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# Formerly At-Risk, Undergraduate Alumni's Mentoring Experiences at a Historically Black University

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Walden University
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Abstract

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M.Ed., Southern University and A & M College, 2005

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

As evidence of the continuing attainment gap, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds have a lower enrollment and completion rate in higher education. Although studies have documented that mentoring programs have the capability to address a variety of problems these students may face in completing college, there appeared to be limited research on examining their experiences in mentoring programs at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU, undergraduate alumni. Astin's theory of student involvement and Tinto's theory of student retention provided the framework for understanding the undergraduate mentoring experiences of 9 HBCU alumni. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants to be interviewed. Participants' interview responses were analyzed and hand coded manually. From analysis of the results, 5 themes emerged: support during transition to college, mentoring guidance, development of relationships, the ability to address personal goals, and development of professional skills for future success. The participants described their mentoring experience as an integral component in their academic and social involvement and overcoming barriers to enrolling in college and earning a college degree. This study may provide insight that administrators may use to implement institutional policies for developing mentoring programs to reduce barriers to at-risk students' college success.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my family. I am so grateful to my husband, Raymond, for dreaming with me daily. I always gave him every reason why I could not earn a doctorate, yet he always gave me just one reason why I could "I believe you can do it." His belief in me and continuous support helped to get me to the finish line. Trying to stay up with me while I perfected an assignment, attempting to do the laundry exactly like me, and reminding me when it was time to take a break or rest for a while means more to me than you will ever know. Thank you for being the spark that makes me want the very best for our family. I look forward to dreaming with you until the end of time. We make a solid team! We win together! I love you.

I want to thank my daughter, Cache', another one of my biggest cheerleaders. In her eyes, I can do anything. Actually, it is you who have inspired me by being a leader at a young age in school and dance, and later becoming a student leader in college, and being courageous fueled me to do more and do my best. Thank you for encouraging me to 'let my hair down'; who else could convince me to cut off all of my hair and zipline through the jungle of Jamaica. The late night encouragement and cooking dinner when I couldn't find the time go such a long way, and I am forever grateful. I am paving the way for generations to follow. I love you!

Finally, I would like to thank my mother, Helen. For years, it was just the two of us. There is not one day that I can recall being in need of basic essentials. There were times when I did not understand why I could not do what other kids were doing, and I later became thankful that you kept me on track. The foundation you laid for me was the

most important piece of the puzzle to ensure my future success. The values you instilled

in me are a part of the drive that got me to this point. I love you!

Here's to all of us! We did it!

I am also grateful for my second committee member, Dr. Patricia Brewer. I submitted each draft with the expectation that there would be a few more to follow after her review. She challenged me to think more, stick to my research question, and to be more thorough yet precise, and for that I am thankful. Finally, I am thankful for my URR, Dr. Floralba Marrero, for the thorough review of my study and recommendations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Mentoring is a process of engagement to establish a collaborative relationship between the mentor and mentee grounded in learning, where wisdom is not passed down but rather a mutual discovery experience (Zachary, 2012). It may be in the form of an individual or group providing support for goal setting, choosing a career path, or to advance an individual psychologically (Gershenfeld, 2014). Mentoring programs are designed to address a variety of problems students may have while in college, providing guidance in areas of financial aid, personal matters, leadership, and academics (Horton, 2015; Melzer & Grant, 2016; National Mentoring Partnership, 2018; Wibrowski, Mathews, & Kitsantas, 2017; Zou, 2009). Mentors help students from low-income families enroll in school and assist them as they become acclimated to college, thereby reducing achievement declines (Castleman & Page, 2013).

Some higher education institutions face barriers in developing mentoring programs for disadvantaged or at-risk students due to lack of funding, counseling training programs, and adequate counselor time availability (Hatfield, 2011; Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). Due to societal changes, more complex mentoring program models are needed, causing a strain on institutional budgets (National Mentoring Partnership, 2017). Some higher education institutions apply for federal funding to assist with providing mentoring services to students during and prior to attending college, commonly known as the Federal TRIO programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Although the federal government is comprised of only 9% of the total sources of funding for mentoring programs, it can help to offset the costs to implement the services, provide training to

mentors, and cover the salaries for staff/faculty (National Mentoring Partnership, 2017).

Although emphasis is not always placed on mentoring pre-college enrollment, Avery,

Howell, and Page (2014) suggested that access to mentoring programs prior to enrolling

in college aids in providing adequate information to at-risk students to assist them in

selecting the higher education institution that is the best fit to ensure success.

Understanding the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, historically Black

colleges and universities (HBCUs), undergraduate alumni can help administrators

implement policies and mentoring programs in an effort to assist the students in

succeeding academically. In this chapter, I present the background, problem statement,

purpose for the study, the conceptual framework, the definitions, assumptions, scope and

delimitations, and potential significance of study before concluding with a summary.

## Background

Some higher education institutions have implemented mentoring programs

through funding by the U.S. Department of Education TRIO programs. Recognizing that

some students need additional assistance in the college application process and furthering

their education, the TRIO programs were designed and funded by the federal government

to assist students from low-income families in obtaining degrees and are comprised of

Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Service (U.S. Department of

Education, 2018). At a 4-year, public HBCU in the state of Louisiana, the Upward Bound

program was funded for over 50 years to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds

within the state with access to higher education. The HBCU hosted dozens of middle and

high school students with a goal to increase the enrollment and completion rates for their

participants. The program also assisted their participants with postsecondary education by providing resources on decision-making skills; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics career opportunities; understanding legislative processes; and researching choices for colleges and universities. To participate in the mentoring program, the HBCU required that individuals be a citizen of the United States, a permanent resident of the United States or meet other residency requirements; be a potential first-generation student; either come from low-income background or have a high risk for failure; and have a need for academic support to pursue education beyond high school.

## Problem Statement

There remains an educational attainment gap in higher education between students from middle-to-high income families and students from low-socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds (Smith, 2013). Students from low-SES backgrounds are considered to have lower income, less educational attainment, poor health, and other lower quality of life characteristics in comparison to other people in society (American Psychological Association [APA], 2016). Studies have shown that there is a lower enrollment of students from low-income backgrounds in higher education (Oseguera & Hwang, 2014) and lower retention and completion rates for those who do enroll (Permzadian & Crede, 2016), particularly at HBCUs (Prince & Ford, 2016). Data have shown that students from low-SES backgrounds tend to have lower academic achievement, slower academic progression, and less career self-efficacy, and as a result, they are affected the most in regards to educational attainment (APA, 2016; National Mentoring Partnership, 2018). This group of students must complete higher education

studies and earn degrees to be productive in society, so it is equally important that they are given the same opportunity as students from middle-to-high income families, and this should be a national priority (Smith, 2013). One problem is that the vulnerable, at-risk student populations are not always advised adequately to promote college success (Avery et al., 2014).

Moving from an environment of advising to mentoring is a necessary element in HBCUs today (Prince & Ford, 2016). Once admitted to a college, mentoring programs should be designed and managed to assist at-risk students by providing guidance and direction in enrolling and pursuing a degree (Smith, 2013). Although mentoring programs are not offered at all higher education institutions and when offered vary by approach and participates, they should have clearly defined goals and purposes (Gershenfeld, 2014). Although the literature demonstrates that mentoring programs have been evaluated and explored in multiple areas throughout higher education (Cornelius, Wood, & Lai, 2016), there appears to be little research examining the experiences of at-risk students who participate in mentoring programs at HBCUs, particularly related to degree completion.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni in their undergraduate program. This information can assist administrators in the development of an effective program and can help future at-risk students succeed academically.

## Research Question

The study was based on the following research question:

RQ: How do formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni describe their experiences with mentoring in their undergraduate program?

## Conceptual Framework

This study was based on Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement. Astin's theory may assist administrators in creating a campus more conducive for learning to support college success. Astin's definition of involvement included four basic components; for a student to be considered involved, they have to show evidence of studying, participating on campus, being involved in student organizations, and having an established line of communication with faculty. While there are other aspects of Astin's theory, I used these four characteristics of involvement to constitute part of the framework supporting the research question of this study of how mentoring experiences have contributed to the students' academic completion.

This study was also based on Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention. In this theory, Tinto focused on academic and social engagement as related to a student's success in college, their educational attainment, and retention. Academic and social engagement could be obtained as a result of the interaction with faculty and/or mentors (Tinto, 1993). Student engagement is widely viewed as playing a major role in student persistence and attainment (Flynn, 2014). Along with Astin's (1999) four characteristics of involvement, these two components of Tinto's theory (i.e., persistence and attainment) provided the framework for addressing the research question in this study.

**Nature of the Study**

In this study, I employed a basic qualitative study design to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU, undergraduate alumni regarding how a mentoring program influenced them personally and academically. A basic qualitative study approach was most suitable for this study in that semistructured questions were used in interviews with a small group of people to understand the nature of their experience. Although qualitative research primarily focuses on gaining or extending knowledge of the area of interest, it may inform practice and, as a result, make a difference in the lives of people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Definitions**

*At-risk college student*: A student who was enrolled in the mentoring program at an HBCU and considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school as a result of their individual or background characteristics. This may include first-generation college students and/or those from low SES households or who experience environmental or other risk factors that hinder their ability to progress and earn a degree, such as lack of transportation, being underprepared academically, lacking of social engagement experience, homelessness, health issues, or learning disabilities (Horton, 2015).

*Historically Black college and universities (HBCUs)*: Institutions established prior to 1964 designed for the purpose of educating African Americans and accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association as determined by the U.S. secretary of Education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

*Mentor*: An individual serving in a role to another individual or group providing psychological or emotional support, support for goal setting and choosing a career path, academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing a student's knowledge relevant to their chosen field, and specification of a role model (Gershenfeld, 2014).

*Mentoring program*: Interaction between at least two people, usually a mentor and mentee, occurring in a formal or informal setting designed to assist the mentee in establishing or accomplishing their specific goals (Zachary, 2012). For the purpose of this study, all participants were enrolled in a TRIO program at an HBCU but often referred to that program with different terms. For consistency in meaning, whenever participants used the program name or name of some aspect of the program that had different names, it is referred to here as "mentoring program."

## Assumptions

I made three assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that eight to 10 formerly at-risk, HBCU, undergraduate alumni who were in the mentoring program at an HBCU could be identified and would agree to participate in the interview process for the study. Another assumption was that participants would be honest in expressing their opinions and sharing their experiences during the interviews. I also assumed that the experiences would be similar to a large percentage of the experiences of participants in a mentoring program at the HBCU.

## Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study extended only to understanding the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, undergraduate alumni at one HBCU. As a result, this may limit the

generalizability of results that might apply to other undergraduate students and their mentoring experiences. Although other undergraduates who participated in mentoring programs may vary in terms of their first-generation, at-risk student, or income status, the delimitation of this study also means that only formerly at-risk, HBCU, undergraduate alumni who were enrolled in and graduated from the mentoring program were included in the study.

## Limitations

The focus of this study on at-risk students at one HBCU may have limited the number of those available for participation in the study as well as limited the generalizability of the population. One limitation was the challenge of contacting the alumni postgraduation due to relocation, incorrect contact information, and/or their willingness to participate. Because the interviews were by phone, another limitation was the inability to observe body language and nonverbal gestures. To address this limitation, I listened to the tone pauses, asides, and emphasis placed on certain words in the participants' responses.

## Significance of the Study

The findings of this study provide insight into the experiences of alumni who were formerly at-risk undergraduates in the mentoring program at one HBCU to help administrators of any mentoring program to understand how best to develop institutional policy and manage mentoring programs for at-risk students as well as identify possible barriers to these students' college success. The results of this study may inform administrators of ways mentoring programs can assist at-risk students to succeed

academically and learn how to apply leadership skills. That knowledge could contribute to the retention and completion rate of at-risk students at HBCUs (Permzadian & Crede, 2016). The research findings may also contribute to the betterment of society by producing more citizens who have obtained degrees and developed leadership skills to become flexible in a changing labor force.

## Summary and Transition

Higher education institutions should be available for all people regardless of their backgrounds, and there should be resources to assist all participants in being successful (Avery et al., 2014; Castleman & Page, 2013). As disparities in the educational attainment gap continue, more research studies are being conducted to identify the issues and provide possible solutions to address the problem (Horton, 2015; Melzer & Grant, 2016; Wibrowski et al., 2017). Mentoring programs have been identified as a solution to assist students in becoming successful academically and earning a degree (Horton, 2015; Melzer & Grant, 2016; Wibrowski et al., 2017). At a few higher education institutions, mentoring programs have been successful and effective at increasing retention and graduation rates and creating social relationships for students from low-income families, ethnic students, and students from lower SES backgrounds. Although mentoring programs have been explored in multiple areas in higher education (Cornelius et al., 2016), more research is needed on their use in the HBCU setting particularly due to the lower retention and completion rates (Prince & Ford, 2016).

In this chapter, I presented the introduction to the study, the problem, the purpose, the research question, the conceptual framework, and the nature of the study. The

assumption, scope, limitations, and significance were also defined. In the next chapter, I will provide a more in-depth description of the conceptual framework and a review of the literature that supports the need and purpose of the study to assist in the development of an effective policy and programs for mentoring future at-risk students. As a result, I will identify a gap in the literature that this study was intended to address.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research studies have shown that retention and completion rates are lower for students from low-income backgrounds (Permzadian & Crede, 2016), particularly at HBCUs (Prince & Ford, 2016). Mentoring services have been identified as yielding positive results for at-risk students in the areas of increased enrollment and chances of on-time degree completion (Castleman & Page, 2013; Cornelius et al., 2016). Although research studies have been conducted on mentoring programs throughout higher education (Cornelius et al., 2016), there appears to be little research in examining the experiences of at-risk students who participate in mentoring programs at HBCUs. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni in their undergraduate program.

Students from low-income families continue to fall behind students from middle-to-upper income families in educational attainment (APA, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2016). At-risk students face a higher rate of factors and barriers that affect their ability to stay in school (Horton, 2015; Karimshah, Wyder, Henman, Tay, Capelin, & Short, 2013). Research has shown these factors and barriers include financial resources (Zou, 2009), lack of direction (Avery et al., 2014), first-generation (Wibrowski et al., 2017), underprepared academically (Melzer & Grant, 2016), and lack of academic and social engagement (Horton, 2015).

Mentoring programs at higher education institutions can help at-risk students by equipping them with the necessary information needed to succeed academically (Avery et al., 2014) and assist them in becoming acclimated in college to ensure success

(Castleman & Page, 2013). Holistic student development is a primary mission for many colleges and universities in the United States (Braskamp & Trautvetter, 2016). Exploring the experiences of students who participated in mentoring programs can help administrators understand how best to implement institutional policies and mentoring programs for first-generation, at-risk students.

Although there has been ongoing research on mentoring programs and their effectiveness in higher education overall, in this study I focused on at-risk students. In the next section, I list the sources and databases used to collect literature to review. There were several terms and combinations of words used in the search for the literature review. After the literature search strategy section, I present two theories synthesized as the conceptual framework of the study: Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention. Finally, I present a review of literature associated with the key concepts used for this study, grouped and summarized by factors, and discuss how this study will fill the gap in the literature.

