

2014

# A Narrative Inquiry of Successful Black Male College Students

Malou Chantal Harrison  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Malou Harrison

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University

2014

Abstract

A Narrative Inquiry of Successful Black Male College Students

by

Malou Chantal Harrison

MA, Florida International University, 2000

BS, State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo, 1983

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

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February 2015

## Abstract

Despite a growing enrollment of Black males in colleges and universities in the U.S., the nationwide college degree completion rate for Black males remains at disproportionately low numbers as compared to other ethnicities and to that of Black females. The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to evoke and promote the voices of successful Black male students and to understand their perspectives on factors that contributed to their college success. Findings from this research provide insight into college experiences and interventions that have positive implications for Black male college student success. Valencia's (2010) work on educational attainment served as the anti-deficit conceptual framework for this study, which used a qualitative approach of criterion-based, purposeful sampling. A total of 14 Black male college students from a community college in the Southeast served as study participants. Eight participants were interviewed, and 6 participated in a focus group. Open-ended interview and focus group protocols were used to engage study participants. The data analysis consisted of open and axial coding to identify recurring themes. The analysis revealed the college experiences to which successful Black male college students were exposed. These experiences included student organization membership, community service, advising, and mentorship engagement. Intrinsic motivation and ethnicity were also emergent themes that appeared to contribute to the students' college success. The study findings are insightful as to how institutions might better support Black male college success and completion. Increased Black male college completion has positive implications for a better quality of life for this population and their families as well as greater socio-economic contributions to society.

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## Dedication

With deep love and affection, this dissertation is dedicated to my four children and late husband, Las. While my dear Las passed away in the midst of my dissertation study and I felt like ending my work, I knew he would have wanted me to proceed and not let my emotions deter my work. Las was ever encouraging of my studies, from the days we were undergraduate students at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo. He majored in Architecture and my field of study was Management. The School of Architecture and the School of Management in Hayes and Crosby Halls, respectively, were side by side on the campus where we earned our baccalaureate degrees. Las and I started a family after our graduation, and from there on lived as husband and wife, best friends, and parents.

Our dear Niyala (Niya), Malika (Lika), Laselve (Eli), and Aaron (Ziah), have been the greatest motivation to me in life. Each of them has had a hand, both emotionally and physically, in helping me with my dissertation. To Niya, you are a budding attorney with a legal career that is evolving. My dear Lika, your work in community engagement leadership represents your passion and genuine love for social justice and service. Eli, your recent admission to the Florida Bar was a high note for our family, and you are on your way to what promises to be a most successful career as a litigator! And my darling Ziah, you have really taken good care of me this year; you have been there for me at low times and when I'm at my happiest. You and I have a bond like no other. Your high school years are at their peak, and I expect nothing less than excellence from you.

Harrison children, I love you all, and I am proud to dedicate this dissertation in your names.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Background**

In my 25 years in higher education, ten of which have been as Dean of Students at a community college, I have shaken the hands of thousands of students who have walked across the stage at Commencement to receive their well-deserved college credentials. Included in those multitudes of students have been persons of many colors, creeds, and walks of life. My service has been at an institution that matriculates one of the highest enrollments of Black students of any college or university in the United States, it has always been of concern to me that the proportion of Black males represented among the annual graduates is noticeably minimal.

The Black college student enrollment rate in the United States has grown to be on par with Blacks' own share of the population; however, completion rates are much less than equal in that same regard, with Blacks only making up 10.1 percent of all degree earners nationwide in 2012 (Harper, 2012; Harper & Davis, 2012). Given there are Black male college students who are graduating with a college credential, it makes sense for educators and researchers to study successful Black male college students and learn the influences and experiences that propelled them toward program completion. Harper (2012) argued that retention research findings that relate to students overall cannot be used to develop generic retention practices that will successfully impact all student groups and Black males in particular. Harper's recommendation for successfully addressing Black male college attainment is to understand their lived experiences. Institutions should then engage policy and campus stakeholders to develop campus specific interventions and programs that are particular to their Black male populations.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2012), the nationwide degree completion rate for Black students is 33.3%, compared to 48.1% for college students overall. Disaggregated by gender, the degree completion rate is 31.5% for Black male community college students. The rate is almost double for Black female community college students. For Hispanic and White male community college students, the graduation rate is 37.6% and 39.1%, respectively. The gap in graduation rates is therefore most evident with Black male degree completion being at the lowest when compared to Whites and Hispanics. Black males also under achieve in community college graduation rates in comparison to Black female females. These statistics are telling in terms of the status of Black male college student attainment in higher education. It is also significant for community college policy makers and practitioners to responsively take global and institutional actions to help lessen the college completion divide among ethnic groups, and particularly for Black male college students.

The 2011 Complete College America Report of findings from 33 U.S. States established time to degree as a representative factor of the low completion rates of ethnic minorities and Blacks in particular. The Report indicated that 7.5% of Blacks enrolled in community colleges earned their degree within 3 years; the percentage was 11.1% for Hispanics. It also indicated that 39.9% of Blacks enrolled in baccalaureate programs earned their degree in 6 years; the statistic was 46.5% for Hispanics. Summarily, “Black men’s degree attainment across all levels of postsecondary education remains alarmingly low, especially in comparison to their same-race female counterparts (Harper & Davis, 2012, p. 104). This attainment status for Blacks begs for a call to action by higher

education policy makers and practitioners, and it shows there is an urgency for colleges and universities to take intentional steps to address this disparity. It should be noted that while the number of Blacks earning degrees is increasing over time, the time to degree of this minority group is still less than favorable. The sizeable gap that exists in Black male college attainment has been closing at a very slow pace over the years. It will take strategic interventions and the engagement of institutional and government stakeholders for continued progress.

There are many non-cognitive reasons for the disparity in Black student retention and degree attainment. These include the ethnic and racial environment at higher education institutions. If Black students do not feel a connection with the institution, or if they experience racial harassment or discrimination of any nature, they will likely leave (Emmanuel, 2009; Harper, 2012; Slater, 2009; Wood & Turner, 2011; Wood, 2012).

The absence of social capital is another factor associated with the attrition of Black college students, a large majority of whom are first-generation college students. Social capital refers to the relationships and connections individuals have with others, and the degree to which those networks are used in a constructive way. First-generation college students often lack a network of peers and family members who are knowledgeable enough about college to provide support and guidance for the student. The resulting deficiency of social capital has a negative impact on students' ability to integrate academically and socially, much less persist and attain a degree in higher education (Morley, 2007; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Perrine & Spain, 2008; Wood, 2012).

It is evident that lack of finances are a real barrier to persistence and completion for Black students. They lack financial literacy and often do not see the value of



borrowing to support a college education. This factor is also associated with the first generation status of many Black students who never received advice about funding a college education. Federal and state financial aid grant programs exist. However, there is a need for greater awareness of these programs to be promoted among Black students. Students' understanding of the availability of grant and scholarship funds and not solely loan programs will help to address this issue.

There are co-curricular experiences that proactively address attrition by promoting significant persistence and degree completion among Blacks. These include targeted orientation and student success intervention programs that help with easing Black students' cultural integration on predominantly white campuses. Pairing upper division students as mentors with First Time in College first-year students was successful at many colleges and universities. Black student unions and fraternities have also been helpful in this regard (Morley, 2007; Slater, 2009).

Another non-academic factor that has a positive impact on Black college student retention and completion is the location of the institution and the presence of a significant enrollment of Black students (Morley, 2007). Colleges in suburban and rural areas tend to have low Black student enrollments, as well as low to non-existent cadres of Black faculty and staff. This factor creates a deficiency in role models for Black students when there are few, if any, Black-oriented cultural or social events that would enable Black students to feel better connected to the institution (Palmer, Davis, Moore, & Hilton, 2010).

Institutions that are Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-oriented tend to have lower Black student persistence than those that are more general in

their academic focus. Black students tend to feel they do not belong at these STEM-focused institutions due to the manner in which they are perceived and treated by white faculty and administrators who assert that Black students are academically and intellectually incapable of succeeding in STEM (Slater, 2009). Harper (2010) discouraged the continuation of deficit-thinking assertions that Black male underachievement in STEM fields is due to their inability to perform in rigorous courses. Additionally, Harper (2010) challenged policy makers and practitioners to instead examine the perspectives and experiences of Black males who had performed well in rigorous STEM courses. There are currently many U.S. Department of Education federally funded Talent Search, Upward Bound and Student Support Services programs that are STEM focused. These programs are precisely designed to address the issue of under-representation of Blacks and other minorities in STEM disciplines.

Palmer and Young (2008) asserted that Black college student matriculation is growing progressively. This growth has tainted educators' commitment to placing adequate program emphasis on Black college student success. Colleges and universities should continue to place emphasis on making college access a priority as it relates to minority groups such as Blacks. However, institutions must also place equal effort on addressing minority completion gaps.

### **Statement of the Problem**

College persistence rates for Blacks are at the bottom rung of all ethnic groups (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2007). Several factors continue to drive less than acceptable retention and degree completion rates among Black college students. While these rates have improved considerably in the post-civil rights era, there are strong

continuing repercussions from this group's limited access prior to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The debilitating proportion of Blacks living below the poverty level also has a strong and ongoing negative effect. An example of these lasting repercussions is the 45% percent of Black community college students who leave college without earning a credential – a significantly higher non-completion rate than both Hispanics (40%) and Whites (35%) (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).

The problem addressed by this study is the disproportionately low percentage of Black males completing a college credential. Harper (2012) discussed that 67.6% of Black male first year students do not complete their degrees, and he provides rationale such as academic unpreparedness, fit, and lack of appropriate support services. Palmer and Young (2008) indicated that terminology such as endangered, uneducable, dysfunctional, and dangerous have been unfairly generalized to Black males in all societal arenas, including that of education. In the same vein, Henfeld (2012) indicated that Black males are arguably considered to be among the most stigmatized members of society. Black male college students, in particular, are the mostly likely among students to leave the community college (Wood, 2012). The notion of stereotypes and poor connotations about Black males is certainly a factor that cannot be ignored as one examines the status of the Black male college student. The sociological implications of such negative stereotypes is that they will spill over into arenas such as colleges, to the disadvantage of the Black male college student.

Blacks are disproportionately more likely to enroll at community colleges as opposed to universities (Glenn, 2007). Black students also exhibit lower graduation and

transfer rates. It would stand to reason that with such trends of Black student achievement, there would be proven interventions to support their success. Glenn's (2007) study highlighted that there has been an increase in the number of Black males earning a college credential as evidenced that, between 1998-99 and 2008-09, there has been a 53% increase for Black students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). However, according to McGlynn (2011), it is how students feel in and outside of the classroom, and the degree to which they feel a sense of belonging that will have a deep effect on whether they persist, complete or not. Given Blacks enroll in community colleges in larger numbers than at other higher education institution types, institutions should strategically address the factor of this population's lower persistence, transfer and graduation rates.

Research gaps exist as they relate to Black male college student attainment and examining students' perspectives around their experiences and success. Palmer and DuBord (2013) posited additional research and evidence are needed on the overall experiences of Black males in community colleges. Harper and Kuykendall (2012) indicated that the majority of research on Black males is focused on trying to understand why a preponderance of Black males, perform so poorly in college. "Necessary is the pursuit of additional narratives from those who can give voice to their educational values, philosophies and values" (Harper & Davis, 2012, p.117). More specifically, Harper (2012) indicated "the most disappointing finding in the National Black Male Achievement Study was that few participants had been consulted for helpful and potentially instructive insights into success" (p. 19). Howard, Flennaugh and Terry (2012) posited there is limited scholarship that places students' voices at the forefront of

examination, and that it severely inadequate for Black male students in particular. Even though Howard's (2008) study used storytelling to capture how Black males navigate their colleges toward completion, he called for further collection of students' narratives to better understand how Black male college success.

There is also a gap as it relates to research grounded in anti-deficit thinking. Research is needed to produce new narratives that counter the prevalence of deficit discourse on Black male students, if any significant social or educational change is to be realized for this population (Brown, 2011; Brown & Donnor, 2011). In fact Brown (2011), in his historical analysis of the literature on Black males from the 1930s to present, found an abundance of regurgitated discourses that centered on the pathological and social deficits of Black males. Brown alluded to the necessity for different, anti-deficit questions to be posed so as to diversify and expand upon the existing recurring narratives of 'absent and wandering', 'impotent and powerless', 'soulful and adaptive', 'endangered and in crisis'. This discussion on anti-deficit thinking toward Black males aligns well with Palmer and Yung (2008), who also indicated the need to end the unfair, deficit labels attributed to Black men.

Some aspects of this achievement gap have been attributed to deficit thinking. Deficit thinking emerged at a time when other social construction phrases emerged such as, 'culturally disadvantaged child', 'cultural deprivation', and 'accumulated environmental deficits' (Black, Edwards, Hess & Shipman, as cited in Valencia, 2010, p. xiv). Deficit thinking contends that ethnic minorities and the economically disadvantaged are the cause of their own socio-economic and educational attainment issues. This study was designed to investigate an opposing school of thought to deficit

thinking, and crafted to highlight factors associated with Black male student success as a means of using the data to address the problem of Black male student college attainment.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to understand and tell the stories of students' experiences during college and what they suggest contributed to their success as students. Understanding and retelling the experiences of these students, have a strong potential to help higher education decision makers enact policies and processes that will enable Black male college level students to succeed. Gleaning personal accounts from Black male college students about non-cognitive experiences they perceive are associated with their success in college will provide empirical data that can be used to inform strategic planning, policy and program development around persistence and completion initiatives.

### **Nature of the Study**

The study used the lens of success stories. The intent was to gain a deep understanding of student experiences while broadly promoting an awareness of Black male college student success. An approach that focused on a narrative participant account was used to determine what experiences Black male college students perceive to be associated with their success. Responses from eight Black male students were collected through interviews and a focus group. A focus group protocol (Appendix C) and an interview guide (Appendix D) were used for data collection tools.

Merriam (2009) emphasized the importance of narrative inquiry as a means of producing meaningful data for qualitative research. Narrative inquiry is further defined as being interpretive. In my research study, I was able to interpret from the interviews

and focus group what the college experience meant to my participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2004), and Clandinin (2008), make a clear distinction between narrative inquiry being a means of creating a new sense of meaning and value as it relates to a particular research topic, as opposed to generating knowledge that adds to knowledge in the field. Given that narrative inquiry seeks to retrieve stories about human experiences, it is also important to understand the role of the researcher in the process of accessing the thoughts and feelings of research participants. The manner in which the researcher analyzes and interprets participants' responses, and retells them, is also critical in terms of "validity and reliability" (Clandinin, 2008, p. 34).

This study employed processes such as cross-checking raw data with transcriptions and "member checking" (Clandinin, 2008, p. 15) to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Wells (2011) and Gergen (2009) maintained that narrative inquiry is a means of producing stories that are valuable to a particular researcher or inquirer. Multi-disciplinary in nature, the researchers posited that narrative inquiry provides an explanation for a particular phenomenon by articulating a series of chronological events that lead to an ending. Howard, Flenbaugh and Terry (2012) and Terry (2011) maintained that pursuing scholarship that provides for the use of Black male narratives has the potential to promote better informed policies and interventions that could help diversify the current discourse of Black male underachievement. The retold participant stories of this study are rich in terms of expressions about their college experiences and what they believe helped them to be successful college students.

When firsthand, personal accounts of persons' experiences are gathered through narrative research, such as in this study, these data serve as a foundation for

understanding human experience in a wide range of contexts. For my dissertation research in particular, the stories gleaned through eight individual interviews and a focus group of six Black male students revealed poignant information relative to their lived experiences on campus. The original choice of eight focus group participants (six actually participated) was based on the advice of Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) who recommended a number between six and twelve. The recommendation was based on having a manageable number of participants. “Twelve participants pose a potential challenge for the researcher or group moderator to manage. It is generally a good idea to recruit more participants than required given that at least two participants may not show up for the interview” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 57).

There are numerous methodological approaches associated with narrative inquiry and the analysis of produced narratives. In my approach, I utilized both the biographical and psychological approaches which Merriam (2009) indicated focus mostly on aspects such as gender and race, as well as the thoughts and motivations of participants.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this narrative inquiry qualitative study were:

1. What are/were the college experiences of successful Black male students at FCC?
2. What are the reasons these students suggest for their college success?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Valencia (2010) indicated that, in examining the educational attainment of people of color, it is important to note the detriments of the historical and current consequences associated with basing attainment capacity on reasons other than how schools are structured and operated educationally, pedagogically and environmentally. It is in that



regard that *anti-deficit thinking* (Valencia, 2010, p. 126) is used as the conceptual framework for this study of Black male college students' perspectives on experiences that have contributed to their college success. *Anti-deficit thinking* emerged as opposition to deficit thinking that contended ethnic minorities, and the poor, were the cause of their own socio-economic and educational attainment issues. The term emerged at a time when other social construction phrases emerged such as *culturally disadvantaged child*, *cultural deprivation*, and *accumulated environmental deficits* (Black, Edwards, Hess & Shipman, as cited in Valencia, 2010, p. xiv).

Deficit thinking theory is grounded in racial and social stature bias to the extent that it attributes unsatisfactory student success to a student's internal abilities, her/his family and cultural background, rather than determining the existence of institutional inadequacies by examining the institution in which the student is enrolled. Associated with deficit thinking theory is the premise that students of color, particularly those who are poor with cultural deficits such as being first generation, possess certain intellectual hindrances, as well as behavioral issues, and a lack of motivation to learn that are the cause of low educational attainment Valencia (2010). Deficit thinking theory allows institutions and their constituent faculty and staff to shun their responsibility for accountability for student success and instead lay the blame of academic deficiencies and failure on the student.

Anti-deficit thinking theory contradicts deficit thinking theory and identifies factors such as pedagogical practices, societal and environmental factors, as well as institutional, curricular and co-curricular policies as the factors associated with student success (Gourd & Lightfoot, 2009). When institutions adopt an anti-deficit approach to

educating students, they are willing to implement assessments to better understand their student bodies and subsequently chart appropriate instruction, interventions and programs to address areas of deficiency and support students in general.

Representative characteristics include:

1. **Blaming the victim.** Blaming the victim (Ryan, 1971) is the ideological foundation of deficit thinking where the theory posits that students are deemed to be the cause of their school failure while systemic dynamics are ignored. The notion that there are tutorial programs to build up the academic skills of minority students is present in deficit thinking. The notion that institutions need to address the academic achievement issues of students by enhancing their educational support systems is present in anti-deficit thinking. Complementarily, in critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007), measures are taken to strengthen the Black community, rather than eliminate racism.
2. **Oppression.** Oppression is also a tenet of deficit thinking to the extent that, historically, there have been compulsory ignorance laws that kept Blacks illiterate, and there have been educational policies and practices, such as segregation, that have kept Blacks and other ethnic minorities separated from majority group students (Valencia, 2010, p. 9).
3. **Educability.** The educability factor of deficit thinking is based in behavioral science, in that deficit thinkers view behavior in pathological or dysfunctional ways when referring to cognitive and motivational deficiencies in individuals, families, and cultures (Valencia, 2010, p. 14). Anti-deficit thinking acknowledges the effort necessary on the part of students to succeed in school, but it also

recognizes that educability is appreciably associated with the socio-political and economic conditions of schools (Harper, 2012; Pearl, 2012).

4. Pseudoscience. Deficit thinking theory is a type of pseudoscience in that researchers' inherent biases toward cultural minority groups cause them to conduct their work on minorities through flawed methodologies, and with findings that are inaccurately reported (Valencia, 2010, p. 12). Anti-deficit thinking theory supports that the more contact majority groups have with minority groups, the more comfortable, familiarized and fair-minded they will become in interacting with them.
5. Temporal changes. Deficit thinking has used various explanations, such as, inferior culture and social class, mediocre genes, and other unfounded classifications to account for apparent deficits (Valencia, 2010, p. 13). Anti-deficit thinking posits individuals of socially blighted communities and minority groups are succeeding, and more attention should be afforded to learning from these successes in an effort to support others (Harper, 2010; Harper, 2012).
6. Heterodoxy. Conventionally, deficit thinking has been the prevailing, dominant thinking around school failure in ethnic minorities; however, contemporary thinking has offered counter arguments, theories and research which presently prevail (Valencia, 2010, p. 16). Harper (2010, p. 68) cautions against relying on existing theories and long standing conceptual frameworks to repeatedly examine deficits rather than discovering through an anti-deficit approach how certain student groups have managed to be successful.

Pearl (2012) offered democratic education as a move toward negating deficit thinking and adopting anti-deficit thinking. Democratic education was described as having a curriculum that prepared all students equally, regardless of ethnicity or economic background. It also required that all students be made aware of their rights as students in a simply articulated fashion, and that school practices in an outside of the classroom gave all students an equal opportunity to succeed. The premise is that when democratic education is intentionally forged and sustained, deficits no longer exist (Pearl, 2012).

Harper (2012) maintained there is value in moving toward an anti-deficit perspective on student achievement by identifying perspectives of how Black males have achieved degree attainment and college success instead of why they do not persist and complete. In a national study, which used an anti-deficit framework, Harper's findings revealed insights on Black male college success from Black male students who had achieved success. Anti-deficit framed questions of the study focused on the manner in which Black male college students cultivate viable relationships with faculty and staff rather than a deficit approach which seek to uncover why Black males have inadequate relationships with their faculty. The anti-deficit focused questions also sought to uncover how Black male students have managed to successfully navigate college and complete despite barriers such as racism and unpreparedness. In contrast, a deficit model would have strived toward finding out why Black male college students have such a low rate of retention and college completion.

Toward anti-deficit thinking, I am fully cognizant that, in order for students to be successful, they must take responsibility for their own learning in terms of class

attendance, completing assignments, studying and engagement in campus life; however, in very basic terms, Harper (2012) asserted the onus is also on institutions to provide a welcoming environment, sound pedagogical practices, and adequate support systems for minorities and Blacks in particular, many of whom have traditionally experienced less-than-adequate schooling in their primary and secondary years.

Central to this study was determining from students themselves the experiences they recognize as having propelled them toward student success. This study discounts deficit thinking theory to the extent that it negates ideology around genetics being a factor of disproportionate levels of college attainment among Black males, and it refutes the notion that Black male college attainment lags behind all genders and ethnic groups because of an endemic culture of low motivation. The research process resulted in the collection of stories and reflections of Black male college students as a basis of thought around their college experiences and what made them successful students. The study has documented the stories, and there are intentions to share them so they may be used by institutions and policy makers in their pursuit of improving the quality of experiences for Black male college students.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Black:* A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

*Completion:* Degree, or credential attainment (McGlynn, 2011).

*Deficit Thinking:* The notion that ethnic minorities, Black and Hispanics in particular, are intellectually deficient because of their family structure, socio-economic and cultural background (McGlynn, 2011).

*Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)*: Public and private two and four-year institutions where Hispanic students comprise at least 25% of the total full-time-equivalent student enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

*Narrative Inquiry*: Relaying/conveying an understanding of the experiences of others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

*Student Success*: The desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from the beginning year through degree completion (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

*TRIO Program*: Federally funded program aimed at increasing college enrollment and graduation of economically disadvantaged students (Harper, 2010).

### **Assumptions**

My assumptions for this study were:

1. The sample was representative of the target population and adequate in size.
2. The participants responded openly and truthfully to questions posed in the focus group and interviews.
3. The participants candidly shared information, individually and in groups, regarding what has contributed to their successes or failures.

### **Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to engaging eight Black male near term and recent college graduates from a single institution in one-on-one interviews, in addition to a focus group of six currently enrolled Black male students in their last term of study from said institution. The period of time spent with participants focused on eliciting deep

reflections around their experiences and, subsequently, sought richer and more detailed responses to the research questions. While the participants were not provided with the questions prior to the interview or the focus group, they were afforded time to review and reflect on the questions before the start of the session. This intervention, in my opinion, eased any potential anxieties, enabled participants' familiarity with the process, and helped them to produce meaningful responses to the interview and focus group questions, respectively.

### **Significance of Study**

There are various reasons why this study is significant. Foremost, it is grounded in the prediction of a U.S. population growth of 56 million in the first 20 years of the Millennium and, most importantly, 46 million of whom will be from ethnic minority groups, led in numbers by Black and Hispanic (McGlynn, 2011). On this view of population, the U.S. is progressively becoming a nation with an ethnic minority, majority population. The U.S. will only be able to compete in a global knowledge economy if degree attainment rates improve considerably for ethnic minorities, such as Blacks and Hispanics. By giving voice to successful Black male college students, policy makers and practitioners will be privy to information that can help to improve the higher education success factor of this minority population.

Given the widening degree attainment gaps among traditional majority and ethnic minority groups, coupled with the abovementioned demographic trends, it is critical that the plight of Black male college student success be strategically addressed with intentionality. This current study focused on that issue.

Even though the U.S. currently fares adequately in baccalaureate degree attainment on a college and global level, other nations have out-performed the U.S. in associate degree attainment (McGlynn, 2011). To this end, this study focused on community colleges which are the producers of associate degree graduates; in this case, Black male graduates.

While Cuyjet (2006) raised the issue of a lack of research data on Black college students disaggregated by gender, Spradley (2001) indicated there is a gap in data on Black college male students in that the research focuses mainly on traditional-aged students, and not on adult learners or non-traditional age Black male college students. Studies indicate the resolve of traditional-age Black male students to leave college is a result of a multitude of factors, such as lack of funding, deficiencies in social, cultural and academic integration, and failure to connect with the institution. Frierson, Pearson and Wyche (2009) indicate high school achievement, socioeconomic status, college experiences, social and academic integration all have direct effects on the persistence behavior of Black males. Spradley (2001) cited a U.S. Census Bureau 2001 report that indicates the number of adult Black male students, 25 years old and over attending college, was up from 143,000 in 1990, to 267,000 in 1995, to 335,000 in 2000. While colleges and universities had to adapt to large numbers of veterans whose tours of duty to Iraq have ended, the current profile of graduation rates for Black students implies institutions have also had to address the academic and developmental needs of the Black adult male students.

My research study will help fill a significant gap in literature as it relates to the success, or lack thereof, of Black male students in community colleges. It presents



firsthand Black male perspectives regarding their lived experiences while enrolled at a community college, as well as their thoughts regarding the experiences associated with their success. In his narrative inquiry study on the persistence of Black males in community colleges, Myers (2012) reports on a sample that had completed at least six credits, and his recommendation for further research posited that a similar study should be extended to other geographic areas.

Finally, the study examined an issue of paramount micro and macro significance to the social mobility and social justice of Black males in America, and to the development, growth and competitiveness of the U.S. The advantages of college completion are experienced by those who earn degrees to the extent they potentially enjoy better jobs, healthcare and retirement. Equally important, governments also benefit from having to allocate less funding to social service programs, and from increased tax revenues generated by college graduates who have entered the workforce (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). A holistic result of these benefits will be a nation that will progress favorably toward socio-economic stability and, subsequently, growth, innovation, and competitive standing on the world stage. This study's contribution to social change will be at those micro and macro levels.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study was designed as a narrative inquiry approach to gain, from their personal perspectives and experiences, an understanding of experiences that influence college success and degree attainment for Black male college students. A complementary objective of this study was sociological in nature, toward the advancement of positive stereotypes about Black males pursuant to their educational

attainment abilities, capacity for college degree completion, and integration into the mainstream workforce. The reality is Black males are completing college degrees, and they are using those degrees to transition successfully into the workforce and into graduate and post-graduate learning environments. In that regard, there is benefit in highlighting such achievements in an effort to motivate Black males to strive more readily and realize a similar potential. On a macro level toward fostering social change, creating the opportunity for successful Black male students to share their stories about their own accomplishments will strengthen their very resolve and confidence to continue to develop intellectually and professionally, and become contributing citizens. There is also great potential for the regard for Black males to be heightened within society in terms of their pathological and intellectual assets, as well as the great benefit to society for them to be afforded every opportunity to achieve the American Dream.

The study involved eight Black male students from the college's population of 97,000 credit students, who are near-term and recent graduates (within the last term), to share their perspectives and stories through personal interviews. A focus group (e.g. Krueger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) of six additional Black male students was used for triangulation purposes. In an effort to inform retention practices and enhance learning environments to bolster the trend of growing credential completion among Black male college students, the study's outcomes will be shared in a variety of venues with college and university practitioners, and policy makers.

