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## First-Generation African American Male Students' Perceptions of Low Retention Rates

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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Clinton Harris

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

First-Generation African American Male Students' Perceptions of Low Retention Rates

by

Clinton Harris

MA, Strayer University, 2008

BS, North Carolina Central University, 1995

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

January 2024

## Abstract

African American males have some of the lowest retention rates of all races and genders in higher education. First-generation African American male undergraduate students (FGAAMUS) attending a public 4-year institution located in the southeastern portion of the United States are experiencing lower retention rates than other students in the same region. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore FGAAMUS' perceptions of the impact of academic and social integration on their retention rates at Waygate University (pseudonym). Tinto's student integration model provided the framework for the study. A sample of 10 FGAAMUS completed in-depth interviews. The transcripts of the interviews were coded using NVivo qualitative software analysis program. NVivo allowed for analysis of transcripts to be completed in a central location while organizing codes, categories, and themes and allowed for more in-depth interpretations and organization of the data. I analyzed the data using thematic analysis with constant comparison. In this coding methodology, each interview was analyzed as the transcripts were received, allowing the development of codes, categories, and themes as data were collected. The project resulting from this study was developed from the findings of four emergent themes: financial aid, academic/administration, campus, and social integration. Implications for social change include strategies to improve the retention and graduation rates of FGAAMUS at the local setting with the hope that these students, because of their educational attainment, may return to serve their communities of choice.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this project study to my family. To Cassie (wife), you have the patience of Job and now that I am out of the belly of the whale, I can start on your “Honey Do List.” To my son, Clinton Jr.; and my daughter, Camilia. I am planning a family trip for all! I am not trying to make up for lost time; I just want us to have a good time.

## Acknowledgments

I want to thank my chair, Dr. Karet, for giving me the leadership and guidance when I was navigating the many straits of uncertainty. Dr. Karet, you were my lighthouse, leading me back to the shores of certainty and confidence when all seemed lost. You gave me the assurance to keep pushing and not to give up on my goal of finishing this program. Thank you for believing in me.

Dr. Pearce, the first time I interacted with you during my first teleconference, your upbeat demeanor relaxed me. I knew you were a positive addition to my proposal advising team in those few moments of interacting with you. I remember you said that I had a pretty smile, but you have a smile in your voice and that smile in your voice was very encouraging to me. Thanks for coming along with me on this academic journey.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

African American male undergraduates have some of the lowest retention rates of all races and genders in higher education, and for first-generation African American male undergraduate students (FGAAMUS) the challenges are even greater. Furthermore, some FGAAMUS are arriving at institutions of higher learning lacking the knowledge of what is expected of them at the postsecondary levels of instruction (Al Hassani & Wilkins, 2022; Bettencourt et al., 2022; Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2023). Although many FGAAMUS are gaining admittance to higher education institutions, many are struggling and failing to complete once enrolled, and low retention rates continues to be a factor (Pratt et al., 2019; Tight, 2020).

Administrators at Waygate University (a pseudonym for a historically Black college and university [HBCU] in the southeastern United States) are seeking ways to help FGAAMUS improve their low retention rates. Furthermore, several universities in the same geographic area have higher retention rates for FGAAMUS. For example, the retention rate at three other local universities is 63%, 67%, and 81% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). Waygate University administrators need additional information on how to improve the retention rates for their FGAAMUS.

African American males account for 4.3% of the total enrollment of 4-year postsecondary students in the United States, yet two thirds of African American males who start college never finish (NCES, 2019). The problem addressed in the current study was the low retention rates of FGAAMUS at Waygate University. The retention rate for AAMUS is 39% (NCES, 2019). The purpose of the current qualitative study was to

explore FGAAMUS' perceptions of the impact of academic and social integration on their low retention rates at Waygate University.

### **Rationale**

The rationale for choosing this local problem was that too many FGAAMUS are starting undergraduate degree programs but are not persisting until graduation (see Baker et al., 2021; Black & Bimper, 2020; Broom et al., 2021). Waygate University was the institution selected for this study because the institution has lower retention rates of FGAAMUS in comparison to other local universities in the area (NCES, 2019).

According to the director of the office of institutional research at Waygate University, the low retention of FGAAMUS is a continuous issue at the local study site and in higher education in general (personal communication, December 6, 2022). The director claimed the problem of low retention of FGAAMUS will not go away without the help of others. The matter of low retention of FGAAMUS needs the attention of all stakeholders who are concerned with the low retention problems of FGAAMUS at this institution.

Moreover, the director of student retention at Waygate University revealed that the institution was experiencing low retention problems for African American male undergraduate students. The director stated he had been working at the institution for over 15 years and had not seen any improvements in the retention rates at the institution (personal communication, November 17, 2022). The director was concerned about the plight of all students at the study site, especially FGAAMUS. The director offered the support of the department for any research needs in the future. The director also stated

that the problem of low retention of FGAAMUS is not unique to Waygate University; other universities are struggling to retain FGAAMUS as well (Garvey, 2020).

Numerous FGAAMUS are arriving at institutions of higher learning scholastically underprepared and financially challenged (Strayhorn, 2017). Furthermore, many FGAAMUS lack the knowledge of what is expected of them at the postsecondary levels of instruction (Harper et al., 2018); many FGAAMUS are gaining admittance to higher education institutions, but once enrolled they are struggling to succeed, and low retention rates continues to be a factor (Buchanan et al., 2019; Burke, 2019).

Administrators at Waygate University are seeking ways to help FGAAMUS improve retention rates (Director of Research and Compliance, personal communication, January 12, 2023). Furthermore, several universities in the same geographic area as Waygate University had higher retention rates for FGAAMUS. Waygate University administrators needed additional information on how to improve the retention rates for their FGAAMUS. Eller and DiPrete (2018) suggested that the differences in the retention rates for FGAAMUS in comparison to their White counterparts indicate that FGAAMUS are experiencing retention-related issues at more significant levels than most students in higher education. Further investigation of this problem is needed because low retention rates of FGAAMUS continues to be an issue at Waygate University and in higher education in general (Bettencourt et al., 2022; Copeland, 2023; Ellis, 2019; Garvey, 2020).

### **Definition of Terms**

Important terms used in this study are defined as follows:

*Academic integration:* How well a student performs academically, whether there are some levels of intellectual development, and whether the student has a positive experience in the academic setting (Tinto, 1975).

*Administrator:* Any person whose employment responsibilities include closely monitoring the retention and graduation rates of students in higher education (NCES, 2019).

*African American:* Any person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa; used interchangeably with the shortened term Black (NCES, 2019).

*Attrition:* The ongoing reduction of students who have previously enrolled in a postsecondary school but failed to reenroll in successive terms (NCES, 2019).

*College graduate:* A student who has successfully earned a bachelor's degree (NCES, 2019).

*Persistence:* The effort of a student to stay focused in a college setting and continue until graduation (Harackiewicz & Priniski, 2018).

*Retention:* An educational institution's policies dedicated to keeping students enrolled in college courses from admission to graduation (NCES, 2019).

*Social integration:* The involvement of students in extracurricular activities and the presence of positive relationships with peers (Tinto, 1975).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study addressed a local problem by focusing on the academic and social integration experiences of FGAAMUS in the local setting. This study may fill a gap in practice and make an original contribution to the field of higher education because the problem of low retention of FGAAMUS is not only a local problem but also an issue that

continues to plague many institutions of higher education (Becker et al., 2018; Eakins & Eakins, 2017). Moreover, the understanding gained from this study may help Waygate University administrators identify ways to improve the low retention rates of FGAAMUS, thereby supporting eventual degree attainment because education has long been an instrument for social change by addressing disparities in society (Copeland, 2023; Garvey, 2020).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore FGAAMUS' perceptions of the impact of academic and social integration on their low retention rates at Waygate University.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: How do FGAAMUS perceive academic integration issues they had to overcome to prevent them from dropping out of Waygate University?

RQ2: How do FGAAMUS describe what social integration issues challenged their sense of belonging while attending Waygate University?

A qualitative method of inquiry was used to examine the research problem. The primary means of developing an understanding were through in-depth interviews with FGAAMUS at Waygate University. The outcome of this study was based on the data collected and the findings of the study. A project was developed proposing strategies based on FGAAMUS reported to increase the retention rate of these individuals.

### **Review of the Literature**

To locate scholarly articles and other relevant literature to review for this study, I searched journals and various online databases, including EBSCOhost, Sage Databases, ProQuest, and Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC). The key terms I used



for this literature search included *higher education retention*, *first-generation college students*, *African American higher education retention*, and *Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)*. Saturation for the literature review was reached because the minimum number of peer-reviewed articles was exceeded for this study. Moreover, I continued to gather additional articles until recurring themes were found and repeated in articles reviewed for this study. Therefore, I believe a level of saturation was reached for this study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was Tinto's (1975) student integration model. Tinto posited that if a student's social and academic integrations are positive experiences, the student will be more likely to persist until graduation. Moreover, Tinto reported that although some students may depart due to a lack of academic prowess, many leave an institution voluntarily. Students' reasons for withdrawal are numerous, and many college administrators are perplexed about how to improve student retention rates (Brooms et al., 2021; Zulfiqar et al., 2023).

Higher education retention studies started in the 1930s (Reason & Braxton, 2023); however, it was not until the 1960s that most of the studies focused on how a student's socioeconomic status impacted their ability to obtain a degree (Aljohani, 2016). Consequently, it was not until the 1970s that scholars examined the sociological meaning of retention and the role institutional culture played in student departure (Tinto, 2006). Spady's (1970) seminal work anchored retention models by considering the sociological factors that may influence students' rationalization for interrupting their educational journey. Inspired by Durkheim's (1961), (see Gerardi, 2020) theory of suicide, Spady

proposed that when a student drops out of college, it is analogous to committing suicide. The rationale for this analogy was that when a person commits suicide, they are no longer connected to society, and future assimilation with society is impossible. In the same context, when a student drops out of an institution, the interruption of their studies (lack of integration) disconnects them from their institution. However, unlike suicide, it is possible for the student to reconnect and reenroll at the same institution later or at a different institution.

Tinto (1986, 1987, 1998, 2006, 2017) found that the interaction and engagement of faculty with students is crucial to improving student retention because the retention rates among marginalized students are usually lower than the general student population. Tinto's (1975) student integration model was a good choice for the current study's framework because it is one of the most recognized and cited sources by scholars studying student retention, attrition, and graduation. For example, researchers have used Tinto's (1975) student integration model and applied it to their specific context (Gray & Perkins, 2019; McDermott et al., 2020; Moraña, 2017). Because so many researchers have used Tinto's model in multiple contexts, it has excellent credibility (Aljohani, 2016). Therefore, Tinto's (1975) student integration model was the best source for investigating the low retention rates of FGAAMUS at Waygate University.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

In higher education, student retention is defined as a student's continued enrollment from the first year to the second year (NCES, 2019). Student retention is a critical issue in higher education because most of the student attrition occurs from Year 1 to Year 2 of a student's matriculation (Caruth, 2018). Persistence is a term that is

sometimes used interchangeably with retention. Persistence is defined as a student's continued enrollment from Year 2 until graduation (NCES, 2019; Savage et al., 2019). Any study investigating retention issues must not ignore the variable of student persistence when investigating the problem of retention. The retention of students in higher education is a high priority for many educators and has been for over the last 4 decades (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2006; Xu, 2017).

I explored FGAAMUS' perspectives regarding why they are exhibiting low retention rates at the local setting. Sometimes to get a better understanding of a problem, it is best to examine the problem from multiple perspectives to ensure the problem is clearly understood (Johnston-Guerrero & Wijeyesinghe, 2023). Therefore, I explored the perspectives of 10 FGAAMUS in the local area that had better retention rates than Waygate University and assessed what these institutions are doing that is making them more successful at retaining students.

McClain and Perry (2017) found that the retention of African American students in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) is challenging for many African American students. In addition, the racial climate in some PWIs is a factor that influences the comfort level of students of diverse racial backgrounds. However, some PWIs have made progress to ensure students of color are treated fairly and that their comfort levels are considered (McClain & Perry, 2017). A challenge in some PWIs is the small representation of African American students and faculty (Pedler et al., 2022; Pratt et al., 2019). Having representatives of one's race and ethnicity is essential in addressing the challenges that African American students face in PWI settings. Efforts to retain students in higher education rely on information from students' experiences; for instance, a

comparison between students who graduate and those who do not (Xu, 2017) is important in understanding factors that contribute to dropping out and leads to the planning of early interventions by identifying some of the causes of low retention.

According to Sedlacek (1999), in some PWIs Black students' enrollment is lower than anticipated and the numbers continues to decline. Sedlacek showed that one reason for the decreasing enrollment rates is the perception that the racial climate in some PWIs is hostile. The feeling of hostility could lead to alienation by some racial minority groups in the setting. Therefore, dealing with racial tensions is essential to improving educational outcomes for racial minority groups attending PWIs. There is a need for race-conscious education in higher education and improving the environment for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Xu & Webber, 2018).

Another issue that affects the retention of African American students is engagement. Caruth (2018) and Strayhorn (2017) explored the perspectives of African American male students on college campuses and found that when students were engaged in activities, it gave them a sense of empowerment and better self-esteem. On the other hand, Swanson et al. (2017) found that African American students' shared experiences lessen the feeling of isolation, which impacts overall student achievement in PWIs. These shared experiences can be as simple as the African American student being part of an intramural team or member of a fraternity or sorority.

### ***Student Preparation***

Disparities in secondary school education affect the preparation of all students, especially African Americans in higher education. Establishing an effective connection between students and the institution is important in increasing the possibility of

graduating. If students lack engagement and a sense of connectedness with their school, it increases the possibility of low retention and the students failing to graduate (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2021).

The efficiency of teachers and staff affects the quality of education students receive and influences their experience. However, the students also play an essential role in shaping their progress (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2017). It is important for students to feel empowered to ask for help when needed. Nevertheless, it is possible for some students to feel shy and not feel comfortable speaking out when needed.

Over the years, there have been many studies on the development of more inclusive learning in different levels of education. This research has influenced policy in the field of education. Thomas (2017) asserted that the development of more inclusive learning leads to improvements in connectedness between the students and the institution, which leads to higher retention and better success rates in students from diverse backgrounds. Moreover, Thomas found that student engagement leads to a sense of belonging and directly affects student success. The staff and faculty at a university play an equally important role in shaping how connected the students are to the university.

Harper et al. (2018) examined the enrollment, retention, and graduation of Black students in an urban commuter higher education institution. A sense of belonging was shown to be essential in ensuring that Black students had a good experience in higher education and increased their chances of graduating. Hotchkins (2017) examined Black student leaders in PWI to explore differences in retention rates. This ethnographic study showed how noncognitive skill development is a highly racialized issue. Developing self-regulated learning skills leads to better student achievement (Thomas, 2017).

There are many reasons a student may quit school. One reason is the lack of time due to the student working too much and failing to complete their academic requirements (Tinto, 2017). Some students may work because they want to, but other students may work because they have no other choice. Financial challenges can cause some students to spend more time working than completing their academic assignments. Therefore, students of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to drop out of higher education institutions (Tinto, 2017).

