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Perceptions of Retention among Bachelor of Social Work Graduates at a Historically Black College and University

Monique Eileen Holsey-Hyman
Walden University

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Monique Holsey-Hyman

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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Perceptions of Retention among Bachelor of Social Work Graduates at a Historically

Black College and University

by

Monique Holsey-Hyman

MSW, Columbia University, 1992

BS, State University at Binghamton, 1986

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Education

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June 2015

Abstract

Student attrition from universities carries high costs for individuals, universities, and society. Despite these costs, there has been limited research on the problem from the students' perspectives, specifically the perceptions of university graduates about what factors may have influenced their own retention at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). African American students complete college at the lowest rate compared to other ethnic sub groups. Guided by Tinto's theory of student departure, this qualitative consensual research study focused on the perceptions of 15 bachelor of social work graduates regarding (a) the factors that helped them to persist to graduation at an HBCU, and (b) the internal and external factors that influenced college retention. Data were gathered from semi-structured interviews, a demographic survey, and a follow-up questionnaire. Data were transcribed; member checked for enhanced trustworthiness; and then analyzed inductively using a team to develop and code domains by consensus, construct core ideas, and develop categories. Findings indicated that, among these 15 graduates, internal factors such as loss of scholarships, lack of faculty support, and lack of academic preparation influenced retention. External issues such as family strain and lack of university/community partnerships were also reported as influencing retention. In addition, findings suggested that these 15 students required increased academic, financial, mental health, and social support services to persist to graduation. This study contributes to social change by affecting improvement in retention and ensuring support services equal student needs. Improvements in retention and support could help to grow an educated and skilled work force.

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Dedication

“Education is the key to success.” This affirmation I have lived by since being a little girl growing up in the South Bronx. My mother Madge Leanna Holsey Shaw, who is presently 79 years old, instilled in her four little girls, “you will never become a victim of your environment” and “educations will open doors.” She advocated for education not only for her own children but also for many children in District Eight in New York City. She was a true advocate of education and encouraged me to put my best foot forward in everything I encountered. She would say, “If you move that can from one side of the table to the next, do it right, because the task and completion are indicative of which you are.” I thank you, Mom, for empowering me to strive for the best, raising me to be independent, strong, and to put God first.

I dedicate this work to my sister Bernadette May Holsey, who was an educator and an inspiration to me. I completed this task also for her, because she was in the process of obtaining her PhD when God called her home in 2001. I dedicate this process to my little sister Leleith Leanna Shaw, who I have tried to be a role model for since she was born 42 years ago.

To my daughters Madison and Morgan and niece Mila, who have allowed me to pay attention to the completion of the task, sometimes taking my frustration out on them but never forgetting I was a mother and aunt who had to lead by example. Thank you for saying “Mom, go write. We have this,” for the last seven years. Even when I wanted to give up, I knew you were looking at me and that gave me the strength to go on.

To my students for over the past eight years who I love so much, I continue to strive to be the best educator and to bring out the best in them, so they can be change agents in the world.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

In 2009, President Obama highlighted the urgent need for the United States to reclaim the world lead in college graduation rates. He noted the strong correlations between education, economic growth, and the need to increase the economic future of America. His plan was based on the importance of enhancing a well-educated and skilled workforce. He set a benchmark for America to achieve these goals by 2020 (Obama, 2009). The need for a well-prepared, skilled, and educated workforce is an importance issue facing America's society and is in the forefront of concern for economic leaders and policymakers. According to Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004), "globalization accompanied by socioeconomic, demographic, and technological changes currently has a significant impact on America's workforce and postsecondary institutions" (p. 6). Currently, six out of every ten jobs require some postsecondary education and training, which emphasizes that individuals with a college degree are essential to economic stability and growth (Lotkowski et al., 2004). Adams (2011) noted that there are "a large number of students attend college with the hope of obtaining a college degree which society says is the new prerequisite for a middle class life" (p. 19).

However, statistics illustrate that only 58% of freshmen entering college in the United States will graduate from the same college within 6 years (Ventra, 2009). Soen and Davidovitch (2008) further confirmed that student retention and degree completion are currently important topics and one in three freshmen fail to complete their degrees. Heldmen (2008) indicated student retention is an important issue facing higher education today. According to Wilson (2006), retention is an important educational goal, and when

students do not complete their education, they limit their employment and social opportunities. Leaving a college or university before degree completion affects the student, the college or university, and the nation. Students who do not complete their education cannot add to a productive workforce. College graduates earn higher wages, which benefits both their families and society.

To improve graduation rates, colleges and universities must develop strategies to retain students. In this study, I examined the perceptions of social work students who have graduated with a Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) from a historically Black university (HBCU) in the South. Specifically, I explored these students' perceptions of successful retention strategies. The results highlighted effective retention strategies, which may assist in reducing the dropout rate in the Department of Social Work. A literature review will follow in Section 2, which includes current research related to the factors that influence and result in higher retention rates.

Background

Hossler, Ziskin, and Gross (2009) noted that, due to increased fiscal constraints of higher education institutions, there are growing pressures from policymakers to improve student persistence and graduation rates. Jamelske (2009) found a 68% retention rate among all United States institutions of higher education. According to Jamelske (2009), “the retention rate at 4-year, private institutions is somewhat higher than 4-year public institutions” (p. 374). The United States allocates funds to colleges and universities through federally funded financial aid programs for many students who fail to complete their education.

The amounts of allocated funds are investments from government revenue to help assure career-ready graduates. The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) studied first-time bachelor's degree-seeking students who were enrolled full-time in a four-year institution in 2001-2002. They reported that only 57% completed a bachelor's degree in six years. The American Institute for Research predicted that the nation will have a difficult time reaching national goals unless there is an increase in the number of students who return to complete their college degrees (Schneider, 2010).

Factors influencing student retention are complex. Retention is a concern for universities and the ability to retain students and develop strategies to decrease dropout rates is a huge national problem (Wilson, 2006). The retention issue impacts the university selected for this study. The university reports student retention of 39% and the graduation rate at 26% (Federal Student Aid, 2012). The university's retention rate is substantially lower compared to several universities in the state of North Carolina. Universities that maintain higher retention rates than the identified university include one university in Greenville, North Carolina with a 79% retention rate and a private university in Raleigh, North Carolina with 91% (Federal Student Aid, 2012). In addition, the university's transfer rate is undeniably higher than the transfer rate of the private university in Raleigh (17%; Federal Student Aid, 2012).

As of 2010, the freshman retention rate at the university that I selected for this study was 54.8%, and it had a 14% 4-year graduation rate (Federal Student Aid, 2012). Based on this information, a first-year undergraduate student attending this HBCU is strikingly more likely to leave or transfer to another university in order to complete his or

her undergraduate degree. The university is in the process of analyzing data to understand why students transfer to other universities. This research study supplements their analysis by exploring the perceptions of social work graduates on retention strategies that kept them in the university's Department of Social Work.

According to the university's Department of Social Work Profile 2011, 23.08% of new freshmen social work majors separated from the university after their first year, 6.15% after their second year, and 1.54% after their third year. Overall, from 2005 to 2010, the department retained 69% of their majors and 31% of their students dropped out. Moriarty et al. (2009) suggested that social work education programs tend to emphasize the importance of the latter part of the social work curriculum, such as field placement, and neglect the beginning adjustment period for new majors.

Similarly, Roberts and Styron (2010) identified an important factor that often affects student dropout. They reported students do not feel socially connected to or integrated with the university and do not persist in their education. This failure to engage students may affect the students' ability to connect and successfully become a part of the university's community of learning.

The Office of Strategic Planning, Institutional Research, and Effectiveness (OSPIRE) at the HBCU that I selected for this study realizes the importance of student success and retention. The university has implemented several strategies to help evaluate and assess student learning and student success. The OSPIRE office regularly conducts surveys and polls that measure satisfaction, knowledge, behavior, cognitive and social development, and programmatic outcomes at an institutional level. However, there is

little to no research at the university level where researchers have explored the perceptions of graduates about the factors that affect their retention at the university.

Hagedorn (2005) noted difficulty in measuring the retention of students and reported that currently several colleges and universities are engrossed with figuring out the retention rates at their institutions. The retention rate is important; however, it does not explain the reason why students drop out or leave college. Hagedorn (2005) noted that the term dropout rate and retention rates usually provide a dichotomous measure; retention is staying in school until completion and dropping out is leaving school prematurely.

This qualitative research study contributes to the body of knowledge needed to investigate the problem of identifying and understanding the perceptions of BSW graduates and the factors that affect retention in the Department of Social Work at the selected university. The research results offer strategies for improving student retention within the university and provide information needed to develop a retention plan for the Department of Social Work. In addition, this study examined social work graduates' perceptions and provided evidence for analysis, which may be used to improve the retention rate in higher learning institutions. The outcome of this study adds to the knowledge of student perceptions on this issue and provides contributions to the field of education and social work.

The social change implications of this study are to increase retention and decrease dropout rates. As a result, more students will complete their college degree, which is a goal of President Obama's American Graduation Initiative (Russell, 2011). When

students complete their degrees, they will also increase their lifetime economic earning potential. At the macro level, this will provide the skilled and educated workforce that President Obama stated is needed to assure the country's economic stability and growth.

Problem Statement

President Obama, in his American Graduation Initiative (2009), identified the importance of the United States increasing the number of college graduates. When a student fails to complete a college degree, it has financial implications for the student, their family, and for society. It also impacts the economy through the loss of the individual's skills, knowledge, and future earning potential (Crosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009). This problem also influences the HBCU identified for this study, which has had a significant decline in the retention rate of freshmen over the past six years. For example, a first-year student who entered the university in fall 2011 and did not return for fall 2012 was 35% (P. F. Denning, personal communication, August 15, 2012). In this study, specifically I examined the university's Department of Social Work.

In this study, I addressed the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding the strategies that helped to retain them at the identified university. In addition, I addressed the gap in literature on issues with retention that represent the successful graduates' perception. The results of the study provide the basis for suggestions to help the Department of Social Work create a retention plan.

Nature of the Study

There are a variety of reasons why students leave higher learning institutions without completing their degrees. Ventra (2009) noted factors relating to retention rates

were academics, achievement, and family backgrounds. Peltier, Laden, and Matranga (1999, as cited in Reason, 2009), in the analysis of their research, identified that gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, high school grade point average, college grade point average, as well as the interaction between these variables, were related to persistence in student retention. Longden (2006) noted that students leave college because they have social, academic, and economic issues, which result in the student feeling out of place and overwhelmed. In this study, I attempted to contribute to the body of knowledge relating to retention variables and improving the dropout rate in the Department of Social Work at a targeted HBCU in the South.

The purpose of this consensual qualitative study was to examine the perceptions that Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) graduates from a southern HBCU had of their university's retention strategies. Creswell (2009) stated, "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to as a social or human problem" (p. 4). The qualitative strategy that was used in this research was the consensual qualitative research model, which highlights the use of a researcher who uses the process of consensus and a systematic way of examining the representativeness of results. According to Hill et al. (2005), "Consensual design incorporates elements from the phenomenological (Giorgi, 1985), grounded theory (Strass & Corbin, 1998) and the comprehensive process analysis (Elliot, 1989)" (p. 2).

The incorporation of these different qualitative research designs lead to the emphasis on consensus, consistency of data, and collecting data from multiple judges who seek to form a consensus relating to analyzing the data collected. According to

Rubin and Rubin (2005), “Qualitative interviewing research is especially good at describing social and political processes, that is, how and why things change” (p. 3). Interview data helps to explain barriers and unlike survey research, in which the same question is asked to all participants, qualitative interviews allow the researcher to gain knowledge by allowing each participant to share what they know about the topic. More details regarding the study design will be presented in Section 3.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding factors that helped to retain them and prevent their dropout at a targeted HBCU?
2. What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU?

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine and identify the factors leading to the low retention rate specifically among first-year students in the Department of Social Work. According to Harrison (2006), the causes and consequences of student withdrawal from college has grown into a significant issue in higher education over the last ten years. Berkovitz and O’Quin (2007) noted the concept relating to retention of college students has received a great deal of attention in the literature and many have examined variables related to this topic. The significance of the study was to assess

external and internal factors that contribute to the withdrawal of students, which results in a retention rate of 48%.

In this study, I investigated the body of knowledge relating to affective retention strategies designed to reduce the dropout rate. I gathered the data through the consensual qualitative research method involving interviews and a follow-up questionnaire. The samples used in this study were graduates from a BSW program. At the university where I conducted this study, it is important to note that all social work students must go through a process of applying and being accepted as a member of the program. The Department of Social Work had an admissions process in which students formally applied to become a social work major. According to the Department of Social Work Admissions Criteria from 2013, once potential majors had 45 credit hours, had completed core courses such as Math 111, English 112, Biology 111, and Introduction to Social Work, and had a grade point average of 2.25, they had to complete an application to the Social Work Program. The process was tailored to sophomores and juniors. Students had to be accepted into the Social Work Program before entering the final degree requirements as a senior that included the field practicum. According to the Council on Social Work Education, field placement is the signature pedagogy of social work education (Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010). Field placement allows students to integrate theory and practice in their final year of the social work education curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation that best supports this research study is the internationalist theory of college student departure (i.e., Tinto, 1975). The theory is

based on a basic concept that individual students enter college with a set of characteristics that affect their retention or departure. Tinto (1986) expanded this theory to include the fact that students arrive with specific intentions regarding college attendance and degree completion; he called this the theory of student departure. The origins of Tinto's theories began with his collaboration with Cullen in 1973. The collaboration sparked a theoretical model of attrition and persistence that included areas of discussion relating to pre-entry, goals, commitments of student institutional experiences, integration goals, and commitment interventions (Metz, 2004).

Tinto (1975) theorized that students who persist in college have fundamental characteristics that include family background factors, individual traits, precollege educational levels, and parental expectations. In his later work, Tinto (1993) recognized that different groups of students had distinctly different circumstances requiring group-specific retention, policies, and programs. Tinto (1998) noted that academic integration was a critical and essential element, which allowed students the opportunity to continue their education in a college setting. Tinto's (1998) view of academic integration suggested that integration should not only occur in the classroom but should also include faculty interaction.

Interestingly, Berger and Lyon (2005) stated that the first 250 years of higher education in this country focused on institutional survival rather than on student college retention. Astin (1970), another theorist, discussed in his early works the model of student involvement and the student involvement theory. The student involvement model in higher education focused on developing student talents that were beneficial to both the

student and the system. Astin also continued his study related to retention and in his later works suggested that certain variables influenced student persistence, such as financial aid. Metz (2004) stated that various studies contributed, evolved, and incorporated new variables in research, which related to the changing dynamics in higher education. The results of these studies suggested that student departure and the factors which influence it continue to be a question that researchers investigate. The information gathered in this study can be used for developing a departmental retention plan for the Department of Social Work and contributes to the body of knowledge needed to create a retention plan for the entire university.

Definition of Terms

The necessary terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Attrition rate: The diminution of students in a number resulting from low retention rates (Hagedorn, 2005).

Department of Social Work at an HBCU in the South: Grounded in a general liberal arts background, the targeted HBCU's Social Work Program equips students with a solid and integrated education with a foundation in social work theories, knowledge, ethics, values, and skills, and provides students with a supervised, direct field practice experience. The targeted HBCU's Social Work Program graduates work within a wide variety of social work, social welfare settings, and with systems at all levels (University Catalog, 2010-2012).

Dropout rate: The rate of students who voluntarily or involuntarily withdraw from an educational institution. The rate is the percentage of students who leave school prematurely (Hagedorn, 2005).

Retention rate: The complement of attrition rate; the percentage of entering students persisting in their studies in an educational institution until graduation (Hagedorn, 2005).

HBCU in the South: an identified Black college in the South that is church affiliated and was initially established to educate freed slaves in theology and biblical interpretation.

Assumptions and Limitations

I designed the research study to have no bias toward any specific organization, department, or population of students. However, the study can relate to the problem of student retention that affects the current population of 2,709 students who, according to the University Undergraduate Catalog from 2011-2012, are enrolled at the identified HBCU in the South. Therefore, I developed the study to target a population of 8-15 social work students who graduated from the Department of Social Work. Targeting this population depicted a portion of social work graduates' perceptions of what works in retention to decrease the dropout rate.

The knowledge of this study will also help this HBCU's current students to be able to complete their degree. These study results are limited to the university studied and the individual students interviewed. Other populations of graduates were not considered because the intent of this study was to research BSW graduates' perceptions relating to

what worked in retention that retained them and decreased the dropout rate. It is important for BSW graduates to obtain their degree because they work with populations at risk and help to improve social and economic conditions.

Limitations, which Creswell (1994) defined as “potential weakness of a study” (p. 110), included barriers relating to the time, availability, and contact information of BSW graduates. I explored the best time to hold interviews and used telephone, Skype, and email to allow for flexibility of participants who chose to participate in the study. Furthermore, the research study determined any limitations related to participants answering questions during the interview in an honest manner as it relates to their perceptions of internal and external factors influencing their experiences with retention. I examined the number of assumptions made regarding improving student retention and the dropout rate at the targeted HBCU in the South. I did not review any earlier assessment tools developed or implemented by the university in order to avoid researcher bias.

