of the research study. After reading the specifics of the study each participant clicked “Yes, I Consent” and agreed to participate in the research study, to start the survey questions. All survey responses were captured using SurveyMonkey an online survey platform. There were no changes in the data collection from the plan in Chapter 3, and there were no uncommon occurrences in the data collection for this research study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative methods are used to study how the participant populations feel and perceive a topic; however, it does not generalize research findings in a quantifiable manner (Babbie, 2007; McNabb, 2002). To analyze themes captured from participants responses to the open-ended survey questions the researcher used NVivo. NVivo allows researchers to analyze and organize a wide variety of data such as documents, questionnaires, images, audio and web content (Edhlund & McDougall 2019)

The steps in this section guided the researcher's data analysis procedures to allow for maximum review, to help prevent redundancy and maintain accuracy. The researcher used six steps to analyze the survey responses. First, the researcher downloaded all participant responses to open-ended questions from SurveyMonkey to NVIVO. All responses were separated by question into notes for analysis, and notes were made for each question and grouped together. For accuracy the research ensured that all notes aligned with the respective question. Each note was organized into themes. The themes from the survey responses were analyzed to glean correlation between male student retention and the theme. After the researcher gathered all themes, common and shared experiences were analyzed to answer the research questions.

The surveys that were analyzed were directly imported from SurveyMonkey into NVIVO. The auto download from the survey platform did not yield any irregularities in the data for this dissertation. Common themes noted by NVIVO's queries were: (a) financial aid and resources, (b) family and friends, (c) commitment to goals, (d) career aspirations/ plans, and (e) I did not know any programs existed. The themes mentioned will be discussed in detail later in the results section.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the data collected was ensured by demographic questions in the beginning of the survey to get background information on each participant to glean credibility and validity of their identity. When ensuring validity in qualitative research social scientists must prove their data is plausible, credible, and

trustworthy deemed as reliable academia sources. Once, the demographics were established trustworthiness and credibility in the data was identified by the common themes yield from the participants survey responses. Examining participants responses for consistent responses that linked the ability to gauge validity in the results. The consistency of data will be achieved when the steps of the research are verified through examination of such items as raw data, data reduction products, and process notes (Campbell 1996). In order to be prepared for any changes and to have a non-bias an opinion the researcher must look at the data in a grounded thorough, realistic and relational view (Patton, 2015).

After employing all strategies to ensure validity, the researcher developed a process to analyze the findings and interpret the data to add to the topic of study. The analysis process was reviewed and revised thoroughly to make sure no steps were overlooked, and all themes were accounted for. Since the researcher follower a step by step collection procedure, the researcher was able to confirm and document the process, maintain and trust accuracy in the findings.

Results

After the researcher completed the analysis of survey results five common themes were identified across survey participants. The following themes were identified: (a) financial aid and resources, (b) family and friends (c) commitment to goals (d) career aspirations/plans(e) I did not know any existed. The next section will address how the survey data linked to the primary research and sub research questions outlined in Chapters 1 and 3.

Primary Research Question

The primary research question for this study was: how do retention policies and initiatives that integrate academic and social engagement at the federal and state level influence the retention of minority male students at four-year public colleges and universities? To answer the primary research question, participants were asked a series of questions about their experience at a four-year public institution in the state of North Carolina. Using open-ended questions participants were able to give detailed accounts of their experience or perception at the institution. Even though, the survey yielded a low number of participants. Respondents were able to give responses that correlate to the factors that influenced their ability or non-ability to matriculate towards degree completion at a four-year public college or university in North Carolina.

To answer the primary research question, participants were asked did you apply or participate in any state or federal programs that helped you remain in college? If so, please explain the programs that were offered. It was noted eighty-three times by participants that they were unaware of state or federal programs offered to help them progress towards degree completion. Followed by five occurrences of participants citing being familiar with or a part of the Federal TRIO Programs to help with their progression towards degree attainment. Table 1 reveals the number of occurrences of each theme most cited in participants' survey responses.

