2023

African American Students' Perceptions of a Community College Mentoring Program

Julia Anderson
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Julia Anderson

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

and that any and all revisions required by

the review committee has been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Earl Thomas, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Carole Pearce, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Leslie Van Gelder, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2023

Abstract

African American Students' Perceptions of a Community College Mentoring Program

by

Julia Lawrence

MA, Walden University, 2011

BS, Texas Southern University, 1994

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2023

Abstract

A local community college was experiencing poor retention rates among African American students, an issue that has challenged community colleges across the United States. To improve this group's retention, college administrators instituted a mentoring program; however, they later indicated a need to better understand which mentoring strategies were most effective. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how students in the program perceived the effects of mentoring, which mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether they perceived mentoring as positively impacting their retention. Tinto's student integration theory provided the conceptual framework to show a connection between mentoring and improved retention among African American students. Two questions guided the study—one related to how African American students attending the community college mentoring program described their experiences, and one focused on which elements of the program students perceived as having the greatest influence on their retention and ability to graduate. A basic qualitative research design was employed. Ten African American students who participated in the mentoring program were recruited via social media for interviews, which were transcribed for thematic analysis. Findings indicated that participants perceived the mentoring program as supporting their ability to remain in school and graduate. These findings may give the local college administrators insight into the mentoring methods that may be most effective in helping African American students succeed. Findings have social implications for community college administrators seeking a better understanding of how mentoring impacts African American students' retention and completion rates.

African American Students' Perceptions of a Community College Mentoring Program

by

Julia Lawrence

MA, Walden University, 2011

BS, Texas Southern University, 1994

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2023

Dedication

Working on my dissertation has been the most difficult educational challenge that I have faced. I learned a lot about myself. I found renewed strength within myself even through adversity to continue to work and complete my goal of earning a doctoral degree. It has been challenging, but I fought the good fight, and I am thankful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for His unwavering love and sacrifice. I am thankful to my son, who has always been a blessing to me. Jerome (Roney) has always been my biggest advocate. He loves his mother and I love him more. Thanks for motivating me, son, and believing in me more than I did myself. You are my blessing, and I thank Jesus for you, Roney! There is nothing that he would not do for me under God, and I feel the same. To my family and friends who helped take care of Victoria while I was working on my dissertation, I say thank you! Thanks for listening and caring about me. I am so blessed to have family and good friends in my life. I will always be grateful for your love and support. Thank you for helping me through the dissertation process.

Table of Contents

Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

When a local community college was experiencing poor retention among African American students, administrators instituted a mentoring program. However, they indicated that they remained unsure about what type of mentoring program and strategies were the most effective. This study addresses the need for research into how African American community college students perceived the effectiveness of different types of mentoring programs and strategies in supporting their retention. Findings may assist administrators at this college in designing mentoring programs that positively affect retention. The implications for positive social change include the potential to provide administrators at other community colleges with information about which methods might be successful in helping African American students complete their degree programs. Effective mentoring could provide positive results including better retention.

This study focused on a 2-year community college in a city in the southeastern United States where retention was particularly low among African American students. In Fall 2016, the overall retention rate for full-time students after their first term was 54%, and the retention rate for part-time students was 33% (Univstats, 2019). However, for African American men, the retention rate was 31% for 2015-2016 and 28% for 2016-2017 (Univstats, 2019). Administrators at the college have struggled to determine why the retention rates for African American men are so low even though they have taken measures to improve them (college administrator, personal communication, Fall 2017).

One measure that administrators attempted was the institution of a mentoring program. But administrators stated that although they started a common mentoring program, they did not fully understand the possible effects of different types of mentoring.

Student retention is also a major concern for institutions of higher education nationally (Anderson, 2019; Frances, 2019; Kerby, 2015). Since the 1960s, student retention has been a focus of institutional strategies at colleges and universities in the United States (White-McNeil, 2016). Most universities perceive retention rates as an important indicator of student academic success at the college level (Carson & Reed, 2015). Retention rates for African American students have continued to be a problem at both the local and national levels (Francis, 2019; Owen & Amar, 2018; Smart, 2017). One study found that retention was problematic among African American graduate students, with minority students being more likely than their peers to depart from their programs without degrees (Griffin et al., 2016). The retention rate, particularly among students of color, has been an ongoing problem (Smart, 2017). One possible way to address these discrepancies is through effective student mentoring programs targeted at improving retention (Mertes & Jankovich, 2016). However, more research is needed to understand which types of mentoring programs would be effective at improving retention rates among African American students and how much of an impact such programs have on students' choice to continue in school.

Rationale

Administrators at the community college in this study have yet to determine

whether the mentoring program they started for African American students at their institution in Fall 2016 has affected college retention or which specific type of mentoring has been the most effective. Administrators expressed their need to understand how the program affected college retention among this group as well as which program characteristics and student perceptions related to the program may have the greatest impact. Further, there is a gap in the literature about the connection between mentoring and retention, especially for minority students (Flores, 2013; Langevine, 2020; Romano, 1995). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether they believed mentoring had a positive impact on their retention.

Definition of Terms

Several key terms are used throughout this project study. These terms are defined below to provide a better understanding of the focus of the study and the terminology used to describe the research and results.

Black or African American: A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (Nichols, 2017).

Mentoring: The process by which a less experienced, less skilled individual is tutored, counseled, or guided by an individual who possesses a high level of skill and experience and is willing to act as a mentor or guide (Smart, 2017).

Mentor: An individual who possesses a certain level of knowledge and guides the

direction of another person's life (Smart, 2017).

Mentee: A person who is currently or was enrolled in a mentoring program (Smart, 2017).

Student retention: The rate at which students remain enrolled in school until completion of a degree (Bishop, 2018).

Significance of the Study

Research supports the use of mentoring programs to improve college retention (Francis, 2019). The results of this study contribute to a better understanding of how African American students perceive mentoring and the impact it can have on their retention. The study may also uncover specific mentoring strategies that positively affect retention among this group of students. This information may assist administrators at the college being studied in designing mentoring programs that positively affect retention, benefiting students as well as the college itself. The findings of this study have implications for positive social change, as they may contribute to the establishment, restructuring, or enhancement of other college mentoring programs.

Research Questions

A low retention rate among African American students is a concern for administrators at the community college in this study. Mentoring is one strategy that has been attempted to address this problem. However, further study is needed to better understand the perceptions of students who have experienced different types of mentoring. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African

American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether mentoring had a positive impact on their retention. The following research questions were used to structure this study:

RQ 1: What are African American students' perceptions of the mentoring program at the community college?

RQ 2: Which elements of mentoring do African American students at the community college perceive as having a positive influence on their retention?

Conceptual Framework

Tinto's (1993) student integration theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study, as it can be used to show a connection between mentoring and positive retention for African American students. Student integration theory demonstrates the social and academic integration that students need to persist and stay in school. It was employed here to understand the social and cultural factors that impacted African American students' retention at the 2-year community college in the southeastern United States. Tinto's student integration model is most frequently cited to explain students' departure from their degree programs (Beckett, 2015; Walker & Okpala, 2017). Tinto argued that the stronger the student's individual level of social and academic integration, the greater their subsequent commitment to the institution and the goal of college graduation (Tinto, 1993). Social integration involves an individual's peer-to-peer interactions and day-to-day interactions at the institution, and academic integration includes the full range of an individual's experiences in the traditional and non-traditional

domains of the academic systems of the university (Griffin, 2018; Tinto, 1993). Faculty and staff interactions with students are an integral part of the academic system. Student integration can include mentoring that is designed to improve faculty and staff interactions (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's (1993) student integration theory was useful in understanding how African American students perceived the impact of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether mentoring was positively correlated with their persistence to remain in college. The research questions used to structure this study were informed by Tinto's theory linking the support systems that help students integrate into campus life to improved retention and graduation rates. These research questions were in turn used to develop interview questions, which served as the data-collection instrument in this study.

Review of the Broader Problem

This section provides a description of the conceptual framework used in this study as well as an overview of literature relevant to the research questions. Tinto's (1993) theories were employed as a framework, as they support a connection between mentoring and improved retention of African American students. Existing research related to this topic includes studies addressing student retention at community colleges, low retention rates among African American community college students, strategies that have been attempted to improve the retention of minority students, mentoring as a means of supporting students, and the types and impacts of mentoring programs. This background

information supports the need for the current research study. For instance, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018), the percentage of degree-seeking students retained from year to year at 2-year colleges was only 62% (NCES, 2018). Existing research supports the role of mentoring programs in ameliorating this problem (Anderson, 2019). But literature on the positive impact mentoring in 2-year institutions has been minimal, with research on African American students being particularly limited (Bishop, 2019; Smart, 2017). The research does indicate that African Americans are entering community colleges at higher rates than in previous years; however, they continue to leave at even higher rates than their counterparts (Beckett, 2015; Smart, 2017).

The initial literature review was completed by locating peer-reviewed, scholarly articles from several education journals, which were accessed via the Walden University databases. The ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE and Educational Research Complete databases were used to search for the following terms: *college student retention, college student retention rates, African American students' retention, African American students' retention rates, college students and mentoring, African American students mentoring, and higher education and mentoring.* This literature review is organized into seven topic areas: the conceptual framework, student retention, student retention in community colleges, African American student retention, strategies used to address retention, mentoring strategies, and the effects of mentoring.

Student Retention in Higher Education

Student retention in higher education is defined as students remaining in college until they complete their degree programs (Bishop, 2019). College retention has been viewed as a crucial component of college and later career success. However, research suggests that student retention in higher education remains a problem, with graduation rates continuing to decline (Nichols, 2017). Though there may be multiple causes for this attrition, developing a sense of belonging among these students may be of greatest importance to their retention (Frances, 2019). Tinto (1993) addressed the importance of students' need for socialization and a sense of belonging. Tinto's research suggested that students who engaged in formal and informal academic and social integration experiences were less likely to leave their institutions. Researchers have discovered several factors that contribute to a student's decision to remain in college or withdraw (Griffin, et al., 2016). These factors include the quality of students' interactions with faculty, their socialization with peers, and their experiences with the institution, all of which can increase or decrease their likelihood of remaining in college (Griffin, et al., 2016). Lack of socialization and institutional support contributed to problems with student retention in institutions of higher education (Bishop, 2019).

Student Retention in Community Colleges

Retention in community colleges has been viewed as a pressing issue in education. One measure of success for community colleges is their ability to find ways to retain students (Hutto, 2017). Community colleges in the United States offer the

opportunity of higher education to students seeking lower costs than those found at 4-year universities (Anderson, 2019). Research has suggested that retaining students has remained a major issue for community colleges for several reasons. First, students attending community colleges tend to be from lower-income households and may have financial challenges that interfere with their community college matriculation (Nichols, 2017; Wood & Penrose, 2015). Second, first-generation college students often lack the type of parental or sibling support that might have enabled them to matriculate from their community college programs (Nevarez et al., 2015; Nichols, 2017). Third, community college students tend to be from ethnic minority backgrounds, who have lower retention rates than their non-ethnic minority counterparts (Nichols, 2017; Wood & Penrose, 2015). Finally, for first-generation minority students who come from low-income households, the challenges of retention were multiplied (Nichols, 2017; Wood & Penrose, 2015).

African American Student Retention

The NCES (2018) indicated that the retention rate for African American students at 2-year colleges was 42%, lower than the rates for other racial groups. African American students were less likely to stay enrolled in college; consequently, their chances of earning a college degree were lower (Nichols, 2017). Multiple researchers have studied the challenges to retention rates among African American students (Chan, 2014; Griffin, et al., 2016). A lack of preparation and socialization have affected retention rates for this group (Smart, 2017). Other studies discussed the negative impacts

of low retention rates on African American students' likelihood of college success (Chan, 2014; Griffin, 2018; Smart, 2017; Smithers, 2018). In one study, researchers sought to determine how valuable students' experiences during their first year in college were in influencing their success in obtaining a degree (Smithers, 2018). The study found that students who were engaged, supported, and integrated into their college life were more likely to persist and remain in school (Smithers, 2018). The following sections discuss different areas of research on African American student retention in greater detail.

Strategies to Address African American Student Retention

Research has shown that mentoring helps students adjust to the college setting; this support is critical for African American students, who often feel isolated on college campuses (Peters, 2018). Student support services are developed to increase students' integration and improve their chances of persisting to graduation, which is important for minority students (Smithers, 2018). Based on Tinto's (1993) theory, it is important for higher education institutions to provide support for students; students successfully assimilated into the college setting are less likely to withdraw. Retention intervention programs have had positive impacts on African American students' academic performance (Barra, 2013; Taulbee, 2017). For example, some historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have implemented a summer transition program that eventually became a key factor in improving retention and graduation rates (Harper & Newman, 2016; Slade et al., 2015). Another study introduced an early intervention program to address challenges to retention before African American students entered an institution of

higher education, filling learning gaps and providing a foundation for future learning (Bimper, 2017). The early intervention program positively affected retention and completion rates. A number of studies have demonstrated how post-secondary remedial education positively affects retention and degree completion rates for college students by reteaching concepts that were confused or misunderstood (Bimper, 2017; Orange & Ramalho, 2013; Slade et al., 2015).

Student Support and Integration

For about 20 years, researchers have been reporting on the importance of social support and integration to the retention of African Americans students at institutions of higher education (Anderson, 2019; Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Grier-Reed et al., 2011; Smithers, 2018; Talbert, 2012). A 2019 study by Anderson evaluated the effectiveness of implementing student support programs. Anderson determined there was a link between effective student support programs and student retention, concluding that it was imperative for African American students to develop peer networks and obtain support from faculty (Anderson, 2019). Many researchers have demonstrated that when students are engaged socially and supported to develop cohesive relationships with other students and faculty, their commitment to their university increases (Anderson, 2019; Lancaster & Xu, 2017; Roscoe, 2015; Talbert, 2012). A 2017 study by Lancaster and Xu used a qualitative case study design to examine the experiences of 25 Black students pursuing majors in STEM. The institution provided a supportive and encouraging atmosphere for Black students by using the TRIO program, a federal program designed to identify and

provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. The program offered

students formal mentoring from faculty members as well as informal programs such as

peer mentoring by upper classmates. The study found that students who were supported

by the institution successfully adjusted to college life, and their sense of belonging was

positively influenced. Students who are supported and have a sense of belonging to the

academic environment have a greater chance of completing their degrees (Anderson,

2019).

According to a study by Smithers (2018), student retention improved when

community colleges designed the right types of student mentoring programs. The results

of this study indicated that students who participated in a Student Support Services (SSS)

program for low-income and first-generation students had higher retention and graduation

rates compared to students who chose not to participate (Smithers, 2018). The SSS

included tutoring programs, learning communities, and faculty advising interventions and

had a positive impact on student retention (Smithers, 2018). Tinto (1993) has elaborated

on the importance of supportive communities for adult students in college. The 2018

study by Smithers suggested that community colleges that focus on strategies to support

the student may improve their retention rates.

Bridge Programs

Bridge programs are another strategy that has been suggested to enhance

academic readiness and the skills required for college success with the goal of improving

retention and graduation rates for African American students (Harper & Newman, 2016;

Slade et al., 2015; Zhang & Smith, 2011). Harper and Newman (2016) explained that summer bridge programs can range from an early intervention model to a comprehensive summer program designed to close the high school-to-college gap. Noting an ongoing problem with retention and graduation rates for their students, researchers at one HBCU implemented a summer bridge program to address the significant number of students who were unprepared when they entered college (Allen, 2021; Slade et al., 2015). In a similar effort, the University of North Carolina General Administration (UNCGA, 2013) recorded the expansion of summer bridge programs in its strategic planning through 2018 as a retention strategy. The long-standing bridge programs at the university have a track record of improving retention (UNCGA, 2013). Multiple articles have addressed the need for bridge programs to prepare and strengthen academic success for African American students (Allen, 2021; Barra, 2013; Slade et al., 2015).