It has become increasingly difficult to ignore the problems with student retention in higher education. According to Alarcon and Edwards (2013), retention is important to students and higher learning institutions because of monetary issues. Students need to complete their educational experience to be able to obtain higher paying wages. Low retention rates suggest that colleges must replace a student who leaves, which requires more financial resources that could be used in other areas of education. Researchers, to-date, have focused on what works in retention from a theoretical viewpoint and have focused on the university’s perception rather than from successful students’ perceptions Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Brower, 1992; Stage, 1989; Tinto, 1986; 1993 (as

cited in Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000). The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge in the community of learning in higher education.

Significance of Study

This research study is significant to the body of knowledge of student retention in higher education. According to Braxton, McKinney, and Reynolds (2006), college student departure occupies the attention and concerns of institutional practitioners, state policymakers, and scholars. For more than 70 years, student retention and the factors that contribute to students leaving higher educational institutions have been a focus of empirical-based research (Bean, 1980, 1982; Cabrera, Stampen, & Hansen, 1990; Rootman, 1972; St. John & Noell, 1989). Even though student retention is being explored, it is also a constant topic on President Obama's reform agenda. Colleges and universities continue to struggle with formulating solutions to this problem.

According to Ventra (2009), for each student who leaves a college, there is a loss of revenue. This loss is not limited to tuition dollars for the college. It also includes loss in revenue for the student, his or her family, and the country. When a student drops out instead of earning a college degree, it limits their economic opportunity (Ventra, 2009).

Summary

For this consensual qualitative study, I examined the perceptions of social work graduates and the factors that affected retention at a historically Black university in the South. This particular study adds to the body of knowledge on student retention by investigating participants who have completed their degrees. The data, which I gathered

through the consensual qualitative research model, may be used to develop a retention plan for the Department of Social Work.

Tinto's (1975) internationalist theory of college student departure provides the theoretical framework for this study. It indicates that various individual characteristics have a role in the college student's departure process. I also explored Tinto's (1986) theory of student departure, which addresses incoming college students and their specific intentions regarding college attendance.

This study fills a void in the literature by exploring retention from BSW graduates' perception. Few researchers have explored this topic from a student's perspective. This research study is organized into five sections. Section 1 included information regarding the problem, purpose of study, research questions, theoretical framework, and other related information. In Section 2, I review the scholarly literature related to the presented problem statement. In Section 3, I describe the methodology, including research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Section 4 includes data analysis and research findings. Section 5 contains an overview of the study, conclusion, and recommendations for future research.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relating to what works in student retention. The chapter also discusses the history of retention and the theoretical framework upon which the research study is based. Literature reviewed for this chapter included peer-reviewed journals and statistical reports from the proposed university and other universities that have demonstrated effective retention strategies.

Literature Search Strategy

In conducting my literature review, I used Google Scholar, NC Live, and the Walden Library. I used Academic Search, ERIC, Education Research Complete, Education from Sage, and ProQuest Central in my search for references for the theoretical and conceptual basis of my proposed research. First, I researched the theoretical framework of retention and reviewed the history of different theorists that Tinto's (1975) internationalist theory of college student departure related to.

In developing and reviewing concepts by reading peer-reviewed literature, I constructed my literature review and reviewed key search concepts such as: *student retention, retention from a student's perception, HBCU retention, and historical overview of retention, retention, and success of first-year programs*. There is a barrier in current research that relates to students' perceptions of what works in retention to retain students and decrease the dropout rate at the targeted HBCU. In addition, I also reviewed dissertations relating to students' retentions at HBCU's. In combination with journal references, I also reviewed retention reports and statistical reports from the identified

university. During research review, there was a lack of literature that relates to what works in retention at HBCUs. I found literature relating to African American males and retention issues in higher education. This researcher's intent is to add to the body of literature relating to retention and students' perceptions of what works in retention to decrease the dropout rate from a BSW graduates' perceptions.

Introduction to the Literature

According to Reason (2009), students elect to leave college before the completion of their degree, which has been studied for over 70 years. Astin (1975) identified six factors that affect the degree completion of a student: residence, campus environment, employment, financial aid, college characteristics, and student institutional fit. The attempt of this research examined the cause of student dropout, examined issues, and developed strategies to reduce the number of students who leave before obtaining their degree. According to Jones and Braxton (2009), while research has produced literature regarding retention and dropout rates, statistics indicate that there is very little research relating to understanding students' perceptions of retention and the attempt to increase persistence.

Craig and Ward (2007) noted that finding ways to end the problem of retention and reduce the dropout rate is very important because of the money invested by both institutions and individual students. This section reviews the history of social work education and the identified university's Social Work Department. In addition, it highlights the importance of obtaining a social work degree for the profession of social work, retention theories, and causes to why students drop out. Furthermore, this section

discusses retention and current strategies relating to what is effective in helping to improve retention and dropout rates of college students.

Historical Framework of Social Work Education

Reid and Edwards (2006) stated, “Social work as it is practiced in the United States (US), is a bit over 100 years old, originating in the late 19th century relating to the Charity Organization Society and Settlement House Movements” (p. 461). The National Association of Social Workers (1996; as cited in Reid & Edwards, 2006) noted, “The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (p. 461). The Council on Social Work Education (1994; as cited in Reid & Edwards, 2006) stated, “The profession of social work is committed to the enhancement of human well-being and to the alleviation of poverty and oppression” (p. 461). The social work profession in the United States exists due to the comprehensive structure of social work education represented in the hundreds of colleges and universities and their various social work programs, departments, and schools (Reid & Edwards, 2006).

First-generation pioneers in social work education included Anna Dawes who was a community leader in Springfield, Maryland and who stressed her concern for organized training for charity workers in a paper she presented at the 7th Section of the International Conference of Charities, Correction, and Philanthropy. According to Reid and Edwards (2006), Mary Richmond, the general secretary of Baltimore Charity Organization Society, presented a paper to the National Conference of Charities and

Correction and stressed the need for a formal training academy "in applied philanthropy," based on a program of staff training which she had developed (p. 470). Mary Richmond emphasized the need for formal training that focused on practical work. According to Meier (as cited in Reid & Edwards, 2006), in 1898, the New York Charity Organization Society organized a summer training program for charity workers who were considered well doers to help with society issues.

Due to the efforts of early pioneers, social work education programs were born in Boston, New York, and St. Louis. The vision of these social work programs were described in a report by the National Conference Committee on Training for Social Workers. Social Work training programs continued to expand throughout the years and led to the enactment in 1911 of the Association of Training Schools for Professional Social Work and organization of 17 charter members and two schools in Canada (Reid & Edwards, 2006). According to Reid and Edwards (2006), in 1919, formal curriculum and requirements for student admission procedures were developed; several programs established a 2-year program of study, which moved the social work program from part-time training for employed social workers.

The beginning of the Great Depression in the 1930s created a rapid expansion of existing social work education programs and the origin of new programs. According to Reid & Edwards (2006), in 1930, seven new programs were accredited in private universities and four in public universities, including the University of Puerto Rico. In the 1940s and 1950s, 13 new social work education programs were accredited in public universities and five in private universities; three were in New York City. Ernest Hollis

and Alice Taylor, senior administrators in the Federal Security Agency in 1948, initiated a study of social work education discussing the requirements of public social services relating to administering the public assistance titles of the Social Security Act (Reid & Edwards, 2006).

The outcome of the study report formulated by Hollis and Taylor in 1951 recommended that accreditation of professional social work education programs be limited to two-year graduate programs which helped to highlight the social work field as a profession. The recommendations from the study highlighted social work education devoting more attention to administration, supervision, teaching, and research. The most important outcome of the study was the recommendation that graduate schools of social work, directly with undergraduate academic programs, establish a single undergraduate educational continuum curriculum. The education continuum curriculum was at a junior or senior level, where students would enter into a graduate program that would have a consistent educational base.

Based on the research of Hollis and Taylor, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) was created in 1952 (Reid & Edwards, 2006). CSWE reviews and accredits those undergraduate and graduate programs in Social Work. CSWE sets standards for social work education and promotes the quality of education in social work programs. Zastrow (2009) noted, “Students who attend schools with accredited programs are assured that the quality of their education meets national standards and generally have an advantage in securing employment following graduation from accredited programs” (p. 103). In 1974, accreditation requirements for undergraduate programs were changed

to highlight professional preparation. CSWE requires that an accredited baccalaureate program “shall have as its primary stated educational objective preparation for beginning professional social work practice and preparation of students for graduate professional education in social work” (Zastrow, 2009, p. 107).

History of Identified University

The historically Black college in the South where I conducted this research was founded in North Carolina and affiliated with the Baptist church. It is a private, coeducational, liberal arts university. The university awards undergraduate and graduate level degrees. Recognizing its diverse population, the university is committed to providing this population with a solid educational foundation. The university catalog states its mission is to facilitate student learning, advance knowledge and achievement, to enhance spiritual, ethical values, and transform a diverse community of learners into future world leaders.

Historical overview of the identified university. The founder was a native of Monson, MA, a graduate of Amherst College and Newton Theological Seminary. In 1875, the North Carolina General Assembly granted the university a charter. According to the Department of Social Work Accreditation benchmark at the university, the initial charter view was no pupil or pupils should ever be excluded from the benefits arising therefrom on account of race, color, or previous conditions of servitude. Through the years, until this present time, the university continues to honor this statement by providing excellence in educational opportunities for all citizens without regard to race, creed, religion, or ethnic origin. However, the university fosters special interest in the

education of minorities who have been denied educational opportunities from mainstream American education.

The first building erected on the campus was named after a benefactor in 1871. In 1873, the first dormitory for Black females in the United States was created. In 1968, the building was no longer used as a dormitory; it currently houses offices for the administrative leadership. The Hall, for which the building is known, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Teaching freedmen the disciplines of biblical interpretation and theology was the driving focus of the university upon its founding. However, 15 years later, the institution broadened its vision and the curriculum was revised and expanded. The university was once home to the following schools: The School of Medicine, Law, and Pharmacy. The university's history includes the first four-year medical school for African Americans in the United States. Although these schools cease to exist, the university continues to produce African American professionals and scholars who continuously make abundant contributions for the advancement of American society. Steeped in liberal arts disciplines since 1921, the university maintains its status.

The first African American university president was elected in 1931; he served from 1931 to 1936. The next president, an alumnus of the identified university, was elected president in 1963; he retained this position from 1963 until 1969. The 12th university president served from 1987 until 2003, the university witnessed major growth under his leadership. The slogan, "Strides to Excellence: Why Not the Best," was coined and served as the driving focus for the university. According to the 2008 Department of

Social Work Accreditation Benchmark, the university was recognized for its historical significance. June 2009 witnessed the first female president of the university, a historical achievement. In April of 2011, the university was the victim of a devastating tornado, which contributed to sizeable destruction of many campus buildings (dorms, student center, and other historical landmarks). The university was forced to end the spring semester early, as the living and learning environments were no longer safe. However, the neighboring community, alumni, and the nation came to the aid of the university. Amazingly, the university was able to repair the damaged structures and re-open in a timely manner for the fall 2011 academic school year.

The University without Walls Program was established in October 1971. The concept of learning has no boundaries afforded citizens in select counties an opportunity to obtain affordable education; therefore, six learning centers were opened. Alarmingly, the program enlarged beyond the university's capability to maintain a quality program. In June 1975, the program was halted. However, the university remained committed to educating the masses and in January 1976, the university re-established the program and the concept of delivery of alternative programs of education were developed and the name was changed to Center for Alternative Programs of Education (CAPE). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, CAPE centers sprung up across North Carolina. According to this university's Office of Institutional Research in 2011, the university operated nine centers: Ahoskie, Asheville, Durham, Fayetteville, High Point, Kannapolis, Raleigh, Rocky Mount (Greenville extension), and Wilmington.

History of social work program at the identified university. In 1998, social work was offered as a major at the main campus and at CAPE locations. At that time, the program was established under the Department of Social Sciences. During this initial stage, the program was not accredited and included general social work courses with an optional 128-hour internship. The program was comprised of part-time faculty who possessed social work degrees and taught most of the courses. The program was restructured with the goal of obtaining full accreditation through CSWE during the fall semester, 2000. The first full-time social work faculty was the program director. Under his leadership, the program was revised for accreditation standards. The social work faculty continued to flourish; three full-time faculty were added in 2003, and a director of field education was hired. In spring 2004, the current social work majors were provided an option of following the old curriculum (field education not mandatory) or changing to the new curriculum, based on CSWE's accreditation standards.

This was a time of enormous growth for the program; the Board of Trustees approved a status change and the program's degree was changed from a Bachelor of Arts (BA) to a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). In 2004, all students entering the program were required to follow the new curriculum; many courses were deleted from the curriculum and replaced with newer courses that were more relevant. In February 2005, the program submitted to CSWE its Letter of Institutional Intent along with other supporting documentation for accreditation consideration. According to the 2013 Department of Social Work Accreditation Benchmark, in an attempt to better serve the program and its students, social work was withdrawn as a major from all but five CAPEs;

the only CAPE sites offering social work as a major are: Ahoskie, Durham, Raleigh, Fayetteville, and Rocky Mount (Greenville extension).

As the program continued on the course of growth, five full-time faculty were added in fall 2004 (including faculty for three CAPE locations: Durham, Fayetteville, and Rocky Mount [Greenville extension]). In January 2005, the program was granted acceptance to pursue accreditation from CSWE; the Benchmark I document was approved. In 2006, the program completed Benchmark II that included the Field Manual and the Social Work Standards Handbook. Timely and accurate submission of Benchmark II afforded the program another commissioner's visit. In May 2006, the first cohort of social work majors who had pursued the new CSWE-approved curriculum graduated. In October 2006, additional supporting data was submitted to CSWE for review and consideration; the program was approved for its second year of candidacy in January 2007. Benchmark III was submitted to CSWE in February 2007. By October 2008, the program was granted full accreditation (with no recommendations) by CSWE. According to the 2013 Department of Social Work Accreditation Benchmark, in November 2008, the program admitted its first students who underwent an intense, yet professionally developed admissions process.

After a successful tenure as a great leader and visionary, the first program director retired after delivering a first-class, fully accredited social work program, effective June 2009. The director of field education was appointed to serve as program director. In September 2009, the Program's status changed and is now recognized as the Department of Social Work and the field director immediately became department chair. The newly

organized department reports to the dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies. The program would go through reaccreditation within four years; new and rigorous accreditation standards had to be followed. New syllabi and curriculum had to be implemented in a short span of time. Unfortunately, the tornado interrupted the gathering of critical assessment data; therefore, CSWE granted the program an extension for submitting documentation for reaccreditation. For the past few years, the faculty and staff have been eagerly compiling necessary documentation for reaccreditation. The Department of Social Work was reaccredited in 2013 for eight years.

The university realized the importance of an accredited program in social work education. Gibson (2012) noted that the profession of social work requires professionals who have an array of knowledge and skills. The importance of social work education produces such professionals that begin as social work students. There is a need for competent and confident social work professionals to enter the workforce. Basnett and Sheffield (2010) suggested that while the majority of students are assessed as competent and go on to complete their social work degrees, some students who are not considered competent and fail to complete the requirements for a social work education become a significant concern for social work education.

Importance of Social Work Education

Social work is a profession that empowers people in the process of helping individuals (micro), families and groups (macro), and organizations and communities (macro; Zastrow, 2013). Social workers are educated to be able to understand the environments of clients and to be able to influence life situations of clients in need. The

focus of equality and social justice has been the overarching theme for the social work profession. Social work education has had an increased focus on the concept of human rights and social change that is also a priority for education at Walden University. The entry level of the social work profession is called generalist practice (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2011, 2014). A generalist practitioner is involved with the helping profession, such as assisting a homeless family, a sexually abused child, a pregnant teenager, or an older adult who is sick and unable to care for herself any longer (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2011, 2014).

Generalist social workers are trained to know an array of skills due to the amount of situations they may encounter. A social worker is expected to be nonjudgmental and open to any situation they might come across in their practice. Barsky (2006) noted that “social work is a profession that draws people from a broad range of socioeconomic and ethno cultural backgrounds” (p. 32). The entry level for the professional social work practice is the Bachelor of Social Work Degree (BSW). Ambrosino, Heffernan, Shuttlesworth, and Ambrosino (2008) found social work students entering the social work profession at this level must complete their educational requirements for an undergraduate degree accredited by CSWE. Students seek a social work degree with the vision to practice as a professional social worker. Schools of social work education are professional institutions, which require that the education process that students receive in social work follow the standards and guidelines for the profession.

Barsky (2006) noted the entry level of the profession, generalist practice, and most social work education programs offer an education conducive to intensive and

specialized training upon completion. Social work education is linked with professional social work practice. However, many students who complete social work education degrees also use their skills and knowledge in other careers and scholarly areas. Social work education places very high respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people (Ambrosino et al., 2008). The primary focus of social work education is to train social workers to advance human needs and potential through promotion of social justice and social functioning (Barsky, 2006).