Nieuwoudt and Pedler (2023) found that more can be done to improve the retention of African American male students in colleges and universities. Increasing student involvement in shaping their campus life has been shown to have a significant impact on improving the campus experience. This, in turn, leads to an increase in the possibility of a student completing a program. The changes that have occurred in the education sector over the years have led to different kinds of universities. Having strategies to ensure there is effective management of diversity in higher education institutions is important in making people from different backgrounds feel a sense of belonging (Pedler et al., 2022).

HBCUs are still important because they serve the original population of underserved African Americans in higher education (Broussard, 2021). The institutions have significantly evolved over the years. For example, HBCUs play an important role in enabling low- and middle-income families to access higher education. For example, a program on some HBCUs campuses called Black Male Initiative programs have been set up to increase the graduation rates of Black students (Brooms, 2016).

Tinto (2017) found that social integration plays an important role in understanding the issue of student retention of racial minority students. The way the participants described their experience with the students was an important interest in the study. The responses from the participants played an important role in understanding what administrators believed to be the cause of FGAAMUS' low retention rates and whether something could be done to bring about a difference (Tinto, 2017).

Challenges in accessing financial aid to pursue higher education may lead to an increased possibility of students failing to complete a program (Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2023). The relationship between instructors and students is influenced by existing policies and by the social experiences of the students. Tinto (2017) emphasized that these interactions influence the attitudes students develop toward their education. Naylor et al. (2015) found that African Americans earn only 10% of college degrees, 12% of graduate degrees, and 7% of doctoral degrees. Also, African Americans have lower retention and graduation rates than their White peers (Naylor et al., 2015).

Effective use of analytics is important in enhancing student retention in higher education institutions because, according to Van Dauser and Tanbe (2018), learning analytics can be used to construct predictive models. These models, in turn, can be used to help identify students who are at risk of failing a course and may be more likely to drop out of higher education. Any type of personal evaluation of the student's achievement helps to improve their skills and be successful in higher education. Understanding factors that may be used as predictors of student retention is important in developing strategies to ensure students complete their programs (Van Dauser & Tanbe, 2018; Wager et al., 2019; Watson & Chen, 2019).

Gender is an important factor of concern in the study of bachelor's degree completion among African American students (Garibald, 2014). Garibald showed that African American male students have lower completion rates than their female counterparts. It is, therefore, important to study and learn what makes African American male students fail to graduate. Higher education institutions play an important role in preparing an individual for the labor market (McCaffery, 2018). In addition, Swanson et al. (2017) found that male students have higher rates of academic difficulties and lower college enrollment and graduation rates in comparison to female students.

A study by Palmer and Scott (2017) showed that there are no significant disadvantages for African American graduates of HBCUs in terms of outcomes related to the labor market. This means that those students who graduate have similar opportunities regardless of their backgrounds. They are, however, different from those who fail to complete the programs.

According to Strayhorn (2017), specific courses a student takes may affect retention and graduation rates. One factor driving this outcome may be that some courses may be more challenging than others, having a higher passing rate and leading to better retention and graduation rates. Therefore, a need for students to be well prepared and effectively mentored is important. This need can be addressed by the administration of the attended universities, especially those of HBCUs.

HBCUs continue to play an important role in the U.S. higher educational system by providing learning opportunities for all students. At least 40% of students seeking bachelor's degrees do not complete their degree within 6 years (NCES, 2019). However, HBCUs for years have been a safe place for African Americans to develop and grow and



eventually obtain degrees in higher education. For example, half of the African American faculty teaching in traditionally White research universities received their bachelor's degrees at an HBCU (NCES, 2019).

The failure of students to graduate may be due to different reasons. Students can drop out at different levels (Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2021; Pedler et al., 2022). A qualitative study by Palmer and Scott (2017) revealed that the pre-enrollment experience of students shapes their experience in HBCUs. Also, Palmer and Scott (2017) discovered that many African American males have a strong desire for higher education; still, the enrollment rates and completion rates of this group of students are still dismal when compared to other groups (Tinto, 2017). The issue of race is of great interest in studying the history of student retention. The segregation of African Americans reduced the opportunities that were available for them (Lewis, 2016). This means that there was a low rate of entry into the university and colleges which reduced the possibility of graduating. There are different variables related to student persistence in college and university. In-depth research focuses on retention for students of different racial backgrounds.

The retention rate of African American male students in HBCUs is lower than the national retention rate for all undergraduate students in the United States which was at 74.5% according to (NCES, 2019). The retention rates for African American male undergraduates are lower than the overall average retention rate. African Americans in education faced a history of segregation and discrimination and the segregation of minority groups influenced access to opportunities (Lewis, 2016; Mosholder, et al., 2016).

### ***First-Generation College Students***

There is a need for effective strategies to accommodate first-generation college students, especially African Americans (De Vuijst et al., 2017). The history of African Americans' higher education interactions has demonstrated that the opportunities to attend college were limited for most African Americans (Eller et al., 2018). For many African Americans, the lack of opportunities in higher education caused challenges and influenced the likelihood of the completion of a program of study. Thus, having some knowledge of the college experience makes students aware of potential challenges. However, for most first-generation students this is not the case. Many first-generation students are not prepared to handle the demands that may come up and may not know how to cope with the new changes in a higher educational setting (De Vuijst et al., 2017; Dotterer, 2023).

Another significant obstacle for first-generation students is that they may have no family members with college experience to help mentor them through the process; therefore, this may cause a possible lack of support from home (De Vuijst et al., 2017; Dotterer, 2023). Additionally, many first-generation students may lack proper guidance from family and/or academic advising programs. Academic advising programs play an essential role in improving students' overall experience in higher education (Donaldson et al., 2016). There is, therefore, a need for better policies currently to ensure that these universities are effectively managed.

Brooms and Davis (2017) found that many African American freshmen college students have positive perceptions of their education, but many also have unrealistic expectations. For example, the transition from high school to college is taken too lightly

for some African Americans because many arrive unprepared. Higher education is different from high school; for example, the need for advanced studying skills, research skills, and students' proper socialization is essential (Sinanan, 2016). In cases where racial differences affect connectedness, some groups may fail to achieve their potential while in higher learning. For example, having family members with university educational experiences is invaluable in making the transition to higher education more effective, unlike the case with many first-generation students (Brooms & Davis, 2017; Sanders & Killian, 2017).

### ***Role of Administrators***

Low retention rates of African American male students are a reason for concern that leads to this research study. College administrators can understand a wide range of factors that affect student retention. Brooms and Davis (2017) found that psychological factors, such as stressors, play an essential role in determining student retention rates. Therefore, both academic and non-academic support and interactions influence the student experience (Mechur & Karp, 2016; Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2021). Understanding college administrators' perspectives is essential in understanding the role they play in ensuring that there are high retention rates (Brooms & Davis, 2017).

The college administrator's role in helping shape the experiences of students in higher education is critical (Kuykendall & Barrett, 2021; Palmer & Scott, 2017). HBCUs show the history of disparities in higher education in the United States. The number of African Americans in higher education is low because of factors such as segregation and the lack of financial resources. There are different challenges that African Americans have faced in higher education that has led to issues such as low entry rates and low

retention rates. The transition of first-year students to the next level also involves dropout cases (Burton, 2016). This, in turn, leads to low graduation rates because of the reduction in the number of students over time. This shows that the issue of retention is an ongoing problem.

Understanding retention as a program has led to the development of different kinds of intervention programs for students. Some students are at greater risk than others to drop out of college or university. The perspective of university administrators is influenced by their experiences with African American male students. McCain and Perry (2017) found that there are challenges in retaining students of color in predominantly White institutions. The racial climate in higher education institutions is a major factor that influences students of different racial backgrounds.

Over recent years, there has been progress to help students of color to be more comfortable (McCain & Perry, 2017). There are, however, still challenges that exist. Aljohani (2016) emphasized the importance of using theoretical models and evidence from research in the development of strategies and techniques to improve student retention in higher education. Increasing student retention and graduation rates requires an effective understanding of students to make the learning environment line up with their needs (Dagley et al., 2016; Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2021; Pedler et al., 2022). Having comfortable academic interactions is important in ensuring that there are effective student outcomes (Black & Blimer, 2020).

In recent years, there has been an acknowledgment of low retention rates of students as being a major problem in higher education. For example, Iacovino and James (2016) argued that there has not been significant attention to the necessity of

psychosocial to student retention compared to the attention on social integration. Prejudice, discrimination, and hostility are among the potential barriers that minorities may be exposed to, especially in predominantly White universities. According to Brooms and Davis (2017) factors such as housing stability and poverty negatively affect class attendance, therefore, may affect student retention rates. Hotchkins (2017) emphasized the importance of social inclusion for increasing opportunities for African American students, especially in PWI. Inclusive policies and the empowerment of students from different backgrounds are playing an essential role in undoing the negative effects of disparities in education that took place years ago (Hotchkins, 2017; Kuykendall & Barrett, 2021).

The administration of higher education institutions plays an important role in shaping the environment for the students. Understanding the problems of student retention from the perspective of the students is important in coming up with solutions (Tinto, 2017). Institutions can do more to increase the retention and graduation rates of students but there are also individual factors or student factors that could be the cause of low retention and graduation rates (Kuykendall & Barrett, 2021). According to Eller et al (2018), lower academic and socioeconomic resources of African American students are the main drivers of the gap in bachelor's completion between African American students and White students. The faculty in a university or college help shape the learning experiences of students and the quality of life they have during their time at an institution. Motivation theories play an important role in explaining the issue of school retention, for example, the expectancy theory showing that individuals put in the effort because they expect something in return that is in line with their effort (Crosling, 2017).

Understanding the perspectives of college administrators is important in understanding the role they play in ensuring that there are high retention rates (Brooms & Davis, 2017). Consideration of the role played by administrators is important in the identification of the influence they have over the retention of students in this setting. For this study, gender is an important variable because the focus of this study is on African American male students only. The retention rates for male students and female students in higher education vary and the perspectives of the administrators will play an important role in providing insight.

Farmer and Hope (2015) revealed the 6-year graduation rate for African American males at 4-year public institutions and private nonprofit colleges is well below 40%. This study by Farmer and Hope is significant in understanding the influence of the precollege variable's students are exposed to. For example, the quality of secondary education. This shows that there are pre-college factors that could lead to challenges in retention and there are also other college-level variables that must be considered for the success of any student. Farmer and Hope (2015) found in this study that students with higher GPAs in high school are more likely to be retained and to graduate compared to those with lower GPAs. On the other hand, Seidel and Kutieleh (2017) used predictive analysis to examine different ways to improve student attrition. The characteristics of an institution can influence the retention rates of students (McClain & Perry, 2017).

Comparison between African Americans in higher education and White students in higher education leads to understanding why there could be differences in retention rates. The struggles African American males face may influence the challenges they encounter in pursuing higher education. Some factors that lead to high dropout rates and

poor transitioning from high school to higher education institutions for many African Americans is that their secondary educational settings are usually located in lower socioeconomic areas of the United States, therefore, the instructor experiences are usually lower (McClain & Perry, 2017).

Farmer and Hope (2015) emphasized that research can be used in improving retention and graduation rates in HBCUs. In the academic population, there are students from different backgrounds and failure by a particular group affects the overall average. McClain and Perry (2017) found that the underrepresentation of African Americans in higher education institutions affects the entire community in society. According to Seidel and Kutieleh (2017) there are different coping strategies by Americans in higher education, but research shows that African American students use culture and race-specific styles of coping which make them different from other groups in the population. Proper understanding of research methods is important in understanding Black male students in higher education institutions (Seidel & Kutieleh, 2017).

Qualitative approaches lead to an understanding of the perspectives of these students and faculty. Quantitative studies, on the other hand, lead to the measurement of rates and trends that are important in a study, for example, graduation rates based on the performance during the first semester after enrolling into the institution (Zaff & Malone, 2020). Such studies are essential in preparing students for higher education. According to Mountford-Zimdars et al 2017 having coping mechanisms is part of the preparedness of African Americans for higher education.

### **Implications**

This study may have an impact on improving student retention rates of FGAAMUS at Waygate University. The study may lead to an understanding of problems FGAAMUS and other challenges that may be leading to low retention and, therefore, a better understanding of possible interventions. The results may also play a pivotal role in understanding how administrators may improve current policies and programs thus making the FGAAMUS experiences better at the local settings. Thus, contributing to possible implications for policy and social change.

Tinto (2017) found that understanding the many different factors that affect African American students' success in higher education requires examining multifaceted perspectives. Thus, the findings of Tinto (2017) support the importance of social and academic integration in improving retention of students. The literature appears to suggest that educational institutions that offer programs and services which encourage positive social and academic integration of students may impact the decision of a student to perseverance until the completion of a degree.

The study's objective may provide insight and provide a better understanding of the problems from the FGAAMUS. Tinto's (1975) student integration model will be the basis for investigating the low retention issues of FGAAMUS at Waygate University. The outcome of this study was based on the data collected and the study's findings. The final project study could be manifested in several ways. My first consideration is for a project is to develop a 3-day professional development training.

Furthermore, I anticipate questions during the IRB process to ascertain those plans are in place for keeping participants safe during the 3-day professional training



event. This approach it seems would empower the participants to be more open regarding developing solutions that could be implemented immediately if the cost of implementation of a potential solution(s) into action is not an issue.

### **Summary**

This section provided a review of relevant literature that is significant in identifying existing knowledge and prevailing gaps in knowledge. This study adds to the body of knowledge on student retention by investigating the perspective of FGAAMUS. The data from this study may be used to develop a retention plan for the retention of FGAAMUS at the selected study site. Section 1 shapes the direction the study will take. This literature review examined sources that provided information on a historical framework of retention. This included information on segregation that affected African Americans. It is also important in understanding the history of HBCUs and how they have evolved over the years. Some sources provided insight into African Americans in higher education to show the challenges and opportunities faced. The literature review bridged an understanding of the concept of college readiness and showed how a sense of belonging, connectedness, and satisfaction is essential in retaining students. Various studies showed the influence of faculty on low student retention. Therefore, this study focuses on the perspectives of FGAAMUS at Waygate University.

Section 2 describes the research design and methodology that was used to collect data for this qualitative study as well as the data analysis results. Section 3 presents an overview of the 3-day professional training event as a project and its implications that were developed to address the results of this study in addition to a literature review that supports the components of the project. Section 4 discusses the strengths of the project,

alternative methods to resolve the problem, and the future applicability of this study. In addition, Section 4 describes what was learned from this study on a personal level.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

The problem addressed in this study was the low retention rates of FGAAMUS at Waygate University. In comparison to other ethnic groups, retention rates of African American males continue to decline (McClain & Perry, 2017). A qualitative method of inquiry was used to address the research problem. The primary means of developing an understanding was through interviews with FGAAMUS at Waygate University. The outcome of this study was based on the data collected and the findings of the study. Qualitative methodology provided the best opportunity for exploring the FGAAMUS' perceptions of what may be causing their low retention rates at Waygate University. Qualitative research supports the exploration of people, places, and events in their natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) also reported that understanding the phenomenon is based on information as it is being analyzed instead of merely proving or disproving a formed hypothesis because qualitative research is inductive, and for this reason qualitative methodology was a good fit for the current study.