Self-Regulated Learning

There is extensive literature on the value of self-regulated learning (SRL) that suggests its correlation with academic achievement (Reader, 2018). Self-regulation "includes such activities as setting goals, applying and adjusting strategies to attain them, cognitively monitoring performance and progress, maintaining motivation and positive effects and beliefs about learning, and utilizing social and environmental resources to help attain goals" (Schunk & Mullen, 2013, p. 369). Self-regulatory processes are critical in learning, and students who self-regulate by planning and monitoring their learning may not have as many retention issues (Hassouna, 2017). Students may self-regulate their

learning by planning and setting goals.

Students who learn how to use appropriate skills and strategies to solve a problem are self-regulating (Merino & Aucock, 2015; Reader, 2018; Rodicio et al., 2013). Learners may also self-regulate by soliciting help from faculty and peers. Self-regulated learning is guided by metacognition and strategic action planning (Hassouna, 2017). Students learn how to comprehend and be aware of their own thought processes (Reader, 2018). Researchers investigating whether and to what extent students were at risk for attrition have revealed that students who set personal developmental goals had a lower risk for attrition (Reader, 2018).   Students who have learned to self-regulate by planning and monitoring may avoid the stress of agonizing about their retention (Reader, 2018).

Mentoring

Historically, there has been a lack of mentors for African Americans in higher education (Griffin, 2018; Kelch-Oliver et al., 2013; Smart, 2017). The literature suggests mentoring as an important strategy for addressing retention issues and improving academic performance (Flores, 2013; Griffin, 2018; Smithers, 2018). Research has also suggested the specific benefits of mentoring for African American students (Burney, 2018; Field, 2018; Staples, 2017).   Mentoring is used as a possible strategy because of its ability to provide the support students need to persist and remain in school (Smart, 2017). Mentors help guide students at critical points in their academic and personal development, an approach that is essential to retaining African American students (Burney, 2018). Burney (2018) contented that the supportive nature of mentoring can

assist in meeting both the academic and social needs of these students. Smart (2017) indicated that mentoring provided African American students the opportunity to bond, which helps with social integration. The literature supports the use of mentoring programs to help African American students persevere and continue with their education (Burney, 2018; Peters, 2018; Smart, 2017).

A 2017 study by Nichols provided an example of one such program. Nichols created a mentoring program to help increase retention at a community college. The students were paired with mentors and received weekly support while in the program. The program encouraged student leadership, engagement in service-learning activities, and participation in ongoing college activities. The approach was successful, and the results of the study provided a better understanding of how mentoring contributes to the behavior required to reach academic goals (Nichol, 2017). Nichols (2017) specifically analyzed the benefits of a professional mentor program to assist the university in understanding how best to retain students of color. It was found that the mentor and mentee were able to benefit from the program because of their interactions and the positive learning environment created by them. The mentee elaborated that they felt supported and that the mentoring program created a sense of community. The mentor stated that the program helped with leadership skills and educational goal setting. Both mentor and mentee commented on how the program forged strong friendships and helped them to remain in school (Nichols, 2017).

Research has focused on the efficacy of a number of mentoring program designs.

One effective approach involves using peer and faculty mentoring to create a setting where mentees feel safe asking questions and receiving academic help (Wood & Penrose, 2015). The definitions of a successful mentoring program and mentoring relationship vary. Co-mentoring (or, peer mentoring) has also improved retention rates among African American college students (Smart, 2017; Peters, 2018), especially first-year college students (Frances, 2019). Mentoring programs increase academic success and retention for African American students by instilling a sense of belonging (Walker & Okpala, 2017) Students who felt accepted and were able to connect with other students and faculty were successful and remained in school (Burney, 2018).

The literature reveals that colleges and universities must find ways to help students remain in school (Burney, 2018; Peters, 2018; Smart, 2017). Many of the colleges studied understood that continual interactions among faculty and students facilitated by a mentoring program could increase retention for African American students (Peters, 2018). As Tinto (1993) suggested, a sense of belonging and support may be essential for academic motivation and engagement among African American students.

Effect of Mentoring on Retention

The literature suggests that designing effective student mentoring programs to improve college retention is critically important (Bishop, 2019; Peters, 2018; Smart, 2017). When community college students lacked opportunities for socialization and faculty interactions their retention was negatively impacted (Bishop, 2019). Mentoring programs have been demonstrated to improve retention (Bishop, 2019), particularly for

African American students (Nichols, 2017). While mentoring has been used to improve academic performance, retention, and college completion rates, there still appears to be more to learn about the precise connection between mentoring and retention, such as which mentoring strategies are most effective (Heaven, 2015; Smart, 2017).

Mentoring Strategies

Numerous studies have identified peer and faculty mentorships as two of the best tools for improving retention (Bishop, 2019; Hurte, 2002; Walker & Okpala, 2017). These findings suggest that students who were mentored by other students and faculty did not leave school.

Peer mentors provide support, encouragement, and motivation to other students. Academic-centered peer interactions may be a primary element contributing to students' academic success and retention (Blue, 2018). Peer interactions help students develop relationships that could shape their learning experiences and encourage their pursuit of academic success (Blue, 2018). The literature consulted suggests that peer mentorships may help to improve student's retention rates (Callahan, 2009; Flores, 2013; Nichols, 2017).

Faculty mentoring programs give students hands-on academic guidance from professionals. In a study analyzing strategies to retain African American community college nursing students, faculty members worked with students in the form of "team coaches," a strategy that was found to be effective (Taulbee (2017). The "team coach" model has been suggested throughout the research on college retention (Barra, 2013).

Coaching has been shown to promote active learning techniques and encourage student success (Golden, et al., 2017; Stewart-Lord, et al., 2017). Faculty mentoring has been identified as a factor that can contribute to the academic success of nursing students (Payton, et al., 2013; Taulbee, 2017). In a study by Payton et al. (2013), students attended group sessions facilitated by faculty mentors that focused on study skills and stress management. The mentored students had a passing rate of 87% to 94% and a 100% retention rate (Payton et al., 2013). Bishop's (2019) research also supported the idea of using mentoring programs to increase retention. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of administrators, faculty, and students regarding the low retention rate. Bishop (2019) interviewed ten purposefully selected participants comprised of administrators, faculty, and students from a community college. The strategies used to improve retention included providing peer mentoring, fostering a sense of belonging, and creating a counselor-mentor role (Bishop, 2019).

Throughout the literature on college retention, mentoring strategies have been shown to impact students' persistence to stay in college (Bishop, 2019; Peters, 2018; Smart, 2017). Designing effective mentoring strategies is critically important to the success of community colleges (Mertes & Jankoviak, 2015). The literature review supports using mentoring strategies to improve student retention at community colleges (Bishop, 2019; Peters, 2018; Smart, 2017).

Benefits of Mentoring Programs

There are numerous studies on the benefits of mentoring programs for students. In

one study, researchers evaluated whether a mentoring program could increase self-esteem in low-income community college students (Hoffman & Wallach, 2005). The results indicated that the students showed higher self-esteem, academic performance, and motivation (Hoffman & Wallach, 2005). In another study, researchers in the United Kingdom provided a controlled evaluation of a peer-mentoring program with first-year undergraduate students; the results showed that mentees had higher levels of integration and willingness to stay at the university (Collings et al., 2014).

Many researchers consider adult mentoring to be a learning partnership that benefits both the mentor and the mentee (Brooms, 2017; Dominguez & Hager, 2013). Mentorships help students who are at high risk of dropping out of school connect to their academic surroundings, consequently increasing their graduation rate. Mentoring can be useful at any level. For example, research has shown that faculty induction and mentoring models can increase the retention rate of new teachers in K-12 and higher education institutions (Chan, 2014). For college students, mentors support academic progress and degree completion (Brooms, 2017). Mentoring may be especially beneficial for African Americans students. African American students who participated in a college mentoring program that offered academic and social support were more engaged and less likely to withdraw from school (Staples, 2017).

Implications

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring

strategies they found to be effective, and whether they perceived mentoring as having a positive impact on their retention. The goals of the study were to inform community college administrators about students' perceptions of their mentoring program and to provide detailed policy recommendations in hopes of repeating the mentoring program in the future. The data collected may assist administrators at the college in designing mentoring programs that positively affect retention.

Findings from this study have several potential implications. First, they may provide administrators at the college under investigation with a blueprint for constructing a mentoring program to increase the retention rate of African American students. Second, this blueprint could then be tested in other areas of the college and at other local community colleges to evaluate its efficacy across a larger sample of students. Third, depending on the results of the proposed larger studies, the mentoring program could be expanded throughout the college and to other community colleges in the area. A final implication of this study's potential findings is the ability to refine the proposed blueprint for African American mentoring in response to qualitative testing with a larger sample size.

If administrators continue to replicate the mentoring program as a result of this study, their actions may foster improved relationships among administrators, faculty members, and students. The positive effects of the program could result in more satisfied students who are motivated to remain in school and complete their college degrees. The findings of this study could result in actions that improve rates of retention, and possibly

graduation, not just at one college but at colleges and universities nationwide.

Summary

This literature review covered several topics related to the low retention rate of African American students at the local community college under study. Tinto's (1993) student integration theory, which provided the conceptual framework for this research, was reviewed in detail. The major studies relating to student retention in higher education and student retention in community colleges were also discussed, followed by studies specifically related to retention rates among African American students. This part of the review revealed that retention rates for African American students have continued to be a problem, both at the local level and nationally (Francis, 2019; Owen & Amar, 2018; Smart, 2017).

It was not known if or to what extent reinstating a mentoring program for African American students at a local community college would affect retention rates for this group, or which specific type(s) of mentoring would be the most effective. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether mentoring had a positive impact on their retention.

In Section 2, the methodology used in this study is described in detail, including an overview of the research design and approach, study participants, data collection and analysis methods, my role as the researcher, and the study's limitations. Section 3 outlines how the research questions posed and the correlating themes that emerged from

the data were used to design a policy recommendation. In Section 4, I offer my reflections on the study, including recommendations for alternative approaches. I then present the overall conclusions that helped shape the policy recommendation resulting from this study, which will be presented to college administrators (Appendix A). It is hoped that the policy recommendation will aid administrators at the local community college in reenacting a mentoring program to improve retention and graduation rates among African American students. This policy recommendation is included in the appendix.

Section 2: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether mentoring had a positive impact on their retention. There were two research questions under consideration. The first question asked how African American students at a local community college described their mentoring experience. The second question asked which elements of mentoring African American students at the college perceived as having a positive influence on their retention. This section reviews several elements of the research methodology, including the research design and approach, the participants, data collection and analysis methods, and limitations.

Research Design and Approach

A basic qualitative research design was used to conduct this study. A qualitative methodology is used to answer *how* and *why* questions and is inductive in nature (Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). It is the most appropriate method for this study because the research questions seek to provide a better understanding of the quality of the experiences African American students had in their community college's mentoring program. Such answers are best sought by asking students open-ended questions that require them to answer using their own knowledge, experiences, and feelings. A goal of the study was to record the perceptions African American students had of their mentoring program and determine which strategies they found most effective. As a general rule, the

research questions dictate the appropriate design to use in a study (Creswell, 2018;

Lowder-Haastrup, 2015). A qualitative study relies on communication that helps the

researcher understand experiences from the participant's point of view (Leedy & Omrod,

2018; Smart, 2017). Qualitative research is characterized by its use of interpretation to

explain human beliefs and behaviors within their specific contexts (Frances, 2019).

A quantitative research design was considered for this study but deemed

inappropriate. Quantitative research involves testing hypotheses and identifying

relationships between variables when enough is known about a phenomenon to be able to

identify the variables of interest. The quantitative method is used to measure phenomena

or variables in a numerical way, using large, randomized samples, and statistical analysis,

with the goal of generalizing the results back to the target population (Creswell, 2018;

Leedy & Omrod, 2018). This method takes a deductive approach to problem-solving that

is best used when the researcher is posing *what* questions (Creswell, 2018; Leedy &

Omrod, 2018). In this study, not enough was known about African American students'

experiences in the mentoring program at the local college to provide the elements needed

for a quantitative study, so the qualitative method was confirmed as the most appropriate

for this study.

The basic qualitative research design focuses on participants' interpretations of

their experiences. The researcher does not assume that they know what a participant is

feeling or how they interpret things (Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). In this

study, the experiences under investigation were those of African Americans in a school-

based mentoring program. Interviews used to collect data in qualitative studies are typically conducted in the form of focus groups or one-on-one in-depth interviews (Frances, 2019; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). The use of in-depth, open-ended interviews and the emphasis on gathering insights on the lived experiences of individuals makes the basic qualitative design appropriate for this study.

Other qualitative research design options were considered, including grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies. Grounded theory involves the researcher developing a broad, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants. The researcher uses an iterative, multi-stage data collection and refinement process to ultimately arrive at a more concrete, grounded theory (Creswell, 2018; Frances, 2019; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). This approach is not appropriate for this study for two reasons. First, this study does not begin with a theoretical assumption, nor does it attempt to build or refine a theoretical understanding around African American college mentoring programs. Instead, the goal of the study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether mentoring had a positive impact on their retention. Second, the data collection process used in this study did not include multiple stages but only occurred in one stage.

An ethnographic research design would not be appropriate for the current study either. In ethnographic research, the emphasis is on studying the shared patterns of behavior, language, and actions of a cultural group (Frances, 2019; Smart, 2017). This

was not the objective of the current study, which focused on individuals' experiences with mentoring rather than on the whole group as a culture. Additionally, the primary method of data collection in ethnography is observation of the cultural group (Frances, 2019; Smart, 2017). This data collection approach would not provide the participant-focused insights and information that are needed to address the research questions for this study.

Finally, the case study approach was deemed inappropriate for this study, as it focuses on developing an in-depth analysis of a single case related to an event, program, activity, or process involving one or more individuals (Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Omrod, 2018; Smart, 2017). In a case study, multiple data collection sources are used, including observation of individuals and retrieval of archival data. This data collection process is extended over a period of time. However, the goal of the current study was not analyzing the African American mentoring program or its participants as cases. Because this study was focused on perceptions and not on activities, processes, or events, a qualitative research design was selected as the most appropriate.

Participants

Sample Criteria

The population for which this study may have implications includes all African American students attending 2-year colleges in the United States, of which there were 2.1 million in 2018 (NEC, 2020). The target population was the subset of African American students in the local community college mentoring program from which study

participants were recruited. Participants had to be African American men or women 18 years or older who had spent at least six months in the mentoring program. Identification and selection of participants was conducted via an advertisement on LinkedIn.

Sample Size and Depth of Inquiry

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be the most effective, and whether mentoring had a positive impact on their retention. The target sample size was eight to 10 participants, though 14 was the plan for recruitment to compensate for any withdrawals that might occur. A low sample size is appropriate for qualitative studies, as the goal is to have longer interviews with open-ended questions that go into detail about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). If data saturation appeared to occur after eight participant interviews, no further interviews would take place.

Access and Researcher-Participant Relationships

To gain access to African American participants of the mentoring program under study, I recruited participants via an advertisement posted to LinkedIn. Prospective participants were asked to give their name and phone number if they were interested in being considered for the study. Students were then contacted by me to schedule an interview time and date.

Interview questions were designed to allow students to describe their mentoring relationships and discuss the elements of mentoring they perceived as having a positive

influence on their retention. The initial questions would be basic demographic questions and questions about how long participants had been associated with the mentoring program. Such preliminary questions are partly intended to build rapport. Data on student perceptions were gathered using these semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, with all communications being recorded and transcribed. One-on-one interviews are extensively used in qualitative research and are an effective tool for investigating personal perceptions of an issue (Nichols, 2017).

Once the interviews began, I provided the respondent with an informed consent form indicating that the identity of the respondent would be kept secret and that the interview would not be shared with anyone outside of this study. The informed consent also indicated that the participant would have protection from being subjected to harm or deception through their participation in the study. In addition, respondents were informed that they could refuse to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable and that they retained the right to end the interview at any time.