## Literature Search Strategy

For this study, I located several sources from the following databases accessible through the Walden University Library: ERIC, EBSCO, Education Source, Google Scholar, SAGE and ProQuest. I also used the following external website sources: Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System, NCES, and the U.S. Department of Education. To return the best and most relevant results, the search was limited to material published in the years of 2012 to 2018 and the following key terms and combinations of terms were used: *mentoring in higher education*, *at-risk students*, *first-generation*

*students*, *low SES backgrounds*, *first-year experience*, *millennial freshman students*, *low income families*, *retention*, *faculty as mentors in high education*, *student engagement*, *student involvement*, *perceptions of mentoring*, *mentoring relationships*, *mentoring styles*, *policy development*, *college student leadership development,* and *effectiveness of mentoring.* The terms with the best and most relevant results are first-generation students, at-risk students, and mentoring in higher education.

### Conceptual Framework

I synthesized two theories as a conceptual framework to guide this study: Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention. These two theories were used as the framework to address aspects of mentoring experiences. Understanding students' mentoring experiences can assist in policy development to improve the learning environment and the identification of possible barriers to college success.

In the theory of student involvement, Astin (1999) noted that students who are more involved will perform better academically and socially. Astin's theory of student involvement is based on three elements: inputs, environments, and outcomes. The inputs are considered to be the student's demographics, background, and prior experiences; environments are considered the college experience and living arrangements; and outcomes are the students' characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values after graduation. The inputs contribute to students' actions, self-motivation, and behavior. Astin's input-environment-output model affords the ability to assess a student's performance based on their input and environment.

In developing the theory, Astin (1999) focused on how students spend their time; their behavior; and their commitment to events, activities, and academic experience. Astin's theory of student involvement is based on five characteristics of involvement; however, in the current study, I used four of these characteristics of involvement to constitute part of the framework addressing the research question of how mentoring experiences have contributed to formerly at-risk, HBCU, undergraduate alumni academic completion. The four characteristics of student involvement used for this study were:

- Involvement requires investment of psychosocial and physical energy,

- Involvement has both qualitative or quantitative features,

- Academic performance is associated with level of student involvement, and

- The effectiveness of an educational policy or practice is related to the policy or practice to increase student involvement.

Students are considered involved when they show physical and psychological evidence of studying, participation on campus, being involved in student organizations, and have an established line of communication with faculty (Astin, 1999). The fifth characteristic – a continuum of student involvement at different times – was not considered as part of the framework for this study.

Quaye and Harper (2015) highlighted that it is possible to be involved and not engaged, which is a key distinction between Astin (1999) and Tinto (1993). This study will also be based on Tinto's theory of student retention. In this theory, Tinto focused on academic and social engagement as related to a student's success in college, their educational attainment, and retention. Higher education institutions must do their parts in

ensuring that all students are engaged (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Academic and social

engagement can be obtained as a result of the interaction with faculty and/or mentors.

Tinto (2000) noted that if there was disconnect between students and faculty, staff, or

administrators, students will depart from institutions. Tinto expressed that engagement

has a positive relationship to persistence and persistence will, in turn, lead to an increase

in student retention. Student engagement is widely viewed as playing a major role in

student persistence and attainment (Flynn, 2014). Along with the previously mentioned

four characteristics of involvement from Astin's theory of student involvement, the two

components of student persistence and attainment from Tinto's theory provided the

framework for this study.

In the field of higher education, theoretical models have been used to predict

whether students will persist and be retained, and these models often include research by

Tinto and Astin (Kerby, 2015). Arroyo and Gasman (2014) took an HBCU-based

educational approach for Black college students to build a theoretical model for Black

student success based on components of research by Tinto (1993) and other theorists as

well as positive work completed in progression for Black students. They created the

model with an institutional focus to stress the importance of the institution's role in

developing policy and programming that supports underperforming or at-risk Black

students. In the following review of literature, I address the extant research on this topic.

**Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

The ability to stabilize student enrollment and graduation rates for at-risk students

is an ongoing issue and has become a major problem for higher education institutions

worldwide (O'Keeffe, 2013). Lack of readiness has been a key indicator in the success of

degree completion for college students (Horton, 2015). Mentoring has been identified as

having significant value to at-risk young adults aged 18–21 years old, increasing their

aspirations to enroll in and graduate from college (Horton, 2015; National Mentoring

Partnership, 2018). In the review of literature that follows, I provide a summary of the

factors identified as barriers to college success, mentoring program models for at-risk

students, policy development for mentoring programs, and mentoring program outcomes

among ethnic students.

**Barriers to College Success**

Mentoring has been identified as a critical component for students who come

from low-income families, are members of an ethnic group, are first-generation students,

and have other life circumstances affecting their chances of success (Horton, 2015). As

the enrollment of students with risk factors increases and the barriers faced by at-risk

students may vary, different mentoring styles may be necessary for students to be

successful in higher education (Horton, 2015).

Research has shown evidence of at-risk students facing more barriers in higher

education than the students from middle-to-high income families (Castleman & Page,

2013; Horton, 2015; Karimshah et al., 2013). Higher education administrators should

motivate and be sensitive to the needs of this group of students to improve their overall

statistics in college success (O'Keeffe, 2013; Petty, 2014). Students who are at-risk,

mostly African American, Hispanic, and American Indian, are from a generation of

people of have been marginalized, persecuted, and underserved in U.S. culture (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005).

Research supports that students from low SES backgrounds need additional assistance to help them succeed academically (Horton, 2015). McKay and Devlin (2016) conducted a qualitative study on students from low SES backgrounds with a total of 89 first-generation students from low SES backgrounds and 26 university staff participating in their survey. Using a success-focused methodological approach, they focused on students who reenrolled after completing 1 year to determine what helped students succeed despite their challenges. In semistructured interviews, students were asked questions about their perceptions of the factors helping them succeed as well as teaching strategies, teacher support, and other factors. The researchers used purposeful sampling to identify staff participants, requiring them to be successful and experienced practitioners in the area of working with students. The staff were asked questions to identify the best teaching strategies and support requirements for this group of students. They concluded that, overall, the students were determined and persistent and that students from low SES backgrounds should not be automatically considered as a problem for higher education institutions because they can contribute to higher education meaningfully.

Over the years, statistics have revealed that students from low SES backgrounds remain the lowest in percentage to enroll in and complete college (APA, 2016; NCES, 2016). Oseguera and Hwang (2014) conducted a quantitative study using a national data set to assess the low enrollment rates of students from low-income backgrounds in higher education comparing the post-high school transition of low-income students to middle-

and high-income students. A total of 14,000 students were surveyed as 10th graders, again as 12th graders, and then again 2 years post-high school. In their study, a total of 12,550 students, from public, religious, and private schools throughout the United States, completed all three surveys. They used a sample selection to identify low-income students, which were defined by social services standards for schools. Their dependent variable was the educational pathway, and the independent variable was associated variables with Oakes's critical conditions. The researchers found that low income students had a higher drop-out rate, were not fully prepared for college, and entered higher education at least 2 years after high school graduation when compared to their high-income peers.

Aside from the factor of SES backgrounds, there are other barriers faced by at-risk students in pursuing their degrees. In a mixed-methods study, Karimshah et al. (2013) focused on the factors and barriers affecting the ability of students with low SES background to stay in school. They conducted a survey using closed-ended quantitative and open-ended qualitative questions via an online student portal. The survey was made available to the entire student body with the exception of international students because their SES may have been defined differently. The purpose of their study was to understand the retention strategies for low SES students, and as a result, emphasis was placed on the qualitative data gathered from the survey. The survey captured how cultural capital, social integration, and self-agency/efficiency influenced the retention of the student. The quantitative values in the study were the student's demographics, individual stress level and its effect on them, and their motivational factors for remaining in school.

The study produced findings from 1,002 survey responses that indicated students from lower SES backgrounds experienced more stressors than other students.

Horton (2015) identified risk factors associated with college persistence and success and grouped them according to background characteristics, individual characteristics, and environmental factors. Horton described the background characteristics as nontraditional student, first-generation, ethnic group, SES, lack of knowledge about college admission, and academically underprepared.

Individual characteristics found in the Horton (2015) study included unrealistic goals, lack of school engagement, self-efficacy, self-confidence, lack of strong role models/mentors, serious health or substance abuse issues, and childcare responsibility. Recommendations included focus for higher education administrators on developing programs for well-rounded individuals, particularly related to the social skills, improved communication skills, and good attributes for developing strong leadership skills. Environmental factors that emerged were related to student persistence included study environment, transportation time and costs, access to student support services, advisor advice and support, adequate facilities, no individual guidance or mentoring.

Environmental factors are equally important and should be considered to ensure at-risk students have access to higher education. Zou (2009) examined whether student financial aid affected the enrollment status and academic success of students from low income families and the lower SES backgrounds. The chi-square significance test was used to determine the relationship between the independent variables (SES background, academic performance) and the financial aid policy. The test yielded that there was a

relationship between enrollment, academic success and financial aid assistance, as many

students from lower SES backgrounds did not obtain financial aid funds.

      Transitioning into the college environment could be a challenge for many college

freshmen. Turner and Thompson (2014) conducted a qualitative study using interviews to

explore the opinions and perceptions of groups of students to understand the obstacles

and enablers that are faced by millennial freshman students transitioning to college. The

purpose of the study was to explore the opinions and perceptions of groups of students

(current freshman, upper classman, and nonreturning freshman) to understand the

obstacles and enablers that are faced by millennial freshman students transitioning to

college (Turner & Thompson, 2014). The central research question was to identify how

participants describe and reflect on their first-year college experience. The three

subquestions were to understand which perceived activities and programs engage

freshman college students into the first-year college environment, which perceived

obstacles do college freshman experience in transitioning into the first year of college,

and which perceived activities and programs might enhance the transition into the college

environment for freshman students?

      The potential participants in the Turner and Thompson (2014) study were invited

via email with detailed instructions on participation. There were 30 participants - 10

freshman, 10 sophomores, and 10 nonreturning freshmen. There were 14 females and 16

males; 10 were Caucasian, two were Biracial, four Asian-American, one Indian

American, three Hispanic, and 11 African American. The researchers served as one

instrument and the recorded, open-ended interviews (face-to-face and phone) were the

second instrument to obtain the experiences and perceptions of the participants to identify the themes and patterns. There were 23 questions directly related to the first-year freshman and college experience. Four themes emerged that identified factors influencing the freshman transition: 67% engaging freshman activities; 65% development of effective study skills; 57% no interactive instructor-student relationships; 53% inadequate academic services-support.

Lopez (2018) conducted a mixed-method study that focused primarily on minority students who were first-generation students with low SES and a lack of role models at home to identify factors that predict student success as it relates to college value. The independent variables for the correlational study were background characteristics, financial factors, sense of belonging, internships, work obligations, social obligations, and family obligations. The study was conducted at a private, liberal arts, non-profit religiously affiliated four-year institution in south Florida. Surveys, focus groups, and employment tracking tools were used on a sample of 50-100 at-risk college students. There were five themes: college success, retention, college completion, at-risk students and rewarding careers. The findings concluded that there is a need for support services for at-risk students as it relates to student success. Additionally, institutions should focus on improving access of at-risk students, retention, program completion, and access to rewarding careers.

As indicated by Horton (2015), childcare responsibility was found to be one of the individual characteristics that exists as a barrier. Some at-risk college students are faced with the challenge of raising children, ultimately placing a strain on them financially,

mentally, and physically. A college student with preschool aged children can be affected by the amount of time they spend on childcare and the lack of time remaining to eat, sleep, relax, and do schoolwork after caring for their child or children (Pennamon, 2018). When compared to the more than a quarter of U.S. undergraduates, the percentage of undergraduates with dependent children is higher for low-income and first-generation students at 36% and minorities or Black undergraduates at 39% (Wladis, Hachey, & Conway, 2018). Wladis et al. (2018) showed that parenthood decreases the college completion rate, more for women than for men because of increased commitment in childcare and household work.

Wladis et al.'s (2018) study at the large urban City University New York explored whether lower quality and quantity of time for college (named time poverty by researchers) explained the lower percentage in college completion by students with dependent children. The research questions included (a) whether parents of preschool-age children have higher levels of time poverty than students without preschool-aged children; (b) if time spent on childcare and/or paid work mediated this relationship; (c) whether students with preschool-aged children have lower rates of college persistence (i.e., reenrollment in the subsequent semester) and academic momentum (i.e., credit accumulation) than students without preschool-aged children; and (d) the extent to which time poverty mediates that relationship.

A large data set of institutional records for all students enrolled in cross section of common taken courses, along with 15,385 student surveys were used as the Wladis et al. (2018) sample. A total of 10.6% of the sample responded to the survey, weighted with

nonresponders. The survey asked questions to understand the number of hours spent on different activities and questions to assess the quality spent for studying. In the exploratory phase of the study, the students with children, age of the children, number of children and measured against college persistence and academic momentum were strong predictors of long-term academic outcomes. Binary logistic regression and analysis of variance models were used to model relationships stated in the research questions.

The Wladis et al. (2018) findings were that students with children younger than 6 years spent more time on housework, childcare, and paid work, and less time studying compared students without children. This group of students had higher expected family contributions, making them eligible for less financial aid, yet had less income contributing to their family size than students without children. The availability of affordable and convenient childcare is a contributing factor affecting college outcomes for student parents, causing them to drop out at higher rates. An implication was the need to expand access to affordable and convenient childcare. To address the issue of time poverty, a revision of federal financial aid calculations and/or a cost of attendance modification could be completed, or on-campus childcare could be provided.

**Mentoring Program Models**

As a part of retention efforts, academic and student affairs offices have used different approaches to retain students as a part of their strategic planning and implementation of services (Kerby, 2015). There are several types of mentoring programs that have been implemented and utilized widely at higher education institutions. The types of mentoring programs range from peer to peer, to faculty, to departmental with a

different purpose (Gershenfeld, 2014; Hatfield, 2011). The mentoring programs must be designed for the at-risk population of students with strategies positively impacting the general population of students and not in contrast (Thayer, 2000). White and African American students from first-generation college and low-income families view their relationships with mentors as a positive perception (Ishiyama, 2007). Research has shown that although the types of mentoring programs may vary at institutions, they have shown some positive impact in college success (Horton, 2015; McGlynn, 2014; Permzadian & Crede, 2016). Permzadian and Crede (2016) conducted a quantitative study to determine the effectiveness of first-year seminars/courses and the effects on retention rates. The researchers found that the effects of mentoring programs vary by the type and that the programs affected retention and academic progression differently, positively for some and not at all for others. It is important that mentoring programs are evaluated for continued success.

Although counseling services are recognized as an integral part of higher education, it is very important that the objectives of those services are met to be most effective. Bidwell (2018) highlighted that financial literacy was at the top of the list of concerns for low-income, first-generation students. Barriers related to accessibility and affordability for at-risk students often stem from a lack of services provided by higher education administrators as determined by a National Association for College Admission Counseling report (Bidwell, 2018). Access to professional college counseling and understanding financial aid opportunities are essential elements to prepare low-income and first-generation students for higher education.