The venue for my study was a Hispanic serving community college in Florida, hereafter referred to as Frome Community College (pseudonym). Frome Community College (FCC) is one of 28 colleges in the Florida College System. As one of the most

diverse community colleges in the system in terms of ethnicities, nationalities and other pertinent demographics, FCC is a Hispanic Serving Institution enrolling and graduating significant numbers of Black students. Selection of FCC as the study site stems from its place as an institution that holds a significant record nationally among colleges and universities in terms of access and credential completion of ethnic minority students, Hispanic and Black students in particular. FCC's sheer size and overall diversity are also unique, making it an ideal educational environment in which to conduct a narrative inquiry of Black male students' perspectives about their success.

Using anti-deficit theory as the conceptual framework, the study focused minimally on intellectuality elements and, instead, was grounded in learning about participants' perspectives of their own non-cognitive experiences and assets. Included were aspects of Frome Community College's institutional structure and environment that inhibited, and/or supported, the quality of their experience, their progress, and ultimate degree attainment. Chapter 2 of this study provides a synthesis of literature that focuses on non-cognitive dynamics that have bearing on the issue of Black male student success. Subsequent chapters focus respectively on methodology, data analysis, conclusions and recommendations. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the data coupled with findings, and Chapter 5 offers recommendations for further research, and includes the potential for positive social change.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to understand and tell the stories of students' experiences during college and what they suggest contributed to their success as students. In-depth interviews and focus groups were used to glean first-hand perspectives about perceived non-cognitive influences on student success among adult-learner Black male college students. The objective was for the results to serve as the basis upon which recommendations for policies and practices that promote Black male college student success could be developed for utilization by higher education decision makers and practitioners at the school used in this study (hereafter referred to as Frome Community College) as well as colleges and universities nationwide.

A significant goal of this study was to instill in the higher education community and society at large a more positive sensibility regarding Black males as it relates to anti-deficit thinking and the achievement of which Black males are capable. The study has the potential to contribute to social change by helping to promote an anti-deficit notion of Black males. Producing narratives about successful Black male college achievement should help to better portray them as a population worthy of opportunities to enter the workforce and participate in mainstream environments.

There is relatively little research on Black male college student retention as it relates to adult learner men and their perceptions about the non-cognitive variables that influenced their success. The literature search for this dissertation used the Academic Search Complete, Education Search Complete, ProQuest Central, and SAGE Premier databases to find pertinent literature for this study. The primary search keywords

included: *Black/African-American male college student and community colleges, Black/African American males and college persistence, deficit thinking and Black males, deficit theory, non-cognitive factors and student persistence, Black/African-American male and student success*. These keywords were selected to elicit a broad range of literature relevant to the topic of my research study.

Multiple researchers (Bush & Bush, 2010; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2007; Perrine & Spain, 2008; Spradley, 2001) have suggested a need for more research and intrusive interventions for adult Black male students. The premise of this need for additional studies is that a majority of Black males pursue higher education through community colleges, and Black males are also among the students with the highest incidence of dropping out (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2007; Wood, 2012; Wood & Turner, 2011). It is more likely for traditional-age Black male college students to easily integrate into college life, and colleges have traditionally targeted support efforts to traditional-aged men and adult women returning to college, but not necessarily adult men.

This literature review supported this study to the extent that it is represented the identification and synthesis of a body of work around themes that are significant to Black male college student success. The narrow range of extant research specifically examined non-cognitive factors of success for Black male college students led to this literature review examining other associated themes. Wood (2012) noted there are few common attrition reasons between Black male and non-Black male college students. While access should be an institutional imperative, it was also indicated that college success factors also be placed on the agenda of higher education institutions' top strategic goals.

In particular, the literature review includes the following topics: (a) Community colleges and student success, (b) non-cognitive factors of student success, (c) Black male college student experience, and (d) narrative inquiry research tradition.

## **Community Colleges and Student Success**

### **Defining Community Colleges**

Community colleges are institutions of higher education that offer an associate's degree as the highest degree granted. Community colleges also provide continuing education and an array of workforce training programs that lead to career and vocational certificates and industry certifications (Beach, 2011; Cohen & Brawer, 2009; Crawford & Jervis, 2011; and Vaughn, 2006). It is the diversity of community colleges that greatly distinguishes them among other higher education institutions (Levin & Kater, 2012). While community colleges enjoy similar gender diversity as universities, the authors maintain they are marked by great differences in ethnic, racial and socio-economic diversity as opposed to other types of colleges and university. Additionally, community colleges as a whole enroll larger populations of first generation and independent students, respectively, than their college and university counterparts.

Equally important to the diversity aspect of community colleges is the definitional aspect of developmental education as a core curricular offering of the community college. In particular, Bush and Bush (2010), Glenn (2007), Harper (2012), Palmer, Moore, Davis and Hilton (2010), Toldson, Fry Brown and Sutton (2009) and Wood (2012) asserted college unpreparedness is exacerbated for Black students because they often attend low-performing high schools where there is a high drop-out rate, discipline issues, low teacher morale, and low attendance levels. (Kafele, 2012) maintained teachers can maximize

student learning by exposing their Black male students to role models with they can identify.

Roueche, Richardson, Neal and Roueche (2008) asserted that the need for developmental education in community colleges is growing regardless of race. They also expounded on how the opportunity of developmental education adds to social change when just one unprepared student who began in remedial coursework earns a baccalaureate degree. Even though remedial courses exist within the community college structure specifically to address issues of academic preparation, Glenn (2007) emphasized that repeating material that has been learned in high school has proven to be discouraging to students. Development Education faculty should rethink instructional delivery and adopt alternative pedagogies that stimulate student learning in this special population. To this end, Levin and Kater (2012) offered alternative modalities of developmental instruction such as accelerated for those who require a shorter time to remediate. They cited modularized instruction as an appropriate tool for teaching students the specific skills in which they are deficient. For students who are almost college-ready, the authors maintained that having students co-enroll in developmental education and college level coursework has positive achievement outcomes for students.

The community college movement has transformed itself in myriad ways from its humble beginnings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present time (Beach, 2010; Cohen & Brawer, 2009; Vaughn, 2006). As community colleges evolved, they also began to focus on the concept of ensuring that those who entered community college were able to successfully complete. Within the 2008 Obama Administration's American Graduation Initiative (AGI) goal of doubling the number of college degrees by 2020, several

initiatives have been forged in support of the AGI. National organizations are leading major college completion initiatives as evidenced by the Lumina Foundation's Achieving the Dream, The Bill and Melinda Gates Completion by Design, and Complete College America's completion agenda.

### **Student Success**

It was the notion of student success that gave rise to the importance of being intentional about factors associated with student persistence. Given the great majority of community college students at risk due to academic, social and economic deficiencies, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), Tinto (1975, 1993, 2008), Cohen and Brawer, (2009), Crawford and Jervis (2011), Berger, Ramirez and Lyons (2012), and Crisp and Mina (2012) examined the huge student retention challenge faced by community colleges. The arguments relative to the unpreparedness of high school graduates permeate the argument that community colleges must continue to serve the remedial education needs of students, particularly in mathematics. In addition, institutions must address the issue of clearer pathways to completion in their programs, as well as better support in the navigation of admissions and financial aid processes in order to enable student access, persistence and success (Crawford & Jervis, 2011; Glenn, 2007); more specifically, in the presence of pre-admission counseling to determine student interests, learning styles, and life obligations, colleges attempt to begin their assessment of the student upon admissions. Placement testing assesses basic skills proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics, where placement scores determine the most appropriate levels of developmental or college level courses in which a student should be placed to enable her or his learning and success. Cohen and Brawer (2009) criticized the processes used by colleges as being



peripherals, rather than deep-rooted in their approach. Cabrera, Burkum, Nasa and Bibo (2012) suggested that colleges need to be intentional in establishing simple and clear academic pathways that lead students toward the completion of their degrees. These authors suggest that a majority of community colleges have a comprehensive intake process for new students. The said intake processes ensure students are placed appropriately and provided with an educational plan to guide them along. Too many students, however, still do not persist for a number of reasons, one of which is that open access need not be as liberal.

It is community college's humanistic aspect of pedagogies rooted in "learning communities, encounter groups, cross-functional teams, life skills training, cooperative learning and service learning" (O'Banion, 1997, p. 45) that have helped students make meaningful links to their learning. These links have been analyzed as being vital to students' motivation. This motivation is critical in advanced students' learning and sense of belonging to the colleges where they are enrolled. Complementarily, and relative to growing rates of attrition among college students, there is a need for a strong co-curriculum and adequate support services (Vaughn, 2006). Cohen and Brawer (2009) cited non-academic factors beyond the control of colleges as the most frequent reason students drop out. Factors include change in work schedule, the need to care for elderly parents, unanticipated need to work full time, health reasons, and a lack of child care for young children. While O'Banion (1997) suggested community colleges must help students develop fervent feelings toward their learning, Perna and Thomas (2006), Vaughn (2006), and Cohen and Brawer (2009) delineated that fervency in more specific terms relative to the support services is critical to student success.

Given the meager beginnings of community colleges, and the educational reforms that have transformed them in the past century, today's community college has taken some aspects from that century to create the best learning-centered institutions in an ever-changing society. No longer is it acceptable for community colleges to focus their strategic plans on being responsive to change without placing student success and completion at the core of their vision and mission. Overarching to the 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges' core priority of advancing student learning, there must also be a strong student support system that is intrusive and intentional in addressing factors associated with student success. Furthering the discussion on the importance of support systems, Hughes (2010) asserted anticipatory advisement rather than intrusive advising is a necessity to advance Black male persistence. Hughes called for providing all Black male college students with advisement and mentoring upon admission rather than waiting until they begin exhibiting academic or adjustment issues.

Student success equates to persistence, completion, and successful transitions to immediate careers or upper division baccalaureate studies, which is the intended outcome of a community college education (Cabrera, Burkum, Nasa & Bibo (2012); Cohen & Brawer, 2009; O'Banion, 2007; Perna & Thomas, 2006; Vaughn, 2006). As 21<sup>st</sup> century community colleges fully commit to affording equal emphasis to develop their support services and co-curricular offerings to be as strong as their curricular programs and learning options, it is expected they will make great strides in enabling students to persist at much higher rates, thereby producing greater percentages of completers who achieve baccalaureate and higher degrees and enter the workforce.

### **Promising Contemporary Student Success Initiatives**

The Carnegie Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina and Hewlett Foundations launched the Community College Pathways program in 2010, to address the issue of Mathematics as a gatekeeper course and barrier to student success. *Statistics Pathway* and *Quantitative Literacy Pathway* accelerate students from developmental mathematics through statistics and other college level math, such as Algebra, to ameliorate the standard time it takes developmental education students to complete required general education mathematics (Crawford & Jervis, 2011; Strother, Campen, & Grunow, 2013; Treisman & Cullinane, 2010). First year results, according to Strother, et al., (2013), were noteworthy, given that 49% of Statway instructed students achieved college level Math credit within one year as opposed to 6 percent of traditional development education-instructed Math students. Presently, over 1,000 students at 41 community colleges are enrolled in Statway Math courses.

Nevarez and Wood (2010) and Prihoda (2011) identified the Achieving the Dream national initiative to promote student success as having a substantial reach in terms of the number of institutions and students it encompasses. Funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education, Achieving the Dream has supported 130 colleges and universities in 24 states nationwide since 2004, and the initiative is especially aimed toward closing the achievement gap for minority community college students. Participating institutions have been provided with funding to collect and use data to develop targeted persistence and completion strategies and programs. The key to the success of Achieving the Dream has been the recognition that the use of data, committed leadership, broad faculty engagement and systemic improvement were necessary to drive

sound policy and program decisions that could lead to improved student success (Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Prihoda, 2011). Myran (2012) cited several indicators of student success and institutional improvement that were achieved through the initiative. Indicators included the number of students who: completed developmental coursework and transitioned to college level; completed college level coursework with a C or better; enrolled term after term; earned a certificate or associate degree; and transferred to a 4-year institution.

The New America Foundation's 2005 *Pathway to Baccalaureate* initiative with Northern Virginia's public school system, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), and George Mason University, is grounded on the premise of early, intrusive student support interventions. The consortium initiative connects college advisors with high school seniors who are experiencing academic, social and financial challenges. The first cohort of 1,700 Pathway students, 37% Hispanic and 17% Black, received advisement, learning activities on admissions, financial aid, and placement testing, and enrolled in a credit-bearing student life skills course, all of which resulted in Pathway students outperforming their non-Pathway counterparts in grade point average, persistence, transfer and graduation rates. The result was a 28% college graduation rate among Pathway students, as opposed to 16% among others (Crawford & Jervis, 2011; Whitmire & Esch, 2010).

### **Non-Cognitive Factors of Student Success**

Non-cognitive variables, as defined in Bush and Bush (2010, p. 41), include such factors as social engagement, motivation, and students' self-efficacy, while cognitive variables are factors such as high school grade point average (GPA), math competency,

test and placement scores. Traditional predictors of college persistence and academic success center on the student's high school GPA and standardized test scores, such as the American College Testing Program (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), as appropriate means for establishing admissions eligibility (Adebayo, 2008).

Contemporary findings assert the traditional predictors of student success in college (i.e. ACT/SAT and high school GPA) have been shown to account for only a modest amount of variance (25%) of a student's academic performance in college as reflected by their GPA (Sparkman, Maulding & Roberts, 2012, p. 642).

ACT Policy Report (2010) also asserts the use of traditional academic factors, such as GPA and objective test scores, are lacking as a holistic approach in determining college student persistence. The report notes that, when coupled with non-cognitive factors, cognitive factors provide a richer basis of determining student success. Also outlined are the results of a recent ACT study which examined the efficacy of cognitive and non-cognitive factors on the persistence of college students. Nine non-cognitive factors were studied in that regard, and it was found that students with academic self-confidence, academic goals, social support, and institutional commitment had the strongest positive relationship to predicting retention. With regard to academic performance, academic self-confidence and achievement motivation had the strongest relationship to college grade point average. The study was limited in that the results were not disaggregated by gender or ethnicity; however, the study's reach was significant in that it was predicated on three national ACT studies on retention practices and six national ACT studies on academic advising. Complementarily, Hagedorn, Maxwell, & Hamptonnet (2007) asserted that research undertaken to examine non-cognitive factors

associated with student success, as it relates to Black male college students, has limited studies to the dichotomies between cognitive and non-cognitive variables, rather than studying these variables independently to uncover their true influence. Summarily, the study gives credence to studies, such as my narrative inquiry, as it posits that institutions need to understand the factors associated with students' success, as students who attain academic success in their college coursework may still be at risk of not persisting if they lack certain non-cognitive skills and attributes (Hagedorn et al., 2007).

### **Black Male College Students: Guiding Theories and Models**

“The vast majority of research on Black male persistence in the 2-year college is influenced by Tinto’s (1975) theory of student departure” (Wood, 2012, p. 307), which posited that student persistence is a factor of a process in which the social and academic systems of a college interact with students, and lead to a series of academic and non-cognitive behaviors that have implications for the students persisting and being successful. The more engaged students were with their peers, the faculty, and the social and academic functions of their colleges, the more committed they were to staying and striving to successfully complete their studies. However, Palmer and DuBord (2013) suggested more research is needed in the development of a viable model of success for Black male persistence in the community college. Grounded in Tinto’s (1975) theory of student departure was Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model of non-traditional student attrition, a model which centered on the role of specific factors such as demographic background, academic and social integration, as well as environmental variables associated with students who had a daily commute to college, students with part-time employment, and students who were adult-learners. In contrast to Tinto’s (1975) theory,

which cited social and academic integration as the key institutional factors associated with student attrition, Bean and Metzner (1985) suggested attention be paid to environmental factors. These factors, though outside the direct purview of institutions, include a lack of finances which could cause non-traditional students to drop out temporarily, or altogether; the need to work, and the detrimental effect employment outside the college might have on a student's ability to use the library or labs or get to classes on time; existing or unexpected family obligations that take time away from studying; a lack of family support and encouragement; and, opportunities to transfer without earning a credential, an outcome which often times leads to loss of credits or drop out due to erroneous information regarding the four-year institution's offerings and support.

### **Detrimental Application of Student Development Theory**

Howard-Hamilton (1997) posited there are many conventional theories and models of student development that have guided higher education in addressing the needs of Black males, albeit being grossly lacking in acknowledging the social, cultural and demographic diversity of student bodies, and ethnic minority students such as Black males. Central to this thinking is the need to create new contemporary student development theories that are intentionally focused and applicable to Black students and Black males in particular (Cheatham & Berg-Cross, 1992; McEwen, Roper, Bryant & Langa, 1990).

However, Harper (2010) maintained it was not necessary to develop new theories germane to Black males college students. He argued that it was feasible to rely on existing theories and models as long as they were used in an "instead-of" fashion (p. 68).

In terms of social capital theory, this meant policy makers and institutions should not belabor Black male students' lack of social capital. Instead, he suggested social capital theory be used to explain how Black males have established viable relationships and connections with college personnel. Instead of using attribution theory to explain the barriers to Black male students persistence and achievement, he suggested the theory be used to describe the individuals, opportunities and resources that propelled their achievement. Critical race theory offers underachievement as being representative of Blacks and ethnic minorities. It ought to instead acknowledge "students of color as experts on their experiential realities and empower them to offer counter-narratives concerning their success in STEM fields" (Harper, 2010, p. 71). Critical race theory can be used as a framework to counter prevailing theories that there is educational equity and an absence of racism for Black males in schools and colleges (Reynolds, 2010).

The moral development of Black male college students could also a factor of their educational success. One poignant example of applying moral reasoning dynamics in assessing students' moral development without regard for ethnicity, race, cultural background, or economic status, is that it could lead to the misrepresentation of the moral development of Black males (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Black male students, for example, may not challenge a rule that their male white counterpart might because, given their race and ethnicity, they know the societal response to their breaking the rule may be more punitive. Would it be accurate to then deduct that Black males have achieved a higher level of moral development? Perhaps not! "African American student development is arguably distinct from student development in general and hence development of this cohort is not adequately accommodated in existing theories and



models of student development” (Cheatham & Berg-Cross, 1992, p. 173). Harper (2009) maintained “race-conscious” (p. 40) high educational impact practices and engagement opportunities are needed to propel the development of racial minorities and Black males in particular. While there has been an abundance of research on the effect of race focused student organization engagement on Black males, studies are needed to examine the impact of Black male initiative programs designed and administered by colleges (Barker & Avery, 2012). A study comprising of 8 Black male participant interviews at a predominantly White institution, examined the impact of an institutionalized Black male leadership program on Black male engagement. Findings showed institutions should design Black male initiatives that serve a critical purpose such as leadership, civic service or career development (Barker & Avery, 2012).

It could also be deemed erroneous to address Black males’ career development utilizing Super’s (1953) and Holland’s (1959) career development theories. The theories indicate individuals seek careers based on the dynamics of their maturity and self-concept over time, and also due to their personal characteristics of heredity and life experiences, respectively. The inaccuracy of the use with Black males would lie in the fact that it might be applied to those who never had the opportunity of a job, the opportunity of an internship, or any hands-on observation of successful career persons. Given the lack of exposure to careers in any real or substantive way, Black male career development would need a different, more applicable theory to use to evaluate their development (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Harper (2010) suggested using a possible “selves” theoretical approach which would require taking into account that opportunities should be provided to Black males to help them envision themselves in viable careers. Owens, Lacey, Rawls and

Holbert-Quince (2010) maintained one of the most useful strategies for addressing career development in Black male students is to show them the career attainment of other Black men.

Chickering's (1993) identity theory can be applied to Black male identity development, however, Howard-Hamilton (1997) posited one would need to include factors such as the importance of developing one's identification with their own ethnic or racial group, as well as the development of relationships with people from other sociocultural persuasions. For Black males, their identity development is propelled when activities or engagements lead to increased racial pride, as well as appreciation of other cultures (Spurgeon, 2009). Therefore, "Chickering's (1993) theory would need to be enhanced in order to properly assess Black male identity development, or some other ethnocentric theory would need to be created" (Howard-Hamilton, 1997, p.20). In studying Black student identity development, research has given emphasis to academic and social integration but not enough to the psychological burdens many Black students face (Strayhorn, 2008). In addressing Black male identity development, Howard, Flenbaugh and Terry (2012) indicated it is their own perception of themselves, coupled with that of external perspectives that together shape who they are. They maintained that even though Black males must take responsibility for constructing positive images of themselves, it is equally important for the "social imagery" of Black males (p. 9) created by society also be presented in a positive light. Henfield (2012) cautioned about placing sole emphasis on racial identity theories as a means of understanding how Black males see themselves. He offered masculinity as being an equally important aspect to be addressed in the identity development of Black males. He also emphasized the "cool

pose” (p. 3) phenomenon Black males use to exhibit their racial essence and masculinity could be a detriment to their development and academic achievement as it wedges them deeper into validating negative connotations of the stereotypical Black male.

### **Ethnocentric Development Theories**

Robinson and Howard-Hamilton’s (1994) Africentric Resistance Model, based on Maulana Karenga’s (1980) value system of seven principles of Nguzo Saba, can also be used to address Black male identity development (Howard-Hamilton, 1997).

“Africentricity represents a strong connection to one’s spirituality and kinship via African culture” (p. 22), and this means Blacks who identify closely with their own race and culture have reached an identity development stage where they can comfortably, and materially, resist all negative messages or experiences that demean or degrade the Black race. The principles of the Africentric model are unity, self-determination, collective work, cooperative sharing of resources, having a purpose in life, creativity in community development, and faith. The model posits that, when colleges and universities use the model to chart programs to enhance Black males’ Africentric development, this action will, in turn, result in their successful matriculation and persistence.

Cross’ (1995) Nigresence Theory posited there are 5 stages of Black male identity development, the first of which is the *pre-encounter stage* where Black males disown their race and adopt a Eurocentric perspective. The perspective of Black males at this stage of development is one where they judge progress as the societal heights one has attained, rather than the degree to which society is making opportunities available to Blacks. The second stage of development is known as the *encounter stage*, where a life-changing experience, or some circumstance, causes the Black male to think critically

about his Eurocentricity and question himself about being Black. Stage three is *immersion-emersion*, and it is at this juncture in Black males' development where there is a determination to depart from being Eurocentric to adopting a more Afrocentric way of life and thinking. At the fourth and fifth stages of *internalization* and *commitment*, Black males fully embrace their ethnicity and culture, and find comfort in their Afrocentric identity. They can now shield themselves from internalizing racial or ethnic insults, they can function well in multicultural environments, particularly those that are predominantly White or Eurocentric, and they have honed a sense of belonging and pride in being Black, which gives them self-confidence and high levels of self-esteem. Howard-Hamilton (1997, p. 23) maintains it is critical that student affairs personnel and faculty understand these stages in Black male students' development so strategic interventions can be created, and implemented, to meet the needs and support the development of this population.

Mason's (1998) model of urban Black male persistence in the community college was influenced by Bean and Metzner's (1985) theory, in that it focused on environmental variables such as finances, hopelessness, and family encouragement as factors of attrition. Unique to the body of work on student persistence, Wood (2012) notes that "H.P. Mason's (1998) model is currently the only published persistence model specific to Black male college students in the community college" (Wood, 2012, p. 308). More particularly, the model is based on a study that examined Black males who dropped out before the end of their first terms; Black males who completed their first term, but failed to matriculate in term two; those who began, but did not complete term two; and, those who successfully completed their first and second terms. Among the study's findings

were; well-defined academic and career goals, study habits, and attendance issues emerged as important factors for persistence. Psychosocial outcomes also surfaced as having implications for attrition, and those included students' perception of the worthiness and practical application of their pursued credential, as well as students' commitment to working toward the fruition of their academic goals.

Based on the aforementioned models of Black male development, Howard-Hamilton (1997) suggested that, to support Black male college student success, colleges should establish peer mentor programs between Black upperclassmen and freshmen, Africentric reading groups, opportunities for male relatives to visit the Campus, community service initiatives that support Black neighborhoods, workshops facilitated by Black faculty, and Black student organizations with a purpose to promote positive aspects of Black culture. The premise is that, by helping Black male students move through the stages of the identity development, they will achieve greater confidence and self-esteem, coupled with the determination to succeed at college. By the same token, if Black males become too Africentric, this could cause them to adopt certain prejudices against anything that is not wholly Africentric, such as their college curriculum and environment, and this outcome could be personally detrimental to them.

### **Relevant Research Studies**

Cuyjet (2006) asserted studies that have produced empirical data regarding factors associated with Black college student success were focused mostly on matriculation, and it is Black women who have been the beneficiaries of targeted college programs. Meanwhile, Black male students were lagging behind in terms of their enrollment and

attainment, as well as interventions that are especially targeted to address the issues they face and support their success. The issue of Black student success is compounded by a lack of research studies and academic works that could be used to inform the development of empirically-based college intervention and student support programs. Cuyjet (2006) cites there are many studies related to peripheral issues like college faculty, public school factors, and sociological factors inherent in the Black community; however, studies that focus more centrally on Black male college students are needed in order to further the Black male college student success agenda.

Cartright and Henriksen (2012) provided insight into a qualitative research study focused on Black male college students who grew up without a father presence in the household. The significance of the study was attributed by the authors to the growing number of Black male college students who grew up fatherless and the impact on their attainment potential. Research shows “the importance of familial support, particularly for Black students, in advancing their educational success” (Cartright & Henriksen, 2012, p. 30). Several themes emerged as part of the research findings, from the phenomenological study, that ought to be helpful to policy makers and practitioners in providing more targeted support for Black male collegians. The research participants reported that having a male role model or mentor was important given the absence of their fathers in their lives. They also stressed the importance of their mothers and the invaluable support they received. And they also expressed a yearning to obtain a college education. Lastly, even in the absence of their own fathers, they all reported a high level of respect of fathers who were in their son’s lives. What was perhaps most significant was their resolve to break the stereotype of becoming Black

male “deadbeat” fathers, by earning a degree and becoming solvent enough to support a family. The practical application for colleges and universities to recognize there are substantial populations of this nature that could benefit from mentoring and being connected to Black male role model.

Palmer and Young (2008) asserted that, while research on the Black male student experience is duly acknowledged, what has been lacking in the research is the disaggregation of the experiences by academic achievement, especially students who are academically under-prepared to persist through degree completion. Comparatively, Cuyjet (2006) raises the issue of a lack of research study data on Black college students disaggregated by gender, while Spradley (2001) indicated there is a deficiency in research study data on Black college male students in that the research focuses mainly on traditional-aged students, and not on adult learners. Cuyjet (2006) noted also that studies indicate the resolve of traditional-age Black male students to leave college is a result of a multitude of factors, such as lack of funding, deficiencies in social, cultural and academic integration and failure to connect with the institution. Spradley (2001) cites a U.S. Census Bureau 2001, report that indicates the number of non-traditional Black male students, 25 years old and over attending college, was up from 143,000 in 1990, to 267,000 in 1995, to 335,000 in 2000. As colleges and universities have recently had to adapt to large numbers of veterans whose tours of duty to Iraq have ended, institutions have also had to continue efforts to address the academic and developmental needs of the Black adult male student. Even though consensus suggests there is a need for additional research, there are studies that have helped to inform the manner in which policy makers and practitioners provide support for Black male college students. For example, Palmer

and Young (2008) stated a preponderance of research studies have examined the Black male experience in colleges and universities in terms of the support, opportunities and challenges they face at predominantly White institutions, as compared with Black colleges and universities. The findings, overall, were that Black male students have more meaningful learning experiences, are more engaged, and persisted at higher rates at Black institutions. More particularly, Black students at White colleges and universities had lower success, as evidenced by their persistence rates, academic achievement, and transition to higher degrees, thus propelling the conclusion that Black male students thrive best educationally at predominantly Black institutions (Bush & Bush, 2010; Harper & Quaye, 2008; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008).

Harper (2010) argued that too many policy reports and published research on Black STEM students continue to focus on determining why student enrollment is not robust and why student achievement is not on par with White and Asian students. He emphasized the importance of using an anti-deficit focus to instead examine the background and experiences of Black students who enrolled and were successful. His National Black Male College Achievement Study (NBMCAS) studied Black male students at various points in their STEM studies. The target population of the NBMCAS was students with grade point averages of 3.0 and above who were actively engaged in student life, established relationships with college personnel, and were the product of high impact practices such as research and internships. Fifty-one Black male STEM majors were interviewed about the persons and experiences that enabled their achievement. Anti-deficit framed research questions focused on what enabled students to make the dean's list and compete for research fellowships and internships; factors that



motivate students to pursue degrees in STEM fields and how students persist in STEM disciplines in spite of rigor and lack of Black peers and faculty, were also among the research questions. Study participants reported having Black male peers and faculty solidified their sense of belonging in their STEM program. They mentioned that their participation in organizations like the National Society of Black Engineers enable them to form relationships with other Black males and strengthen their dedication to pursuing a STEM degree and career.