A qualitative approach was used for this study because it allowed for the exploration of the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2017). This study focused on the perceptions of 10 FGAAMUS who were enrolled at the local study site during the time of the study. The place of study was limited to Waygate University.

Yin (2017) discussed the importance of providing boundaries within a qualitative study. Boundaries ensure the focus remains narrow and direct and that the study does not

become too broad (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For these reasons, a basic qualitative design was appropriate for this study to explore why FGAAMUS are exhibiting low retention rates at Waygate University.

Limitations exist when using a qualitative approach because generalization of the data to larger populations may be challenging to accomplish (Yin, 2017). Another limitation is that I acted as the primary data collector and creator of the analysis instrument; therefore, there was a possibility that my personal bias could have influenced the research quality (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, because I was present during the data collection, it could have influenced participants' ability to provide authentic answers to the interview questions (see Yin, 2017).

Other methods were considered but were not feasible for this study. For example, mixed methods and quantitative designs were not appropriate because no numerical data were collected to answer the research questions. Also, the data collected were not used to prove or disprove a hypothesis (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, ethnography and grounded theory were less appropriate for this study than the basic qualitative design. Ethnography requires the researcher to become a part of the community to examine its culture (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). My study focused on exploring FGAAMUS' perceptions, not their culture. The grounded theory design requires researchers to develop a theory from the data to answer the research questions (Yin, 2017).

Qualitative data are based on the lived experience of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I did not consider participants based on longitudinal data; I collected data through interviews. The results of this study may provide evidence to Waygate University and community stakeholders that may help inform decisions regarding future

policies and program creation for improving the low retention rates of FGAAMUS or other students at the institution who may benefit from the findings of this study.

### **Participants**

Only current FGAAMUS attending Waygate University were eligible to participate in the study. Snowball sampling that started with general recruiting using student directory information was used to find and recruit participants to reach sample size of 10 FGAAMUS. Potential participants needed to agree to participate in the study and to return their signed informed consent forms. The proposed sample size was based on previous studies and the need for data saturation in a basic qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Data Collection**

#### *Instrumentation*

The data collected in this study were qualitative data representing FGAAMUS' perspectives. The data were collected using recorded, semi structured, one-on-one interviews using the interview protocol presented in Appendix D. Investigating FGAAMUS' perceptions of a phenomenon was best conducted using qualitative methodology (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2017).

The use of interviews allowed for sufficient data collection to answer the research questions. Moreover, one-on-one interviews were conducted to reduce other students' influence on FGAAMUS' responses (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An interview protocol (see Appendix D) guided the interviews. The semistructured format of this interview protocol was to ensure that a thorough exploration of FAAMUS' perspectives was conducted. The use of an interview protocol ensured that all interviewers included

the same questions while also providing participants the opportunity to view some of the questions before the interview (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2017). To ensure the face validity of the interview protocol, I used the expertise of the specialized research methodologist in my committee to determine that the proposed interview questions were aligned with the research questions.

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) director of Waygate University approved of the study because I had gained approval from Walden University (approval number 06-27-22-0163384). Upon approval from Walden University's IRB, I posted an online request for participation in the study (see Appendix C). The online request explained the purpose of the study, how data would be collected and used, the time commitment required for participation, and the study's voluntary nature with a request to contact me via email if interested in participating in the study.

Upon receiving responses from interested FGAAMUS, I sent additional emails to arrange an interview at the participant's convenience. At the end of the interview, each participant was asked if they had suggestions for potential colleagues who would be a good resource for this study. This snowball strategy increased the probability of finding participants who were a good fit for this study.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an online platform such as Zoom was suggested in the proposal but was not used during this study. Moreover, to establish a researcher-participant working relationship, I allowed each participant to select the interview date, time, and choice to be interviewed in person or online. All participants were interviewed in person. I used the interview protocol to guide the discussion with the participants and

the role the participant would play in the study. All participants reviewed the informed consent form and understood their rights while participating in the study. To ensure the participants' privacy and confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for participants during data transcription and analysis. Also, other details that may have identified participants, such as the study's location, were redacted. Data was not used for any purpose outside of this project study. Hard copy data was kept secure in a locked file cabinet at my home. Consent forms were kept separately from interview data to maintain confidentiality.

Digital data collected in the form of audio recording using an iPhone 14 with recording capabilities were saved to my password-protected computer that only I had access to. Also, each file was password protected separately so that only I could access it. After the data were transferred to my computer, interview recordings were removed from my iPhone 14.

Because I had no previous interactions with any of the participants in the planned study site, there were no concerns for ethical challenges in this local setting. Moreover, my role was explained during the completion of the informed consent form by the participants (see Yin, 2017). As the study was conducted, I accounted for any biases and ensured that the participants fully expressed themselves rather than being guided intentionally or unintentionally. Although awareness of these biases and experiences does not eliminate their impact on the study, awareness expands the researcher's ability to mitigate the influence of these biases and experiences on the study results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These potential biases, in addition to ethical considerations, were further justification to limit interactions with study participants before interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

Each interview was audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes. After the transcription was completed, I reviewed the interview transcription and audio recording to check for accuracy. After ensuring the transcripts' accuracy, the transcripts were coded using the NVivo qualitative software analysis program. NVivo allowed for analysis of transcripts to be completed in a central location while organizing codes, categories, and themes and allowed for more in-depth interpretations and organization of the data. I analyzed the data using thematic analysis with constant comparison. In this coding methodology, each interview was analyzed as the transcripts were received, allowing the development of codes, categories, and themes as data were collected (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2017). The use of thematic coding allowed the data to determine the codes, categories, and themes while allowing comparison of the data to existing codes, categories, themes, or definitions (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Coding data using thematic analysis with constant comparison allowed for iterative coding because it required returning to each set of data after additional data were collected and analyzed (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The iterative process of thematic analysis with constant comparison allowed for codes, categories, and themes to evolve and develop to explain the data, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the data (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2017).

## **Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility Strategies**

Member checking was employed for this study to ensure the findings' credibility. Member checking allowed me to review the transcript of each participant and they were



asked to review all notes, materials, and data pertinent to the study (Yin, 2017). Using member checking, I ensured that the codes, categories, and themes generated during data analysis were appropriate to the data collected, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

### **Dependability Strategies**

To ensure dependability in this study, my committee members evaluated whether the audit trail supported the study's dependability. This procedure was achieved by examining whether the data collection and analysis procedures were carried out correctly. Moreover, my committee members reviewed and determined whether I was careless or made mistakes in conceptualizing the study, sampling people and events, collecting the data, interpreting the findings, or reporting results. These steps were taken to ensure the dependability of the study.

### **Discrepant Data**

Discrepant data are data that may not be congruent with the data's current patterns or understandings (Yin, 2017). The existence of discrepant data indicates that the researcher did not try to manipulate the data to conform to biases that they may have but instead interpreted the data as they were collected (Yin, 2017). Discrepant data were included to challenge any biases and the codes, categories, and themes that developed from data analysis. Using discrepant data to challenge the codes, categories, and themes helps provide a complete understanding of the data (Yin, 2017). No discrepant data were discovered during this study; therefore, I did not need to employ a second researcher.

## **Data Analysis Results**

This section provides findings based on the most common themes and categories identified from the data collected for this qualitative study. The purpose of this study was to explore FGAAMUS' perceptions on the impact of academic and social integration on their low retention rates at Waygate University. The research questions that guided this study were the following: (a) How do FGAAMUS perceive academic integration issues they had to overcome to prevent them from dropping out of Waygate University? (b) How do FGAAMUS describe what social integration issues challenged their sense of belonging while attending Waygate University? The findings and analysis are organized in the following manner: (a) participant demographics of 10 FGAAMUS and (b) a presentation of four themes that emerged from FGAAMUS' shared experiences.

### **Participant Demographics**

A snowball sampling technique was used to select participants. The 10 participants included FGAAMUS from different majors from Waygate University including first-year students, sophomores, juniors, and seniors between the ages of 19 and 47. To maintain confidentiality, I identified the 10 participants interviewed for this study by the following pseudonyms: Bob, Carl, George, Henry, Jordan, Josh, Keith, Paco, Peter, and Ted. Table 1 provides the names, classifications, ages, and majors of each student.

**Table 1***FGAAMUS Demographic Interview Profiles (N = 10)*

FGAAM	Name	Classification	Age	Major
001	Bob	Junior	20	Criminal justice
002	Carl	Senior	22	Business administration
003	George	Sophomore	20	History
004	Henry	Sophomore	22	Political science/business
005	Jordan	Senior	22	Business administration
006	Josh	Junior	20	Political science
007	Keith	Sophomore	19	Criminal justice
008	Paco	Senior	47	Political science
009	Peter	Freshman	18	Business administration
010	Ted	Junior	21	Mass communications

**Research Questions and Themes**

Through the transcriptions of the 10 FGAAMUS' interviews, several themes emerged to reveal the complexities underlying their experiences at Waygate University. Overall, four themes and nine categories were identified to answer the two research questions. Based on the words, phrases, and similar characteristics, the themes and categories are presented in Tables 2 and 3 in relation to the corresponding research question.

**Table 2**

*Themes: Financial Aid and Academic/Administration*

Research question	Theme (count)	Category (count)
RQ1: How do FGAAMUS perceive academic integration issues they had to overcome to prevent them from dropping out of Waygate University?	Financial aid (29)	Money (21) Expenses/books (8)
	Academic/administration (30)	Family/parents (18) Determination/motivation (12)

### ***Financial Aid***

The first theme that emerged from the analysis of FGAAMUS' perceived academic integration issues they had to overcome to prevent them from dropping out of Waygate University was financial aid. The categories of money and expenses/books emerged to explain experiences with academic integration. This theme reflected the importance of financial support and finding ways to address the financial barriers that prevent students from achieving their educational goals. This theme highlights the excessive cost of textbooks and tuition, the struggle to pay for books out of pocket, and the loss of financial aid. This theme emphasizes the need for more financial support, especially for first-generation students who face additional challenges. The categories are discussed in the following sections.

**Money.** Many students addressed the lack of money they had for tuition and the need for support in receiving money. Carl and George both talked about the same

struggles they had in terms of not having any or enough money and financial aid. Carl said

Oh, I'll say my freshman year when I had fell off track for my education and stuff, uh, and I had lost my financial aid for, uh, part of the semester. Uh, definitely with financial aid, uh, if you manage your money right, you can literally expand that and-and stretch that out throughout the whole school year.

George reiterated

I told myself, I was like, yeah, why not just take summer class, go ahead, get ahead or whatever. Um, I took the summer classes, and I didn't have enough financial aid for the summer. My financial aid situation getting mixed, like messed up, I already didn't get a refund. So, I'm like, dang, like man, that, you know, most college students, how a lot of us end up getting by for real.

These students all emphasize the importance of having adequate financial aid and money to achieve success in college.

Henry expressed

They're very open to it because originally, I was an athlete, so I ended up getting a scholarship and that on top of financial aid were a huge thing to be paying for it. Being a first-generation student, I didn't know what was available to me but the different services and different areas and clubs and different groups, they make sure like, hey, if you're willing to work for it, you have opportunities that are willing to help you anyway. Whether it's financial, mental, physical, personal.

Ted confirmed saying

Yeah, so-so the organization I joined my freshman year really helped me financially when it came to books and, um, books especially. And then I-- One thing I did was focus on my academics, got a- got a high GPA enough to apply to a lot of scholarships and I received some money. There are different campus organizations that are able to help you.

**Expenses/Books.** Additionally, the participants also discussed the excessive cost of textbooks and tuition, expenses, and the struggle to pay for books out of pocket, and the loss of financial aid. They also highlight the need for more financial support, especially for first-generation students who face additional challenges. Jordan stated

But for my classes they actually like--we actually need the books, so having to pay for the books. If you receive financial aid, you'll be able to use the money you get from financial aid to purchase the book after a while and like transfer it over. So, I don't have no financial aid to even purchase my books. So, things like that it's just like sometimes I can be frustrated.

Keith stated, "A lot of criminal justice books are very expensive. And, um, I didn't really have a book voucher, um, that many grants to cover tuition and all the fees plus books." Paco felt as though "I was dean's list, you know, 3.85, but private school, very expensive." George stated, "done spent a lot of money in here already." Jordan further identifies with the struggle of expensive books expressing "we don't have book vouchers, so you have to pay out of pocket for your books, and books can be expensive." Likewise, Carl agreed saying "Oh, I'll say my freshman year when I had fell off track for my education and stuff, uh, and I had lost my financial aid...the school really helps you really, they really do help you." This underscores the financial barriers that can prevent

students from achieving their educational goals and the importance of finding ways to address these challenges.

### ***Academic/Administration***

The second theme that emerged from the analysis of FGAAMUS perceived academic integration issues they had to overcome to prevent them from dropping out of Waygate University was academic/administration. The categories of family/parents and determination/motivation emerged to explain experiences with academic integration. This theme speaks to the importance of family support in pursuing higher education. It highlights the role of supportive parents in motivating and pushing students to attend college, and the impact that a supportive family can have on an individual's determination and motivation to graduate.

The theme of academic/administration also addresses the importance of being the first in the family to attend college and set a steppingstone for future generations. Additionally, this theme focuses on the importance of determination and motivation in completing college, as well as the benefits of gaining knowledge and becoming a responsible adult through higher education. The categories are discussed in the following section.

**Family/Parents.** George stated,

both of my parents are pretty supportive of higher education especially my mother. She went to a public a community college, she got pregnant with my oldest sibling. So, she wasn't able to actually get the full college experience. My dad didn't attend college either. So, yeah, they're pretty excited that I took a different route than everybody else.

Paco discussed

my father had no opinion about college, 5th-grade education. My mother was-- is very supportive and is a champion of education. And she is, [chuckles] uh, [chuckles] threatened me. I better get across that stage. Um, that's something she's looking forward to. So, um, she is probably, uh, my angel and my driving force.

George and Paco's family and parental backgrounds and their experiences with higher education reveal the importance of having a supportive family in pursuing higher education. George's mother's support for education despite not being able to complete college herself, and Paco's mother's championing of education, demonstrate how a supportive family can be a driving force for someone to succeed in their education. Moreover, Paco's mother's threat to him to cross the stage highlights the level of accountability and encouragement that a supportive family can provide. The dialogue emphasizes that having a dedicated support system can significantly impact one's educational journey.

The dialogue from George and Paco revolves around their family backgrounds and their experiences with higher education. George's parents are supportive of higher education, especially George's mother who had to drop out of college due to pregnancy. George's father did not attend college either. However, George took a different route and pursued higher education. On the other hand, Paco's father had no opinion about college and had only a 5th-grade education. Paco's mother was incredibly supportive of education and is a champion of it. She is a driving force for Paco to succeed in his education.