Several aspects of formal mentoring programs have been evaluated. Gershenfeld (2014) summarized the results of 20 studies, six international, from 2008-2012 related to formal mentoring programs selected from several databases. Mentoring programs were explored where undergraduates previously served as mentors or mentees, to better understand the impact of mentoring programs on undergraduate students. The author concluded that for effectiveness in the success of a mentoring program, it should have a specific focus with clearly defined goals

Faculty serving as mentors will assist students in becoming engaged academically and socially (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Blackwell and Pinder (2014) conducted a qualitative study with a grounded theory approach to understand what motivated first-generation college students to pursue a college education. There were two groups of participants, a central group of first-generation students and a comparison group of third-generation students. Semistructured interviews were conducted in person and online, which were later transcribed and coded for emergent themes. After examining the results, it was determined that first-generation students had an internal motivation to attend college whereas third-generation students were encouraged to attend college by family. The study recommended that teachers become mentors, particularly for at-risk students.

Certain subjects, such as math and English, may be a challenge for some at-risk students while taking developmental courses, causing them to suffer academically and/or drop out of college (Morales, Ambrose-Roman, & Perez-Maldonado, 2015). Mentoring programs can assist students with academic and social integration by providing "*social capital*" as described by Morales et al. (2015). Morales et al. conducted a study at a

public urban university over a three-semester timeframe with a population of 45 students who were enrolled in a peer-mentoring program funded by a Title V institutional grant. The purpose of the study was to determine a mentor's ability to translate and transmit academically effective behavior to a mentee. The program was designed to increase the pass rate for students enrolled in developmental math courses and improve the student self-efficacy, social integration, and engagement within the institution.

Students selected to serve as mentors in the Morales et al. (2015) displayed high levels of achievement by maintaining a minimum 3.0 grade point average (GPA) and being actively involved on campus. The mentors were trained, matched with mentees through a mentee connection process, and paid $15/hourly. The mentor/mentee dyads met face to face, via social media, messaging, e-mail, and phone and were required to attend every bimonthly full-program meeting.

The assessment of the program was completed at the end of each semester by the math pass rate and end of semester exit and focus group interviews. The interviews and focus groups were open-ended and semistructured, videotaped, transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed for data analysis. The finding for the pass rate was of 15 mentees, 47% passed the math developmental class in the first semester, all 13 passed in the second semester, and 12 of 17 passed in the third semester, which an average of 72% pass rate over the three-semester timeframe. The finding as related to self-efficacy was that a total of 80% of the students expressed an increased belief in themselves and their abilities to reach their academic goals. The findings further concluded that 100% of the mentees increased their social integration and engagement.

Mentoring programs could have different outcomes for different groups of people. Ishiyama (2007) conducted a qualitative study to examine how Caucasian and African American students from first-generation college and low-income families viewed their relationships with their mentors. A total of 33 participants attending a predominately white institution were interviewed to examine their perceptions of mentoring to be used as a guide to pair students with mentors, specifically for first-generation students and students from underrepresented groups. The students were grouped by African American, first-generation low-income, African American first-generation low-income, and African American continuing generation students. Overall, African American students from both categories were more likely to have positive perceptions.

Cole and Grothaus (2014) conducted a qualitative, phenomenological study to examine urban school counselors' perceptions of low income families. A total of ten counselors participated in two cycles of interviews and responded to two reflective questions. From the transcribed interviews and questionnaires, six themes were identified: perceptions of family characteristics; perceptions of family attitudes; awareness of obstacles and challenges for the families; struggle showing empathy; choice of roles in working with families; personal feelings. Findings from the study suggested that if counselors self-reflect and ensure they do not have bias concerning these groups of students, they would be in a position to help the students succeed in school.

Mentoring programs can be designed to target one aspect or multiple areas for assisting a student. In an effort to develop a student's leadership skills, higher education institutions can design a student leadership development program, or a mentoring

program with faculty and staff assigned as advisors to the student government association, student clubs, and social organizations. Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt (2001) conducted a longitudinal study to assess whether a student's participation in a leadership program had an impact on their personal or educational development. The researchers collected data from 875 students upon entry, during freshman year, and their senior year from 10 institutions that were funded to create leadership programs. They were administered a questionnaire as a part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, and a 20-question supplemental questionnaire with a focus on specific leadership outcome measures. Descriptive and multivariate analyses were used. The findings from the study indicated that participants showed positive results in civic responsibility, leadership skills, multicultural awareness, understanding of leadership theories, and personal and societal values.

Soria, Fink, Lepkowski, and Snyder (2013) conducted a study to investigate the connections between student involvement in leadership activities, their understanding of social responsibility, and their engagement in promoting social change. Astin's social change model of leadership development was used as the primary framework. The Student Experience in the Research University survey, based at University of California-Berkeley, was used to ask 213,160 undergraduate participants across nine large, public universities core questions related to use of time, their major, campus climate, and satisfaction and randomly assigned to one of four themes: academic engagement, community and civic engagement, global knowledge and skills, and student life and development. The data were analyzed using Kaiser's criteria components and regression.

Overall, the findings were that students who participated in leadership positions have a positive association with social change. Students who participated in advocacy groups, Greek fraternities and sororities, political organizations, religious organizations, and community service organizations were associated with engagement of social change greater than students were involved in recreational organizations. Soria et al. suggested that faculty, advisers, and student affairs personnel at higher education institutions can work to encourage students to participate in student leadership for positive outcomes in promoting engagement in greater social change.

Ensuring that mentees and mentors understand the objectives and expected outcomes is vital to the success of the mentoring program. Colvin (2010) collected data from spring 2008 to spring 2009 at a large public university in the western United States to understand how peer mentors, instructors and students viewed their roles and relationships using peer three mentoring groups: students currently in a first experience class, students who completed the mentoring class, students who continue to serve as mentors afterwards. The evaluation of the peer mentoring model included observations, weekly reflection journals, and interviews. In this qualitative study, a grounded theory approach was used where themes emerged from blind coding 40 interview transcripts. The findings revealed that students, peers, and instructors felt that there are benefits (support) and risks (interaction, vulnerability) to being mentored. The roles were identified as connecting link, peer leaders, learning coach, student advocate, and trusted friend. All participants agreed that the major benefit of having or being a mentor was doing better in school.

Just as the goals and objectives of mentoring programs are vital to the success of a mentoring program, having a knowledgeable mentor is equally important. Administrators must ensure that college admission professionals are trained adequately to ensure that they are providing the most accurate information to students and well versed in multiple areas in student services (Bidwell, 2018). Cross-training college admission professionals to provide information on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion process, interpreting award letters, and explaining the net price of pursuing a higher education degree will enhance the understanding of students and parents and assist greatly in their college decision making (Bidwell, 2018).

**Policy Development for Mentoring Programs**

Retention and student success continue to be at the forefront of institutional goals and strategic plans, particularly for minority-serving institutions (MSI), as the enrollment largely consists of at-risk students (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). The literature widely supports that mentoring can have an overall positive effect on at-risk students in obtaining degrees (Horton, 2015; McGlynn, 2014; Permzadian & Crede, 2016; Wibrowski et al., 2017). Students who are considered at-risk students most often enroll at MSIs, which includes HBCUs, Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges and universities (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2015a). The Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students project was created to convey the importance of MSIs and afforded them the ability to collect data used for institutional decision making, accountability, change initiatives increasing student engagement and learning (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2015b). Yomtov, Plunkett, Efrat, and Marin (2015)

conducted a study of a peer-mentoring program at a university in southern California. The results showed that students with a mentor performed better academically than those students without mentors and identified how mentors can improve the first-year experiences of university students.

Research has shown that underprepared students have been affected academically, particularly first-year college students (Melzer & Grant, 2016). Melzer and Grant (2016) conducted a study to explore the personalities and perceived academic needs between prepared and underprepared students. There were 109 students male and female, mostly Caucasian from middleclass backgrounds used in the sample at a small private university in southern Connecticut. A survey was administered to seek responses to educational and personal needs. A Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate the responses. The purpose of the study was to improve teaching strategies, to provide some insight to administrator who worked with this group of students, and make degree attainment a higher possibility for this population. The findings indicated that the social support needs impact the academic outcome for underprepared students, as a result, this population can succeed with adequate support.

Castleman and Page (2013) investigated the effectiveness of early outreach counseling programs that recruit students immediately after high school with assistance provided in the decision to enroll in college. Interventions were used to prevent what was described as a summer meltdown and increase college access to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The first intervention was having school counselors/advisors contact high school graduates to extend additional support. The second intervention was

enrolling students in a text message campaign to receive personalized messages. The third intervention was utilization of peer mentors to contact students, offering a first-hand perspective. Lastly, a partnership was formed between the district and the colleges where the mass of students enrolled to determine which outreach efforts were most effective. Their study results indicated that the approaches improved the enrollment rates of low-income students and may lead to on-time college graduation.

Early detection, in addition to the early outreach approach, expands on efforts to assist at-risk students earn higher education degrees. Jia and Maloney (2015) conducted a study to understand the factors that lead to unsuccessful first-year experiences to identify and reduce those factors affecting at-risk students. The study included 15,833 first-year students at a large public university in New Zealand, using 88,464 course specific observations. The two dependent variables used in this study were course noncompletion outcomes in the first year and non-retention outcomes in the second year. The personal characteristics, race, gender, and educational background, program of study, and National Certificate of Educational Achievement exam summary measure were included in data set. Individual course observations are used in first year, while individual student observations are used in the second year. The findings concluded that female students have a lower probability in course noncompletion. Students who scored higher on the National Certificate of Educational Achievement exam have a lower risk of course noncompletion. Ethnicity appeared to have a substantially negative impact on the probability of course noncompletion. The program of study had a negative effect on the

probability of course noncompletion, with the lowest being in the areas of education, health sciences, and design,

When implementing mentoring programs, it is important that mentors are prepared to successfully mentor students to contribute to college retention rates. Schademan and Thompson (2015) investigated student and faculty beliefs about college readiness, the role instructors played in serving as a cultural agent, and how beliefs about college readiness influenced instructors' roles as mentors. The study revealed that higher education institutions must support mentors to motivate them to be fully committed as a mentor to students in need, mainly first-generation, low-income students. Taking the time to properly invest with resources can produce a more favorable outcome. Administrators should strive to create an environment conducive for learning and a feeling of inclusion.

Implementing a mentoring program designed to help students succeed could result in increased graduation rates for at-risk students. Wibrowski et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study of the role of a skills-learning support on first-generation college students' self-regulation, motivation, and academic achievement. The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of the Skills Learning Support Program (SLSP) on students' retention and understand students' perceptions of their self-regulation skills and motivation as they enter college and progress through their first-year. The SLSP was designed to support first generation college students from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The students were provided academic, counseling, and financial support services, as they did not meet the regular admission standards. All of the 876 participating college freshman were from a university in the northeast region of the

United States. Of the 137 who participated in the SLSP, of which 40% male, 59% female,

majority first-generation college students from a variety of ethnic minority groups. The

SLSP participants completed surveys in two 1-hour sessions at the beginning and end of

their freshman year. Data were collected on all participants, both groups, over a period of

4 years. The following measures were used: personal data questionnaire (background

information); the motivational strategies for learning questionnaires (motivational belief

and learning strategies); patterns of adaptive learning skills (students' goal orientation);

academic achievement (credits completed). The results indicated positive, significant

changes in motivation, use of learning strategies, resource management strategies, and

student goal-orientation.

When the factors specifically related to at-risk students are identified, there are

ways they could be used to inform policy. Laskey and Hetzel (2011) conducted a study at

a mid-sized private university located in the Midwest. The data for the study was

conducted over a 3-year period on 115 traditional age (17-19-year old) at-risk students of

different gender and ethnic backgrounds who were enrolled in a Conditional Acceptance

Program, a 1-year admission program for students who do not meet the standard

requirements. The study included multiple variables: personality measurement using Five

Factor Inventory, high school and college GPA, number of times students participated in

tutoring, and demographics of gender and ethnicity. The purpose of this study was to

investigate the factors that influence the retention and GPA of students in a college

program designed for at-risk students. Statistical applications included $t$-tests and chi-

square calculated to compare groups. There was a positive correlation between

personality and tutoring, in that it increased the retention and GPA. The study further

concluded that the high school GPA was not a good predictor of college success, and that

gender, ethnicity, and high school profile did not affect the college GPA and retention.

The limitation was that students were in an urban setting and a private university. The

findings help to assist institutions in identifying factors that contribute to the success of

at-risk students and using this information to better prepare them for the higher education

environment. Higher education institutions must continue to expand support services and

create an environment conducive for all students to obtain degrees (Latskey & Hetzel,

2011).

  The National Mentoring Partnership (2018) recognized that there is a mentoring

gap that exists in America, and ongoing efforts must be made to include the

implementation of policies to assist at-risk students with graduation and to improve the

quality of life for all young people regardless of background. The partnership conducted a

study by surveying 1,109 ages 18 to 21 across the country-the first-ever national survey

to represent the perspective of young people.

  The National Mentoring Partnership (2018) study framed three areas of insight:

mentoring's connection to aspirations and outcomes, the value of mentors, and the

availability of mentors (as connected to leadership and policy). In the insight area of

mentoring's connection to aspirations and outcomes, research using a meta-analysis of

over 73 independent mentoring programs, there were positive outcomes across social,

emotional, behavioral, ad academic areas of youth development, especially at-risk youth,

succeeding in school, work, and life. More than 76 % of at-risk young adults who had a

mentor were inspired to enroll in and graduate from college, versus the 56 percent who were not. The at-risk young adults were more inclined to participate in sports or extracurricular activities and hold leadership positions in clubs, sport teams, school council or other organizations. The length of the mentoring relationship had an even greater positive impact on the mentee.

In the insight National Mentoring Partnership's (2018) area of the mentor's value, the survey showed that 95 % of the young adults found that mentoring was helpful and provided them with the support and guidance to lead productive lives. Structured mentoring provided more academic support, whereas informal mentoring provided more personal development. The mentoring relationships encouraged mentees to become future mentors, and were linked to producing a higher rate of leadership and volunteerism, enabling the young adults to contribute to the world. In the insight area of the availability of mentors, data showed that approximately 16 million young people, including nine million at-risk young adults, did not have a mentor. This leaves a challenge to both program leadership and policy to develop additional opportunities for mentoring young people. The data further supported that the mentoring needs of young people have not been met fully and that at-risk youth are less likely to have a mentor but more likely to want one. The lack of availability of mentors has led to more students dropping out. Based on feedback from the National Mentoring Partnership's survey, the overall findings concluded that young people with mentors, particularly at-risk, have shown to have powerful effects on producing more positive futures and outcomes in school, the workplace, and their communities. Mentoring can serve as an intervention tool to identify

risk factors to assist at-risk students with graduation from college. Although mentoring has been recognized as valuable, it is still lacking in opportunities for expansion to reach more at-risk young adults. Moving forward, seven recommendations were made to assist young adults thrive in society: use mentoring to address national challenges; provide a quality mentoring relationship to the young people with the greatest need; expand local, state, and federal policies that advance quality mentoring; ensure quality structured mentoring; support and increase private sector engagement in mentoring; facilitate connections between research and practice; and explore innovations to close the mentoring gap.