Data Collection

Data Collection Justification

Data collection in a qualitative study requires in-depth inquiry into the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the target participants. The individual interview format used in this study allowed participants to discuss their views and experiences in their own words and without any influence from other participants. Interviews are among the best-established methods of data collection and are used widely in qualitative research (Smith

& Sparkes, 2016). A semi structured interview protocol with open-ended questions allows a researcher to ensure that the main issues being investigated are covered while also allowing interviewees to discuss their views and experiences (DeVance, 2021; Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Data Collection Instruments

One data collection instrument was used in this study, which was an open-ended interview protocol. The interview protocol contained open-ended interview questions that were posed to each participant. The interview protocol was created by me, with the initial questions focusing on demographic information, such as the participants' major in college, grade level, age, ethnicity, etc. The other questions focused on the students' perceptions of the mentoring program, including asking for a description of the type of mentoring in place, participants' likes and dislikes, and the aspects of the mentoring program the students found effective. Finally, students were asked how their academic and social experiences on campus were different, if at all, after participating in the mentoring program, and whether they perceived the type of mentoring they received as either helping or hindering their retention. Probing questions were used to follow up on scripted questions and to encourage participants to answer in greater depth and detail. Probing questions are a critical part of the interview process, as they allow the researcher to delve deeper into the *why* of the participants' initial answer (Creswell, 2018).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were scheduled via Skype or telephone rather than in person. As previously noted, all participants were required to

read and sign an informed consent form before the interview process began. The participants were also required to consent to their interview being recorded. After the informed consent was signed, interviewing and recording began. Each interview took between 45 minutes and 1 hour to complete. Once the data collection session was complete, participants were asked if they had any questions and thanked for their participation in the study. I later transcribed audio recordings into a text document. The text document was then input into the Dedoose (2016) qualitative software for analysis and coding of recurring themes.

The Role of the Researcher

The college mentoring program researched in this study was located at an institution where I had no affiliation and no past or current professional relationship with the staff, the setting, or the participants. Therefore, personal biases were not expected to have an adverse effect on data collection or recruitment of participants.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

</div>

After the data collection period ended, the entire respondent-researcher interview was transcribed for each participant and placed in its own document. Both manual and software-assisted analysis were used to process this data. Manual data processing was guided by Strauss and Corbin's (2018) qualitative analytic approach for analyzing qualitative data using a thematic analysis method.

The second step in this process was coding. In qualitative research, coding is the inductive process of identifying and organizing themes that surface from the data. This

process tends to first generate an excessive number of codes, but reviewing the data helps the researcher refine themes and reveals a better view of the phenomenon being studied. It is important to review data more than once to ensure the best result (Strauss & Corbin, 2018). Although computer-generated analysis provides the researcher with more methods of organizing the data, the researcher is still responsible for deciding how to analyze and interpret the data. In Step 3, I identified any discrepant cases that might necessitate conducting further interviews until data saturation was achieved. In Step 4, I reported the findings.

For the fifth step of data analysis, the Dedoose (2016) software program was used to reorganize data, visually arrange codes, add new codes, and build codes in successive ranks, integrating structure as the coding system is built. This step allowed me to look at text documents systematically and organize items of interest into themes (see Dedoose, 2016). In Step 6, I reviewed the document again to identify similar codes and create new ones to describe emerging themes. Assorted colors were used to separate the codes by categories and sub-categories. The Dedoose software assisted me in formulating codes related to the phenomenon, illuminating specific themes in the data. The software program allowed me to visualize the data, view it from different angles, and create presentations to communicate results.

Limitations

There are some limitations in a qualitative study that are mostly out of the control of the researcher. One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size of eight

to 10 participants. Studies with smaller sample sizes often have lower reliability than those with larger sample sizes (Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). Another limitation of this study is the qualitative methodology. Qualitative studies emphasize obtaining depth of information and not breadth, so the findings may be detailed but may not be broad in scope. Additionally, the study findings may not be applicable to, or representative of, the larger population given the sample size and qualitative nature of the study. Content analysis, the approach used to analyze and interpret the data for this study, is more subjective than quantitative analysis and therefore less reliable (Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). Also, given the subjective nature of the content analysis approach, inaccurate interpretation of results is a possibility (Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). To address this limitation, interviews were recorded to ensure that participants' comments and beliefs were captured verbatim. The interviews were transcribed right after the recording and sent to participants to review, edit, and correct. The goal of following these steps was to provide greater reliability and validity to the data analysis process. Finally, the participants provided detailed and robust accounts of their experiences during data collection via audio recordings, which aided in both the accuracy and transferability of the results (Creswell, 2018).

Data Analysis Results

This qualitative research study examined African American students' perceptions and experiences while participating in a mentoring program. Participants included African American men and women who participated in a mentoring program while

attending a community college in the southeastern United States. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether mentoring had a positive impact on their retention. Two research questions guided and helped me build the study's findings. The first research question asked how African Americans students in the community college mentoring program would describe their mentoring experience. The second research question asked which elements of the mentoring students received at the community college they perceived as having a positive influence on their retention.

The results of the study were derived from interview responses from eight African American students who participated in the mentoring program at the community college being researched. Participants were recruited from social media. I posted an ad on LinkedIn to gain access to African American students who were participating in the program. A semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions was used. The interview format provided an opportunity to extract meaningful descriptions of how participants experienced the mentoring program (Smart, 2017). During the interviews, which were scheduled by appointment, I used audio recording and note-taking to record responses. All participants gave informed consent to this protocol. The information was then organized to allow for tracking all data and emerging codes. I noted patterns, relationships, and themes as findings supported by the data and aligned with the research questions.

Data Analysis and Collection Procedures

I began the study after receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional

Review Board (IRB) 04-14-21-0163358. My first step was to post a flyer on LinkedIn to

recruit participants who attended the southeastern community college under study and

participated in its mentoring program. The volunteers had to be African American

students aged eighteen years or older. A confidential volunteer link to the online consent

form was included in the LinkedIn post. One of the key elements of IRBs is the informed

consent process that is put in place to minimize risks to participants (Francis, 2019). I

developed the informed consent form for this study to ensure the protection of

participant's rights and to inform them that their participation in the study was voluntary

and that they could withdraw at any time. Participants were also informed that their

responses would be reported using designated pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms is a

well-established best practice that helps hold researchers accountable for maintaining

study participants' obscurity and confidentiality (Reader, 2018). After participants signed

and submitted the online Google form, it was emailed back to me, acknowledging

participants' informed consent to participate in the study.

Interviews were administered via a semi-structured, open-ended protocol using a

list of questions developed to gain insight into the study's research questions. Because

this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were

conducted via Skype or telephone, with participants being allowed to choose the medium

of communication they preferred. Participants were required to give consent to allow

their interviews to be recorded. An audio recording device was used to record the entire interview, which I later transcribed into a text document. The text document was then input into the Dedoose (2016) qualitative software, where the interviews could be analyzed and coded for recurring themes (Francis, 2019).

Review of the Problem and Research Questions

The administration of a local community college has attempted to institute a mentoring program to improve poor retention rates among their African American students. The problem addressed by this study is that administrators indicated they were unsure what type of mentoring and mentoring strategies may be the most effective for student retention. The findings of the study showed that mentoring had a positive impact on retention for African American students. All the participants who were interviewed spoke positively about the mentoring program and expressed that the program was beneficial to them in remaining in school and completing their college degrees.

The purpose of the qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found effective, and whether mentoring had a positive impact on retention. The data collected from the interviews showed that most of the African American students' perceptions of the mentoring program were positive and that they found the peer and faculty mentoring strategies crucial to helping them persist and remain in school. The findings suggest that mentoring programs may be beneficial for African American students and that peer and faculty mentoring strategies may have a positive

impact on retention. It was in this context that this inquiry was conceptualized with support from Tinto's (1993) conceptual framework.

Tinto's (1993) student integration theory proposed a connection between mentoring and positive retention for African American students. Both Tinto's social integration theory and his academic success model support the use of varied learning environments (e.g., teacher-student relationship and student-peer). Tinto argued that the stronger the individual level of social and academic integration, the greater the students' subsequent commitment to the institution and the goal of college graduation. Tinto's academic and social models are dominant in education research and are frequently cited by researchers seeking to identify factors that lead to and predict students' academic success and persistence to college completion (Walker & Okpala, 2017).

To investigate the problem at the community college, two research questions were formulated. The discussion of the findings focused on these research questions. I summarized the findings of the research questions by identifying five themes from of the participant's answers to the interview questions.

The first question was posed as follows: RQ1) What are African American students' perceptions of the mentoring program at the community college? This question was designed to align with the collection of data during interviews. Based on interview responses collected via audio recording, note-taking, and transcription, I was able to develop the themes. The five themes identified earlier reflect African American students' perceptions of mentoring and its positive impact on retention. The first emerging theme

suggested that some participants viewed the mentoring program as a positive bonding experience and a network of support. Participants 1, 3, and 4 indicated that the mentoring program offered an environment where mentors and participants could grow and learn through positive interactions. The second emerging theme was an atmosphere of openness that helped participants forge strong friendships. The third theme was that the mentoring program helped participants navigate through campus life and assisted them with achieving goals and persisting toward graduation. The fourth theme was that the mentoring program helped with personal growth and making good decisions. Making good decisions was paramount to obtaining the goal of graduation, and most of the participants said that the mentoring program was the reason why they stayed in school. The final theme that emerged from the data was the participants' perception that the mentoring program helped them make an impact on others. "Paying it forward" was a term that some of the participants used during the interviews. The participants seemed to propose that the openness and strong friendships that were established in the mentoring program were factors in them completing their degree.

The findings from the interviews align with research question one. The overall findings of the study reveal that African American students had a positive perception of the mentoring program, and the program helped them remain in school and persist. According to Tinto's (1993) conceptual model, there is a connection between mentoring and positive retention for African American students. Individuals who connect and bond with programs and engage in academic activities are more likely to persist towards

completion (Tinto, 1993). The data from the interviews conducted for this study confirmed that African American students at the community college felt positively about the mentoring program and perceived it as having a beneficial impact on their own retention. The students discussed how the benefits of the program and their academic success influenced their perceptions. The themes that emerged from interview responses by participants provided data relevant to research question one.

The second research question posed for this study was as follows: RQ2) What elements of mentoring do African American students in a community college perceive as having a positive influence on their retention? Many of the themes that emerged from the participants' interviews provided insight into research question two. When asked to give examples of elements of the mentoring program that worked well, the participants seemed to suggest that positive bonding and having a network of support was a key aspect of good mentoring. Participant 3 stated that she bonded with her mentor, who "became a network of support" and advised her in her "personal life outside of college." Participant 4 added that the program helped her achieve personal goals as well as academic goals and pushed her to join organizations outside of college.

The participants seemed to propose that the atmosphere of openness and the friendships that were established in the mentoring program were factors in their ability to complete their degrees. Participant 6 described the relational nature of her mentoring experiences and said she enjoyed working with the other participants. She commented on how other participants and the mentors checked in on her when she was absent from the

program. She added that the program's atmosphere of accountability and openness helped her forge strong friendships and allowed her to remain in school. Most of the participants' perceptions of their mentors were positive, and they commented on the role the mentors played in supporting their retention.

When study participants were asked to explain the role of their mentors in detail, all of them mentioned how having a mentor helped them to move through their college programs. Participant 1 stated that the support of the mentoring program was why he persisted and met the graduation goal on time. Most of the participants stated that the mentoring program aided them in achieving goals in their personal lives as well. It was noted in the interview process that several participants felt that their mentors cared deeply about them and that their relationship was sincere.

The findings from the interviews provide information that aligns with research question two. The results suggest that there are multiple elements of mentoring that African American students perceived as having a positive influence on their retention. African American students felt supported by the program. Their mentors helped them navigate the entire college process. They also benefited from having a network of support that included other program participants. Tinto's (1993) student integration theory suggested two primary forms of integration that are imperative for student persistence and retention. The first is social integration, which involves an individual's peer-to-peer interactions and day-to-day interactions at the institution (Griffin, 2018; Tinto, 1993). Academic integration includes the full range of an individual's experiences that occur in

the traditional and non-traditional domains of the academic systems of the university

(Griffin, 2018; Tinto, 1993). The importance of these forms of integration is supported by

the results of this study.

Data Coding

In this study, interview transcriptions provided the essential framework for

pinpointing individual statements related to participants' experiences. Statements that

shared a correlation were coded to reveal emerging themes. Manual coding of each

participant's transcript helped to identify patterns and develop themes that were

important in writing the results. The findings procured from the interviews are reviewed

in this section in relation to the specific themes they support. The data collected indicated

that African American students perceived their mentoring program to be positive,

supportive, and effective in helping them persist in college and earn their degrees. The

study participants perceived the following elements of the program as having a positive

influence on their retention: a network of support that promoted peer interactions,

positive bonding experiences and the development of lifetime friendships, assistance with

navigating campus life, and help with personal and academic goals that supported their

ability to persist toward graduation.

Participants' descriptions of their experiences in the mentoring program provided

me with knowledge and insight into the research questions posed for this study. By taking

notes, actively listening to the participants, and examining their responses, valuable

information was attained about the mentoring program at the community college. The

research questions are addressed with supporting documentation describing the feedback provided by each participant. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, a number of themes emerged that provided information connected to the research questions. These themes were as follows: *positive bonding and a network of support, openness and the establishment of lifetime friendships, help with navigating campus life, assistance in achieving goals including persistence toward graduation, help with personal growth and making good decisions, and opportunities to impact others.* Each theme is discussed below with support from participants' responses.

Positive Bonding and a Network of Support

The first emerging theme suggests that some participants viewed the mentoring program as offering a positive bonding experience and a network of support. Most of the participants stated that they had a positive bonding experience with their mentor. When asked to give examples of what worked in the mentoring program, the participants seemed to suggest that positive bonding and having a network of support was a key aspect of good mentoring. Participant 1 said he "felt closeness to the other participants and to the mentors in the program." He added that having a social circle with mentors that look like you are important for African American students. Participant 3 described how she bonded with her mentor: "At the beginning of the program my mentor established expectations and followed through. My mentor was respectful of my time and became a network of support by advising me in my personal life outside of college." Participant 4 added that the program helped her achieve personal goals as well as college

goals, adding that she joined other organizations outside of college to prepare herself for the real world. Participants 1, 3, and 4 indicated that the mentoring program offered an environment where mentors and participants grow and learn through positive interactions.

Openness and a Lifetime of Friendships Were Established

The second theme to emerge from the data was the atmosphere of openness established in the mentoring program., which encouraged the formation of strong friendships among participants. When the participants were asked what the best part was about participating in the mentoring program, most of them discussed the openness and the friendships that were forged. The participants seemed to propose that these factors helped them in completing their degree. Participant 5 said, "the mentoring program was relational, and doing life together with the other participants helped me to stay in school." He added that the openness and guidance of the mentors were a great support to him as an African American male student. Participant 6 described the mentoring experience as relational and said she enjoyed working with the other participants. She commented on how both the mentors and the other participants checked in on her when she was absent from the program. She added that the elements of accountability and openness encouraged her to establish lifetime friendships and allowed her to remain in school. Many participants pointed to the sense of community and support fostered within the mentoring program. Participant 7 expressed her belief that "the mentoring program helped to improve retention because none of the participants dropped out of the program

and all of the participants graduated." She added that she felt accountable to the
mentoring program because her mentor cared about her. Participants elaborated on how
the program's culture of openness, and the friendships they established, made them feel
like a family. They felt that their mentors were forthright and relatable to them as African
American students. The mentors cared and provided a positive influence, which
participants reciprocated by supporting each other.

**Help with Navigating Campus Life, Assistance with Achieving Goals and Persisting
Toward Graduation**

The third theme that emerged from the data collection process was that the
mentoring program helped participants navigate campus life and assisted them in
achieving goals and persisting toward graduation. When the participants were asked to
explain in detail the role of their mentor, all of them briefly elaborated on how having a
mentor helped them to move through their college program. Most of the participants
stated that the mentoring program aided in achieving goals in their personal life as well.
Participant 8 stated, "My mentor helped me to set smart goals that were realistic and
attainable." Participant 8 commented on how having a mentor helped them navigate
through campus life: "The mentors gave us a tour of the campus at the beginning of the
program and supported us throughout the entire program." It was noted throughout the
interview process that several participants assumed that the mentors deeply cared about
them and felt that their mentor-mentee relationship was genuine and sincere. Participant 1
added that the support of the mentoring program was why he persisted and met the

graduation goal on time. Participant 3 mentioned, "the best part of being in the mentoring program was having someone in your corner that look like you and that was there to help you to succeed in college and do better in life." Most of the participants suggested that the mentoring program was essential for them to stay in school and complete their college degree.