Table 1

Federal and State Retention Initiatives

Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
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United States Reserve Officers' Training Corps	3	3%
Federal TRIO Programs	5	5%
Federal Grant Research Exchange	3	3%
I didn't know any existed	83	88%

SQ1

SQ1 derived from the primary research question. This question helped the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that affect African American males who attend a four-year public colleges or universities at the institutional level. Institutions of higher learning all have unique policies and procedures, however, in the state of North Carolina public institutions must carry out policies and procedures set by the University of North Carolina System in addition to their internal policies and procedures. SQ1 was how do policies and initiatives at the institutional level influence the retention of minority male students? To address sub-research question one participants in the study were asked a series of questions about what influenced their progression to degree attainment and what institutional policies and initiatives helped them persist towards degree completion.

The data revealed that when asked did/does your college/university have institutional-wide initiatives to support your progress throughout your academic career? If so, explain the types of programs. The most common theme with 59% of occurrences amongst respondents was that students were unaware that institutional -wide initiatives

existed. Followed by being familiar with institutional-wide initiatives but the participant could not recall the name of the program with 16% occurrence. 11% of occurrences of participants mentioned Academic Advising as an initiative to support their academic progress. Table 2 gives the themes most cited by participants.

Table 2

Institutional-Wide Retention Initiatives

Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
None/I didn't any existed/I was not aware	55	59%
Academic Advising	10	11%
Counseling Center/Career Counseling/Development	5	5%
Institutional Developed Initiative	8	9%
Yes, but cannot recall the name	15	16%

In order to gauge if institutions had programs gear specifically for male students to have an impact on their retention, participants were asked to please describe programs at your institution geared towards helping male students adjust to college life. 72% of participants noted they were unfamiliar with programs geared specifically for male students on their campus. Table 3 presents the most common themes cited by all survey participants. As it relates to institutional policies and procedures, all participants were asked what obstacles do/did you face on your college campus? This question was asked to glean participants' perceptive on the obstacles that influenced degree attainment as it relates to their college or university. The data revealed that the most common theme noted amongst participants was that they did not experience any obstacles while in

college. Followed by financial resources with the second highest number of occurrences in participants' responses. The data in Table 4 notes the occurrences of the most common themes of participants responses to the obstacles they experienced during their college career.

Table 3

Male Student Retention Initiatives

Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
None/I didn't any existed/I was not aware	68	72%
Social Club/Cultural Organizations	13	14%
Male Mentoring Programs	13	14%

Table 4

Obstacles Faced During College

Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Being away from home	4	4%
Being a minority	4	4%
Support System/Motivation/Personal/Fitting in	8	9%
Academic difficulty/Faculty Engagement/Campus Environment	7	7%
I did not face any obstacles	22	23%
Financial Resources/ Tuition Affordability	14	15%
Transportation	6	6%

Work/Academic/Social life balance	8	9%
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SQ2

SQ2 was how do retention policies affect other minority male students compared to African American male students? To address this research question, the researcher examined the retention factors of all minority male students in order to compare African American males to their male counterparts. To address this question, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about what influenced them to remain in school. Undergraduate retention is an institution of higher education's ability to retain a student from admission until graduation (Berger & Lyon, 2004). Even though, the participation rate of other races outside of African Americans was extremely low. All participants were asked the same question to gauge respondents' reasons for remaining in college, and if they considered dropping out or if they left school.

The researcher asked participants if they completed or are completing their degree. If so, what factors contribute/contributed to them staying in college or to them completing their degree. Upon analyzing the results, the data revealed numerous factors as the reason for participants completing their degree or staying in school. However, participants noted family and friends as the number one contributing factor for degree attainment with 27% occurrences in survey results. Commitment to goals was the second theme noted as a contributing factor to degree attainment with 18% of occurrences in survey results. Table 5 lists the top themes noted to contribute to degree attainment by all participants.

Table 5

Factors that Contribute to Degree Attainment

Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Family and Friends	25	27%
Faculty, Staff, and Institutional Support	10	11%
Career and Future Aspirations	15	16%
Commitment to life's goals	17	18%
Money	10	11%

To answer SQ2, the researcher had to filter survey responses by ethnicity to compare other minority males' experiences to drill down to the factors that influence African American males. When comparing different ethnicities' responses, the data revealed in Table 6 through Table 10 that Family and Friends was the most noted theme as the contributing factor for degree attainment with the most occurrences followed by career aspirations/plans. However, African American males noted financial resources one of the top influential factor for degree attainment. Tables 6 through 10 displays the factors noted to contribute/contributed to participants' degree attainment by ethnicity.