**Determination/Motivation.** Several students also expressed their reasons for having the determination and motivation needed to graduate and complete college. Bob indicated, “My parents they pushed me hard to come to college because they didn’t come. So, they I guess, motivate me to do it. I feel like it’s important cause I’ll be the first to do it.” Carl explained, “To set up, uh, a steppingstone for future generations to come in my family. Jordan said: “Oh, yeah. Other than making money cause that’s one reason why I’m an entrepreneurship manager. I’m really big on financial freedom.” Keith expressed

Um, because I feel as though in the world that we live in, knowledge is power.

And, um, going to college, you tend to learn more intellectual things than you did in K-12. So, you, um, you go into the real world. With college education, it tends to help you be more responsible as an individual and as an adult.

Peter and Ted concurred that determination is a key factor in graduating from college. Peter noted, “Well, I think it’s important for me to graduate from college to show-show some follow-through.” Ted stated, “I feel like it’s important cause I’ll be the first to do it. Yeah, first in my family.” Bob, Carl, Jordan, Keith, Peter, and Ted all commented on the distinct reasons why individuals feel it is important to attend and graduate from college. These reasons include parental motivation, setting a steppingstone for future generations, financial freedom, gaining intellectual knowledge, becoming a responsible adult, demonstrating determination and follow-through, and being the first in their family to attend college.

Overall, in response to research question one, the themes of financial aid and academic/administration highlights the influence of family background on one’s education and the importance of support in the areas of financial aid and academics from

family, parents, and administration/academic resources in having the determination/motivation to pursue higher education. These themes also speak to the academic integration issues students must overcome such as financial aid, books, money, and school expenses. As well as determination/motivational factors such as personal growth, financial freedom, family legacy, and career opportunities that prevent dropout.

**Table 3**

*Themes: Campus and Social*

Research question	Theme (count)	Category (count)
RQ2: How do FGAAMUS describe what social integration issues challenged their sense of belonging while attending Waygate University?	Campus (13)	HBCU culture (5) School policies (8)
	Social (20)	Homecoming/programs (10) Sense of belonging (6) Engagement/connections (4)

### ***Campus***

The first theme that emerged from the analysis of FGAAMUS perceived campus integration issues challenged their sense of belonging while attending Waygate University was campus. The categories of Historically Black College or University (HBCU) culture and school policies emerged to explain FGAAMUS experiences with social integration. This passage speaks to the importance of HBCU culture, cultural understanding, and representation in education. It highlights how attending an HBCU can provide a different cultural experience and energy compared to predominantly white institutions (PWIs). The campus theme also emphasizes the impact of seeing Black educators and successful alumni in influencing the decision to attend an HBCU.

It also emphasizes the challenges and isolation that African American students may face in classrooms where they are the minority. Additionally, this theme communicates the importance of school policies in addressing issues such as tuition for out-of-state students, expensive meal plans, inclusivity in honors programs, and access to technology resources. It also addresses challenges related to housing requirements and parking restrictions on campus. Overall, these experiences underscore the significance of HBCU culture, cultural representation, and equitable school policies in providing a positive educational experience for students. The categories are discussed in the following section.

**HBCU Culture.** Students recounted why they chose HBCU and their cultural experiences and challenges while attending and HBCU versus Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). This theme speaks to the importance of cultural understanding and representation in education, the role of faith, risk-taking, personal growth, and the influence of Black educators and successful alumni in the decision to attend an HBCU.

Bob replied, “I would say just to go to a college cause I didn’t really learn the cultural things till I got here cause I didn’t know about college already.” Carl said

Well, first I went to another institution, uh, a predominantly white institution...but when I went on the campus and things, it was just like, I don’t know, I didn’t feel the same energy that I had gotten from this university.

Henry mentioned

I’ve been to PWIs and so forth since I was a little kid. I went to an almost all-white prep school for high school and middle school. Being able to see someone who looks like me and that having an impact on my success is huge, because

going into a class and not seeing anyone and feeling isolated is a major detriment to a lot of African Americans.

This discussion speaks to the exposure and impact of HBCU culture has on FGAAMUS including learning about cultural things, experiencing a different same energy at an HBCU, and the impact HBCU culture has on success and how going into a class and not seeing anyone can be detrimental to African Americans.

Additionally, Josh, Peter, and Ted commented on their decision to choose an HBCU because of the importance of gaining access to Black educators and being able to be a part of a HBCU versus PWI culture. Josh stated, “Um, I believe Waygate chose me in a way. Um, I think that-- So, I-I told my counselor-- Like I said, I love Black educators in my life, and so my counselor’s a Black, uh, woman.” Peter asserted

Well if I’m being honest, it was sort of important. I wouldn’t say it was high on the priority list. And HBCU, I mean, it’s not a bad thing. It’s a good thing because there’s a lot of programs tailored to Black men, especially here.

Ted responded, “Yeah, so it was really important for me to at least have one of my colleges be HBCU because I did go to predominantly White high- uh, White high school.”

**School Policies.** Students also described changes that they would like to see in school policies based on challenges they have experienced on campus and within their university. Recalling issues with the tuition for out-of-state students, meal plans being too expensive, changing the honors program to be more inclusive, the importance of being an HBCU, and having unlimited technology resources for creative students. Carl commented, “Um, the only thing I really had a problem with at this university is probably

the tuition for the out-of-state students, like the tuition difference.” George stated, “I would say the only thing that--the main thing that you get charged for the most are like the real necessities. Like your-your meal plan is like a couple of thousand dollars.” Henry said, “it’s hard because it’s really great here, and I am very happy with my choice coming and everything that I’ve been able to achieve and which I will continue to achieve.”

Jordan articulated

Um, I would change the honors program, uh, due to the fact, uh, the honors program you usually get selected when-- before you even come to college. And the thing is with me I have a 3.7 GPA and I’m not in the honors program, so I don’t receive the benefits.

Paco stated, “Just one though. I got so many things [laughs] I-I mean, if you give me Chancellor power, you know, board of trustee’s power, I got so many things. So, I got a real problem because this is a HBCU.” Ted exclaimed, “I would make sure that this university has a place where like technology’s unlimited, you know, a lot of students are creative here.”

Moreover, participants described campus challenges related to housing requirements, parking restrictions, and difficulty getting to class due to parking situations.

Peter stated

Hmm. See, that is a good question because there’s a lot to change, if I’m being honest. Like one, I would just say the housing requirements because I understand there’s a lot of people who coming to the school and they wanna give everybody housing, but the standards, they’re just not up to par.

Josh replied

But, uh, I think one thing I would do, um, in the business aspect, and then in the policy aspect of it is, um, there should be a pool of money for first-generation students because when you have all this like I said before, adversity.

Bob asked, “What would I change? I don’t know. I would probably change the, um, I would say parking situations out here and things like that. It’s hard for us to get around getting to class.” Keith noted, “Um, parking, Because, um, I feel as though there’s a lot of parking lots at our-- at the senior university, but there’s a lot of restrictions onto where students can park.”

### *Social*

The second theme that emerged from the analysis of FGAAMUS perceived campus integration issues challenged their sense of belonging while attending Waygate University was social. The categories of homecoming/programs, sense of belonging and engagement/connections emerged to explain FGAAMUS experiences with social integration. This theme speaks to the importance of homecoming and campus programs in creating a sense of community and belonging for students. It highlights how social events like homecoming, basketball and football games, and induction ceremonies for campus organizations contribute to positive experiences and social integration within the college community. Students express the feeling of being part of a big family and the sense of support and camaraderie that these events bring. Carl stated, “So, once I sat down and-and random people started talking to me and stuff like, “Hey, how you doing, man?” Can I get your number so we can help each other out on the class work and stuff?” Peter also felt a sense of belonging by stating, “Well, I would say they gave me a sense of

belonging because they actually enjoy being around me. And there's people here that actually want to be here."

They also emphasize the importance of having a sense of belonging on campus and how participating in community events and organizations has made their college experience more enjoyable. Additionally, this theme emphasizes the significance of engagement and making connections with professors, mentors, and peers. Students describe how these connections have positively impacted their mental health and overall college experience. Overall, it underscores the importance of social integration, a sense of belonging, and engagement in creating a positive and fulfilling college experience for students. The categories are discussed in the following section.

**Homecoming/Programs.** Other students talked about the importance of social events like homecoming, basketball and football games, and induction ceremonies for campus organizations that produced positive experiences with social integration into the college community. Keith stated

Um, it would have to be homecoming. Because, um, just seeing all the current students and alumni there, it's like, everybody's like just one big family, you know? It is never anybody really not welcoming. So that's when I realized that I enjoyed my time in college.

Paco said

We're going homecoming, right? Boom, showing up, and sure enough, the dean asked me to do some research and I was like, "Hey," and he's like, "Hey, I-I'm gonna put you up for this scholarship, but I need pa-pa-pa, and I need this-this research for my paper," and so I tell her. So, it's like—but then, you know, um,

it's the love of doing that, but then there's the other side and it's-it's where the faith comes in.

Ted explained

Homecoming...Socially, there are a lot of great organizations on this campus.

You know, there's the Men's Achievement Center, uh, you know, there's different campus organizations that are able to help you socially, you know, and honestly, it really-- No one could tell you how to socially adapt.

Carl agreed stating

Um, I'll say my first homecoming, the first day of the homecoming I woke up, I look out my window and it's a group of people just-just standing outside, just turning, blasting music, just-just get on going crazy. I love it so much. I really do love like the-the sense of family that the-the school creates for all the students and the alumni, uh, 'cause that's-that's what really makes this school great.

George noted

I would say just our basketball game, we go to the basketball, the football game. We all having a good time. So that definitely was a, um, that was definitely, uh, pretty cool, football games, basketball games, they're usually pretty cool, as well as homecoming. Homecoming is al- homecoming is always great. That's my home.

Peter said, "Well, I would say the Bridge Week, which I was just talking about earlier." Henry responded



I'd say MAC induction for the Men's Achievement Center here. But a group of students went out of their way to make sure that they got the pin and they brought a bunch of other members around, including the advisors here and the head.

**Sense of Belonging.** Students also expressed the importance of having a sense of belonging on campus. They discussed the ways in which they have a sense of belonging, such as through participating in community events and organizations, and the positive impact it has had on their college experiences. Students viewed their social integration experiences on campus as supportive and welcoming and felt that being a part of them has made their college life more enjoyable. Peter said

Gave me an extreme sense of belonging. And it just brought me around a group of like-minded individuals that are the same age as me too, which is amazing. Well, I would say it gave me a sense of belonging when I first got here because those are programs for people just like me, African American males who wanted to pursue higher education.

Ted indicated

They gave me a sense of belonging when, you know, uh, when I needed the help, they're always willing. You know, if I didn't need their help, if I didn't ask for help, they're always willing to go the extra mile to at least check up on me, you know, every now and then if they have, you know, obviously the time. I'd be the same exact thing. You know, just check up on them. Um, that's what really gave me a sense of belonging with my peers.

Carl noted, “So when I came to this HBCU, uh, that all changed. Um, sitting next to someone that had a-- the similar skin colors meaning like that-that made me their friend and their close, you know, significant other and stuff.”

George stated

Um, I became a student leadership. Um, I became the freshman class vice president from the start, and that was what really made me realize that these people here are really family. And so that’s something that really showed me the sense of, um, caring here at this university.

Ted described

Homecoming was- definitely gave me a sense of belonging. On the freshman year, we didn’t have a homecoming. Sophomore year, it was- it was okay. Wasn’t as good as this year, my junior year where it was 100% capacity. They gave me a sense of belonging when, you know, uh, when I needed the help, they’re always willing. Um, that’s what really gave me a sense of belonging with my peers.

**Engagement/Connections.** Lastly, the students shared their experiences with social integration through engagement and making connections. They believed that engaging with professors, being sociable, connecting with mentors, and establishing long-lasting friendships have helped them to feel more connected to their college community. They described how being open to new experiences has positively impacted their mental health and overall college experience. Henry revealed, “That’s a huge thing for me because having that face-to-face contact and being able to talk and have that relationship is when I know I’m really engaged in my learning and my growth.”

Paco expressed, “Yeah. So, the, um, the political science professors really, um, engaged me to open up and not just share my opinion, but to change my thought process.” Josh stated

Be engaged. Um, here at our HBCU campus, everyone wants to be your friend, you know. And I just think the best, um, advice is just to be engaged. You wanna make sure that you are, um, sociably recognized... You want to be able to go into a room and s-s-somebo- more than one person can speak to you.

George said

Like I know I’m, me and the dean, uh, the dean of students, we were really good. Uh, I’m very connected with her because I had a, um, I was a teaching assistant basically last semester, and I had her class.

Peter agreed, “I wouldn’t enjoy it as much because it helped me establish connections with people I actually trust now and long friendships even now.”

### **Summary**

This section discussed findings based on the most common themes and categories identified from the data collected for this qualitative study. The primary goal of this study was to interpret precise, descriptive, and heuristic research by examining non-cognitive issues and barriers experienced and perceived by FGAAMUS attending an HBCU. Additionally, this study intended to review the experiences that impact academic and social integration through the production of robust, rich, and thick descriptions of the research questions under study. The findings and analysis revealed that four major themes emerged from the experiences shared by ten FGAAMUS, including financial aid

and academic/administration in the discussion of academic integration. As well as campus and social to explain experiences with social integration.

### Section 3: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative professional development/training curriculum project was to provide a proactive approach to addressing a pressing local problem by focusing on the academic and social integration experiences of FGAAMUS at Waygate University. The issue of low retention rates among FGAAMUS is not limited to the local setting; it is a challenge that continues to plague many institutions of higher education. By understanding the experiences and perceptions of FGAAMUS, important insights will be provided to Waygate University administrators to identify effective strategies to improve retention rates and support these students in achieving their educational goals.

Education has long been recognized as a powerful instrument for social change. By addressing disparities in society through education, stakeholders can create a more equitable and inclusive environment for all students. The aim of this project was to help university administrators identify ways to improve the low retention rates of FGAAMUS by focusing on four areas including financial aid, academic/administration, campus, and social integration, thereby supporting degree attainment. Through development of a comprehensive and tailored professional development/training curriculum, administrators can provide FGAAMUS with the necessary support and resources to thrive academically and socially in an effort to make a meaningful difference in the lives of FGAAMUS at Waygate University and beyond.

#### **Rationale**

The rationale behind this project stemmed from the recognition that the low retention rates of FGAAMUS are not only a local problem but also a widespread issue in higher education institutions. It is crucial to address this problem because it affects not

only individual students but also society. A deeper comprehension of the factors leading to low retention rates among FGAAMUS at Waygate University can be used to develop new approaches/models to improve their academic and social integration experiences.

Academic integration encompasses FGAAMUS' ability to navigate coursework, access resources, and engage in meaningful learning experiences, while social integration pertains to their sense of belonging, community engagement, and connections with peers and faculty. By exploring FGAAMUS's perceptions of the impact of academic and social integration, I identified the challenges they face and the barriers that hinder their success. Based on the findings, a comprehensive professional development/training curriculum was designed to address these challenges and to equip faculty and staff with the necessary knowledge and skills that will empower FGAAMUS to overcome retention obstacles.