Help with Personal Growth and Making Good Decisions

The fourth theme that emerged was that the mentoring program helped participants with personal growth and making good decisions. Several of the mentees expressed how the mentoring program helped with their personal growth and good decision-making. Many participants also discussed how the mentoring program helped them to acclimate to campus life, and how personal growth was necessary to become accustomed to the new environment. Because most of the participants were first-generation college students, their families could not help them understand and navigate college life. Making good decisions was paramount in obtaining their graduation goals, and most of the participants said that the mentoring program was the reason why they stayed in school. Participant 2 noted, "The mentor program helped me to become a leader through motivation and constant support." He explained how he was able to correct his time management issues and be purposeful about completing his college degree: "My mentor advised me on a personal life issue, and it was great to know that she was actively listening and was very supported." Participant 6 stated, "Going through this life challenge helped me to grow and be conscious of my decisions." Several of the participants

declared that the mentoring program was the key to their persistence to stay in school and complete their college degree, which had a positive impact on their lives.

Motivation to Impact Others

The final theme that emerged from the data collection process was that the mentoring program helped participants make an impact on others. "Paying it forward" was a term that some of the participants used during the interviews. Participant 5 stated "the mentoring program helped me to impact other lives. I am mentoring my little sister through motivation and support, and now she is excelling through middle school." Participant 5 commented on how his mentor would always encourage him to help others. Most of the participants became mentors themselves, noting that they wanted to share the positive impact the program made on their own lives with other students. Participant 3 explained, "I became a mentor because I wanted to share what I learned and help other African American students." She suggested that the mentoring program was the best part of her college experience. She communicated this message to her mentees and advised them to take full advantage of the program. Participant 1 shared that he became a mentor for two years after he participated in the mentoring program, saying "I know that the mentoring program works; it has helped me to become a leader and a better man. It has created a sense of purpose in my own life" Most of the participants suggested that the mentoring program was extremely important to helping African American students persist and complete the graduation goal.

Participant Interviews

Before I began each participant's interview, the consent form was discussed again in detail. I also sought permission again to audio record the interview to ensure that answers could be reviewed for accuracy. Participants were reassured that they would be allowed to review the resulting transcripts to correct any inaccuracies and ensure confidential reporting of their responses. Smart (2017) indicated that recording and transcribing all interviews is necessary to capture participants' exact words. A total of eight participant interviews was completed, which included interviews with four male and four female participants. The interview lengths ranged from 40 minutes to 60 minutes; follow-up interviews were conducted via email and phone for the purpose of clarification. Interviews were conducted because the purpose of the study was to allow research participants to describe their mentoring experiences, what specific mentoring strategies they find effective, and whether mentoring has a positive impact on retention.

The recorded participant's interviews were assessed and then transcribed into text. Each transcript was reviewed for accuracy, creditability, and reliability several times. I used the process of member-checking by allowing each participant to check the accuracy of their transcription via email. All participants reviewed their transcripts and confirmed that the material was correct, with the exception of some minor corrections made by two of the participants. Consequently, interpretative validity was addressed by utilizing a triangulation of data, interviewing multiple participants, and asking clarifying questions throughout the data-collection process (Bishop, 2019). After each interview, I completed

the interview transcriptions soon as possible. It is important for data collection and analysis to take place simultaneously to encourage accurate transcriptions, and to help inform future questions for ongoing research (Anderson, 2019). All transcripts were reviewed and coded throughout the entire data-collection phase of the study.

Summary of Outcomes

The data for this study came from interviews with African American students who participated in a mentoring program at a local community college. I interviewed eight students. All interviews were transcribed and member-checked for accuracy. After member-checking was completed, the transcripts were coded and triangulated. Field notes were also taken to help provide an accurate account of each conversation. I wrote down the participant's responses during the interviews to better capture non-verbal cues about how the participants felt as they answered questions. The previous section discussed five relevant themes that emerged in response to specific interview questions. These questions were carefully written and selected to help clarify the participants' perceptions. The following sections will summarize the results of the study in relation to the problem and the research questions. This discussion will be contextualized within the larger body of literature on mentoring and incorporate Tinto's (1993) student integration theory, which provides the conceptual framework for this study.

The Project Deliverable

The previous section provided a systematic summary of this study's findings in relation to the problem and the research questions. A qualitative design was used to

understand African American student's perceptions of their mentoring program and what elements of mentoring was perceived to positively impact their retention. Several themes were identified that supported the data and align with the research questions. The consensus among the participants in the study is that African American students perceived their mentoring programs to be positive, supportive, and useful in helping them persist and earn their college degrees. The elements of mentoring that African American students perceived as having a positive influence on their retention and persistence to graduation were revealed as follows: a network of support and peer interactions, positive bonding and lifetime friendships, helpful navigation through campus life, helping with personal growth, and opportunities to impact others.

The findings of this study will be presented to the local community college to aid administrators in designing and implementing a new mentoring program for African American students at their institution. I chose to draft the project deliverable in the form of a policy recommendation paper. A policy recommendation, also known as a white paper, outlines recommended steps for addressing a problem based on detailed research. A policy recommendation is used to pinpoint specific needs, determine solutions, and communicate a possible course of action. The following section describes the process that was used to create the policy recommendation paper and provides rationale for the selection of this genre.

Section 3: The Project

In this section, I provide an overview of the policy recommendation paper that will be presented to college administrators at the local community college to inform them of the findings of this study. A background of the existing problem, a summary of findings, and a literature review are presented to provide context and rationale for the policy recommendation paper. It is hoped that the recommendations that will be presented to college administrators will reveal the need to reenact the mentoring program and may assist in the design of a program that positively affects retention of African American students. Analysis of data collected during the interview process generated themes that may help administrators learn how to increase the retention rates for African American students. Overall, the African American students who participated in this study perceived the mentoring program to be positive, supportive, and effective in helping them to persist through college and earn their degrees. The policy recommendation paper provides specific recommendations for designing, reenacting, and sustaining a mentoring program that offers this type of positive support for African American students.

Rationale

I opted to create a policy recommendation paper detailing specific suggestions to ameliorate the problem of low retention rates among African American students at the local community college. The retention problems at the community college examined in this study could be best addressed through the creation of policy that aids in the establishment of a well-designed mentoring program. It is envisioned that the policy

recommendation paper can be used to justify the local community college and other institutions in considering the establishment of structured, organized, and well-planned mentoring programs designed to positively impact African American students' retention. The policy recommendation aligns with this study's research questions and the themes that emerged from data collected during interviews. Overall, the participants had a positive perception of their mentoring program, stating that it was helpful, supportive, and impactful, and that it provided them with important resources.

The results of the current study and the accompanying recommendations are consistent with existing research on the topic. Research shows that mentoring is an appropriate strategy for addressing low retention of African American students (Ponder, 2020). The use of a policy paper to translate research findings into actionable steps is also well established in the research. For example, Francis (2019) used a detailed policy paper to bring attention to the fact that mentoring programs can address the retention problem at community colleges. The study showed how designing structured mentoring programs may alleviate or minimize the retention problem for students at the local community college.

The results and recommendations from this study will be shared with college administrators via a scheduled presentation. It is anticipated that the results of the study and the recommendations will help administrators in reenacting a newly designed, highly structured, and well-planned mentoring program to positively impact retention rates for African American students at their college. Reenacting the mentoring program at the

local college and integrating a new curriculum through the adoption of this policy

document will require investment of resources to commit long-term to African American

students. It is hoped that the results of this basic qualitative study may produce a positive

social change at the local college and possibly support the creation of similar programs at

other institutions. The following section summarizes the literature that was reviewed to

help formulate this study and which provides context for the results.

Review of the Literature

I conducted a literature review to provide support for my recommendation that

administrators at the local community college reenact their mentoring program and to

demonstrate how mentoring programs can be used to help increase African American

students' retention. The review of literature focuses on themes related to African

American students' perceptions of mentoring programs and the elements of mentoring

they perceived as having a positive influence on their retention. To conduct this research,

I searched a wide range of databases such as Eric, ProQuest, SAGE, and Educational

Research Complete using the following search terms: *policy recommendation*, *student*

engagement and mentoring programs, mentoring and students' connection, peer

mentoring and colleges and universities, funding and higher education, and *mentoring*

and retention. The literature presented in the following sections addresses the themes that

will form the core of the policy recommendations. In this way, the sections are linked to

crucial points of the project's design. I begin by reviewing literature on the policy

recommendation paper; this genre was deemed appropriate for the current project

because of its ability to frame clear recommendations for action grounded in specific research findings. I then present research on the use of mentoring programs to improve retention and graduation rates among African American community college students organized by theme.

The Policy Recommendation Paper

A policy recommendation paper, or white paper, is an informative document that is built on detailed research (Brown, 2020). This genre was selected because it aligns with the study's research questions and the themes that emerged from the data. It is also appropriate because the problem being researched could be addressed through policy to reenact and enhance the community college's mentoring program. A white paper is used to pinpoint specific needs, determine solutions, and communicate a possible course of action.

The results of the study revealed that African American students perceived their mentoring program as positive, supportive, helpful, and key to their decision to stay in school. These findings are aligned with Research Question 1, which sought to ascertain whether participants found the mentoring program beneficial. The themes that emerged from the data collection process are also aligned with Research Question 2, which focused on determining the elements of mentoring African American students perceived as having a positive influence on their retention. These themes included positive bonding and a network of support, openness and the establishment of strong friendships, help with navigating campus life, assistance in achieving goals and persisting toward the

graduation, help with personal growth and making good decisions, and opportunities to impact others. These themes are consistent with Tinto's (1993) social integration theory, which was used as a theoretical lens when constructing this study.

The findings of this study will be presented to administrators at the local community college, including a proposal for administrators to work with faculty members and students to create a new mentoring program that will support African American students and increase their retention rate. The policy recommendation process involves helping policymakers justify new policy by generating research-based evidence they can provide to stakeholders (Woodbury & Englesberg, 2022). I will recommend that administrators use the themes revealed in interviews with study participants to enhance their mentoring program. This goal can be accomplished by integrating a mentoring program in the curriculum for first-year students and creating strategic goals to keep the program sustainable.

Mentoring Programs that Provide a Network of Positive Support

A review of relevant literature consistently revealed that mentoring programs were beneficial for college students (Ponder, 2020). Researchers such as Dinh and Zhang (2021) have used high-impact practices including mentoring and internship programs to increase recruitment and retention of underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities in 2-year college programs in science and technology. The participants reported benefits from the networking opportunities provided through the program and described the program as positive and supportive. The program fostered an interest in the

geosciences, and the underrepresented students commented positively on their bonding experiences with other participants and the mentors in the program. In a similar study on a mentoring program that provided peer tutoring and on-campus social activities, the students stated that the mentoring program was positive and supportive and that it was crucial to their ability to excel and stay in school (Martin, 2020). Using a policy recommendation can encourage community involvement in mentoring programs; a policy can be used to change the actions of school leaders and improve learning for students (Woodbury & Englesberg, 2022).

The findings of this study support using mentoring to positively impact retention of African American students at the local community college and benefit students' personal and professional development. The results from the interviews conducted for the present study suggested that students who participated in the community college's mentoring program found the network of support and positive bonding experiences the program provided helpful on campus and in their personal lives. For example, Participant 4 stated that the mentoring program was helpful in her achieving personal goals as well as college goals, explaining that she joined other organizations outside of college to prepare herself for the real world. Research supports the use of mentoring programs to help students in the educational setting and in their personal lives (Moy & Lee, 2021). Mentoring can serve as a strategy to guide African American students at critical points in their educational and personal development, providing a vital intervention than can support their persistence and retention in college (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Participant 1

responded that he "felt closeness to his mentor and the other participants in the program."

He added that having a social circle with mentors that look like you were important for

African American students. Participant 3 explained how she bonded with her mentor: "At

the beginning of the program, my mentor established expectations and followed through.

My mentor was respectful of my time and became a network of support by advising me

in my personal life outside of college." There were no comments on any aspect of the

mentoring program that did not work for the participants.

Collaborative and Structured Mentoring Programs

In the policy paper resulting from this study, I recommend that administrators at

the local community college structure their new mentoring program to include peer

mentoring, creating opportunities for students to interact with and support one another.

The participants who were interviewed for the study commented on the close

relationships and friendships that were established with their peers, a theme that is

supported by the literature. According to Flowers (2020), close peer relationships are

important for African American students. He commented that peer mentoring has been

shown to be a driving force in their success. Peer mentoring can help African American

students connect to campus support networks, which positively impacts the college they

attend (Schwartz et al., 2018). Peer mentors are helpful to students because they can often

relate at a level that was more similar and more recent to the student's experiences

(Ponder, 2020). Retention improves when participants engage in peer mentoring

relationships that include tutoring and academic support (Payne, 2021). Research has

indicated that peer mentors were supportive and resourceful, and that interactions with mentors gave students greater connections to the college (O'Neal, 2020). Peer mentoring programs have helped students remain in school and persist to graduation (Collier, 2017), including Black male students (Wilson, 2021) and African American students (Igbo & Sule, 2019; Merritt, 2020).The literature thus supports using peer mentoring and various other mentoring strategies to help African American students persist toward graduation (Bonsangue & Gilmore, 2018; Sanchez, 2018).

Numerous studies have also noted the importance of providing appropriate training to peer mentors. Higher education institutions must support mentors to motivate them to be fully committed to helping students in need (Clarke, 2020). Mentoring relationships expand when mentors understand the value of mentoring (DeVance, 2021). Simmons and Smith (2020) found that a life coaching intervention module exceeded the objective of equal persistence rates between the underrepresented African American students who had received peer coaching and their majority counterparts. Students who experienced the intervention reported improved perceptions of their college experiences and academic skills (Simmons & Smith, 2020).

A structured mentoring program with well-trained peer mentors can help African American students persist and remain in school (Ponder, 2020; Wilson, 2021). As such, the policy recommendation presented to administrators at the local community college will emphasize the need for a comprehensive training policy for mentors before they can work with new students. The training would help mentors to gain the knowledge, skills,

and abilities needed to perform effectively in the mentoring role and specifically address the needs of African American community college students. Although interviewees in this study did not discuss the structure of their mentoring program in detail, their responses revealed that it was collaborative in nature. Each participant interviewed stated that they worked with their mentor as well as with other participants in the program. They expressed their enjoyment of the collaborative structure and the benefits that followed. The participants seemed to propose that the open atmosphere of the program and the friendships they established there were factors in them completing their degrees. As Participant 5 put it, "doing life together with the other participants helped me to stay in school." It is recommended that administrators work with faculty members and students to structure a new mentoring program that will provide this type of support to students as a strategy to increase the retention rate. The policy recommendation, or white paper, will help to provide structure that encourages a collaborative atmosphere in the mentoring program.

Help with Navigating College Life, Assistance in Achieving Personal Goals and Persisting Toward Graduation

Mentoring programs and other campus support services are key in retaining minority students and helping them navigate college (Plater, 2020). Programs that use peers, coaches, college staff, and faculty members as a support system have been shown to help first-generation African American student athletes navigate campus life, set personal goals, and graduate from college (Martin, 2020). The students stated that the

mentoring, tutoring, and overall help they received aided them in building relationships and acclimating to college life as well as helping them cope with personal challenges (Martin, 2020). Institutions that build effective partnerships with various entities on campus in order to enhance students' social and academic integration will see fewer students leave school (Martin, 2020; Plater, 2020; Tinto, 1993).

Participants in the present study noted that their mentors served as role-models and supported their academic and personal needs. Most of the participants thought that their mentors and the program itself helped them to persist and remain in school. In addition to the role mentors played in helping the participants move through their college program, they also assisted them in achieving goals in their personal. For example, Participant 8 stated, "My mentor helped me to set smart goals that were realistic and attainable." The same participant describe how the program helped them navigate campus life: "The mentors gave us a tour of the campus at the beginning of the program and supported us throughout the entire program." Several of the participants I interviewed presumed that the mentors cared deeply about them and that their relationship was genuine and sincere. Most participants suggested that the mentoring program was essential to helping them stay in school and complete their college degrees. Participant 1 noted that the support of the mentoring program was why he persisted and graduated on time. Participant 3 stated, "the best part of being in the mentoring program was having someone in your corner that look like you and that was there to help you to succeed in college and do better in life."