### **Black Male Experiences at a Historically Black College**

The importance of the study described by Palmer and Young (2008) was that it examined the way in which academic and personal factors have implications for the academic success of under-prepared Black male students at a Black college. The study was qualitative in nature, included interviews with 11 Black males, was complemented by retrospective data, and the results corroborated earlier college student retention research, including Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure, in that it revealed student involvement is a factor associated with persistence. The study found that Black female students are more involved on campus than Black males, a finding consistent with previous research that noted Black male students are increasingly uninterested in campus leadership positions, while females increased their involvement. Another finding is that many Black male students do not get involved because of the absence of Black males on campus, a factor which makes many Black men perceive campus engagement to be socially immaterial. The data analysis also revealed Black male students value faculty interaction to the extent of feeling more connected with their college when professors openly exhibit interest and genuine belief in their capacity to be successful. Lastly, the

study's findings included non-cognitive skills, such as motivation, confidence, and commitment, as variables that promoted student success and persistence among Black male students, versus aptitude and other cognitive measures.

Importantly, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) produce 25% of Black college graduates. There is a wide body of research that indicates HBCUs are more effective at retaining and graduating Blacks than other types of institutions (Betsey, 2008).

### **Best Practices for Black Male Persistence in Texas Community Colleges**

Given there are community colleges in Texas that exhibit a reverse statistic in terms of Black male versus white male graduation rates, Glenn (2007) provides an analysis of a study that sought to identify which Texas community colleges have been successful in graduating the largest percentages of Black males and, equally important, to determine what individual predictors and institutional factors influenced the persistence. With regard to that study, there were two cases established for examination, and the result was that the institutions in Case One had a higher retention rate for Black male students than those in Case Two. The most significant retention strategies employed by the institutions in Case One that could be replicated by the Case Two institutions, included an emphasis on freshman orientation to forge a connectedness among students with faculty, staff and peers. Also included was an emphasis on academic support and counseling for at-risk students, utilization of a committee to ensure any student with a less than 'C' average was assigned to a student success coach, essentially a case manager responsible to monitor the student's class attendance and facilitate her/his participation in tutoring, counseling, and other student success activities. The study also showed that

having an understanding faculty, advertised counseling services, and a concerted investment in professional development for faculty toward cultural sensitivity, were important influences pertaining to Black male college student persistence.

### **National Black Male College Achievement Study**

Harper (2012) studied Black male college students through the National Black Male College Achievement Study, which included interviews with over two hundred actively engaged student leaders in forty-two different kinds of colleges and universities. The study was grounded in anti-deficit thinking and guided by an “Anti-deficit Achievement Framework” (Harper, 2012, p. 6) to better understand Black male student success to the extent that it focused on their assets such as the personal, institutional and environmental resources they perceived helped them be successful, their strategies toward becoming engaged and forming relationships with peers and faculty, their level of interaction in the classroom, and how they navigated instances of racism and prejudice that may have been present in their college experiences. Rather than dwelling on the educational and socio-economic deficits that have long been attributed to Black male students, Harper (2012) sought to discover what success students saw as propelling their success. “The most disappointing finding in the National Black Male Achievement Study was that few participants had been consulted for helpful or potential insights into their success (Harper, 2012, p. 19). Valencia (2010) defines deficit thinking as “a theory that asserts the student who does not succeed in school does so because of his or her own intellectual disabilities, lack of motivation, language or behavioral deficits” (p. 6).

The National Achievement Study produced a series of recommendations synthesized from the experiences and perspectives, shared by the students and proposed

by Harper (2012), as pragmatic ways in which interventions might be afforded by families, educators and policy makers to support the success of Black male college students. Harper notes families ought to focus on the following factors that promote student success:

- Set high educational and career expectations for Black males as early as possible;
- Schools and higher education institutions need to forge initiatives aimed at educating parents and families about college expectations and requirements so families are better equipped to support their sons' pursuit of a college education;
- Institutions need to take a responsive and committed approach to supporting Black student organizations and providing culturally specific and enriching engagement opportunities for Black male students;
- Colleges and universities should commit to partnering with local school systems to offer Black males constructive college preparatory opportunities while they are in high school;
- Policy makers need to lobby Congress for more substantial need-based federal aid; and, educational leaders need to commit to setting aside institutional aid to support the cost of education for Black male students (pp. 21-25).

Harper (2012) provides immense motivation for the dissertation study I conducted as I sought to utilize an anti-deficit approach to studying successful Black males at Frome Community College, and getting them to share reflections, insights, and perspectives on their experiences and how they have successfully navigated their personal and college lives.

## **Persistence Factors**

While the majority of Black male students begin their higher education at a community college, a disproportionate number persist and complete a credential (Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2008; Palmer, Moore, Davis & Hilton, 2010; Wood, 2012). More specifically, in excess of two-thirds of Black male college students do not complete a credential within six years (Harper, 2012; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008). Researchers and practitioners have offered several reasons and policy and pragmatic solutions to address issues of persistence for Black male students, and they span the academic and non-academic gamut.

Glenn (2003-2004) cited a combination of academic unpreparedness, subsequent placement in developmental courses, and a corresponding disheartenment with re-learning high school material, as a cause for Black male college attrition. Given the negative implications for access and participation in higher education for academically disadvantaged students, which would be compounded for Black males in particular, Palmer et al., (2010) discuss the necessity of dismantling a current trend among States to eliminate developmental education from colleges and university curricula because of low achievement rates. Some 50% of all Mathematics and English classes taught at community colleges are at the developmental education level (Glenn, 2003-2004, p.117), which is added evidence of the important need for these courses in bridging the gap between high school academic achievement and college basic skills requirements.

Hagedorn et al., (2007), Mosby (2009), and Harper (2012) aligned Black male student success with family relationships and support, suggesting that strong relationships between mothers and their Black male sons have a positive influence on the son's

persistence and success. The idea is that students who have strong relationships with their families are motivated by the support and genuine interest in seeing them succeed, are desirous of making their families proud of them and, therefore, strive toward that end (Wood, 2012). Student connectedness with faculty and other students is also offered as a factor of persistence for Black male students (Glenn, 2007; Harper, 2012; Mosby, 2009) to the extent that peer friendships, faculty mentorship, and other informal and formal interactions facilitate students' integration with their institution are foundational to Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure. However, relationships are critical even in Black males' pre-college years "to close the achievement gap as a disproportionate amount of adolescent African-American males are not fully engaging in education as a catalyst for their future success" (Wyatt, 2009, p. 463). The importance of Afrocentric mentoring programs for Black male students, in or after-school will help ensure that Black male identity development is addressed during adolescence so development begins to be fostered even before college matriculation (Wyatt, 2009).

Hagedorn et al., (2007), Glenn (2003-2004), and Mosby (2009) associated well-defined, educational and career goals as being positively correlated with the persistence of Black male college students, citing career readiness counseling and workshops as necessary interventions for this population of students. Palmer et al., (2010) found that, even though finances are normally associated with college access, a lack of funding presents a barrier to enrollment and persistence. Glenn (2003-2004) indicated that some 46% of community college students lived at or below U.S. poverty levels (p. 117) and, with the rising cost of tuition, prohibitive textbook prices, commuter transportation, and family obligation expenses, Black male students are already hard pressed to fulfill basic

needs, particularly since need-based aid, such as federal Pell Grants, has not increased (Harper, 2012; Palmer et al., 2010). A 2006, Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) study found that students who were the most economically disadvantaged were the ones with the largest disparities between their financial aid and the cost of attendance, and are the most susceptible to stop out temporarily, or drop out altogether, from college. This study was corroborated by a U.S. Department of Education study that same year that found finances were an escalating obstacle to enrollment and participation in college. Palmer et al., (2010) respond there needs to be interventions by Congress through the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act for the sake of all poor students, especially those who are ethnic minorities and particularly Black males.

### **Social Change Issues**

The implications for social change, as it relates to Black male college students, will become more apparent given U.S. Census projections that Blacks are among the minority populations expected to significantly increase by 2050, while white populations are projected to decrease (Palmer et. al., 2010). Schauer, Osho and Lanham (2011), Harper and Quaye (2008), and Adebayo (2008) cite the work of Sedlacek (1987, 1999) who studied Black college students for 20 years and developed a Non-Cognitive Questionnaire after those years of studying non-cognitive factors associated with minority student success, particularly as it related to Blacks and Hispanics. Factors predicted to influence persistence and graduation among these two ethnic minority groups included positive self-concept, realistic self-evaluation, significant community involvement, leadership skills, strong support system, and ability to navigate the system. In a recent study by Schauer, Osho and Lanham (2011), where they use the Non-

Cognitive Questionnaire to enlist information from 125 Blacks at an HBCU, these researchers found the Questionnaire was deficient in serving as a sound predictor of success of minority students in their study. The research team asserted that, in order to study the phenomenon of non-cognitive factor influences on student success with a greater degree of reliability and validity, studies need to focus on students qualitatively on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration environmental factors, parental involvement in their academics during their primary and secondary years, past health and family issues, and socio-economic background. These recommendations provided an added impetus for the qualitative, narrative inquiry I conducted to understand how Black male's student experiences influenced their college success.

### **Social Capital Dynamics**

There are implications of racial and ethnic dynamics on students' progress toward social and academic integration and, inevitably, their overall success, particularly at predominantly White universities (Morley, 2007; Perrine & Spain, 2008). Pursell, Yazedjian & Toews (2008), Wells (2008), and McDonald (2011) cite social dynamics as useful in providing an explanation of how an individual's association with his or her family, neighborhood and friends, affects his or her academic behavior and persistence in college. These researchers found that students who have prior social capital persist at a higher rate and, even though socio-economic status emerged as a standard variable in persistence studies, social capital variables, such as parental education, friends' plans for college, and a student's own commitment and self-efficacy, suggest a strong foundation of family and fellow peers positively affect college student persistence. First generation college students, matriculate with greater non-cognitive deficiencies than continuing-



generation college students, and the said deficiencies must be addressed by the college if students are to persist and be successful. “Although first generation students often feel supported by their families, this may not play a role in predicting academic behavior unless their parents themselves are degreed or have at least attempted a college degree” (Pursell, et al., 2008, p. 203).

Research has found ethnic minority college students, Blacks and Hispanics in particular, encounter particular experiences at White institutions that impede them from persisting and, subsequently, completing in a timely fashion. Tinto’s (1975) model of student departure is asserted to be a basis on which institutions need to look more closely at creating a learning environment and campus life where these minority groups are able to become fully integrated into the comprehensive fabric of the institution (Morley , 2007; Palmer & Young, 2008; Perrine & Spain, 2008; Sparkman, Maulding & Roberts, 2012).

Important to the discussion of examining race and ethnicity in terms of their relationship to the process of social and academic integration, as opposed to examining race and ethnicity categorically, is that it furthers research that reveals how identity development can have an influence on student persistence, independent of academic preparation or socio-economic status (Bush & Bush, 2010; Palmer et al., 2010). Therefore, even though minority students may lack the social and academic capital of their majority counterparts, it is essential that colleges and universities not dwell on said deficiencies, but, instead, chart support programs that will facilitate student success in the absence of such capital.

Palmer and Gasman (2008) discussed the rich social capital HBCUs possess, and the degree to which it positively affects student success. In a study of 11 Black male students at an urban HBCU it was found that students, faculty and staff, individually and collectively, enabled the HBCU to be a purveyor of social capital. “Faculty mentors and role models provided guidance, nurturing, social networks, and helped socially integrate students in the university’s community” (Palmer & Gasman, 2008, p. 63). “Students encouraged by their fellow students to persist, stay focused on their goals and completing assignments” (Palmer & Gasman, 2008, p. 67). Strayhorn (2008) maintained that while an institution’s social capital is critical in enabling relationships that facilitate Black male students success, social capital appears to be associated with higher levels of satisfaction but not academic achievement. However, Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2010) concluded from a qualitative study of Black males at an HBCU, that the institution’s same race make-up, and the combined mentorship efforts of all college constituents helped propel students’ academic achievement. Wood and Turner (2011) asserted there is a strong correlation between faculty and Black male student success as reported by 28 Black male students, in a qualitative study undertaken at a southwestern mid-sized community college. Important elements reported the study included addressing academic progress, motivating students, and helping students resolve concerns.

With regard to specific policy and institutional imperatives that ought to be forged to address issues of integration for Blacks, there are some that include the formation of ethnicity groups such as, Black Student Unions, the execution of Black Heritage Month events, and Black fraternities, which need to be strategically managed so they do not advocate or hinder multicultural interaction and integration (Walters, 2007). Bush and

Bush (2010) note institutional change should manifest itself in greater academic purpose for minority primary and secondary students to the extent of providing students with a core curriculum that is known to positively affect student persistence; one where teachers are consistently re-certified to teach said courses in addition to multicultural training (Palmer et al., 2010). College admission efforts that do not simply strive for a quota for freshman class of Blacks, but more strategically, evaluate students' potential to overcome their academic disadvantages can benefit Black students without reinforcing the racial and ethnic hierarchy (Walters, 2007). Lastly, institutions should make a concerted effort within the purview of the curriculum, and co-curriculum, to create intentional opportunities for inter-cultural collaborations that foster dialogues and raise consciousness about cultural commonalities and differences among minority and majority students (Morley, 2007; Palmer et al., 2010).

In a 2006, report from the American Council on Education, Palmer and Young (2008) disclose there was an increase of 42.7% in the rate of matriculation of Black males in colleges and universities from 1993-2003, albeit a remaining gender disparity that was progressively growing. With regard to less-than-favorable college matriculation rates among Black males, Glenn (2007), Palmer and Young (2008), and Palmer and Strayhorn (2008) attributed the dismal statistic to sociological issues, such as the preponderance of Black males who are advised throughout their K-12 tenure that they will not make it to college. Additionally, there is the frequency with which Black male students are placed in special education programs while in elementary secondary schools, thereby leading them to earn special diplomas that preclude college admission. Another factor is that Black male students are disproportionately excluded from school through suspensions

and expulsions which, in turn, predispose their thinking about school and, inevitably, their college-going behavior. Emdin (2012) asserted that given the achievement gap between Black males and other students, policy makers and practitioners must acknowledge the value of examining pedagogical and support approaches unique to Black males. Educators need to employ distinct instructional modalities to motivate Black males to become better learners.

### **Literature Relative to Research Tradition**

While my dissertation study, which employed a narrative approach, took place at Frome Community College, “even when qualitative researchers study institutional narratives, it is people who are seen as composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 43). Given my interest in compiling a composite story of perspectives and experiences as they relate to adult Black male college student perceptions about the non-cognitive factors that influenced their college success, I have selected a narrative inquiry research tradition as an ideal approach to support my study. Narrative inquiry is the study of lived experiences as expressed by those who have engaged in the experience. As with this narrative study, where I interviewed Black male college students regarding their perspectives on non-cognitive factors that influenced their success, the practice with narrative inquiry tradition is for a researcher to enter into a relationship with participants and interview them to glean information about their experiences in a particular regard. Then, through analysis and interpretation, the researcher composes an account of the expressed experiences into a cohesive story that has the capacity to offer recommendations for improvements, as well as potential opportunities (Wells, 2008).

While narrative inquiry is a widely-used qualitative approach in research studies, the extensive literature review I undertook only unfolded a few narrative inquiry studies whose focus was Black males and Black male college students in particular. Emanuel's (2009) study, for example, examined the experiences of successful African American males to identify factors associated with their overall success. The study used a narrative inquiry approach to examine the effects societal and environmental factors had on ten African American males' overall success. Given the lived experiences of the research participants, there were four overarching themes that emerged, which included family, community and the impact of religion, as well as educational experiences. Even though this study explored the lived experiences as they related to the factors that influenced their success over and beyond their educational attainment, the study's findings provided insight for strategies that could be used to facilitate academic performance and achievement.

Myer's (2012) narrative inquiry study explored the persistence of African American males in community colleges. The study, guided by Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007), engaged fourteen male African American college students who ranged in interviews that questioned them about various aspects of their college experience. The study findings showed positive personal, social and environmental factors boosted African American males' resolve to be academically successful and rise above barriers to their success. The study conclusions drawn from the findings were that family and institutional support have an impact on college attainment for African American male students, subtle racism exists on community college campuses, and Black male community college students are motivated toward success because of their desire to

counteract negative stereotypes. Highlighted are recommendations for further research that included anti-deficit approaches, other than examining the college experiences and perspectives of African Americans who did not persist in their major. It is also recommended that similar studies be undertaken with institutions in other parts of the US, which was the direction my study took. Whereas my study used anti-deficit theory to exhibit the assets Black male college students possess, future research (Myer, 2012), is suggested in terms of using Critical Race Theory to refute the stereotypes regarding Black males and to reveal the capabilities of Black males.

Chesson (2009) used narrative inquiry to learn about the lived experiences of Black male students where Critical Race Theory was used to deconstruct participants' perspectives about what it took to be successful college students and the impact of race. The data collection method was interviews using a purposeful sample of six Black male university students in good standing at Colorado State University. The questions from the interview focused on the impact of school teachers and guidance counselors, peer and faculty engagement, support services, and campus environment. Themes that emerged included participating in a rigorous high school curriculum and enrichment activities that focus on Black student issues, and engagement in and out of the classroom with university faculty and with other Black male students.

Ross' (1995) narrative inquiry research design sought to uncover factors associated with the successful achievement of 17 Black male students, born in the U.S. and abroad, at an HBCU. The study also sought to determine that positive role models for Black males do exist among the population of Black college students. Interviews and purposeful sampling were used as the methodology which revealed findings about

successful Black male students, such as family, was the most significant factor in their lives. Religion and spirituality also played a role in their lives. They had a strong work ethic, and commitment to succeed and serve as positive examples for other Black males.

### **Summary**

Given the knowledge about the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the important national imperative of the U.S. to substantially increase the proportion of college graduates to more than 60% by the year 2025, the national college completion initiatives have been advanced and funded by the Obama Administration, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation, and The College Board, all of which have engaged community colleges in data-informed programs aimed at transforming college policy and programs, as a means of boosting persistence and completion (Harper, 2012). As the issue of Black male educational attainment pertains to social change, Wells (2008) discussed the degree to which a higher education and credential is the most impacting equalizer for persons in society. Lucas (1996), Brown (2012) and Levin and Montero-Hernandez (2009) asserted that community colleges have long been hailed as environments for the democratization of high education opportunity. Since a disproportionate percentage of Black males attend 2-year colleges, it is critical that said institutions become more proactive and attentive to supporting Black male students. Albeit an ongoing disparity in earnings and socioeconomic status exist among Black males and their White counterparts, college degrees continue to serve as enablers in terms of aiding persons to move up the social ladder. This reality means there is a social responsibility on the part of policy makers, colleges, and universities to specifically address the issue of low Black male educational attainment, whether the venue is

historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), community colleges, or other types of higher education institutions (Wells, 2008).

When one reflects on the historical and social attributions of Black male educational attainment in America over time to the present, coupled with the deficit thinking paradigm that has been predominant among educators and policy makers (Harper, 2012), it is clear that Black males deserve better as a population of society. Given the body of literature this review encompassed, this study is grounded in the premise that, in order to improve the success of Black males college attainment, a series of intrusive interventions and supports must take place, individually and collaboratively, among policy makers, educators, and students themselves. There is no one single solution to mobilizing the improvement of attainment of the Black male. What is grossly apparent, however, is that there are numbers of Black male college graduates who are enjoying the American Dream. We can certainly study their successes and ‘*clone some of those success recipes*’ to improve the level of success for multitudes more Black male students. As a nation we must, more concertedly and collaboratively, build upon the assets of our Black males from early on to ensure they earn college credentials and begin to contribute in substantial numbers to our domestic growth and the elevation of the U.S. in the world economy.

Chapter 2 has reviewed the literature relevant to this study, and briefly referenced the methodology that will be employed. Chapter 3 will comprise of the research design, methodology, participant selection procedure, data collection and analysis methods that will be utilized in the study. Chapter 4 to come will outline the data analysis, while



Chapter 5 will offer recommendations for further study and implications for social change.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to understand and tell the stories of students' experiences during college and what they suggest contributed to their success as students.

A total of 14 Black male college student participants were selected for this study through purposeful sampling using criterion based logic. The participant group comprised of recent graduates and near-term graduates. The researcher engaged 8 participants in individual interviews and convened a focus group of 6 participants. Protocols of questions guided the interviews and the focus group session, respectively.

The interviews and focus group meeting were audio recorded, and verbatim transcriptions were developed and member checked. The researcher then constructed narratives from each transcription, and the narratives were member checked. The narratives were analyzed through open and axial coding in an effort to identify recurring themes. These themes were further analyzed as a means of answering the two research questions of this study which centered on Black male students' college experiences and their perspectives on what made them successful students.

Narrative inquiry was used in this study as a means to reveal students' own spoken experiences about how they were able to successfully navigate the college system despite personal, institutional, and environmental variables that are ever present in the lives of college students. These voices are needed to create well-informed policy and programs to support other Black males. This would potentially motivate a much-needed paradigm shift in how society views Black males.

The literature review for this dissertation notes that Black males are plagued by significant educational attainment issues that begin in elementary school and accumulate through secondary school to college, with the result that they are disciplined more than their White peers. They are discouraged by teachers and guidance counselors from aspiring to college, and are placed in great numbers in exceptional education classes (Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer et al., 2010). However, Black males are also completing college, and they are using those degrees to transition successfully into the workforce and into graduate and post-graduate learning environments. There is a great benefit to highlighting such achievements in an effort to motivate Black males to strive more readily to realize their potential.

It is meaningful when an opportunity is provided for successful Black male students to give voice to their lived college experiences. This creates a healthy venue for intrinsic reflection on the part of the students, and it has the capacity to promote greater self-confidence and esteem. There is also opportunity for the potential of Black males to be heightened within society in terms of their pathological and intellectual assets. This also has positive implications for a great benefit to society for Black males to be afforded every opportunity to achieve the American Dream.

#### Research Design and Rationale

The two research questions for my qualitative study were: What are/were the college experiences of successful Black male students at FCC? What are/were the reasons these students suggested for their college success?

The study methodology for my study was a narrative inquiry. The selection of this qualitative approach was beneficial because it facilitated the relay of ideas through

narrative, human stories of my participants. Narrative inquiry is grounded in Dewey's theory of experience, particularly as it relates to his thinking about situation, continuity and interaction (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004, p. 50; Dewey, 1997, p. 51). Dewey's (1997) criteria of experience include the setting or environment in which the experience is taking place, which is the community college in the case of my research study.

Secondly, Dewey's idea of continuity was associated with examining past, present, and future experiences to identify solutions to the issue being addressed. Dyson and Genishi (1994) theorized that narratives help transform what takes place currently to shape a future that is much better than what students and communities are experiencing in the present. Narrative analysis, according to Wells (2011), is used to examine the content, structure and context of the narrative to gain meaning of a particular phenomenon.

Clandinin and Connelly (2004) described narrative inquiry as a means toward understanding a particular experience. In the case of my research study, understanding was pursued through the experiences of Black male college students through a focus group and interview relationship between me, the researcher, and selected Black male college student participants. The methodology elicited stories that relate to the human experience in a way that this experience is voiced by the participant and re-told by the researcher. The notion was that individuals make sense of themselves and the world through narratives (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Chamberlain and Thompson (2004) offered similar thinking regarding the relationships that evolve from narrative inquiry, given that time, place, the occasion, the researcher and participants become interwoven. Clandinin and Connelly (2004) also offered the view that:

An enquirer enters into this interview matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social ( p. 20).

The words of French philosopher Sartre (1968) are a powerful view of the depth of meaning about peoples' life journeys and experiences that narratives contribute.

People are always tellers of tales. They live surrounded by their stories and the stories of others; they see everything that happens to them through those stories and they try to live their lives as if they were recounting them. (p. 58)

Based on the literature that exists about narrative inquiry, I feel justified that utilizing this qualitative research methodology has helped me fulfill the goals and objectives of my study.

Narrative inquiry was therefore most applicable for my research study as it facilitated my examination of the college experiences of Black male students at FCC. I was not only able to share the narratives of Black male students through this study. My analysis of the narratives has enabled me to make conclusions and recommendations around programming that would inevitably further the college success of Black male college students. Through interviews and a focus group I conducted with the Black male participants in my study, I sought to understand their life experiences, in terms of their personal and educational lives, in an attempt to piece together a cogent story of who they are, as well as factors they perceive to be related to their educational attainment.

Ultimately, I sought to identify challenges and deficiencies experienced by Black male college students. However, more importantly, I have through my research

identified opportunities and assets that have propelled their educational success. In turn, I have been able to recommend solutions that will support other Black male college students in the pursuit of educational attainment.

### **Qualitative Traditions Considered for the Study**

Phenomenology was a serious consideration on my part because, like narrative inquiry, it focuses on the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2012; Klenke, 2008; Merriam, 2009). That method, however, is best suited for studying human experience as it relates to phenomenon such as emotion, imagination, intuition, and other affective aspects of the human experience, albeit not providing a context for the sharing of accounts (Merriam, 2009). Another notable comparison between narrative inquiry and phenomenology I took into account was that, while narrative inquiry studies provide accounts of the lived experiences of individual participants, such as the Black male college students in my study, phenomenological studies provide accounts of the meaning for multiple individuals of their lived experiences and what they have in common given a specific phenomenon.

Ethnography focuses on the culturally informed behavior of a people, and it is conducted through a “lengthy stay and immersion in a given social setting” (Merriam, 2009, p. 28). Since it seeks to uncover phenomenon such as cultural beliefs and corresponding behaviors and ways of existence of a homogenous group of people, it was not a feasible method of inquiry for my study.

Grounded Theory is a unique form of qualitative inquiry in that the intent is to the generation of a theory that is grounded in the data that has been collected (Merriam, 2009; Urquhart, 2013). I rejected this method of inquiry since the intent in my study was

not to create a theory to explain to explain the lived experiences of the students, but rather to report the stories and make meaning of what experiences are associated with the success of Black male college students.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for my qualitative study were:

Research Question 1. What are/were the college experiences of successful Black male students at FCC?

Research Question 2. What are/were the reasons these students suggest for their college success?

### **Role of the Researcher**

As an administrator at Frome Community College and the researcher for this study, I exercised an open, unbiased mind in undertaking the research study. While Janesick (2000) maintained there is some bias in all research designs, and Morse (1994) made a similar assertion, Creswell (2012) argued for “clarifying researcher bias at the onset of a study” (p. 251). It is important that in the clarification, the researcher should be prepared to articulate any pre-conceptions or existing prejudices and preferences that might have implications for the approach of the study. Merriam (2009) noted, “The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 15), and they have their human ability to immediately seek clarifications and engage in “member checking” (p. 15) for inaccuracies with regard to participants’ responses.

Pragmatically, as the researcher, I conducted the focus group and individual interviews, and developed transcriptions of the study. Once I transcribed the recordings, I performed accuracy checks on my own transcription by reviewing the recordings and

my transcriptions to ensure I had a verbatim transcription. I also followed Merriam's advice and employed 'member checking' with each participant, by sending them their personal transcription that pertained to their individual interview and sought their confirmation of its accuracy. I also kept a journal so any personal perspectives or beliefs that came to mind as I performed the data collection and analysis were documented and bracketed during my analysis of the data. I continue to be genuinely, both personally and professionally, interested in this research study and its potential contributions to social change as it relates to Black males and their potential to contribute to, and enjoy the opportunities of mainstream America. I held myself accountable that every precaution against self-bias was taken so the recommendations I made were based on data and findings that were accurate and valid. I was also purposeful in the participant selection process.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Criteria**

The participants for this study were Black male adult college students in clear academic standing, between 22 and 45 years old, enrolled in their last term at Frome Community College, or having graduated in the most recent term. As noted in the *Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection* section, several department directors were enlisted in the recruitment process and provided the criteria for inclusion. Students who were identified as meeting the said criteria were invited to engage in a focus group meeting of no more than 90 minutes. An additional set of students were invited to participate in an individual interview lasting no more than 90 minutes, and, a member-checking exercise of approximately half an hour. Participants were asked to provide a



copy of their Frome Community College degree audit as confirmation that they met the criteria as outlined above.

As indicated in the *Ethical Considerations and Protections* section of this proposal, in an effort to confirm the interest and permission of the participants, they were provided with a Study Overview/Letter of Participation (Appendix A), which includes a brief description of the study, the problem statement and research question that guided the study; and a Consent Form (Appendix B) that each participant signed, which assured them full confidentiality of their participation and disclosures during the study.