Additionally, by filling the gap in practice, this study contributed to the field of higher education. It provided valuable insights and recommendations for Waygate University administrators and other institutions grappling with similar retention issues. The goal is to improve the retention rates of FGAAMUS, increase their degree attainment, and promote social change by addressing disparities within higher education. This project's rationale was the urgent need to address the low retention rates of FGAAMUS at Waygate University. By focusing on academic and social integration experiences and developing a targeted professional development/training curriculum, I sought to support FGAAMUS in achieving their educational goals, foster inclusivity, and create a more equitable higher education landscape.

## **Review of the Literature**

A comprehensive review of recent literature revealed a multitude of challenges that FGAAMUS encounter with academic and social integration. These academic and social integration issues are appropriate to address from the research/theory because they impact FGAAMUS' ability to navigate coursework, access resources, and engage in meaningful learning experiences, while also influencing their sense of belonging, community engagement, and connections with peers and faculty.

### **Academic Integration**

One of the primary challenges identified was the lack of financial aid, which often creates a barrier to access and success in higher education (Bastedo et al., 2023) The high cost of textbooks and related academic materials worsens this financial strain (Ajayi et al., 2021; Becker et al., 2023; Carbaugh, 2020; Huntsman et al., 2020; Jenkins et al., 2020). Family and parental support, or lack thereof, is another significant factor affecting FGAAMUS. Studies have found that family and parental involvement positively impacts academic outcomes (Capannola & Johnson, 2022; LeBouef & Dworkin, 2021; Sims, 2019). However, for FGAAMUS, this support may be limited due to a variety of socioeconomic factors (Capannola & Johnson, 2022; Covarrubias et al., 2019). Moreover, literature underscored the critical role of determination and motivation in navigating academic challenges. However, Tsai et al., (2023) asserted that FGAAMUS often grapple with maintaining motivation due to the multiple adversities they face.

### **Campus Integration**

Regarding campus integration, research indicated the importance of inclusive campus environments in facilitating FGAAMUS success (Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2023;

Perry, 2017). The unique culture of HBCUs has been found to foster a sense of belonging and community engagement among FGAAMUS (Fernandez et al., 2023; Pedler & Nieuwoudt, 2022). School policies can either hinder or promote the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS. According to Palmer and Scott (2017), policies that recognize and address the unique challenges faced by these students are crucial. Social integration was also emphasized in the literature, with studies highlighting the importance of homecoming events and similar programs in fostering connections with peers and faculty (Hu et al., 2023; Trolan et al., 2023). Furthermore, a strong sense of belonging, significantly impacts FGAAMUS' retention and success (Fernandez et al., 2023). Additionally, engagement and connections, particularly with faculty, have been identified as key to fostering positive learning experiences and academic outcomes for FGAAMUS (Hu et al., 2023; Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2021; Pedler et al., 2022).

### **Theory and Research**

Additionally, there were several theories in the literature that were related to the challenges faced by FGAAMUS. Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure was particularly relevant. It postulates that students' decisions to persist in or depart from college are influenced by their degree of academic and social integration. This theory can be used to understand the high dropout rates among FGAAMUS (Tinto, 2017). Bandura's (1977) social learning theory can also be applied. It suggests that people learn from each other through observation, imitation, and modeling. In the context of FGAAMUS, this theory emphasizes the importance of role models and mentorship in facilitating successful academic and social integration (Tinto, 2017).



Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory, which focuses on how individuals cope with transitions and life events, can be used to understand the challenges faced by FGAAMU students as they transition to college life, often without the same support systems as their peers (Becker et al., 2023; Schlossberg, 2019; Zerges et al., 2022). Perry's (1970) theory of intellectual and ethical development, which outlines the stages of moral and intellectual development in college students, can provide insights into how FGAAMU students navigate their intellectual growth and ethical development amid the challenges they encounter (Kawai, 2023). Lastly, Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital offers a framework for understanding how FGAAMU students, often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, may lack the cultural capital that can ease navigation of higher education systems (Huang, 2019).

In conclusion, the literature suggested that a multifaceted approach that addresses financial, academic, familial, motivational, policy, cultural, and social factors is vital to enhancing the academic and social integration of FGAAMU students. This interconnected analysis of theory and research underscores the complexity and depth of the challenges faced by FGAAMU students and highlights the need for comprehensive and inclusive strategies to support their success in higher education.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I began my search using the Walden University Library. I used a variety of search terms and indicated that the literature should include articles that were peer reviewed and published within the last 5 years. To conduct my search, I used a combination of online databases, academic and research journals, library resources, and search engines to locate relevant research studies, articles, and books. I accessed online databases such as

ProQuest, JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar, and PsycINFO to find scholarly articles and studies. These databases are known for their extensive collection of academic resources, including research articles, case studies, reports, and more.

I used search terms and phrases to narrow the results and find the most relevant studies. These phrases included *First-Generation African American Male students*, *academic and social integration*, *theories related to student retention*, *African American male student dropout rates*, *educational theories*, *Tinto's Theory*, *Bandura's Social Learning Theory*, and various combinations of these terms. I also looked through academic and research journals related to education, sociology, and psychology such as the *Journal of Higher Education*, *Journal of African American Studies*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *Journal of College Student Retention*, and others. I also used the reference lists of the articles and studies I found to locate additional related research. University libraries' online catalog and resources were also used because they often provided access to a wide array of scholarly resources. This comprehensive and systematic approach helped me find a variety of resources related to the topic and to ensure that the search was as thorough as possible.

### **Project Description**

The title of the professional development 3-day training is *Enhancing Academic and Social Integration for First-Generation African American and Underrepresented Minority Students*. This professional development training program was designed to address the low retention rates of first-generation African American and underrepresented racial minority students at Waygate University and similar higher education institutions. This training aims to equip faculty and staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to

enhance the academic and social integration experiences of FGAAMUS, thereby increasing their retention rates and promoting inclusivity within the university setting.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this professional development 3-day training is to provide faculty and staff with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by FGAAMUS, particularly in terms of academic and social integration. By delving into the perceptions and experiences of these students, I sought to identify potential barriers and develop effective strategies to support FGAAMUS' success. This training program may serve as a catalyst for creating a more inclusive and equitable higher education environment where FGAAMUS can thrive.

### **Goals**

The goals of this professional development training include the following:

- gain insight into the unique challenges faced by FGAAMUS in terms of academic and social integration,
- understand the impact of academic and social integration on the retention rates of FGAAMUS,
- explore evidence-based best practices and strategies to enhance academic and social integration for FGAAMUS,
- develop the skills and knowledge necessary to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for FGAAMUS, and
- collaborate and share experiences with colleagues to foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

**Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this training program, participants will be able to

- identify the specific challenges and barriers that hinder the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS;
- apply evidence-based strategies to enhance academic integration, including navigating coursework, accessing resources, and promoting meaningful learning experiences;
- implement techniques to foster social integration, such as creating a sense of belonging, engaging the FGAAMUS community, and strengthening connections with peers and faculty;
- design and implement inclusive practices that support the success and retention of FGAAMUS; and
- collaborate with colleagues to develop institutional policies and initiatives that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within the higher education setting.

**Target Audience**

This professional development training program was designed for faculty and staff at Waygate University and other higher education institutions seeking to improve the retention rates of FGAAMUS. The program is relevant for individuals involved in student affairs, academic advising, teaching, mentoring, and any role that directly or indirectly influences the academic and social integration experiences of FGAAMUS. Together, faculty and staff can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that empowers FGAAMUS to achieve their educational goals and contribute to a more

equitable society. Table 4 shows the planned schedule of activities, and Appendix A contains a detailed schedule.

**Table 4**

*3-Day Schedule of Activities*

Day 1: Understanding the challenges faced by FGAAMUS	Day 2: Promoting social integration and inclusive practices	Day 3: Implementation and action planning
<p>Module 1: Introduction and setting the context  <i>Time: 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Icebreaker and introductions</li> </ul> </p>	<p>Module 5: Strategies for fostering social integration  <i>Time: 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Role-playing scenarios and group discussions on fostering social integration</li> </ul> </p>	<p>Module 9: Implementation strategies  <i>Time: 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Panel discussion with guest speakers sharing successful implementation strategies</li> </ul> </p>
<p>Module 2: The unique challenges of FGAAMUS  <i>Time: 10:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Presentation and Discussion on the challenges faced by FGAAMUS</li> </ul> </p>	<p>Module 6: Inclusive teaching and mentoring practices  <i>Time: 10:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Interactive workshop on inclusive teaching and mentoring practices</li> </ul> </p>	<p>Module 10: Action planning and evaluation  <i>Time: 10:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Individual and group action planning sessions</li> </ul> </p>
<p><i>Noon Lunch Break: 1 Hour</i>            Module 3: Impact of academic and social integration on retention rates  <i>Time: 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Group activity analyzing the correlation between academic and social integration and retention rates</li> </ul> </p>	<p><i>Noon Lunch Break: 1 Hour</i>            Module 7: Designing inclusive learning environments  <i>Time: 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Small group activity designing inclusive learning environments</li> </ul> </p>	<p><i>Noon Lunch Break: 1 Hour</i>            Module 11: Reflection and closing remarks  <i>Time: 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Reflection activity and closing remarks</li> </ul> </p>
<p>Module 4: Best practices and strategies for enhancing academic integration  <i>Time: 2:45 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Case study analysis and group discussions on evidence-based best practices</li> </ul> </p>	<p>Module 8: Collaboration and continuous improvement  <i>Time: 2:45 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.</i>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✚ Activity: Collaborative session to develop institutional policies and initiatives</li> </ul> </p>	

### **Resources, Support, and Barriers**

To effectively conduct this training program, several resources are needed. These include comprehensive training materials such as presentations, handouts, and case studies that address the challenges faced by FGAAMUS. Additionally, audiovisual equipment for presentations and group activities, flipcharts or whiteboards for visualizations and discussions, and access to guest speakers with expertise in the field are necessary. It is also crucial to have access to research, data, and relevant literature on best practices for enhancing academic and social integration.

Existing supports play a significant role in the success of the training program. Support from the training institution or organization is essential in terms of funding, logistics, and coordination. Collaboration with other institutions or organizations working on similar initiatives can provide additional resources and expertise. Experienced trainers or facilitators specializing in diversity, equity, and inclusion training can contribute to the quality of the program. Support from the participants' institutions in implementing the strategies discussed during the training is also vital. Moreover, access to technology and online platforms for continued learning and networking after the training program is beneficial.

However, there may be potential barriers to the training program. Resistance or lack of buy-in from administrators, faculty, or staff at the participants' institutions could hinder its implementation. Limited resources or budget constraints may present challenges in effectively implementing new initiatives or programs. Lack of diversity and representation among the training participants might impact the effectiveness of discussions and perspectives shared. Cultural or language barriers could also hinder

effective communication and understanding. Additionally, some participants may exhibit skepticism or resistance due to ingrained biases or lack of awareness about the challenges faced by FGAAMUS.

To overcome these potential barriers, several solutions can be considered. Engaging with administrators and key stakeholders early on to gain their support and buy-in for the training program and its objectives is crucial. Providing evidence-based research and data can help convince skeptics and promote understanding of the challenges faced by FGAAMUS. Seeking external funding or grants to support the implementation of initiatives and programs discussed during the training can alleviate budget constraints. Actively reaching out to individuals from diverse backgrounds and institutions can ensure a diverse and inclusive participant group. Incorporating cultural competency training and language support can help overcome communication barriers and enhance understanding among participants.

### **Implementation Plan and Timetable**

The implementation plan for the professional development/3-day training consists of four phases. In the pre-training preparation phase, which will take place in the first month, we will focus on securing funding for the program and developing a comprehensive training curriculum. This will involve identifying potential guest speakers and trainers with expertise in diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as researching and gathering relevant research and literature on best practices.

During the second month, the participant recruitment and selection phase will occur. We will develop selection criteria based on the target audience and ensure diversity and representation. To promote the training program, we will reach out to

institutions and organizations that work with FGAAMUS. Interested participants will be invited to submit applications, which will then be reviewed. We will select participants who meet the criteria and inform them of their acceptance.

The training program delivery phase will span from the third to the fourth month. We will start by conducting an orientation session to provide participants with an overview of the program's objectives. Training sessions will be scheduled over several weeks to allow for reflection and application of concepts. Guest speakers and trainers will be invited to contribute their expertise, and a variety of methods, such as presentations, group activities, case studies, and discussions, will be used to deliver the training. Active participation and engagement will be encouraged, and opportunities for networking and collaboration will be provided. Additionally, resources and tools will be offered to support participants in their continued learning and implementation of strategies.

In the final phase, which will take place in the fifth and sixth months, the evaluation and follow-up activities will occur. A post-training evaluation will be conducted to gather feedback on the effectiveness of the program and identify areas for improvement. The data collected will be analyzed, and any necessary adjustments will be made for future iterations of the training. Participants will receive certificates or acknowledgments for their participation, and follow-up will be conducted with them and their institutions to assess the implementation of strategies discussed during the training. Ongoing support and resources will be provided to participants, including access to further training or consultation if needed. Finally, success stories and best practices shared by participants will be disseminated to inspire and motivate others.



According to the timeline provided in Table 5, the development of this training will take approximately six months. In the first month, we will secure funding, develop the curriculum, identify speakers/trainers, and gather research. In the second month, we will promote the program, collect applications, review them, and select participants. The training sessions will be conducted from the third to the fourth month, and the evaluation and follow-up activities will take place in the fifth and sixth months. Throughout the process, ongoing support and resources will be provided, and success stories will be shared. Note that the specific dates for each activity within the respective months can be determined based on the availability of resources, trainers, and participants.

**Table 5***Development of 3-Day Training Timetable*

Phase	Task	Stakeholder	Time frame
#1 Pretraining preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure funding and develop training curriculum</li> <li>Identify guest speakers and trainers</li> <li>Gather research and literature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curriculum development/research team</li> <li>Funding organizations and donors</li> </ul>	Month 1 (August)
#2 Participant recruitment and selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the training program and collect applications</li> <li>Review applications and select participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selection committee</li> <li>Targeted institutions and organizations</li> </ul>	Month 2 (September)
#3 Training program delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct orientation session</li> <li>Schedule and deliver training sessions</li> <li>Invite guest speakers and trainers</li> <li>Encourage participation and engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitators</li> <li>Participants</li> </ul>	Months 3 and 4 (October and November)
#4 Evaluation and follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct posttraining evaluation</li> <li>Analyze data</li> <li>Follow up with participants and institutions</li> <li>Provide ongoing support and resources</li> <li>Share success stories and best practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All participants/stakeholders</li> <li>Evaluation team</li> </ul>	Months 5 and 6 (December and January)

**Student/Participant Roles and Responsibilities**

In this professional development/3-day training, the roles and responsibilities are divided among various individuals and groups. Students are expected to actively participate in the training sessions, engage in discussions, complete assigned readings, and apply the knowledge and skills gained from the training in their academic and social integration efforts. They are also encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the training program and share success stories and best practices to inspire others.

Facilitators play a crucial role in delivering the training sessions, creating a safe and respectful environment, providing relevant information, and facilitating discussions and activities. Guest speakers and trainers contribute by sharing their expertise and experiences, delivering presentations or workshops, and answering participants' questions. The target institutions and organizations help promote the training program, recommend participants, and support their members or students in actively participating.