The findings of this study address the research questions posed. African American students at the local community college perceived their mentoring program to be helpful, supportive, and positive. The themes that emerged from the data collection process aligned with research question two, which asked which elements of their mentoring program African American students perceived as having a positive influence on their retention.

Project Description

This qualitative study explored African American students' perceptions of a mentoring program instituted at their community college to determine which elements of the program they perceived as having a positive influence on their retention and persistence to graduation. Administrators at the college instituted the original mentoring program in an attempt to improve retention among this specific group. However, in 2019, the school closed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the program was dissolved. Students eventually started back to school in a virtual setting and then in person, but the mentoring program had not resumed at the time of this study. The goal of this study was to generate a policy recommendation to educate administrators about student perceptions of the previous program and aid in the design of a new mentoring program for African American students at the college. The specific suggestions contained in the policy recommendation are summarized in this section.

The first consideration in designing a mentoring program is how to make the project manageable and sustainable. I recommend that the program only be integrated

into the curriculum for 1st-year students as a means of keeping the mentoring program sustainable. Limiting the mentoring program to 1st-year African American students would target students during a crucial transition period while keeping the scope of the program manageable. The possible challenge of identifying and recruiting enough mentors to work with program participants will be reduced by limiting the program in this way. Should the program become more self-sustaining over time, it could be expanded to include other segments of the student population. As another measure to keep the program efficient and sustainable, I recommend that students can opt out of the program at any time.

Proposal for Implementation

One important consideration for the new mentoring program is the space it will operate in. I recommend that the college provide a classroom on campus to host the new mentoring program for African American students entering their first year of college. Students who opt into the program will be randomly assigned to a mentor, whom they will meet during Freshman orientation. I recommend assigning both peer and faculty mentors during this process. Peer mentors are helpful to students because they can relate at a level that is more similar and more relevant to the student's experiences because they are students themselves (Druery & Brooms, 2019). This finding was confirmed in my interviews with program participants. the interviews is that the participants enjoy working with peer mentors. Faculty mentors provide other benefits for African American students, including improving student engagement, a crucial predictor of undergraduate students'

retention and graduation (Howard, 2021). Developing a connection with faculty in the form of coaching provides students with a sense of belonging and increases their will to persist (Howard 2021).

As for the structure of the program, I suggest that mentors and mentees meet for one hour each week, using the mentoring classroom as a meeting space. Throughout the year, mentors will support students by offering academic skills-coaching, mentoring, and motivation to persist through challenges. Mentors will provide customized sessions on skill development that will include time management, study skills, textbook comprehension, and test-taking skills to provide students with direct academic support. The mentoring program will also provide workshops featuring guest speakers, conferences, and meetings on topics related to student success and retention. If desired, mentors and mentees can schedule meetings in different locations to work together on schoolwork or socialize.

Mentoring programs are proven to increase retention of minority students (Lee, 2018). The data from this study revealed that students want a mentoring program that provides a network of support through peer interactions, generates positive bonding and lifetime friendships, helps with navigating campus life, supports personal growth, and provides opportunities to impact others. The new mentoring program will be designed to support students in achieving their goals and help them be successful in college.

Resources Needed/Potential Barriers

To help measure the success of the program, I recommend having students record

and report on their experiences through the year. Students will be given a five-subject notebook and asked to keep a journal recounting interactions with their mentor and any special events provided by the program, including workshops, guest speakers, conferences, and meetings. Students will also be asked to meet monthly with their mentors, including peer and faculty mentors, in order to provide feedback on the program. At the end of the program, mentees will be asked to provide the journal as a written record of their experiences. The costs of the program will include the price of binding and duplicating the white paper, the time needed to implement the new mentoring program, and money needed to support program events and materials. No other materials will be used; the new students, peer mentors, faculty mentor, administrators, and the mentoring program are the primary resources.

There are some possible challenges to program implementation, including financial barriers, restrictions on time, and the challenge of fostering genuine collaboration among students, peer mentors, faculty mentors, and administrators. The challenge of recruiting faculty and peer mentors to serve in the program represents another possible barrier. Everyone who signs up for the program must be willing to sign an agreement regarding their conduct within the program.

Of course, administrative leadership may initially be concerned with the means of financing the program(Gandhi et al., 2019). The institution must be willing to allocate funds for mentor recruitment and training .

Implementation Timetable

Formation of a Focus Group

The results and recommendations from this study will be presented to college administrators in Summer 2023. I will recommend that administrators start by forming a focus group comprising faculty members and students.. The role of the focus group will be to create strategic goals to keep the program sustainable; I will recommend that the focus group use the themes revealed in study interviews with study participants to aid in structuring their program. It will be essential for the focus group to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of mentors, mentees, and those providing oversight to the program, and to identify potential candidates for these roles. It will also be important to gather recommendations from the students in the focus group who may be impacted by the creation of such a program (O'Neal, 2020) The goals is for the focus group to be implemented by Fall 2023.

Formation of a Faculty Committee

I will recommend that college administrators present the general findings of this study at a staff meeting in Summer 2023 and recruit a faculty committee to help pilot the program in Fall 2023. Research emphasizes the importance of using evidence-based practices when designing any program to support the retention of African American students (Brooms, 2019).. A focus group comprised of faculty and students can help administrators better understand how to support these students in persisting to graduation

(Twumasi, 2019). The mentoring program will have the added benefit of supplying a valuable service opportunity to faculty and students at the college.

Recruitment of Mentors and Participants

Administrators can start recruiting upper-class students to volunteer as mentors by sending out a flyer in the Fall of 2023. Individuals selected to run the mentoring program should develop measures to identify and recruit effective peer mentors, possibly recruiting former mentees to fill these roles. The selection process should be a result of collaboration between the student, faculty members, and administrators in the focus group. After the student mentors are selected, I recommend that the student mentee, student mentor, and faculty mentor sign an agreement outlining the nature of their relationship. Research shows that for a mentoring relationship to be successful, everyone must understand and agree on their roles and expectations (Foster, 2019).

Mentor Training

College administrators and faculty members will implement and oversee the mentor training. I recommend that a peer mentors training session be held prior to the beginning of the new school year.in the mentoring classroom. Depending on availability of funding, breakfast, lunch, snacks, and water may be provided. At the completion of the one-day mentor training session, peer mentors will be randomly paired with a first-year college student.

The mentor training will include a detailed overview of mentor's roles, expectations, responsibilities, and key mentoring skills. The training should also include

guidance for maintaining effective, safe, and appropriate relationships between mentors

and mentees. Training is important because effective peer mentors help their mentees

with both the social and academic aspects of college (Kopel, 2018); they help students

feel connected to the institution, persist, and obtain their college degree (Simmons, 2019).

A grievance process should also be outlined to handle potential complaints or cases of

misconduct arising from interactions between individuals participating in the program.

Project Evaluation Plan

The faculty committee responsible for running the mentoring program should regularly

evaluate the program's effectiveness using both formative and summative assessment

methods to collect information from students, peer mentors, faculty mentors, and

administrators. Formative evaluations will monitor the impact of the program by

collecting ongoing feedback that faculty members and administrators can use to make

improvements or adjustments along the way. For example, mentees will be asked to keep

a weekly journal recounting interactions with their mentors as well as any special events

provided by the mentoring program, such as workshops, guest speakers, conferences, or

meetings. Mentees will also be asked to meet with their peer and faculty mentors monthly

to provide feedback on their interactions with their mentors and the program as a whole.

Faculty mentors will then meet monthly with the administrators overseeing the program

to share this feedback from student participants. The goal of these formative assessments

is to inform the program's implementation on an ongoing basis (Grubbs, 2020).

Summative evaluations are another important assessment method used to measure the effectiveness of a program or activity overall (Gutierrez & Tomas, 2019). Administrators can accomplish this goal by asking student mentees, peer mentors, and faculty mentors to participate in a survey twice per year to collect data on the effectiveness of the program. Administrators will also monitor mentees' retention rates for both semesters and share the findings at the end of the school year to determine the overall impact of the mentoring program on retention rates. The journal that mentees will keep as a written record of the program will be used as a summative evaluation tool also.

Administrators will share all of the evaluation data with the faculty committee running the program, and they will discuss how to share the information to the entire college, whether through the school's website, a written document, or another method.

Project Implications

The findings of this study and the accompanying policy recommendation have direct implications at the local level. It is hoped that administrators at the community college featured in this study will use the recommendations provided in Appendix A to justify the reenactment of a mentoring program for African American students at their institution. The policy recommendation document also includes specific advice for structuring a program that is effective, manageable, and sustainable. My analysis of student perceptions of the previous mentoring program supports the use of a mentoring program to help increase retention and graduation rates among African American students at the college.

My research findings may also have implications for other community colleges and the

African American students they serve. Administrators from other institutions can use this

study to provide rationale for the creation of their own mentoring programs. The policy

recommendation outlines important considerations when designing such a program and

recommendations for implementation that could be adapted to other institutions. In this

way, the findings of this study have multiple implications for positive social change,

potentially benefiting African American college students, the institutions they attend, and

society at large

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Administrators at a southeastern college have struggled to determine why the retention rates for African American students are so low even though they have taken measures to improve them, namely, introducing a mentoring program targeted at this group. Administrators expressed their need to understand how the mentoring program affected college retention among this group of students as well as which program characteristics and student perceptions related to the program may have had the greatest impact. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether they believed that mentoring had a positive impact on their retention. Once the study was completed, the objective was to produce a policy recommendation, or white paper, to assist in designing and implementing a new mentoring program for African American students at the college.

The findings of this study were significant in a number of ways. First, they provided valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current mentoring program that could inform the creation of other similar programs. Second, the findings produced actionable results that were used to create policy recommendations for the development and implementation of a new mentoring program at the school under study. For example, the results of the study indicated that participants viewed the mentoring program as a positive bonding experience and a network of support. This reveals that an effective mentoring program should contain robust opportunities for positive bonding

between mentees and mentors. Another important finding of the study was that the

mentoring program helped participants navigate campus life and assisted them with

achieving goals and persisting toward graduation. This finding demonstrates that an

effective mentoring program should assist mentees in achieving the specific steps and

goals necessary for graduation. The findings from this study also show that establishing

an atmosphere of openness that fosters friendships was an important factor in helping

mentees complete their degrees. This indicates that any mentorship program should have

systems in place that promote openness and friendships between the mentees and

mentors. These are key elements that should be a part of any effective college mentorship

program.

Despite the strengths of this study, there were three important limitations. The

first limitation was that data were collected from a relatively small sample size of 10

participants. Studies with smaller sample sizes often have lower reliability than those

with larger sample sizes (Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). Another limitation of

this study is its qualitative methodology. Qualitative studies emphasize obtaining depth of

information and not breadth, meaning the findings may not be broad. Finally, the findings

may not be representative of the larger population. The next section contains

recommendations for alternative approaches based on these limitations.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The present study provides important insights into the experiences of African

American student participants in a community college mentoring program designed to

improve their retention and graduation rates. However, a quantitative study on the effect

of mentoring programs on the retention of African American students could help confirm

these findings by posing closed-ended questions related to a larger sample of African

American community college students. Such an approach would allow researchers to

evaluate whether there is a statistically significant relationship between this study's

predictor variables (positive bonding experiences, a network of support, an atmosphere of

openness, and the establishment of strong friendships) and its outcome variable (African

American students' positive perceptions of the efficacy of their mentoring program).

Operationalizing these predictor and outcome variables as Likert scales survey questions

and presenting these questions to a large randomly sampled group of African American

students who participated in the mentoring program would allow for a more precise

confirmation or disconfirmation of findings, which cannot be achieved using a qualitative

study.

Performing a quantitative study would address two limitations of the current

study: the small sample size and the question of the representativeness of the findings to a

larger group. Quantitative studies use larger samples to achieve adequate statistical

significance, typically accepted as .80 (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020). Having a statistical

power of at least .80 means that the sample size needs to be large enough to have at least

an 80% chance of detecting a significant effect if one actually exists, at the .05 error

level, and a medium sized effect. If the respondents are taken from a relatively large

random sampling of the population (meeting adequate statistical power), this will also enhance the representativeness of the study's findings.

I also offer two recommendations for alternative approaches to the proposed community college mentoring program for African American students. This study recommended that all first-year African American students be enrolled in the mentoring program, regardless of academic ability, to ensure they receive adequate support. Enrollment in the mentoring program would include academic monitoring and quarterly/biannual mentee surveys. However, as mentioned in the recommendations, there could be challenges to financing and staffing such a program. An alternative approach is to only enroll African American community college students who are at higher risk for withdrawing from the college as measured by poor high school grades and or low entrance exam scores. This approach minimizes the number of faculty needed to support the program as well as the needed financial resources. Additionally, African American students who were not initially enrolled in the program would be monitored to ensure they were making adequate academic progress. Students who were not initially enrolled in the mentorship program could enroll themselves voluntarily if they felt they needed additional support.

A second recommendation would be to hire staff specifically for the mentorship program instead of relying on professors to serve as mentors. In addition to their teaching duties, professors are often asked to serve on numerous committees. These additional duties, along with mentoring students, may become overwhelming and adversely affect

the mentorship program. Therefore, it is recommended that hiring dedicated staff for the mentorship program be considered as an alternative to using professors. Another option would be to establish a hybrid system that implements dedicated support staff and professors.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

This project provided me with many valuable insights and expanded my research skills significantly. The process of conducting the literature review, respondent interviews, and data analysis all served to expand my abilities as a researcher. First, the literature review process forced me to develop a strategic approach to planning a research project. Given that the literature is full of articles on mentoring, I developed an outline of the types of mentoring studies that were relevant to my topic. Once I developed this outline, the process of collecting and synthesizing the research became much more focused and productive than the typical research paper I would write in my graduate classes. Not only did I have to synthesize the findings of the literature and how they related to my topic, but I also had to critically examine the weaknesses of the literature. This forced me to strengthen my understanding of what makes a good study and what makes a not-so-good study.

My doctoral studies also provided me the opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews. This was the first time I conducted interviews using an interview guide rather than a Likert-scaled questionnaire. What I learned from the interview process was that most of my insights were not gained from the interview questions themselves, but

through the probing questions that followed. I have gained a greater appreciation for the depth of insight that can be gained from semi-structured interviews. Another valuable lesson that I learned about the interview process is that the discussion guide is just a guide. The researcher must plan the order of their questions, but once the interview begins, the flow of the conversation oftentimes pulls the discussion in other directions. At first this threw me off, and my conversations did not flow. However, once I stopped worrying about the order of the questions, the conversations began to flow much more smoothly, and I was able to obtain all the information I needed for my study.