Resilience of Social Work Undergraduate Social Work Education

Due to the stressful areas of social issues that social workers deal with in the profession of social work, it is very important to build resilience and well-being in students during their educational experience. Social work educators are responsible for developing professionals who are able to cope with the emotional demands of the job. Resilience in the social work profession begins with the completion of a social work degree (Grant & Kinman, 2012). According to Grant and Kinman (2012), studies conducted on the issue found a high level of stress and burnout amongst social workers (Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Lloyd, King, & Chenoweth, 2002; Stalker, Mandell, Frensch, Harvey, & Wright, 2007). Research findings indicated that social work trainees and staff are exposed to high levels of stress, which is hard for them to disclose to practice educators (Maidment, 2003; Barlow & Hall, 2007). Grant and Kinman (2012) conducted a study geared to explore the emotional and social compliance that underline resilience in trainee social workers and the extent to which resilience is related to psychological well-being.

A sample of 290 students who were undergraduate social work degree majors completed a range of online questionnaires in relationship to the study; 69% were first-year students, and the remaining were 39% students in their second year. Emotional intelligence was measured using a 33-item scale developed by Schutte et al. (1997), reflective ability was assessed by a 23-item scale developed by Aukes et al. (2007) and empathy was measured using a 21-item scale adapted from a measure developed by Davis (1983). The results of the data revealed students who were more socially confident and reflective tend to be more resilient to stress. Social work students who were more resilient were also more psychologically healthy. The importance of social work resilience affects social work competence and enhances the well-being of a social work trainee. Resilience and personal well-being enhances potential personal growth in performance and retention in the field of social work (Grant & Kinman, 2012).

Further research discusses the resilience of social workers and social work trainees in the field of social work and social work education. Milner and Criss (2006) stated that social work students experience multiple stressors that impact their ability to effectively learn, complete social education, and practice social work. Wilks and Spivey (2010) noted social work students may perceive more stress during her/his training in social work education as opposed to a trained social work practitioner during her/his professional career. During a social work career, a social worker will face several different stressful situations when it comes to working with different clients. However, the process of learning social work skills is also stressful because of demanding coursework and field placements where individuals must practice demonstrating skills

they have learned during the educational experience. Milner and Criss (2006) explored retention issues relating to the general population of students compared to the stress for social work students include finances, relationships, life-stage transitions, time management, and academia. Several researchers (Hudd et al., 2000; Humphrey & McCarthy, 1988; Sarafino & Ewing, 1999) examined and found that college students experience significant levels of stress, which hinders their ability to succeed and complete their undergraduate studies. These stresses are exacerbated by factors such as having to obtain outside employment, poor time management skills, and the stress of acquiring large loans to stay in college.

These stressors affect the completion of the Bachelor of Social Work degree (Milner & Criss, 2006). There is research, as cited in Tobin and Carson (1994), that has examined the factors that lead to stress and lack of students completing their degrees; however, little research examined student stress that might hinder the completion of a BSW degree. A qualitative study conducted by Milner and Criss (2006) examined student stress and gathered students' own stories regarding the way they experienced stress and the impact it had on their degree completion. The main focus of the study was to explore students' perceptions of the primary sources of stress and how it impacted their academic performance and sense of well-being. Researchers Milner and Criss (2006) conducted a convenience sample of undergraduate social work students enrolled in two institutions in the Southeast.

The two institutions included a private liberal arts college with 2,300 students and the other institution was a large university with about 43,000 students. Social work

students enrolled from both schools; students ranged from 18-24 years of age, with 6% of the participants included in the study being male. Students spoke freely about their perceptions of student-led interviews. Students talked about their stress level and being overwhelmed in the social work education program. The study's results outlined experiences which students discussed relating to sources of stress in their social work education. Juggling roles, attending school, maintaining their families, financial pressure, and time management were stated to be overwhelming issues. Students noted that stress had a negative impact on their academic performance. The perceptions of these social work majors indicated that stress was a common theme that resonated throughout the students' samples. Social work education and the coursework was a unique stressor and was a harmful effect on their academic performance, their health, and sense of well-being.

The study also highlighted ways in which students coped with stress that affected their completion of a social work degree. Students identified several coping strategies such as using stress management techniques, developing better time management, being involved with their peers, and connection to family and religious community. The study also created awareness among the researchers relating to the impact stress had on students in their lives. The role of faculty as mentors and advisors also helped to improve student stress, student success, and the presence of such support made a difference between students persisting in their studies and dropping out of school (Milner & Criss, 2006).

Historical Framework of Retention

Kiser and Price (2008) reviewed over 50 years of literature generated in the area of college student persistence and retention. Reason (2008) found early researchers, Astin, 1964; Bayer, 1968; and Vaughan, 1968 explored the area of retention and student persistence predating 1970. According to Caison (2005), “Tinto’s theory of student integration is the most widely cited research regarding literature on student retention” (p. 427). Caison (2005) stated that Tinto’s research platform grew out of the study of Durkheim (1951) on suicidal behavior and his view that suicidal behavior was the result of the inability to integrate socially and intellectually into society. Tinto (1975) related the withdrawal of students to the view of Durkheim (1951) and noted that students who leave school had traits of suicide that related to student’s attrition and the inadequate social and academic integration into the culture of the university.

According to Metz (2004), Van Gennep’s (1960) rites of passage theory which discussed the significances of transitional stages in one’s life provided a foundation for Tinto’s (1975) student departure theory, noting that a person moves from one place or stage to another by going through certain rites of passage which are celebrated as socially significant events. The celebrated event(s) that a person is a part of helps the person to integrate into social settings, which can serve as evidence of accomplishment and acceptance. Another early influence of Tinto’s theoretical development was Spady (1970), who also adapted a theory of student retention departure from the works of Durkheim’s suicide theory (Metz, 2004, p. 192). William Spady’s 1970 model stated that a student’s personal attributes interact with environmental influences. His model was

from a sociological approach based on student interaction including environmental influences. Spady's theory of student retention suggested that students have certain characteristics and goals, which relate to their academic performance in college and these influence students' behavior. Spady was one of the first sociologists to develop a theory of student persistence model.

According to McQueen (2009), "Durkheim's application of societal model of suicide used statistical evidence to prove that suicide rates vary by social groups and infers the cause as the collective relationship of a group to society in terms of high or low integration" (p. 76). Durkheim identified four types of suicide: egoistic, anomic, altruistic, and fatalistic. Egoistic suicide occurs when solidarity and integration are low. Anomic suicide occurs more under solidarity conditions that arise from a lack of regulation rather than integration. Altruistic and fatalistic suicides involved high solidarity arising from high integration or regulations. Tinto's views of student engagement arose from the research of Durkheim's application of the suicide model and related dropping out for some people as a form of altruistic suicide, a result of high solidarity and high integration into pre-existing social niche. The applications of student engagement and the suicide model analogy relate to the theory that students self-destruct by leaving a university and in effect have no future. Astin (1970) completed one of the earliest studies related to his model of student involvement theory. His student involvement theory suggests that students become involved in college and their levels of involvement in the institution's environment affects the student's potential and drive to persist in college.

Students tend to learn by becoming involved. Astin (1975) advanced his research by identifying six factors that may affect the retention of students such as residence, campus environment, employment, financial aid, college characteristics, and student institutional fit. Several retention theories have been developed and established to explain the attrition, persistence, and retention of college students. Retention theories have concerned themselves with such factors as the institutions' policies on student commitment, campus climate, and student involvement with peer and faculty (Kiser & Price, 2008, p. 422). Furthermore, Kiser and Price (2008) suggest Tinto is noted for his research relating to student persistence and theory of student integration. His 1975 interactionist theory stated that students have an individual set of traits that determine their commitment to the college or university and their commitment to completing their degree. These traits and their level of commitment relate to their social and academic integration within their institution. Tinto (2007) noted student retention became an issue in higher education 50 years ago and the issue was viewed through the discipline of psychology.

Retention was viewed as a problem of students lacking individual characteristics of motivation, skills, and attributes. In addition, overall academic and social integration increases the level of the students' commitments to complete their degrees. Students who chose not to pursue their degree were seen as failing themselves, not the institution failing them as students. Tinto's student departure theory originated with his collaboration with Cullen's student attrition. The collaboration produced a theoretical model of attrition and persistence that highlighted the following areas:

Pre-entry attributes which relates to prior schooling and family background, goals/commitment noting student aspirations and institutional goals, institutional experience, academic faculty interaction, co-curricular involvement, peer group interaction, integration academic and social goals/commitment intentions, external commitments, outcome departure decision, transfer, and dropout. (Metz, 2004, p. 192)

Tinto's collaboration with Cullen spearheaded his 1975 student departure theory, which incorporated the six components devised from his collaboration. Tinto's 1975 student departure theory discussed that students arrive at college with certain expectations and aspirations. Furthermore, when students are not integrated into the college environment, degree completion can be affected. In addition, institutional factors such as faculty-student, peer group, and extracurricular involvement help to shape a student's progression through college. Tinto (1997) found that academic involvement led to increased social integration. When academic and social interaction increases, a student's persistence to complete college increases. A student's decision to graduate or to drop out is influenced by their level of persistence. Theorists continued to develop theories relating to retention. Bean and Metzner (1985) "developed the academic integration model that included the following: student's background, money, and finance, grades and academic performance, social factors, institutional fit and commitment, and intentions" (p. 10).

The most important factor for students when it relates to student retention is institutional commitment. According to Metz (2004), John Bean developed a casual

model theory related to organizational behavior, the reasons for student persistence, and attrition that reviewed a student's background and environment inside the institution and outside of the institution and identified five areas that affect a student's decision to leave or persist: background, organizational, environment, intention to leave attitudinal, and outcome variables. In addition, in the 1980s, several other researchers such as Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini investigated the influences on student attrition and student persistence. They also reviewed the student involvement theory from the perspective of student interaction with faculty and peers.

According to Metz (2004), Pascarella and Terenzini researched and recommended that future studies relating to student persistence include race and gender as important factors. They also suggested that further research should focus on the interrelationship between social and academic integration and how it relates to retention, persistence, and goal attainment. Metz (2004) stated that Pascarella and Terenzini moved beyond Tinto's single institution model and began to focus on interaction between faculty and students and suggested that the amount of time that faculty spent with students in and out of the classroom encouraged student intent and persistence. Student retention continues to be an important area of study in higher education. Tinto (2007) noted there has also been a great deal of work regarding theoretical models that have developed a position in the research world of retention. The research reviewed has even developed a sophisticated understanding of the complex realities that affect students leaving or persisting in their academic studies. Cadet (2008) noted student retention and persistence is associated with merit and other factors which makes it an extremely

important area relating to the reason why African American students leave college before earning a degree, a significant research area.

Historical Overview of HBCUs

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) are distinct and are a sense of pride for African American people. Prior to the Civil War, there were no universities with the mission to educate and train Black people. Lincoln and Cheyney Universities in Pennsylvania and Wilberforce University in Ohio were the only options for freed Black men and women to obtain a college education (Gasman & Tudico, 2008). Churches and missionary associations for educating Blacks regarding religious education and training (Albritton, 2012) initiated many HBCUs. HBCUs were not founded just for educating Blacks as a tool to obtain jobs; they also played a huge part in improving social liberation and discrimination for Blacks. Toldson (2013) found 103 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) educating 135,722 male and 238,685 female students across the United States from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (Institute of Education Sciences & National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). HBCUs have played a major role in developing educational opportunities for underrepresented groups. African Americans have been able to make significant contributions to the economic, intellectual, and cultural aspects due to their education at an HBCU.

Today, research has demonstrated that HBCU graduates enjoy greater financial success in their careers (Price, Spriggs, & Swinton, 2011), and U.S. rankings consistently show that HBCUs are among the top producers of students who persist through graduate and professional schools (Fletcher, 2013). Jawando (2010) noted President Obama

signed an executive order to continue the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the role he needed them to play in order to help him to achieve his goal of having the United States lead the world among college graduates by 2020. He also discussed his commitment to HBCUs by announcing his plan to increase spending on HBCUs by \$850 million over the next 10 years. William Jawando, of the White House Office of Public Engagement, also noted that President Obama's 2011 budget called for an annual increase in spending on Pell Grants; important because 50% of HBCU students qualify for Pell Grants (Jawando, 2010).

President Obama in his second term has vowed to allow federal actions to help HBCUs strengthen their efforts to recruit, retain, and graduate larger numbers of students (Toldson, 2013). In order for this projected goal to work, the White House Initiative on HBCUs will have to work closely with the new White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans to bolster efforts to prepare the 8,550,344 Black children currently enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade in the United States (Institute of Education Sciences & National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

HBCU Retention Issues

Johnson (2013) suggested that HBCUs have also seen low graduation rates, a challenge for their success. Many students who attend HBCUs come from low-income families and a number of them are first-generation college students. These students are at-risk for dropping out of college not only because of academics, but also for the lack of financial resources (Johnson, 2013). African American students have a unique need and experience when it comes to retention and carrying out the academic responsibilities of

degree completion. Gilliam and Kritsonis (2006) noted that retention is a major factor in an institution's financial stability and it is extremely important when it comes to the lack of African American students' degree completion. African American students complete college at the lowest rate compared to other ethnic sub groups (Gilliam & Kritsonis, 2006, p. 2). As cited by Seidman (2005), Schwartz and Washington (2002) state that African American women face many obstacles in the completion of their college degree such as low levels of parental support, limited resources to pay for college, low self-esteem, and low social expectations for going to college and completing a college degree. Many African American students are first generation college students who come from low-income families and cannot afford to pay to stay in college. Financial aid plays an important part in recruitment, retaining, and graduating minority students.

Seidman (2005) noted Landry (2002) explained that an administrator at HBCUs stated that the main reason that students leave college is financial issues. When students do not have the ability to acquire assistance or support or services needed to overcome the obstacles of college, their survival rate is affected. These students may drop out and obtain employment or enroll in a college on a part-time basis. Landry (2002) stated to overcome these problems mentoring programs were developed where faculty met with small groups of students to help them deal with institutional barriers and degree completion. Furthermore, Flowers (2004) noted the importance of pre-entry and precollege characteristics of African American students have been reviewed in the body of literature that has researched African American students' retention issues. Several research studies (Flowers, 2003; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999, 2003; Hood, 1992; Kobra,

1992; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schwartz & Washington, 2002) examined African American students' background and variables relating to pre-entry attributes, goals and commitments, and institutional experiences in direct correlation to retention. Several measures (Flowers, 2004) were used to explore and understand African American students' background and variables relating to pre-entry attributes, goals and commitments, and institutional experiences. Some examples are the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) to assess educational outcome and student involvement, the five CSEQ Likert scales that consisted of the Understanding Arts and Humanities scale, the Personal and Social Development scale, the Understanding Science Technology scale, the Thinking and Writing scale, and the Vocational Preparation scale. In addition, the author also explored measuring student involvement using an eight CSEQ Likert scale including the library Experience with Faculty scale, the Course Learning scale, the Art, Music, and Theater scale, the Personal Experience scale, the Student Union scale, the Athletic and Recreation Facilities scale, and the Clubs and Organization scale. The results of the study showed that in-class and out-of-class experiences have a positive impact on the development and educational outcomes of African American students.

According to Flowers (2004), Schwartz and Washington conducted a study in 2002 of 229 African American freshmen who attended a historically Black college in the Southeastern region and researched how the extent of precollege factors and college experiences influenced student retention and academic performance. The study measured the degree to which students stay in college until the second semester of their first year. Furthermore, Schwartz and Washington (2002) found that students' high school rank and

students' perception of their social adjustment on campus were strong indicators of retention. Flowers (2004) stated, "Students whose high school ranks were lower and students who felt that they were a part of the social fabric of the institution were more likely to return the spring semester" (p. 28).

Gilliam and Kritsonis (2006) suggested that historically Black college and universities (HBCUs) lack research relating to student persistence and retention. Historical retention theories lack the understanding of several factors that influence the levels of retention for African American students. According to Gilliam and Kritsonis (2006), enrollment, retention, student development, and graduation of African American students is contingent on six factors: active recruitment, flexibility of admission requirements, availability of sound financial aid packages, favorable institutional climate, mentoring programs, and attitudes of African American students. Factors that influence African American retention according to Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) relate to having a mentor. These researchers noted:

Mentoring facilitates students' academic and social involvement. Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that mentoring may influence an individual satisfaction with college. To the extent that this is true, mentoring would directly or indirectly influence a student's intentions and, consequently, persistence retention decisions. (p. 73)

The research of Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) analyzed the relationship between mentoring and African American students' satisfaction from a research-focused relationship versus personal-professional relationships. The results showed that research

focused relationships with a faculty member had a positive effect on satisfaction with college students as opposed to the personal based relationship; it did not have a positive effect on student satisfaction of college itself. In conclusion, for African American students financial issues, academic preparation, and the responsibility of being the first one in their family to attend college are factors that affect student retention (Seidman, 2005, p. 17).