Table 6

African American Males' Factors for Degree Attainment

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
African American/Black	Faculty/Institutional Support	6	6%
	Family and Friends	19	20%

Career Aspirations/Money	15	16%
Commitment to Goals	21	22%

Table 7

White/ Caucasian Males' Factors for Degree Attainment

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
White/Caucasian	Career Aspirations	5	5%
	Family/Friends	6	6%
	Money	6	6%

Table 8

Hispanic/Latino Males' Factors for Degree Attainment

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Hispanic/Latino	Family	1	1%
	Career Aspirations	1	1%

Table 9*Asian/ Asian American Males' Factors for Degree Attainment*

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Asian/Asian American	Career Plans	2	2%
	Friends	1	1%

Table 10

American Indian/ Alaska Native Males' Factors for Degree Attainment

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
American Indian/Alaska Native	Family reason	1	1%
	Career advancement	1	1%

To narrow down factors for not completing their degree. Participants were asked if they did not complete their degree what were the contributing factors. The most cited theme for all respondents with 13% of occurrences was financial resources. Table 11 reveals the most common themes noted by participants as the factors that contributed to them not completing their degree. To compare African American male participants to their male counterparts the data was breakdown by ethnicity. To explore the factors that influence male retention, participants were asked have you ever dropped or stopped out of a college or university? If yes, what were the contributing factors for you not completing your degree program? Across all ethnicities financial resources was noted as the most cited theme with the occurrence in survey results. Tables 12 through 16 reveals the contributing factors for participants not completing their degrees by ethnicity to compare African American to their male counterparts to answer SQ2.

Table 11

Contributing Factors for Not Attaining a Degree

Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Stopped out to take care of/start/had a family	6	6%
Financial Resources	12	13%

Grades	5	5%
Transferred closer to home	5	5%

Table 12

African American Male: Contributing Factors Not Completing Degrees

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
African American/Black	Family/Personal	6	6%
	Financial Reasons	10	11%
	Academic/Grades Reasons	3	3%
	Transfer/Too far from home	5	5%

Table 13

White/ Caucasian Male: Contributing Factors for Not Completing Degrees

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
White/Caucasian	No	6	6%

Table 14

Hispanic/Latino Male: Contributing Factors for Not Completing Degrees

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Hispanic/Latino	No	2	2%

Table 15

Asian/Asian American Male: Contributing Factors for Not Completing Degrees

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Asian/ Asian American	No	2	2%

Table 16

American Indian/Alaska Native Male: Contributing Factors for Not Completing Degrees

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
American Indian/Alaska Native	Yes, Financial reasons	2	2%

In the spirit of finding the factors that influence African American male student retention, the researcher asked participants did/does your college/university have institutional-wide initiatives to support your progress throughout your academic career? If so, explain the types of programs and to Please describe programs at your institution geared towards helping male students adjust to college life? The series of questions align with sub-research questions one and two by examining did universities have initiatives to support participants progress towards degree attainment. When asked, did/does your college/university have institutional-wide initiatives to support your progress throughout your academic career? If so, explain the types of programs. The most cited theme noted by participants was that they were unaware of institutional-wide initiatives to help with degree attainment followed by Academic Advising as a common initiative. Tables 17 through 21 displays the themes with the most occurrences by ethnicity.

Table 17

Institutional-Wide Initiatives to Support Academic Progress: African American

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
African American/Black	Academic Advising	7	7%
	Counseling Center/Career Development	6	6%
	No/I was not aware of any	32	34%
	Institution Developed Initiatives	9	10%

Table 18

Institutional-Wide Initiatives to Support Academic Progress: White/Caucasian

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
White/Caucasian	No/Not that I know of	4	4%
	Peer Advising	1	1%
	Academic Advising	3	3%

Table 19

Institutional-Wide Initiatives to Support Academic Progress: Hispanic/Latino

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Hispanic/Latino	No	1	1%
	International Student Advising	1	1%

Table 20

Institutional-Wide Initiatives to Support Academic Progress: Asian/Asian American

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
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Asian/Asian American	I do not recall	1	1%
	Academic advising/writing center	1	1%

Table 21

Institutional-Wide Initiatives to Support Academic Progress: American Indian/ Alaska Native

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
American Indian/Alaska Native	I do not know of any	2	2%

To gauge if institutions had programs geared specifically to aide in male student retention, participants were asked to please describe programs at your institution geared towards helping male students adjust to college life. Participants noted that they were unfamiliar with initiatives specifically for male student retention at their institution. However, it is important to note that serval respondents stated that there were institutionally developed initiatives for male students that attend/attended HBCUs this will be discussed further in chapter 5. Tables 22 through Table 26 reveal the types of programs institutions had specifically to cater to the male student population by ethnicity to compare African American males to their male counterparts.