One of the most challenging phases of the research process was the qualitative data analysis phase. During my matriculation in my doctoral program, we learned how to conduct statistical analysis using various descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. However, there were no classes on how to perform qualitative data analysis. There was a class that described the different qualitative techniques, but no class that detailed the content analysis steps. This is something that I had to learn on my own via the literature. Once I finally completed the qualitative analysis process, I reviewed my work a second time to ensure that I came up with the same conclusions. Content analysis is one of the skills I will continue to use in the future, so the extra time it took me to learn this technique was well worth the investment.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

College retention among African American students is a major issue in the United States. Retention rates for this group have continued to be a problem at both the local and

national levels (Francis, 2019; Owen & Amar, 2018; Smart, 2017). Even for non-African American students, retention is a major concern for institutions of higher education nationally (Anderson, 2019; Frances, 2019; Kerby, 2015). One possible way to address these discrepancies is through student mentoring programs targeted at improving retention (Mertes & Jankovich, 2016). However, more research is needed to understand which types of mentoring programs would be effective at improving retention rates among African American students and how much of an impact such programs have on students' choice to continue in school. Thus, this research takes on importance. If the current mentorship program can be improved, the insights could be leveraged to develop mentorship programs at other universities in the United States.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The current study involved a qualitative in-depth interview approach to address the research questions. The results can be used to develop mentorship programs around the United States that could result in a significant improvement in retention among African American students. This could lead to more African American students graduating from college and potentially obtaining better jobs and more stable family lives. The study could also have a positive impact on the literature, as it provides in-depth insights into how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether they believed that mentoring had a positive impact on their retention. These findings add to the literature and allow future researchers to expand upon the research in this area. Finally, this

research could benefit the administrators and African American students at the southeastern college featured in this study. Current students at the college would benefit from a mentorship program that improved their prospects for graduating. The study could help administrators at the college improve graduation rates among their African American students. Additionally, the insights from this study might be used to structure other mentorship programs that are not ethnic-group specific.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether they believed that mentoring had a positive impact on their retention. The study was driven by the need to improve the African American mentorship program at a community college in the southeastern United States. The results of the study indicated that the participants viewed the mentoring program as a positive bonding experience and a network of support. The results also indicated that the program's atmosphere of openness helped participants forge strong friendships. Finally, the study revealed that providing opportunities for positive bonding and supplying a network of support were key aspects of good mentoring. These results were used to develop recommendations for creating and improving mentoring programs for African American students at community colleges. Retention rates for African American college students have continued to be a problem at both the local and national levels (Francis, 2019; Owen & Amar, 2018; Smart, 2017). The results of this study may

provide a blueprint for developing mentoring programs that improve the graduation rates of African American students in colleges and universities across the United States.

References

Allen, S. R. (2021). *The impact of summer bridge programs on progress and retention into the second year among African American students at a predominantly white institution* (Publication No. 28776139) [Doctoral dissertation, Widener University.] ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://www.proquest.com/openview/447a606a9bf9554cea4e995a02e3f32f/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y

Anderson, K. L. (2019). *How community college presidents and deans impact graduation and retention rates* (Publication No. 13879684) [Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University.] ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://www.proquest.com/openview/9a91c0d969cc36dac430ebd6f47ff162/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y

Baker, C. N., & Robnett, B. (2012). Race, social support and college student retention: A case study. *Journal of College Student Development*, *53*(2), 325-335. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/469348

Baker, V. L,. & Lattuca, L. R. (2010), Developmental networks and learning: Toward an interdisciplinary perspective on identity development during doctoral study. *Studies in Higher Education*, *35*(7), 807-827. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070903501887

Barra, M. (2013). The effect of medical mathematics retention strategies in decreasing attrition rate among African American licensed practical nursing students in a

community college. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, *20*(3), 125-133.

https://www.proquest.com/openview/71b6d604c1f1a3c13759683c145254c3/1?pq
-origsite=gscholar&cbl=34124

Beckett, R. M. (2015). *The identification of best retention and graduation practices and policies for African American students in the Florida college system* (Publication No. 10187962) [Doctoral dissertation, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/identification-best-retention-graduation/docview/2054024774/se-2

Bimper, Albert Y., Jr. (2017). Mentorship of Black student-athletes at a predominately white American university: Critical race theory perspective on student-athlete development. *Sport, Education and Society, 22*(2), 175-193.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2015.1022524

Bishop, E. H. (2019). *Addressing the completion agenda by improving a community college's student retention rates* (Publication No. 10187962) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/6306/

Blue, A. (2018). *Exploring mentoring strategies needed by higher educational managers to increase student retention rates and decrease dropout rates in a higher education organization* (Publication No. 10793153) [Doctoral dissertation, Colorado Technical University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

https://www.proquest.com/openview/eb506a11cc4d13ffd53436c76708cdcd/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750

Bonsangue, M. V., Drew, D. E., & Gilmore, M. W. (2018). The impact of a supportive community experience on African-American Students in chemistry and chemical engineering. *The Learning Assistance Review 23*(2), 9-40.

Brooms, D. R. (2018). Exploring Black male initiative programs: Potential and possibilities for supporting Black male success in college. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *87*(1), 59–72. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.87.1.0059

Brooms, D. R. (2019). "It lit up the campus": Engaging Black males in culturally enriching environments. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 12*(4), 330–340. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000087.

Burney, C. L., Jr. (2018). *The impact of mentoring on African American males' ability to overcome "perceived effects of" stereotype threat* (Publication No. 10871564) [Doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/impact-mentoring-on-african-american-males/docview/2057756623/se-2

Cain, L. D. (2015). *Barriers encountered by African American women executives*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University.] Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/7475

Callahan, K. M. (2009). Academic-centered peer interactions and retention in undergraduate mathematics programs. *Journal of College Student Retention:*

Research, Theory & Practice, *10*(3), 361-38. https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.10.3.f

Calver, T. J. M. (2021). *Faculty, clinical supervisors, and teacher candidate perceptions and experiences of teacher candidate feedback* (Publication No. 10376) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

Carson, R. D., Reed, P. A. (2015). Pre-college career guidance on student persistence and performance at a small private university. *Career and Technical Education Research, 40*(2), 99-112. https://doi.org/10.5328/cter40.2.99

Carter-Francique, A. R., Hart, A., & Cheeks, G. (2015). Examining the value of social capital and social support for Black student-athletes' academic success. *Journal of African American Studies*, *19*, 157–177. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-015-9295-z

Chan, T. C. (2014). Effective induction and mentoring programs for K-12 teachers and teacher education faculty: Perspectives of an operational model. *New Waves*, *17*(2), 45-55.

Clarke, C. M. (2020). *Formerly at-risk, undergraduate alumni's mentoring experiences at a historically Black university*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/9083/

Collier, P. (2017). Peer mentoring: A tool for serving the diverse needs of 21st century college students. *Metropolitan Universities*, *28*(3), 3–8. https://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/muj/article/view/21621

Collings, R., Swanson, V., & Watkins, R. (2014). The impact of peer mentoring on levels of student wellbeing, integration and retention: A controlled comparative evaluation of residential students in UK higher education. *Higher Education*, *68*(6), 927-94. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10734-014-9752-y

Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

Dedoose Version 9.0.17, web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (2021). Los Angeles, CA: SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC. www.dedoose.com.

Dinh, T.V., & Zhang, Y. L. (2021). Engagement in high-impact practices and its influence on community college transfers' STEM degree attainment. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *45*(11), 834-839. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2020.1824133

D'Lima, G. M., & Kitsantas, A. W. (2014). Ethnic and gender differences in first-year college students' goal orientation, self-efficacy, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *107*, 341- 356. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2013.823366

DeVance, O. G. (2021). *Goal and strategy formation for persistence for men of color at a community college.* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/11181

Dominguez, N. and Hager, M. (2013), Mentoring frameworks: Synthesis and critique. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, *2*(3), 171-188. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-03-2013-0014

Duranczyk, I. M., Franko, J., Osifuye, S., Barton, A., & Higbee, J. (2015). Creating a model for graduate student inclusion and success. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research 8*(3), 147-158. https://doi.org/10.19030/cier.v8i3.9346

Field, K. (2018, June 3). A third of your freshmen disappear. How can you keep them. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *35*(8). https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-third-of-your-freshmen-disappear-how-can-you-keep-them/

Fletcher, S. & Mullen, C. (2012). *Sage handbook of mentoring and coaching in education*. Sage.

Flores, A. M. (2013). *Student satisfaction with an online university and its mentoring program as predictors of student academic performance* (Order No. 3601235). [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Flowers, J. H. (2020), The privileged rural: The college experiences of rural African Americans. In Chambers, C. R. and Crumb, L. (Eds.), *African American rural education* (*Advances in race and ethnicity in education,* Vol. 7). (pp. 87-102). Emerald Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2051-231720200000007007

Foster, K. (2019). *Does leadership & academic coaching paired with small peer group*

interaction improve Black male student academic engagement, self-efficacy and self-esteem? [Capstone project, Hamline University]. School of Education Student Capstone Projects. 304. https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp/304

Francis, V. D. (2019). *Mentoring and retention of first year college students at Brown Community College* (Publication No. 7001) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/7001/

Gandhi, M., Ray, T., Fernandez, R., Rispel, L., Nxumalo, N., Lescano, A., Bukusi, E., & Cohen, C. (2019). Mentoring the mentors: Implementation and evaluation of four faculty sponsored mentoring training workshops in low-and-middle income countries. *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, *100*(1), 20-28. https://doi.org/10.4269/ajtmh.18-0559

García R. H., Sánchez, E., & Acuña, S. R. (2013). Support for self-regulation in learning complex topics from multimedia explanations: Do learners need extensive or minimal support? *Instructional Science*, *41*(3), 539-553. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11251-012-9243-4.

Golden, A. A, Bogan, Y., Brown, L., Onwukwe, O., & Stewart, S. (2017). Faculty mentoring: Applying ecological theory to practice at historically Black colleges or universities. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, *27*(5), 487-497. https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2017.1279097

Grier-Reed, T. L. (2010). The African American student network: Creating sanctuaries

and counter spaces for coping with racial microaggressions in higher education settings. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling Education and Development*, *49*(2), 181-188. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1939.2010.tb00096.x

Grier-Reed, T., Ehlert, J., & Dade, S. (2011). Profiling the African American student network. *TLAR*, *16*(1), 22-30.

Griffin, R. L. (2018). *Experiences of male learning community participants at a private historically Black university* (Publication No. 5342) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/5342/

Griffin, M. M., Mello, M. P., Glover, C.A., Carter, E. W., Hodapp, R. M. (2016). Supporting students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in postsecondary education: The motivations and experiences of peer mentors. *Inclusion*, *4*(2), 75–88. https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-4.2.75.

Gutiérrez, M. & Tomás, J. M. (2019) The role of perceived autonomy support in predicting university students' academic success mediated by academic self-efficacy and school engagement. *Educational Psychology*, *39* (6), 729-748. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2019.1566519

Hall, T., & Martin, B. (2013). Engagement of African American college students through the use of hip hop pedagogy. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, *8*(2), 93-105. https://doi.org/10.5172/ijpl.2013.8.2.93

Harper, S. R., & Newman, C. B. (2016). Surprise, sensemaking, and success in the first

college year: Black undergraduate men's academic adjustment experiences. *Teachers College Record*, *118*(6), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811611800609

Hassouna, R. A. F. (2017). *Portraying the lived mentoring experiences of school of education faculty members in public research universities on their paths towards tenure: A phenomenological study* (Publication No. 10288117) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Heaven, A. (2015). A conceptual framework for transforming African American males through student affairs programs. *Race, Gender & Class, 22*(1), 54-64. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26505323

Hoffman, A. J., & Wallach, J. (2005). Effects of mentoring on community college students in transition to university. *The Community College Enterprise*, *11*(1), 67-78.

Howard, F. E. (2021). *Faculty and staff mentors' experiences supporting academic success with at-risk undergraduates*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10235/

Hurte, J. V. (2002). Mentoring: The forgotten retention tool. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, *19*(18), 49.

Hutto, P. N (2017) The relationship between student retention in community college courses and faculty employment status. *Community College Journal of Research*

and Practice, *41*(1) 4-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2015.1069227

Igbo, I. & Sule, E. (2019). Peer mentoring as a successful retention strategy for a baccalaureate nursing program in a historically Black college and university. *Nursing Education Perspective*, *40*(3), 192-193.

Kelch-Oliver, K., Smith, C. O., Johnson, K., Welkom, J. S., Gardner, N ., & Collins, M. H. (2013). Exploring the mentoring relationship among African American women in psychology. *Advancing Women in Leadership 33*, 29-37. https://doi.org/10.21423/awlj-v33.a98

Kerby, M. B. (2015). Toward a New Predictive Model of Student Retention in Higher Education: An Application of Classical Sociological Theory. Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 17(2), 138–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025115578229.

Kopel, J. (2018). *Personal connections of first-year college students*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

Lampton, H. (2020). *A qualitative study of the obstacles affecting African American males 'persistence in higher education* [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University]. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/4865/

Lancaster, C. & Xu, Y. J. (2017). Challenges and supports for African American STEM student persistence: A case study at a racially diverse four-year institution. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *86*(2), 176–189. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.86.2.0176.

Langevine, J. A. E. (2020). *Parental involvement and academic achievement of middle school Hispanic American students in South Texas* [Doctoral dissertation, Grand Canyon University]. ProQuest Dissertation Publishing.

Lee, J. A. (2018). "Affirmation, support, and advocacy: Critical race theory and academic advising. *NACADA Journal*, *38*(1), 77–87. https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-17-028

Leedy, P. D. & Ormrod, J. E. (2018), *Practical research: Planning and design* (12th ed.). Pearson Education.

Lowder-Haastrup, J. (2015). *A qualitative study: Challenges that may be encountered when transitioning from face-to-face to online courses* (Publication No. 3728640) [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Martin, I. (2020). *First generation African American college student-athletes and their lived experiences* (Publication no. 8627) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/8627/

McCoy, D. L., Winkle-Wagner, R., & Luedke, C. L. (2015). Colorblind mentoring? Exploring white faculty mentoring of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *4*, 1938-8926. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038676

Mekdessi R., Curan, B., Lam, B., Grech A., & Nguyen M. (2013). *Health sciences peer-mentoring; A student-staff-alumni collaboration*. [Paper presented at the 16th International First Year in Higher Education Conference, Wellington, NZ].

http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers13/4C.pdf.

Merino, A., & Aucock, M. (2015). The human element: Self-regulated learning skills and strategies through role-modelling and guided mastery. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *29*, 163–180. https://doi.org/10.20853/29-2-474

Merritt, M. R. (2020). *Lived experiences of African American nursing students in an associate degree nursing program* (Publication No. 8948) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/8948/

Mertes, S. J., & Jankoviak, M. W. (2016). Creating a college-wide retention program: A mixed methods approach. *The Community College Enterprise, 22*(1), 9-27.

Moy. G.E.; & Lee, K. A. (2021) Improving mentoring program fidelity through ecological consultation: A community-university partnership. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *31*(1), 128-146. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2020.1737088

National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *Bachelor's degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected years, 1976-77 through 2010-11*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_322.20.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *Total fall enrollment in degree-granting post-secondary institutions, by level and control of institution and race/ethnicity of student: Selected years, 1976 through 2012*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_306.20.asp

National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *Total fall enrollment in degree-granting post-secondary institutions, by level and control of institution and race/ethnicity of student: Selected years, 1976 through 2021*.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_306.20.asp

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2018). Undergraduate retention and graduation rates. National Center for Education Statistics, NCES.ed.gov.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_ctr.asp

Nevarez, C., Wood, J. L., & Penrose, R. (2015). *Leadership theory and the community college: Applying theory to practice*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Nichols, P. M. (2017). *Community college completion: A qualitative study of African American community college mentors and past African American male participants in an academic mentoring initiative* (Publication No. 10602312) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

O'Neal, E. L. (2020). *African American males' perceptions on increasing retention and graduation rates* (Publication No. 9792) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/9792/

Orange, C., & Ramalho, E. M. (2013). Reducing the need for post-secondary remediation using self-efficacy to identify underprepared African American and Hispanic adolescents. *Electronic Journal of Educational Psychology*, *11*(1), 51-74.

http://investigacion-psicopedagogica.org/revista/new/english/index.php?n=29

Owen, M. I., & Amar, A. F. (2018, March 29). *Peer teaching in an undergraduate health assessment course to promote skills retention*. [Conference presentation]. Nursing Education Research Conference 2018: Generating and Translating Evidence for Teaching Practice, Washington, D.C., United States.

http://hdl.handle.net/10755/624050

Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS* (7th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003117452.

Payne, L. (2021). *Perceived influence of a mentoring program on African American male student retention* (Publication No. 10263) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10263/

Payton, T. D., Howe, L. A., Timmons, S. M., & Richardson, M. E. (2013). African American nursing students' perceptions about mentoring. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, *34*(3), 173-7.

Peters, L. D. (2018). *The significance of mentorship for African American males attending a predominately white institution* (Publication No. 10846571) [Doctoral dissertation, Trevecca Nazarene University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Pew Research Center. (2014). *Millennials in adulthood*.

https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/

Plater, S. V. (2020). *Factors that influence African American male retention in public*

four-year institutions (Publication No. 8786) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/8786/

Ponder, A. (2020). *Understanding retention issues among African American males in a community college setting* (Publication No. 9226) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/9226/

Poor, C. J., & Brown, S., (2011). Increasing retention of women in engineering at WSU: A model for women's mentoring program. *College Student Journal*, *47*, 421-428.