Student Perceptions Relating to Retention and Success

Student success and persistence relate to various areas that help to retain students in college. In addition, retention has been studied as stated in the literature review for several years. However, there is a barrier in literature from the student's perception, which discusses what students feel helped to retain them in college. According to Zepke, Leach, and Butler (2011), researched literature focuses on what and how higher education institutions contribute to student success and retention. There is a substantial amount of literature that relates to what students feel helps in their success and retention.

In the study by Zepke et al. (2011), a number of case studies involving nine higher education institutions and the literature reviewed suggested that researching student success requires gathering more than one source of data. The study used teachers and students' interviews. The survey used a forced choice questionnaire and examined students' perceptions relating to success. The researcher in each case-study institution distributed the survey to first-time enrolled students. The researchers received 1,246 responses. The conclusion of the study suggested that students who integrate academic cultures, adapting institutional cultures to the diversity of students enrolled, assisted them

to develop the necessary skills to succeed (Zepke et al., 2011, p. 239). When students are also affected by stressors such as health, family, work or financial issues, students engage less in their studies, which has a negative effect with their studies. The study highlighted internal and external factors that educators need to review, for example, there was a confirmation that success is affected by noninstitutional factors and subpopulations are affected in different ways.

What Works In Retention

Retention Among Freshman Students

Ventra (2009) noted that only 58% of entering freshman follow through with degree completion from the same college within six years. Strategies from colleges and universities that help retain students in their first year include student support activities such as advising, tutoring, and mentoring. The end of the first year of college is affected by the interaction of administration, faculty, and other students at college. Several other factors such as classroom experiences, dormitory living experiences, engagement with faculty and other students, and extracurricular activities help to increase student retention. Students make a retention decision relating to four levels: return to the same college, leave this college and transfer to another college in the same university, leave this college and transfer to another university, and drop out of college (Ventra, 2009, p. 19).

The first year represents a stressful transition for college students who have to cope with a new environment and emotional stressors in college. Some students cannot handle the transition and decide to leave higher education during or at the end of their first year. Morrow and Ackermann (2012) conducted a study of 960 first-year

undergraduates that completed an online survey relating to their experience in their first year of college. The Sense of Belonging scale and the Academic Attitudes scale were used to test the students' persistence and retention. Students who reported more support from faculty expressed a sense of belonging and a desire to persist in the university.

Copeland and Levesque-Bristol (2011) conducted a study that included administering a survey to 390 first-year programs at Missouri State University. Students enrolled in the university and enrolled in the university's Introduction to University Life and Introduction to Psychology took part in the study. Students were asked to participate in an online questionnaire, which consisted of 33 yes/no, and open-ended items, which they created and 82-scaled items, which came from five validated measures. The study aimed to examine how the university might increase student success and improve retention. The data collected was qualitative and several suggestions were made on how universities might improve the needs of student learning outcomes, success, and retention.

Brown (2012) conducted a study that consisted of a survey to examine retention issues from a freshmen orientation period. The purpose of the study was to develop the Freshman Orientation Survey for the College of Education and Health Professions. The survey items were based on Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975), postsecondary task force reports, existing survey instruments, and significant variables listed in the peer-reviewed literature. Family issues such as financial and environmental commitment were a part of the issues relating to retention. Students revealed that financial situations were a problem when they had to work, go to school, and keep up a certain grade point average

to keep a merit scholarship. Parental involvement was another issue that affected the retention of freshmen. Students who have controlling parent issues and parents who were involved in college decisions affected the completion of degree requirements (Brown, 2012). Institutional pressures such as students having to take education requirements which they felt were not conducive to their educational programs had a less positive perception on the learning climate and environment for the student. Clear expectations of what the university experience would be like helped to create a learning environment that was positive. Students influenced by an inspiring teacher increased the perception of a positive learning climate and increased a student's view of the university.

Recommendations and outcomes of the Brown (2012) study suggest that one way a university can reduce the financial pressures for students is to offer more on-campus work programs which allow students to work in exchange for tuition reimbursement or stipends. Parents who exert external control by making decisions can really hinder the educational experience. The study suggests that universities can combat the influence of external pressures on students by spending time in orientation seminars or introductory letters to educate parents about the negative effects of control. When institutions relate course material to individual students' interests, students feel that the assigned course is beneficial to their course of study during the duration of their education (Brown, 2012). Universities can also help to reduce this form of external pressure on students by reviewing with parents in orientation the negative effect that control can have on student retention. The study outcome also suggested that universities could improve perceptions of the learning climate and retention by establishing clear expectations with students.

In addition, findings suggested that students could benefit if universities would encourage some of their most passionate and patient instructors to teach introductory level courses and thus help to engage freshman. Students who feel encouraged rather than pressured, who are offered choices, who have fulfilling relationships, and who feel competent in their roles as students have increased motivation to succeed and are more likely to take responsibility to complete their degrees (Brown, 2012). First-year programs have become the level of intervention for several universities and colleges when it relates to retaining students.

Ward and Commander (2012) suggested that first-year programs focus on issues such as adjustment to college, instruction in learning techniques, and interactions among students and faculty leading to student success. Initiatives for encouraging first-year student persistence included extended welcome weeks, orientation programs, freshman seminars, expanded residential life program, workshops, tutorials, and peer advisement and/or mentoring (Ward & Commander, 2012, p. 64). Freshman Learning Communities (FLC) is a retention effort that several academic learning communities have installed on more and more campuses. Ward and Commander (2012) found that there are four common models of learning communities: linked or clustered courses, cohorts in large courses or FIGs (Freshman Interest Groups), team-taught or coordinated studies programs, and residence-based learning communities that link to residential programs.

Ward and Commander (2012) conducted a study to examine the qualities of learning communities at a large public institution in the Southeast using quantitative and qualitative data. The study also used triangulation and multiple methodologies to explore

a strong research base. The learning community examined used a cluster model, which they hoped would strengthen a student's connections to their teachers and subject matter. Groups of 25 students enrolled in blocks of five courses and four content areas participated in three-hour new orientation courses. The study found that there was strong faculty participation and the program has experienced steady growth for 11 freshman-learning communities with 225 students in 1999 to 60 FLCs with 1,500 students in 2008.

Ward and Commander (2012) reported that after collecting quantitative data that related to the national findings on the impact of freshman learning communities and comparing FLC cohorts of students beginning in 1999 to non-FLC students each semester through 2007, there was an improvement and effective long-term results relating to academic achievement, retention, and graduation rates. The fall 2006 FLC cohort had a retention rate of 84.26% compared to 79.4% for non-FLC students. The trend continued in the fall 2000 cohort and the fall 2001 cohort. The overarching results of the study reported from the Office of Institutional Research noted that there was an increase of academic achievement, retention, and graduation rates for freshman learning cohorts. The quantitative and qualitative findings from the study supported the value and importance of learning communities and improving student retention.

According to Crockett (2011), "Nearly 95% of incoming freshmen express a strong desire to finish a college degree; however, chances are, about half won't make it" (p. 7). The 2012 National Freshman Attitudes Report is an annual national research study that explores the attitudes that influence student success. The report studied about 94 first-year college students at 315 colleges and universities throughout the nation that

surveyed students during the academic year of 2011-2012. The attitudinal survey consisted of 100 questions that students completed online or using a traditional paper-and-pencil. The survey instrument used in the study was the College Student Inventory Form B (CSI-B), which is a part of the Retention Management System Plus from Noel-Levitz, an enrollment management-consulting firm.

The motivational assessment reviews barriers and opportunities for students as they transition to college. Of the survey participants, 45.4% came from four-year private institutions, 32.1% from four-year public institutions, and 22.6 % from two-year institutions (Noel-Levitz, 2012, p. 3). The average age of the student was 20.4 and 58.5% were Caucasian, 20.2% African American, 12.2% Hispanic, 3.8% Asian, 1.1% American Indian, and 3.8% multiethnic (Noel-Levitz, 2012, p. 3). The annual study suggested that freshman attitudes and motivation are an important part of the college completion rate and retention. The study revealed that identifying differences in attitudes and persistence by subgroups on campus could help institutions to create an individualized retention plan rather than a “one size fits all” approach. This information can also help develop targeted interventions to focus on influencing negative student attitudes and behaviors toward goal attainment in college.

In addition, the importance of student engagement in first-year programs can raise the tolerance in attitude toward college from the first to second term. In first-year programs, students are encouraged to engage with their instructors and fellow students inside and outside of the classroom. The study also offered participating institutions data that identified patterns of student motivation and gave insight about the belief systems

and behaviors students brought to their college early. These beliefs of tolerance such as previous experiences at home can have an effect on students' emotional attitudes and retention. To help students reach completion and graduation, it is critical to meet the holistic needs of all types of students through a measured, plan-filled, and data-informed approach.

Effective Strategies to Combat Retention

Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) noted that retention affects the entire community of learning on campus. Members of the college communities need to be committed to the welfare of the student and have a stake in the success of policies and practices that reduce student departure. Several college institutions have committed to researching ways to combat the problem of student retention. Noel-Levitz is a higher education consulting firm that focuses on enrollment and student success. For over 40 years, the agency has been committed to helping institutions meet their goals for enrollment and student success. The Noel-Levitz Student Retention and College Completion Practices Report (2013) conducted a study and an electronic poll of campus officials at four-year and two-year institutions, private and public, in the spring of 2013. The findings of the study were that academic support programs, first-year student programs, honor programs, and mandatory advising emerged as the top-ranked, most effective strategies and tactics across higher education (Noel-Levitz, 2013). Programs that were targeted and designed for students of color were rated in the top practice in 2013 for two-year public institutions. In conclusion, less than half of respondents across

institution types reported having a current, written plan for student retention and college completion that they felt good about (Noel-Levitz, 2013).

Noel-Levitz worked in conjunction with several schools and formulated case studies to highlight what the institutions did to combat retention issues. Delaware State University (DSU) is a four-year, historically Black public university and was ranked 15th among colleges in US News and World Report. In 2005, the university began restructuring enrollment strategies for recruitment and retention of students because of a serious decline in enrollment. Delaware State worked with Noel-Levitz Enrollment Management Council (EMC) to create teams and committees and implemented goals and initiatives. In 2010, the university began to implement predictive modeling to help improve the recruited student population. The data for the predictive modeling tool was an instrument for the DSU's tele-counseling team in prioritizing 9,000 applicants who received follow-up calls and targeted 3,900 admits that were more likely to enroll. DSU conducted a "price elasticity" study kept the cost of tuition in 2008, 2009, 2010 the same, with little increase for tuition. The university also reviewed a new strategy in the financial aid area and targeted students' financial aid packages being submitted earlier.

According to Noel-Levitz, DSU also implemented several other strategies to help combat enrollment and retention:

- Overhauled new student orientation to include transfer days and parent tracks;
- Created Hornet Days that bus in students to the campus from primary territories;
- Used predictive modeling tools and strategic financial aid research to influence yield, identify students more likely to persist, and to bolster more qualified

student leads at the top of the funnel;

- Incorporated more sophisticated financial aid leveraging each year;
- Connected privately raised funds to retention and enrollment needs;
- Instituted online web applications and payment systems;
- Created innovative Facebook-like concept for admitted students within the university's website;
- Created a predictive model for enrollment goals; and
- Worked with the Delaware Legislature to pass the Inspire scholarship bill that corrected an inequity and provided qualified Delaware residents \$3,000 in-state per year towards tuition to DSU.

DSU proceeds to annually evaluate admissions, financial aid processes, and customer service to improve retention. The university also continues to utilize its comprehensive data information management model that incorporates recruitment goals, financial aid leveraging, creative marketing, and effective retention strategies. Results from DSU strategies have had a long-term effect and outstanding results for the university. Results for DSU included:

- After utilizing predictive modeling for one year, grew the applicant pool by 10% and the admit pool by 14%;
- Increased yield by 27%;
- Increased net tuition revenue by \$4 million;
- Increased the mean total reading and math SAT scores by 25; and

- Increased the retention rate for new freshmen from 64% in 2007 to the present 70.5%. (Noel-Levitz, n.d.)

Delaware State University has been able to increase overall enrollment from 3,000 students to a record enrollment of retained students of 4,178 in 2011-2012.

Fayetteville State University (FSU) is a historically Black university in North Carolina founded in 1867 and state supported in 1877. The university had a one-year retention rate increase of 6 to 17% over a five-year period utilizing the Cheer Scholarship Program. The program is a summer bridge teaching community that was created to assist students who are not prepared for college and come from low-income and underserved backgrounds. The program is a five day a week curricular and cocurricular program intervention that engages with students 12 hours a day. The goals of the program were to strengthen academic preparation, help students adjust to campus life, and develop habits for college life. The rationale for the Cheer Program was that students who are engaged earn better grades and are more likely to persist.

Students are assigned to a community of 20 students who attend class together, participate in weekly, required tutoring sessions, and attend “Wise Choice” workshops that take place in the evenings and weekends and address cocurricular areas relating to students such as ethics, health, wellness, and goal settings. The program increased the retention rate for a Cheer Scholar from 6 to 17% higher than a student who was not a part of the program. During 2005 to 2007, HBCUs averaged a 62% retention rate compared to a 71% rate for Fayetteville State’s Cheer Scholars Program (Noel-Levitz, n.d). In addition, the Cheer Model has been designated as an example for the state system in

which FSU was asked to advise three other institutions in creating similar summer bridge programs. FSU also received money from the state higher education system for the Cheer Scholars Program. Due to retention improvement and the student success efforts, FSU received the Lee Noel and Randi Levitz Retention Excellence Award in 2010.

Southwestern Adventist University increased retention 5% in one year by collaborating with Noel-Levitz's retention consulting firm in developing an effective retention strategy. Southwestern Adventist University in Texas gathered data and developed assessment tools and training for members of the university. The university tripled its goals of improving retention with first-year students who came back in their second year from 58% to 74%, increasing 16%. The interventions of Noel-Levitz helped the university to accelerate the learning curve and improved the university's performance (Noel-Levitz, n.d.). Georgia College and State University also collaborated with Noel-Levitz retention consulting firm to form a retention committee. The committee conducted a student satisfaction research study, evaluated academic advising, and performed a critical analysis of annual return rates of students. The university developed a campus-wide retention plan that addressed barriers to re-enrollment and attrition through active interventions like advisor training, supplementary instruction, and academic support in upper level courses. The university increased its first-year to second-year retention rate and the retention committee formulated a system-wide retention plan as proactive issues that led to negative retention issues.

Financial Issues Relating To Retention

The cost to attend college has increased over the past decade from the 1996-1997 to the 2006-2007 school year increased an average of \$216 per year, an increase of 4.4% after adjusting for inflation (Robb, Moody, & Abdel-Ghany, 2011, p. 432). According to a study conducted by Robb et al. (2011), data was collected from two universities (one in the Midwest and one in the Southeast). Surveys were emailed to approximately 47,000 participants at both universities. Over 3,000 surveys were obtained for a response rate of 6%. Each respondent completed an 83-question survey covering questions relating to personal and financial issues. The data collected revealed that financial factors play a significant role in student persistence behavior as well as in student perceptions of debt. The data also revealed that students tend not to persist in their education due to the psychological burden of student loans and debt. In conclusion, students with more responsible financial behavior were more likely to persist in their education.

Financial aid issues also affected the institution that students attended when it came to money spent for students who dropout. Institutions invest money through tuition discounts and grants, thus the university loses money when students depart before completing their degrees (Habley, Bloom, Robbins, & Robbins, 2012, p. 88). When students leave an institution between the first and second year, assuming the discount, grants account for 50% of annual tuition, and a percentage of 68% are receiving financial aid. There is a first-to-second year loss of revenue of about \$123,480 (Habley et al., 2012). Suggestions have been made that institutions use some reallocations of funds to help with retention programs and program initiatives.

In addition, retention issues can also affect the ranking of a university and the amount of funding the university might be allocated. Ranking in higher education is a conversation held by the politicians of today (Hazelkorn, 2013). Politicians refer to ranking as a measure of their nation's economic strength and the goals of universities. Universities use ranking to help set targets relating to their performance such as reputation, status, and retention (Hazelkorn, 2013). Universities are being held accountable to heighten the completion of high-achieving students, emphasizing value-for-money education for their customers. Ranking of higher education institutions have an effect on the global, national, and institutional level of education. The idea of ranking institutions is still being researched and it has raised the question about how to measure and meaningfully demonstrate the quality and performance of the institution (Hazelkorn, 2013).

In addition, a study conducted by Kelly, LaVergne, Boone, and Boone (2012), also addressed student perceptions of factors that influence success. The underlying research that relates to influences on college persistence has been well documented and the one aspect of student retention lies in the commitment of integrating students into the social communities of an institution (Rosenthal, 1995; Tinto, 1993). The purpose of the study conducted by Kelly et al. (2012) was to examine college students' perceptions of selected social factors that influence student persistence. The methodology used was descriptive survey research that used the Delphi technique (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963).

Purposeful sampling was used to select the members and the target population from all of the students enrolled in the spring semester 2010 at Northeast University. The

researchers implemented a questionnaire using a series of emails while using Zoomerang.com as the host website. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate and to analyze data. The findings of the study were based on responses of 280 college students. Kelly et al. (2012) found that positive relationships with professors, social involvement, and being connected to the university were major social factors that encouraged students to persist in their education. The overall theme in the data collected suggested that students that are connected to a wide range of social factors help them to matriculate through the institution (Kelly et al., 2012, p. 662).