Table 22

Male Student Retention Programs: African American/Black

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
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African American /Black	Social Clubs/Organizations	11	12%
	I was not aware of any	34	36%
	Academic/Athletics Advising	5	5%
	Institution Developed Initiatives	9	10%

Table 23

Male Student Retention Programs: White/Caucasian

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
White/Caucasian	No	3	3%
	Transition to College/Freshman Seminar	4	4%
	Academic Advising	6	6%

Table 24

Male Student Retention Programs: Hispanic/Latino

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Hispanic/Latino	No	1	1%
	International Student Advising	1	1%

Table 25

Male Student Retention Programs: Asian/Asian American

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
Asian/Asian American	Cultural Club	1	1%

Academic advising	1	1%
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Table 26

Male Student Retention Programs: American Indian/Alaska Native

Race	Themes	No. of occurrences	Percentage (%) of occurrences
American Indian/Alaska Native	No	1	1%
	Outreach Programs/Clubs	1	1%

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the factors that influence the retention of African American males at four-year public institutions. To complete this task the researcher analyzed males over the age of 18 that attend or attended a four-year public institution in the state of North Carolina. The study was guided by one primary research question and two sub questions. Data was collected through a Survey administered through SurveyMonkey. The researcher used NVivo, a qualitative software program, to organize the survey response into key themes. The steps outlined earlier in this section was used to analyze the data to find a correlation between each participant's response. Through a detailed analysis of survey data there were several themes to arise from participant data.

Three research questions steered this research to examine the factors that influence retention of African American males at four-year institutions. The primary research question aligned with the study to see if there were policies or initiatives at the state or federal level to help influence retention of African American males as well as

their male counterparts. The most common theme noted by participants was that they did not of any retention policies or imitative offered to aide in their academic progress.

The most common theme at the institutional when participants were about the factors that contributed to helping them stay in college or complete their degree family and friends was stated as the most influential factor. In research question three, the results compared participants perspectives to gauge if there is a difference between African American responses and their male counterparts. Even though, the survey yielded a low participation rate from minorities outside of African American males, the data revealed that financial resources were the most common theme to influence male student retention.

Chapter 4 included the research setting, demographics, data collection method, data analysis method, the evidence of trustworthiness, the results of data analysis, and a summary. Chapter 5 will include interpretations of the findings, limitations of study, recommendations for future research on this subject matter, implications of social change for the research study, and a conclusion. Chapter 5 will also include a detailed summary of the entire dissertation.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the factors that influence African American males in public four-year institutions. To examine the factors that influence African American retention, the researcher studied males over 18 years of age who attended one of the 16 four-year public colleges or universities under the UNC system. The researcher solicited participants through social media outlets such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter to take an online survey via SurveyMonkey. The survey was advertised on social media from October 4, 2019 to November 17, 2019. Individuals who met the requirements clicked the link in the advertisement to receive further details and begin the survey. The survey yielded 94 respondents who consented to take the survey and met the qualifications. The survey took participants approximately 7 to 15 minutes to complete.

This qualitative study was conducted to address gaps in literature regarding the factors that support the retention of African American male students specifically. African American males represent half of the prison population in the United States and now constitute nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated population (NAACP, 2013). Equipping higher education professionals with the tools required to develop effective and efficient retention policies will lead to an increase in African American male college graduates.

Qualitative research was used to gain an in-depth understanding of motivating concepts, characteristics, and opinions. Analysis of qualitative data helps

identify common themes and patterns to explore connections between participants. The researcher used NVivo to help analyze survey data. NVivo assisted with sorting and organizing open-ended survey responses into common notes and themes. NVivo allows researchers to analyze and organize a wide variety of data such as documents, questionnaires, images, audio and web content. NVivo auto coding and queries identified several themes. The themes with the most occurrences were financial resources, family and friends, and commitment to goals career aspirations/plans.