**Mentoring Program Outcomes of Minority Students**

The National Mentoring Partnership (2018) study highlighted the benefits of providing mentoring to at-risk students overall. Studies have also shown that there is a positive outcome for minority students academically and socially when they participate in mentoring programs (Cabrera, 2014; Knaggs, Sondergeld, & Schardt, 2015). When parents, peers, or educators provide any form of mentoring or guidance, minority students display a greater sense of college aspirations and a have a smoother transition into college according to Cabrera (2014). A qualitative study was conducted by Cabrera at Portland University to explore and understand the experiences of first-generation minority students. The Astin I-E-O Model was used as the theoretical framework for this study. First-generation minority students were invited to voluntary participate in the study. The study included 43 participants who are the first of their family to potentially earn a four-year degree, predominately juniors and seniors, ranging between the ages of 19-53 years

old, and participated in the Diversity and Multicultural Student Services (DMSS). DMSS included Diversity Enrichment Scholars, Presidential Equal Access Scholars, TRIO students, Student Leaders and Organizations, and the Multicultural Center.

An online survey using a home-based program named Qualtrics was used to determine the influence of factors (family, peers, high school educators, high school mentoring programs) and their contribution to the college decision making process. The survey responses of 42 participants, those who identified as first-generation, along with 17 questions which included demographics, yes/no, and open-ended questions were used to analyze the data. The results of the survey were imported into a Microsoft Excel file. The incomplete responses were eliminated, a color coding system was used to distinguish the questions and answers, and open coding was used to break down and examine the data. The limitations of the study were the researcher's connection to the study being a first-generation student, sole inclusion of DMSS students, invited by the advisors, and qualitative analysis yielding a wide range of responses making the data more complex. After analyzing the results, themes were identified and placed into groups: initial college motivators, educational support and guidance, high school mentor programs, family support and guidance, peer support and guidance, and other support, guidance, and comments. The findings concluded that having family involvement, support from educators, and encouragement from others contributed to their ability to succeed in college. Students received the most of their assistance through mentoring programs.

**Summary and Conclusions**

There is little research on understanding the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk undergraduate alumni, as it relates to college success in HBCUs. Mentoring is vital for at-risk students in numerous ways to address the multiple barriers faced in furthering their education (McGlynn, 2014). The literature supported that mentoring programs have a positive impact on the enrollment and retention of at-risk students. The findings from this study could assist higher education administrators in developing effective mentoring programs and inform policy to contribute to the success for future at-risk students. In Chapter 3, I describe the research design and methodology for the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni in their undergraduate program. In Chapter 3, I detail the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology, and the threats to validity.

**Research Design and Rationale**

The following research question guided this study: How do formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni describe their experiences with mentoring in their undergraduate program? I employed a basic qualitative study design to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU, undergraduate alumni regarding how the mentoring program influenced them. Although the qualitative research approach primarily focuses on gaining or extending knowledge of the area of interest, it may inform practice and, as a result, make a difference in the lives of people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The basic qualitative study design was most suitable for this study in that it has a central focus on how the experience of an event, program, or other context can be described or explored and primarily through interviews (see Patton, 2015). I conducted open-ended structured interviews on a total of eight to 10 alumni to understand the nature of their experience.

I chose to interview participants by phone for added convenience for the participants and so I could record the sessions. Telephone interviews have become more common as a result of new innovations in the forms of communication and technology (Opdenakker, 2006). The audio-recorded interviews were conducted individually as a responsive interview, giving the participant the opportunity to provide in-depth responses

(see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Standardized, open-ended interview questions were posed to each participant, which allowed them to fully express their experiences and perspectives (see Turner, 2010). I developed the open-ended questions as expansive questions, allowing the participant to cover a wider range in their response with additionally related information (see Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

In this study, individual interviews were based on a protocol and not a focus group because I was interested in the depth of the participants' individual reflections of their experiences (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Individual interviews allow the participants to share their personal experiences, thoughts, and perspectives without interference or the influence of other individuals (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Focus groups tend to provide an environment that displays less confidentiality, prevent a participant from fully disclosing information, and make them fear negative reactions when their experience is the minority (Patton, 2015).

I considered a grounded theory approach for this study. Grounded theory allows for a comparison and analysis of data collected from two groups using a theoretical sampling (Patton, 2015). Because the goal of this study was to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni, expanding the study to students who were not at-risk would have shifted the focus away from the intended target population. Grounded theory would not have supported the purpose of this study because there already was an established framework; consequently, I did not select this design.

Another design considered but not adopted was the phenomenological approach. This approach may help in gaining a deeper understanding from a broader array of

participants related to how they were affected by the program, how they felt about it, described it, and judged it (Patton, 2015). Using this approach, the researcher investigates the full lived experiences of the participants (Patton, 2015). The phenomenological approach could have extended the length of time of the study. The goal of this study was to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni and not necessarily their full lived experience; therefore, the phenomenological approach was not selected.

Lastly, a case study design was also considered for this qualitative study. Patton (2015) stated that any research study can be a case study. The purpose of a case study is to describe or explore a case that is focused on time and place within a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The case study design was not selected because this study could not be bound by time. The number of participants whose experience may cover a longer and varying timeframe in the study needed to come from several years of experience with the program. The basic qualitative study design was the most appropriate research design with which to address the research question.

**Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher in this study was to interview each participant and analyze and interpret the collected data. The HBCU that was the source of participants is my alma mater and agreed to provide me with access to potential participants to conduct the study. I used a sample from the university's alumni members beginning from the year of 2006 to the present. While I also had an existing professional relationship with the university system of which the HBCU was a part, at the time I conducted research, I was

employed by a different institution within the same system. The system is comprised of one 2-year college, two 4-year universities, a law center, and an agricultural center. Each is a separate entity as defined by state legislature. Consequently, I did not foresee any challenges with conflicts of interests because I worked at a separate campus and had no relationship with any of the formerly at-risk students at this HBCU during the defined time period of 2006–2018 for this study.

I became an alumni member of the HBCU in 2002. I was classified as an at-risk student, being a first-generation college student, ethnic, and from a low-income family. I was enrolled in a similar mentoring program at the HBCU, which focused primarily on providing guidance and support with the enrollment and financial aid processes but not the one from which my participants were drawn. I have worked in the student services area of higher education as an administrator for 16 years, with 10 years at a local community college and 6 years at a local law center within a HBCU system. Although I share some life experiences with them, I did not know or have previous relationships with any of the potential participants. To further address any potential bias in interpretation, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed based on the findings. Participants had the opportunity to review their own transcripts for accuracy to ensure that they were an accurate reflection of their responses.

**Methodology**

In this section, I provide a full description of the population, sampling procedures, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. The data analysis plan then includes a description of how the data were collected, organized, and categorized.

**Participant Selection Logic**

The target population was formerly at-risk, HBCU, undergraduate alumni who participated in the mentoring program during their undergraduate years between 2006 and 2018. The university's personnel provided me with guidelines for their cooperation in distributing my invitation to the study to potential participants from the target population. I used purposeful sampling to select participants from those who responded. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select the participants who will directly respond to the intended inquiry (Patton, 2015). Of the total respondents, the nine individuals with an interest in participating who completed and returned the informed consent and scheduled interviews were selected for the study. I expected to reach saturation with this number of nine participants based on Patton's (2015) discussion of interviewing. Saturation is met when information from the data collection becomes repetitive, yielding no new information from the interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The range of eight to -10 participants provided the opportunity to reach saturation.

**Instrumentation**

I audio recorded the phone interviews individually. An interview protocol constituted the instrument for this study (see Appendix) and was developed in consultation with my committee based on tips for writing protocols and interview techniques provided by Jacob and Ferguson (2012) and Rubin and Rubin (2012). I was guided in developing the questions by my research question and the conceptual framework in addition to the findings in the research literature. Standardized, open-ended questions in interviews are critical in research studies, making it possible to ask the same

question of each participant but allowing the participant to fully express their experiences from their perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Turner, 2010). The open-ended questions were also written as expansive questions, allowing the participant to cover a wider range in their response, as suggested by Jacob and Furgerson (2012). The use of open-ended questions also allowed me to collect demographic information (i.e., major, housing arrangements, and year graduated) to provide context for the mentoring experiences.

The first part of the interview included questions on basic background information to make the participant comfortable and to build trust. This was followed by questions regarding their perceptions as at-risk students and experiences with the mentoring program, expanding from the least difficult to those that provided more depth of responses. Although the participants may have shared the same general background characteristics, their experiences and perceptions of the mentoring program should be considered unique. I developed and asked the interview questions seeking responses that captured each participant's experience in the mentoring program as she or he perceived it.

**Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

After receiving approval from both the HBCU's internal ethics review and Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I began the recruitment of the participants, selection process, and data collection. I provided the cooperating HBCU with an e-mail invitation (see Appendix) for them to send to the alumni who participated in its mentoring program between 2006–2018 and successfully completed their undergraduate degree. The e-mail invitation included an overview of the study including the purpose of the study, the expectations of participants, details of compensation if they

agree to participate in the study, and how to contact me to agree to participate. I contacted

the first nine respondents who returned the informed consent to set up a phone interview.

The informed consent form identified the interview procedures, voluntary nature of the

interview, risks and benefits associated with being interviewed, privacy notice, and my

contact information. The informed consent protocols also included the purpose, what

would be asked of them as participants, risks and/or benefits to participating,

confidentiality, and the collection method, as suggested by Patton (2015).

The phone interviews were scheduled within a 2-month timeframe and were

conducted and recorded by me using a free conference call application with the recording

option as well as a handheld tape recorder as a backup method. I also recorded notes in a

journal during the interview. I scheduled the phone interview sessions in 60 minute time

allotments. At the start of each interview, I reiterated the purpose of the study as detailed

in the invitation and informed consent. At the conclusion of the interview, I informed the

participant that a transcript of the interview would be e-mailed to them to confirm

accuracy and that they could return it to me with any additional thoughts they want to add

upon reflection. Participants were reassured that their identity would remain confidential

and only pseudonyms would be used in the publication. Finally, I formally thanked them

by e-mail with a $20 e-gift certificate as agreed upon and informed them I would be

sending a short summary of the results when the study was completed. The transcribed

and participant-reviewed interviews were used for the data analysis process.

**Data Analysis Plan**

There are several ways to analyze data collected in qualitative studies. Patton (2015) stated that the purpose drives analysis, and the design provides the direction and purpose framing the analysis. I used content analysis to analyze the data in this study. Content analysis is used to identify, organize, and categorize the content of narrative text (Patton, 2015). The responsive interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify recurring words or themes through coding, as suggested by Patton.

I manually hand coded each of the transcripts. Coding is an important step in analyzing data and should be completed in the early stage of data analysis; coding comprises identifying themes, patterns, events, and recurring concepts within passages of interviews or focus groups (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I created the categories and themes using the responses from all interviews. This process allowed me to gain a closer understanding of the research problem and the mentoring experiences of the participants. Rubin and Rubin (2012) also suggested identifying the themes that are mostly related to the research from questions asked during the interview because how the themes and concepts are grouped influences what can be seen in the data. As the coding proceeded, I watched both for discrepant cases and saturation of data, noting when and if either occurred. I did two levels of manual hand coding to obtain a richer perspective, as suggested by Saldana (2016).

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, it is important to provide evidence of quality, trustworthiness, and creditability in a research study. Burkholder, Cox, and Crawford

(2016) stated, "the meaning of validity is related to the concept of truth; in research, valid findings accurately describe or reflect the phenomenon under study" (p. 103). Validity is the trustworthiness in qualitative research. There are a few aspects that Shenton (2004) discussed: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability.

Credibility is when the researcher aims to ensure that the study measures what it actually intended (Shenton, 2004). In addition to recording the interviews, I established credibility by recording notes and reflections during the interview in my researcher's journal. Transferability is when work can be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that providing thick, rich descriptions would help other researchers or readers in determining the extent of which findings could be transferred. Dependability is when another researcher can repeat the work and get the same results (Shenton, 2004). The interview protocol transcripts were transcribed verbatim. Providing the details of my process will also make it possible for others to follow the same procedures. Confirmability addresses the objectivity concerns of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). To prevent bias and eliminate the risk of interpretation by researcher, I coded the transcripts based upon a verbatim transcription and review my researcher's journal and compare to the coded transcript to identify any bias.

## Ethical Procedures

I followed the guidelines and ethical standards specified in Walden University's IRB application and approval process, as well as the IRB process at the HBCU. When conducting research involving human subjects, three guiding principles requested by

Walden University's IRB should be followed: justice, a fair distribution of benefits; beneficence, the maximum possible benefits and minimal harms; respect for persons, acknowledgement of autonomy and to protect those who have diminished autonomy. The HBCU has also provided me with an IRB checklist for the protection of human subjects to ensure the basic and additional consent elements are met.

Ethics is a matter of right or wrong and associated with morality (Babbie, 2016). The informed consent was distributed prior to the beginning of the interview and data collection. The informed consent ensures each participant that their participation is voluntary, that their information through all associated notes and recordings will remain confidential, informs them of any associated risks, and that they can discontinue participation at any time. All notes and recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer in my home office and discarded properly after a period of 5 years.

## Summary

In Chapter 3, I provided the details of the research design for this basic qualitative study on understanding the mentoring experiences of HBCU alumni who were previously at-risk students who participated in a mentoring program. I explained my procedures to be used in recruitment, data collection and analysis, along with establishing the trustworthiness and addressing threats to ethical issues. In Chapter 4, I provide the results from the data collection.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni in their undergraduate program. I focused on their mentoring experiences as they related to the students' academic, social, and professional development. In this chapter, I describe the setting for the study, the participants' demographics, the data collection procedures and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study.

**Research Question**

The study was guided by the following research question:

RQ: How do formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni describe their experiences with mentoring in their undergraduate program?

**Setting**

The participants for this study had all been identified previously as at-risk in a mentoring program and had graduated from a large, public HBCU in a southern state with an average population of 5,000 students. It was the flagship school within its system and offered a bridging program as preenrollment support for students before they entered their degree programs; the institution maintained a mentoring program throughout the college experience. Annually, the mentoring program counselors visited select high schools within their state-defined region to provide a presentation to students on what the overall program entailed and give students the opportunity to apply. Those students selected who met the qualifications were allowed to participate in the bridge program, which gave them the ability to enroll in college-level courses the summer before their

senior year of high school, live on-campus in the dormitories during the summer months in high school, attend workshops and sessions designed to enhance personal and professional skills, and receive the benefits of precollege services (i.e., ACT prep sessions and admissions and application assistance).

I interviewed a total of nine participants who participated first in the college's bridging program and then in the HBCU mentoring program over the course of their undergraduate experience. I used a telephone conference calling service to interview each participant after they had selected the day and time that worked best for them. The calls were free from background noises and distractions. The telephone interviews were completed in quiet, private spaces. One participant experienced some connection issues throughout the conference call with some minimal static periodically, but both parties could hear each other throughout the interview and the transcript was clear; therefore, the connection did not affect the interview. There was one call dropped incident, and, as a result, the participant dialed back into the session immediately within 1 minute, and again, there were no problems with hearing or the transcription of the interview from that point on.

As the researcher, I attempted to make each participant feel comfortable to speak freely about their experiences. Prior to starting the recording, I asked each participant if she or he was situated to begin the interview and if she or he had any last-minute questions. One participant asked if I had previously participated in the mentoring program and another participant asked what made me select this topic of research. All

participants were prepared to begin the interview and very cooperative in answering each question. The interviews were all completed within a 60-minute timeframe.