Reader, C. M. (2018). *The effectiveness of intrusive advising programs on academic achievement and retention in higher education* (Publication No. 10792407) [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana State University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Regan, J., & Gold, J. (2010). Think tanks with deliverables: How communities of practice helped LPL financial management growth and organizations complexity. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, *29*(3), 17-26.

Rodicio, L., Mayer, S., & Jenkins, D. (2014). Strengthen program pathways through transformative change. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 167, 63–72. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20111

Romano, R. M. (1995). First-year attrition and retention at a community college. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, *2*(2), 169-177.

Rosco, J. L., (2015). Advising African American and Latino students. *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education 31*(2), 48-60. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45373113

Sanchez, B., Pinkston, K. D., Cooper, A. C., Luna, C., & Wyatt, S. T. (2018). One falls, we all fall: How boys of color develop close peer mentoring relationships. *Applied Developmental Science, 22*(1), 14-28. https://doiorg/10.1080/10888691.2016.1208092

Schunk, D.H., Mullen, C.A. (2013). Toward a conceptual model of mentoring research: Integration with self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychology Review, 25*, 361–389. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-013-9233-3.

Schwartz, S. O., Kanchewa, S. S., Rhodes, J. E., Gowdy, G., Stark, A. M., Horn, J. P., & Spencer, R. (2018). "I'm having a little struggle with this, can you help me out?": Examining impacts and processes of a social capital intervention for first-generation college students. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *61*, 166–178. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12206

Scott, C. L. & Homant, R, J. (2007). The professional mentor program plus: An academic success and retention tool for adult learners. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *9*(1), 61-73.

Shojai, S., Davis, W. J., & Root, P. S. (2014). Developmental relationship programs: An empirical study of the impact of peer-mentoring programs. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research, 7*(1), 31-38. https://doi.org/10.19030/cier.v7i1.8309

Simmons, L. D. (2013). Factors of persistence for African American men in a student

    support organization. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *82*(1), 62-74.

    https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.82.1.0062

Simmons, L. D. (2019). Beyond matriculation: Examining factors that contribute to

    African American male persistence at a predominantly white institution. *Journal*

    of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, *21*(3), 358–383.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025117714163

Simmons, R., & Smith, K. S. (2020) Success central: Addressing the persistence of

    African-American and Latinx college students using a peer success coaching

    intervention. *Innovative Higher Education 45*, 419–434.

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-09516-8

Slade, J., Eatmon, D., Staley, K., & Dixon, K.G. (2015). Getting into the pipeline:

    Summer bridge as a pathway to college success. *Journal of Negro Education*

    84(2), 125-138. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.84.2.0125

Smart, S. L. (2017). *A phenomenological study which examines the mentoring experience*

    of African American males enrolled in an urban two-year community

    college (Publication No. 10273040) [Doctoral dissertation, Texas Wesleyan

    University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2016). Interviews: Qualitative interviewing in the sport and

    exercise sciences. In Smith, B. & Sparkes, A. C. (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of*

    qualitative research in sport and exercise (pp. 125-145). Routledge.

Smithers, D. (2018). *Retention and graduation rates of African American and Hispanic students in community colleges in TN: Index of institutional practices that support minority student success* (Publication No. 10904498) [Doctoral dissertation, East Tennessee State University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Staples, K. D. (2017). *Engagement and mentoring as predictors of graduation for African American males in community colleges* (Publication No. 10262764) [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Stewart-Lord, A., Baillie, L., & Woods, S. (2017). Health care staff perceptions of a coaching and mentoring programme: A qualitative case study evaluation. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, *15*(2), 70–85.

Stoessel, K., Ihme, T. A., Barbarino, M., Fisseler, B., & Stürmer, S. (2015). Sociodemographic diversity and distance education: Who drops out from academic programs and why? *Research in Higher Education*, *56*(3), 228-246. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11162-014-9343-x

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (2018). *Basics of qualitative research techniques.* Sage Publishing.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2011). Bridging the pipeline: Underrepresented students' preparation for college through a summer bridge program. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *55*, 142-159. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764210381871

Talbert, P. Y. (2012). Strategies to increase enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. *Journal of Developmental Education*, *36*(1), 22-36.

Taulbee, R. (2017). *Exploring student perceptions of retention issues in a 3-year baccalaureate-level nursing program* (Publication No. 10637778) [Ed.D. dissertation, Northcentral University] ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, *45*(1), 89-125. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543045001089

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student departure*. University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures for student attrition.* (2nd ed.) Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2006) Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention*, *8*(1) 1-19. https://doi.org/10.2190/4YNU-4TMB-22DJ-AN4W

Twumasi, A. P. (2019). *Perceptions of African American males regarding supports for school success* [Doctoral dissertation, Houston Baptist University]. DARIUS. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12262/198

Univstats, (2019), Cedar Valley College. https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/cedar-valley-college-CC01078

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics. (2013). *Institutional retention and graduation rates for undergraduate students, fiscal*

year 2012.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/Indicator_CTR/coe_ctr_2014_05.pdf

University of North Carolina Board of Governors. (2013). *Our time, our future: The UNC compact with North Carolina.*

https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p16062coll9/id/106795

University of North Carolina General Administration. (2013). *2012 Summer bridge summary*.

Walker, K. Y., & Okpala, C. (2017). Exploring community college students' transfer experiences and perceptions and what they believe administration can do to improve their experiences. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, *65*(1), 35-44. https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2017.1274618

Waller, S. N., Costen, W. M., & Wozencraft, A. J. (2011). If we admit them, will they stay?: Understanding the role of social connectedness in the retention of African American students in a recreation and leisure studies program. *Schole*, *26*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/1937156X.2011.11949670

West, I. J., & Gokalp, G., (2011). Effective strategies for supporting doctoral students. *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations Communities and Nations* *11*(2), 11-20. https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9532/CGP/v11i02/38996

White-McNeil, A. (2016). *The influence of historically Black colleges and universities experience on first year retention* (Publication No. 3217) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/3217/

Wilson, A. C. (2021). *Success strategies of persistence for Black male community college students* (Publication No. 3217) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/3217/

Wilson, D. (2014). Follow me to the baccalaureate: Reflections and advice from African American community college transfer student journeys. *The Community College Enterprise*, *20*(2), 72-84.

Woodbury, M., & Englesberg, P. (2022). *Educational community leaders' support of African American students in low-performing schools* (Publication No. 29163735) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Zhang, P., & Smith, W. L., (2011). From high school to college: The transition experiences of Black and White students. *Journal of Black Studies*, *42*, 828-845. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934710376171

Appendix A: The Project

Introduction

In this section, I offer policy recommendations for the design of a new mentoring program that include a background of the existing problem, a summary of this study's findings, and a literature review. I will present this paper to administrators at the local community college as evidence of the need to reenact a mentoring program to support the retention of African American students. As the findings of this study demonstrate, students' perceptions of the previous mentoring program were positive. Students felt supported and believed that the program helped them to persist and earn their college degrees. My data analysis generated themes that may help structure a new mentoring program and increase retention rates for African American students.

Background of the Existing Problem

When African American students at a local community college were experiencing poor retention, the administration instituted a mentoring program in an attempt to improve retention rates among this group. Administrators indicated that they were unsure about what type of mentoring program and strategies would be the most effective for student retention. The purpose of this study was to better understand how African American students perceived the effects of mentoring, what specific mentoring strategies they found effective, and whether mentoring had a positive impact on their retention.

A review of the literature revealed that college retention is particularly low among

African American students. The National Centers for Education Statistics, (NCES, 2018)

indicated that the retention rate for African American students at 2-year colleges was

42%. This is lower than other racial groups (NCES, 2018). African American students are

less likely to stay enrolled in college, and their chances of earning a college degree are

lower (Nichols, 2017). Research shows that mentoring helps students adjust to the college

setting; this component is especially critical for African American students, who often

feel isolated at college. A factor that may affect the success of racial and ethnic minority

students is on-campus social support. Tinto's (1993) theory of college students' departure

emphasized the importance of institutions of higher education providing support for

students. Students who successfully assimilate into school are less likely to withdraw

(Tinto, 1993). Therefore, college administrators need to design effective mentoring

programs that positively impact African American student retention.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the mentoring program at the community

college that was researched helped African American students persist and remain in

school. The consensus among participants in the study that their mentoring program was

positive, supportive, and effective in helping them persist and earn their college degrees.

The elements of mentoring that African American students perceived as having a positive

influence on their retention were revealed as follows: a network of support that fostered

peer interactions, positive bonding and the establishment of lifelong friendships, help

with navigating campus life, help with personal growth, and opportunities to impact others.

In the interviews, all the participants elaborated on how the program helped them to remain in school and how their mentors supported them through their college program. Most of the participants stated that the mentoring program assisted them in achieving goals in their personal life as well. These findings confirm that administrators need to design mentoring programs that positively affect retention and reveals the need to reenact the mentoring program at the community college. Based on these results, administrators can use the elements of mentoring that African American students perceived as having a positive influence on their retention to create highly structured, well-planned mentoring programs to positively impact retention rates for African American students at their college.

Description and Goals/Purpose

This qualitative study was designed to explore African American students' perceptions of their mentoring program and to determine what elements of mentoring they perceived as having a positive influence on their retention. Administrators at the college instituted a mentoring program in an attempt to improve retention. The school was on lockdown and had to close due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students eventually started back school in a virtual setting and then in person, but the mentoring program has not resumed. The goal of this project was to inform, provide evidence, and educate

administrators about the need to design mentoring programs that positively affect retention, and to reenact the mentoring program at the local community college.

Scholarly literature supports the use of mentoring programs as a strategy to help increase African American students' retention rates. The literature reviewed for this study demonstrates that mentoring programs at the college level provide substantial support that helps motivate students to persist and remain in school. Based on the scholarly literature and the results of the study, I determined that a policy recommendation paper was a suitable genre for this project. College administrators can increase their ability to retain more students by designing better mentoring programs for African American students. A position paper is useful for demonstrating how such a mentoring program can support, help, and motivate African American students at the community college to remain in school and complete their college degrees.

The research supports mentoring as an important strategy in addressing retention for college-level students (Ponder, 2020). However, when administrators at the school under study attempted to institute a mentoring program to improve retention among African American students, they were unsure what type of mentoring and mentoring strategies were the most effective for student retention. Participants in the college's previous mentoring program indicated the positive effect the program had on helping them to persist and remain in school. For this reason, this paper examines mentoring as a strategy to alleviate or minimize the retention problem that African American students are experiencing at the local community college.

The Local Problem

African American students at a local community college were experiencing poor retention rates. In an effort to improve retention among this group, administrators at the college attempted to institute a mentoring program; however, they indicated that they were unsure about what type of mentoring program and strategies would be the most effective. The purpose of this paper is to present findings and recommendations to the administrators in an attempt to reenact the mentoring program.

This study addressed the need for research into how African American community college students perceive the effectiveness of different types of mentoring programs and strategies in supporting their own retention. The results of the study revealed that African American students perceived their mentoring program as positive, supportive, helpful, and key to their decision to stay in school. Findings may assist administrators at this college in designing mentoring programs that positively affect retention. The implications for positive social change include the potential to provide administrators at other community colleges with information about which methods may be successful in helping African American students complete their degree programs. Effective mentoring may provide positive results, including better retention.

Research Design and Approach

A basic qualitative research design was used to conduct this study. A qualitative

methodology seeks to answer *how* and *why* questions and is inductive in nature (Creswell, 2018; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). It was the most appropriate method for this study because the research questions sought to provide a better understanding of the quality of experiences African American students had in their community college's mentoring program. The answers were sought by asking students open-ended questions that required them to answer using their own knowledge, experiences, and feelings. During the interviews, the participants answered questions regarding their perceptions of their mentoring program, and the strategies they found to be most effective were recorded.

As a general rule, the research questions dictate the appropriate design to use in a study (Creswell, 2018; Lowder-Haastrup, 2015). A qualitative study uses communication that helps the researcher understand experiences from the participant's point of view (Leedy & Omrod, 2018; Smart, 2017). Qualitative research is characterized by its use of interpretation to explain human beliefs and behaviors within their specific contexts (Frances, 2019).

The basic qualitative research design for this study focused on participants' interpretations of their experiences. The experiences under investigation were those of African Americans in a school-based mentoring program. Interviews used to collect data in qualitative studies are typically conducted in the form of focus groups or one-on-one in-depth interviews (Frances, 2019; Leedy & Omrod, 2018). For this study, in-depth, open-ended interviews were used to collect data. The use of in-depth, open-ended

interviews, and the emphasis on gathering insights on the lived experiences of individuals makes the basic qualitative design appropriate for this study.

Research Questions

A low retention rate among African American students was a concern for administrators at the community college in this study. Administrators attempted to institute a mentoring program; however, they indicated that they were unsure about what type of mentoring program and strategies would be the most effective. This study sought to provide administrators with insights into the efficacy of the previous program.

The following research questions were used to structure this study:

RQ1) What are African American students' perceptions of the mentoring program at the community college?

RQ2) Which elements of mentoring do African American students at the community college perceive as having a positive influence on their retention?

The consensus among the participants in the study is that African American students perceived their mentoring programs to be positive, supportive, and useful in helping them persist and earn their college degrees. The elements of mentoring that African American students perceived as having a positive influence on their retention and persistence to graduation were revealed as follows: a network of support and peer interactions, positive bonding and the formation of lifetime friendships, helpful navigation through campus life, assistance with personal growth, and opportunities to impact others.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data was collected through an in-depth semi structured interview protocol with open-ended questions. Data collection in a qualitative study requires in-depth inquiry into the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the target participants. The individual interview format used in this study allowed participants to discuss their views and experiences in their own words and without any influence from other participants. A semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions allows a researcher to ensure that the main issues being investigated are covered while also allowing interviewees to discuss their views and experiences.

One data collection instrument was used in this study, which was an open-ended interview protocol. The interview protocol was created by me and contained open-ended questions that were posed to each participant. Initial questions focused on demographic information, such as the participants' major in college, grade level, age, ethnicity, etc. The other questions focused on the students' perceptions of the mentoring program, including asking for a description of the type of mentoring in place, participants' likes and dislikes, and the aspects of the mentoring program the students found effective. Finally, students were asked how their academic and social experiences on campus were different, if at all, after participating in the mentoring program, and whether they perceived the type of mentoring they received as either helping or hindering their retention. Probing questions were used to follow up on scripted questions and to

encourage participants to answer in greater depth and detail. Probing questions are a critical part of the interview process, as they allow the researcher to delve deeper into the *why* of the participants' initial answer (Creswell, 2018). An audio recording device was used to record the entire interview, which I later transcribed into a text document. The document was then input into the Dedoose (2016) qualitative software for analysis and coding of recurring themes.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were scheduled via Skype or telephone rather than in person. As previously noted, all participants were required to read and sign an informed consent form before the interview process began. The participants were also required to consent to their interview being recorded. After the informed consent was signed, interviewing and recording began. Each interview took between forty-five minutes and one hour to complete. Once the data collection session was complete, participants were asked if they had any questions and thanked for their participation in the study.

Summary of Findings

This qualitative research study examined African American students' perceptions and experiences while participating in a mentoring program. Participants included African American men and women who participated in a mentoring program while attending a community college in the southeastern United States. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how African American students perceived the

effects of mentoring, which specific mentoring strategies they found to be effective, and whether mentoring had a positive impact on their retention. Two research questions guided and helped me build the findings. The first research question asked how African Americans students in the community college mentoring program would describe their mentoring experience. The second research question asked which elements of the mentoring African American students received at the community college they perceived as having a positive influence on their retention.

The results of the study were derived from interview responses from eight African American students who participated in the mentoring program at the community college being researched. Participants were recruited from social media. I posted an ad on LinkedIn to gain access to African American students who were participating in the program. A semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions was used. The interview format provided an opportunity to extract meaningful descriptions of how participants experienced the mentoring program (Smart, 2017). During the interviews, which were scheduled by appointment, I used audio recording and note-taking to record responses. All participants gave informed consent to this protocol. The information was then organized to allow for tracking all data and emerging codes. I noted patterns, relationships, and themes supported by the data and aligned with the research questions.