Interpretation of the Findings

To investigate the factors that influence the retention of African American males, the researcher examined males 18 years of age or older who attended one of 16 public institutions in the state of North Carolina. Participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions to capture perceptions of their college experiences. The researcher designed the survey instrument to answer a primary research question and two sub questions. This research was designed using Tinto's model of student engagement and departure. Tinto's model was fully detailed in Chapter 2.

It was found that students, especially Black male students cited financial resources, family and friends, and motivation to complete goals as factors that influenced them to remain in school. Rice and Alford's (1989) argued that minority students' academic performance is driven by factors that occur inside and outside of the classroom. This study explored factors that influence the retention of African American males to gauge whether or not policy and programs impact student retention. Findings from this research and examinations of factors that influence retention can assist higher education

leaders in developing policies to help retain African American male students. At this time, there are no standard policies or initiatives set by the federal or state government for colleges and universities to follow which leaves colleges and universities to develop their own. Even though institutions design their own internal policies and programs to address student retention overall, by targeting individual segments of their population, it will overtime have a position effect on their overall student retention and graduation rates. The next sections will discuss results as they link to the primary and sub questions.

Primary Research Question

The primary research question for this study was: How do retention policies and initiatives integrating academic and social engagement at the federal and state level influence the retention of minority male students at four-year public colleges and universities? As stated in Chapter 4, to answer the primary research question, participants were asked a series of questions about their experiences at a four-year public institution in the state of North Carolina. Using open-ended questions, participants were able to give detail accounts of their experiences or perceptions of institutions. The survey yielded a low number of participants. Respondents were able to give responses involving factors that influenced their ability or nonability to matriculate towards degree completion at a four-year public college or university in North Carolina.

It was noted 83 times by participants that they were unaware of state or federal programs were offered to help them progress towards degree completion. There were five occurrences where participants cited being with the federal TRIO programs to help with their progression towards degree attainment. Participants noted they were unaware that

federal and state policies and programs existed to help with obtaining their degree. Several participants mentioned the Federal TRIO program as an initiative that helped them during their college careers. TRIO programs are federal outreach and student service programs designed to identify and provide services to students with disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. ED, 2018). The TRIO program is a grant program based on need and first-generation college status in which all institutions do not have access to services. Participation eligibility for this program is not based on gender, race, or ethnicity.

Students in the TRIO program are given an advisor along with their campus advisor from point of entry to graduation. TRIO programs assist students with adjusting to campus by giving students access to special resources to ensure a smooth transition to college life. The TRIO program links academic and social integration by exposing students to programs or cultural exchanges inside and outside of the classroom, which aligns with Tinto's model. Since institutions are required by the state and federal government to report retention and graduation rates, higher education at the state and federal level should develop policies to help maintain good retention and graduation rates across the country. If federal and state policymakers use this study that explores the factors that influence retention amongst different student populations, they can align policies to theories based on students' experiences. Based on facets of the Federal TRIO programs, both the state and federal levels can develop policies that link students' challenges and influences to impact academic and social systems to be inclusive of all ethnicities.

SQ1

As conveyed in Chapter 4, SQ1 derived from the primary research question to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that affect the retention of African American males who attended a four-year public institution. Institutions of higher learning all have unique policies and procedures; however, in the state of North Carolina, public institutions must carry out policies and procedures set by the UNC system in addition to internal policies and procedures. The researcher asked participants several questions to answer this sub-research question such as How do policies and initiatives at the institutional level influence the retention of minority male students? and Did/does your college/university have institutional-wide initiatives to support your progress throughout your academic career? If so, explain the types of programs. The findings revealed that the most common themes were participants did not know any institutional wide initiatives existed followed by participant being familiar with programs but not knowing the name of the program. Lastly, participants mentioning Academic Advising as an initiative to support their academic progress.

These questions examined the factors that influence students' progression towards degree attainment on the institutional level. Institutions develop internal policies and initiatives to help with retention based institutional indicators such retention, persistence and graduation rates. 2% of research participants mentioned institutionally developed programs gear towards male student retention assist them with attaining their degrees. These institutionally developed programs were mentioned by students that attended HBCUs in the state of North Carolina. Participants noted that the programs focused on

formal academic performance and informal academic systems which encourages student and faculty interaction to be integrated with formal extracurricular activities and informal social campus interactions. As institutions use student achievement and engagement as success metrics for retention.