In order to matriculate through a university, a student must be in-tune with their personal attributes. According to Mkumbo and Amani (2012), the process of assigning causes to our or other people's behavior is called attribution (p. 247). Attributes are related to a person's success and failures and can explain the differences in motivation between high and low achievers (Batool, Arif & Ud-Din, 2010). The attribution theory, according to Weiner (1985), relates to three areas in an academic task in three sets of characteristics. People may succeed or fail because of internal and external factors. The cause of success or failure may be either stable or unstable. The causes of success or failure may be either controllable or uncontrollable. In order to understand the Attribution Theory, Mkumbo and Amani (2012) conducted a study of 260 undergraduate students from the University of Dar es Salaam in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The purpose of the study was to assess the variation in attributes of academic achievement between high-performing and low-performing university students. A questionnaire was used to collect data in three different areas such as demographic

characteristics, sex, age, and academic performance. The results supported the predication of the Attribution Theory that emphasized success is always related to internal factors and failure is related to external factors. In addition, the study's findings suggested that students should accept that much of what happens to them is a result of what they do (Mkumbo & Amani, 2012, p. 254).

Present Issues in Higher Education

Effective quality education is declining and colleges and universities are not preparing students to be marketable in a changing society (Driscoll, Comm, & Mathaisel, 2013, p. 253). Education is a human right and higher education needs to prepare students who are going to be able to succeed in the global challenge. Higher education is a broken system and needs an overhaul in order to make a change in the future of America (Taylor, 2013). Furthermore, the value of education has increased, and in the Pew Research Center poll (2011) of 2,142 adults, to 75% of American graduates state that education is too expensive and college does not prepare them for jobs in society (Driscoll et al., 2013). In addition, financial assets for universities are the way many institutions survive today. Without the financial assets and sufficient funds there will be staggering debt for private institutions like the proposed university for this study (Driscoll et al., 2013). Colleges who received government money are based on students who are enrolled and not student graduation rates. Twelve billion dollars will be allocated to help improve the educational system in higher education; however, some of this money should be used to improve the graduation rate in colleges and universities (Driscoll et al., 2013).

Overall, financial aspects that universities seem to face can affect the retention of students based on the literature reviewed. In order to address these issues, one must review what researchers have found will help retain students to improve the retention rates today. Studies like Errey and Wood (2011) provided an Australian perspective that discussed class structure and nature of assignments, institutional factors, and personal factors as key elements that increased or decreased engagement. In the study, universities who enhanced student engagement led to greater student satisfaction and success. In the study of Noble and Henderson (2011), they found that students who engaged in quality engagement with peers and academic staff in informal relationships were most likely to advance in academic success. Students who are involved in these relationships feel valued and report having a bond that will allow students to seek help, which will enhance success. Furthermore, a study by Clarke, Kift, and Creagh (2011), at Queensland University of Technology stated that first-year experience leads to success in retention given an “intentional first-year curriculum design that carefully mediates and supports first-year learning” (p. 11). Clarke et al. (2011) argued that success and retention could work when professional and academic staff work together to support students in their first year. This is a possible lesson from other countries.

Retention improves when professional and academic staff work together to support students and where cocurricular supports, such as peer mentors, dovetail with the educational framework of students' first year. If university leaders and policymakers want to improve retention and the dropout rate, they must commit to the needed efforts to ensure that students are experiencing a productive environment. According to Roberts

and Styron (2010), an important factor that affects student success is not feeling socially connected or integrated to the college or university. This is an aspect that higher education needs to address from a student's perspective.

Summary

In the review of literature, I reviewed the history of social work, history of the identified university, history of the Department of Social Work, the importance of social work education, the undergraduate social work student, retention issues, HBCU retention, what works in retention, and case studies relating to successful retention strategies. The review of literature I covered provided the foundation for this qualitative research study, which examined the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding the factors that helped to retain them, and to increase the retention rate in general, at a historically Black university in the South. While the literature review highlighted empirically based research and successful strategies to improve retention, the literature review suggested a gap in literature in terms of the students' perception of what works in retention. Section 3 describes the research design, with a focus on data collection and analysis.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of BSW graduates and the factors that helped to retain them at the selected university. Qualitative research involves the exploration and comprehension of existing relationships between people and problem solving (Creswell, 2012). According to Tovar-Blank (2009), the purpose of qualitative research is to understand the concept of interest from the participant's viewpoint. To capture and organize BSW graduates' perceptions and the factors that helped to retain them at the selected university, the consensual qualitative research (CQR) method of qualitative inquiry was used in this study (Hill, Williams, & Thompson, 1997; Hill et al., 2005).

CQR was introduced to the field in 1997 by C. E. Hill, B. J. Thompson, and E. N. Williams as a way to balance the strength of qualitative methodology with the rigor of quantitative methodology (Hill et al., 2005). CQR is constructivist in its approach to the nature of reality in that it recognizes the multiple, equally valid, and socially-constructed realities of participants. The interviewer's role is one of an honest reporter trying to uncover what the participants truly believe rather than someone engaging with participants to construct one's own meaning. CQR also aims to identify themes across participants with "hopes to generalize, at least to some degree, to the population" (Hill et al., 2005, p. 197).

The perceptions of BSW graduates and the factors that helped to retain them at the selected historically Black university focused on the concept from an individual

meaning and the importance of rendering the complexity of the situation through qualitative research. Student retention is an issue that has been examined for many years (Hewitt & Rose-Adams, 2013).

Student retention concepts should also help universities and colleges explain why students leave college and what factors decrease the dropout rate from a graduate's perception. The significance of this study was to assess factors that potentially decreased the dropout rate and improved the retention rate at the identified university. According to OSPIRE, the fall-to-fall retention rate for the entire university in 2007 was 58%, in 2008 52%, in 2009 55%, in 2010 49%, and in 2011 38%. The identified university's six-year graduation rate ranged from 30% in 2003 to 58% in 2007.

The university's internal reporting system uncovered information regarding conferred BSW degrees and the percentage of total degree completion. Results indicated that 41 social work students graduated in 2008-2009, which represented 10.4% of the university's total graduates. In 2009-2010, there were 26 social work graduates, 7.6% of the university's total. In 2010-2011, 48 social work graduates were 12.2% of the university's total. In 2011- 2012, 58 social work students graduated compared to the 16.8% university's total. In 2012- 2013, 49 social work students graduated, which was 17.63% of the university's total graduates. As of fall 2013, the retention rate at the university is 53.2%.

There are currently 215 students in the social work program at the university, and a number of these students attend tutorial services from the Academic Success Center to help increase degree obtainment. The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides

academic support to a diverse community of learners by making available extensive academic intervention for probationers, those with a GPA of 2.0 and below, those who need special academic assistance, or those simply seeking to excel academically. By integrating the Center of Student Success tutorial services into their routine, the university hopes to engage students with the confidence to achieve academic success and pursue degree completion.

The university's internal reporting system disclosed that during the 2012-2013 academic year, the university's total undergraduate student enrollment was 2,212, of whom 560 students utilized the ASC center. In addition, out of 225 social work majors, 64 students used the center during the 2012-2013 academic years. OSPIRE (2013) noted there were 184 social work students who had a grade point average of 2.25 or above (68.77%) and 84 social work students who had a grade point average under 2.25 (31.23%). According to Osman (2007), "leaders and administrators across the nation recommend strengthening student academic support through the use of remedial tutorial services which may increase student achievement and skill proficiency" (p. 8).

A goal of the study I developed was to assemble data to inform stakeholders regarding the BSW graduates' perceptions of what helped to improve the dropout and retention issues in the Department of Social Work. The purpose of this research study was also to supply knowledge and provide considerable contributions toward positive social change by decreasing the dropout rate at a historically Black institution of higher learning. The information gathered may be used to develop retention strategies for the Department of Social Work and the university.

Research Design

Methodological Approach

According to Tovar-Blank (2009), “Research regarding student persistence typically utilizes a quantitative approach to examine the psyche-sociocultural factors that may play a role in an individual’s decision to persist” (p. 62). The quantitative research approach has been effective in establishing the foundation for academic persistence; however, qualitative methods of investigation can enhance the understanding of academic persistence. I considered quantitative descriptive research for this study. However, it was ruled out because most quantitative data techniques are data condensers. This method condenses data in order to see the big picture and analyze the data.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), by using qualitative interviews, researchers can explore important personal issues. Furthermore, interviewers engaged in theory-elaboration research choose a specific problem that is examined and from that, develop themes that have some broader significance. Qualitative methods, by contrast, are best understood as data enhancers; it is possible to see key aspects of cases more clearly (Neuman, 1997, pp. 14-15 as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004).

I also considered the grounded research design because this design uses multiple stages of data collection and constant comparison of categories from the data (Creswell, 2009). The Grounded theory is used to find a general abstract through the process of interaction with participants grounded in a study. The process also involves using multiple stages of collection, refinement, and interrelationship of categories of information. According to Creswell (2012), the main characteristics of this design are the

constant comparison of data of different groups to maximize the similarities and differences of information. In this study, there was a group of participants that had the same characteristics relating to being BSW graduates and their perceptions of retention at a HBCU. This study did not maximize the similarities and differences of the various groups to gather information.

I ruled out the phenomenological model because according to Creswell (2012), the phenomenological design is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of the human experience about a phenomenon as described by participants. In this study, students did not go through an experience nor tried to observe an experience. The subjects through an extensive and prolonged engagement developed patterns.

The design of this study was Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), which captured and organized participants' experiences of being retained at the identified university by identifying and examining Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) graduates' perception of what factors helped to retain them at a historically Black college or university in the South. Furthermore, the study explored what BSW graduates perceived as the internal and external factors that influenced college retention in the Department of Social Work. The CRQ (Hill et al., 2005) method of qualitative inquiry was used in this study.

Consensual Qualitative Research

According to Tovar-Blank (2009), "Hill, Thompson, and Williams in (1997), as a way to balance the strengths of qualitative methodology (i.e., relativist ontology and transactional epistemology) with the rigor of quantitative methodology (in terms of

axiology, rhetorical structure, and methodology), developed consensual Qualitative Research (CQR)” (p. 209). During the 1990s, founders of the CQR research model wanted to conduct qualitative research, and they explored several different approaches. The existing qualitative approaches had a number of valuable features; however, the descriptions were vague and difficult to understand. In search of a research model that would integrate the best features of the existing qualitative methods, would have a format of rigor, and could be easy to teach, Hill, Thompson, and Williams created the CQR method.

Several areas of the CQR research method resemble other qualitative methods, but the CQR methods have unique components. The initial process relates to using open-ended questions to collect data obtained from the true perspective of participants in the study. A small number of cases are studied to allow the researcher the ability to review the data collected intensively.

The context of the data is used to understand the views of the participants and words are used to explain the particular experience. The researcher gathers data through interviews, a questionnaire, and a consensus team of two to three identified members. Members of the CQR team made judgments and formulated a consensus to acquire the best format of the data. Another member was selected outside of the team to become an auditor, who checked the consensus judgments to ensure that the primary team did not overlook important data. The ending plan of the research process allowed the primary team to review the raw data to make sure the results and conclusions were accurate based on the data.

The CQR process involves three major steps. First, the responses from the data that incorporates the open-ended questions from questionnaires or interviews for each individual interview are divided into domains. Ideas are developed and constructed for all the material within those domains. Finally, a cross analysis is formulated and developed into categories to describe consistencies in the core ideas with domains across cases. According to Hill and Knox (2009), the initial steps for the CQR research method begin with the researcher developing the questions, choosing and structuring a team, and selecting a targeted population. The researcher must recruit participants, design the pilot questionnaire or interview, and collect data. The team must complete and check the transcripts after reviewing the data so it can be sent to the researcher for correction.

According to Hill and Knox (2009), relating to the analysis of the data, the team will code the domains and develop a consensus relating to the common themes. The auditor, who is outside of the team, reviews the data and revises the domains and core ideas developed. A cross analysis allows the researcher to review the data and develop categories across cases. Once again, the team comes to a consensus regarding the cross analysis of the data collected. The final steps in the consensual qualitative research method relate to developing a narrative across all cases, writing up and presenting the results, gathering feedback from participants and colleagues, rewriting the results, and when possible, publishing the results of the data.

The qualitative consensual research method was warranted for this research study because it allowed information to unfold naturally and the semistructured interview format allowed the data from participants to emerge freely. Stein (2007) suggested the

consensual qualitative research method allows the researcher to explore the participant's subjective experience. Another advantage of using the consensual qualitative research method is that it allows the researcher to draw theories about data from the ground up, with several prescribed steps. According to Fuertes, Mueller, Chauhan, Walker, and Ladany (2002), the CQR method employs numerous features such as including the consensus on core ideas, categories, and representativeness of findings across cases that enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

The primary research questions in this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding factors that helped to retain them and prevent their dropout at a HBCU?
2. What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU?

Population and Sample

In this study I focused on identifying and examining BSW graduates' perceptions of factors affecting retention at the targeted HBCU in the South and to decrease the dropout rate in the Department of Social Work. During the academic years from 2008 to 2013, 225 students graduated with a BSW. The theoretical foundation that supported the research was Tinto's (1975) internationalist theory of college student departure. Tinto's theory states that students enter college with various individual characteristics, which play a role in the college student departure process.

Participants

A HBCU in the South was the institution used in this study. The target population included 225 social work students that graduated from the university with a BSW from 2008-2013. Sixteen participants were interviewed for this study. First, a pilot study interview was conducted, which is an important component of the research process in a consensual qualitative method (Hill, 2011). Hill et al. (1997) suggested that researchers select participants randomly from a homogeneous group who are knowledgeable about the issue under study. They recommended that a sample size for studies using the CQR research method should be eight to 15 participants. In a CQR study, researchers Brinkman, Gibson, and Presnell (2013) used a sample size of 15 women and two men from a range of academic majors and from freshmen to seniors, who participated in their study.

The participants included in this study were 14 females and two males, who were African American BSW graduates from the identified university. Sixteen interviews were conducted, one pilot interview and 15 interviews for the study out of 35 participants who expressed interest in participating. Decisions for interview selection were based primarily on the correct email and contact information, availability of participants, and the researcher responses from the initial email to alumni informing them about the study. Limitations for using this population relates to graduates' contact information being outdated.

Recruitment

The Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the application for the study entitled, "Factors Influencing Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Graduates' Perceptions of Retention at a HBCU Consensual Qualitative Study." The approval number is 05-01-14-0133860.

Participants in this Consensual Qualitative Research study were selected to participate in this research study from the Department of Social Work's graduation list for the past five years. The five-year graduation list was obtained from the chair of the Social Work Department. The list was then reviewed and the names on the list were numbered. Every fourth participant on the list was invited to participate and was sent an email to inform them of the study and their interest about the research being conducted (see Appendix A). A systematic approach was used to help determine the viability of the research study. The goal of this approach was to help identify efficient means to generate consistent, optimum results.

However, due to the graduation list ranging from 2008 through 2013, several of the emails and contact information were outdated. This was a limitation for using this population in this study. I received several correspondence emails noting undeliverable messages to potential participants due to contact information being outdated. The systematic sampling method of selecting every fourth participant was modified and when I received an undeliverable email, the next participant on the list was emailed. I continued to use a systematic approach by selecting the next fourth person on the list.

Fifty BSW graduates were emailed and invited to take part in the research study and to contact the researcher if they were interested in learning more about the study and their potential involvement. The recruitment email informed the potential participants of researcher's identity and the requirements of participants. As the researcher, I asked for direct contact from potential participants to learn more about the study and their possible involvement. I suggested a response date to all potential participants. The first 15 participants that responded to my research were forwarded the participant informed consent form (Appendix B), the demographic form (Appendix C), and the interview guide that contained the research questions (Appendix F).

Participant Characteristics

The recruitment process secured 20 interested participants, however according to Hill et al. (1997), the recommended sample for a Consensual Qualitative Research method (CRT) are 8-15 participants. I completed 16 interviews, including one pilot interview; 15 interviews were conducted and used for data analysis. My research involved calling five participants to thank them for their interest in the research study and to explain that the Consensual Qualitative Research method being used in this study recommends using a sample of 8-15 interviews. The extra five participants were thanked for their time and interest.

Participants Analysis

I conducted 16 interviews and 15 of them were used for data analysis for the study. There were 13 females and two males who were a part of the study. The age range of the participants was from 23-58 years old (Median = 32.9; Mean = 25 years).