Pseudonyms were used for all research participant names as outlined in the ethical procedures section of this chapter. Data will be kept for five years, stored in a locked file cabinet in my home, plus on my personal computer which is password protected. After five years all hard copies of data will be destroyed and electronic files will be deleted from my computer, including the 'Recycle Bin'.

**Sample Size and Strategy.** The sample size for this study was originally set at being sixteen participants. Eight participants were to participate in the focus group meeting; however, only six showed up and participated in the actual meeting. And an additional eight participated in individual interviews. I believe the interviews of the selected Black males have generated a rich body of data related to their college experiences and what they perceive contributed to their success as students. Creswell (2012), Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), and Merriam (2009) maintained that sample sizes should be small in qualitative studies as a general rule; however, it is equally critical to the meaningfulness of the study that wide-ranging detail be gathered about the few

individuals selected as study participants. With regard to narrative inquiry, in particular, it is commonplace to have one or two research participants (Creswell, 2012, p. 157).

There are two basic forms of sampling according to Merriam (2009), of which probability sampling facilitates the generalization of study results from the random sample to the larger population it represents. Probability sampling is not feasible for qualitative research since qualitative researchers are compelled to select participants who represent the lived experiences about which the study seeks to relay.

This study used a purposeful sampling approach to identify the research participants. Purposeful sampling is an approach in which a researcher sets out to decisively identify and select a sample from which he or she can learn the most (Merriam, 2009). For example, since my narrative study is to learn firsthand the experiences of Black male college students at a community college, and their perspectives on what has enabled their college success, my intent cannot feasibly be to select freshman Black males students who are just beginning their college experience. I selected near-term graduates and graduates since they represent the specific population of my study.

Creswell (2012) maintained three decisions are necessary when a researcher resolves to engage in purposeful sampling. First, the researcher must decide on which participants will be selected: Second, the specific sampling strategy must be identified; and, third, the size of the sample must be decided. In narrative inquiry, the researcher is more concerned with who the participants will be as they will need to exhibit the lived experiences that will help the researcher answer the research question (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Cognizant of Creswell (2012) and Merriam's (2009) recommendations, the specific strategy I used in my non-random, purposeful sampling was criterion sampling. Criterion sampling entails using a set of specific criteria upon which to base one's selection of the research participants (Merriam, 2009) and, in so doing, the researcher strives to ensure the criteria are aligned with the purpose of the study. Foundationally, each of the students I engaged met a specific set of attributes as outlined in the aforementioned participant selection criteria section of this chapter. These criteria essentially served as an overarching guide that helped to ensure I selected participants who had lived the experiences the study sought to explore.

### **Instrumentation**

The research protocol I developed for the study consisted of a focus group protocol of open-ended questions (Appendix C) and an interview guide of a series of open-ended questions (Appendix D). The rationale for having a focus group, as well as individual interviews, was to be able to benefit from responses that emerged as a result of the focus group dynamic and environment. Individual interviews do not provide the dynamic that helps participants recall an experience because another participant shared a story or circumstance. Therefore, the rationale for having both focus group and individual interviews was to broaden the richness of the aggregate data I collected.

My study explored and revealed, from Black male college students, their feelings, thoughts and lived experiences relative to their educational attainment at the community college. Even though observation is a data collection approach common to qualitative research, it does not allow researchers to ask specific questions as to perspectives and experiences as an interview protocol does (Merriam, 2009).

The development of both the interview and focus group protocols of my study were informed by Patton's (2002) question types that urge the use of experience and behavior questions. The idea is to glean what the respondents have done by exploring how they have acted in certain environments, and what opinion and values address what they think about a particular phenomenon. Both of my interview protocols included 'feeling' questions aimed at evoking responses relative to the affective domain of respondents, and 'background' questions that related to the demographics of the respondents.

### **Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

To recruit prospective participants and reduce bias, I enlisted the assistance of the directors of Frome Community College's TRIO Support Services Program (a federally funded student support program for economically disadvantaged students), Disabled Student Services Program, Student Life Department, Advisement & Career Services, and faculty advisors of student organizations. I met with each of the directors to familiarize them with the study, including its purpose, criterion, the research questions I sought to answer, and the time commitment required of participants. Given the cohort format each of the above-named programs follow, directors are familiar with their student cohorts and, therefore, equipped to identify potential participants based on the required selection criteria. Each director and faculty advisor was asked to invite and identify five students who met the selection criteria. From the aggregate group of students identified, I placed the names in alphabetical order, and began to contact students by phone and confirmed my participant pool of eight for the focus group. Only six showed up on the day of the

scheduled focus group meeting. I continued the same process and confirmed eight additional students for the individual interviews.

At the time of the phone call for the focus group and for the individual interviews, I read the consent form to my prospective participants, and emailed a copy to each participant which they signed and brought with them to their interview. Participants were then provided with the date and time of their focus group interview, and their individual interview dates, respectively. I contacted the remaining students and thanked them for offering to participate and indicated that they had not been selected to participate, but could be at a future time.

### **Procedures for Data Collection**

I served as the moderator of a focus group of six Black male students, as well as the interviewer of eight Black male students, from whom I gleaned perspectives about their college experiences and suggestions as to factors associated with making them successful college students.

Participants for the focus group and individual interviews were recruited and selected as outlined in the section entitled, *Procedures for Recruitment and Participation*.

Upon arrival for the focus group meeting, the six participants were asked to read the Study Overview (Appendix A) and turn in the accompanying signed Consent Form (Appendix B). The meeting was then conducted with the group of participants. The meeting was recorded to capture all data accurately, and a verbatim transcript was prepared from the recording.

For the individual interviews, each of the eight participants at their respective meeting times were asked to read the Study Overview (Appendix A) and turned in the

accompanying signed Consent Form (Appendix B). The interview was then conducted and recorded to capture all data accurately. Verbatim transcriptions were prepared from each of the recordings, and these transcriptions were subsequently shared with the respective participants to further ensure accuracy of the content. No additional interviews were necessary with the participants. Additionally, once the verbatim transcriptions were member-checked, the data were reconstructed into individual stories to make sense of the transcripts. In narrative inquiry, it is this reconstruction by the researcher that gives voice to the thoughts and perspectives of participants in a comprehensible manner. Participants received a copy of their respective stories and were asked to review and revise them for accuracy. There was no need for revisions.

Focus groups are defined as ideally having six to twelve persons, for whom a moderator guides the discussion and promotes discourse about the issue in question (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Focus groups are used most often as a preliminary stage of research as a means of adding insight to the results obtained from a survey or individuals interviews (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 17). As suggested by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), I integrated the use of a focus group for added insight, albeit the central focus of my study was the eight respondents who participated in the individual interviews.

Focus groups are most beneficial when research participants are a homogeneous group where all are made to feel comfortable about sharing, and the interaction among participants is guided in such a way that no one person dominates the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Patton, 2002). One advantage of focus groups is the capacity of the researcher to collect data from participants' own articulated

experiences, as well as the perspectives they share in response to what other participants have shared. Focus groups are also advantageous to research studies such as my study in that they provide data from a group of participants more quickly than is possible through individual interviews. This element of synergy among participants is not attainable through individual interviews and, thus, the data collected could be significantly different and add value to that of individual interviews. The group dynamic is also beneficial in enabling the moderator to make early notations about commonalities and variations in the lived experiences of participants whereas that opportunity is absent in the individual interview process.

Disadvantages of focus groups are the group is often dominated by an opinionated participant who leads the group in a particular direction of discussion. Additionally, if there are shy participants, they may be less inclined to share as readily as desired, given the group dynamic. This was the case with my focus group of six, where indeed, there were two participants who dominated the meeting with their willingness to share liberally. Moderators serve as observers, listeners and, eventually, analysts according to Krueger and Casey (2009), which is the role I played.

Merriam (2009) asserted that, in all qualitative approaches, either some or all data are collected through an interview process as was the case with my study. In my study, it is my opinion that the interview and focus group meetings generated a meaningful body of data which served to assist me in answering my research questions. “Interviewing in qualitative investigations is usually more open-ended and less structured as this allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). As such, my

questioning used an open-ended approach with the flexibility for follow-up questions in which I engaged as necessary.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process for my study included my careful review of each audio recording and subsequent transcription to ensure accuracy. Merriam (2009) asserted one of the most efficient and meaningful ways to analyze data in a qualitative study is to begin analyzing inductively during the data collection process. The rationale is that this approach allows the researcher to further “focus the study, make important decisions about the study as it progresses such as the need for additional respondents or the enhancement of questions given the responses of previous respondents” (Merriam, 2009, p. 171). During my repeated review of the transcriptions to hone deep familiarity with the responses, I used inductive analysis to identify narrative areas and search for patterns in the data that I deemed had a direct correlation to my research questions. Then I used the Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) data analysis software, to facilitate the retrieval of pertinent data for my development of individual narratives, and the subsequent coding and categorization of themes. It is through this process of inductive analysis that I developed narratives and emailed them to each of my research participants, requesting them to review the narrative and provide comments indicating any areas of inaccuracy or misinterpretation on my part.

According to Merriam (2009), coding facilitates the process of making sense of one’s qualitative research study. Codes serve as a basis for discussion and comparison as a researcher collects and codes the actual data until the researcher is satisfied the codes summarily explain the phenomenon.



Once I performed open coding on the data, I used “axial coding” (Merriam, 2009, p. 180) to group the initial codes into categories. For example, through open coding, I assigned codes such as *community service*, *volunteering*, *campus job*, and *participation in college events* to certain pieces of data. Through my axial coding process, I grouped those three codes into a category called *campus experiences*. This is the process I employed with all narratives until I reached ‘saturation’, which was described by Merriam (2009) “as the point at which you realize no new information, insights or understandings are forthcoming” (p. 183). Once I was satisfied with the number and essence of categories I developed, these served as the foundation of my findings and, ultimately, the answers to my research questions. The findings also facilitated my development of recommendations, as outlined in Chapter Five.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Merriam (2009) provided recommendations of strategies that promote trustworthiness as it pertains to internal and external validity. Webster and Mertova (2007) indicated; “the trustworthiness of narrative research lies in the confirmation by participants of their reported stories of experience” (p. 99), that is, member checking. I used “member checks” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229) as a means of engaging my research participants in reviewing, checking and providing feedback on the transcription of their interview, as well as the interpretive narratives that emerge from inductive analysis. Conducting member checking on the interview transcription, and providing feedback on the interpretive narratives constitute the process of “triangulation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 299) which Merriam indicates as strengthening the confirmability of a study given the use of multiple methods to provide corroborating evidence. Conducting a focus group

and individual interviews, as I did, is also considered a form of triangulation in establishing dependability, given the potential to corroborate findings.

To facilitate transferability of my study, I have provided sufficient “*thick descriptive*” data, as recommended by Merriam (2009, p. 227) so that my study findings may be applied in other college environments and replicated in settings elsewhere (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In my study, there are detailed descriptions of the research design and findings, including quotes from the research participants.

### **Ethical Procedures**

No part of the actual research for this study was carried out until a full review had been conducted of my research proposal and approval received from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I also completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) Human Subjects Protection Training Module (Appendix E). To ensure research participants had the opportunity to contact my Dissertation Chairperson in any regard, the Chairperson’s telephone and email contact information was provided on the Consent Form.

I followed the ethical protocols described in Merriam (2009), by ensuring I had not discussed the personal disclosures of any participant with another. Additionally, I used aliases and pseudonyms when referring to participants and the institution, respectively, so that full privacy and anonymity were preserved.

As noted earlier in this chapter, in an effort to confirm the interest and permission of the participants, each was provided with a Study Overview/Letter of Participation (Appendix A) outlining the study and its process, and a Consent Form (Appendix B) which assured them of the anonymity of their disclosures and their prerogative to

withdraw from the study at any time, and without penalty. The process of enlisting the informed consent of research participants was a critical step in attempting to ensure participants fully understand their rights and responsibilities, and the need to be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate (Merriam, 2009). The informed consent associated with my study addressed the overarching purpose of the study and the specific data collection methodology, the means by which participants' anonymity will be preserved, and disclosure of any risks associated with the study (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

The above-mentioned requirements and cautions guided the manner in which I conducted my study. The pseudonym, Frome Community College (FCC), was used in transcriptions and concluding statements of my study. Even though the actual names and signatures of the participants appear on consent forms, those forms, as well as recorded interviews that bear participants' actual names, are now kept separate and apart in a secure cabinet at my home for a period of five years. Alias names appear in the transcriptions and in the report of the dissertation study. A caution Merriam (2009) indicates, is that ethical dilemmas can arise at any time during a research study and that, no matter how established an institution's code of ethics may be, "actual ethical practice comes down to a researcher's own values and ethics" (Merriam, 2009, p. 230). In the instance of this study, no ethical issues arose.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 introduced narrative inquiry as an ideal qualitative approach for my study. The Chapter also provided an in-depth view of the research design and methodology, data collection and analysis, participant selection and recruitment, and

issues of trustworthiness and ethics. Chapter Four presents the data and in Chapter Five, I delineate my interpretation of the findings, conclusions and recommendations for interventions and further research.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to understand and tell the stories of eight Black male students' experiences during college and what they suggest contributed to their success as students. This chapter presents the findings from interviews with eight Black male college students who were college graduates or in their final term of study. The resulting narratives present the students' personal stories of their college experiences through their respective voices.

The results of the study centered on recurring themes related to the college experiences of participants as well as their perception of what contributed to their college success. Findings emerged from the researcher's analysis of the transcriptions and narratives. The college experiences of the study participants included their engagement in on-campus employment, college event attendance, volunteerism, student organization participation, and tutoring and advisement assistance. Participants shared that the following contributed to their success as college students: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, relationships with campus personnel and family members, positive emotions, and factors related to their ethnicity.

### **Collecting the Data**

The data collection process used for this research study was described in Chapter Three as it relates to recruitment, selection and the recording of data. Several Student Services Directors at Frome Community College (FCC) were enlisted to identify potential participants based on the study criteria communicated to them. I provided each of them with Walden University's and FCC's authorizations to conduct research. Each

director identified five potential participants, from which I confirmed eight for the focus group meeting, and eight additional students for the individual interviews. The recruitment process took two weeks of telephoning 34 students, leaving messages, and awaiting return calls until 16 willing participants were confirmed as the sample.

A focus group meeting took place in a study room at the FCC library with six participants and two no-shows. This focus group session was guided by a protocol of open-ended questions (see Appendix C) and was audio-recorded and transcribed. Member-checking entailed follow-up phone calls with the participants to determine accuracy in areas that I felt I needed clarification.

The individual interviews took place in a study room in the library. A protocol of interview questions (Appendix D) was used to guide the respective interview sessions. Each participant received a transcript of their interview to check for accuracy; all participants confirmed that the transcripts were accurate. I then prepared a third-person narrative giving voice to each participant based on their respective personal college experiences, and their perspectives of what made them successful college students. These narratives were then emailed to each participant to be further checked for accuracy and to ensure that I had captured their voices. I analyzed these narratives and determined that the same ideas were being generated by each of the eight respondents and no unique thoughts were being presented by participants. Additionally, as I reviewed and analyzed the data through open and axial coding, I found that there were consistent themes among the participants, which indicated that saturation had been reached.

Chapter Four is structured in two-parts to facilitate the presentation of my findings in two distinct ways. The first part essentially comprises of the eight participant

narratives. In the second part, I present my findings through an analysis of emerging themes and formal responses to my research questions.

### **Organization of Data**

Part I of Chapter 4 is comprised of eight narratives based on the perspectives of my research participants' college experiences and what they suggest contributed to their college success. The narratives are credible because they have been member-checked and are real in terms of their descriptions of the college experiences of each participant. I begin each narrative with what I inferred was one of the participants' most poignant quotes as it relates to my research questions. Each narrative then continues with a retelling of the corresponding participant's college experience story.

Part I is essentially an attempt to answer my first research question, "What are/were the colleges experiences of 8 Black male college students at FCC? It is important to note that the very purpose of my narrative inquiry was to answer my research questions through the individual stories of participants' college experiences. The narratives simply present the voices of the participants while also capturing perspectives that offer recommendations for enhancements. The researcher reflection at the end of each story is my own personal reflection.

### **Part I: Findings Illustrated through Participant Narratives of Experience**

The entire sample participated in individual interviews. The data collection process took three weeks, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

*Participants' Enrollment Status*

Participant	Student Status	Date of Interview
Aaron Arnaud	Near term graduate.	April 28, 2014
Brian Barnave	Near term graduate.	April 28, 2014
Carl Christian	Graduated; currently enrolled at state university.	April 29, 2014
David Dewars	Graduated; employed.	April 30, 2014
Elijah Eglise	Graduated; currently enrolled at state university.	May 8, 2014.
Francois Furnot	Graduated; currently enrolled in FCC's Baccalaureate program.	May 9, 2014
Gary Gabiddon	Graduated. Employed.	May 12, 2014.
Harry Holmes	Graduated. Employed	May 12, 2014

## Research Question 1.

What are/were the college experiences of eight successful Black male college students?

**Aaron Arnaud**

My philosophy is, if someone did it before me, I can do it too, even if I have to sacrifice. I came here to get my degree here, then my Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. (Aaron Arnaud)

Aaron was a part-time student studying Biology at the time of the study. He previously attended high school in Haiti and did not speak English when he came to the United States. As a result, he enrolled in ESL classes to learn English, which was very difficult for him. He was determined to learn English, and he sacrificed a lot to make sure that he studied and took his classes seriously. Aaron indicated, "I see too many people playing around, like doing all the things that do not relate to college. I'm going



forward. So I know it's hard, but I'm going. I'm not going to stop. I have to achieve my dream, so I'm here to do whatever I have to do to achieve my dream.”

He felt his major was a difficult one, and even though other students continuously told him that Biology was very hard; he was not going to succumb to say that it was impossible for him to succeed at it. His philosophy was that if someone did it before him, he could do it too. Aaron proudly related that his parents were Haitian, and “Haitian parents make sure you know when you are growing up that you will be going to college. You don't have a choice, you just know you will go to college and get a degree”. And so, Aaron always knew he was going to college, and he always dreamed of being a doctor and working in a hospital. “I really want to do that, and so that was my dream since I was five years old, really long before high school, and I will never stop until I achieve that dream”.

All through Aaron's time at FCC, he worked part-time in the Financial Aid Office while also going to school at the same time. The job gave him the opportunity to get good work experience, but most of all it gave him the money that helped him pay for college.

Aaron spoke with great enthusiasm about being a member of the Haitian Ibo Club and the good experiences there because of his active involvement. “I got involved and I have been able to learn a lot about the college and what is happening, such as the special events for students, scholarships, and internships. There are a lot of speakers that come to meet us in the Ibo Club. I have also made new friends at the campus, and many students in the Ibo club depend on me to help them with financial aid information since I work in the department”.

Aaron was also a STEM ambassador, and he described that as a program where he took new students on tours of the science complex. STEM ambassadors were also peer mentors for new science majors, and as an ambassador he was also a peer tutor in the lab. The whole point, as explained by Aaron, was to help other students to learn about STEM, and be interested in being a STEM major.

Aaron's professors had been good to him, especially in Biology where he went to his professors' offices all the time for extra help. Aaron felt some of them expected him to work harder than others, but he was fine with it because it would prepare him for the future. For example, his Chemistry professor was really intense but Aaron did well because he did his. Aaron stated that, even though he'd complain about his professors, he always got good grades because those situations required more sacrifices, and he was always ready to make sacrifices to get ahead. Aaron's desire is to transfer to Ferris University (pseudonym), which he claimed is very competitive, so he knows he has to work hard to get into that school. He advised he knows the Chairperson of the Chemistry Department very well, and that individual gave him advice about medical school and the courses he needs to take to get into medical school. Aaron also had an advisor, Mr. P, who helped him a lot with making a decision about Ferris University, and he did an IEP (individualized education plan) so Aaron knew exactly what to take every term.

Aaron also did volunteer hours on campus tutoring Math. He felt too many students have problems with Math because they don't have the foundation of Math, and they need to take every Math class seriously, "from the beginning because if you're in Calculus, you are going to have trouble if you did not take Algebra seriously. Even now, I go to the Math department to get some tutoring myself, because I'm good at Math but

not perfect and I still need help. Basically, you just need to try your best with everything”. Aaron concluded that the professor can explain something a thousand times and you’ll never be able to understand unless you make the effort yourself. He felt FCC provided everything for students to be successful, but that the college needed to add more workshops for new students, and to encourage students to get more involved because that’s how they would get to know what is available to you on campus.

Aaron’s hero is his mother because she works really hard, and she put him at FCC. She didn’t go to university or college, “but by looking at her she’s my inspiration. She is one who taught me what hard work will bring to you, and how important it is to make sacrifices. My success as a doctor will be for me and for my mother”.

Aaron’s advice to other students, who are like him, is to do their best. He reiterated his belief that if you try hard, you should be able to pass your classes. And if we want respect, students have to do much more than playing around. He qualifies that, when he says ‘playing around’, he means students need to spend more time studying and less time at the club. “We can do better and we all need to do better. If students start thinking I really want to do something with my life and believe in it, they will succeed. We all have something we love, we all have something we believe in and we all have something we want to achieve in life. So if you really believe in what you want, you should motivate yourself to work hard and achieve it. That’s what I have been doing”.

#### Researcher’s Reflection

Aaron was very enthusiastic about the interview, and he articulated with a sound sense of purpose that he had good experiences at FCC. He struck me as a realist and someone bent on succeeding, given the fact that he mentioned that his major was a

difficult one that he knew he would have to work extra hard to be successful. I saw before me a highly motivated young man with a vision for completing a terminal degree as he spoke enthusiastically of getting his Associate degree, and then moving on to a Bachelor's, Master's and MD. He spoke intelligently about his future transfer institution, which again is very commendable in terms of his established goals.

Evidently, his college experiences were rich, not to mention an inspiration to him: He was a member of the Haitian Ibo Club, where he benefitted from the diverse array of activities the Club offered for him to learn important college-related information, such as, scholarship and internships, and for him to be actively engaged. Additionally, he was a STEM Ambassador where he assisted others to learn about STEM and the associated careers and opportunities. And, he served as a volunteer Math tutor on campus, which he insisted that every student needs to take Math seriously from the beginning since most students do not receive a good Math foundation. His outlooks about working hard to achieve, coupled with how engaged he was, made him a model for other students to strive to have similar college experiences.

### **Brian Barnave**

I wanted to do college and succeed, and that's what really motivated me, my family and myself; it was me pushing myself. (Brian Barnave)

Brian is 26 years old. He graduated from an inner city high school in 2006, and went straight to college, but he spent three years of high school in Haiti. He had to learn English when he came to the U.S., and it was very hard; but he did. "No one else in my family has a college degree, but my family always stressed the importance of an education while I was growing up. School was very important in my house". Brian

preferred school here in America because in Haiti there is one teacher that teaches you everything, but here you have the opportunity to learn from many different teachers.

When Brian started FCC, he was required to enroll in the lowest level remedial Reading and Mathematics courses, of which he ended up failing Math, hence retaking it the following term. Shaking his head, he relates he took remedial courses for five terms, while concurrently enrolled in college level courses, for a total of seven years going to school on and off, part-time, and working.

Brian said, “I have an EMT Certificate and Associate in Science Degree and, at the end of this term, I’ll have a Bachelor of Applied Science Degree in Public Safety Management”. He proudly asserted that he had come a long way not knowing what he really wanted to do when he first came to FCC. When he first got to FCC, he really didn’t know what he was going to school for, until he had my son. So from then, he had a real reason to go to school. He admits that at first, he was going to school because his parents told him to go, and he decided to study Business because it seemed easy, but it really wasn’t what he wanted, so that’s why he was in and out all the time.

“When my son was born and I had my own family, he became my motivation and I knew I had to get my head straight. I didn’t want to end up in a dead end job and not be able to support my family. I wanted my son to look up to me, and I wanted my wife and daughter to also look up to me and be able to give them a good life”.

Brian’s plan is to get certified in homeland security after he graduates this term. He is trying to go on to the federal government and work in homeland security because he feels there are more opportunities there.

At the time of this study he was working part-time as a detention technician at a local jail and getting paid well, and Brian indicates he was able to get this county job because of his associate degree. On the job he inputs information in the computer. Without him nobody comes in or out of the jail, and so he is in charge of incoming and outgoing staff and visitors. His disposition changes when he indicates that he feels he is literally in jail with them, and that he feels he's in a box every day and wants to move out and up.

“Here at FCC, I don't do too much but go to class since I have the job at the jail. I haven't really attended too many events, but I'm always around Mr. D. I went to a meeting that Mr. D. told me about. It was a father and son meeting about how to act in certain situations. It was really about being Black and how to react if you're stopped by the police”. It was after the Trayvon Martin shooting when Brian attended the meeting. It was of great interest to him, and it gave him some ideas he hadn't thought of before. Since he works in a jail, there are a lot of Black men there. Brian related that survival in jail and out here as a Black man is about being mindful of what you say, and how and when you talk about certain things. At five years old, his son tells him some things and he asks him where he heard those things. What Brian says was most significant, however, is learning that, whether it's his five year old son or a policeman who stops me to ask me a question, it's important to be mindful of how you respond, and that you should always be calm, think first, and never react, but respond.

At school, Brian does not really mix a lot because he does not stay on campus too much because of his job. He does not speak in class unless spoken to; but, if he ever needs the professor he speaks with him after class. He just recently started sitting in front

of the class; so, if he needs help, he will ask but does not just talk in class since he is a quiet guy. Brian reiterates he is polite because that's the way he was raised, and he says hello if he sees his professors in the hallway. At first he thought he was shy, but while he now realizes he can hold a conversation, he just feels like staying to himself most of the time. Brian attributes this to his experiences and asserts that, when you're buddy-buddy with everyone, you get yourself into trouble. And that's the way his parents are too; they just stay to themselves and with the family all the time.

“As for advisors, it's just TRIO and Mr. D., and that's all I need and want. Because I met Mr. D. through my wife since she used to be in a program with him when she was in high school. I can go talk to Mr. D. whenever I want. Anything I need to discuss, or anything I need, I can go talk to him because it grew to that. We have a father-son relationship, and it's not just school or financial aid; it's family situations and life... we just talk”. Having Mr. D. has helped Brian a whole lot as he stated that, sometimes you need help, but you don't know who to talk to because you feel some people will just tell you what they think you want to hear so they can get you out of their face quickly. But when you know someone the way he knows Mr. D., even if he doesn't have the answer, he'll go the extra mile to get the answer. There were many times when Brian needed help with certain things and counted on Mr. D because he has a handle on things. Brian insisted that having Mr. D. really helped him go through college easy, and go through the courses easier on his own. Brian gave the example of the inmates in the jail where he works, particularly those in the detox unit, and he indicates you can't just look at them and think they're a bunch of junkies. He feels most of them went through certain things in life and they didn't have anyone to turn to; they were out there on the

streets with no one to talk to. Brian indicates that is why he goes back to saying how important it is to have someone he can talk to at school, like Mr. D., and he feels it should be a man, even though there is nothing about women; but, for him personally, he think young Black men tend to listen to Black men. Brian tries to talk to the young inmates and tell them how to change their lives, but many of them just don't get it. Education is the way out, but many of them don't realize it.

“I'm in the Black Men Collegiate 100 program, and I like our group because we are a group of Black guys who want to get an education to better ourselves. I feel like our society pushes Black men towards sports and fashion, rather than making sure we care about getting a good education. I also joined the Ibo Club, and I got to know a lot of Haitian students. We wanted to keep our culture alive, and we did activities for Haitian Flag Day and we did volunteer work in the community to send supplies to Haiti”. Even though he didn't care too about being in school at one time, Brian emphasizes that now he definitely sees the importance. He realized after his son was born that there comes a point, whether it's working at McDonald's as a manager, or anywhere else where you're getting a decent paycheck, you're going to need a college education, and the majority of Black men don't have that and they're not looking that. Brian indicated they're looking to be rappers and making the fast money. “I mean they put more effort into selling CDs on the street than coming here. But it's important to reach out to the Black students here at FCC because they're escaping their regular life to come to school. They come here for classes, and they go back to their community and their neighborhoods. So, while they're here at FCC you have to do things like this Collegiate 100 to positively influence them”.



Brian gets financial aid, and it helps him pay for his classes. He was able to meet Mr. R. in financial aid because of Mr. D., and he needed him because he was on academic probation for a while and they were going to take away his financial aid. But he is sure Mr. R. helped him out because of Mr. D., and he is thankful or he would have had to take out loans, and loans, and more loans. “So basically, both of them played big part in me being successful and finishing up my classes, even both of them probably don’t know it”.