Aside from the established requirement of being an at-risk college student, all participants shared another characteristic: Each of them enrolled as a traditional undergraduate student immediately after graduating high school. Although my recruitment search included mentoring program participants graduating between the years of 2006 and 2018, all of the participants who agreed to participate graduated between the years of 2013 and 2018, with the exception of one who graduated later in 2019. The 2019 graduate received the invitation to participate in error, with an assumption that he was a 2018 graduate. I added the student as a participant to see if his experience yielded a difference in the data collected, but it did not and he became the ninth participant.

To provide context for listening to the participants' experiences, I collected information about the majors and housing arrangements and added that information to the data collected regarding participants' gender and year of graduation. The majors and housing arrangements varied among the participants. Table 1 provides these details about each participant. When each participant is introduced the first time in the following discussion of results, I add these details to provide a deeper context for their experiences.

Table 1

*Demographics of Participants*

| Participants (pseudonyms used) | Gender | Year of graduation | Major | Housing arrangements |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gail | Female | 2018 | Mechanical engineering | On campus |
| John | Male | 2017 | Political science | On campus |
| Linda | Female | 2016 | Computer science | Off campus |
| Lionel | Male | 2018 | Marketing | Off campus |
| Nick | Male | 2016 | Biology | Off campus |
| Robert | Male | 2013 | Computer science | Off campus |
| Mary | Female | 2014 | English | Off campus |
| Henry | Male | 2019 | Mass communication | Off campus |
| Arthur | Male | 2018 | Criminal justice | Off campus |

**Data Collection**

After I received IRB approval from both Walden University (Approval No. #06-14-19-0614204) and the HBCU (Approval No. #00002445), I notified the mentoring program coordinator at the HBCU and asked that my invitation be e-mailed to potential participants. The coordinator shared the invitation in two ways: (a) through the contact information available in the program's database of confirmed alumni members of the HBCU and (b) through more recent contact information obtained from the college's alumni office.

Four main issues surfaced during this process that caused a delay in e-mailing my invitation: (a) some potential participants had invalid or outdated contact information, (b) some mentoring program participants in the database had not actually enrolled at the HBCU, (c) some who had enrolled at the HBCU did not complete their studies, and (d) some enrolled at the HBCU but later transferred to other institutions. My participant pool

was limited only to those who finished the mentoring program and completed their programs at the HBCU.

The consent form was shared with each potential participant after she or he expressed an interest in participating. As the participants replied with their consent, I scheduled an interview with the first nine participants to respond and could tell from their interviews that I was reaching saturation based on Patton's (2015) discussion of hearing data in the interview process. I used an interview protocol of standardized, open-ended questions (see Appendix) that was developed based on the research question, the conceptual framework, and previous research findings as the data collection tool for this study. The telephone interviews were audio recorded using a free conference call application to ensure accuracy of the data. As a backup method, I used a handheld recording device. I also took notes and recorded them in a research journal.

Although I anticipated scheduling interviews over a 2-month timeframe, I began data collection in August and did not complete it until December because of the time it took to reach the nine participants and schedule interviews. There were no other variations in my data collection plan. All interviews were completed within a 60-minute timeframe as projected. I transcribed each interview immediately afterwards and forwarded a copy to each participant so their responses could be reviewed for accuracy. I also sent a thank you e-mail with a $20 e-gift certificate to each participant as promised in the consent form. There were two participants who submitted corrections to their transcripts: One was related to an official ranking in an organization in which she participated and the other was the name of a building another participant frequented. All

participants thanked me for allowing them to participate in the study and to know that

their experiences could contribute to assisting administrators understand how best to

develop institutional policies and manage mentoring programs for at-risk students as well

as identify possible barriers to these students' college success.

**Data Analysis**

I used content analysis to analyze the data in my study. Content analysis is used to

identify, organize, and categorize the content of narrative text (Patton, 2015). Each

responsive interview was transcribed and analyzed to identify recurring words or themes

through coding (see Patton, 2015). I manually hand coded each of the transcripts through

the process of coding by highlighting similar words, phrases, and experiences to identify

themes, patterns, events, and recurring concepts within the passages of the interviews

(see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Using the responses from all the interviews and grouping

together the concepts I heard in the data, I created the categories and themes responsive

to the research question and purpose. Through reading and listening to the interviews

multiple times, I gained a closer understanding of the participants' mentoring experiences

that helped develop the themes in the data.

I completed two levels of manual hand coding to obtain a richer perspective, as

suggested by Saldana (2016). As the coding proceeded, I watched both for saturation of

data and discrepant cases, noting when and if they occurred in my research journal.

Saturation was met by the eighth interview transcript. I reduced the categories by

eliminating those very similar and highlighted those closely related to the research

question. At the end of this process, five themes emerged.

**Themes and Codes Related to Research Question**

In this section, I provide a brief summary of the themes and codes from the data analysis. The research question focused on how formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni describe their experiences with mentoring in their undergraduate program. The findings related to the research question were captured and identified as five themes: transition support, mentoring guidance, development of relationships, personal development, and professional skills for future success.

The transition support theme was related to those experiences that participants identified as providing support for the transition between their high school and college experiences. The following words and phrases were used as codes to develop this theme: introduction to college, bridge program, jump start to college, voluntary program, tutoring, test preparation, HBCU, and community (see Table 2).

Mentoring guidance, the second theme, was defined as the experiences related to the interaction and support participants identified from their mentor/s and their related support services once fully enrolled in the college's program. The following words and phrases were used as codes to develop the theme: motivating, encouraging, access to faculty and staff, right direction, kept on track, involvement, support, guidance, counseling and psychological services, career services, financial services, orientation, and technical assistance.

The third theme, development of relationships, was defined as the nature of relationships that developed for participants as a result of their participation in the mentoring program. The following words and phrases were used as codes to develop the

theme: open-door policy, family-like relationships, life-long friendships, mentors, connections, network of friends, faculty/staff mentor-to-student relationships, and peer-to-peer mentoring relationships.

The fourth theme, personal development, was defined as the experiences expressed by the participants as contributing to their development in self-efficacy, confidence, and exposure to things while they worked towards completing their degree. The following words and phrases were used as codes to develop the theme: exposure, social growth, pushed boundaries, outside of comfort zone, confidence, and graduation.

The fifth theme, professional skills for future success was related to those experiences and skills gained described by the participants as contributing to future goals towards success. The following words and phrases were used as codes to develop the theme: academically focused, seminars, resume writing workshops, mock interviews, and leadership.

Table 2

*Relationship Between Research Question, Themes, and Codes*

RQ: How do formerly at-risk, HBCU, undergraduate alumni describe their experiences with mentoring that helped them succeed in their degree program goals?

| Theme: Transition support | Theme: Mentoring guidance | Theme: Development of relationships | Theme: Personal development | Theme: Professional skills for future success |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Codes: introduction to college, bridge program, jump start to college, voluntary program, transition, tutoring, test preparation, HBCU, community | Codes: motivating, encouraging, access to faculty and staff, right direction, kept on track, involvement, support, guidance, counseling services, psychological services, career services, financial services, orientation, technical assistance | Codes: open-door policy, family-like relationships, life-long friendships, mentors, connections, network of friends, faculty/staff mentor-to-student relationships, peer-to-peer mentoring relationships | Codes: exposure, social growth, pushed boundaries, outside of comfort zone, confidence, graduation | Codes: academically focused, seminars, resume writing workshops, mock interviews, leadership |

**Discrepant Cases**

During the process of data analysis, I noted words, circumstances, and occurrences that did not fit into the categories and identified these as discrepant cases. Patton (2015) suggested the analysis of discrepant cases be used to understand the opposing side; however, all of the participants presented evidence related to the five themes analysis, and as a result, there were no discrepant cases.

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

To ensure evidence of quality, trustworthiness, and creditability in the research study, I considered the following four aspects discussed by Shenton (2004): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. During data collection and analysis, I

established evidence of trustworthiness in the study occurred by reporting valid findings.

Burkholder et al. (2016) stated, "the meaning of validity is related to the concept of truth;

in research, valid findings accurately describe or reflect the phenomenon under study" (p.

103). I followed the strict protocols I established prior to data collection to ensure the

trustworthiness of this study.

**Credibility**

Credibility or internal validity is when the researcher aims to ensure that the study

measures what it actually intended (Shenton, 2004). In addition to recording the

interviews, I established credibility by taking notes and reflections during the interview

and recording them in a research journal. After each interview and transcription process, I

then emailed the transcript to each participant to conduct transcript review to verify

accuracy of the transcript and their response to the questions. This ensured that I captured

their true intentions in their responses, providing credibility. In interviewing a total of

nine participants where saturation of data related to the study's intent became evident, I

also added to the study's credibility.

**Transferability**

Transferability is when work can be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that providing thick, rich descriptions would help

other researchers or readers in determining the extent of which findings could be

transferred to other circumstances and situations. The interview questions in this study

along with added probes and follow-up questions based on participant responses, helped

to gather in-depth descriptions of the participants' mentoring experiences reported in the

results section. In addition, some of the demographic information collected from the participants (see Table 1) may help to determine transferability.

**Dependability**

Dependability is when another researcher can repeat the work and get the same results (Shenton, 2004). By providing a standard protocol that I followed in the interviews, others should be able to replicate my research to determine dependability. In addition, the data collection process described in Chapter 3 was consistently used and can act as a guide for others (scheduled and recorded verbal interviews, verbatim transcripts reviewed by each participant, reflection notes taken by me the researcher). I followed the strict protocol I established prior to data collection, including engaging with the participant for the entire interview, sharing transcripts for participant review, and constant reference to my research journal; therefore, the trustworthiness of this study was ensured.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability addresses the objectivity concerns of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). To improve confirmability, I carefully recorded notes in my researcher's journal during the interviews and made remarks concerning thoughts, ideas, or questions next to each question on the interview protocol for each participant's responses. When I coded the transcripts, I considered my bias in my notes and coding that might have risked misinterpretation. I reviewed my researcher's journal and compared it to the coded transcript in order to identify any bias and then discussing the emergent codes with my chair, confirmability was strengthened.

**Results**

There was one research question for this basic qualitative study: How do formerly at-risk HBCU alumni describe their experiences with mentoring in their undergraduate program? The results of this study were gathered using my interview protocol of standardized, open-ended questions, making it possible to ask the same set of questions of each participant, but allowing the participant to fully express experiences from their perspective (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Turner, 2010). The open-ended questions were also written as expansive and probing questions, allowing the participant to cover a wider range in their response, as suggested by Jacob and Furgerson (2012). The following five themes emerged as results from the interview (see Table 1).

**Theme 1: Transition Support**

I labeled the first theme to emerge from the findings transition support to describe the overwhelming response expressed by all of the participants for the deep level of support they experienced through the bridge program during their transition from high school to college. All participants indicated a number of benefits provided by the bridge program that included an introduction and jump-start to adjusting to the college, access to faculty and staff for mentoring, and services necessary to keep them on the right track in their academic progress. Program participants were afforded the opportunity to first participate in the program that allowed them to take college courses at no cost, before matriculation in the college. The bridge program was viewed by the participants not only as a pathway to assist with the transition from high school to college, but also an environment where they gained a sense of pride and developed a strong connection to the

HBCU. All participants expressed that the HBCU's nurturing and cultural-based environment also made for a smoother transition from high school to college. As examples, Gail, a female 2018 graduate, mechanical engineer major with on-campus housing summarized her experience:

> The major benefit of the [mentoring program] is that they basically gave you a well put-together introduction to college in high school. A lot of kids don't have that opportunity. We were able to meet up and do math and science and all these other things expected to do in college while we were in 11th and 12th grade. Then when you get to college and they allow you to [continue with] that bridging program, it shows that they really invested in your education and in you. I did the bridging program where I was able to take two classes the summer after graduating high school. So that helped and I didn't have as much of a struggle dealing with admissions as I would have had if the [mentoring program] wouldn't have allowed me to take those classes.

John, a male 2017 graduate, political science major with on-campus housing, described his experience with the mentoring program:

> During my bridge summer, the [mentoring program] had a bridge summer program for folks who recently graduated in the summer before they start the fall of their first year, they are allowed to take summer college, so that was very easy for my transition into collegiate academia. The matching process was pretty good being that they matched mentors and mentees with folks who would be compatible in terms of interests or majors or hobbies or things like that, and that

made for an easier transition because you were with folks that you were able to

work along-side people that had been through some of the things that you would

going to be experiencing as a first-year student, but also people who could be

relatable in more than one aspect, and who could speak to personal lived

experience because they were also students as well.

John added that his mentor helped to make the transition to college seamless and

helped to reduce anxiety some students experience in college:

My mentor made me feel like I had as much as I could have some control over

what my collegiate experience would be. I think that one of the things that tend to

scare first-year students that I have found is that there is a lot happening all at

once and they don't know how to mitigate it and don't know what to do in a lot of

aspects, which all this is new, so that's understandable, but for the most part,

having that mentor there was able to help smooth over the transition and to

provide some sort of sense of security where you have a resource of someone who

appear to have been through the things that you have been through and can speak

to some of the things that you're feeling now because they felt that when we were

in college.

Linda, a female 2016 graduate, computer science major with off-campus housing,

actually made her decision to attend the university as a result of participating in the

bridge program. "[The people in the bridge program] were the initial people to help me

apply for summer school so it made it easier for me to continue on in the fall when I

became a full-time student." She added: "just having that open door policy [made it

possible] for us to go back to them and ask questions and ask for help, ask for anything. They definitely make sure that it is an open-door policy."

Lionel, a male 2018 graduate, marketing major with off-campus housing, shared the support he received:

"They showed us how to fill out the FAFSA; they had a whole class dedicated to seniors to show you how to do the FAFSA. They made sure we filled out for scholarships as well. They showed us these things before we even stepped foot into the college campus."

Arthur, a male 2018 graduate, criminal justice major with off-campus housing, added that:

The most advantageous resource was having the lesson plans or curriculums [for college courses before-hand, while] in the bridge program. Having them readily available to us so we'll learn those skills and lessons ahead of time so we'll have more practice on them, so that when it's time to have them in class, at our respective high schools we'll already have the material and we'll excel in that respective material.

Henry, a male 2019 graduate, mass communications major with off-campus housing, expressed a similar thought:

At first, I initially didn't make a great ACT score early in my high school career but the [mentoring program] definitely got me the help that I needed and I definitely was focused on a different session they gave us for ACT prep and I was

able to get a high enough score to get a good scholarship from the university and

from honors college.

Nick, a male 2016 graduate, biology major, with off-campus housing shared a similar

experience with the bridge program and the major benefits:

Tutoring was a major benefit. I could bring any problems that I had to them [in

tutoring sessions]. Even at this point and time, after graduating from college, I

still use those same exact resources from when I was in high school. So those two

things, for sure, actually helped us out in regards to the resources that they gave

us; the ACT/the standardized test and the college based assignments and courses

that we were in.