Regarding cultural background, 15 participants self-identified as African American on the demographic profile. Seven students reported that they were first-generation college students and reported that they took advantage of the Academic Success Center during their educational career at the identified university used in this study. Ten participants reported that they are employed in the social work field presently and 13 students have pursued graduate level education. Alumni who graduated from 2009-2013 data were used in this study. Table 1 gives a pictorial view of participants in the study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics and Goals

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Total
Male	X						X									2
Female		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13
Age	24	25	24	25	53	34	24	43	40	37	58	25	24	35	23	
First Generation	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	7
College (Y/N) Year	11	12	11	13	12	09	13	12	13	12	12	13	13	09	13	
Graduated Academic Success Center (Y/N)	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	7
Employed in Social Work Field (Y/N)	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	10
Self-Identification Black/African-American (Y/N)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	15
Pursuing Graduation Level Education (Y/N)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	13

Note. X = Participant's number. Y = Yes. N = No

Instrumentation

Interview development. Hill et al. (2005) recommends that researchers ask a few scripted questions (i.e., 8-10) in one hour. Too many questions may lead to “thin questionnaire-like data rather than a rich understanding of the individual’s experiences” (Hill et al., 2005, p. 199). The primary focus for the scripted questions is to allow participants the opportunity to ensure consistent information and thoroughly explore the issue.

There was also a recommendation that researchers conduct a pilot interview with people from the targeted population to help in refining the interview protocol. The pilot interview allows the researchers to revise questions, and practice using the protocol in an interview setting. The interview protocol for this study was developed by the researcher (Appendix: D Interview Transcript and Guide, Appendix E: Pilot Study Interview Questionnaire, and Appendix F: Interview Guide). The interview questions and guide were reviewed during the proposal for this study by the primary researcher and two members of the doctoral committee. There were 12 interview questions from the Pilot Study Interview Questionnaire and Interview guide with a number of probes. The self-created interview instrument (Appendix E: Pilot Study Interview) was used in the study. The pilot study interview guide involved the following questions:

1. Why did you decide to go to college?
2. What factors led you to choose to attend the identified university?

Probe: What led you to major in social work?

3. In your experiences, why do some students decide to leave or drop out of the university before graduating?

Probe: Do you think the reason is financial, campus life, or not being prepared for the academic rigor?

4. Did you have a classmate who dropped out of the university? Why did this student decide to drop out and not complete their degree?

Probe: Please explain any other factors you think might be important.

5. Did you ever think about discontinuing your education at the university and at what point in your educational process did this occur?

Probe: 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?

6. What were your perceptions of the internal/external factors that affected the dropout and retention rate at the identified university during your enrollment period?

Probe: Internal factors relate to issue(s) at the proposed university; for example, relationships with professors.

Probe: External factors relate to issue(s) such as family support.

7. What are your ideas about ways to help students complete their degrees? What do you feel works in retaining students? And in the Department of Social Work?

8. During your four years at the university, were you aware of any programs the university used to keep students in school and to help them be successful?
9. What ideas do you think might be worth considering for implementation at the university to improve the retention and dropout rate?
10. What recommendations do you have, as a graduate of the university's social work program, you think would keep students in school?
11. Did you use the Academic Success Center. If yes, did you find it helpful?
Probe: Please explain and give an example.
12. What are your perceptions of what alumni can do to help improve the probability of students staying in school and graduating from the Department of Social Work?

After IRB approval, 12 questions from the Pilot Study Interview Questionnaire (Appendix E) were used to guide the pilot interview. The pilot interview participant was selected from the graduation list obtained from the chair of the Social Work Department. The first participant on the list was selected to participate in the pilot study. The pilot participant was a 52-year-old African American female who graduated from the selected university in 2013 with a Bachelor of Social Work degree. A pilot interview was conducted face to face with the pilot participant transcribed, member checked, and reviewed with the pilot participant to see if any changes needed to take place with the interview process or instrument used. According to Hill et al. (2005), researchers should complete a pilot interview with people from the target population to help refine the interview protocol.

As the researcher, I transcribed the interview and forwarded the transcription to the pilot participant for member checking. The pilot participant was emailed the Interview Follow-Up Questions (Appendix K) to determine if the pilot participant wanted to elaborate regarding her responses during the interview. The pilot participant stated, “I do not want to add anything to the interview” and signed the confirmation form that the researcher obtained face to face. Based on the response from the pilot participant, who stated, “I felt comfortable answering the questions and also during the interview process,” I did not modify the questions in the interview protocol. However, I did incorporate the use of two audio recording devices due to problems with the audio recording device used during the pilot interview. I then proceeded with the research study.

Procedures

As the researcher, I selected participants to participate in the study by reviewing the Department of Social Work’s graduation list for the past five years. The graduation list was obtained from the chair of the Social Work Department. The participants’ criteria were Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) graduates from the identified university who graduated during the years 2001-2013. The graduation list for the last five years was reviewed and the names on the list were numbered 1 through 4. Each fourth participant on the list was emailed (Appendix A: Recruitment Email #1) to invite them to take part in a research study. According to Hill et al. (2005), one method of selecting participants is to send a letter to members of the targeted population followed-up by a phone call with important information about the study and what is being asked of participants.

Participants were asked to email to find out more about the research study and to inquire whether they were willing to share their experience regarding what retained them at the HBCU and in the Department of Social Work by a certain date. I then began to receive responses and returned emails that stated the email was no longer valid. The systematic sampling method of selecting every fourth participant was modified, and if I received an undeliverable email, the next participant on the list was emailed. The continual systematic approach was used. Fifty confirmations were received from the email result host indicating email delivery.

Fifteen participants responded and wanted to receive more information about the research study and were emailed the participant informed consent form (Appendix B) and the demographic form (Appendix C). The number of participants interviewed was based on the research method being used in this study's recommendation of using a sample of 8-15 interviews. A self-created interview instrument (Appendix F) was used.

I personally compiled the forms through email and began to set up interview times that were conducive to the participants' schedules. Each participant determined what mode of interview contact he or she wanted to take part in. Twelve out of 15 participants selected to engage in face-to-face interviews. Three participants preferred phone interviews because they resided out of town.

Hill et al. (2005) notes that the "interviewer's role is typically as a trustworthy reporter trying to uncover what the participants truly believe, rather than as someone who engages with the participant in a deeply relational way to construct meaning" (p. 197). All interviews were audiotaped. Interviews took place in the community, at the identified

university, and over the telephone. Interviews varied in length from 25-60 minutes. I conducted interviews with the participants who completed the demographic profile (Appendix C). I then transcribed the interviews and forwarded the transcription to participants for member checking. Participants were also forwarded Interview Follow-Up Questions (Appendix K) to inquire if the participant wanted to elaborate regarding their responses during the interview.

Gathering of Data

I personally formulated a research log notebook with CQR meeting notes, audio recordings of consensual team meetings, and a log for interviews and participants' correspondence. All forms were kept in a research log notebook that was secured in the office of the researcher within a locked storage cabinet. In addition, all participants' interviews were secured on an external hard drive and stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. All research information was treated with the upmost confidentiality and support. All guidelines for conducting research were adhered to and followed regarding Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Analysis

Research team. Hill et al. (1997) stated that "members of the CQR research team need to get along, respect each other, be able to resolve inherent power differences, feel free to challenge each other and have the ability to negotiate and resolve differences" (p. 528). It is also important that members of the CQR team have been trained and experienced in qualitative methodology. There are different models of team compositions related to studies that have been researched in the past. In the studies,

Hayes et al. (1996), Hill et al. (1997), and Rhodes, Hill, Thompson, and Elliott (1994), researchers used the model of three people that served on the primary team and one outside auditor who had minimal interaction with the primary team. Hill et al. (2005) “suggest that the auditor’s role was to check whether the raw data is in the correct domain and that all important material has been faithfully represented in the core ideas, that the wording of the core ideas succinctly captures the essence of the raw data, and that the cross-analysis honestly and faithfully represents the data” (p. 13).

The CQR research team consisted of me, two professionals, one who has a Masters in Social Work (MSW), and another who has a Masters in Human Services (MHS). Both of these members of the team had conducted their own graduate-level qualitative research. A third professional on the team, holding a Doctorate in Organizational Psychology, conducted her own qualitative study. The fourth team member was a graduate student who is presently a research assistant. The auditor holds a Doctorate in Education (PhD) and also has experience in qualitative research. Each member of the team was asked to sign a Consensual Team Information and Participant Form (Appendix G).

In addition, team members were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. According to Hill et al. (1997), the essential components of CQR are the use of (a) open-ended questions in semi-structured data collection techniques (typically in interviews), which allow for the collection of consistent data across individuals as well as a more in-depth examination of individual experiences; (b) several judges throughout the data analysis process to foster multiple perspectives; (c) consensus to arrive at judgments

about the meaning of the data; (d) at least one auditor to check the work of the primary team of judges and minimize the effects of group thinking in the primary team; and (e) domains, core ideas, and cross-analyses in the data analysis.

The CQR team met four times face to face and corresponded by telephone and through email. Each CQR member was asked to review articles on CQR, specifically Hill et al. (2005) and Hill et al. (1997) before the first meeting. Hill et al. (2005) “suggested that the team members read articles on CQR research and become well versed in the terminology (e.g., domains, core ideas etc.) and the procedures used” (p. 79). There is also a suggestion that the team also read the updated article Hill et al. (2005) on CQR to understand and incorporate the authors’ recommendations for modifications to the method. During the first CQR meeting, the researcher discussed the role of the CQR team and had the members discuss any biases relating to the population that was used in the study. The research team discussed their experience with HBCUs. The research team felt that no one on the team had any bias about HBCUs that would hinder the validity of the research study. By discussing and naming potential biases initially experienced by the research team, the researcher could then interpret the reliability and validity of the data within the context of the research team. Hill et al. (1997) noted that team members need to be committed to the process, respect one another, and be willing to disagree and work to reach a consensual agreement. An atmosphere needs to be developed where everyone feels safe to talk.

Preliminary analysis of data. The intended purpose of this study was to examine and identify the factors leading to the low retention rate specifically among first-year

students in the Department of Social Work. The process enabled the researcher to develop a plan for organizing and analyzing data, to review data from various viewpoints, and to obtain an understanding and interpretation (Creswell, 2009). According to Hill et al. (2005):

Data analysis involves three central steps: Domains (i.e., topics used to group or cluster data) are used to segment interview data. Core ideas (i.e., summaries of the data that capture the essence of what was said in fewer words and with greater clarity) are used to abstract the interview data within domains. Finally, a cross-analysis is used to construct common themes across participants (i.e., developing categories that describe the common themes reflected in the core ideas within domains across cases). (p. 10)

Hill et al. (1997) offered a step-by-step method for examining qualitative data. First, the interviews were transcribed, coded, and then forwarded to the members of the primary research by the researcher. Coding was used to analyze collected data from participants and helped the researcher formulate common domains from the data. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), coding is a process of systematical labeling of concepts, themes, events, or topical markers. Coding helped in this study and with the research consensual model to formulate common domains from gathered data (Hill et al., 2005).

The audio recording of each participant and transcriptions were also sent to the research team to review for accuracy. Each member was asked to review the transcriptions and began to think about initial themes for the data in preparation for the

first consensual meeting. During the initial meeting the primary research team met to discuss their initial ideas. One team member proposed that the team elaborate more on the core ideas and begin modeling the problem. The CQR team brainstormed some ideas. However, in discussing the overall goal of the group, they agreed that in order to begin the process of domain determination, they should refer to the interview questions answered by the research participants and list all questions and the responses for each participant under the question.

During the first meeting, the team brainstormed possible core ideas for the domains and agreed upon four domains: justification for college attendance, reason for institution choice/social work major, opinions regarding university attrition, and retention. The team agreed the fourth domain of retention would merge interview questions 4-12 since these questions discussed similar themes. This section would also provide a great opportunity to look at trends and common themes within the participants' responses. The team felt the researcher could provide data such as percentages of the participants whose responses supported a specific finding such as "A majority of the research participants stated that" during the results chapter. The team felt it was a great opportunity to provide a critical analysis of supporting research and how the research findings support or dispute the current research.

The team also agreed upon seven core ideas: external pressure, modeling/replicate behavior, location, HBCU, external influences, improvement, and parental factors. The team also agreed upon 13 subcategories: family, career, institution, scheduling flexibility, finances (financial aid), course offerings, recruitment, alumni interaction, altruistic

desires, unplanned pregnancy, unpreparedness for college, beliefs regarding reasons for low attrition, and knowledge of available resources. The team stated they would review what they had discussed and set a time for the next meeting. The researcher forwarded meeting notes and the list of beginning domains, core ideas, and categories to the external auditor for preliminary review.

During the second meeting of the CQR team, the researcher asked the team to review the proposed organization of the participants' responses into the correct domains, core ideas, and subcategories, which were highlighted at the first meeting for accuracy regarding what the team agreed upon. The researcher and CQR team recognized there were some errors and made corrections, such as moving a number of participant responses from one domain to another that best described the participants' responses. The CQR team made a decision to merge the core idea of external pressures and the subcategory of career choices and renamed the core idea modeling/replicating behavior. After another review of the domains, the team discussed and came to a consensus that there were only four domains. Each domain represented one of the interview questions. Domain 1 related to Interview Question 1, Domain 2 related to Interview Question 2, Domain 3 related to Interview Question 3 and Domain 4 related to Interview Questions 4-12 since they repeated similar themes.

The research team organized the research data and the domains, core ideas, and subcategories established in the first meeting. The team went through the revised draft and made corrections regarding organizational errors on the data, which was forwarded to the external auditor for review. The major changes are listed below in Table 2.

Table 2

CQR Major Changes/Revisions

Recommendation	Core Idea
1	Core Idea 3: Parental Factors should read as Subcategory 3: Parental Factors.
2	Domain 3: Altruistic Desires should read as Core Idea H: Altruistic Desires.
3	Domain 4: Opinions Regarding University Attrition should read as Domain Opinions Regarding University Attrition.
4	Subcategory A: Financial should read as Core Idea A: Financial.
5	Subcategory B: Unplanned Pregnancy should read as Core Idea B: Unplanned Pregnancy.
6	Domain 5: Unpreparedness for College should read as Core Idea C: Unpreparedness for College.
7	Domain 5: Retention should read as Domain 4: Retention.
8	Core Idea: Academic Rigor should read as Core Idea A: Contemplation of Exiting Institution.
9	Researcher and the CQR added “Academic Rigor” to Domain 4: Retention, Core Idea A, Subcategory 3.
10	Domain 6: Beliefs Regarding Reasons for Low Attrition should read as Core Idea C: Beliefs Regarding Reasons for Low Attrition.

The team members reached consensus on all of the changes being made. The research team agreed to organize the domains relating them to the prospective research question. Domains 1 and 2 related to Research Question 1 and Domains 3 and 4 related to Research Question 2, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Domains Relating to Research Questions

Domains	Researcher Question
Domain 1: Justification for College Attendance	1. What are the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding factors that helped to retain them and prevent their dropout at a targeted HBCU?
Domain 2: Reason for Institution Choice/Social Work Major	1. What are the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding factors that helped to retain them and prevent their dropout at a targeted HBCU?
Domain 3: Opinions Regarding University Attrition	2. What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU?
Domain 4: Retention	2. What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU?

Note. Column one relates to domains created from research. Column two relates to the research question.

During the third meeting with the CQR team, the researcher presented the findings from the first two meetings and asked the team to review the product from previous meetings. I presented the data in a chart to the team and reviewed the chart and discussed the cross analysis of the data. The domains, core ideas, and categories were shared with the auditor. The auditor reviewed the domains and core ideas and reviewed the researcher's description of the initial categories. The auditor's feedback was discussed among the CQR team. The auditor's role is also to review data and give detailed feedback at each stage of the analysis process (e.g., creating domains, constructing core ideas, creating the cross-analysis). My initial results were discussed with the team and the auditor regarding the cross analysis of the data. During the fourth meeting, the researcher presented the summary of results to the research team. The final

analysis of these research questions yielded in four domains, 14 core ideas, and 27 categories (see Table 4).

Data interpretation. The intended purpose of this study was to obtain BSW graduates' perceptions regarding strategies in retention and how they can be used to improve the dropout rate in the Department of Social Work. The process can develop a plan for organizing and analyzing data, reviewing data from various viewpoints, and obtaining an understanding and interpretation (Creswell, 2009). According to Hill et al. (2005):

Data analysis involves three central steps: Domains (i.e., topics used to group or cluster data) are used to segment interview data. Core ideas (i.e., summaries of the data that capture the essence of what was said in fewer words and with greater clarity) are used to abstract the interview data within domains. Finally, a cross-analysis is used to construct common themes across participants (i.e., developing categories that describe the common themes reflected in the core ideas within domains across cases). (p. 10)

Upon analyzing the data gathered, I established themes, patterns, and codes. Coding was used to analyze collected data from participants and to help the researcher formulate common domains from the data. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), coding is a process of systematical labeling of concepts, themes, events, or topical markers. Coding helps in the consensual research model when it comes to formulating common domains from gathered data (Hill et al., 2005).

According to Hill et al. (2005), noted importance should be placed on core ideas that relate to the data collected, which helps to eliminate assumptions and interpretations when data is reviewed and transcribed. Domains and core ideas were constructed independently for each interview and reviewed by the researcher and the auditor. According to Tovar-Blank (2009), in a CQR research study, the researcher and the additional rater separately reviewed paper copies of the transcripts, coded domains, and made notes on the transcript itself. Once domains were coded, consensus was achieved between the primary researcher, research team, and external auditor by comparing their domains and supporting data.