Institutions are starting to develop initiatives geared towards target populations especially African American male students. Participants that attend or attended North Carolina A&T University mentioned an institution program called Men on the Move that focuses on helping male students at the HBCU matriculate towards degree attainment from point of entry. Another HBCU in the UNC system Elizabeth City State University recently announced their Male Student Success pilot program to aimed to help male students' academic success, campus/student life adjustment and general life skills. This program was developed to address the male retention and degree completion gap.

These new initiatives use Tinto's beliefs that if an institution that is committed to social and academic integration with partnerships from campus organizations find students are less likely to leave due to the relationship built on campus. This is supported by the data from this research. The data in this study revealed that most of the respondents that completed their degree found a family connection to their campus environment. Participants also noted a strong bond with peers, faculty and staff was an influential part of them remaining in school. Developing policies and initiatives for retention using the factors that influence retention as a guide will drive realistic results based on students' real-life experiences. Aligning student learning with student support to

create structured policies can enhance the university experience and build a campus culture of academic and social engagement.

According to Leach (2005) the theory of academic and social integration requires institutional culture to adapt and adjust to relationship building with student to get them acclimated to campus life. Students experiences or characteristics influence their goals and ability to commit to an institution, if students are not connected to the institution students are more likely not to persist. This supports Tinto's (1987) study finding that external social systems may interact or undermine a student's ability to persist in college if these external systems such as friends, family demands and work are integrated with the academic and campus culture.

SQ2

SQ2 was How retention policies affect other minority male students compared to African American male students? As explained in Chapter 4 to address sub-research question two the researcher filtered the survey responses by ethnicity to compare African American the retention factors to their male counterparts. Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about what influenced them to remain in school. Even though, the participation rate of other races outside of African American males was extremely low. All participants were asked the same questions to assess their reasons for in remaining college. The data revealed numerous factors as the reason for participants completing their degree or staying in school. Participants top influences were family and friends. commitment to goals and financial resources.

The male participants noted some of the same factors as influences to retaining them in college. As noted in Tinto's work the results from the study aligned with the indicators of a strong transitions from high school to college assists students with acclimating to college life. Students that have an exceptional support system of family, friends and faculty were found not have separation issues from being away from home and adjusted to campus life easily. Students that were made to feel welcome into the campus community felt a connection to their institution. According to Pascarella & Terenzini (2005), students that were considered the minority at their institution were less likely to persist. Even though, a majority of participants that participated in the survey attended a HBCU, participants that attend PWI noted on their survey result not feeling a part of the campus community but remaining in school. Vella (1994) noted the need for African American male students to bond with faculty and staff to build strong relationship to feel a connection to the campus community. In a study conducted by Hrabowski (1998), black male students that to have balance between the academic and social environments of college life, are successful at navigating through their college career.

Institutional cultural tends to shape student departure and success. Examining the foundation of this phenomenon by ethnicity higher education leaders can create policies to aid in retaining more students. Strayhom (2008) coincided with this studies' results by expressing that black males who have dreams or aspirations to graduate 5 times more like to be retained than those without future aspiration or commitment goals. Institutionally developed programs that focus on integrating academic and social engagement such as

learning communities, peer organization and faculty lead cultural exchanges can be a step forward to structure retention policies and initiatives.

Subsequently, HBCUs in America have the highest percentage for graduating the most African American male students. Many of these institutions have started retention efforts to focus primarily on African American males. Upon assessing the valuable of their efforts, the data can be used to create sustainable policies and procedures to support African American male retention. Administrators and faculty on predominantly White campuses, can collaborate with HBCUs to achieve better graduation outcomes by implementing programming and policies that targeted minority male students (Holmes et al., 2000). According to ED only 5.4% of full-time faculty are African American which links to the argument that higher proportions of African American faculty on campus are strongly associated with higher graduation rates among African American students (Tumer & Myers, 2000). In this study, participants noted faculty as factor for remain in college because of family and welcoming experience. Swail et al. (2003) attributed students' success is largely determined by whether the students feel a sense of appreciation and hospitality both socially and academically through each developmental stage of college.