Mary, a female 2014 graduate, English major with off-campus housing,

articulated her experience with the support of the bridge program as:

Everyone was always concerned about each other's well-being. We would have

morning assembly; not to hype us up in a way, but just to make us understand our

own worth. That's what all of the teachers did there. They would ask about our

day. They would ask about our family just to make sure that we're doing ok and if

we needed extra help with time management. Everything didn't factor around

academics but that was our foundation that allowed other things to stem from it.

There is always community and encouragement there.

All participants believed strongly in the bridge program and shared all positive

benefits of it to help with transitioning from high school to college, not only for

themselves but also for future at-risk students. Gail commented: "Others, especially high

school students, will get the chance to experience college before actually being enrolled in college. They will have a jump start. They really give you what to expect. They really help you achieve."

Linda described how the transition support contributed to completing her degree:

I thoroughly enjoyed [the bridge program]. That is something that I do wish every student could get a chance to do, especially first-year students who do not have that background or help to afford college. If their parents never attended or they didn't have anyone in their family having attended college, definitely having that help to push them so that they can reach that graduation line. I know a lot of students start off in college but a lot of them do not finish. Making sure that they have that extra help, that extra push, that extra person either checking on them or that can voluntarily go to, having that will get them closer to graduation.

Lionel strongly believed that other individuals would benefit from the bridge program and summarized the advantages:

Others would definitely benefit by just being around other individuals that come from different and similar backgrounds as you; you get to know another perspective; you get to make new friends; you get to build new relationships; you get to see what it feels like to have a mentor, somebody that is not even related to you and wants to see you win, wants to drive that initial "hey you can do it."

Mary believed she was more confident in her transition from high school to college as a
result of her bridge program experience:

> I was a lot more confident about talking to people. I was a lot more confident with
> how to peruse the university and how to find my way to things because I had been
> there, I had technically got like a jump start from being in the [mentoring
> program] while in high school. I was always on the university's campus on
> Saturdays. I knew where certain buildings were, I knew how to get to certain
> areas; so college wasn't as terrifying as it could have been. It helped a lot with me
> growing as a person and with me growing confident wise.

Henry shared a similar experience:

> [The bridge program] definitely helped me. I am definitely grateful for it even to
> this day. Hopefully a lot more male or female first-generation college students, or
> students period who come from low income backgrounds that they would be
> exposed to these type of things. Be able to get exposed to programs like [it] so
> they may become great students in college and even better citizens in society right
> after college.

Arthur described his transition experience with the bridge program:

> A lot has come behind me and most of the [mentoring program] kids get results
> because it's a good system, it works, like they said, "TRIO works." I think it
> would be nice for the people that come behind me to get into the program. It
> definitely helps with first-time generation college students and seeing them all the
> way through college and far beyond. It's a good tool, it's a good help for HBCU

and low-income and failing school students to get into that program. That way

they have some guidance throughout college and after college; helping them with

filling out forms, admissions forms, financial aid; things they don't teach in high

school. Having that program outside of high school will definitely help them

move up and move better through along the college system.

All of the participants viewed attending this HBCU as very important in their

college choice and experience, and attributed a large part of their seamless transition from

high school to college to their HBCU enrollment. As a result of the participants'

responses, the HBCU experience has been viewed as an added layer in the form of

transition support and included in this theme versus a stand-alone theme. They believed

that they were uplifted through motivational support by faculty and staff who could relate

directly to their situations, and that being enrolled at the HBCU in first the bridge

program and then the mentoring program, gave them a sense a pride and hope, and a

strong connection to the HBCU. Mary shared:

Being surrounded by individuals, intelligent Black men and women, who

understood the importance of higher education, especially being a first-generation

college student; and understood the odds placed against us as a people, but also

understood how not to let the odds control us, we still fight against them. It wasn't

until after my first year, I really understood the importance of it. I didn't really

understand until going through my program, how much the faculty cared, and I

think the [mentoring program] helped me to understand that just with how being

surrounded by people who look like you, teachers who look like you and also

want you to further on in your field or just to have a well-balanced future really

helped me to understand just how important an HBCU could be.

John described how his background was a major factor in his college choice:

I came from a very afro-centric, very strong community of folks who are Black.

They reinforced the importance of investing not just your time, energy, and

talents, but your education in a community that was black and for nurturing Black

students, something that you won't get at predominately White institutions or

Hispanic serving institutions. So for me, it was very important that going to an

HBCU be on the top of my list. Being in that community [was a benefit], seeing

well off Black women and Black men, inspiring other future successful Black

women and Black men, to go on and do better things with their lives.

Henry described his connection to the HBCU:

Just [the university's] academic history and the culture of a HBCU brought me to

it. Coming from being a 1st-generation college student, that definitely pushed me

to go get a secondary education and definitely going to a HBCU, I definitely

wanted to be a part of that culture; knowing that a lot of the great people in

history attended HBCUs throughout their tenure as well. So going to a HBCU was

the main driving point of me going to the university.

Arthur felt strongly about attending the HBCU and stated:

That was my only option. I didn't plan on attending another school. After finding

out about HBCUs and how they cater to the needs of minorities, that was my

choice and like I said, growing up around the university I knew what an HBCU

was and I wasn't gonna give my attention or my money, I guess, to a school that

catered to people that didn't look like me.

Linda stated:

I still wear my [program logo] shirt today; understanding that I represent myself

and what the program stands for. I wish every first-year student who do not have a

background where the family attended college could participate to have that extra

push to the finish line.

**Theme 2: Mentoring Guidance**

A second theme that emerged from the findings related to the research question

was the importance of mentoring guidance in the form of motivation, encouragement, and

guidance. There was an overwhelming response expressed by all nine participants for the

mentoring guidance they received as a result of the participation in both the various

aspects of the mentoring program and one-to-one mentoring guidance. Being in the

mentoring program allowed participants to have not only mentors, but access to other

faculty, staff, and administrators who provided guidance and direction in different areas

throughout the university. As an example, Nick described his mentoring experience as

having a team for support:

I did have a team behind me, and what I mean by team, I mean support. What I

mean about support goes back to me mentioning about the advisor I had from the

[mentoring program]. They always made sure that I was ok. If I had anything

going on with financial aid, or anything going on with me submitting things, or

letters of recommendations, whatever documents the school needed, they were

there in every aspect, every step of the way. So, I did have a strong support when

it came to admissions or the admitting process. They made sure nothing was

missing and that I grabbed anything needed from high school that the school may

have possibly needed. The support that I had in regards to while I was in high

school [transitioning to college and] becoming an undergrad, even with me

becoming a grad student, the same team, that same support actually helped carried

me throughout my educational process; from high school, to receiving my

bachelor's degree, to receiving my master's degree, they were there literally every

step of the way.

Mary described the level of support as wide-range:

"There was always support, whether it was just to help me fill out an application or how

to rewrite a resume or just encouraging words when things are just building up."

John described his mentoring guidance as a network:

There was access to staff and mentors, so that was one level of support. Then

there were also folks that they connected us to at the institution. Just by virtue of

being in the program, there were other resources that were available to us from

counseling and psychological services to career services, even technical assistance

folks in case we needed anything on campus. We had a pretty vast network of

folks. There was everything from setting up credit cards to campus meal plans, to

rules and regulations of the campus, to where are the places people like to hang

out, where people like to study, traditions of the university, where to get

merchandise that you want and show school spirit and buy t-shirts and all kind of

stuff. Also very real things like where to do laundry, where you go if you need

counseling or psychological services, where the health center is on campus, and

all those types of things as well. What type of insurance you can use on campus,

so that was really important. I had a very comprehensive orientation process, so

just about everything you can think of or needed as a first-year student was

covered.

All of the participants expressed that there was an abundance of motivation and

encouragement provided while being enrolled in the mentoring program. As examples,

Nick shared his experience of the encouragement and motivation he received:

Everybody knows being in college is not easy. Enrolling and being admitted in

college is one thing but going straight through 4 years is not easy, it is very, very

challenging. It's very, very difficult at times and sometimes it makes you want to

throw in the towel; it makes you want to quit. If you don't have that motivation,

or you don't have someone to speak to push you to keep pushing and keep

moving, to help encourage you, that type of resource, then you're basically gonna

end up dropping out or being expelled. That's one of the things that I'm actually

blessed and thank God for that I had that type of resource and had that type of

source that I could talk to someone about it when I felt like giving up. They were

telling me that you are a leader, you are very, very smart, there is nothing really

that you can't do. The only person that can stop you from reaching your success is

yourself.

Gail shared that her mentoring experience was comforting:

They made me feel comfortable about school, life, they were really encouraging

and motivating because some of the classes made me feel like I had to get rid of

them and take another semester. I appreciate their honestly but the fact that they

were there every step for the way no matter how bad the classes looked or how

bad life looked they were always there to motivate you, make you feel special.

They are great. They give you that you can do it type attitude.

John described his mentoring experience as supportive and motivational:

I will continue to harp on the importance of having a support network that this

mentorship program provided. College is pretty tough, not just academically, but

it gets emotionally draining at some point, mentally draining at some point, and

having people that you can lean on who have your vested interest at heart, it is so

critically important, Because I had that and I was able to lean on folks when times

were tough and I didn't have money in my meal plan, when I needed somebody to

talk to, even when I needed help with something that was academic based when I

just was not getting it in class and I needed somebody to help me walk through

these problems, I was able to allow folks in my network from the mentoring

program who I had for mentor or mentees to just be able to provide a safe space

where we can help each other succeed.

## Theme 3: Development of Relationships

The third theme that emerged from the findings related to the development of

relationships with others. All of the participants expressed how much they valued their

mentor/mentee relationship formed through the mentoring program and that they still

keep in touch with their mentors. The mentoring relationship provided a model for the kind of relationships that could be developed with others. It was not only the relationships with mentors that became important, but there was also evidence of staff-to-mentee relationships, peer-to-peer mentoring relationships, and friendships that developed.

John shared that his interactions with his mentor helped to provide a blueprint for academic and personal decision making, as well as developing other relationships:

I was assigned a mentor, but our relationship was pretty good. I actually still keep in touch with him for different things. For me, what was most rewarding was that he was able to speak to academic things, but also personal situations that I found to be quite beneficial. One thing for example, I was talking about changing majors and he had changed majors twice. So he was able to speak to how to do that, who you need to talk to, things you need to think through before deciding to just up and change your major. So those things I found to be very helpful, not just on academic sense, but very personal to be able to speak to and articulate those things for me and give me a blueprint.

Lionel summarized his relationships and the bonds created:

I am still close to my mentor. He mentored me and told me the importance of getting an education and I saw where he was in life and it made me want to strive for more- to get a degree and to say I'm a first-generation college student and I could succeed with a college degree. He definitely played a huge role in that. You get to interact and build a relationship with all your mentors, but you are assigned

a mentor. With [my mentor], we didn't get along at first but we ended up

becoming great friends by the end of my career with the [mentoring program]. All

my mentors were cool. I had a great relationship with them. It was like one big

family.

Gail shared a similar experience of the development of relationships and friendships:

I'm really thankful for all of my mentors, all of the friendships that I've made and

that they are not just there for you while you're in school they're there for you

long after, so that's appreciated. I do like that it's not like when after you

graduated they completely disappear from your life, they are always there and

they will always make time for you no matter how busy they are, which is really

appreciated. Also having other adults in your life who are not family is good.

Sometimes you feel like you can't talk to your family members all the time. So

having other adults who are not family who also motivate you and who also

believe in you will help a lot more other people as well.

Gail added that she developed relationships with staff members through similar

interests:

I looked at [the director of engineering summer institute] as a mentor. She

provided a lot of different research opportunities and job opportunities [to me]. I

looked to [the chairman of the engineering department]. He gave me insight on

what classes needed to be taken and when scheduling. I had a mentor in [the

honors college]. My thesis was on 3dimensional printing and he had a lot of

experience, he provided me with research tools that I can use and designs and

databases. I used [a former financial aid worker, who transferred to naval science] as a mentor [to help me with my financial aid] because she knew the process.

Mary described one relationship with a mentor of hers:

[He] was just so wise. He would literally give us hand-outs with different quotes on them and we would talk about different topics of the day and I remember one of his saying would be "nobody can teach you like you can teach yourself." He would always make sure that we saw our worth. Literally us as Black Americans, he always made sure that we knew that we were beautiful, that we were handsome, that we were smart and capable of any and everything. He was always so encouraging, whether it was me or other just people that had graduated and come back to the program just to talk to us. Just, like, he was so uplifting and wonderful, and just literally just so encouraging. He would make sure that you knew you were capable of any and everything that you set your mind to and that you would achieve it.

Henry found that the mentee/mentor relationship extended beyond academics:

They made sure, even though they didn't have anybody staffed with that particular major, they made sure they had a good variety of mentors who had like different interests, not just academically but socially in organizations as well. So, if we had any questions, we could ask them personally and they wanted to make sure we kept that good mentor/mentee relationship even after we graduate from the [mentoring program] program. One of the admissions counselors was also my mentor, [later becoming my] fraternity brother [after I joined the organization].

[He] told me about the great things and great products from [the university] and [convinced me to enroll]. Seeing the great things [he] did as member of the royal court, student government association, and being hired by [the university], caught my interest. So, a lot of my mentors today, we're great friends still, great colleagues as well.

Arthur described a comparable experience:

[Mentees] discussed everything with my mentor. He mentored only males. [He] is actually a physician so he went over everything; keeping your body clean, sex education to academics and Greek life and everything. We talked about it all. They did pretty good at staying with us and they still do today. It's been 6 years since I got out the [mentoring program] program and I still talk to them for Christmas, New Years, holidays, all that stuff, birthday; my birthday was on Christmas day and each one of them sent me a text and told me happy birthday.

Participants shared how the mentor made them feel during their interactions, individually and/or in group settings. Almost all of them described the relationships as family-like, trusting, and warm. Nick described his relationship with his mentor as a close relationship:

To this day, he and I have a very, very close relationship. Every now and then, I always go to the office and tell him about everything that is going on, even with me being a full-time employee at the university, I still talk to him on a day-to-day basis, anything related to school or outside of school, I always talk to him about it. I honestly have other people who I consider mentors too as well, it's actually a

group of them that I talk to on a day-to-day basis; it's kind of like more so of a family that I have. I look at my mentors as a family. They actually saw me grow, I grew with them, and they helped me grow in so many areas, helped me grow as far as public speaking, helped me grow as far as having responsibility, and even to this day helping me as far as a resume, or anything dealing with letters of recommendations. So whatever it is that I need assistance with, they are always there. So my mentors, we have a very, very strong relationship with each other. Even when it came to issues I had at home with my parents. Stuff that I couldn't talk to them about, I was able to talk to my mentors about. Stuff I was actually nervous about and I didn't know how to approach my parents I actually talked to my mentors about.

Linda expressed that they actually had more than one mentor and they made her feel welcome while building a relationship. She summarized her experience:

We actually could talk to both, but we had female mentors that whenever we would stay in the dorms, we would always have mentoring sessions that went beyond school. We would talk about personal lives; they would open up their lives and share with us and we would open up our lives and share with them, any concerns; we had that open floor to be able to share with them if weren't as comfortable. A few of my personal friends, me and two friends (they are my best friends I met them through the [mentoring program] my first semester) and a few of them didn't feel comfortable sharing in front of the group, the counselor/mentor would always give them the option to come afterwards if they

wanted to talk about something private, just to have that adult or person there they could discuss something with. They definitely made us feel warm and welcome. It was kind of like instead of a mentor/mentee relationship, it was like a little sister/big sister relationship. They gave us advice on what college was like, what happened to them when they were in high school and how they survived it, and how they were dealing with being college students and being adults essentially.