Investigator Triangulation

A critical feature of CQR is the application of investigator triangulation through a team of researchers and external auditors. Each member on the team engaged in reviewing the data from the interviews and then came together to highlight relevant domains and core ideas. The primary goal of the team was to identify categories or themes that emerged across interviews. The external auditor was a part of the team to review data for validity and reliability, case analysis, and cross-analysis of participant interviews. I obtained an external auditor that was not privy to the terms and factors associated with the concepts of retention and dropout rates from the BSW student's perception. The external auditor does not teach in a Social Work Department. According to Vivino, Thompson, and Hill (2011), the task of the consensual team and outside auditor was to be open and transparent to discuss themes, procedural changes, and assumptions/biases. The process of investigator triangulation helped to bring forth the

best results from the data. The use of these steps helped the researcher use a systematic process of analyzing the data collected.

Protection of Participants-Ethical Considerations

As the researcher, I considered ethical issues in conducting this research study. Ethical issues were discussed in the informed consent, which also addressed privacy and confidentiality. I was in agreement with policies and procedures adopted by Walden University and the IRB of the university where the research took place. Participants volunteered and signed an informed consent that described the research study and the intended use of the study (see Appendix B). The informed consent forms were emailed and later hand delivered to intended participants. They explained the nature of the study and the rights of each individual not to participate in the study.

Confidentiality and the protection of each participant was one of the researcher's main priorities. Information participants provided was held in complete confidence. The researcher did not use the information for any purpose outside of the research study. No names or other identifying information was used in the study. However, because the consensual research method was used in the study, team members and an outside auditor signed a consent form regarding confidentiality. According to Creswell (2009), an informed consent form should be signed before the participants engage in the research study to ensure that the rights of the participants are being protected during data collection.

Role of the Researcher

According to Rubin and Rubin (2009), qualitative research is as a conversation in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. Interviews with participants were the main instrument used to collect data in this qualitative study. In establishing an acceptable research role, the researcher formulated the study to be sure interviewees understood and accepted their role. As the researcher, I attempted to eliminate bias in this study by allowing the primary team members to discuss any bias relating to the study prior to collecting data. Allowing team members to record expectations and biases allows members to try to set aside bias during the coding process. Merriam (2002) “suggested there are several possible biases that can result from the research process when the researcher is also the interviewer and those biases can affect data findings” (p. 13). In addition, the research team formed the foundation for CQR because multiple perspectives increase the likelihood of bracketing research bias, avoiding groupthink, objectively analyzing data, and reaching consensus (Vivino et al., 2012).

Hill et al. (1997) advised that research teams could include undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate, and faculty members as long as the above criteria were met and power dynamics were minimized. The research team for this study included the primary researcher, primary research team members, and one auditor. The research team was informed of their expectations as part of the study and was asked to sign a consensual team information and participant form (Appendix G) and a confidentiality agreement (Appendix H).

One auditor was selected to participate as the primary team auditor and the selection criteria for this member were experience with qualitative research, expertise in relevant content area, ability to pay attention to detail while seeing the big picture, and characteristics such as flexibility, openness, organization, punctuality, and willingness to work independently (Hays & Singh, 2012; Schlosser, Dewey, & Hill, 2012). The auditor was disconnected from the research team so that he or she could provide a more objective analysis and offer positive case analysis. The auditor was forwarded all notes from meetings participants' transcripts, and articles to be reviewed, specifically Hill et al. (2005) and Hill et al. (1997).

The auditor made recommendations during the preliminary analysis of data that required the team to make changes regarding the domains and core ideas. During the auditor's review of the final analysis, she made the following recommendations:

Altruistic Desires should have the two core ideas of leading by example and emulating behavior. In addition, the external auditor made the recommendation to present final analysis of data in four tables by domain instead of one table presenting all information. All recommendations were accepted. Questions asked during the interviews used the same format for each participant. This allowed for a deeper knowledge of the intended topic of the study.

Summary

Section 3 described the research methodology that was used in this research study to investigate strategies that are effective in retaining students in universities. This section discussed the research format, design of study, study population, data collection,

and ethical considerations. The data of this study are presented and analyzed in Section 4. Section 5 includes a summary, conclusion, recommendations, and commentary.

Section 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to answer research questions by identifying and examining Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) graduates' perception of the factors which helped to retain them at a HBCU in the South and to study what BSW graduates' perceived as the internal and external factors that influenced college retention in the Department of Social Work. The main purpose of the study was to examine this area to add to the body of knowledge in academia that offers suggestions regarding retention and dropout at a HBCU. This section presents themes that emerged from guided interviews from 15 graduates who received Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degrees. According to one participant:

Financially, parents might not have the money. Like myself, my parents, didn't have the money because my sister was also in Catholic school. You know you have to pay for that. I really had to take out a whole bunch of loans that I really didn't want just to finance my education, so I could be in school, and I could finish in my four years. (Participant 2 interview)

Data Recorded

Section 4 includes the research findings in an overview of data analysis and results from the study. As the researcher, I used an interview guide to engage participants in a discussion relating to their perception of factors that helped to retain them at a HBCU in the South and to explore what BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influenced college retention in the Department of Social Work at

the identified university. Each interview was audio recorded and field notes were developed to help the researcher organize data collected. I formatted a research log notebook with CQR meeting notes. Then I downloaded the log to an external hard drive and secured the documents within a locked storage cabinet. Furthermore, all forms such as consents, demographic profiles, and member checking were collected and stored in a binder under each participant's number, such as *Participant 1*, in a locked and secured cabinet.

As the researcher, I recorded the dates of appointments' schedules and times of each interview in a log. With each participant, I transcribed and member checked to review transcripts for accuracy. Each participant was emailed a transcription of the interviews. Members of the consensual qualitative research team also received them for review before the team's initial meeting. All identifying information was removed and participants were classified by using numbers one thru 15. With my research log, I organized participants' responses to each question asked in the interview. Table 4 highlights a sample summary of responses from participants relating to interview questions.

Table 4

Summary Research Question 1: Why Did You Decide to Go to College?

Participant	Response
P1	Decided to go because of family.
P2	Decided to go because my parents never went to college.
P3	My mother told me I had to go.
P4	Lack of proper salary/making minimum wage.
P5	Promised my parents I would attend.
P6	Decided to go to college because it is a family identity.
P7	To pursue a higher education and gain opportunity for professional career.
P8	Needed a career change.
P9	Single parent and wanted to make a better life for my children.
P10	Make a better life for myself, and finances was also a reason to go back to school.
P11	On my bucket list/early retirement.
P12	To ensure a better employment opportunity.
P13	Only one to further my education in my family.
P14	Better education, for my family/household/daughter to see education is the way to succeed.
P15	Teenage mother/further education for my son.

Note. P = the participant number in the study.

I presented the log to the consensual team, who felt it was helpful in reviewing and analyzing data for domains, core ideas, and categories. The consensual team also felt the log of participants' responses helped them review the data in an organized manner, which allowed them to formulate themes.

Overview

The research questions guiding this consensual qualitative study addressed the following:

1. What are the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding factors that helped to retain them and prevent their dropout at a targeted HBCU?

2. What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU?

The participants' responses to Research Question 1 regarding BSW graduates' perceptions of what helped to retain them and prevent dropout at the targeted HBCU related to students having support from their community of learning. The support needed from their perception stemmed from administration, staff, and faculty. This was the key issue that emerged from the data that helped retain BSW students and prevented their dropout.

Question 7 from the interview guide related to Research Question 1. As the researcher, I asked, "What are your ideas about ways to help students complete their degrees? What do you feel works in retaining students? And what do you think worked in retaining students in the Department of Social Work?" Participant 5 responded:

Well, for the retention piece, I'm going to go with that first. In the school, uh, the Department of Social Work, having a chair and having academic advisors who had a vested interest in the students who were not there to um, spout out information to us and have us regurgitate it to them. Having individuals who really put stock in what they were teaching us. They were giving us um, not only educational material, but they were actually showing us that we had life lessons that were going to uh, assist us in uh, working in the field of social work. Being able to have someone to talk to you and talk you through what you need to do to

complete your degree. Um that, that would be a great help in retention.

(Participant 5 interview)

Question 6 from the interview guide related to Research Question 2. As the researcher, I asked, “What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU?” According to participants’ responses, internal issues that influenced college retention related to financial issues such as lack of scholarships for students to complete their degrees and loss of finances to complete their studies.

Campus life problems, such as lack of support from peers, bullying on campus, and peer interaction, were also internal issues that hindered a positive experience that retained students. Lack of support and communication from faculty and not being prepared for academic rigor added to internal pressures that also influenced college retention in a negative way. According to the participants, external issues also affected the dropout rate. Twelve participants who responded out of 15 participants indicted that family issues such as lack of family support and family strain were external issues that affected retention. Participants also felt the image of the identified university in the community and the lack of resources the university had developed in the community added to the external issues that affected the dropout rate. The lack of community partnerships with peer institutions added to a negative experience and created limited resources for students. The identified responses from 15 participants related to internal and external issues as depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary Research Question 2: BSW Graduates' Perceptions of Internal and External Factors that Influence College Retention

Participants	Internal Issues	External Issues
1	Campus life/Academic rigor	Lack of positive reputation in the community
2	Financial Issues/Campus Life/Bullying	Lack of Family support
3	Lack of scholarship money	Family strain
4	Lack of support of professors	Everyday stressors/parents struggling
5	Lack of good customer services	Life stressors, jobs, parents, children
6	Support from students	Lack of developing relationships with other schools
7	Peer interaction	Family issues
8	Good teachers were let go/financial issues/tuition/expensive textbooks	Family issues
9	Not prepared for the academic rigor/monetary issues	University not having resources to link students to community agencies
10	Relationships with professors	Life of a student/family life/different crisis
11	Advisors/lack of customer services	Attending classes/full-time work/families' issues
12	Fear of failure/loss of adequate finances	Pregnancy/family loss
13	Can't afford college/good relationships with faculty	Lack of family support
14	Not being prepared for school/finances	Lack of family support
15	Financial issues	Family issues

Note. Participants relates to the numbered interview discussing internal and external issues that relate to retention.

In order to investigate the primary purpose of this study, research questions relating to the perceptions of BSW graduates of factors that influence college retention and internal and external factors that helped to retain them were explored in this study. The analysis of these research questions yielded four domains, 14 core ideas, and 27 categories. The results are organized first by domain, second by core ideas, and lastly by category. One or more core ideas are reviewed and matched to the domain. According to Hill et al. (2005), domains “(i.e., topics used to group or cluster data) are used to segment interview data” (p. 10). Core ideas review the data that categorize the main idea of what was said in fewer words that are used to highlight the components of participants’ experiences within each domain. Direct quotes from participants in the study were used to highlight and personalize the data.

Stability of Results

Hill et al. (2005) recommended presenting the cross-analysis of results through frequency of the occurrence in the sample. In the study of 15 participants, categories that occurred for one participant are labeled *rare*. Categories that occurred for two to seven participants are labeled *variant*. Categories that occurred for eight to 13 participants are labeled *typical*. Categories that occurred for 14 or more participants are labeled *general*. It should be noted that Hill et al. (2005) created this language to convey a limited number of responses. Hill et al. (2005) discussed, “If a particular theme included more than thirty responses, the CQR language was adapted to meet this need. In these rare instances, (a) general will mean all or all but two of the responses included this interaction, (b) typical will mean more than half of the responses included this interaction” (p. 12).

Reflections of Participant Characteristics

The detailed aspects of participants' demographics are highlighted in Section 3 in Table 1: Participant Demographics and Goals. Characteristics of participants influenced the data gathered and examined in this study. Seven of the 15 participants were between the ages of 34-58, who were considered students who attended the identified university in the nontraditional program called the Center for Alternative Programs in Education (CAPE). The Center for Alternative Programs in Education (CAPE) is an adult degree program designed to serve adult students interested in earning an undergraduate degree that fits with the multiple responsibilities of the average working adult.

According to OSPIRE, the program's mission is to provide quality educational services to adult learners to prepare them to compete in the 21st century workforce and become productive citizens in their surrounding communities, the nation, and the world. Since 1994, more than 4,000 students have graduated from the program. The CAPE Adult Degree Program provides educational delivery systems for self-directed, highly motivated persons who are otherwise unable to attend college because of job or family responsibilities, military service obligations, and/or those who require evening and/or part-time classes. Several of their BSW graduates attended the selected university to make a better life for their families or because they needed a change in their current career. Participant 10 stated:

I decided to go to college for many reasons. First of all, I wanted to have a better life for myself. I attended college straight out of high school and I became sidetracked by the joys of being a young adult. Therefore, I quit school. So, I

decided that I wanted to try something new and went back to school to achieve, went to attain (participant pauses), an associate's degree. Then after seeing my fellow coworkers who (participant takes a long pause), were having jobs that I did but because they had the degree, they made more money than me. Finances was also a definitely a part of my decision to go back to school. (Participant 10 interview)

Three of the seven CAPE undergraduate participants ($n = 3$) took advantage of the Academic Success Center, which they reported helped them to obtain their degree. Participant 5 said, "Um, actually, um (participant pauses). Actually, I did use that program because our CAPE program had limited resources that were beneficial and I did need to go outside to the CAPE program to the main campus. The experience was helpful in my academic career." Participant 12 had a similar experience and explained, "Yes, I did and I also found it helpful. I've used, of course, all the computer labs and I received counsel from the center to build my resume." Participant 8 stated, "Um, I did use the Academic Success Center. I did use it one time; I find it to be helpful".

Justification for College Attendance

External pressure/modeling/replicate behavior. Two core ideas, external pressure and modeling/replicate behaviors, were formulated from Domain 1, Justification for College Attendance. The first core idea, external pressure, discussed that several participants attended college due to family members reinforcing the student to further their education. Participant 1 responded:

I decided to go to college solely because of my family. Um, in my family education is highly valued, so my entire life it was what you had to do.

Something beyond just completing your high school education, you will go to college. It's not up for debate or discussion. If you don't, we don't know where you going to stay (participant laughs), but you will not be staying here and not do something with your life. (Participant 1 interview)

The core idea of external pressure ($n = 6$) was variant in frequency and related to the category of family that influenced students to attend college. Five participants stated something along the lines of having to attend college due to their family and one participant decided to attend college because they wanted to improve their financial issues, for example, the lack of proper salary and making minimum wage. The category career ($n = 5$) was also variant in frequency. Each participant indicated that they attended college to pursue a higher education and to gain an opportunity for a professional career. Participant 8 stated:

I decided to, um, go to college because (participant stammers and pauses) I felt like I needed a career change. Um, I had worked in manufacturing for about 15 years. And with the downfall of that, I felt like I needed to do something different. (Participant 8 interview)

Modeling and replicating behavior stemmed from participants feeling that they needed to be an example for a child or family member by completing their degree ($n = 4$) and was variant in frequency. Participant 15 stated, "I decided to come to college because at the time I was a teenage mother and I thought it would be very important for

me to (participant mispronounces the word “further”) further my education not only for me, but for my son as well.”

Domain 1 related to Research Question 1: Why did you decide to go to college? and Question 2: What factors led you to choose to attend the identified university? Table 6 displays the results of Domain 1, which was entitled “justification for college attendance,” along with the two core ideas: external pressure and modeling/replicate behavior, and two categories: family and career.

Table 6

Results, Domain 1: Justification for College Attendance

Domain	Core Idea	Category	<i>n</i>	Frequency
Justification for college attendance	A: External Pressure	Family	6	Variant
		Career	5	Variant
RQ 1: Why did you decide to go to college? RQ 2: What factors led you to choose to attend the identified university?	B: Modeling/Replicate Behavior		4	Variant

Note. RQ = research question. *n* = the number of participants who answered the question relating to the domain and core idea.

Reason for Institution Choice/Social Work Major

Location, HBCU, external influences, and altruistic desires. Four core ideas (location, HBCU, external influences, and altruistic desires) and nine categories (institution, scheduling flexibility, finances/financial aid, course offerings, recruitment, alumni interaction, parental factors, leading by example, and emulating behavior) developed from Domain 2, which was Reason for Institution Choice/Social Work Major.

Three participants related to the core ideas of location. The location of the school was a major issue participants identified as influencing their undergraduate education. Location ($n = 3$) was also variant in frequency with the category of institution.

The category institution ($n = 3$) was variant in frequency and discussed that participants attended the university because of its size, and alumni encouraged them to attend the institution because of the family atmosphere. Participant 2 stated:

I knew (participant pauses), one of the alumni's was (participant stutters) was one of my mentors in New York. She was told me how the school was good and how I should come and check it out. And I came and I like what I saw. I liked that it was small and that everybody was friendly. I liked the atmosphere. Um, one, it was an HBCU. And it was in close proximity to my house. (Participant 2 interview)

Participant 11 stated, "Um, one, it was an HBCU. And it was in close proximity to my house."

Under the core idea of HBCU there were two categories, scheduling/flexibility ($n = 5$) and finances/financial aid ($n = 7$) which were both variant in frequency. Participants discussed that they attended the identified university because it was a HBCU and they had never attended a predominantly African American university. Participant 13 stated, "Um, I never been to a predominately African American university or school and I felt that I wanted to get to know my own culture so I decided to go to an HBCU, which was the selected university."