The selection committee ensures a fair and transparent participant selection process. The evaluation team assesses the effectiveness and impact of the training program. Support and resource providers offer ongoing support, resources, and guidance to participants. Success story sharers inspire others by sharing their personal experiences and best practices. Overall, each individual and group involved in the training program has specific roles and responsibilities that contribute to its success and the participants' learning and growth.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The best type of evaluation plan for this training program was a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. This approach would provide a comprehensive understanding of the program's effectiveness and impact on participants. The justification for this evaluation plan is that it allows for a holistic assessment of the training program by collecting both numerical data and qualitative feedback. Quantitative measures, such as pre-and post-training assessments, can be used to measure improvements in participants' knowledge and skills. Additionally, surveys can be utilized to gather data on participant satisfaction, engagement, and perceived impact. Qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus

groups, can be employed to gather in-depth feedback, success stories, and suggestions for improvement. This mixed-methods approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the program's strengths and weaknesses, as well as insights into the participants' experiences and the program's impact on their academic and social integration efforts.

The overall goals of the evaluation plan are to assess the effectiveness of the training program in achieving its intended outcomes, identify areas for improvement, and gather success stories and best practices to inspire others. The outcome measures could include improvements in participants' knowledge and skills, increased confidence and self-efficacy, successful academic and social integration efforts, and positive feedback from participants regarding the program's impact on their personal and academic lives.

The stakeholders involved in this evaluation plan include the participants, facilitators, guest speakers and trainers, target institutions and organizations, selection committee, evaluation team, support and resource providers, and success story sharers. Each stakeholder group would have a role in providing input and feedback, participating in data collection, and utilizing the evaluation findings to improve the training program. Overall, the evaluation plan would involve a collaborative and inclusive approach to ensure the voices and perspectives of all stakeholders are considered.

### **Project Implications**

The project implications for this professional development/3-day training are significant, both in terms of individual and societal impact. By providing participants with the knowledge, skills, and support necessary for successful academic and social integration, the training program aims to empower individuals to thrive and contribute to

their communities. The ultimate goal is to facilitate social change by promoting inclusivity, diversity, and equity.

At the individual level, the project has the potential to transform the lives of participants. By equipping them with the necessary tools and resources, the training program can enhance their academic performance, improve their social skills, and boost their confidence and self-efficacy. This, in turn, can lead to increased opportunities for personal growth, career advancement, and overall well-being.

On a larger scale, the project can have significant social change implications. By promoting inclusive education and social integration, the training program can contribute to the creation of more diverse and accepting communities. This can lead to reduced discrimination, improved intercultural understanding, and increased social cohesion. The project can also help break down barriers and challenge stereotypes, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

The importance of this project to local stakeholders is immense. For educational institutions and organizations, the training program can contribute to their goals of promoting diversity, inclusion, and student success. It can also enhance their reputation as institutions that prioritize the well-being and academic achievement of their students. Local communities can benefit from the increased social cohesion and intercultural understanding that result from successful integration efforts. Additionally, local businesses and employers can benefit from a more diverse and skilled workforce.

In a larger global context, the project aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4: Quality Education, and Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities (United Nations, n.d.). By promoting inclusive education and social

integration, the project contributes to global efforts towards achieving equitable and inclusive societies. It also aligns with the global discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion in education, which has gained significant attention in recent years. Overall, the project's implications are far-reaching and have the potential to make a meaningful impact both at the individual level and in the larger context of social change, locally and globally.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The professional development training program has several strengths that make it promising in addressing the low retention rates of FGAAMUS in terms of academic and social integration. The program aims to provide faculty and staff with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by these students, allowing participants to gain valuable insights into the barriers that hinder FGAAMUS' success. The program also emphasizes evidence-based strategies, incorporating research-based best practices to enhance academic and social integration of FGAAMUS. Furthermore, the program focuses on creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment fostering these students' sense of belonging and empowerment. Additionally, the program encourages collaboration, continuous improvement, and sharing experiences among colleagues. This collaborative approach may foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, allowing participants to learn from one another and develop collective strategies to enhance the academic and social integration experiences of FGAAMUS.

However, the program has certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. Its generalizability may be limited because it is designed for institutions such as Waygate University. Although the strategies discussed may apply to other institutions, the context and challenges may vary. Additionally, the successful implementation of the program may require additional resources such as funding for support programs or training for faculty and staff, which may pose challenges for institutions with limited resources (see Cabrera et al., 1993). It is also important to consider external factors such as systemic

inequities and societal barriers, which may significantly impact the success and retention of FGAAMUS.

The program may need to address these external factors directly or via collaboration with other stakeholders. Lastly, evaluating the program's long-term impact on retention rates and overall student success is crucial, and ongoing assessment and evaluation are needed to ensure the program's effectiveness in addressing the retention issue. Considering these strengths and limitations, institutions can make informed decisions about implementing the professional development training program and make necessary adaptations. Further research and evaluation may help refine and enhance the program's effectiveness.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

One alternative approach to addressing the low retention rates of FGAAMUS is to integrate student support services directly into the academic curriculum. By embedding support services such as tutoring, mentoring, and counseling within the academic structure, institutions can ensure that students can access the necessary resources and assistance throughout their academic journey. This approach eliminates the need for faculty and staff to undergo separate professional development training and instead creates a system in which support is readily available to all students. Another way to address the retention issue is to focus on targeted recruitment and outreach efforts. Institutions can develop recruitment strategies to attract FGAAMUS, ensuring they feel welcomed and valued. Additionally, implementing outreach programs targeting FGAAMUS can help build community and support, minimizing the challenges FGAAMUS may face regarding social integration.



Using student peer mentors can be a practical approach to enhancing the academic and social integration experiences of FGAAMUS. By pairing incoming FGAAMUS with successful upper-level students who have similar backgrounds or experiences, institutions can provide a support system that is relatable and understanding. Peer mentors can offer guidance, share their experiences, and provide a sense of belonging and connection. Institutions can address the retention issue by institutionalizing inclusive pedagogies that cater to the diverse needs and backgrounds of FGAAMUS. This can involve incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices, diverse perspectives, and voices in the curriculum, thereby creating inclusive classroom environments in which all students feel valued and included.

Collaborating with external stakeholders, such as community organizations, businesses, and government agencies, can provide additional support and resources to address the retention issue. These partnerships help create internship opportunities, provide financial support, or offer mentoring programs that enhance the academic and social integration experiences of FGAAMUS. Institutions can expand their capacity to support these students by leveraging external resources and expertise. It is crucial to continuously evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the strategies implemented to address the retention issue. Ongoing research can help identify emerging challenges, evaluate the impact of interventions, and inform future improvements and adaptations. By staying informed and responsive to changing needs, institutions can ensure that their efforts to support FGAAMUS remain adequate and relevant.

By considering alternative approaches such as integrating student support services, implementing targeted recruitment and outreach, engaging student peer mentors,

institutionalizing inclusive pedagogies, establishing collaborative partnerships, and conducting ongoing research and evaluation, institutions can explore different avenues to address the low retention rates of FGAAMUS more effectively. This can also be addressed by focusing on alternative definitions and solutions to the local problem. Educational institutions can implement cultural sensitivity training programs for faculty, staff, and students to enhance their understanding of diverse cultures, including FGAAMUS.

This can help create a more inclusive environment that respects and values different cultural identities. Institutions should invest in expanding support services tailored to the needs of FGAAMUS. This may include establishing mentorship programs, academic tutoring centers, counseling services, and financial aid resources that are easily accessible and culturally sensitive. Institutions can organize events and activities that foster social connections and promote a sense of community among FGAAMUS. This can include cultural celebrations, networking events, and student organizations that engage FGAAMUS and create opportunities for them to connect and build a support network.

Educational institutions should actively work toward diversifying their curriculum to include a broader range of perspectives and experiences, including those of FGAAMUS. This can include diverse readings, case studies, and guest speakers to provide a more inclusive and representative educational experience. Institutions can also establish dedicated financial aid programs and scholarships aimed at supporting FGAAMUS. This can help alleviate their financial burdens and enable them to focus on their education without undue financial stress. By implementing these alternative

solutions, educational institutions can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for FGAAMUS, thereby improving their retention rates and academic success.

### **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change**

Through the research and development of this training program project, I have gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by FGAAMUS in their academic and social integration. The literature on the unique challenges of FGAAMUS presented data and research that revealed the barriers that hinder their integration. This knowledge has helped me recognize the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for these students. Researching the impact of academic and social integration on retention rates provided compelling evidence of the correlation between these factors. By analyzing statistics and scholarly literature, I learned how crucial it is to address the academic and social needs of FGAAMUS to improve their retention rates. This project emphasized the significance of creating inclusive environments that support FGAAMUS' integration.

Exploring best practices and strategies for enhancing academic integration has been enlightening. Through data analysis and group discussions, I learned from the successful practices of my peers. These evidence-based strategies, combined with the research and data presented, have equipped me with practical tools to enhance academic integration for FGAAMUS in my own context. The literature on fostering social integration provided valuable insights into techniques for creating a sense of belonging and inclusion for FGAAMUS. Through role-playing scenarios and group discussions, I brainstormed practical solutions and developed strategies to promote social connections

among these students. This project highlighted the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive community for FGAAMUS' holistic success.

The development of the interactive workshop on inclusive teaching and mentoring practices gave me practical tools and techniques to promote inclusivity in my role as an educator and mentor. Sharing experiences and challenges with my peers allowed me to learn from their insights and develop strategies to create inclusive learning environments. This project emphasized the importance of recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of FGAAMUS to support their academic and social integration.

The collaborative session on developing institutional policies and initiatives was instrumental in fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. Through discussions and idea sharing, I gained valuable insights into promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion within my institution. This project emphasized the importance of collective action and shared responsibility in enhancing academic and social integration for FGAAMUS.

Lastly, the panel discussion with guest speakers and the action planning sessions provided me with practical implementation strategies. Learning from the experiences and successes of others inspired me to develop actionable plans to enhance academic and social integration in my own context. This project emphasized the importance of setting realistic goals and timelines to ensure effective implementation. Overall, the research and development of this training program deepened my understanding of the challenges faced by FGAAMUS and the strategies and best practices to enhance their academic and social integration. I feel empowered to create inclusive environments and support the success of FGAAMUS in my role.

Reflecting on my personal and learning growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer throughout the research and development of this training program, I can say that this experience has been transformative. As a scholar, I delved deeper into the challenges faced by FGAAMUS in their academic and social integration. Through extensive research and analysis, I expanded my knowledge base and gained a comprehensive understanding of the unique barriers that hinder the integration of these students. The exposure to scholarly articles, case studies, and statistical data sharpened my critical thinking skills and enhanced my ability to synthesize information. This project also encouraged me to explore different research methodologies and approaches, broadening my research toolkit and expanding my academic horizons.

As a practitioner, I acquired practical tools and strategies to address the academic and social needs of FGAAMUS. Engaging in interactive workshops, collaborative sessions, and panel discussions allowed me to learn from experienced educators, mentors, and administrators. Their insights and experiences shaped my approach to inclusive teaching, mentoring, and creating supportive learning environments. I developed a repertoire of inclusive practices that I can implement in my own educational setting, ensuring that I am better equipped to support the success of FGAAMUS. This project also strengthened my ability to analyze institutional policies and develop initiatives that foster equity, diversity, and inclusion. I am now more confident in advocating for inclusive policies and practices within my institution.

As a project developer, I honed my organizational and project management skills. Collaborating with a diverse team of experts, I learned the importance of effective communication, coordination, and delegation. The process of designing and developing

this training program, from conducting needs assessments to creating interactive modules, allowed me to apply my research and theoretical knowledge to a practical setting. I gained hands-on experience in developing actionable plans, setting goals, and implementing strategies. This project also taught me the value of adaptability and flexibility because I had to navigate challenges and adjust along the way. Overall, this experience equipped me with the skills and mindset necessary to initiate and lead future projects in the field of education and inclusivity.

In conclusion, the research and development of this training program contributed to my personal and learning growth as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. I expanded my knowledge base, developed practical skills, and gained valuable insights from experts in the field. This experience enhanced my understanding of the challenges faced by FGAAMUS and empowered me to create inclusive environments and support their success. I am confident that the lessons learned and skills acquired through this project will continue to shape my professional journey and enable me to make a meaningful impact in the field of education.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

Throughout this project, I realized the importance of the work undertaken. The focus on addressing the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS revealed a critical issue that had long been overlooked. This research highlighted the unique challenges faced by these students and the need for targeted interventions to ensure their success.

One of the lessons I learned from this project is the significance of inclusive education. It is not enough to provide access to education; faculty and staff must also create environments that embrace diversity and support the needs of all students. Through

this research, I identified barriers that hinder the integration of FGAAMUS, such as a lack of cultural representation in the curriculum, limited access to resources, and a sense of isolation. This reinforced the importance of inclusive teaching practices, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the curriculum.

Another important lesson I learned is the power of mentorship and support systems. Many FGAAMUS face unique challenges due to the lack of familial or community support in navigating the college experience. My research emphasized the significance of mentorship programs, peer support networks, and campus resources in fostering a sense of belonging and providing the necessary guidance and support to help these students succeed. Recognizing the importance of mentorship inspired me to seek opportunities to mentor and support underrepresented students, both within and outside of academic settings.

Additionally, this project highlighted the need for systemic change within educational institutions. Policies and practices that perpetuate inequities must be addressed and reformed. My research has prompted important discussions about the role of institutions in creating equitable learning environments and ensuring the success of all students. My research reinforced the importance of advocating for inclusive policies and pushing for institutional change to dismantle systemic barriers that hinder the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS.

Overall, this project was a powerful learning experience for me. It deepened my understanding of the challenges faced by FGAAMUS and motivated me to contribute to creating more inclusive educational spaces. Through this research, I gained valuable insights into the importance of inclusive education, mentorship, and systemic change. I

am committed to using this knowledge to advocate for equity and to support the success of underrepresented students in any way I can. This project ignited a passion in me to continue working toward creating a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The potential impact of addressing the academic and social integration of first-generation African American and underrepresented minority students (FGAAMUS) can be far-reaching, leading to positive social change at various levels. At the individual level, providing support and resources to FGAAMUS can lead to improved academic outcomes, increased self-confidence, and a sense of belonging. By addressing the unique challenges faced by these students, we can empower them to overcome barriers and reach their full potential. This, in turn, can have a positive ripple effect on their families, as they become role models and sources of inspiration for younger siblings or future generations.

At the family level, supporting the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS can foster a culture of educational attainment. When families witness the success and positive experiences of their children, it can inspire other family members to pursue higher education. This can break the cycle of limited opportunities and create a new norm where education is valued and prioritized. At the organizational level, institutions of higher education can play a crucial role in promoting positive social change. By implementing inclusive policies, culturally responsive pedagogy, and mentorship programs, colleges and universities can create environments that support the success of FGAAMUS. This not only benefits the individual students but also contributes to a more diverse and inclusive campus community. It sends a powerful message that all students are valued and have equal opportunities to thrive.