Furthermore, it was noted that there was a low turnout rate of other ethnicities besides African American males to complete the survey. However, the survey results revealed that family and friends was a factor that influenced their retention. This results are aligned with Larimore and McClellan (2005) argument that minority students, social support and family matter greatly in their retention and successful college experience, the

support from family, supportive staff and faculty, institutional commitment, personal commitment, and connections to homeland and culture are factors that influence the persistence of minority students especially Native American students.

After analyzing the data, it was difficult to compare African American males to compared to their male counterparts due to the disproportionate participation rate. However, all ethnicities across the board shared common themes and experiences that influenced their matriculation to degree completion. Researchers like Harper (2012) suggest that policymakers implement retention policies to ensure colleges are diverse and be inclusive of all ethnicities. Since, retention is a hot topic in higher education and often institution put retention and retainment in their missions or strategic plans. Colleges and universities that align their policies and procedures to this mission should ensure that the institution is accomplishing their goals and objectives. In time, having a strong assessment system, institutions can focus on implementing improvement measures to achieve higher retention rates. Development of multifaceted programs and policies can drive institution to be inclusive to a diverse population, especially African American males.

Limitations of the Study

Upon completion of this study, the researcher was able to identify several limitations to trustworthiness from the execution of the study. The first limitation to the study was that the researcher used a small population from one state as representation for the whole population of male college students. The second limitation to trustworthiness is that since the survey was advertised via social media, participants self-identified and

were not screened before completing the survey. Another limitation is that this study used a random purposive sample, with this sampling technique there was no way for the researcher to set a cap on the number of participants from each university to participate. Also, a limitation to the study was that the researcher only accepted participants from public institutions and excluded participants from private institution in the state of North Carolina which lower the pool participants to complete the survey. Lastly, the research assumed HBCU and PWI institutions students have the same challenges this is a limitation because these institutions' student body and campus culture are totally different. The describing the limitations of this study allows for researchers to consider them when developing future research studies.

Recommendations

For future research on this topic, the researcher has several recommendations to improve upon this study. The first recommendation is to open the survey up to male participants from different state systems to gauge a larger participant pool. Another recommendation is to compare male participants from private institutions to males' participants at public institutions to examine if there are different factors that influence the retention of African American males by institutional structure. Family/friends and financial resources were factors that contributed to male student retention, to get an in-depth look at this factor the researcher recommends a study with structured interviews with a small number of participants, to gain participants feedback on how institutions could integrate policy and practice to support their transition to campus life. Also, conducting a case study of financial aid policies and minority student retention and

persistence can give researchers a look into how policies can be created around financial resources to keep these students enrolled. Lastly, it is recommended to repeat this study and have separate sample from HBCU participants and PWI participants. This way the researcher can compare the two types of institutions. Numerous HBCU have launched or in the pilot stages of implementing initiatives and policies to focus on filling the African American male degree completion gap. Comparing the two institutional classification will show if the pilot program work and can be duplicated at other institutions.

Implications

The data from this research has an enormous potential for positive social change. This study outlined numerous factors that higher education professional at the federal, state and local levels can use as a guide to develop policies and initiatives geared towards retaining African American male students. As stated in Chapter 1, social change is a grassroots effort and change start with the people on the ground. African American male students have the lowest retention rate at U.S. colleges and universities compared to all other demographic groups by race and gender. The factors mentioned from the data in this study should encourage administrators, faculty and other stakeholders to use real life factors driven by the voice of their constituents to develop realistic policies to close the achievement gap in higher education. Retaining African American males in college to help them matriculate towards degree completion assist with decreasing the number of African American males that represent half of the prison population in the United States and that African Americans now constitute nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated population (NAACP, 2013). Equipping higher education professionals with

the tools required to develop effective and efficient retention policies will lead to an increase in African American male college graduates.

Retaining students in this demographic group in college should help to decrease the number of incarcerated African American males. Data from this study as revealed that developing policies and strategically creating initiatives around academic and social structures will keep African American males engaged and attached to the campus community. Pascarella and Teretizini (2005) study revealed that African American men who are early engaged in the social context of campus life are more likely to persist toward graduation. Evidence from this study also open the doors for positive social change as it can open the door for racial inclusivity of all races on numerous college campuses. Diverse policies to help minorities males especially on predominately White campuses can lead to building programming to help retain students to point of entry to degree completion. The creation of target marketing programming as a positive effect on graduation and retention rates. Lastly, the findings of this study will connect higher education administrators to facilitate a discussion around the factors that influence African American male student retention and how it impacts their overall mission and university goals. The policy makers at the federal and state level, university administrators, faculty and staff should explore and examine research study. The results of this research study could result in the development of policies at the federal, state and institutional level that aligns with each other for implementation at U.S. institutions across the nation.