As relationships were developed, the mentors and mentees found that they had more in common than when they were initially matched.

John shared how cohesive the relationships with his mentor was:

Henry believed the relationship formed with his mentor was similar:

Some of the biggest topics [with some who were first-generation college students] were [how they transitioned] being a first-generation college student, things that they struggled with coming into college and things they were strong with, being able to identify the similarities according to different problems I think I probably would have had or I thought I was gonna have and they were able to give me

different solutions or tell me things to work on while being a high school student

so that when I get to college I wouldn't make the same mistakes and some of the

[decisions they made that caused problems] when they were a college student.

All of the participants expressed that they formed many friendships and/or peer-

to-peer relationships while being enrolled in the mentoring program. As an example, John

shared how easily connections formed and the longevity of the relationships developed:

We received a peer network, a niche set of groups who have similar values and

experiences that they can speak to. I have been able to make friends that are now

my best friends; I met them through the mentoring program. I am going to be in a

couple of weddings soon with people who were in the mentoring program. So you

develop real connections, life-long connections, beyond just a few years as an

undergraduate.

Linda included friendships at the top of her list as a major benefit of the program:

Of course it was education, but from my standpoint it is where I met wonderful

people. I can definitely say I met my two best friends there; we are still best

friends til this day. It has been about 11 years since I started with the TRIO

program. Without TRIO, I probably would not have met them. We went and

graduated from three different high schools.

Linda also described her mentoring experience as a mentee and mentor:

I actually did come back and be a mentor the summer before my last semester,

summer of 2016. Being a helping hand or a listening ear for that generation under

you, I take pride in that being able to help them. And also being mentee, having

somebody to talk to, knowing that you aren't alone in this, that they have people

that came before you that went through the same thing you're going through or

that you're gonna come up to.

**Theme 4: Personal Development**

The fourth theme that emerged from the findings related to their experience in

their undergraduate mentoring program was their personal development. All participants

expressed gratitude to have been a part of the mentoring program in that it had

contributed greatly to their personal development in the areas of self-efficacy,

confidence, and exposure to many experiences that allowed them to complete their

college goals and obtain a degree. The mentoring program afforded students the

opportunity to visit different cities, attend concerts, and experiences they may never have

had an opportunity if not enrolled in the mentoring program. Robert, a male 2013

graduate, computer science major, attributed his personal growth to the experiences he

had in the mentoring program: "being exposed to different things, made me want more

for myself."

John described the mentoring program as a platform for mentees to grow, learn,

and build confidence:

For me, mentorship in terms of personal development is so crucial, especially for

young Black and brown men, and young Black and brown boys because in a lot of

cases there are not, there is a lack of resources, and a lack of structure in place for

those young Black and brown men. So, having a place where they can develop

personally, free from judgment, free from persecution, and allow themselves to

learn and grow, I think that is hugely beneficial.

John added how being in the mentoring program served as a foundation for his

future personal goals:

I have a passion for young Black and brown men. Being in a space to mentor a

younger Black male was an experience that I personally value, but also would lay

the groundwork for professional things I'd like to do like maybe writing a book,

or developing a limited liability company that is niche for helping the

development of young Black and brown men. Even with more recently, I was

featured in a collection of stories of successful young Black men to speak to and

provide encouragement and motivation for young Black boys; that was largely

because of the mentorship that I did because it enabled those doors to be open and

allowed me to speak to those personal things first-hand.

Linda reflected on her various opportunities that contributed to her personal development

through exposure to many first time experiences:

I can honestly say without the [mentoring program] I would have not known what

it was to stay on campus because I did not stay on campus my entire undergrad

career. I had the opportunity to stay on campus when I went through the

[mentoring program]. We went on vacation a couple of times with them, Atlanta

once and I think to Texas once. [Being a part of the mentoring program] I went to

my first concert with them. It was actually seeing Diana Ross. There was nothing

else that we possibly could have done. I really enjoyed it.

Lionel recapped a similar experience and firmly believed that he was now personally capable of interacting with others socially at much higher levels as a result of his participation in the mentoring program:

You met a lot of kids who were from a lot of different backgrounds and we also took trips during the summer-time that exposed us to different places and to different people and different backgrounds. Socially it was a positive thing. It made me examine myself in ways that I could go out and socialize more, I could open myself up more, I could be the person that I want to be in life or at least start being that person that I want to be, that I need to be. Definitely personal development was the most important from jump. I would say it brought me more relationship type things; knowing how to talk to people and knowing how to engage with people. As a leader you have to be able to engage with people and you have to be able to talk to people and interact with people. The [mentoring program] definitely taught me that and I use that in my leadership today. It gave me a chance to get a college degree. It brought me more of an opportunity to be successful after college.

Lionel added that the mentoring program made him a more well-rounded individual:

It showed me that you can definitely (no matter your home situation) if you want to achieve something you can; showed me that there are people out there with good intentions (everybody doesn't have bad intentions) who want to see you do good in life; showed me that it is a life outside of [my city]; it showed me a lot.

Robert highlighted his social enhancements through exposure:

It exposed me to lives outside of what I knew and what I was used to seeing. It introduced me to like-minded individuals, those who come from similar backgrounds who want levels of success. It also introduced me to other great minds, like administrators, mentors; those who are older than us but still look like us, that are still striving or reaching new heights, and using their lives to do it. It caused me to think and want more for myself; when visiting all of these different cities and seeing all of these different things, it just put my life into perspective. Being in the dorms, it gave me an opportunity to speak up for myself. I was in a setting with different age groups and different personalities. It allowed me to develop my social skills in that way and leadership skills. It helped my future goals and life choices. There was a [professor] who had this saying called QTOT – Quality Time on Task. It put things in perspective for me to spend time making productive choices.

Henry summarized alike experience:

[We had the opportunity to grow] socially, [as well as be] exposed to different parts [of the United States] by travelling each summer. Some of the places we did go I was exposed to and never been to was like Disney World, Ohio, we went to DC, we went to Chicago Illinois, so being able to go to those places I was never able to go to before definitely exposed me to the different cultures of the different states, different things they may have. We also toured different universities in those different states we went to every year, so even on the trip we did have a lot

of fun, we did have educational portion we did visit different universities to kind

of expand our horizons of universities outside of Louisiana.

Arthur described his personal development as being exposed to a multitude of formal

techniques and skills:

We took trips and we travelled. We went to different cities and learned etiquette

and learned different things as far as the respective things we over in our

mentoring sessions, health and hygiene, admissions processes at different other

colleges, HBCUs, we only travelled to HBCUs to do college tours. Going to

upscale restaurants and learning how to dine properly; that was the outside things.

Been to a few professional basketball games, used those skills there, going out to

eat with celebrities and basketball stars and we ate with them and learned how to

dine and use proper etiquette. I think I benefited a whole lot as far as personal

development because now some of those things, same skills and techniques that I

was taught I still practice today [such as] making spreadsheets, power points, and

learning how to speak and present.

The mentoring program workshops and sessions focused not only on the

academic aspects, but also social and civic engagement, and financial literacy. Gail

believed the mentoring program attributed to her personal growth and she gained more

confidence:

The [mentoring program] definitely taught me how to stand up for myself. In high

school, I was always the quiet one. Being in [mentoring program] definitely

pushed boundaries or got you out of your comfort zone so that you could reach

that next level. They basically instilled in you that you could do and be anybody

that you wanted to be; that you are more than just a statistic. That was a motto that

you are more than just a statistic and basically taught you or gave you a roadmap

on how to be a successful leader in life and how to be a successful leader to

others; how to be successful in general. They are pretty positive in that area as

well.

Nick shared how the mentoring program helped him to grow socially:

I was able to break out my comfort zone. What I mean by comfort zone, I was

actually able to think outside the box; what I mean by think outside the box/not

keeping myself in a box. What I mean by that is speaking to people who I know.

Not being ashamed to speak to people I don't know; being able to speak to people

to a stranger, to be around strange company, being around people you don't know,

being shy, being nervous because that's one of the main things I had issues with;

even with me being a part of the program was being shy, being around people I

don't know, but they actually broke me from off that cycle. Not being nervous in

front of people I don't know, not being able to communicate with people that I

don't know, not even being able to be around people who I don't know, they

literally broke me from off that.

Henry shared that he gained the confidence he needed to develop socially:

I know for sure one key area I was able to improve on was my public speaking

skills. I don't want to say that I was shy at public speaking but being able to be

mentored by some of the college students who were great public speakers and

some of the administrators I was kind of like able to develop a stronger

confidence to speak in front of groups of people. Also as well, with the male

mentors in the program as well, every year they did a training session on etiquette

for men. So being able to when we go to sit down somewhere, how to dress, how

to properly wear a suit definitely helped me even to this day, as far as soft skills,

being able to talk to people, being able to approach people, how to approach and

properly talk to women in different settings, so being able to develop my soft

skills in order to make me a better college student, to make me an overall better

man as well.

Arthur shared that he learned tips through his mentoring experience that

developed into personal skills:

One of the most important aspects was time management and studying; those

portions of the program and those mentoring portions. I struggled with time

management in high school, not so much studying but they gave me extra study

tips. But time management, those helped me out tremendously, especially dealing

with the band, dealing with all these other organizations and things I did in

college. Without those little tips, I probably would have learned a much harder

way if I didn't take what [mentoring program] gave me and just followed it

through and just going through what they told me, sticking with my mentor,

remembering those tips, those all attributed to me gaining my college diploma.

**Theme 5: Professional Skills for Future Success**

The final theme that emerged from the findings related to the experiences in the mentoring program was the development of professional skills for future success. All of the participants indicated that the mentoring program contributed greatly to their professional skills that were used for future goals towards success. The participants expressed that the workshops and sessions provided contributed to enhanced leadership skills and assisted with making more informed life choices for their future goals. The workshops and sessions also focused on resume writing and mock interviews.

Gail believed the [mentoring program] attributed to her professional skills:

The [mentoring program] definitely allowed me to grow professionally. They would do seminars where they would help us write our resumes reviewed, critique us on our resumes. They would do mock job interviews. They would prepare us for the real-world job interviews. They would allow for us to go to different events, like career fairs. They would train us for how to answer questions in a professional setting. They were really a big factor in the professional development aspect. They really help you with tips on how to achieve the goals you have set for yourself. That's a major key in my life.

Mary described her experience with leadership qualities:

We would be in the conference room and they would have presentations about how to connect yourself with the job market, just how to do a plethora of things. I'm better in terms of leadership now. I've definitely been better about taking on

leadership roles or volunteering for something I can clearly help with without feeling nervous or anxious about it.

Henry affirmed that he gained leadership skills he needed for future success:

They definitely taught me how to be an efficient leader, how to work with different groups of people, how to be a team player, despite you being the leader of the group or if you are just being a group member, being able to see both sides to being a leader. One thing I remember they taught us, being a leader isn't always about leading but leading from the back and really definitely pushing everybody that you're leading to become better people and better versions of themselves to get towards the goal. Overall, they taught me how to properly network with people being a leader is all about your brand and making a great first impression with people when you go to new places. Definitely a lot of those small things like I said, definitely helped me grow into a better leader and help me segue way into leadership roles I had on campus once I got to the [university]. The program definitely helped me and motivated me to be able to be a leader or start my own type of organization or nonprofit. Which is kind of similar to backgrounds and goals towards youth or underserved youth or youth who are first-generation college students to give them an opportunity to be exposed to different life skills, to be able to increase their ACT scores, to be able to become better citizens in society. So being able to impact students like myself, [mentoring program] definitely gave me that motivation and foundation just to make an impact to youth who came from the same type of background I did.

**Summary**

The data analysis led to the development of five themes, resulting from the findings related to the research question. I identified those five themes from the participants' descriptions of experience in the mentoring program. The overall experience of the program expressed by all nine participants was positive, in that they felt the mentoring program contributed to their transition from high school to college, provided both one-to-one mentoring and support within the program, and created opportunity for relationships, personal goals, and professional skills.

In Chapter 5, I include an analysis and interpretation of these findings, while considering the literature described in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework. I will also describe the implications of social change and a recommendation of how these findings could be used to inform practice and guide future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk, HBCU, undergraduate alumni. I employed a basic qualitative study design to gain and extend knowledge of the area of interest and possibly inform practice (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research question that guided the study was: How do formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni describe their experiences with mentoring in their undergraduate program?

The way the participants described their experiences were very similar and positive in regards to how mentoring helped them succeed in attaining their degree program goals but unique in regards to their personal experience. I asked the participants semistructured, open-ended questions during audio-recorded, telephone interviews. Five themes emerged from the findings: transition support, mentoring guidance, development of relationships, personal development, and professional skills for future success.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

I confirmed the interpretation of the findings of this study and the five themes that emerged from data analysis through comparison with the conceptual framework and the review of the literature as described in Chapter 2. I synthesized two theories to guide this research study as a conceptual framework: Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement and Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention. The themes capturing the mentoring experiences of the formerly at-risk, HBCU alumni in their undergraduate program and their extensive participation on campus as well as their perspectives on tutoring assistance, test-taking tips, and connections to faculty and staff align with Astin's theory

of social involvement. The described social engagement of the nine participants aligns

with Tinto's perspective as having contributed to their success in college and, ultimately,

led to their educational attainment.

In the theory of student involvement, Astin (1999) noted that students who are

more involved will perform better academically and socially. I found evidence of Astin's

four characteristics of student involvement in this study. First, involvement requires the

investment of psychosocial and physical energy. This characteristic was expressed in all

themes in the nine participants' experiences but particularly in the themes of transition

support and development of relationships. All participants expressed willingness to

participate in the mentoring program and were receptive of having a mentee-to-mentor

relationship. They all described the transition from high school to college through the

bridge program as an essential element in their path to success.

Second, although I carried out no quantitative measurements in this study,

involvement had qualitative features expressed particularly through the nine participants'

responses in the quality of mentoring guidance and development of relationships themes.

There was established lines of communication with faculty and staff as mentors,

administration, and amongst peers. The participants shared instances and experiences

mentee-to-mentor and peer-to-peer mentoring developing into relationships and

friendships. All aspects of the mentoring program as a qualitative analysis were viewed in

a positive way by all nine participants.

The third of the characteristics, Astin's (1999) view that academic performance is

associated with the level of student involvement, was not specifically discussed in this

study; however, more than half of the participants were involved in student organizations and/or participated on campus and developed professional skills. There was also evidence of studying through participation in workshops and mentoring sessions focused on academics.

Lastly, the fourth characteristic, effectiveness of educational policy or practice as related to an increase in student involvement, was evident in the nine participants' experiences and aligned with the importance of transition support theme associated with the systems in place in the mentoring program. The bridge program proved to be an effective institutional policy and was the gateway that set the stage for developing relationships, offering mentoring guidance, and increasing student involvement as well as the development of social and professional skills.