Most of Brian’s advisement was from Mr. D. and someone he referred him to in the Criminal Justice department. “At first I had gone to advising, but it was all over the place. I was getting classes that were wrong and teachers I didn’t like. You really don’t need advising cause you can go online yourself and see what courses you need to take. Students need to take responsibility for themselves”.

Brian says Mr. D. is his role model. He sees so many students who come to TRIO and they basically adore Mr. D. He feels Mr. D. must be frustrated and aggravated with students sometimes because of all their issues, but he’s like a father to many of them. Brian said, “He’s the father some of them never had”.

So the advice Brain has for other students like him is to get out of the crowd. One of the mistakes he says he made was that, at first, he was one the students who would sit out there in the breezeway and talk to girls and other friends, knowing he had schoolwork to do. That habit made him do badly in his classes because he wasn’t doing his assignments or studying. “Also, you find that you’re wasting the government’s money when you get financial aid and you’re basically not serious about school. So really, it’s

about getting out of the crowd, joining a program that you're interested in, and getting to know someone like Mr. D. who is like a mentor”.

Brian feels FCC is a good school, and that everything is provided for the needs of students. One of the biggest things he sees students complain about is financial aid, so he suggested that FCC needs to give students information about applying early, so they apply early and get their financial aid early. He does not see any barriers for Black male students because students need to make the best of whatever situation or school they attend. He sees a lot of the Administrators at FCC are Hispanic, and the Black students talk about it. But he thinks if students focus on educating themselves they can change that and get some of the opportunities for themselves in the future. Brian feels there is something at FCC for Haitians, Jamaicans, and African Americans. He reiterates the importance of TRIO, Collegiate 100, and financial aid, and those are all resources that are vital for students to be successful at FCC.

#### Researcher's Reflection

Brian had a very serious demeanor throughout the interview. The many instances in which he spoke with great emphasis about the need to focus, and the need to know what one wants and work toward it, confirmed to me time and time again as we conversed that he is a disciplined and principled young man. It became apparent to me that, although his college experience was perhaps not as rich it could have been due to the many times he stopped out and perhaps lost momentum, it was his own self-determination that was a consistent force throughout. His college experiences included being a member of TRIO and the Collegiate 100 and, even though he was a member, he was not actively engaged in program opportunities those two entities offered. In fact,

with TRIO it was the mentorship with Mr. D. that constituted his engagement and a most significant connection with FCC. That experience of going to Mr. D. to resolve all issues, college related and life related, was huge!

An important part of Brian's college experience was his full-time job at the jail he went to each day after classes. I believe this is what continues to propel him forward in his college degree pursuit, as he saw hopelessness in the inmates, and particularly due to the recidivism of which he spoke in the interview.

### **Carl Christian**

The atmosphere in my neighborhood wasn't that great, and I wanted to do better. I just turned it on when I got to FCC, like to this day I have not missed a single day of school since 2009, I take it seriously, and I take it so seriously because I'm determined to better myself. (Carl Christian)

Carl is 24 years old. He stated he grew up in a city that has the highest murder rate and highest Black population of people in the state, and he hears gunshots almost every single night at home. Carl graduated from his neighborhood high school in 2011, and went to FCC immediately after graduation. He was full-time at FCC every semester, and he made the Dean's list every semester until he graduated last December and started university. His major at FCC was Building Construction, and he is still doing well now that he has transferred to a university. He wants to finish his Bachelor's degree and start working so he can begin to help his mom.

Carl's mom raised him as a single mom, and she worked tirelessly and sacrificed much just to give Carl and his brothers and sisters, just anything and everything she didn't have growing up. Carl saw the sacrifices she tried to make for him and his

siblings. He had a cousin who was the first in their family to graduate with a college degree, but in his house he is the first. He wants to make sure that when he starts a family, he will be able to provide and set a standard for the rest of his family. Carl dreams of taking care of his mother so she won't have to work after she retires. "And that was really a primary goal and dream for me wanting a college education. I want to take my mother out of the work force. She has worked enough".

Carl wasn't considering going to college at one time because he was kind of lazy in high school. He hardly went to school because he didn't like waking up early, so he just chose to stay home a lot. Overall, high school was a good experience for Carl, but the only bad thing was there was a lot of bullying and peer pressure. He didn't succumb to any of it, but many of his friends did. Also, he had a lot of friends and, unfortunately, many of them were killed during high school. He noted, "The atmosphere in my neighborhood wasn't that great, and I wanted to do better. I just turned it on when I got to FCC, like to this day I have not missed a single day of school since 2009, I take it seriously, I take it so seriously because I'm determined to better myself.

Carl heard college professors were hard and they gave a lot of work. He said, "It was my cousin who talked me into going. It's a crazy story because I was graduating high school and I didn't know where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do, so she talked me into coming to FCC". His cousin was part of a big brother-big sister program, and her sister was married to someone at FCC. "So Mr. Y. introduced me to Mr. T., and Mr. T. introduced me to Mr. D., and ever since I was a part of TRIO. TRIO definitely made all the difference for me in college because I spent very little time outside of TRIO; so all my experiences were either in class or in TRIO. I learned, I volunteered, I worked

part-time, I mentored, I was mentored and everything was just awesome because of TRIO”.

Carl thanks his cousin because she saw he had potential and she didn't want it to go to waste. Carl also takes credit for knowing he had potential, but claims he was lazy and didn't want to work; however, once he got in the FCC environment it was TRIO and Mr. D. pushing him, and Ms. M. pushing him. Once he got into the classes and realized it was not so difficult if he put out effort. In his first semester Carl got 1 C and 3 As, and that was the first time he was actually disappointed and cared that he got a C. Before in high school, it was just like nothing if he got a bad grade. When he sees other people around him doing better, he knows he can too. “I know I can do this, so I need to, yeah”!

Once Carl became part of TRIO he would go in for tutoring because he had college algebra and statistics he needed help with. Many times, he would also just go in to get advice from Mr. D. on what classes to take or just to talk about life in general. Mr. D. would give Carl opportunities to volunteer, and Carl volunteered even though many times he really didn't want to. He joined the Collegiate 100 Black Men organization, helped with campus tours when new students came on campus, and told them what it would take to be successful college students. “I felt I owed it to TRIO and Mr. D. because they gave me the tutoring I needed and they gave me a grant. They were like a family outside of my real family. They gave me a place to be, something to be a part of, a bigger picture, something bigger than myself. I knew I was being held accountable to a certain standard when I was part of TRIO and that helped me raise the bar on myself. They just did so much for me; they're still doing a lot for me because I work there part-time. I don't know where I would be right now if it wasn't for TRIO, and I say that

honestly all the time. And it was my turn to give back”. It was Carl’s second semester and he was taking a Speech class and doing a project on Gandhi. One of his favorite Gandhi quotes was, “Be the change you want to see in the world”. Carl stated that was what he later did in TRIO when things changed from him getting services to him providing services. Because he would wait on a ride home, and sometimes that was for several hours, he would ask Mr. D. if they needed help with anything. Carl did little things around the office, and soon he was offered a job as a Math tutor and a Peer Mentor. He was able to help many students who were in his position coming into college, not knowing if they could make it, not knowing if they had it in them, and needing someone to extend that olive branch...giving them a word or two of encouragement, and giving them services like tutoring or other resources. Carl was given the opportunity to benefit from those services and relationships, and he don’t want the opportunity to escape. So any opportunity, he was always there, and he got a job opportunity with TRIO and ran with it.

During his membership in the Collegiate 100, where the club met once a week to discuss issues facing Black males in the community, Carl also attended meetings of the 100 Black Men of Florida because that was the organization Collegiate 100 members were supposed to join once they graduated college. Carl said, “The 100 Black Men were like mentors to us, and they came on campus to speak to us about how to make sure we could be successful”.

Speaking about his relationships on campus Carl noted, “I had great relationships with my professors, because I’m a guy that takes my education seriously. I always in my professors’ office hours, and they have always been willing to help me. And, by the way,

I always sit in the front of the class, every class. This is advice I give to every single student about using their professors' office hours, and getting seen and heard by sitting in the front row". Carl was proud that Professor G. wrote him a recommendation letter for a scholarship, and it was because of Professor S. that he did a project and learned so much about Gandhi. "I see them all the time even now in the hallways, and when I do it's like seeing an old friend or family member. And back to seriousness about school, even though I get financial aid, I feel as though that money needs to go to proper use and that's another reason I stay focused about school. So the advice I have for other students like me is to get out of the crowd".

Carl believes he did everything right when he came to FCC, and so advises he would tell other students to do exactly what he did as that is the reason he is doing so well now that he has transferred to a university. Carl's advice is that all students should be serious about their education, study hard, and want better for themselves and their family. They should become a TRIO student if they can, and then everything will fall into place for them like it did for him. Carl's view was that students should always think about giving back by helping other students to get ahead, like he did at FCC through clubs, organizations and otherwise.

Carl feels you never know how good you have it until you don't have it anymore. Now that he has transferred to a university he really cherishes everything he had at FCC. Carl recommends that "FCC needs to keep the TRIO program going, and hopefully it can serve more students", and he reiterated every student should be able to get the services and resources TRIO provides, especially since there are many high school students like him who don't know what they want to do after high school graduation. "They don't

want to go to college but they think like I did that college is not attainable. Send more college students and advisors out to the high schools to meet with us Black guys to encourage us to enroll. I'll be the first one to come with you to my old high school. It's hard growing up in an area where you see guys from when you were five years old to when you are 20 years old and they are in the same place. I didn't want to become that, I really couldn't and I don't want it for anyone else".

#### Researcher's Reflection

It was clear to me that Carl's life was centered on the TRIO program from his first year until he graduated. Even as we conversed he was a student at a four-year institution; however, he was a part timer in TRIO at FCC. What I saw was a tremendously grateful young man who felt he owed his college success to TRIO. His college experience was rich, and there was a look of great satisfaction and endearment when he spoke of his college experience including tutoring, advisement and mentoring in TRIO. He spoke proudly about being a volunteer in TRIO, which later led to him being hired as a part-time tutor in TRIO as well as a peer mentor. The reason I noted his college experience was, in great part, influenced by TRIO was because his ride home each day was not until the evening, and he spent all his out-of-class hours throughout the day in TRIO. His involvement in the Collegiate 100 organization and his engagement with prospective students taking a campus tour were also important to his overall experience.

It was apparent over and over throughout the interview that the relationship he was able to build and maintain with TRIO, and his mentor Mr. D., was a focal point of his experience. Carl also had close relationships with his professors, which he described as "great relationships". When I think about the crime-ridden neighborhood in which



Carl lived, I saw how his attachment and close relations with advisors and professors may have been an important substitute for the neighborhood residents with whom he felt he didn't belong.

### **David Dewars**

You need to be on time for everything, not late. What I notice with Black guys is we have the same tendency as rappers being late to all their shows. Be where you gotta be 30 minutes earlier than you need to be. If you do that it will help you at school, on your job and in your own life. (David Dewars)

David is 26 years old. He graduated a term ago in December with an AA in music education. He shared that he went to a fairly good high school here in the community, and he was a student who went to class and never skipped. "There were a lot of bad influences at my school and I could have done a lot of things, but I chose to look over those things and stay on top on what I had to learn. That's why I was able to come to college". At first he wanted to go to the army, but they didn't take him because he wasn't able to turn in his medical records on time, so he started at FCC in 2010, and took three years to complete his degree. David said, "I'm proud of myself because I'm first in my family to graduate from college". Even though David was full-time every term, at first he had to take remedial Math and Writing classes his first term, and he had to repeat classes such as English Composition 2, Nutrition, and Intermediate Algebra; thus, he got delayed a little bit along the way.

David appreciated his time as a student at FCC, because he actually got his first real job working at the college in the library part-time and, as he was in school, it really gave him a chance to learn how to balance everything, such as his social life, work, and

school work. So all together, the student experience gave David a new sense of understanding that, if you don't have time management, you could lose everything like your grades, your job and even your sanity.

David also did some volunteering on campus for an annual Thanksgiving event, giving out turkeys to the students. And also for the Children's Holiday event, he volunteered there and helped with setting up the event and also staffing the lines of children waiting to get into the play areas. David also volunteered to speak to new students and give them advice about the dos and don'ts of being successful at FCC. He would advise them that "the most important thing is to stay focused on what you need to do, and do your assignments and your studying without leaving them for the last minute", like he had done sometimes. Also, with the new students, he was a chaperone and had to show them around the campus on a tour so they would get to know the buildings and all the programs at FCC.

"I had a very good relationship with my professors, and the professors I didn't talk to are the ones whose class I did not do well. I don't know if maybe some were just grading me according to my work if they didn't know me. And the ones that I joked with and even made them laugh many times graded me according to my work, plus my character and the effort I put into my work. I got good grades, and I mean really good grades, with the ones I talked to because I guess making the connections, and me making those connections, helped me do better in my work". With his music and math courses, David got really good grades in those classes and he had a great relationship with those professors. He also got good grades in English and in Philosophy because he connected with the teachers. He disclosed he went to their office hours anytime he needed help in a

class and couldn't figure things out himself. "I took responsibility, so I wouldn't be like ducks sitting in water. I took things into my own hands so I could learn and pass my classes. I also did some service learning, and that's how I got my first job at the library. I started by stacking books and organizing the shelves, then they hired me after a while".

David attributes the biggest help he ever got at FCC being financial aid. Without that help he does not think he would have made it very far. He noted the aid helped him to get to achieve his AA degree, given that it paid for everything. David also received tutoring in the Math lab plenty of times. Even when he really didn't need tutoring he went anyway because he liked Math, and as it got harder he was glad he went and was able to pass his Math classes.

David's advice to other students is to be successful you need to be on time for everything, and not be late. "That's my bad tendency. I learned from a friend when he told me that he leaves about an hourly early so he can be there at least thirty minutes early for where he needs to be. So I'm learning to do that for my own good". He also advises students to think seriously about what they want to study in school and, once they decide on what it is, David advises students to work hard at it. "Work on it in class and in your spare time. It's important to be serious about what you want to do so you're not changing majors and wasting time switching degree programs". David observed too many students switching from one degree to another, and remarked that he switched a couple of times from art education to music education, and then he wanted to switch to music business. David was emphatic in his words around students needing to find out what they want to do in school and as a career, to not waste time, and simply "get straight to it". His advice to students also included the importance of joining the TRIO program

because of the invaluable help it gives students to get through college, as it did for him. David cautioned about financial aid that “if it doesn’t come through on time, my advice to students is they should ask for a payment extension so their classes don’t get dropped”. He feels students need to take responsibility for themselves at school and make it their business to ask, because that’s what he did to get an extension on paying his tuition. He suggested, “Join a club, get involved. If you know people, they can help you get through any problems with college”.

David indicated FCC was lacking in that it didn’t open up its basketball court for students to play; he was indignant that FCC had a court that was all locked up. “There are too many Black guys here that have nothing to do after class, so they just go home and hang out in their neighborhoods”. He felt FCC should use sports or music, and “get students together to make beats in the recording studio, and that bringing them to see the recording studio would get them excited, get them involved, and get them to learn the skill of broadcast and production”. David also felt FCC needed to do better at getting information to students, given the norm was for them to hear about events one or two days before instead of in enough time. “We need to have a reason to stay on campus, and then students will be more successful”.

David is interested in furthering his education at FCC. He has already earned an AA in music education, but now he is thinking of getting a BAS in music business. His career goal is to start his own business, so he will be able to become independent and move out of his parents’ house. With pride in his voice David shared that he knows how to do a lot of the engineering behind music, and that he even helps people with that in his spare time. He also plays the piano, and he actually goes back and forth in articulating

his baccalaureate study goals as to whether he should continue in Music Education or Music Business. David's real goal is to become a music producer as he is already good at producing beats, and knows he could be successful as a producer.

#### Researcher's Reflection

David was a jovial young man with a keen sense of humor. His mood was cheerful and at ease throughout the interview. His mention of his best grades coming from the professors with whom he had a close relationship, to me, meant that he likely worked harder in classes where he felt more comfortable. His experiences stemmed from his part-time job on campus, for which he expressed extreme gratitude. It was his job that enabled him to hone time management skills in terms of balancing his college, work and social life - it was a real influence on him in a positive way. While he did not join any student organizations, he was well connected to FCC through his volunteerism at campus events and as a student ambassador for new and prospective students.

Many students take financial aid for granted, and they usually lament about the arduous process. It was interesting that David mentioned how the biggest help he got at FCC was financial aid in that, since it paid for everything, it helped him graduate. I felt that his inclusion of financial aid in the same breath as his service learning and part-time job experiences was a unique factor, which was absent from other students' perspectives of their college experiences. Of interest to me also was the importance David placed on how helpful student organizations could be for students, even though he was a member of none due to his job requirements.

**Elijah Eglise**

It's because I apply myself, and did what was supposed to be done, what was necessary; it's been an amazing journey, from advisors to faculty, and I have a long lasting relationship with many faculty members here. (Elijah Eglise)

Elijah grew up in Haiti where he went to a Catholic school that was very strict. He wore a school uniform, had devotion every day, and it was very different from his school here in the U.S where he came to finish high school. It was a culture shock when Elijah moved to the U.S. from Haiti as the language was different and the behavior of people was different. His mother had a fear of him getting into the wrong crowd in public school here in Florida, so she sent him to live with his godmother in a suburban part of Tampa. So he first went to a high school here in our inner city community where there were gates and doors being locked after the bell rang; and in Haiti, there was nothing like that, not even school police. After he graduated from high school in Tampa with a 3.7 GPA, Elijah moved back to his mother's house and started working in retail. As he was making good money at the time he did not attend college because he had to work and help his mother with the bills. Elijah had been accepted to a state university, and he did not want to blame anyone for not going, but he doesn't think anyone was really pushing him hard enough to go to college. Elijah qualified his statement by indicating his mother was very strict about education and she always pushed him, but somehow he had a choice and decided to go to work so the family could be better off at the time. Then the recession hit, he lost his management position, and was offered a sales associate position. That is what made him decide to go to college.

So Elijah arrived at FCC, ready to register one day and received the worst customer service ever. He knew all about customer service since he had worked in retail. But at FCC, he said “I had to wait about 45 minutes to see an advisor, only to be told I couldn’t see an advisor or get registered because I had missed one step that needed to be done online”. He got upset, his ego kicked in, and he decided to forget about FCC and go to a proprietary school nearby. He was just looking for an easy way out, even though he admits that manner of thinking is not good most of the time. Well you live and you learn, and three months in Elijah learned the school was not accredited, so he ended up being \$6,000 in debt. “I learned not to blame anyone but myself because if I had done my research, if I didn’t look for the easy way out, I wouldn’t be in that situation. So I made my way back to FCC”.

Elijah was an International Relations major at FCC where he got his Associate in Arts degree in two years; he is now studying at a university completing his Bachelor’s degree, and he wants to go to law school in the future. He is considering becoming an attorney, plus teaching History part-time because it interests him a lot and he realizes one of the problems with our youth is that they don’t know their history. So Elijah has some options he is thinking about and, “I’m determined to make it happen for myself”.

Elijah worked part-time in the Computer Department with Mr. B., and when Elijah got there he was asked if he was sure he really wanted a college education. “Mr. B. asked me if I was sure. I said that I was sure, and it was at that point that I made the choice that was going to apply myself and get my college degree. It was all a personal choice for me”.

Elijah concluded that FCC had the necessary resources for students, but it was up to students to go after them. He gave the example that Mr. D did not go to his house and bring him into the TRIO program, but that he happened to be walking by and seeing a flier he went in. Elijah's connections flourished from then on. His boss in the Computer Department introduced him to Mr. M., and he ended up joining the Pan African Student Association of which he was president for the organization in his second year. He also joined Tropical Beat Caribbean Student Organization, and from there the Haitian Ibo Club, and the Investment Club. Elijah joined many clubs because he knew that by being so involved he would expose himself to many different people and opportunities that would make him a better student and a better person. Elijah believes it's not about the change one makes in terms of earning money, but the change one can make in someone else's life. The organizations also helped Elijah to be a voice who could help other students not make the same mistakes he made. As an immigrant, Elijah also felt it was important to reach out to other immigrants so they could look at him and say 'if he is able to be successful, they could definitely do it too'.

Elijah cherished his relationship with his professors at FCC. He was able to build close relationships to the extent that he would ask his professors to help him promote the Pan African Student Association. He excelled in most of his classes, and he felt that also helped to solidify his connection with his professors. Elijah said his professors saw that he was a serious student who was driven to succeed, so he did not have any problems getting recommendation letters from them because they all knew him very well. He also connected with the TRIO program and felt indebted to Mr. D and Ms. M., but said he does not know how to repay them. They were always there for Elijah with school issues



and things that had nothing to do with school when he needed advice. Mr. D. and Ms. M. helped Elijah with his transition to university. He received Math tutoring there, and he considered them to be his mentors since he could discuss practically any issue with them and get advice. But Elijah firmly believes that students have to apply themselves like he did. Even though FCC has all the resources, Elijah cautioned that students need to take the initiative to seek out the resources or else they are of little benefit. Elijah also participated in many community service activities like a breast cancer walk on campus and a relief effort for Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.

Elijah's mother is his role model. He lost his father ten years ago, and his mom stepped up and worked two jobs to support him and his sister. Elijah respects his mother highly in that regard. He said "*My mother is my hero*", and after he started working at the retail store he told her it was time to retire, and she did. Elijah and his family are still able to live comfortably, and for that he is very proud.

But there are other people who were very helpful to Elijah, and the top two were Mr. B, his boss in the Computer Department who gave him the part-time job on campus, and Mr. M., the advisor for the Pan African Student Association. Both of them were very important to Elijah's success in college.

Elijah's advice to other students is to apply themselves. "I know my generation is a microwave generation where we want everything fast and easy, and we're not willing to work for it. When you're looking at a career sheet, don't just look at the column where the salary is listed, look at the courses and what the career is all about to see if you're really interested. You need a passion for whatever you will be doing in life". One of the things Elijah also did was to give motivational talks to other student organizations. He

told other students the story of his transition from high school to college, and what it took to be successful at it; “I also used the story of all my experiences at FCC, and I made it real for the students”.

#### Researcher’s Reflection

Elijah was the epitome of an engaged student! It was truly refreshing to converse with him and hear about his leadership experiences and activities in the three different student clubs in which he was a member. He had a part-time job on campus and this, coupled with his full involvement in student life, enabled the incredibly close relationships he was able to make with students, professors and advisors. He was very thoughtful about his responses, always linking his perspectives of his college experience to a piece of advice he’d want to give to other students. It was as if all of Elijah’s engagements were done with intention to better himself in a particular area, or add to his exposure in a certain arena, which I found to be profound. In fact, while other participants spoke of their good relations with faculty and the invaluable help they received during office hours, Elijah was the only one who included in his response specificities, such as the recommendation letters he procured, as well as the help from professors in recruiting students for his three student clubs. I thought that was powerful!

Elijah was highly motivated and you could tell he had a vision for himself as a leader. His culture played an important role in informing his college experiences as evidenced by his involvement in three clubs that were of a Caribbean and African cultural focus. He mentioned his Haitian heritage multiple times, and his community services off campus, like the breast cancer walk and Haiti earthquake relief effort, solidified my

thinking as to the manner in which he was methodically engaging himself in a wide range of significant experiences to better actualize himself.

### **Francois Furnot**

School is the place to further your life, so take that step that's all you need to do, take one step and stick with it; then believe in yourself that you're going make it and you're going see the difference. Because four years ago, I had the same idea and wow, four years now I can say oh my God, I graduated with my Bachelor's.  
(Francois Furnot)

Francois is 32 years old. He grew up in Haiti where he finished high school and immediately started college. Although he earned a degree in mass communications in Haiti, he still had to get a U.S. degree; so, and he spent four years at FCC where he earned an Associate in Arts degree and a Bachelor's degree in Film and Television Production.

As Francois' mother wanted a better life for her family, they travelled from Haiti to the United States in 2006. When Francois came from Haiti he experienced a culture shock like anyone migrating to another country might experience. He concluded the culture in Haiti is not the same as in the U.S. He said, "It was not just the language, it was that people were more formal and well-mannered in Haiti". But he found FCC to be a school that has a mosaic of cultures that helped him feel welcome because so many students and professors are immigrants and share similar experiences as immigrants. When he first migrated to the U.S. Francois first went to Maryland where he learned English. He felt like he was talking to people and they were listening to him, but he could tell they weren't really understanding much of what he was telling them due his

limited English and heavy Kreol accent. Francois felt like an outsider; however, he was happy when he moved to this community here because he immediately saw Haitian organizations. He also found Jamaicans and Hispanics, who were fitting into a new culture here in the U.S., and suddenly he didn't feel like an outsider any more.

Francois is from a family who values education. From the time he was small, his mother told him he was going to school and college, and that he was not going to be like her with only a grammar school education. "My mom has been my inspiration all the time. I love my dad, but it's my mom, sweet but tough, who really sacrificed for me and my sister. She is one who taught me that I need to take responsibility for my own destiny; she was my mother and my father. She always insisted that no matter what happened to me at the end of the day I needed to smile, even if it was bad, and figure out how to make the situation better".

Francois had a setback here in America when he first arrived because they did not recognize his high school diploma or his degree from Haiti. He was very disappointed because he felt the system was discriminating against him and his country. In Haiti he was an honor student in high school and in college in Haiti, so he was discouraged that all the work he did in Haiti earning a college degree was getting him nowhere in the U.S.

As life was not easy here in America Francois had to begin working as soon as he learned English and earned a GED. He was working in a wholesale club where he met an FCC professor, Professor O, who needed help in the store one day. While Francois was helping him Professor O started telling him about the opportunities at FCC. Professor O. would come into the store every week and he and Francois would talk for five or ten minutes. "Every single time, he would encourage me to come to FCC. He

was so impressed that I already had a degree in mass communications, and that I had been an anchor and journalist in Haiti”. So that is how Francois described his journey to FCC; it was a mixture of his own determination and willingness to go back to school, and the help from somebody else telling him he could do better for himself.

Francois started FCC in 2009, and got his Bachelor’s degree in 2013. Throughout his time at FCC, he was grateful to have Professor O., because he was able to go to him for advice about anything. As Professor O. is a radio and television production professor it was perfect for Francois to already know someone who could help him at the school. “You need to have an open mind. You need to embrace a culture of responsibility. If I was not friendly and willing to talk to Professor O. when I was working in the store, I would not have enrolled at FCC”. Francois believes we are all human beings, thus we need to know we can help each other. He felt that, even though Professor O. is not Black, it made no difference to him. He shared the view that, “We have to stop blaming others and feeling negative thoughts about them not helping us and wanting to keep us down. That mentality is hurting Black people, because we are excluding ourselves and preventing ourselves from moving forward when we don’t have positive thoughts about how we can move forward. We need to take responsibility for ourselves”. Francois believes that, if students are not willing to take responsibility to go back to school and to study hard, then they shouldn’t expect anything to change for the better in their lives. He said, “Being successful and moving ahead requires a lot of hard work”.

In discussing factors that helped him be successful Francois noted “I have been on the dean’s list every term, I was a member of Phi Theta Kappa honor society, and I was majoring in radio and television broadcasting, something I was passionate,

knowledgeable and experienced about. I am very proud of myself, and I keep working hard to do better and better”. Francois is planning to transfer to a university to get a graduate degree. He’s not stopping! There’s an opportunity for him because of an agreement between FCC and a local university where he can get a tuition discount. Francois has had offers from other schools out of town, but he wants to stay here in this community to do his graduate degree locally.

Francois described his time at FCC as being very enjoyable, given that he met many professors and staff who helped him as a student and on a personal level. He recalls having had lunch or a cup of coffee on campus with a lot of his professors. He described him as having “*normal conversations*” with them. With some of them it was more personal and they exchanged cell numbers. On occasion professors needed some information and connection with the Haitian community or other communities, and Francois was able to help them because of the established relationship. Francois took advantage of their office hours whenever necessary. He would ask for clarification on things he did not understand, and always wanted to understand how to apply the things he learned in class to real life. Francois would take the initiative to reach out to people on campus for assistance, and he advised other students to do the same.

Francois did a lot of motivational speaking on campus at different events, telling students about his story and why it’s important, not to just enroll in college, but also “to be determined to work hard to get your degree”. He was a member of the Haitian Ibo Club helping with the events they had, and also advising some of the younger students. He also joined the iMentor program where he had a mentor, and was also was a peer mentor to another student. Francois made a documentary on domestic violence, and he

was able to show it in a couple of classes at FCC so students would get to understand this social problem. He wanted to do this because he really felt it was an issue that young people needed to be educated on, and needed to feel responsible to not tolerate it or engage in it. Additionally, Francois did a lot of community service with many causes in the community, especially for the benefit of Haitians back home.