Conclusion

This study and its data opened the door to a large discussion around African American male student retention and the factors that influence their retention rate. Participants in this study shared their experiences and gave a glimpse of the challenges they experienced during their college career. Using the Tinto model, the researcher was able to link theory to exploration by creating a survey instrument around the concept of academic and social integration. Tinto (1997) research on college student behavior found that the degree of integration by a student into the academic and social activities of an institution correlate positively to a deeper sense of institutional and goal commitment which then contributes to a higher rate of persistence. Upon reviewing the literature review, data from this research adds to existing literature by linking the factors that influence African American male student retention to federal, state and institutional policy development. Even though, survey participants primarily attended or attend HBCUs this study's data and methodology can be used as a pilot for these institutions to gain clarity on the African American male college experience and how to help them successfully navigate to achieving their goals.

Factors that can be seen as barriers for retaining this population and factors that can be considered positive motivators give researchers a better understanding to the issues and needs of African American male students. In today's society, African American male youth face challenges from the point of entry at young age in the K-12 system. To alleviate stressors for African American males when navigating the higher education system, it is crucial that policies and initiatives developed by higher education

leaders are inclusive of their experiences. This study reinforced the notion that positive interactions influence students' motivation to complete their education. Implementation of policies and programs that focus on academic and social engagement can further assist the institution with connecting student orientation, advising and financial aid with internal classroom activities and research. In closing, this study was valuable because it explored how African American males view on the motivating factors for them remaining at their institution. Furthermore, participants were able to discuss if the institution had structured policies and initiatives to help their adjustment to the campus culture.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. How old are you?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

2. What ethnicity would you consider yourself?

- White or Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian or Asian American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- other

3. Are you currently enrolled at an institution of higher education?

- Yes
- No

4. What institution do/did you attend?

- East Carolina
- Elizabeth City State University
- UNC Greensboro
- UNC Charlotte
- Fayetteville State University
- North Carolina A&T State University
- North Carolina Central University

- North Carolina State University
- UNC Asheville
- UNC-Chapel Hill
- UNC Pembroke
- UNC Wilmington
- UNC School of the Arts
- Western Carolina University
- Winston-Salem State University
- Appalachian State University

5. Did you graduate from the institution that you selected in the previous question?

- Yes
- No

6. What type of student do you or did you consider yourself?

- Traditional/ Full-time
- Non-Traditional/Part-time Student
- Transfer Student

7. Do/Did you feel your race was under-represented on your college campus? Please explain.

8. If you left or thought about leaving college early, what would be your primary reason for not returning to college?

9. Is it/was it difficult for you or your family to handle the cost of college tuition? Why?

10. During your time at the institution, do you feel that your family are/were supportive of your pursuit of a college degree?

11. During your college career how satisfied were you or are you with your overall social life on campus such as relationships with friends, college organizations, and extracurricular activities?

12. How would you describe your relationship with faculty members on activities inside and outside of the classroom?

13. How would you describe your interaction with university staff?

14. Do you feel University staff were genuinely interested in helping students?

15. Have you ever dropped or stopped out of a college or university?

- Yes
 No

16. If yes, what were the contributing factors for you not completing your degree program?

17. If you completed or are completing your degree, what factors contribute/contributed to you staying in college or moving forward to complete your degree?

18. Are you paying, or did you pay for college using financial aid (loans, grants, scholarships)?

19. Do/did you feel that you were well prepared for college life?

20. Do you feel that you fit in with the campus culture of the institution?

21. What obstacles did you face, or do you face on your college campus?

22. Please describe programs at your institution geared towards helping male students adjust to college life?

23. Did/does your college/university have institutional-wide initiatives to support your progress throughout your academic career? If so, explain the types of programs.

24. Did you apply or participate in any state or federal programs that helped you remain in college? If so, please explain the programs that were offered.

25. Are you a first-generation student?

- Yes
- No