At the societal/policy level, addressing the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS can influence broader social change. It can challenge existing systemic inequities and push for reforms in educational policies and practices. By advocating for inclusive education, culturally relevant curricula, and the allocation of resources to support underrepresented students, we can work towards dismantling barriers and creating a more equitable educational system. This has the potential to transform society by promoting social mobility, reducing disparities, and fostering a more inclusive and accepting community.

In summary, addressing the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS can create positive social change at multiple levels. By empowering individuals, inspiring families, transforming organizations, and advocating for policy reforms, we can work towards a more equitable and inclusive society.

Note that the implications for social change described do not go beyond the scope of this study. While this research focuses on understanding the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS, the potential impact for positive social change at the individual, family, organizational, and societal/policy levels is broader and encompasses a wider range of factors and interventions. This study primarily aims to explore the experiences and challenges faced by these students and identify strategies to support their academic success and social integration within the scope of our research objectives. While I acknowledge the potential for positive social change, it is beyond the scope of this study to implement or evaluate large-scale interventions or policy reforms. Therefore, it is crucial to interpret the findings of this study within its defined boundaries

and consider the broader implications for social change as a direction for future research, policy development, and intervention implementation.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of employing qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and challenges faced by FGAAMUS. This approach allows for a rich understanding of their perspectives and the factors that influence their academic and social integration. The study also emphasizes the significance of employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The quantitative data can help establish patterns and trends, while qualitative data can offer nuanced explanations and context to support and enhance the quantitative findings.

This study contributes to the existing literature on the academic and social integration of first-generation African American and underrepresented minority students by providing empirical evidence for the applicability and relevance of social integration theories, such as Tinto's Model of Student Departure and Astin's Theory of Student Involvement. The findings can further validate and expand on these theories, enhancing our understanding of the factors influencing these students' success. The empirical findings of this study can inform the development and implementation of interventions and support programs aimed at improving the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS. The identified challenges and strategies can serve as a basis for designing targeted interventions that address the specific needs and barriers faced by these students, enhancing their overall success in higher education.

The empirical evidence presented in this study can also contribute to policy discussions and decision-making processes at institutional, organizational, and governmental levels. The findings can inform policies and practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within educational institutions, leading to improved outcomes for FGAAMUS. Recommendations for practice for future research could also improve outcomes.

Based on this study's findings, it is recommended to develop and implement targeted support programs that address the specific needs and challenges faced by FGAAMUS. These programs can focus on academic support, mentorship, financial aid, and social integration to enhance their overall success and retention rates. Educational institutions should prioritize creating a welcoming and inclusive campus climate that embraces diversity and cultural competence. This can be achieved through cultural competency training for faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as fostering a sense of belonging and community for FGAAMUS. Providing resources and spaces that celebrate diversity and promote cultural exchange can also contribute to a more inclusive environment.

Additionally, strengthening family and community engagement would help in recognizing the significant influence of family and community support on the success of first-generation African American and underrepresented minority students. It is important to foster partnerships between educational institutions, families, and communities. This can involve hosting workshops and events that educate families about college resources and processes, as well as collaborating with community organizations to provide additional support and resources for students. Institutions should invest in professional

development opportunities to support faculty and staff to enhance their cultural competence and understanding of the unique experiences and challenges faced by FGAAMUS. This can include training on inclusive pedagogy, cultural sensitivity, and effective mentoring strategies, enabling faculty and staff to better support and guide these students in their academic journeys.

Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to track the long-term outcomes and experiences of FGAAMUS. This can provide valuable insights into their persistence, graduation rates, career trajectories, and overall well-being.

Longitudinal studies can also help identify any changes in their experiences and challenges over time, as well as the effectiveness of interventions and support programs.

By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for FGAAMUS, improving their academic and social integration and increasing their chances of success in higher education.

### **Conclusion**

This study and project shed light on the barriers and obstacles faced by FGAAMUS in higher education. It emphasizes the urgent need for educational institutions to address these challenges through targeted support programs, enhanced campus climate, and strengthened family and community engagement. By investing in faculty and staff development and conducting longitudinal studies, institutions can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that fosters the academic and social integration of these students. This comprehensive approach can improve the success rates of these students and contribute to a more equitable and diverse higher education landscape.

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of mentorship and role models in the success of FGAMMUS. By connecting these students with faculty members, alumni, and professionals from similar backgrounds, institutions can provide them with guidance, inspiration, and valuable networking opportunities. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the significance of addressing the socio-economic barriers that disproportionately affect these students. Access to financial resources, scholarships, and work-study opportunities can play a crucial role in alleviating financial burdens and allowing these students to fully focus on their academic pursuits. Ongoing research and data collection are essential to understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by FGAAMUS.

I would like to end my project study on this final note. I shared this story during my proposal defense which is entitled “The Starfish Story” by Loren Eiseley. The story goes something like this...

One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked, he came upon a young boy who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one. Puzzled, the man looked at the boy and asked what he was doing. Without looking up from his task, the boy simply replied, “I’m saving these starfish, Sir”. The old man chuckled aloud, “Son, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?” The boy picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water and turning to the man, said, “I made a difference to that one!” (Eiseley, 1978).

As educators, we are sometimes overwhelmed with the task of educating the masses (i.e., *all the starfish on the beach*). For example, we may have to deal with a student who is not achieving because the student did not have enough food at home, or another student failing because they are dealing with parents who are on the verge of getting a divorce. Whatever the problems are our job is to make a difference in students' lives. This project study may not eliminate all the problems of low retention rates of FGAAMUS; however, if I know that I have somehow made a difference for some of the FGAAMUS who are scattered along the beaches of higher education, I will achieved a sense of accomplishment like the little boy in the story. I believe I can make a difference for at least one FGAAMUS; then I am going to try again and again, and again.

As I reflect on all that I have learned throughout my doctoral journey, the impact that this study may have on social change becomes evident. The process for creating social change is arduous, and because the fruit of social change develops slowly at times many people become discouraged that the desired changes can occur. Sometimes, the scope of the need for social change is overwhelming because of the magnitude of those needing change. However, remembering "The Starfish Story" motivates me to believe that positive social change is possible.

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## Appendix A: Final Project

### **3 Day Professional Development Training:**

Enhancing Academic and Social Integration for FGAAMUS

*Duration: 3-day Training Program*

#### **Day 1: Understanding the Challenges Faced by FGAAMUS**

*Module 1: Introduction and Setting the Context*

- Time: 9:00 am - 10:30 am
- Activity: Icebreaker and Introductions
  - Trainer Notes: Create a welcoming and inclusive environment. Encourage participants to share their experiences and expectations for the training program.

*Module 2: The Unique Challenges of FGAAMUS*

- Time: 10:45 am - 12:00 pm
- Activity: Presentation and Discussion on the challenges faced by FGAAMUS
  - Trainer Notes: Present data and research on the specific challenges and barriers that hinder the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS. Encourage participants to share their own perspectives and experiences.

*\*12 Noon Lunch Break-1 Hour*

*Module 3: Impact of Academic and Social Integration on Retention Rates*

- Time: 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

- Activity: Group activity analyzing the correlation between academic and social integration and retention rates
  - Trainer Notes: Provide participants with statistics and case studies highlighting the impact of academic and social integration on the retention rates of FGAAMUS. Facilitate discussions on the importance of creating inclusive environments.

*Module 4: Best Practices and Strategies for Enhancing Academic Integration*

- Time: 2:45 pm - 4:30 pm
- Activity: Case study analysis and group discussions on evidence-based best practices
  - Trainer Notes: Introduce participants to various techniques and strategies for enhancing academic integration. Encourage participants to share their own successful practices.

**Day 2: Promoting Social Integration and Inclusive Practices**

*Module 5: Strategies for Fostering Social Integration*

- Time: 9:00 am - 10:30 am
- Activity: Role-playing scenarios and group discussions on fostering social integration
  - Trainer Notes: Explore techniques to create a sense of belonging and inclusion for FGAAMUS. Encourage participants to brainstorm practical solutions for fostering social connections.

*Module 6: Inclusive Teaching and Mentoring Practices*

- Time: 10:45 am - 12:00 pm
- Activity: Interactive workshop on inclusive teaching and mentoring practices
  - Trainer Notes: Provide participants with practical tools and techniques to promote inclusivity in their teaching and mentoring roles. Encourage participants to share their own experiences and challenges.

*\*12 Noon Lunch Break-1 Hour*

- *Module 7: Designing Inclusive Learning Environments*
  - Time: 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
  - Activity: Small group activity designing inclusive learning environments
    - Trainer Notes: Guide participants in designing inclusive learning environments that cater to the needs of FGAAMUS. Provide feedback and support during the activity.

*Module 8: Collaboration and Continuous Improvement*

- Time: 2:45 pm - 4:30 pm
- Activity: Collaborative session to develop institutional policies and initiatives
  - Trainer Notes: Facilitate a discussion on collaboration and continuous improvement. Encourage participants to share ideas and develop actionable plans to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within their institutions.

### **Day 3: Implementation and Action Planning**

#### *Module 9: Implementation Strategies*

- Time: 9:00 am - 10:30 am
- Activity: Panel discussion with guest speakers sharing successful implementation strategies
  - Trainer Notes: Invite guest speakers who have implemented effective strategies to enhance the academic and social integration of FGAAMUS. Facilitate a Q&A session with the participants.

#### *Module 10: Action Planning and Evaluation*

- Time: 10:45 am - 12:00 pm
- Activity: Individual and group action planning sessions
  - Trainer Notes: Guide participants in developing actionable plans to implement the strategies discussed during the training program. Encourage participants to set realistic goals and timelines.

*\*12 Noon Lunch Break-1 Hour*

#### *Module 11: Reflection and Closing Remarks*

- Time: 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm
- Activity: Reflection activity and closing remarks
  - Trainer Notes: Facilitate a reflective activity where participants can share their key takeaways from the training program. Provide closing remarks, highlighting the importance of their role in enhancing academic and social integration for FGAAMUS.

### **Module Formats:**



- ❖ Presentations: Utilize PowerPoint slides or other visual aids to present information.
- ❖ Discussions: Encourage participants to engage in open discussions and share their perspectives.
- ❖ Activities: Incorporate interactive activities such as role-playing, case studies, and group work to enhance learning and engagement.
- ❖ Panel Discussions: Invite guest speakers to share their experiences and insights.
- ❖ Reflection: Allocate time for participants to reflect on their learning and make connections to their own experiences.

**Trainer Notes:**

- ❖ Create a safe and inclusive environment that encourages open dialogue and active participation.
- ❖ Provide opportunities for participants to share their own experiences and insights.

**Outline for Discussions****1. Introduction and Ground Rules**

- Set the purpose and expectations for the discussion.
- Establish ground rules for respectful and inclusive dialogue.

**2. Topic Introduction**

- Provide an overview of the topic or issue to be discussed.
- Share relevant information, statistics, or case studies to stimulate thinking.

**3. Guiding Questions**

- Prepare a set of open-ended questions to guide the discussion.
- Encourage participants to share their perspectives, experiences, and insights.

#### 4. Facilitation Techniques

- Use active listening to ensure all voices are heard.
- Encourage participants to build upon each other's ideas and challenge assumptions respectfully.
- Provide prompts or follow-up questions to deepen the discussion.

#### 5. Summarize and Synthesize

- Summarize key points and themes that emerged during the discussion.
- Facilitate a synthesis of different perspectives and encourage participants to find common ground.

### **Worksheet for Discussions**

1. Discussion Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Guiding Questions:

- Question 1: \_\_\_\_\_

- Question 2: \_\_\_\_\_

- Question 3: \_\_\_\_\_

- Question 4: \_\_\_\_\_

- Question 5: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Key Points and Insights:

- Participant 1: \_\_\_\_\_

- Participant 2: \_\_\_\_\_

- Participant 3: \_\_\_\_\_

- Participant 4: \_\_\_\_\_

- Participant 5: \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Common Themes or Agreements:

- Theme 1: \_\_\_\_\_

- Theme 2: \_\_\_\_\_

- Theme 3: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Outline for Activities**

### 1. Introduction and Purpose

- Explain the activity's objective and how it relates to the training topic.

- Highlight the benefits of interactive learning and engagement.

### 2. Instructions and Materials

- Provide clear instructions on how to perform the activity.

- Prepare any necessary materials, handouts, or props.

### 3. Group Formation and Roles

- Organize participants into groups (pairs, small groups, or teams) for collaborative activities.
- Assign specific roles or tasks to each group member to encourage participation and cooperation.

#### 4. Activity Execution

- Monitor and support groups as they work on the activity.
- Encourage creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

#### 5. Debrief and Discussion

- Facilitate a debriefing session to reflect on the activity's outcomes and insights.
- Encourage participants to share their experiences and lessons learned.

### **Worksheet for Activities:**

**1. Activity Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Objective:** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Instructions:**

- **Step 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

- **Step 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

- **Step 3:** \_\_\_\_\_

- **Step 4:** \_\_\_\_\_

- **Step 5:** \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Materials Needed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Group Formation:**

- **Group Size:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Roles:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Group Members:** \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Reflection Questions:**

- **Question 1:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Question 2:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Question 3:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Outline for Reflection**

## 1. Introduction and Purpose

- Explain the importance of reflection in the learning process.
- Emphasize the role of personal experiences and connections to deepen understanding.

## 2. Individual Reflection Time

- Allocate sufficient time for participants to reflect silently.
- Provide prompts or questions to guide their reflection process.

## 3. Sharing and Discussion

- Encourage participants to share their reflections with a partner or in small groups.
- Facilitate a group discussion to explore common themes and insights.

#### 4. Application and Action Planning

- Guide participants to identify practical ways to apply their learning.
- Help them develop action plans to implement their insights in real-life situations.

#### **Worksheet for Reflection**

1. Reflection Prompt: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Personal Reflection:

- What did you learn from this training session? \_\_\_\_\_

- How does this learning relate to your own experiences?

\_\_\_\_\_

- What insights or realizations did you have during the session?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Sharing and Discussion:

- Partner/Group Member: \_\_\_\_\_

- Reflection Sharing: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Application and Action Planning:

- How can you apply this learning in your personal or professional life?

\_\_\_\_\_

- What specific actions will you take to implement your insights?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Post Training Survey Evaluation

### 1. Demographics:

- Age?
- Gender?
- Name of Position/Role at University?
- Advisor? Number Advising?
- Years of experience in current role?
- Department?

### 2. Overall Training Experience:

- How would you rate your overall experience with the training? (*Scale: 1-5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent*)
- What aspects of the training did you find most valuable?
- What aspects of the training could be improved?

### 3. Training Objectives:

- To what extent did the training meet the stated objectives?
- Did the training content align with your expectations?
- Did you feel that the training was relevant to your needs and professional development?

### 4. Facilitation and Delivery:

- How would you rate the facilitator's knowledge and expertise on the topic?
- Did the facilitator effectively engage and interact with the participants?
- Were the training materials and resources clear and helpful?

### 5. Activities and Exercises:

- Did the activities and exercises enhance your learning experience?
- Were the activities and exercises relevant and applicable to the training content?
- Did the activities and exercises promote active participation and engagement?