Francois said that whenever spoke to students he would tell them they needed to believe in success to be successful: “If they did not believe in it, whatever help they received in tutoring or mentoring or advisement, or even financial aid, would never be enough because their minds would continue to tell them that they were going to fail”. So he’d tell them it was a process for them to believe that they were going to be successful, that they were good enough, and that attitude would preclude anyone from getting in the way of their success.

Francois’ advice to students is that it is important for them to make use of the resources at FCC. In particular, he advises Haitian students to join the Haitian Ibo Club and meet other Haitian students with whom they can share experiences, form study groups, and help each other academically. “I also tell them that if I could take seven classes, keep a full-time job and make the dean’s list, then so can they. And I did that because I saw the end of the tunnel. I saw that I could earn my degree if I was willing to work hard and sacrifice”.

Francois believes FCC is a good school, and more students need to know about FCC, especially Black students who don’t see that they need a college education. He recommends that FCC should go out into the community and into different high schools and tell them about the school. If he did not meet Professor O. in the store, he would not

have known about FCC and what he could achieve there. He also suggested FCC “should give all students an advisor because many students don’t know where to get the answer for many things at FCC”. Francois felt FCC needs to find more ways to connect students with the professors outside of class so students feel a familiar connection with their faculty such as, “emails need to be sent to students every other week just to ask how everything is going, and invite them to let you know if they have a problem”.

Francois cautioned that sometimes students don’t want to tell you on their own, but if you ask them, they will tell you their issues. He recommended that FCC needs to bring more professionals to Campus so students can see people who are successful. Francois believed students needed to have the opportunity to meet role models “so they get to know what it takes and then strive to be just as successful”.

#### Researcher’s Reflection

Francois’ expressions of gratitude for professors and FCC with regard to his opportunity of getting a college degree were, in my opinion, definitely heartfelt. Critical to his initial enrollment at FCC, and subsequent deep integration into college life, was the fact that a faculty member met him at his part-time retail job and recruited him. Not only did his experiences center on mentorship from that faculty member throughout his studies, but the part-time job he landed on campus was also through the faculty member.

Reference to his rich Haitian culture was ever-present and he was clearly proud of his Haitian upbringing. As a member of the Haitian Ibo club and the iMentor initiative, he was an older student who felt obligated to provide advice to other students on how to navigate college and not succumb to pitfalls. His talent and work in developing documentaries (e.g. domestic violence), some of which he shared with students, were a



source of pride for him because he felt the knowledge gained could be helpful to students and society. My overall perspective of Francois was that his wealth of college experiences was an inspiration to him. Equally important, however, was his desire to enrich the college experiences of others, as evidenced by his many collegial engagements.

### **Gary Gabbidon**

Stay the course, just keep going, and don't let anyone undermine what you are trying to do. No matter how hard it gets, you'll get there, you'll graduate. Just find a support system that will push you and drive you; and they may be tough on you but it's for a good purpose. (Gary Gabbidon)

Gary is 27 years old. Gary grew up in Jamaica with his family of six siblings. His aunt adopted him and brought him to the United States when his mother passed away. Gary wanted to come to America, but at the same time he loved Jamaica and didn't want to leave. Gary finished high school in the U.S. Growing up in Jamaica where everyone valued education, Gary knew that he needed to finish high school and then go further with his education; however, after high school here his auntie was pushing him to find a job or some way to make money to start helping out. From his Jamaican upbringing Gary wanted more as he didn't believe that high school is where it stops. In fact, Gary loved school in Jamaica and it was his lessons that came first for Gary, but it was also football and the best music and culture that Gary said he will always cherish. After sitting out a year after he graduated from high school, Gary worked full-time and contributed to paying bills at his auntie's house. Not satisfied with the job and the pay he was getting, Gary saw it as a dead end and he knew he could do better for himself. In his

quest to do better Gary decided to move out of his auntie's house, quit his full-time job, and found a little part-time job that helped him get by. That's when Gary decided it would be best for him to work part-time and go to FCC part-time, which he did and never stopped until he earned his Associate degree.

Throughout his life Gary has looked up to and admired his oldest brother. Gary said, "My role model throughout my life has been my brother who lives in England. From the time I was little, my brother was the support system to the family and, basically, all the burden was put on him. When my mom passed he basically took up all the responsibility for six of us, to feed us, send us to school, and make sure we had what we needed. I spoke to him on the phone recently, and I told him that I thank him for everything he's done. I told him that I appreciate that he guided me through life and that he made me a better man, and that I wouldn't be anywhere today if it was not for him". Gary said he had a very good experience at FCC. He started in remedial classes in Reading and Writing, and his major was Physician Assistant. He was on the dean's list one term, and he graduated in three years with his degree. Gary noted he had a lot of help from the TRIO program, and they were his strong support system that basically pushed him to keep going. Also, his fiancée was there at FCC with him, and she was the personal backbone that pushed him and made his experience better. Truly it was the TRIO program and his fiancée who gave him the drive to continue going on the days he felt like quitting. Gary shared, "They helped me through every situation especially when it was financial aid related and I felt I had no one else to speak to them on my behalf. So once I met the director of TRIO, Mr. D., I never went back to my advisor because he was so great. He helped me make sure I was taking the right classes and he recommended the

best professors for me to take. Also, whenever I ran into a problem financially, I would go straight to him and he would take me over to financial aid and we would get it done real quick and easy. It made all the difference having TRIO and Mr. D. They really cared about me, because they listened to me”. Instead of passing him from one office to another office, the individuals took care of issues for Gary themselves; for example, Gary noted he was able to speak to Mr. D. about his major and possibly changing it. Mr. D also gave Gary advice about transitioning to FCC’s Bachelor’s degree program, but Gary decided to sacrifice himself for his fiancée so she could go to nursing school. When his fiancée completes nursing school next year, Gary plans to start his Bachelor’s degree program.

In addition to Mr. D. and Ms. M. in the TRIO program, Gary also had a very good relationship with his professors. In discussing this success factor, Gary stated “Ms. M. was my official advisor and she helped me choose my classes every term; but Mr. D. was more like my mentor who helped me with classes and everything else. There were two professors especially that were very helpful to me. They gave me good advice about being a student and being smart about studying”. Gary noted also that his Psychology professor helped him with information about medical social work, and that is where Gary wants to major for his Bachelor’s degree. Gary also went to his professor’s office hours if he had problems with not understanding the material. Gary attributed his success to Dr. K., his Biology professor, as being a real mentor to him. Gary deemed Dr. K. to be a very wise professor who he had for Human Anatomy and Physiology, and with whom he communicated on a different level. If Gary failed a test or an assignment, for example, Dr. K. would make an appointment for Gary to come in, sit down, and go over the work.

Dr. K. also gave Gary a lot of advice about the medical field, and he helped Gary understand the different medical professions outside of physician assistant.

Gary did not join any clubs on campus because he was always working; however, there were times when the TRIO program wanted Gary to volunteer on campus, and he was there any time they asked him. Sometimes there were high school students on campus and TRIO wanted Gary to talk to them about the importance of college and some of his experiences. He also volunteered to be at orientations for new students, and he provided them with information about the TRIO program and services like tutoring, advisement, mentoring, and college tours that were available.

Through the TRIO program, Gary attended a few Collegiate 100 organization events on campus where he met professional Black men who were attorneys, elected officials, and businessmen who came to speak. Gary also served as a volunteer in the community by coaching Little League football, and he has been doing it for about six years. He loves coaching because it is all about young children who need a sport to keep them busy after school, and give them something to develop an athletic skill and learn teamwork and discipline.

“Advice that I always gave to FCC students and also to high school students who came on campus is, no matter what anyone may say, don’t let anybody put you down. I tell them to be like me and keep pushing because, at the end of the road, there’ll be nothing but happiness in your life. I tell them that no matter how hard it gets, they should just try to find a support system that is going to push and drive them. I tell them that they when they set their goals, they need to stay the course and they’ll get there; they’ll graduate”.

Gary believes FCC has a lot of programs that can benefit a lot of students. But what is needed is for more students to know about the programs. He recommends that FCC needs to have more departments setting up tables around the campus so students will know all the majors the institution offers. It has to be once a week, or once every two weeks, according to Gary, so students are consistently seeing what's available. Also, it's not only the majors that Gary identified as needing to be advertised, but also the programs that can draw in the students and attract them to stay after class to participate. "Students need to understand it's not just about sitting in class, coming to college and going home. In fact nobody ever came to me and advise me to join any organization. When I walked through the hallways here, I didn't see much so I really didn't know what programs you had for me. Thank god I ran into someone I knew who introduced me to TRIO". Gary remarked that FCC needs to communicate better to students so they know everything that's going on and they can get involved. In Gary's estimation, "Students who know what services are available to them will be much more successful".

#### Researcher's Reflection

Gary exhibited a high sense of purpose about himself and his aspirations as we conversed about his college experiences. His ethnic pride was evident, given his disclosures about his upbringing in Jamaica and the values instilled in him. Another notable factor was that the death of his mother propelled his migration to the U.S. His experiences at FCC were centered on the support and sense of belonging he felt because of his association with the TRIO program. His experience was that of receiving tutoring, advisement, and mentorship through the program. Given his part-time work off campus while he was enrolled, Gary attributed that obligation to the reason he was not more

involved on campus, albeit the Collegiate 100 organization where he met Black community and corporate leaders who came to address organization members. He did volunteer from time to time on campus, facilitating new student orientations and campus tours when the TRIO program engaged him as such. Overall, Gary's co-experiences on campus were mostly TRIO associated.

I noted he had excellent relationships with some of his faculty members and, like Elijah, he received guidance from professors outside the realm of the course work they taught. This, to me, truly goes beyond the standard faculty to student rapport when, for example, Gary was able to glean information about careers from two of his professors.

### **Harry Holmes**

College helps you out in the long run, because when you write your resume it's important to be able to put that kind of stuff on it. Then that helps you out, more than they see that you just graduated from high school. And then college keeps you out of trouble, keeps you busy in a good way. (Harry Holmes)

Harry is 29 years old. He earned his Associate in Arts degree after many years because he was attending college on and off. His parents are from the Virgin Islands, and they were always very strict about education. Even though Harry was born here in the U.S., he associates with the islands because of how his single mother raised him. Harry is the oldest of four brothers and he wanted to set an example for them, especially since so many boys they knew dropped out of high school and were just hanging around doing nothing. As he didn't want his brothers to see him hanging around because they would think it was okay, Harry went to college immediately after high school and finished his degree. Two of his brothers also got their degree, and he is proud of them. There was

one more brother left to get a college degree, and Harry knew he had to keep motivating him to focus and stay in school. Harry said, “I am the role model for my brothers, so I knew I had to keep moving forward so they would not have any excuses”.

Harry’s noted his mother is his hero, and he also calls her his role model. “She taught me and my brothers all the girl stuff like the cooking and the ironing and also cleaning. She played the mother role and the father role too, and I respect her. She did not let us do whatever we wanted to do. We had to get up, go to school, and we had to help each other because we didn’t have any other family here, only a couple of distant cousins”. Harry’s mother always compared their neighborhood here in America to being the ghetto, which was a different environment from the islands where it was mostly easy going and a very nice place. In the United States Harry and his brothers mostly stayed in the house because his mother did not want them to fall victim to what was happening outside. Harry remembers his mother saying she raised him and his brothers to live a certain way, and it was not the way of the streets. Harry also credited his partner with his success, “My girlfriend has also been a big influence in my life. We have three kids, and we try to motivate each other to keep going forward”.

Harry was determined to succeed, but he got off to a rough start trying to get a degree in Computer Information Technology. He did not know anyone at the FCC Outreach Center where he first enrolled, and he would just come to class and go home. He wanted to get a degree because he knew that, to raise the bar in his life and his family’s, he needed more than a high school diploma; however, he noted there were no advisors at the FCC outreach center, or really anyone that Harry felt he could talk to. Since he didn’t feel comfortable at the outreach center, Harry stopped going for about

two years, and he just worked full-time. Then his cousin got killed, and something in him said go back to school, take up where you left off and do something productive for the long haul. Harry remembered his younger brothers and that he had to set an example for them. So, instead of going back to the FCC outreach center, Harry decided to go to FCC's main campus, and he really didn't want to go there because it was so big he knew he would feel overwhelmed. Reflecting on that experience, Harry shared that "one of my first professors, Professor R. took an interest in me after I told her I had been cutting and failing classes. She started motivating me to move one, and she told me she knew I could succeed if I really focused on my work. Her class was very good". Harry guesses since he had failed some classes from before when he was at the center, he was required to take her Student Life Skills class. And she taught him how to study better, and also time management so he could be a better student.

There had been one advisor at the FCC center who tried to help Harry, Ms. P., who had the same birthday as Harry. It was Ms. P. who suggested that Harry should try the main campus, and she is the one who really got him to take Ms. R's class. Harry was shocked when he got to Professor R.'s class because previously he would just take his classes and leave; however, he found himself staying and talking to some students and also talking to Professor. R. Harry described the relationship as, "She helped me get over the fear of speaking in front of the class, and even though I failed my Speech class twice, Ms. R., told me to take it again as soon as I finished her class. I took it and I realized I wasn't afraid of speaking in front of the class anymore. I passed the class. I felt like I knew everybody in the class and I was talking to my friends. Since I met Professor R., I passed all my classes ever since. She advised me about my future, and I ended up



changing my major to Physical Education and Coaching, which is really what I want to do”. Professor R. explained everything in a way that Harry could understand, even about the Math that he would need to take for the Physical Education major. Harry saw that major was perfect for him because he coaches little league football as a volunteer, and he hopes one day to coach a high school football team. Professor R. is the one who introduced Harry to the TRIO program, and told him to start going there to get Math tutoring and for them to be his advisors for his classes.

Ms. M., in TRIO, and Harry got to talking about his classes and also about what he was really interested in doing for his career. She became what Harry described as his “official advisor”, and she advised him to start doing volunteer work at the FCC Fitness Center. Harry was able to learn about the different pieces of weight training equipment, and he was able to help students who came to work out. Harry also got to work out, so he was very happy. He met a lot of students and professors at the Fitness Center, and he began to feel more and more comfortable being at FCC. He even won a President’s Volunteer Award because he had volunteered over a hundred hours at the Fitness Center.

Harry’s had some advice for other students. He suggested that students always ask for help. Harry stated that Black people think they don’t need help, but he would tell them to get to know as many professors as possible because we live in a world where you need to know somebody that knows somebody to get ahead. “Until I started to see I needed help, and I denied that I could do it myself, things started opening up for me. So now when I see a chance to help somebody, because I know the blessing will come back regardless”. Harry has been a coach for three years, and most of the boys he coaches live in his same neighborhood. He tells them that, even though they all live in the

neighborhood, they don't have to be that picture that everybody sees--all the robbing and drugs. Harry once took some of the Little League boys on a field trip out of town, and they had never experienced anything such outing in their lives. Little League is a good way to keep young boys focused and off the street according to Harry, and so he is happy to be teaching them to play football. He says he is also teaching them character, and there are tutors to help the boys whose grades are not good. So that's how Harry spent his time when he was not in class or helping out at the Fitness Center on campus.

Harry believes FCC has everything a student needs and he suggests that, while FCC has a lot of programs and services, the key is that it's just for the students to get to the programs. A recommendation Harry made was that FCC needs more staff in the hallways advertising the programs. He said, "You need more staff out here in the hallways advertising the programs. Once or twice a week they should be out there, drawing in the students to get them interested in the programs. Show the students that it's not just about coming to college, sitting in class and going home. You could join this program; this program does this; you could try out for that and so on". Sometimes Harry would walk through the college and basically he did not see many things to do. Nobody came up to him and suggested that he join a program, attend an event, or take advantage of a certain service. Harry recommends that FCC should have sports, "as it would draw more students to stay on campus and not just come to class and go home". He felt there is nothing for students to really do at FCC. "That's why I went and volunteered at the gym. But overall, I had a good experience here at FCC. I liked the graduation ceremony, and I got to shake the president's hand on stage. You need to continue with the TRIO

program, and if every student could be in TRIO that would be very good because they would stay in school. I know I did, and it was a lot because of TRIO”.

#### Researcher’s Reflection

Harry’s college experience started out less than favorably at an FCC outreach center where he indicated he felt as if he didn’t know anyone and, therefore stopped out. It was not surprising to me when he said that it was when he returned to FCC’s main campus and encountered a professor who showed interest in him, that he began to feel that he fit in.

He spoke with gratitude about that professor introducing him to TRIO where he was able to receive tutoring and advisement in TRIO. He showed great pride when he shared that point because TRIO helped connect him with the Fitness Center where he was able to volunteer and receive a volunteer award while learning about weight training equipment. It was his being at the Fitness Center, helping other students with their work out, meeting a lot of people, and having the opportunity to himself work out, that he progressively felt more and more comfortable at FCC. The feeling of belonging and fitting in was critical to his success, and it was interesting to hear him voice this concept himself.

### **Part II: Analysis of the Findings**

Part I of Chapter 4 honored the essence of this narrative inquiry study in that it presented the perspectives of the eight participants around their college experiences. The eight retold narratives essentially served the purpose of answering Research Question 1: What are/were the college experiences of eight successful Black male college students at FCC?

The following documentation below presents the findings that resulted from an analysis of themes. The chapter also presents responses to the research questions, given that the open and axial coding process used to analyze the transcriptions and narratives and the consistent themes that evolved as delineated in Table 2.

### **Descriptions and Explanation of Themes** Table 2

#### *Themes Identified from the Open and Axial Coding*

Theme Name
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campus Experiences</li> <li>• Student Services</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Positive Emotions</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• Institutional Deficits</li> </ul>

**Campus Experiences.** Students described experiences such as community service, working on campus, volunteering on campus, and college event participation in a positive light. For example, “I’m working as a part-time, so I really know what’s happening in financial aid” (Aaron); “Besides the father-son meeting I went to, some man from the community came to speak to us and give us advice” (Brian); “He would often give me ah opportunities to volunteer, then he offered me a job as a Math tutor as well as a peer mentor” (Carl). “I ended up working in the computer department with Mr. B” (Elijah).

**Researcher's Reflections.** Judging by the manner in which participants shared their various college experiences, they were clearly a positive influence. Because Aaron, in the above-mentioned quote, mentioned gaining knowledge of financial aid as a benefit of his part-time job, I gathered the job meant much more to him than the hourly wage he earned. The fact that Elijah mentioned the name of the supervisor with whom he 'ends up' working, shows there was some type of connection or relationship he formed with his supervisor, Mr. B. Brian mentioned that the representative from the community spoke to them and gave advice. By virtue of him mentioning a benefit (i.e. the advice), gives the impression, that the Brian believes he received benefit from interacting with the representative.

In summary, participant responses ranged from engagement in community service, working on campus, volunteering, to participating in college events (Table 3).

Table 3

*Theme 1: Campus Experiences – Consistent Experiences of Successful Black Male College Students*

Open Codes	Yes	No
Community Service	7	1
Campus Employment	4	4
Campus Volunteerism	7	1
Campus Event Attendance	7	1

**Student Services.** Services such as tutoring, mentoring, advisement, student organization opportunities, and financial aid, to which students were referred or took the initiative to access themselves served as another theme. Only two students made

negative comments about student advisement, which later changed to a positive experience with other student services. For instance, “I’m planning to go into a Science career, and I was a STEM ambassador helping other students to learn about going into Science” (Aaron). Elijah was one of two who had a negative comment, and it related to, “I waited 45 minutes in line and when it was my turn to see the advisor and, ahm, the young lady at the desk told me that I had to register online (hmhm) and I said no; so I left and went to another institution and later found out it wasn’t accredited so I came back to FCC and found Mr. D. in TRIO.” Brian commented, “First I went to Advisement, but it was all over the place, I was getting classes I didn’t need and teachers I didn’t like, until I found TRIO and an advisor in the School of Justice or that would still be going on”. “I would meet with Mr. M. in advisement or Mr. D. in TRIO to talk about my classes or life in general” (David). “I felt like I owed TRIO because you know they helped me with tutoring, they gave me a grant, and they just-they were like a family outside o’ my family” (Carl). “At the Haitian Ibo Club, you learn about other students’ stories, they help you with your homework, and it’s not just about helping you academically but also to become a better person” (Francois).

***Researcher’s Reflection.*** It is apparent a couple of students perceive there are issues with the Advising Department at FCC, which the institution may need to address. I believe, however, it is because of these students’ intrinsic motivation that they were able to navigate these challenges and find services that served them well, as was the case with David and Elijah. Aaron was visibly proud of his experience as a student leader and someone who was potentially helping other students to make career choices around the STEM fields. His motivation was also very evident and at a level where he was

stimulated to help other students. It was apparent that Elijah and Francois, in particular, had totally immersed themselves in student organizations such as the Haitian Ibo Club, and Tropical Beat Caribbean Student Organization to the point that they assumed a leadership role in the organization, and benefitted emotionally from the camaraderie and a sense of belonging to something positive.

In summary, participant responses ranged from tutoring, mentoring, advisement, and financial aid to participation in student organizations (Table 4)

Table 4

*Theme 2: Student Services – Consistent Experiences of Successful Black Male College Students*

Open Codes	Yes	No
Tutoring	7	1
Advisement	8	0
Mentoring	8	0
Financial Aid	8	0
Student Organizations	6	2

**Motivation.** It was evident that each and every participant been propelled by deep motivation. The strongest evidence was their own intrinsic motivation as evidenced by comments such as, “So I know it’s hard, but I’m going. I’m not going to stop. I have to achieve my dreams” (Aaron). “That’s what really motivated me; me pushing myself” (Brian). “The only person that’s gonna be in your way is you” (Francois). There was also a very strong sense of cultural and environmental motivation that was present in the

participants who were Caribbean natives or of Caribbean descent. Aaron, Elijah, Francois, and Gary were Caribbean natives, and they all spoke about the inherent perspective of education being a critical foundation of anyone's success in Haiti and Jamaica. Each of them expressed that there was an expectation in Caribbean families that school did not stop until one obtained a college degree; thus, the presence of what I labeled as cultural motivation. Carl's motivation stemmed from wanting to escape his environment of a crime ridden neighborhood and ending up hanging out on the corner. He explained that "growing up in an area where you know you see a lot of the same guys from when you are five years old to when you are 20 years old and they are in the same place and ah, I really didn't want to become that." Gary's cousin had been shot and killed in his neighborhood, and that propelled him to go back to FCC and become serious about completing his degree. I labeled these two forces, environmental and cultural motivation.

*Researcher's Reflection.* So many other responses throughout the focus group and individual interviews gave me confirmation that these young men had a deep sense of self-motivation and self-direction to succeed. It was very powerful, and I felt that it was mainly this motivation, though expressly higher in some than others, that was a major driving force around their college success. Clearly, the combination of other motivational factors helped, such as Carl wanting to succeed in college so he could get a good job and enable his mother to retire early, as well as, Gary who wanted to be able to emulate his father's actions as a supportive head of the household and breadwinner.

In summary, participant responses ranged from intrinsic motivation, family motivation and mentor motivation to cultural/environmental motivation. (Table 5).



Table 5

*Theme 3: Motivation – Consistent Experiences of Successful Black Male College Students*

Open Codes	Yes	No
Self-Motivation (Intrinsic)	8	0
Family	7	1
College Personnel	8	0
Cultural/Environmental	8	0

**Relationships.** Throughout the interviews as described in the narratives, participants discussed with great satisfaction and fondness the names of advisors and faculty who they deemed to be influential in some significant way in their success as students. Most participants also mentioned their relationships with family members and their positive influence on their college progress. Whether it was a faculty member, student organization advisor, or academic advisor, with the exception of one, participants spoke about a ‘go to’ person on campus without whom they would not have been successful. “If I didn’t meet ah Professor B then I wouldn’t be as successful where I am academically right now” (Francois); “He gave me the fishing rod so I could learn how to fish, and I’ve been fishing ever since, and that’s what’s important” (Elijah); “Mr. D is kind of the one that kept me in line with school and I could always go talk to him when I need help” (Brian); “So you know I’m always in office hours and they’ve always been able to help me” (Carl).

**Researcher’s Reflection.** So important was this idea of having someone the participants had connected with, and could go to whenever they wanted, and so

influential were these faculty and staff ‘go to’ persons that all participants were able to mention at least one. The one participant who didn’t mention an advisor or professor type so to speak, did mention that, as a result of his part-time financial aid position, he had access to the financial aid director and would get all his questions about financial aid and other things answered. That access, in my opinion, constitutes a viable relationship for the participant, even though he was unable, unlike the others, to articulate that it was a relationship. What was truly interesting was that it was only the participants who participated in student organizations who spoke about relationships with other students, and how the interactions were reciprocal in terms of discussions, serving together, and helping each other become better students. The fact that only three students were able to discuss faculty relationships and name their professors indicated there may need to be a more intentional effort by the institution to engage students with faculty outside of the formal classroom setting. In fact, it was mentioned by Francois that, it was because of his open and friendly personality, he was able to connect so easily with his professors, even many times meeting them for a cup of coffee in the cafeteria and serving as a resource if they needed advice and information about the Haitian community. By the same token, Francois stated, “I’m talking about faculty. We don’t engage more with them because, deep in ourselves, we refuse to ask for help because we think on they’re going to blame us”. Francois goes on to recommend that FCC needs to organize and advertise more meetings and events for students to meet with faculty to help facilitate trust and students’ comfort level with the faculty. Francois added, “then they become like, okay, I love that professor, I love that faculty because they reached out to me”.

In summary, participant responses ranged from professor and staff/administrator relationships, family relationships to peer relationships. (Table 6).

Table 6

*Theme 4: Relationships – Consistent Experiences of Successful Black Male Students*

Open Codes	Yes	No
Professor Relationships	3	5
Family Relationships	7	1
Peer Relationships	5	3
Staff/Admin. Relationships	8	0

**Positive Emotions.** The demeanor of all participants was overall extremely favorable as they responded to the interview questions and provided examples of their engagement as students at FCC. It is the pleasantness and upbeat manner, coupled with complimentary commentaries around the dominant theme areas that prompted the researcher to recognize this emerging theme. Of note, throughout their responses participants specifically mentioned how grateful they were that they had been helped a great deal, that FCC is a good school, and other such positive expressions. It is clear that positive emotions were present as voiced by every participant. Aaron stated, “I have had good experiences here” when describing his satisfaction with his involvement in the Haitian Ibo Club. “Mr. D. is like a father to so many us; he’s like the father some of us never had”, said Brian when discussing why his advisor was his role model (*Sense of Belonging*).

Carl indicated, “They just did so much for me, they’re still doing a lot for me” when describing his feelings about being part of the TRIO family (*Gratitude and Indebtedness*). “My time at FCC was very enjoyable”, discussed Francois when describing his sentiments about the assistance he received from professors and staff on a personal level (*Gratitude*). “I’ve been on the dean’s list every term”, said Francois when speaking about his membership in the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, and his passion for radio and television broadcasting (*Pride*). Gary stated, “They really cared about me because they listened to me” when describing the attention he felt he received as opposed to being shuffled from office to office to get assistance.

***Researcher’s Reflection.*** It was apparent that all participants, without exception, felt a sense of gratification with the institution in many respects. Participants expressly discussed good and gratifying experiences, others expressed feelings of belonging in addition to appreciation for the time and attention paid to them. Of importance, was the positive and endearing manner of the participants overall. Particularly Elijah, who was by far the most engaged student as a member of three student organizations with a part-time job on campus and heavily engaged in community service, his words of indebtedness and gratification about his experiences in TRIO were, “I don’t know how to repay them. They were always there for me with school issues and things that had nothing to do with school when I needed advice”.

In summary, participant responses ranged from mentions of gratification, belonging, indebtedness, to pride. (Table 7)

Table 7

*Theme 5: Positive Emotions – Consistent Experiences of Successful Black Male Students*

Open Codes	Yes	No
Gratitude	8	0
Belonging	5	3
Indebtedness	8	0
Pride	8	0

**Ethnicity.** The researcher deems ethnicity to be an important theme that emerged from the analysis of the responses and narratives. The reason this was deemed to be a dominant theme was because six participants mentioned their ethnography. Aaron, Brian, Elijah, Francois, Gary and Harry mentioned their ethnography in relation to the value placed on education in their native countries. Carl and David did not mention their ethnography, but simply mentioned they had grown up in local neighborhoods. Interestingly, the six participants who mentioned their ethnicity all expressed that it was inherent in their native countries that great importance was placed on education. Aaron stated, “My parents are Haitian, and Haitian parents make sure you know when you are growing up that you will be going to college.” “No one else in my family has a college degree, but my family always stressed the importance of an education while I was growing up (in Haiti)”, said Brian. “In Jamaica growing up, everyone values education and we know that we need to finish high school and then go further with our education”, stated Gary. “My parents are from the Virgin Islands, and they are very strict about education. So I went to college immediately after high school, and I finished my degree”, said Harry. All six expressed words of ethnic pride such as “From my Jamaican upbringing, I wanted more” (Gary). “I was so happy when we moved to the community

here, because I immediately saw Haitian organizations” (Francois). “Even though I was born in America, I associate with the islands because of how my parents raised me” (Harry).