Interview transcriptions provided the essential framework for pinpointing individual statements related to participants' experiences. Statements that shared a correlation were coded to reveal emerging themes. Manual coding of each participant's

transcript helped to identify patterns and develop themes that were important in writing the results. The findings procured from the interviews are reviewed in this section in relation to the specific themes they support. the data collected indicated that African American students perceived their mentoring program to be positive, supportive, and effective in helping them persist in college and earn their degrees. The study participants perceived the following elements of the program as having a positive influence on their retention: a network of support that promoted peer interactions, positive bonding experiences and the development of lifetime friendships, assistance with navigating campus life, and help with personal and academic goals that supported their ability to persist toward graduation.

Participants' descriptions of their experiences in the mentoring program provided me with knowledge and insight into the research questions posed for this study. By taking notes, actively listening to the participants, and examining their responses, valuable information was obtained about the mentoring program at the community college. The research questions are addressed with supporting documentation describing the feedback provided by each participant. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, a number of themes emerged that provided information connected to the research questions. These themes were as follows: *positive bonding and a network of support, openness and the establishment of lifetime friendships, help with navigating campus life, assistance in achieving goals including persistence toward graduation, help with personal growth and making good decisions, and opportunities to impact others.* Each

theme is discussed below with support from participants' responses.

Rationale

I opted to create a policy recommendation paper detailing specific suggestions to ameliorate the problem of low retention rates among African American students at the local community college. The retention problems at the community college examined in this study could be best addressed through the creation of policy that aids in the establishment of a well-designed mentoring program. It is envisioned that the policy recommendation paper can be used to justify the local community college and other institutions in considering the establishment of structured, organized, and well-planned mentoring programs designed to positively impact African American students' retention. The policy recommendation aligns with this study's research questions and the themes that emerged from data collected during interviews. Overall, the participants had a positive perception of their mentoring program, stating that it was helpful, supportive, and impactful, and that it provided them with important resources.

The results of the current study and the accompanying recommendations are consistent with existing research on the topic. Research shows that mentoring is an appropriate strategy for addressing low retention of African American students (Ponder, 2020). The use of a policy paper to translate research findings into actionable steps is well established in the research. For example, a study conducted by Francis (2019) used a detailed policy paper to bring attention to the fact that mentoring programs can address

the retention problem at community colleges. The study showed how designing

structured mentoring programs may alleviate or minimize the retention problem for

students at the local community college. The success of the project will largely depend on

administrators' ability to identify key stakeholders and encourage their buy-in.

Recommendation #1

I recommend that administrators reenact a newly designed, highly-structured, and

well-planned mentoring program to positively impact retention rates for African

American students at their college. Reenacting the mentoring program at the local college

and integrating a new curriculum through the adoption of this policy document will

require investment of resources to commit long-term to African American students. The

first important consideration when designing a new mentoring program will be how to

make the project manageable and sustainable. It will be recommended that the program

only be integrated into the curriculum for first-year students. This recommendation will

be offered as a means of keeping the mentoring program sustainable. Limiting the

mentoring program to first-year African American students would target students during

a crucial transition period while keeping the scope of the program manageable. Limiting

the program in this way will help address the possible challenge of identifying and

recruiting enough mentors to work with program participants. Should the program

become more self-sustaining over time, there is the possibility of expanding it to include

other segments of the student population. It will also be recommended that students can

opt out of the program at any time.

Recommendation #2

I also recommend that administrators include faculty mentors in the new mentoring program. Research overwhelmingly supports the efficacy of student-faculty relationships in promoting student engagement, a crucial component in undergraduate retention and graduation (Howard, 2021). Faculty mentoring programs have been shown to provide specific benefits for African American students (Howard, 2021). Developing a connection with faculty in the form of coaching provides students with a sense of belonging and increases their will to persist (Howard, 2021). According to Bratton (2018), students associated building positive relationships with peers, faculty, and administrators as having the greatest effect on their retention and academic success. Research by Wood and Newman (2017) on engagement among Black males in urban community colleges showed that colleges with high levels of faculty-student engagement had higher graduation rates. This study also demonstrated that student's perceptions of their education contributed to their success (Wood & Newman, 2017). Support from peers and faculty members contributes to successful outcomes and better retention rates for African American students (Broom, 2018). Arguably, thoughtful and deliberate mentoring is one of the most important roles for higher education faculty. As such, I will strongly recommend that faculty mentors play a role in the re-establishment of the mentoring program under study.

Recommendation #3

I recommend that the peer mentors participating in the program be provided high-quality training to prepare them for their roles. Mentors will be recruited, selected, and trained by faculty members and administrators. The peer mentor training session will be held prior to the beginning of the new school year and will include a detailed overview of mentors' roles, expectations, responsibilities, and key mentoring skills. The training should include guidance for maintaining effective, safe, and appropriate relationships between mentors and mentees. According to Kopel (2018), training is important for mentors because effective peer mentors help their mentees with both the social and academic aspects of college. Peer mentors can help students feel connected to the institution and persist to obtain their college degree (Simmons, 2019).

I also recommend that program leaders outline a grievance process for handling potential complaints or cases of misconduct arising from interactions between program participants. This recommendation offers a level of protection and guidance for students, faculty, and administrators participating in the program, should complaints or misconduct cases arise.

College administrators and faculty members will implement and oversee the training program for mentors. The mentor training will take place in the mentoring classroom at the college. After the completion of a one-day mentor training session, the peer mentors will be randomly paired with a first-year college student.

Recommendation #4

I recommend the formation of a faculty committee. Administrators will recruit faculty members by presenting the findings of the research at a staff meeting in the summer of 2023. Volunteers will be asked to join by Fall of 2023. I recommend that the faculty committee be created to help oversee the design and implementation of the new mentoring program. According to Brooms (2019) postsecondary educators, and leaders must do more of what works to educate and retain African American students. A focus group may help them better understand what helps these students to persist and obtain their college degree (Twumasi, 2019) These faculty members will provide a valuable service opportunity to all of the students and administrators while supporting the college's goal of creating and maintaining a robust mentoring program to support the retention of African American students.

Recommendation #5

I recommend the formation of faculty/peer mentors and students focus groups. I recommend that administrators form a focus group to work with faculty members, peer mentors and students to create a new mentoring program that will support African American students and increase their retention rate. The focus group will create strategic goals to keep the program sustainable; I will recommend that the focus group use the themes revealed in interviews from the study participants to enhance their mentoring program. The prospective focus group will be encouraged to clearly define the roles and

responsibilities of faculty members, peer mentors, and students, and those providing oversight to the program and to identify potential candidates for these roles. It's important to hear directly from students who may be impacted by the program. A focus group will allow students to express their concerns and recommendations to institutional leaders (O'Neal, 2020). The goals are for the focus group to be implemented by Fall 2023.

Recommendation #6

I recommend a signed agreement between all parties involved in the mentoring program that describes the nature of their relationship. Administrators will send out a flyer requesting upper-class students to volunteer as mentors in the Fall of 2023. The mentoring selection should be collaborative between the student, faculty members, and administrators. After the student mentors are selected, I recommend that the student, mentor, and faculty mentor have a signed agreement that describes the nature of the relationship. The signed form would be an agreement between the student and the mentors. The mentoring relationship must ensure that everyone understands their roles and expectations and are in complete agreement (Foster, 2019).

Conclusion

Research has shown that mentoring programs positively impact retention. A qualitative design was used to understand African American students' perceptions of their mentoring program and what elements of mentoring they perceived as positively impacting their retention. Several themes were identified that supported the data and

aligned with the research questions. The consensus among the participants in the study is that African American students perceived their mentoring programs to be positive, supportive, and useful in helping them persist and earn their college degrees. The elements of mentoring that African American students perceived as having a positive influence on their retention and persistence to graduation were revealed as follows: a network of support and peer interactions, positive bonding and lifetime friendships, helpful navigation through campus life, help with personal growth, and opportunities to impact others.

I am suggesting that the administrators reenact the mentoring program and use the above recommendations to design a highly structured, organized, and well-planned programs that will positively improve retention for African American students. The goal of the project was to inform, provide evidence, and to educate the administrators of the need to design mentoring programs. Reenacting and enhancing the prior mentoring program by training mentors and adding a faculty mentoring component requires the commitment of the institution to help African American students to persist and remain in college. These findings, the theoretical concepts, and the strategies described in the review of the literature led to the following recommendations previously mentioned for creating the policy recommendation that can be used by administrator, faculty members, peer mentors, and mentee to address the retention problem at the local college.

References

Booker, K., & Brevard, E., Jr. (2017, January 18). Why mentoring matters: African

American students and the transition to college. *Mentor: An Academic Advising

Journal*. https://journals.psu.edu/mentor/article/view/61245/60877

Bratton, J. (2018). The academic success of African American males at a Maryland

community college. *Journal of Underrepresented & Minority Progress*, *2*(1), 44–

72. https://doi.org/10.32674/jump.v2i1

Brooms, D. R. (2019). "It lit up the campus": Engaging Black males in culturally

enriching environments. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 12*(4), 330–

340. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000087

Brooms, D. R. (2018). Exploring Black male initiative programs: Potential and

possibilities for supporting Black male success in college. *The Journal of Negro

Education, 87*(1), 59–72. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.87.1.0059

Brooms, D. R., & Davis, A. R. (2017). Staying focused on the goal: Peer bonding and

faculty mentors supporting Black males' persistence in college. *Journal of Black

Studies*, *48*(3), 305–326. http://doi.org/10.1177/0021934717692520

Brown, M. C. (2020). *Trends and barriers regarding attrition among adult learners at a

community college* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Dissertations and

Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/8366/

Clarke, C. M. (2020). *Formerly at-risk, undergraduate alumni's mentoring experiences

at a historically Black university*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University].

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/9083/

Collier, P. (2017). Peer mentoring: A tool for serving the diverse needs of 21st century

college students. *Metropolitan Universities*, *28*(3), 3–8.

https://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/muj/article/view/21621

Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*

approaches (5th ed.). Sage.

DeVance, O. G. (2021). *Goal and strategy formation for persistence for men of color at a*

community college. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden

Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/11181/

Druery, J. E., & Brooms, D. R. (2019). "It lit up the campus": Engaging Black males in

culturally enriching environments. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*,

12(4), 330–340. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2018-42541-001

Foster, K. (2019). *Does leadership & academic coaching paired with small peer group*

interaction improve Black male student academic engagement, self-efficacy and

self-esteem? [Capstone project, Hamline University]. School of Education Student

Capstone Projects. 304.

https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1311&context=h

se_cp

Francis, V. D. (2019). *Mentoring and retention of first year college students at brown*

community college (Order No. 13895314). [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/mentoring-retention-first-year-college-students/docview/2239318971/se-2

Grant, T. V. (2019). *African American males' perception of the barriers in higher education.* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/7383/

Gregory E. M., & Lee, K. A. (2021) Improving mentoring program fidelity through ecological consultation: A community-university partnership. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *31*(1), 128–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2020.1737088

Grubbs, S. J. (2020) The American community college: History, policies and issues. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, *52*(2), 193–210. http://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2019.1681385

Gutiérrez, M., & Tomás, J. M. (2019) The role of perceived autonomy support in predicting university students' academic success mediated by academic self-efficacy and school engagement. *Educational Psychology*, *39*(6), 729–748. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2019.1566519

Herd, C. T. (2021). *African American freshman students' perceptions of student persistence at a historically Black college* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10650/

Howard, F. E. (2021). *Faculty and staff mentors' experiences supporting academic success with at-risk undergraduates*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10137/

Igbo, I., & Sule, E. (2019). Peer mentoring as a successful retention strategy for a baccalaureate nursing program in a historically black college and university. *Nursing Education Perspective*, *40*(3), 192193.

https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NEP.0000000000000346

Kopel, J. (2018). *Personal connections of first-year college students*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/4865/.

Leedy, P. D. & Ormrod, J. E. (2018), *Practical research: Planning and design* (12th ed.). Pearson Education.

Lowder-Haastrup, J. (2015). *A qualitative study: Challenges that may be encountered when transitioning from face-to-face to online courses* (Order No. 3728640). Available from ProQuest One Academic. (1734046964). Retrieved from

https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/qualitative-study-challenges-that-may-be/docview/1734046964/se-2.

Martin, I. (2020). *First generation African American college student-athletes and their lived experiences*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/8627/

Merritt, M. R. (2020). *Lived experiences of African American nursing students in an associate degree nursing program.* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/8948/

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2018). National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/

O'Neal, E. L. (2020). *African American males' perceptions on increasing retention and graduation rates*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/9792/

Nichols, P. M. (2017). *Community college completion: A qualitative study of African American community college mentors and past African American male participants in an academic mentoring initiative* (Order No. 10602312). Available from ProQuest One Academic. (1937577427).

https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/community-college-completion-qualitative-study/docview/1937577427/se-2.

Payne, L. (2021). *Perceived influence of a mentoring program on African American male student retention.* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10263/

Plater, S. V. (2020). *Factors that influence African American male retention in public four-year institutions*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=10058&context=dissertations

Ponder, A. (2020). *Understanding retention issues among African American males in a community college setting* (Order No. 28026503). Available from Dissertations & Theses @ Walden University; ProQuest One Academic. (2434562371). Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/understanding-retention-issues-among-african/docview/2434562371/se-2.

Rice, K. M. (2019). *Improving the General Education Development (GED): Retention and completion rates of low-income adults*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/6655/

Sanchez, B., Pinkston, K. D., Cooper, A. C., Luna, C., & Wyatt, S. T. (2018). One falls, we all fall: How boys of color develop close peer mentoring relationships. *Applied Developmental Science, 22*(1), 14-28. Retrieved from https://doiorg/10.1080/10888691.2016.1208092

Schwartz, S. O., Kanchewa, S. S., Rhodes, J. E., Gowdy, G., Stark, A. M., Horn, J. P., & Spencer, R. (2018). "I'm having a little struggle with this, can you help me out?": Examining impacts and processes of a social capital intervention for first-

generation college students. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *61*, 166–178. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12206

Simmons, L. D. (2019). Beyond matriculation: Examining factors that contribute to African American male persistence at a predominantly white institution. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *21*(3), 358–383. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1521025117714163

Simmons, R., & Castillo, A. (2018). Peer coaching: A model for supporting the persistence of first-generation college students. In S. Whalen (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 14th National Symposium on Student Retention* (pp. 296–305). The University of Oklahoma Press.

Simmons, R., & Smith, K. S. (2020). Success central: Addressing the persistence of African American and Latinx college students using a peer success coaching intervention. *Innovative Higher Education*, *45*(5), 419–434. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-09516-8

Smart, S. L. (2017). *A phenomenological study which examines the mentoring experience of African American males enrolled in an urban two-year community college* (Publication No. 10273040) [Doctoral dissertation, Texas Wesleyan University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Solomon, E. (2019). *African American male veterans' perceptions regarding factors that influence community college completion*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/7898/

Tanner, Nicole N. (2019). *Underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in the United States*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/7200/

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, *45*(1), 89-125. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1170024

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student departure*. University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures for student attrition*. (2nd ed.) University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2006) Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention*, *8*(1) 1-19. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2190/4YNU-4TMB-22DJ-AN4W?journalCode=csra

Trang V. D. & Zhang, Y. L. (2021) Engagement in high-impact practices and its influence on community college transfers' STEM degree attainment. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *45*(11), 834-849. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10668926.2020.1824133

Twumasi, A. P. (2019). *Perceptions of African American males regarding supports for*

school success [Doctoral dissertation, Houston Baptist University]. DARIUS.

http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12262/198

Watson, S. (2019). *Perceptions of persistence in a community college English composition class*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/7577/

Wilson, A. C. (2021). Success strategies of persistence for Black male community college students (Publication No. 10624) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.

https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10624

Wood, J. L., & Newman, C. B. (2017). Predictors of Faculty–Student Engagement for Black Men in Urban Community Colleges: An Investigation of the Community College Survey of Men. Urban Education, 52(9), 1057–1079.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915623343