6. Group Dynamics and Collaboration:

- Did you feel comfortable participating in group discussions and activities?
- Did the group dynamics contribute to a positive and inclusive learning environment?
- Was there sufficient opportunity for collaboration and knowledge sharing among participants?

7. Learning Outcomes:

- Do you feel that you have gained new knowledge or skills from the training?
- Were the learning objectives achieved?
- How do you plan to apply what you have learned in your professional or personal life?

8. Training Logistics and Organization:

- Were the training logistics (e.g., venue, timing, materials) well organized and communicated?
- Did you receive sufficient information and support prior to the training?
- Were there any logistical issues that could be improved for future training sessions?

9. Recommendations:

- Based on your experience, what recommendations do you have to improve future training sessions?



- Are there any specific topics or areas of interest you would like to see covered in future trainings?

10. Additional Comments:

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the training?

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation survey. Your feedback is valuable in improving our training programs.*

Appendix B: Enhancing Academic and Social Integration for FGAAMUS: A 3-Day  
Professional Development Training PPT

Enhancing Academic  
and Social Integration  
for FGAAMUS

A 3-Day Professional  
Development Training  
Facilitated by Clinton  
Harris

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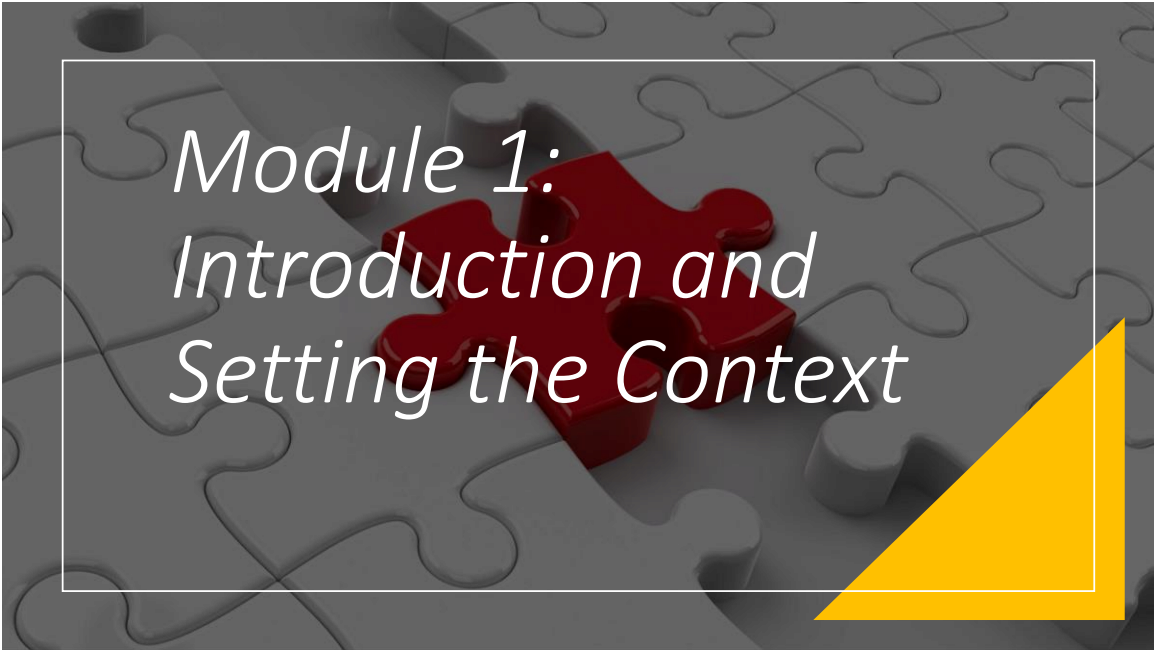


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Day 1:  
Understanding  
the Challenges  
Faced by  
FGAAMUS

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*Module 1:  
Introduction and  
Setting the Context*

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Activity:  
Icebreaker and  
Introductions

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## *Module 2: The Unique Challenges of FGAAMUS*

Activity:  
Presentation  
and Discussion  
on the  
challenges faced  
by FGAAMUS

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## *Module 3: Impact of Academic & Social Integration on Retention Rates*

Activity: Group activity analyzing the correlation between academic and social integration and retention rates

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*Module 4: Best Practices  
and Strategies for  
Enhancing Academic  
Integration*

Activity: Case  
study analysis  
and group  
discussions on  
evidence-based  
best practices

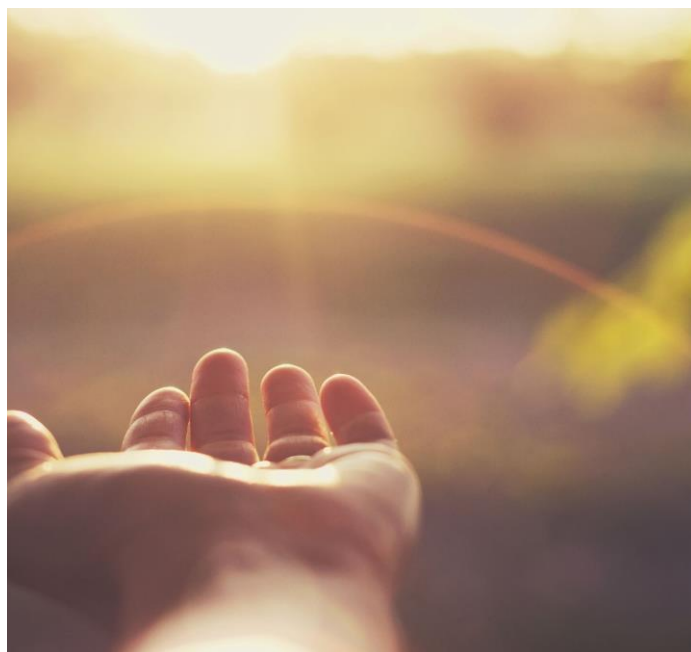
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Day 2: Promoting  
Social Integration  
& Inclusive  
Practices

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A 3D-rendered image of a red puzzle piece standing upright on a grey puzzle surface. The text is overlaid on the image within a white rectangular border.

*Module 5: Strategies for  
Fostering Social  
Integration*

A bright yellow right-angled triangle is positioned in the bottom right corner of the puzzle image.



Activity: Role-playing scenarios and group discussions on fostering social integration

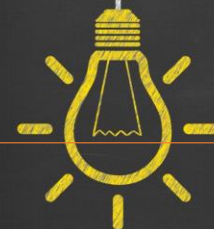
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*Module 6: Inclusive Teaching & Mentoring Practices*



Activity: Interactive  
workshop on inclusive  
teaching and mentoring  
practices

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*Module 7: Designing  
Inclusive Learning  
Environments*

Activity: Small group activity designing inclusive learning environments



*Module 8: Collaboration  
and Continuous  
Improvement*

Activity: Collaborative session to develop institutional policies and initiatives

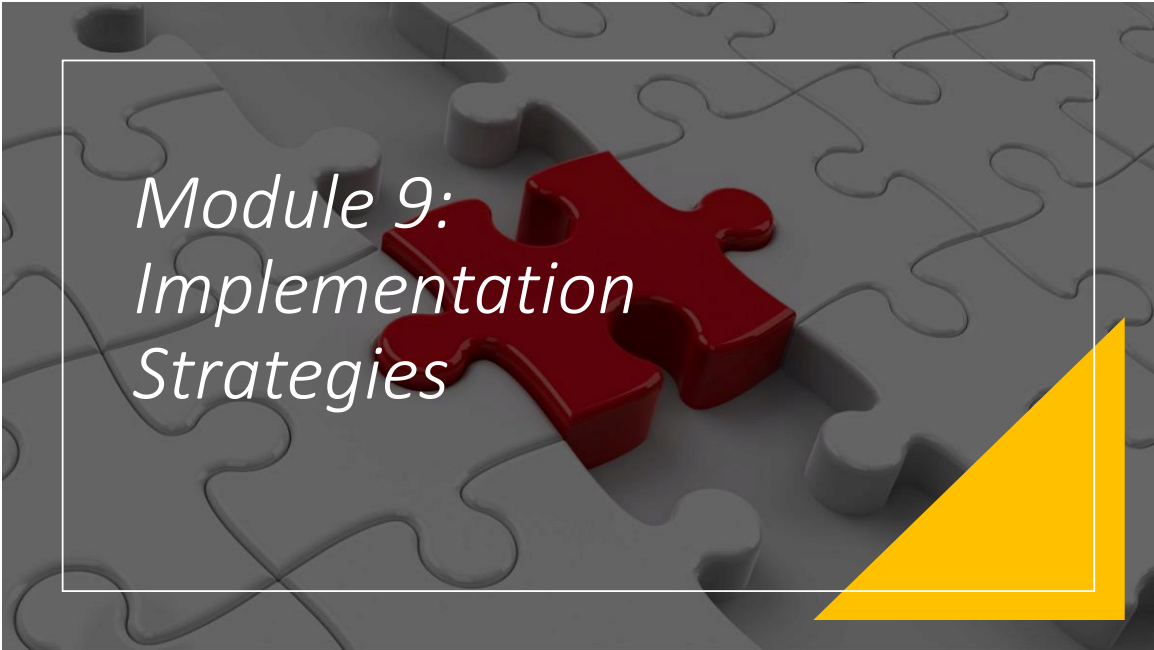
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Day 3:  
Implementation  
& Action  
Planning

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## *Module 9: Implementation Strategies*

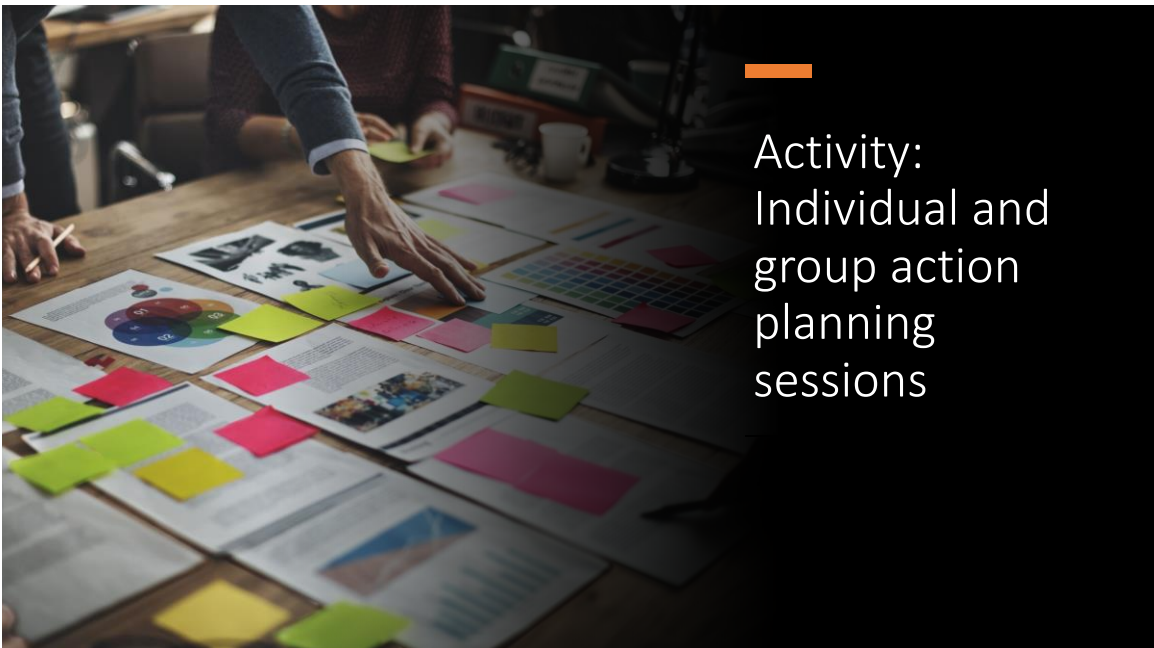


Activity: Panel discussion  
with guest speakers  
sharing successful  
implementation strategies





## *Module 10: Action Planning & Evaluation*





Activity: Reflection activity  
and closing remarks

### Appendix C Recruitment Email

You are invited to take part in a research study. The primary purpose of this study is to identify and examine First-generation African American Male Undergraduate Student's perception of what factors helped to retain them at a Historically Black College University in the south. In addition, the study will explore what FGAAMUS perceive as the internal and external factors that influenced their college retention.

The researcher, Clinton Harris, is a doctoral student at Walden University, Doctor of Education – Higher Education and Adult Learning program and is conducting this study. Interviews will be conducted to learn about students' experiences that relate to college retention. I am seeking first-generation African American male undergraduate students who are willing to share their experiences regarding what worked to retain them at a HBCU in the southeastern portion of the United States at the selected University.

I would love to hear from you. Please e-mail me at xxxxxxxx.xxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx or call me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx if you are interested in learning more about the study. Please email your response by \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Clinton Harris, Doctoral Student

## Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As you know, the purpose of this study will be to examine and identify first-generation African American male undergraduate student's (FGAAMUS) perceptions on the impact of academic and social integration on their low retention issues at Waygate University. Your participation is voluntary and you can stop this interview at any time. Do you have any questions for me before we start? I will record this interview and keep only the audio recording for this study. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

### **Interview Protocol: Questions**

1. Please describe why did you decide to go to college? (RQx)

Probe: *Can you provide more details on...?*

2. What were the factors that led you to choose to attend Waygate University? (RQx)

Probe: *Can you elaborate on...?*

3. Based on your experience as a student at this university, what are the major potential factors or situations that will make FGAAMUS decide to leave or drop out of the University before graduating? (RQx)

Probe: *Is the financial situation a potential reason?*

*Can the lack of preparation for the academic rigor be a reason?*

4. Can you describe any situation that made you think about discontinuing your education at this University? (RQx)

Probe: *At what point in your educational process did this occur?*



*Please explain why you wanted to discontinue your education and what made you decide to stay.*

*Was there anything specific that made you change your mind?*

5. Please describe the factors that affected your decision to enroll at this University during your enrollment period? (RQx)

*Probe: Did you have any prior relationships with professors?*

*Did you were aware of the dropout rates for FGAAMUS during the enrollment period?*

6. What suggestions do you have about ways to help FGAAMUS complete their degrees? (RQx)

*Probe: Did your fellow classmates give you a sense of belonging to the University? Can you provide more examples of... ?*

7. Since your enrollment at Waygate University, were you aware of any programs the University used to keep students in school and to help them be successful? (RQx)

*Probe: In what ways did the faculty/administration give you a sense of belonging to the University?*

8. What ideas do you think might be worth considering for implementation at the University to improve the retention rates of FGAAMUS? (RQx)

*Probe: Can you provide an example of...? Can you elaborate on... ?*

9. What recommendations do you have for any potential FGAAMUS to help them graduate their academic program at this university? (RQx)

*Probe: What would be your advice to help incoming FGAAMUS to better integrate academically?*

*Probe: What would be your advice to help incoming FGAAMUS to better integrate socially?*

10. Do you have anything to add related to the issues covered in this interview?

Thank you again for your time and willingness to participate in this interview.

I will email you the transcript of this interview to verify what I have recorded correctly reflects your views.