**Researcher’s Reflection.** There is certainly essence in the pride the immigrant participants showed in speaking about their native country being a place where education is valued. That factor was definitely a propelling factor in terms of their pursuit of a college education. Of these six participants, four of them participated in student organizations with an ethnic focus. More specifically, Aaron, Brian, Elijah and Francois were members of the Haitian Ibo Club and described their experiences engaging with other students, giving, and receiving assistance. Elijah was also a member of Tropical Beat Caribbean Student Organization and the Pan African Student Association. Francois was also a member of the Tropical Beat student club.

In summary, participant responses ranged from mentions of ethnicity, educational values, participation in ethnic-focused clubs, to ethnic pride. (Table 8).

Table 8

*Theme 6: Ethnography – Consistent Experiences of Successful Black Male Students*

Open Codes	Yes	No
Reference to Ethnicity	6	2
Engagement in Ethnic-focused Student Club	4	4
Reference to Education as Value Factor of Ethnicity	6	2
Ethnic Pride	6	2

**Institutional Deficits.** Participants never spoke negatively about their experiences at FCC, nor did any participant show any visible disdain other than the aforementioned comments about their initial experiences in the Advising office. Participants did, however, mention areas they believed FCC should consider improving to further address advancing success among Black male students. Participants stated a need for more attention to be placed on outreach to make prospective students aware of college programs. “Make the programs easier for students to reach, so outreach to them in middle school and make them realize, you need to take your ACT serious and you need to take your SAT serious because those exams they gonna open doors for you for scholarships and for you to enter any school you want” (Gary). “Have workshops for freshmen explaining everything them so they know everything when they get there” (Aaron). David also shared the need for FCC to have fliers and use the FCC television station to give students important information. “One of the biggest thing I hear people complain about it Financial Aid, take the information to them, give them the information so they do it early and get their financial aid early” (Brian). “Open up the basketball court, and give them something to do, do something like that to keep them on campus” (David). “But it’s important to reach out to Black students here at FCC because they’re escaping their regular life to come to school. So while they’re here at FCC you have to do more things like Collegiate 100 to positively influence them” (Brian).

**Researcher’s Reflection.** My perspective is that these recommendations were founded on the experiences, positive and negative, of the participants. While it appears from the respondents’ overall responses in the interviews that they had positive experiences at FCC, there are areas they believed needed to be improved to better serve

Black male students; and they were able to share these without much thought; which shows they were actively engaged at the institution, and they perceived they knew the institutional well.

Table 9

*Theme 7: Institutional Deficits – Consistent Experiences of Successful Black Male College Students*

Open Codes	Yes	No
Outreach to middle and high schools	5	3
Information Workshops on Student Services	5	3
Co-Curricular Activities	6	2

### **Integration of the Focus Group and Individual Interview Data Sources**

#### **Focus Group**

As a complement to the individual interviews of the eight participants, a focus group of 6 participants was also conducted. “Focus groups are used most often as a preliminary stage of research as a means of adding insight to the results obtained from a survey or individuals interviews” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 17). Heeding, Stewart and Shamdasani’s (1990) promulgations, I utilized a focus group to add further insight in my study, bearing in mind that the central focus of my study was the eight respondents who participated in the individual interviews.

The focus group represented the very same demographic of the individual interview participants, and the responses reinforced the themes that emerged from the individual interview narratives. During the focus group data collection process, participants were asked nine open-ended questions regarding their college experiences at FCC and how



they perceived their experiences influenced their success. In essence, the focus group data collection exercise was used for triangulation to embody an added understanding of Black male college students' college experiences over and beyond the responses from the individual interviews.

The focus group participants' collective responses clearly affirmed the responses of the participants of the individual interviews as they relate to the two research questions. In terms of the research questions and the overarching questions of college experiences, and their suggestions for what contributed to their success, the range of responses closely mirrored those of the participants in the individual interviews. The focus group participants discussed being associated with the TRIO program and student organizations, where they delineated the services and interactions from which they benefitted. There was also a consensus and an underlying theme of taking responsibility and hard work, being critical to every student's purview of their college experience. Students also expressed positive emotions about their experience at FCC, and were adamant about their intrinsic motivation being a major factor in their success as college students. Figure 1 provides sample excerpts from the focus group interviews to illustrate the foregoing findings.

Example 1. "Everything is dependent on you, and your experiences, who you meet, and what programs you are in to help you succeed. TRIO played a great part in that. If it wasn't for TRIO, I don't think I would've continued through college because I would've got frustrated and just went off somewhere else and be somewhere else. So I'm thankful for being in TRIO, because it helps me stay focus."

Example 2. "I think it's just my own determination that contributed to my success here at FCC. Looking at my family and especially my mom and dad; and I'm not even sure if they finished middle school, because I know they definitely didn't finish high school, and seeing where they are now in life, and whether or not I want to repeat that cycle, and I did it--I just pretty much ate everything up cause I was just ready to succeed".

Example 3. "Yes, maybe some resources (at FCC) need to improve, but we have the resources, this generation needs to

take personal responsibility for their own success.”

Example 4. “I needed to apply myself. I needed to look at the mirror and say OK, you are responsible for your own action. Nobody is responsible for you. You are your own man and you have to look to see what you want for your future.”

Example 5. “I work in the Testing department, and I see so many students who were born here that are not taking advantage of all the opportunities they have and they’re faced with”.

Example 6. “It’s a whole package at FCC to make you really become successful in school, but the first step is really you to say OK I want that.”

Example 7. “We have our professors and mentors, so if you have something going on, you have to contact your professor and say, oh I’m dealing with that issue, or I don’t understand that word because English is not my first language. And they’ll always tell you, this is the way you need to study and you need to do this to pass the test.”

Figure 1. Excerpts from focus group interviews.

## Interviews

The individual interview questions were specifically developed to elicit responses around participants’ college experiences, and their perceptions around what contributed to their success. The interviews produced qualitative data that were analyzed through open and axial coding. It was clear throughout the analysis of data that participants’ experiences represented both commonalities and differences. Similarities included the degree to which motivation, as well as relationships, played a major role in their persistence and progress toward college completion. Each student articulated a strong support system of motivation and relationships which helped to propel them forward in their college lives, as evidenced by the afore-mentioned seven themes that emerged from the analysis.

### Research Question One

What are/were the college experiences of eight successful Black male students at FCC?

The responses to Research Question 1 are represented by four themes: 1) campus experiences; 2) student services; 3) relationships; and 4) motivation.

### **Campus Experiences**

Participants described campus experiences that included community service, being employed on campus, volunteering on campus and participation in campus events. Overall, participants were positive in describing their experiences. Seven participants participated in community service that ranged from Breast Cancer Walks and Haiti Relief Efforts to coaching Little League Football. Four participants held part-time jobs on campus in areas such as the financial aid department, media services department and the library. Volunteerism was prevalent as evidenced by seven participants who were engaged as orientation peer leaders, STEM ambassadors, campus tour guides and fitness center aides. Participants attended campus events such as the annual Christmas and Thanksgiving events and forums where community and corporate leaders were facilitators.

“I also participated in many community service activities like a breast cancer walk we organized on campus”, stated Carl, regarding his community service involvement.

“I did some service learning, and that’s how I got my first job in the library”, said David, about how his engagement in service learning paid off with a paid position.

“It was after the Trayvon Martin shooting, and the forum was about being Black and how to react if you’re stopped by the police”, said Brian, about a campus event from which he benefitted.

“I am also doing volunteer hours on campus tutoring Math”, added Aaron as he shared about his experience as a STEM ambassador.

## **Student Services**

Participants described student services from which they benefitted, including tutoring, advisement, mentoring, financial aid, and student organizations. All participants received advisement, mentorship, and financial aid. Advisement and mentorship were through different venues such as the advising office, TRIO office, staff and faculty members; however, all participants described their experiences as being important to their college experience. Brian was the only one who did not receive tutoring. Gary was complimentary of the advisement and mentorship he received from his advisor and professor, respectively. “Ms. M. was my official advisor, and she helped me choose my classes every term”, stated Gary, regarding the support he received. He added, “Dr. K was really a mentor to me. He is a great man. He is a wise man. He gave me a lot of advice about the medical field”. The sentiments shared by Gary about his professor, Dr. K., particularly the manner in which he describes him as being great and wise, show the relationship that existed, and the respect he had for his faculty member.

Carl benefitted from tutoring, and he expressed his indebtedness for the support he received. “I felt I owed it to TRIO because they gave me tutoring and a grant, said Carl, about the support he received and his indebtedness for the assistance.

Brian voiced the benefit he received that allowed him to fund his tuition. “I get financial aid, and it helps me pay for my classes”, said Brian, while discussing how grateful he was not to have to take out a loan.

## **Relationships**

When asked about the relationships that had an influence on their college experience, all participants mentioned at least one staff who was a ‘go to’ person they

could speak to about college and life issues. Seven participants discussed an endeared family member who they said encouraged and pushed them while they were in school. David was the only participant not to mention the influence of a family member; however, his mentions of professor relationships and the frequency with which he met with professors after class suggested the relationships were much more than peripheral. Even though all participants indicated they had a good relationship with their professors, for the purposes of this study only three were documented as such. The reason is because only three participants were able to give the name of the professors and articulate a relationship of frequent associations with their professor (s) such as, engaging with them outside the classroom on academic or non-academic matters.

“My role model throughout my whole life has been my brother who lives in England, stated Gary in terms of family relationships. He added, “I told him that I appreciate that he guided me through life and that he made me a better man and that I wouldn’t be anywhere it if as not for him”.

“Throughout my time at FCC, I was so grateful to Professor O, because I was able to go to him for advice about anything”, said Participant regarding how his own self determination and someone else’s support helped him progress.

“Many times I would just go in to get advice from Mr. D. on what classes to take or just to talk about life in general”, stated Carl, regarding the relationship he had formed with the TRIO director.

“I also met a lot of people at the Center, and I began to feel more and more comfortable at FCC, shared Harry, in recalling how forming relationships with fellow students helped him to fit in more and more at FCC.

## **Motivation**

The concept of motivation, as it relates to participants' college experiences, is an important one given all participants suggested they were motivated to keep working toward their college degrees. The intrinsic motivation of all participants was ever-present throughout the narratives, and the sentiments voiced by each participant illustrate the depth of self-motivation toward making better of themselves by staying in school and completing a degree. All participants were motivated by either cultural or environmental 'pushes' to enroll and complete their degrees. Carl and David spoke about their neighborhoods being blighted, and childhood peers who were hanging out and not doing anything productive. They discussed that they were going to school because they wanted better for themselves, and they were pushing themselves to succeed so they would end up differently with a college degree and career. Aaron, Brian, Elijah, Francois, Gary and Harry were all immigrants who voiced that part of their impetus for enrolling and persisting in college was instilled in them as Caribbean immigrants whereby education was important and they should earn a college degree.

"It's hard growing up in an area where you see guys from when you were five years old to when you are 20 years old and they are in the same place. I didn't want to become that; I really couldn't", said Carl, reflecting the environmental push of loafers in his neighborhood.

"Also, my parents are Haitian, and Haitian parents make sure you know when you are growing up that you will be going to college", stated Aaron, in reflecting parental motivation.

“And so that is how I got to FCC. It was a mixture of my own determination and willingness,” stated Francois, reflecting his intrinsic motivation around pursuing college.

### **Positive Emotions**

Participants’ college experiences were steeped in positive emotions about many factors associated with their interactions and engagement at FCC. All participants shared expressions of gratitude whether it was about the tutoring or financial aid they received, and also the opportunities to engage in volunteer activities. The sense of belonging experienced and voiced by five of the participants was clearly an important factor, as evidenced by one participant indicating that he had stopped out at one time because he felt he didn’t fit in. Interestingly, apart from feeling grateful, all participants felt a sense of indebtedness to FCC and largely to the TRIO program (7 participants) for they felt if it were not for TRIO they would not have progressed as they had. The other participant who voiced indebtedness, attributed it to the professor who recruited him from the retail store to begin studies at FCC and subsequently became his mentor. All participants shared instances of pride in either their academic accomplishments overall at FCC or some aspect of their engagement on campus.

“But I’m sure Mr. R. helped me out because of Mr. D., and I’m thankful or I would have had to take out loans and loans and more loans”, said Brian.

“They were like a family outside of my real family. They gave me a place to be, something to be part of, a bigger picture, something bigger than myself”, shared Carl, regarding how he felt about the staff of the TRIO program.

“I don’t know how to repay them. They were always there for me with school issues and things that had nothing to do with school when I needed advice, stated Elijah, reflecting his feelings of indebtedness.

“I have been on the dean’s list every term”, stated Francois with pride, regarding his successes at FCC.

**Researcher’s Reflection.** There were many commonalities among the college experiences of the participants that included tangibles such as interactions and engagements as well as non-tangibles such as emotions and motivations (Figure 2).

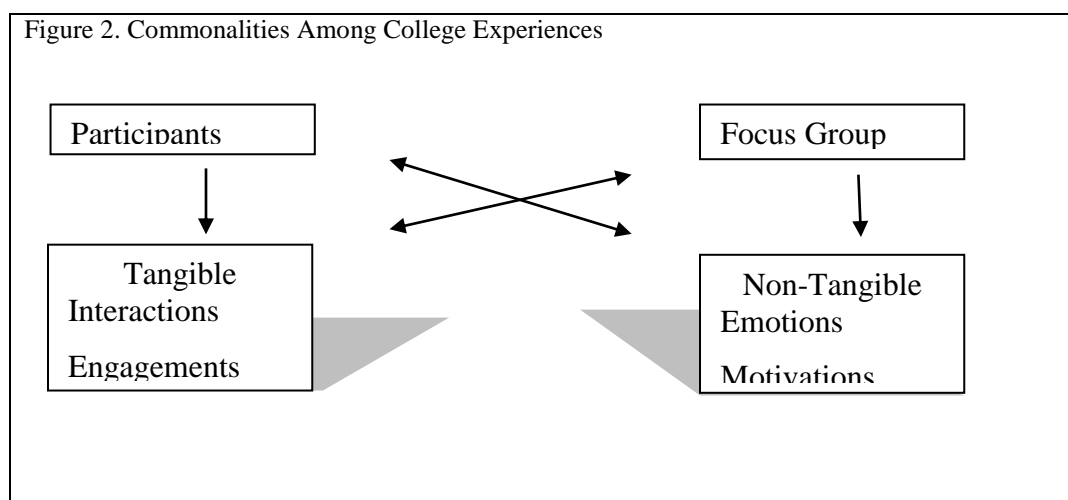


Figure 2 represents the reality that both the participants who took part in the individual interviews and those of the focus group meeting shared similar interactions, engagements, emotions and motivations. They all share the same criterion of being Black male college students at FCC who are near term graduates or graduates.

All participants were enthusiastic and forthcoming about their experiences and perspectives around the college experience at FCC. The ease with which they shared led me to believe they were most genuine in their verbal expressions. There were no visible signs of distress or disdain with any responses regarding their college experiences. In



instances where, for example, Carl spoke of his crime ridden neighborhood, I recalled he bowed his head and shook it as he spoke but soon after, lifted it again as he described how good an opportunity it was to have been at FCC and to experience what he had.

### **Research Question Two**

What are/were the reasons these students suggest for their college success?

**Aaron** attributes his success to his professors' willingness to assist outside of the classroom, his Chemistry Department Chairperson's mentorship about medical school, as well as the TRIO advisor's development of a course map of what he needed to take each term. He also attributes his success to his own motivation and efforts to work hard.

My professors have been good, especially in Biology, because I go to their offices all the time for extra help. Some of them expect you to work harder than others, but it is to prepare you for the future. For example, my Chemistry professor is really intense but I'm doing fine because I'm doing the work. And even though I complain about my professors, I always get good grades because in these situations it requires more sacrifices and I am always ready to make sacrifices to get ahead. The professor can explain something a thousand times and you'll never be able to understand unless you make the effort yourself. And I want to transfer to FU university, which is very competitive so I know I have to work hard to get into that school. I also know the Chairperson of the Chemistry Department very well because he gave me advice about medical school and the courses I need to take to get into med. school. And FCC provides everything for you to be successful. We all have something we love; we all have something we believe in and we all have something we want to achieve in life. So if you really believe in

what you want, you should motivate yourself to work hard and achieve it. That's what I've been doing.

**Brian** speaks of self-motivation as a factor of his success in college, and that it was the birth of his son as well as his own passion to succeed that pushed him forward. He also describes his relationship with his advisor as being important to his success, given that he was able to get many challenges and issues resolved through his advisor's assistance and counsel.

As for advisors, it's just TRIO and Mr. D. And that's all I need and want. Because I met Mr. D. through my wife, since she used to be in a program with him when she was in high school, I can go talk to Mr. D. whenever I want. Anything I need to discuss or anything I need, I and go talk to him because it grew to that. We have a father-son relationship and it's not just school or financial aid. It's family situations and life; we just talk. Having Mr. D. has helped me a whole lot. Sometimes you need help but you don't know who to talk to because you feel some people will just tell you what they think you want to hear so then can get you out of their face quickly. But when you have someone like Mr. D. even if he doesn't have the answer, he'll go the extra mile to get me the answer. There were many times when I needed help with certain things, and he knew where to go and he has a handle on things. So having him, really helped me go through college easy, go through the courses easier on my own. I get financial aid, and it helps me pay for my classes. I was able to meet Mr. R. in financial aid because of Mr. D. And I needed him because I was on academic probation for a while and they were going to take away my financial aid. But I'm

sure Mr. R. helped me out because of Mr. D. and I'm thankful or I would have had to take out loans and loans and more loans. So basically, both of them played a big part in me being successful and finishing up my classes even though both of them probably don't know it. And so you have TRIO, Collegiate 100 and financial aid. Those are all resources that are vital for us to be successful here.

**Carl** emphatically ascribes his success in great part to his association with the TRIO program, and particularly the advisors of the program. He also credited his own motivation toward wanting to do better for himself and his mother, as well as the effort he put forth as a student. Even though he didn't specifically mention faculty relationships as a factor, he did state that seeing faculty during office hours was critical to his success as a student.

TRIO definitely made all the difference for me in college because I spent very little time outside of TRIO. So all my experiences were either in class or in TRIO. I learned, I volunteered, I worked part-time, I mentored, I was mentored and everything was just awesome because of TRIO. Once I got to FCC, it was Mr. D. and Ms. M. in TRIO pushing me. And once I got into the classes and I realized it's not so difficult if you put out effort. So once I became a part of TRIO, I would go in for tutoring, because I had college algebra and then I had statistics that I needed help with. Many times I would just go in to get advice from Mr. D. on what classes to take or just to talk about life in general. He would give me opportunities to volunteer, and I did even though many time I really didn't want to. I felt I owed it to TRIO and Mr., D. I knew I was being held accountable to a certain standard when I was part of TRIO and that helped me

raise the bar on myself. They just did so much for me, they're still doing a lot for me because I work there part-time. I don't know where I would be right now if it wasn't for TRIO and I say that honestly all the time. And it was my turn to give back. I felt that was what I later did in TRIO when things changed from me getting services to me providing services as a part-timer.

And by the way, I always sat in front of the class, every class. This is advice I give to every single student about using their professors' office hours, and getting seen and heard by sitting in the front row. I did everything right when I came to FCC, and so I would tell other student to do exactly what I dd. I can tell you that's why I am doing so well at my university now. Students should think about becoming a TRIO student if they can, and then everything will fall into place for them like it did for me.

**David** shared that relationships he had with faculty members in great part influenced his college success. He also attributes his success to the fact that he was afforded financial aid to help pay for his classes.

I had a very good relationship with my professors, and the professors I didn't talk to are the ones whose class I did not do well. I don't know if maybe some were just grading me according to my work if they didn't know me. And the ones that I joked with and even made them laugh many times graded me according to my work, plus my character and the effort I put into my work. I got good grades, and I mean really good grades, with the ones I talked to because I guess making the connections, and me making those connections, helped me do better in my work. I'm not sure. But with my music professor and with my math professor, I got

really good grades in those classes and I had a great relationship with those teachers. I also got good grades in English and in Philosophy because I connected with the teachers. I went to their office hours anytime I needed help in a class and couldn't figure out myself. I took responsibility, so I wouldn't be like ducks sitting in water. I took things into my own hands so I could learn and pass my classes. I had a very good relationship with my professors, and the professors I didn't talk to are the ones whose class I did not do well. I don't know if maybe some were just grading me according to my work if they didn't know me. And the ones that I joked with and even made them laugh many times graded me according to my work, plus my character and the effort I put into my work. I got good grades, and I mean really good grades, with the ones I talked to because I guess making the connections, and me making those connections, helped me do better in my work. I'm not sure. But with my music professor and with my math professor, I got really good grades in those classes and I had a great relationship with those teachers. I also got good grades in English and in Philosophy because I connected with the teachers. I went to their office hours anytime I needed help in a class and couldn't figure out myself. I took responsibility, so I wouldn't be like ducks sitting in water. I took things into my own hands so I could learn and pass my classes. The biggest help I ever got at FCC was financial aid. Without that, I don't think I would have made it very far. It helped me to my AA, and that means it paid for everything.

**Elijah** was adamant that it was his determination and the manner in which he applied himself in and out of the classroom that enabled his success. He also spoke with

conviction about the relationships he developed with faculty, advisors and mentors that were also instrumental in helping him succeed in college.

I also connected with TRIO and Mr. D. and Ms. M. I don't know how to repay them. They were always there for me with school issues and thing that had nothing to do with school when I need advice. I received Math tutoring there, and I considered them to be my mentors since I could discuss practically any issue with them and get advice. But I still believe, and I will stress it again, that you have to apply yourself. That's the key, because the school can have all the resources; the school can have what the students need, but if the student is not taking the initiative to go and look for it and take advantage of it, it is of little use. But there are other people too who have been very helpful; and the top two were Mr. B., my boss in the Computer department who gave me my part-time job on campus. And Mr. M., my advisor for the Haitian Ibo club. Both of them were very, very central in my success in college.

**Francois** attributed his college success to his passion about the field of study he was pursuing coupled with his hard work and sense of taking responsibility for his own success. He also suggested that the professor who recruited him to the college and subsequently became his mentor, was a major factor in his success at FCC.

It was a mixture of my determination, willingness to go to school and the help from somebody else telling me I could do better for myself. Throughout my time at FCC, I was grateful to have Professor O., because I was able to go to him for advice about anything. Professor O. is a radio and television production professor, so it was perfect to already know someone who could help me at the

school. And Professor O. is not Black, but I don't care who I talk to. We are all human beings, and we need to know we can help each other.

We need to take responsibility for ourselves. If you're not willing to take responsibility, to say go back to school and to study hard like I did, then you shouldn't expect anything to change for the better in your life. Being successful and moving ahead requires a lot of hard work. And I have been on the dean's list every term. I was a member of Phi Theta Kappa honor society, and I was majoring in radio and television broadcasting something I was passionate, knowledgeable and experienced about. I am very proud of myself and I kept working hard to do better and better.

**Gary** credits the TRIO Program, and his fiancée who also attended FCC, with being his strong support system that pushed him toward successfully completing his degree. He felt indebted to his TRIO mentor, because he could go to him for any reason, academic or life related. He also gives a great deal of credit to two professors, whom he advises guided him and mentored him about his academic pathway and corresponding career options.

I had a lot of help from the TRIO program, and they were my strong support system that basically pushed me to keep going. Also my fiancée was there at FCC with me, and she was the personal backbone that pushed me and made my experience better. Truly it was TRIO and my fiancée who gave me the drive to continue on the days I felt like quitting. So once I met the director of TRIO, Mr. D., I never went back to my advisor because he was so great. He helped me make sure I was taking the right classes and he recommended the best professors for me

to take. Also, whenever I ran into a problem financially, I would go straight to him and he would take over to financial aid and we would get it done real quick and easy. It made all the difference having TRIO and Mr. D. They really cared about me, because they listened to me. And instead of passing me from one office to another office, they took care of it for me themselves.

There were two professors especially that were very helpful to me. They gave me good advice about being a student and being smart about studying. My Psychology professor helped with information about medical social work, and that is where I want to major for my Bachelor's degree. Of course, I went to their office hours if I had problems with not understanding the material. Dr. K., my Biology professor, was really a mentor to me. He is a great man. He is a wise man. I had him for Human Anatomy and Physiology and we communicated on a different level; for example if you fail a test or assignment, he will make an appointment for you to come in, sit down and so he can see what you're not understanding. He also gave me a lot of advice about the medical field, and he helped me understand the different medical professional outside of physician assistant.

**Harry** credited his success at FCC in great part to a professor who took an interest in him, particularly because he had stopped out for some time having felt he knew no one at the institution and he did not fit in. In his acknowledgement of the professor's influence on his success, he also recognized the important support of his TRIO advisor to whom the professor had referred him. He also felt a major part of his



persistence at FCC was due to his volunteer work at the campus Fitness Center, where he met a host of students and increasingly felt more connected with the institution.

But one of my first professors, Professor R. took an interest in me after I told her I had been cutting and failing classes. She started motivating me to move one, and she told me she knew I could succeed if I really focused on my work. Her class was very good. I guess since I had failed some classes from before when I was at the Center, I was required to take her Student Life Skills class. And she taught me how to study better, and also time management so I could be a better student. I was really shocked when I got to Ms. R.'s class because before I would just take my class and leave. But I found myself staying and talking to some students and also talking to Ms. R. She helped me get over the fear of speaking in front of the class, and even though I failed my Speech class twice, Ms. R., told me to take it again as soon as I finished her class. I took it and I realized I wasn't afraid of speaking in front of the class anymore. I passed the class. I felt like I knew everybody in the class and I was talking to my friends. Since I met Professor R., I passed all my classes ever since. She advised me about my future, and I ended up changing my major to Physical Education and Coaching, which is really what I want to do. She explained everything in a way that I could understand, even about the Math that I would need to take for the Physical Education major. Professor R. introduced me to the TRIO Program, and told me to start going there for Math tutoring and for them to be my advisors for my classes. Ms. M. in TRIO and I got to talking, and she became my advisor. She advised me to start doing voluntary work at the Fitness Center. I also got to learn about the different weight

training equipment so I could help students who came to work out. I also met a lot of people at the Center, and I began to feel more and more comfortable being at FCC. You need to continue with the TRIO program, and if every student could be in TRIO that would be very good because they would stay in school. I know I did, and it was a lot because of TRIO.

It is evident that, were it not for Harry's relationship with Professor R., he would not have progressed as he did. Not only had Harry failed and dropped out once, but it appeared he was destined to fail again on this second round at FCC had it not been for the interest and guidance of Professor R. His relationship with his advisor Ms. M. also proved to be important not only because she referred him to receive tutoring, but also her referral of him to volunteer on campus. It was through his volunteerism on campus that Harry began to meet other students in a social setting, and began to feel he belonged.

### **Discrepant Findings**

The stories of the participants were congruent. Even though one had a negative story about this initial experience at FCC which made him leave to another institution, he returned to FCC after one term and graduated subsequently. Another participant who stopped out because he felt no one cared, and he did not fit in, returned to FCC after two years and subsequently graduated. However, this data is not contrary to the major themes that emerged. There were no discrepant findings in the study.

### **Evidence of Quality**

In an attempt to ensure the highest research standards with my study, I implemented several strategies throughout the process. Interviews and a focus group meeting were complemented by member checking of transcriptions as well as the retold

stories. I also kept an audit trail of details such as the dates and times of interviews as well as details about my coding process. A color coding system was used to code and extract themes that aligned directly with the research questions.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Merriam (2009) provided recommendations of strategies that promote trustworthiness as it pertains to internal and external validity. Webster and Mertova (2007) indicated, “the trustworthiness of narrative research lies in the confirmation by participants of their reported stories of experience” (p. 99). I used “member checks” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229) as a means of engaging my research participants in reviewing, checking and providing feedback on the transcription of their interview, as well as the interpretive narratives that emerged from the inductive analysis.