Consequently, the findings of this study aligned with Astin's (1999) characteristics of student involvement. The nine participants shared that by being enrolled in the HBCU mentoring program from high school through graduation, they were able to interact socially by being connected to students with similar characteristics. They gained confidence through mentor motivation and participation in different clubs and organizations as well as received assistance and were provided tools to enhance social skills and personal development in workshops on resume writing, interview tips, and leadership and presentation skills. Ultimately, they completed their degree program with the help of the additional resources made available to them throughout their experience.

In the theory of student retention, Tinto (1993) focused on academic and social engagement as it related to a student's success in college, educational attainment, and

retention. Tinto (2000) noted that if there was a disconnect between students, faculty, staff, and/or administrators, students will depart from the university. Tinto expressed that engagement had a positive relationship to persistence, and persistence led to an increased student retention. The findings of the current study align with Tinto's (1993) theory, particularly as they relate to theme of development of relationships. Academic and social engagement that resulted in the development of relationships was also the result of interaction with faculty, staff, and/or mentors, evident in the mentoring guidance theme. With all of the participants sharing similar characteristics of being first-generation college students, they each seemed to find and rely on academic and social engagement tools in the mentoring program experience to assist in educational attainment with mentors there to support, guide, and motivate them when they needed the extra push to make it to graduation. In addition to this interpretation of the findings through the lens of the conceptual framework, the five themes that emerged from the data had parallels found in the literature.

**Transition Support**

The findings in this study confirmed Melzer and Grant's (2016) results that at-risk, first-generation students faced challenges and barriers to academic preparedness. The findings of Horton (2015) and Zou (2009) related to personal economic factors and the findings of Horton, Karimshah et al. (2013), Lopez (2018), and Zou concerning the environmental factors faced by this population were reflected in the themes of the current study. These factors served as key elements for the reasons that transition support and mentoring programs are successful in degree completion. Horton identified risk factors

associated with college persistence and success, grouping them into the following categories: background characteristics, individual characteristics, and environmental factors. The following background characteristics Horton described are highlighted in this theme: first-generation, ethnic group, SES, lack of knowledge about college admissions, and underprepared. The bridge program from where the nine participants in this study were drawn was designed to assist students in this population. As a result, the experiences of participants confirmed the importance of addressing the challenges and barriers to completion found in the literature.

The findings of current study suggest that while being at-risk, the students gained supports and relationships from the mentoring program that mitigated these risks; all nine participants used the experiences to develop personal and professional goals to complete the program. In a mixed-methods study, Karimshah et al. (2013) identified the barriers faced by at-risk students aside from the SES background factor in that cultural capital, social integration, and self-agency/efficiency influenced the retention of the student. Although SES background was included in the criteria as a requirement to be eligible to participate, some of the barriers identified by Karimshah et al. were also shared by the participants in the current study.

In this study, each participant reflected on how the program assisted them in having a smooth transition to college and how certain aspects of the mentoring program aided them by providing access to tutoring services, ACT test preparation, and college curriculum along with lesson plans precollege via the bridge program. They described the experience as a "jump-start." All nine participants expressed that the HBCU's nurturing

and culturally based environment gave them an extra layer of transitional support that they believe could not be obtained at a predominately White institution, specifically, or any other type of institution. As also conveyed in the literature review findings, the participants in the current study noted that test preparation, tutoring, and studying tips were major factors in their successful transition. Turner and Thompson's (2014) four factors influencing freshmen transition were engaging freshman activities, development of effective study skills, no interactive instructor-student relationships, and inadequate academic services support, which were all key factors in the current study as well.

**Mentoring Guidance**

The literature review and the findings of this study confirmed that there is an on-going need for guidance with at-risk students and there are challenges and barriers affecting the self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence and well as personal economic and environmental factors faced by the at-risk population. In this study, the participants placed an emphasis on support and guidance in instructions on how to apply for financial aid, including grants and scholarships; how to complete university applications and meet the established deadlines; and being guided in the right direction for technical support, student support services, career services, and, in some cases, personal issues. Zou (2009) examined whether financial aid affected the enrollment status and academic success of students from low-income families and low SES backgrounds, finding that many students from lower SES backgrounds did not obtain financial aid. Support services for at-risk students are important when role models are not otherwise available (Lopez, 2018).

In this study, the mentoring guidance filled this essential role in the degree completion process for the participants. All participants, especially Nick and Gail, emphasized the importance of having the mentors and access to faculty, staff, and/or administrators. Nick believed that he would not have completed his degree program without the support, motivation, and guidance he received as a participant in the program. Gail was able to complete the classes she believed were too hard to pass with the guidance of her mentor who received a degree in the same major.

There was some evidence of environmental factors that affected the participants' decisions related to college persistence and success. The risk factors identified by Horton (2015) were study environment; whether the participant lived on or off-campus (taking into consideration the transportation time and costs to convenience); and access to student support services, advisor advice and support, guidance or mentoring. These all played a role in the participants' motivation and willingness to succeed. Bidwell (2018) highlighted that financial literacy and barriers related to accessibility and affordability often stemmed from a lack of services provided by higher education administrators and a student's lack of understanding financial aid opportunities. The mentoring program experience of the participants in the current study proved to be a necessary tool to guide them.

**Development of Relationships**

The mentoring program under study was designed to have a mentor establish a relationship with a mentee before beginning college through graduation with both routine and nonscheduled interactions to assist where needed. Some of the participants expressed

that it was both these planned and spontaneous conversations that got them to the finish

line. Others expressed that they could talk to their mentor about topics that they could not

discuss with their parents or other family members. They all expressed that the

conversations extended beyond academics to their personal well-being and future

aspirations. These interactions resulted in the development of very supportive, ongoing

relationships.

In this study, the mentees were matched with mentors who shared similar

characteristics when possible. The similarities in majors, extracurricular activities, or

interests helped to create a stronger relationship and encouraged participation in clubs,

organizations, extracurricular activities, and/or campus events. Cornelius et al. (2016)

focused on three aspects of a formal mentoring program: the match process, training and

orientation, and interaction frequency. The findings concluded that students who

completed the program had positive transition experiences and became more engaged and

integrated into the university. Permzadian and Crede (2016) conducted a quantitative

study to determine the effectiveness of first-year seminars/courses and the effects on

retention rates. The researchers found that the effects of mentoring programs varied by

the type and that the programs affected retention and academic progression differently.

The types of mentoring programs can vary, including mentor-to-mentee, peer-to-peer,

and/or faculty/staff-to-mentee structures, and are designed for different purposes

(Gershenfeld, 2014; Hatfield, 2011). Multiple studies have been conducted on the effects

of various mentoring programs with variations, all of which had positive results in

developing relationships for college success (Horton, 2015; McGlynn, 2014; Permzadian & Crede, 2016).

**Personal Development**

The mentoring program afforded students with numerous opportunities that attributed to their personal development through exposure and experiences that contributed to self-efficacy and confidence. The students were exposed to student life with on-campus living experiences, trips to different cities and concerts, and workshops and sessions designed to promote social engagement, teach etiquette skills, social interaction, and self-care. Many of the participants referenced a phrase QTOT from one of the mentors, which helped them to spend time making productive choices for goals and life choices, and it has remained with them today.

There are several factors that can affect a student's self-confidence, self-efficacy, and ability to succeed academically. The participants all shared that the mentoring program provided the personal development, social growth, and maturity needed to complete college and was referenced by one participant as an investment in them. Mentoring programs can assist students with academic and social integration by providing social capital as described by Morales et al. (2015).

**Professional Skills for Future Success**

Participation in the mentoring program led to many of the professional skills needed for future success. Participants were given opportunities in workshops designed to enhance public speaking, resume writing, and leadership skills – all essential for future success. This finding reflected that of Soria et al. (2013) who used Astin and Astin (1996)

in understanding the connections between student involvement in leadership activities, their understanding of social responsibility, and their engagement in promoting social change. Soria et al. suggested that faculty, advisers, and student affairs personnel at higher education institutions can work to encourage students to participate in student leadership for positive outcomes in promoting engagement in greater social change.

In my study, almost all of the participants were involved in academic or social clubs and organizations, or participated in extracurricular activities or attended campus events. The participants who lived on campus participated in these activities more due to accessibility. The participants who joined Greek letter organizations indicated that their mentors were of the same organization, and some participants who joined academic clubs indicated that their mentor informed them of the membership opportunity.

## Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study were related to the design. The participants were identified as graduates of one HBCU mentoring program, possibly limiting the generalizability of the results. There were also a few anticipated limitations that arose during the data collection process. Contacting alumni postgraduation was a challenge in that the contact information was often inaccurate for some because of relocation, or other changes in contact information even though the mentoring program coordinator was able to obtain more recent contact data from the alumni office. For some, their willingness was affected by time availability to participate. Although the telephone interviews prevent observation of body language and nonverbal gestures, which might be a

limitation in terms of data collected, I was able to listen to tone pauses, asides, and emphasis placed on certain words in the participants' responses.

## Recommendations

The data confirmed other results in the research literature in that mentoring programs have the ability to assist at-risk students through the college enrollment process and provide the tools necessary to lead to college completion. Further research may produce broader understanding of at-risk participants who enrolled in mentoring programs at multiple institutions and of different types for comparison. For the purposes of this study, the sample included only the participants who attended the HBCU as discussed in the Setting section of Chapter 4. The nine participants in this study demonstrated clearly that the HBCU played an integral part in their transition from high school to college and through matriculation to graduation. For future research, it would be beneficial to obtain descriptions of the mentoring experience of at-risk students at other HBCUs, and other types of institutions both public and private. A comparative study could be done to determine if there is a difference in the descriptions of the mentoring experiences by at-risk students across multiple higher education institutions and by type and level and the role HBCUs play in the college enrollment and retention process for at-risk students. Additionally, a study could be conducted to measure the academic performance of students enrolled in mentoring programs and another using the participants as a control group and nonparticipants as a comparison at various types of institutions.

**Implications**

The results of this study on the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk alumni could be used to provide insight to help higher education administrators develop institutional policy and implement or maintain mentoring programs for at-risk students and identify their possible barriers to college success. The findings suggested that mentoring programs can increase the chances of at-risk students enrolling in college and maintaining continuous enrollment through graduation, thus contributing to the institutions ability to retain the students. The results also suggested that certain aspects and components of the mentoring program assisted with refining the participants' social, professional, and relationship skills, making them more well-rounded individuals and potentially more marketable in the workforce. Additionally, the results of the study suggested that academic and social involvement through academic and social organizations, clubs, and extracurricular activities contribute to how engaged the participants feel at the institution. Further, the results suggested that the type of institution, in this case an HBCU, contributed to how connected the participant became to the institution. Finally, the research findings may contribute to positive social change by providing administrators perspective on developing mentoring programs that will produce more formerly at-risk graduates making a positive contribution to society.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand the mentoring experiences of formerly at-risk HBCU undergraduate alumni. The data collected in this study of their experiences confirmed the barriers faced by at-risk students and shed light on the

importance of having a mentor through supportive relationships, and transitional support as a foundation for success. Each participant viewed the mentoring program as a positive experience, as an investment in them, and of great significance to their personal development and enhanced professional skills. Some of the participants described their mentoring relationships as very personal and comfortable, being able to have conversations with the mentor on topics that could not be discussed with family. All of the mentoring relationships and friendships developed through the program remain today.

The most surprising aspect of their experience was that the participants unanimously believed the HBCU environment contributed to their academic success and ultimately degree completion. The HBCU experience was portrayed as one like no other, designed to cater to the African American student specifically. There were instances described as family-like events, support and guidance provided by like individuals who have experienced the same struggles and challenges, and exposure to opportunities that developed them personally and professionally.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

I am Calaundra Clarke, conducting a study to understand the ways mentoring experiences of HBCU alumni contributed to their academic completion. Your participation in the mentoring program and your successful degree completion qualify you as an important participant in my study. This study will provide insight to help administrators understand how best to develop institutional policy and manage mentoring programs for at-risk students and identify their possible barriers to college success.

Please provide your consent for recording the session, to allow me to capture your responses accurately and completely. I will also take notes as a secondary measure. Your identity will remain confidential. This is a voluntary interview. If you agree with the consent, we will begin with background information and proceed into the questions to assist with the study.

Interview Questions

1. What criteria did you use in selecting your college?
   Probes:
   a. How important was it to you to attend an Historically Black College and University (HBCU)?
   b. Who played an active role in your college choice decision, or were you the sole decision maker?

2. What housing arrangements did you have: on campus, off campus, or at home with parents?

3. Tell me about any extracurricular activities on campus that you participated in?
   Probes:
   a. What were they?
   b. Were you in any clubs or organizations?
   c. How much time do you think you spent a week on extracurricular activities?
   d. Tell me about the reasons you participated.

4. Describe the level of assistance provided to you during your admission process.
    Probes:
    a. How adequate was the assistance that was provided?
    b. What specific tasks or experiences assisted you?

5. Describe the level of assistance provided to you during your financial aid process.
    Probes:
    a. How adequate was the assistance that was provided?
    b. What specific tasks or experiences assisted you?

6. Describe the level of assistance provided to you during your advising process.
    Probes:
    a. How adequate was the assistance that was provided?
    b. What specific tasks or experiences assisted you?

7. What type of information was provided at the new student orientation?
    Probes:
    a. Was the information academically related, socially related, or both?
    b. How helpful was the information provided and in what ways?

8. Describe the process for enrolling/participating in the mentoring program? Was the process voluntary or were you automatically assigned as a requirement?
    a. How did you hear about the mentoring program?
    b. Did you receive assistance with enrolling in the program?
    c. What were the requirements for your participation in the programs?

9. Describe your relationship with your mentor.
    Probes:
    a. How was your mentor assigned/determined?
    b. How did your mentor make you feel?
    c. How often did you meet?
    d. What topics were important to you to discuss?
    e. Did you all converse on topics other than academics?
    f. Did you have anything in common?
    g. How engaged would you say you were in the mentoring relationship?

10. Describe your experience with the mentoring program.
    Probes:
    a. How much time was involved with individual sessions? Group sessions?
    b. What would you say the major benefits of the program were for you?
    c. Were there things you would have liked to discuss, but didn't?
    d. Were there things you would have liked to have done, but didn't?

11. Describe the level of support provided to you by participating in the mentoring program.
    Probes:
    a. Were there others who assisted you besides your mentor? If so, who?
    b. Were there designated times when mentoring assistance was available?
        i. Registration process
        ii. Financial aid process
        iii. Advising process

12. Describe the interactions you had with others on campus while in the program.
    a. How did the program affect your interaction with faculty?
    b. How did the program affect your interaction with staff?

13. What kinds of resources were provided through the mentoring program?
    Probes:
    a. Academic
    b. Social
    c. Other aspects

14. Tell me what was important to you about the mentoring.
    Probes:
    a. What elements were most important?
    b. In what ways did you feel the program benefited?
        i. Personal development
        ii. Leadership qualities
        iii. Future goals
        iv. Life choices

15. What things do you wish had happened in the program?

16. Describe any specific aspects of the mentoring program you believe may have attributed to you earning your degree.

17. In what ways do you think others would benefit from participating in the mentoring program?
    Probes:
    a. What about things that didn't work well for you in the program?
    b. If you were going to design a mentoring program, what would you include? What would you exclude?

18. Is there anything else you would like to share about your mentoring experience in college?