Conducting member checking on the interview transcriptions, and providing feedback on the interpretive narratives constitute the process of “triangulation” (p. 299) which Merriam indicates as strengthening the confirmability of a study given the use of multiple methods to provide corroborating evidence. Overall, member checking secured the participants’ endorsement of my interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2012). Conducting a focus group and individual interviews, as I did, is also considered a form of triangulation in establishing dependability, given the potential to corroborate evidence.

To facilitate transferability of my study, I have provided sufficient ‘*thick descriptive*’ data, as recommended by Merriam (2009, p. 227) so my study findings may be applied in other college environments and replicated in settings elsewhere (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Included in my findings are detailed descriptions of the research design

and findings, including eight retold stories and direct quotes from the research participants.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 4, I presented the major findings of my research study in a two-part structure. As a narrative researcher, I was determined to uphold the integrity of narrative inquiry by honoring the voices of the participants through retold stories in Part I of Chapter 4. Part II of Chapter 4 represents a more traditional presentation of the data analysis outcomes as well as responses to the research questions. Chapter 5 will provide conclusions and recommendations.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions, Recommendations, and Summary

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to understand, and tell the stories of students' experiences during college and what contributed to their success as students. My goal of gleaning personal accounts from successful Black male students about their college experiences at Frome Community College (a pseudonym) was to provide the advantage of giving voice to their experiences of being successful. The stories of eight Black male college students, facilitated through interviews, represent retold stories about their college experiences and their views as to what helped them to be successful. The *thick, descriptive* data collected, coupled with the findings derived from the data analysis, provide a sound foundation on which to make recommendations for action and further studies.

Following are the research questions coupled with an overview of the respective answers:

1. What are/were the experiences of 8 successful Black male students at Frome Community College (FCC)?

The college experiences of the participants included campus engagement such as on-campus employment, participation in student organizations, attendance at college events, volunteerism, and the receipt of tutoring and academic advisement. These experiences served to further both the social and academic capital of the participants. Students spoke of honing leadership skills and networking with fellow students as members of student organizations. They also shared that the tutoring they received was invaluable in enabling them to be successful in their courses. Participants reported that

the experiences helped them feel a sense of belonging at FCC, not to mention a sense of connection with a faculty member or advisor.

2. What were the reasons these students suggest for their college success?

Participants suggested several reasons for their college success. Relationships with faculty members and advisors was a recurring theme. Participants' positive sentiments about specific campus personnel were very telling. Self-motivation and extrinsic motivation were also present in students' discussion of what led to their success as students. Tutoring and advisement assistance were also factors students suggested were invaluable to their success at FCC. Students also credited their engagement on campus as instrumental to their success. The implications of what participants shared certainly should be considered by the leadership of FCC. Utilizing these findings, FCC ought to examine its policies and practices, and consider enhancing its support services to ensure there is greater intentionality in supporting Black male student success.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of this narrative research study reflected the research participants' voices about their experiences and reasons for success while enrolled at Frome Community College (FCC) (pseudonym). Even though there were no notable contradictions between my findings and prior literature, there was a distinct finding in my research study. 6 participants, all of whom were Caribbean natives or of Caribbean descent, shared that their ethnicity was a factor that contributed to their college success. They specifically related that they were all first generation college students. However, they further discussed that the importance of an education was instilled in them as youths. They each knew it was expected that they would complete high school and college.

These 6 participants shared that it was known in Caribbean families, that one had to place emphasis on one's education, and that sense of purpose was a motivating factor for their college success at FCC.

When asked to describe their experiences at FCC, all participants provided stories using detailed accounts of their own lived experiences on campus. These included emotions of gratitude and belonging as well as relationships they had developed with faculty and staff. Even though there were recurring themes due to similar experiences, each participant shared their own story.

Relationships were a key factor among all participants: All eight discussed professional and familial relationships that they held dear with professors, staff, family, and peers. Only three participants spoke about having a professional relationship with their professors. This is a circumstance that college leaders and faculty should examine and consider ways to boost student-faculty engagement outside of the classroom. All participants except one mentioned a male professor or advisor who was their "go-to" mentor on campus and also spoke very fondly of how influential this mentor was to their success. The one other participant mentioned that a female advisor had referred him to a male advisor and insisted on going with him to introduce him to this advisor. He expressed a deep appreciation for the woman advisor's time and caring, noting that if it were not for her, he would not have been able to succeed.

While student connectedness with faculty is offered as a factor of persistence for Black male students (Glenn, 2007; Harper, 2012; and Mosby, 2009, several studies (e.g., Hagedorn et al., 2007; Harper, 2012 and Mosby, 2009;) have connected Black male student success with family relationships and support, suggesting that strong relationships

between mothers and their Black male sons have a positive influence on the son's persistence and success. The implication of this association is that students who have strong relationships with their families are motivated by the support and genuine interest in seeing them succeed, are desirous of making their families proud of them and, therefore, strive toward that end (Wood, 2012). The literature, as indicated by Wood (2012), aligns to my findings to the extent that all participants discussed with great passion and appreciation the sacrifices made by their mothers as background for their success in college. One discrepant case in that regard was the participant in my study who mentioned his older brother, who stepped in after his mother's death, and was a major source of inspiration behind his college success. These findings mentioned above clearly confirm knowledge in the discipline and Ross' (1995) narrative inquiry in particular, which found that family was the most significant factor in the academic success of Black male college students.

Participants' stories and corresponding findings also indicated that deep, personal motivation and yearning to succeed in college and make something of themselves contributed to their success. Driving forces in participants' success were intrinsic motivation coupled with that of family, college personnel and cultural/environmental pushes. Ross (1995) indicated a strong work ethic and commitment to succeed were important influences on Black male college success.

The six participants from Caribbean families credited education as being a valued part of their background. Therefore, that aspect of their culture was a major part of their motivation toward being successful in college. There were participants whose comments centered on what it was like to grow up in an inner city, where childhood peers were idle



and unproductive. They expressed decisively that seeing their peers in such a situation was a driving force in their constructive pursuits. Black male community college students are motivated toward success in great part because of their desire to counteract negative stereotypes (Myer, 2012). Equally important is Palmer and Young's (2008) study which concluded that non-cognitive skills were variables that promoted student success and persistence among Black male students, versus aptitude and other cognitive measures.

The conceptual framework of this research study was based on anti-deficit theory. Anti-deficit thinking theory contradicts deficit thinking theory and identifies factors such as instructional practices, societal and environmental factors, as well as institutional, curricular and co-curricular policies as the factors associated with student success (Gourd & Lightfoot, 2009). The aforementioned statement aligns well with my findings in that each of my participants spoke of tutoring, advisement, and mentoring not to mention the relationships that emerged, as being important to their success.

Anti-deficit thinking recognizes the determination required on the part of students to succeed in school, but it also acknowledges that educability is appreciably associated with the socio-political and economic conditions of schools (Harper, 2012; Pearl, 2012). With regard to my study, the intrinsic motivation discussed by the participants and the responsibility each of them voiced they were taking for own success speaks volumes about how these align with the literature reviewed.

This study was limited to engaging eight Black male near term and recent college graduates from a single institution in one-on-one interviews, in addition to a focus group of six currently enrolled Black male students in their last term of study from said

institution. While one may not be able to generalize vastly due to the limitation, the narratives which evolved from the data collection were rich and descriptive, giving voice to students' perspectives on their college experiences and what made them successful college students.

### **Implications for Social Change**

It is important that I follow-up with dissemination plans to share the findings and recommendations of this research study with the leadership of FCC and more widely with practitioners at other community colleges. However, what is equally important is this study's potential impact on social change. The findings are liberating in terms of highlighted Black males in a most positive light, given their near term or graduation from college. The findings also attribute positive intrinsic motivation, ability to form solid relationships, love and regard for family, and a yearning to be successful to Black males.

Creating the opportunity for successful Black male students to share their stories, as this study did, about their own experiences and accomplishments, has no doubt strengthened their very resolve and confidence to continue to develop intellectually and professionally, and become contributing citizens. For their engagement in this research study was in essence an exercise in reflection about themselves, where they had to think critically about themselves as men.

There is also opportunity for the potential of Black males to be heightened within society in terms of their pathological and intellectual assets, as well as the great benefit to society for them to be afforded every opportunity to achieve the American Dream.

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, Wells (2008) and McGlynn (2011) discussed the degree to which a college credential is the most impacting equalizer for

persons in society, and they note that college degrees provide for higher socioeconomic status and enable individuals to move up the social ladder into the subsequent class. It is anticipated that the findings and subsequent recommendations that have emerged from this research study will have important implications for long-term, sustainable social change in terms of the mainstreaming of Black males into educational settings and propelling them toward greater educational attainment, higher wages, and high skilled careers. This outcome is more promising than current statistics regarding unemployment, incarceration, or paths of blighted life experiences.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Given the findings of this study, I recommend several initiatives to enhance the college experience for Black male college students, and propel them more readily toward persistence and college completion.

- Hold focus group sessions with Black male students during their first weeks and on a scheduled, periodic basis to validate, support, and continually encourage students' intrinsic motivation and yearning to be successful in college.
- Formalize a mentoring program that would be a combination of peer and faculty/staff mentors. The more accessible a mentor and “go to” person is to students the more opportunities there are for them to establish formal and informal relationships and connectedness with the institution.
- Formalize partnerships with local Black community based organizations such as, Black Chambers of Commerce and Professional Black male fraternities, to build a pool of role models and mentors who could afford shadowing and internship

opportunities for students to learn about, and imagine themselves in successful careers.

- Establish student organizations that are specifically focused on promoting and supporting the ethnographic representation of students. For example, having a Haitian Club, Caribbean Student Club or Black Student Union may be argued to be divisive; however, these serve the purpose of validating an important element of ethnic and cultural pride for Black males.
- Use the stories gathered through this study as a basis for professional development for faculty and staff and as a means of familiarizing personnel with the perspectives of Black male students. This would prompt personnel to reflect upon the Black males they have encountered in their classrooms and service areas and how they might have supported them in more intentional ways. This might also prove to stimulate additional interest and conversations among faculty and staff around innovative ways to support these students.

The recommendations delineated above are pragmatic and reasonable. They can be easily implemented at institutions if there is an institutional commitment to supporting Black male student success. Aligned with my recommendations is Tinto's (1975) theory, which essentially suggested that the more engaged students were with their peers, the faculty and the social and academic functions of their colleges, the more committed they were to staying and striving for success. Participants in my study exemplified the above-mentioned attributes.

I intend to disseminate an executive summary of my research, the findings as well as my recommendations to the leadership of FCC. I also plan to submit proposals to the

Association of American Community Colleges (AACC) and the League for Innovation in the Community College to present at their Annual and Innovations conferences, respectively.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The findings of this study provided deep insight into the college experiences of eight Black male college students as well as areas for potential future research.

- Given of the eight participants, four were Haitian, two were from the English speaking Caribbean and two were native African Americans: A case study, with a focus on ethnography, could be conducted with a heterogeneous sample that includes a Haitian, Jamaican, and African American male student, to learn more about factors associated with their educational experiences from primary to college level.
- A narrative study could also be undertaken with Black males who are near term graduates or graduates of baccalaureate programs at community colleges. FCC offers eight different Bachelor's degree programs, and with the growth of such programs at community colleges it will be important to support Black male student achievement in those programs.
- A narrative study could be undertaken to give voice to the perspectives of faculty and staff at FCC around Black male student academic and social integration on campus.
- A mixed method study could be conducted to determine the efficacy of a TRIO program on Black male persistence in a community college.

## Reflections

As a mother of two Black boys, I knew I would have to maintain an open mind and contain my biases as I engaged with the eight Black male college students. It was important to me that their stories emerge as they had voiced them to me. I could not help, however, feeling a deep sense of pride and admiration for every single one of the eight young men I interviewed. It was so heartening to witness in their body language, intonations, and words how highly motivated they were about ensuring they were successful as college students. With full regard for the backgrounds of these men, four of whom were Haitians with strong linguistic and cultural ties to their cultures, my intent is to ensure I follow through with the dissemination of the findings of my study. And with regard to one of the native born African American men who heard gunshots frequently at night as he lay his head on his pillow, and who wanted to be successful so he could support his single mother and force her to retire immediately, my respect and love for Black males have grown exponentially.

Hearing the stories of these eight promising, successful Black male college students was validation that I had selected the most appropriate conceptual framework for my study. Steeped in anti-deficit thinking and with a resolve to help dispel stereotypes of Black male intellectual incapacity, the findings of my study showed a capacity for college success. As Harper (2010) maintained, it is not appropriate to use social capital theory to belabor Black male students' lack of social capital. Instead he suggested social capital theory should be used to explain how Black males have established viable relationships and connections with college personnel. And instead of using attribution theory to explain the barriers to Black male students' persistence and achievement, Harper (2010)

suggested the theory should be used to describe the individuals, opportunities and resources that propelled their achievement. It would be refreshing to see more and more researchers adopting an anti-deficit approach to studying Black male student success. As concluded from Myer's (2012) narrative inquiry findings, Black male community college students are motivated toward success in great part because of their desire to counteract negative stereotypes.

As I reflect on the participants and the stories they shared, I feel obligated to mention that I am tremendously pleased that I chose to ground my study through an anti-deficit framework rather than using critical race theory, which one might deem should have been my theoretical base, given the focus was on Black male students. We need to constantly be mindful that subtle racism still exists on community college campuses (Myers, 2012). However, with regard to my study, race did not emerge as a prominent theme in any respect throughout the interviews. I wonder if it was due to the huge diversity of students that exists at FCC; and if there is any existing racism, it is indeed very subtle and unnoticed. As a researcher, I was determined to contribute to social change by highlighting that there are successful Black male college students. These students have rich stories of intrinsic motivation, commitment, deep college and familial relationships, and a willingness to work hard so they can support their families and make them proud.

### **Summary**

This research study gave voice to eight Black male college achievers, who were highly motivated and grateful for the opportunity and support they received as they persisted through college. The stories they shared are rich evidence that indeed Black

males have ambition and are willing to work hard to earn college degrees and become contributing members of the society. Stereotypes about Black males are certainly negated through the findings of this study. I do hope this study will have added in some small way to the breadth and scope of anti-deficit thinking, as it pertains to Black male students, in academia as well as society. There is much work to be done in terms of Black males being plagued by educational attainment issues that begin in elementary school, and accumulate through secondary school to college. They are disciplined more than their White peers, they are discouraged by teachers and guidance counselors from aspiring to college, and they are a predominant population in exceptional education cohorts and classes (Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008; Palmer et. al., 2010). While we must never become complacent in advocating for those inequitable conditions to persist, we must also continue to highlight our Black school boys and college men who are achieving, and help to change the face of Black males in society.



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## Appendix A: Focus Group-Consent Form

Thank you for your consideration to take part in a research study that seeks to compile a composite story of perspectives and experiences of Black male college around factors that influenced their college success. Please review this consent form which is intended to facilitate your understanding of the purpose of the study and the process, and to get your consent to participate. Once you have read the form, I urge you to ask as many questions as you deem appropriate,

The study will be conducted by Malou C. Harrison in her capacity as a doctoral candidate at Walden University. An alias, not your real name, will be used in all transcriptions and reports to preserve your anonymity.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to glean firsthand perceptions from Black male college students that could be utilized by higher education decision makers at your college as well as colleges nationwide. Information collected from this study could serve to inform policies and support programs around enabling the success of Black male college students.

### **Procedures:**

If you decide to participate in the study, the following will be requested of you:

- Participate in a focus group along with seven other students for a period of 60 to 90 minutes.
- Check the accuracy of my interpretation on your interview through a process called ‘member checking’ which should take you no more than 30 minutes; and,
- Rest assured that for confidentiality purposes your real name will not be used in any transcriptions or reports.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

As you know, your participation in the research study is strictly voluntary, and you may decide to withdraw from participating at any time, for any reason, and without penalty of any kind. While it is hoped you will continue with all aspects of participation in the study, you should feel free to refrain from answering any question that makes you uncomfortable or causes you undue stress.

**Challenges and Opportunities Presented by the Study:**

Time may present a challenge for you as you dedicate no more than 90 minutes for the focus group meeting; however, by sharing this amount of time, you will be contributing to a study that seeks to give voice to the experiences of educational attainment of Black males as a means to create policy and programs to assist other Black males, and to help create a much-needed paradigm shift in the manner in which society views Black males in general.

**Remuneration:**

There is no remuneration associated with your participation in the study.

**Confidentiality:**

All information you share in the focus group meeting will be kept strictly confidential. Your real name will not be used when the study report is written, and there will be no information that discloses your identity.

**Contact:**

Malou C. Harrison is the sole researcher for the study, and she may be reached at malou.harrison@waldenu.edu. The researcher's Dissertation Committee Chair's name is Dr. Kevin Quinlan, and he may be reached at 902-895-2813 or kevin.quinlan@waldenu.edu. At any time before, during or after your participation in the study, you should feel welcome to contact the researcher or her faculty mentor to discuss any questions, concerns or issues regarding your rights and responsibilities as a participant. For questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact Walden University's Institutional Review Board contact person, Dr. Leilani Endicott, at 1-800-925-3368, *ext. 3121210*.

By signing this Consent Form, I am confirming that I have read the Consent Form document provided to me by the researcher. I have received answers to all of the questions I posed to the researcher, and I fully understand and endorse the role I will play as a participant in the study. I understand that my participation in the research study is strictly voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time, for any reason, and without penalty of any kind. I am over the age of 18 years, and I consent to participating in the study.

Name of Participant (Print Name)

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Participant's Signature

Date:

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Researcher's Signature

Date:

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**Note:**

The study will be conducted by Malou C. Harrison in her capacity as a doctoral candidate at Walden University. You will be provided with a copy of this Consent Form, bearing your signature. Thank you!

## Appendix B: Individual Interview-Consent Form

Thank you for your consideration to take part in a research study that seeks to compile a composite story of perspectives and experiences of Black male college around factors that influenced their college success. Please review this consent form which is intended to facilitate your understanding of the purpose of the study and the process, and to get your consent to participate. Once you have read the form, I urge you to ask as many questions as you deem appropriate,

The study will be conducted by Malou C. Harrison in her capacity as a doctoral candidate at Walden University. An alias, not your real name, will used in all transcriptions and reports to preserve your anonymity.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to glean firsthand perceptions from Black male college students that could be utilized by higher education decision makers at your college as well as colleges nationwide. Information collected from this study will serve to inform policies and support programs around enabling the success of Black male college students.

### **Procedures:**

If you decide to participate in the study, the following will be requested of you:

- Participate in an interview for a period of 60 minutes
- Check the accuracy of my interpretation on your interview through a process called 'member checking' which should take you no more than 30 minutes; and,
- Rest assured that for confidentiality purposes your real name will not be used in any transcriptions or reports.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

As you know, your participation in the research study is strictly voluntary, and you may decide to withdraw from participating at any time, for any reason, and without penalty of any kind. While it is hoped you will continue with all aspects of participation in the study, you should feel free to refrain from answering any question that makes you uncomfortable or causes you undue stress.

**Challenges and Opportunities Presented by the Study:**

Time may present a challenge for you as you dedicate no more than 60 minutes for the interview; however, by sharing this amount of time, you will be contributing to a study that seeks to give voice to the experiences of educational attainment of Black males as a means to create policy and programs to assist other Black males, and to help create a much-needed paradigm shift in the manner in which society views Black males in general.

**Remuneration:**

There is no remuneration associated with your participation in the study.

**Confidentiality:**

All information you share in the focus group meeting will be kept strictly confidential. Your real name will not be used when the study report is written, and there will be no information that discloses your identity.

**Contact:**

Malou C. Harrison is the sole researcher for the study, and she may be reached at malou.harrison@waldenu.edu. The researcher's Dissertation Committee Chair's name is Dr. Kevin Quinlan, and he may be reached at 902-895-2813 or kevin.quinlan@waldenu.edu. At any time before, during or after your participation in the study, you should feel welcome to contact the researcher or her faculty mentor to discuss any questions, concerns or issues regarding your rights and responsibilities as a participant. For questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact Walden University's Institutional Review Board contact person, Dr. Leilani Endicott, at 1-800-925-3368, *ext. 3121210*.

By signing this Consent Form, I am confirming that I have read the Individual Interviews-Consent Form document provided to me by the researcher. I have received answers to all of the questions I posed to the researcher, and I fully understand and

endorse the role I will play as a participant in the study. I understand that my participation in the research study is strictly voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time, for any reason, and without penalty of any kind. I am over the age of 18 years, and I consent to participating in the study.

Name of Participant (Print Name)

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Participant's Signature

Date:

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Researcher's Signature

Date:

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**Note:**

The study will be conducted by Malou C. Harrison in her capacity as a doctoral candidate at Walden University. You will be provided with a copy of this Consent Form, bearing your signature. Thank you!

## Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol

1. How would you describe your high school experience? What was good about it? What was not so good about it?
2. How would you describe your college experience at Frome Community College?
3. What would you say helped in your own success at FCC? Describe how much that means you were personally responsible or not and to what degree? How much would you attribute to FCC?
4. How many professors did you have who were of your gender and ethnicity, and looked and spoke like you? How important was that factor to you, and why?
5. What impact did your professors or any other FCC official have on you as a student? How do you feel your experience would have been different with that individual's support? What support was specifically given to you, and in what setting?
6. To what extent do you think race played a role, either positively or negatively, during your time as a student at FCC? If so, how? If not, to what do you give credit for that outcome?
7. In what way can FCC better serve students like you?
8. If you were asked to speak to a group of 1<sup>st</sup> year students of your gender and ethnicity, and provide them advice about navigating FCC, what would you tell them?
9. We are at the end of the focus group session. Is there anything else you'd like to share? Thank you!

## Appendix D: Interview Protocol

## Interview Protocol

Research Study: A Narrative Inquiry of Successful Black Male College Students

Interview Date:

Interview Time:

Place:

Interviewer's Name: Malou C. Harrison

Participant's Name:

Verbal Re-confirmation of Consent Form already signed: (    ) Yes    (    ) No

## Questions:

1. Please describe in your own words what your college level school experiences have been.
2. What was your primary reason for deciding to attend college?
3. What is/was your major, and what school will you/did you transfer to for upper division studies?
4. How would you describe your relationship with faculty members, advisors, and the administration? Describe your engagement in student life/activities at the college?
5. Describe the student support services you use/used at the college?
6. What advice would you offer other students like you to advance themselves successfully at the college?
7. What recommendations would you make to the college administration regarding changes you see as needed in policies or practices that would support and facilitate the success of students like you?
8. We're at the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experiences at the community college?

Thank you very much, and please remember you will receive a transcript of this interview to review for accuracy of your input.



## Appendix E: Curriculum Vitae

**MALOU C. HARRISON****8410 S.W. 208 Terrace, Miami, Florida 33189****Home: (305) 233-3865 -Cell: 786-380-5878****Email: malouharrison@gmail.com****Core Leadership Accomplishments from 2003 to 2014**

- Led strategic campus enrollment management initiatives which resulted in increased direct entry students at the institution.
- Procured and launched the Campus' 1.5M TRIO Support Services grant program now in its second 5 year funding phase.
- Launched the College's Roadmap to Completion grant program, under the auspices of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).
- Spearheaded the successful procurement of articulation agreements with Fisk University, Tuskegee University and Emerson College to facilitate scholarships and the seamless transition of MDC students after graduation.
- Co-led the launch of the multi-year, multi-campus MDC Single Stop and MDC Mentoring Programs, which have served over 7,500 students in two years, providing federal financial assistance, resources and mentors to students.
- Co-led MDC's proactive response to the U.S. Executive Order on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in support of undocumented MDC students and their families.

**Professional Experience****Campus President, August 2013 to Present  
Miami Dade College, North Campus and MDC-West**

- Serves as an executive member of the College's leadership team and visionary leader of the Campus management team.
- Charts and oversees a broad-based educational and operational strategic initiative to further student enrollment, quality and relevance of programs, and student success.

- Provides leadership to reinforce the fiscal direction of the campus and institutional philanthropic initiatives, including championing viable partnerships.
- Champions the procurement of financial resources, and provides direction in raising the national visibility and prominence of the Campus and its programs.

**Dean of Students, May 2003 to August 2013**  
**Miami Dade College - Miami, Florida**

- Served as chief student services officer with a track record for successful campus-wide leadership and administrative responsibility for establishing and maintaining a campus focus on student recruitment, persistence, development and achievement for a campus serving 50,000 students per year.
- Oversaw all functional student services areas on campus including the New Student Center, Admissions & Registration, Financial Aid Services, Advisement & Career Services, ACCESS Services for Students with Disabilities, Student Life, the Testing Center, Student Discipline, the college-wide student newspaper as well as the TRIO Student Support Services, MDC Mentoring, and Single Stop grant funded programs.
- Provided oversight responsibility for crisis response and support to students as well as personnel working with students, including the management of individual and group crisis and emergency situations, mediation and other conflict resolution interventions including the management of individual and group crisis and emergency situations, mediation and other conflict resolution interventions.

**Chief of Staff to the College President, October 1995 to May 2003**  
**Miami Dade College - Miami, Florida**

- Provided oversight line responsibility for the college-wide divisions of Public Affairs and Cultural Affairs, in addition to the administrative operation of the College President's Office, including the fiscal management of an overall budget of approximately \$6M, new program development, community relations, legislative initiatives, and conference development, authorship of internal documents, and articulation with four-year institutions.
- Within the realm of providing oversight responsibility, rendered leadership for a quality and viable integrated marketing, media relations, and cultural affairs operation that supports the recruitment, fundraising, and cultural programming efforts of the College.

- Served as the College's chief liaison with the Department of State in administering the State Department's International Visitor Program in Miami Dade County.
- Served as the College President's liaison to the District Board of Trustees and as the official liaison of the College President with students, faculty and staff,

**Adjunct Professor of TESOL, January 1997 to January 2001  
Miami Dade College – Miami, Florida**

**Executive Assistant to Campus President, October 1989 to October 1995  
Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus – Miami, Florida**

- Responsible for a myriad of administrative functions related to the overall operation of the Campus President's Office; served as budget manager for the Campus President's budget, in excess of \$700,000, including the overall allocation of funds to support a variety of expenditures.
- Served as liaison to many educational institutions such as the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), and the League for Innovation, as well as community organizations like the United Way of Dade County, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), and the Miami-Dade Chamber of Commerce.
- Provided leadership in developing and coordinating the Campus' strategic plan for faculty and staff involvement in all Wolfson Campus campus-wide projects.
- Worked collaboratively with the Campus' leadership team of Deans and student services and academic managers in the decision-making process of the Campus.

**Financial Aid Advisor, January 1989 to October 1989  
Institute of Security and Technology – Miami, Florida**

- Responsible for assisting new and continuing students explore financial aid options; provide advisement about the financial aid application process and repayment obligations. Processed financial aid, including Federal and State Financial Aid, and loans, for a student body of approximately 500 students. Collaborated with the students, parents, and lenders throughout the process.

**Assistant to Director, Educational Opportunity Center, May 1983 to  
December 1988  
State University of New York (SUNY) – Buffalo, New York**

- Responsible for assisting the Director in administering a program for academically disadvantaged high school graduates and adult learners pursuing postsecondary education.
- Initiated recruitment and retention activities including high school visits, community agency information sessions and workshops, and oversaw the educational components of the program such as the intake, testing, advisement, and the tutorial center; served as the chief liaison with Buffalo public high schools and community organizations in the effort to recruit students and facilitate their transition to the State University of New York's college-level degree programs.

## Education

Walden University. Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Ph.D., Community College Leadership  
Program Completion Expected, November 2014

Florida International University, Miami, Florida  
Master of Arts, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)  
Degree Conferred, May 2000

State University of New York, Buffalo, New York  
Bachelor of Science, Management  
Degree Conferred, May 1983

## Publications

- *Association of American Colleges and Universities, Peer Review Journal (2012)*. Co-Author: "Student Affairs and Faculty Join Hands to support Student Achievement at Miami Dade College".
- *League for Innovation in the Community College, Student Services Dialogues: Community College Case Studies (2008)*. Co-author: "Commencement at Miami Dade College-A Celebration of Diversity and Student Success".

## Professional Affiliations

- National Blue Ribbon Member, Community College Consortium on Immigrant Education (CCCIE)
- Advisory Board Member, Miami Dade County Sister Cities Coordinating Council
- Executive PASS Board Member, Council for Educational Change

- Advisory Board Member, Educational Excellence School Advisory Council of Law Enforcement Memorial Senior High School and Brentwood Elementary School
- Member, City of North Miami University Relations Board
- Member, Miami Dade County Public Schools, African American Task Force