The category scheduling and flexibility ($n = 5$) was variant in frequency and participants discussed attending the identified university because of the convenience of having night courses. Nontraditional hours of courses helped the students work and attend school. For example, Participant 14 stated, “Well, I always wanted to go to college and I chose that university because it actually had a night program. So, it helped me to actually go to college and work during the day.”

Finances/financial aid ($n = 7$) was variant in frequency as another category under the core idea of HBCU. Participants discussed what factors led them to attend the identified university. The identified university awarded scholarships and financial aid, which helped them attend college. Participants explained that finances were the main reason in their perception that hindered students from seeking a degree and completing their education. For example, Participant 3 stated, “Scholarship money allowed me to attend college and the size of the university. I never wanted to be at a really big school coming from a small high school.” Participant 1 said:

And then when I actually applied to my university I needed to see how much a school will give me in terms of paying towards my education and the university I chose gave me a full scholarship. So it was a combination of receiving free money. (Participant 1 interview)

External influences were another core idea under Domain 2, which produced four categories. They were course offerings ($n = 4$), and recruitment ($n = 3$), which were both variant in frequency. Alumni interaction ($n = 1$) and parental factors ($n = 1$) both were rare in frequency. Participants discussed the importance of attending a university that

had a variety of majors for students to study, the flexibility of location, and an evening program. There were determining factors for selecting the university to attend.

Participant 8 said:

Well, when I first came to the university, my major was information systems and I realized the math was overwhelming. So I said, okay, I really got to rethink this thing. I have to find something that I'm going to enjoy doing. So when I went through all of um, the curriculum and looking at the classes and courses, social work stuck out to me because I, you know, (participant pauses) I feel like I'm a helpmate and I wanted to do something to, to help people and so I felt like that would be a good fit for me. (Participant 8 interview)

Participants discussed what led them to major in social work. Two participants discussed that they had a professor who helped them change their major and another participant stated a college recruiter they met their freshman year helped influence them to major in social work. One participant discussed that an alumni encouraged them to attend the identified university. Another participant discussed a parental factor, her mother's death made her decide to go back to school and obtain a college degree.

The last core idea in Domain 2 was altruistic desire, which involves the unselfish concern for other people. It involves doing things simply out of a desire to help, not because a person feels obligated to do so. Eleven participants decided to major in social work in order to help other people, to serve others, and to become a change agent in society. This core idea had two categories; leading by example/helping people ($n = 9$) was typical in frequency and emulating behavior ($n = 4$) was variant in frequency.

Four participants decided to major in social work because they wanted to be a change agent, help the community, and serve others as they witnessed in their community. These four participants responded as follows:

Participant 2: I like helping people and I saw that she was a positive role model in the lives of younger students, like me, so I decided to do what she studied in school.

Participant 5: I've been a social worker since the day I was born. My life experiences as being, um, raised in kinship care and then adopted by my maternal grandparents. Having been somewhat abandoned and cared for by others, I've been in the service of social work all my life. Um, and the greatest social worker that I've ever read about was Jesus Christ. And I wanted to be, um, somewhat a follower of his teachings to help others and the less fortunate. So, um, since my main purpose in life is to serve, what better way to serve is to be a social worker.

Participant 6: Just being, wanting to be a change agent. Being exposed to advocacy early on as my father was a Baptist minister and we always helped out in the community. Growing up in an all-Black neighborhood and just seeing the resiliency in everybody within that neighborhood. I wanted to uh, take part in it. So I thought social work would be a great field to go into.

Participant 15: Um, I was just always good at helping people. People always come to me for advice, constantly asking me questions. And um, actually, my stepmother inspired me. She's a social worker as well. (Participant 2, 5, 6, & 15 interviews)

Nine participants had a common theme and thread in their response to majoring in social work, which was having a passion for working and helping people. For example, Participant 1 stated:

I still wanted to pick a major where I get to work with and help people primarily, a little bit more hands on, a little more in depth. When I looked into the Social Work Department I knew it would focus more on the people skills to help intervene with people's life situations. (Participant 1 interview)

Participant 3 stated:

Besides the fact that I like helping people, I felt like in the field of social work you don't have to know exactly what you want to or going to do right away. There's so many fields that you can branch off from in social work. So, the fact that my options remained open regardless of what degree I was pursuing in social work, it kind of, it was comforting to me because I didn't have to make a career choice right away. (Participant 3 interview)

Participant 8 stated, "I feel like I'm a helpmate and I wanted to do something to help people and so I felt like that would be a good fit for me." Participant 12 said:

Life challenges. Um, I had recently, gotten uh, custody of two of my grandkids and um, met a lot of walls. Um, applied for various services, and was told that I didn't qualify. So (participant pauses and inhales), I got mad and decided (brief pause) social work was where I needed to be to help others like me. (Participant 12 interview)

Domain 2 related to Research Question 2, which states: What factors led you to choose the identified university? And the probe question was: What led you to major in social work? Table 7 displays the results of Domain 2, which was entitled “Reason for Institution choice/Social Work Major.”

Table 7

Results, Domain 2: Reason for Institution Choice/Social Work Major

Core Idea	Category	<i>n</i>	Frequency
Location	Institution	3	
	HBCU		
External Influences	Scheduling Flexibility	5	
	Finances/Financial Aid	7	
	Course Offering	4	
	Recruitment	3	Variant
	Alumni Interaction	1	Rare
Altruistic Desires	Parental Factors	1	Rare
	Leading by Example	9	Typical
	Emulating Behavior	7	Variant

Note. *n* = the number of participants who answered the question relating to the core idea, category, and frequency.

Domain 3, Opinions Regarding University Attrition, related to three core ideas; financial (*n* = 9) was typical in frequency, and unplanned pregnancy (*n* = 4) and unpreparedness (*n* = 2) were both variant in frequency. There were also three categories; stress level (*n* = 1) and academic preparation (*n* = 1), which were both rare in frequency, and campus environment (*n* = 6), which was variant in frequency. Domain 3 related to Research Question 3: In your experiences, why do some students decide to leave or drop out of the university before graduating? In addition, the probe question: Do you think the reason is financial, campus life, or not being prepared for the academic rigor?

Nine participants discussed their experiences relating to financial issues being the primary issue why students decide to leave the university before graduating. The core

idea of finances/financial aid ($n = 11$) was typical in frequency. Participants discussed their perceptions of why some students decide to leave or drop out of the university before graduating. Financial hardship, monetary issues, and financial family issues caused stress and added to the dropout rate. Participant 9 stated:

I feel that students leave the university (participant pauses) um, and they drop out is because of monetary reasons um (participant pauses), not really having the means to continue their studies. And sometimes the university does not um, offer um, the financial aid needed. So therefore, students have no choice but to leave if they're not being (participant pauses) assisted by the financial aid department.

(Participant 9 interview)

Unplanned pregnancy was another core idea under Domain 3 ($n = 4$) and was variant in frequency. Five participants stated they knew of several students who had to leave the university before graduating due to unplanned pregnancy. This occurred during their freshman and sophomore year, which caused them not to return to the university the following year. The students felt they would leave the university during their pregnancy and spend the first year with their baby. They also had intentions of coming back to the university and completing their degree. For example:

Participant 15: I did have a classmate during our freshman year. After the break, she never came back for her sophomore year because she was pregnant.

Participant 2: I did have a friend who did drop out. Um, she dropped out because she was pregnant her sophomore year and she (participant pauses) she didn't want

to drop out, but she did because she wanted to um, cater to her daughter and move closer to family so that she could get the support and help that she needed.

Participant 7: For various reasons. Pregnancy, peer violence on campus, and funding. Um, not enough loan money or at um, (participant pauses) financial aid.

Participant 5: Um, the classmate that I had that dropped out her personal life and the pregnancy, um, kind of took, um, took first place and education took a back seat. And um, she's decided to sit out until the child is of an age that she believes she will be able to return to school and complete her degree. (Participant 2, 5, 7 & 15 interviews)

Unpreparedness for college was the third core idea under Domain 3, which was ($n = 2$) variant in frequency. Under this core idea were three categories; stress level ($n = 1$) and academic preparation ($n = 1$) were both rare in frequency, and campus environment ($n = 6$) was variant in frequency. Two participants discussed their perceptions of why students dropped out of the university and did not complete their degrees. The participants explained that the university's academics, campus life, and being overwhelmed added to the students not being prepared to attend college. These issues were factors to why students did not finish their degrees:

Participant 14: I think sometimes that (brief pause) people just fall head-over-heels and then don't think about everything before they actually decide to go to college. And so they get overwhelmed and because they're not prepared for what college has to offer.

Participant 13: Sometimes if they feel the teachers don't care about them they feel like they are wasting their money going to a university. I do believe that academics and campus life have a major part in keeping students in school.

(Participant 13 & 14 interviews)

Participant 8 discussed that she felt stressed and had outside pressure to leave the university and not complete her degree:

Um, I think, like people that I've talked to it gets to be a little overwhelming. Um (participant pauses), with the younger uh, age group, I think for them, most times, it's not something that they really want to do. It's something that their parents want them to do. And then they realize when they get into school that it's just, it's just not working out for them. (Participant 8 interview)

Academic rigor and not being prepared for college were the top issues that students decide to not complete their degree, according to their perception. Participant 11 explained: "Uh, not academically prepared. Personal issues such as family and work, uh, academic rigor would probably be one of the top things" (Participant 11 interview).

Campus environment was the last category under Domain 3. Six participants discussed that the university's environment was a factor to why students left the university before completing their degrees. Environmental constraints, bullying on campus, and lack of support on campus were main issues for students at the identified university. The campus environment played a major part in the success of students completing their degree. The six participants responded as follows:

Participant 1: If a student doesn't feel that they belong or feel included in the campus environment or they feel out of place, it's going to prompt them to start thinking, well maybe I should have chosen another university, maybe this wasn't the best fit like I thought it was when I first applied. When I did the campus visit, I mean, it was one thing when you go to the campus for a visit. It's another thing when you actually live on the campus and you're not necessarily meeting too many people. And then the final thing would be lack of support systems. When you don't feel as though you have people encouraging you to stay the course, it's going to be easier for you to say, since I don't like it, I can leave and not look back.

Participant 2: Um, pregnancy, tuition, bullying, um and sometimes school's just not for everyone.

Participant 3: Um, I think that financial strain and campus life were probably two big ones. I think that some people are under the impression that college life is supposed to be, you know, a bunch of parties and stuff and if they don't feel like they can do what they want on a college campus as far as partying or coed visitation, stuff like that um, that can lead students to leave.

Participant 4: Um, maybe problems on campus. Not getting the full, I guess, the full education that you came for.

Participant 6: They're either working full time or they have other obligations such as family and so forth, and campus environmental constraints and issues.

Participant 15: I just think students don't have (brief pause), a good support system. And the lack of support on campus. (Participant 2, 3, 4, 6 & 15 interviews)

Table 8 displays the results of Domain 3, which was entitled "Opinions Regarding University Attrition."

Table 8

Results, Domain 3: Opinions Regarding University Attrition

Core Idea	Category	<i>n</i>	Frequency
Financial		9	Typical
Unplanned Pregnancy		4	Variant
Unpreparedness for College		2	Variant
	Stress Level	1	Rare
	Academic Preparation	1	Rare
	Campus Environment	6	Variant

Note. *n* = the number of participants who answered the question relating to the core idea, category, and frequency.

Retention was the last domain that the consensual team and researcher agreed upon after review and analysis of the data. The consensual team and researcher agreed to merge data from Questions 4 through 12 since the questions discussed similar themes. This domain provided a great opportunity to look at trends and common themes within participants' responses.

Five core ideas developed: contemplating of exiting institution, beliefs regarding reasons for low attrition, improvement, knowledge of available resources, and recommendations. In addition, 12 categories emerged from the participants' responses relating to Domain 4. The first core idea was contemplation of exiting institution and two categories emerged: (a) did contemplate exiting institution/social, family and support issues, which was typical frequency ($n = 10$), and (b) did not contemplate exiting

institution, which was variant in frequency ($n = 5$). Table 9 displays the results of Domain 4 that was entitled “Retention.”

Table 9

Results, Domain 4: Retention

Core Idea	Category	<i>n</i>	Frequency
Contemplation of exiting institution	Did contemplate exiting institution/social, family, and support Issues	10	Typical
	Did not contemplate exiting institution	5	Variant
Beliefs regarding reasons for low attrition	Internal Factors	15	General
	External Factors	15	General
Improvement	University level/within the social work department	15	General
	Implementation	15	General
Knowledge of available resources	Yes, aware of available resources	8	Variant
	No, not aware of available resources	7	Variant
Recommendations	Financial	3	Variant
	Mentoring	9	Typical
	Support	15	General
	Preparedness	2	Variant

Note. n = the number of participants who answered the question relating to the core idea, category, and frequency.

The core idea of contemplating exiting the institution related to Question 4 and 5 from the interview guide: Did you have a classmate who dropped out of the university? Why did this student decide to drop out and not complete their degree? And did you ever think about discontinuing your education at the university and at what point in your educational process did this occur? Thirteen participants responded that they had a classmate who dropped out of the university before finishing their education. Social issues such as not enjoying campus life, becoming pregnant during their sophomore year of school, personal issues, and financial issues affected their classmates and caused them

to drop out. Family issues and lack of support from family and the community of learning at the identified university also had an impact on classmates who dropped out of school. Two participants responded that they did not have any classmates who contemplated dropping out of school during their years of enrollment at the identified university.

Question 5 was: Did you ever think about discontinuing your education at the university and at what point in your educational process did this occur? The probe was: 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? Ten participants responded that they contemplated leaving the university before completing their degree. Three participants responded that they were lonely at campus and felt they had no support to help them finish their education; three participants felt stressed and overwhelmed due to the rigor and challenges of school. Three other participants discussed social issues such as health concerns, childcare issues, and death of a family member made them contemplate dropping out of school. Lastly, participants discussed having financial issues that almost caused them to leave the university. For example:

Participant 1: Yes I did (participant laughs). It was during my freshman year.

Um, the reason why I was thinking of discontinuing my education was because I was lonely. I was not making as many friends as I wanted to my first year and I started thinking, perhaps it would be best if I choose another university, go somewhere else. However, that changed.

Participant 4: Yes. I thought about it every year (Participant chuckles). Every single year. I (participant pauses), I was stressed. I don't know. It wasn't really financial or (participant pauses), it was just minor, you know, stressors that come along with life I guess. But, um, what made me continue was just getting through that year and getting closer to the point of graduating. And for me, I always been the type that was no need to get to your junior or senior year and then quit, because you were so close. So getting to the point of graduation to me was what kept me going.

Participant 15: Yes, I did at one point. Um, it was a time in my life where I was having issues with um, childcare and it was very difficult for me to find someone to keep my son while I was in school. And it, I think it was during my junior year. (Participant 1, 4, & 15 interviews)

Five participants responded that they never thought about leaving the university before completing their education. Participant 14 said, "I actually enjoyed going to the university, so I did not want to drop out." The second core ideas under Domain 4 were beliefs regarding reasons for low attrition. Fifteen participants discussed that there were internal and external issues that caused students to leave the university. Both internal and external were ($n = 15$) general in frequency. Participants discussed internal and external factors that affected the dropout rate and retention rate at the identified university. Eight participants related campus life to the internal issues that affected the dropout and retention rate at the identified university. For example, the lack of customer service and communication on campus was an issue.

Four participants discussed issues with faculty and not being supported, and three participants discussed the lack of financial resources such as scholarships and financial aid. Fifteen BSW graduates perceived that external issues affected the dropout rate. The main issues that resonated throughout the participants' responses about external factors were family issues. Twelve participants responded that the lack of family support and family strain were external issues that affected the retention issue at the identified university. Three participants responded along the lines of the lack of community partnerships with peer institutions added to a negative experience and created limited resources for students.

The third core idea from Domain 4 was improvement which had two categories; external factors at the university level and within the social work department ($n = 15$) and implementation ($n = 15$), both general in frequency. Fifteen participants had ideas about ways to help students complete their degrees that related to support on a university level. Participants suggested that the university have more support for students in the area of scholarships, support from faculty, helping students who are struggling with academic success, and engaging students in leadership organizations on campus. Examples were:

Participant 1: One of the ideas that I was thinking about was that one of the things I learned in school is that a lot of times, we tend to want to address a problem after the problem has already occurred and when a person is in front of us and there in a bad situation, we often find ourselves before we can address that initial problem, we have to address the factors that led up to that problem. In a student setting, a lot of the times, you can't necessarily address the problem once they've

been put on academic probation. Students who are on probation need help to stay in school.

Participant 13: I feel like the, I feel like the amount of support and (pause) and the fact that all the faculty members are so supportive of the students and are there for them at any time. Um, whenever you need them they make themselves available to you, to talk to you they sit down with you. Um, they let you know if they right or wrong, if you are doing good, if you are not doing good. Is not kind of like I am just going there to get my classes. Is more of them would sit down and talk to you about what you been doing and what you physically need to do to help you get so you can get out of school.

Participant 7: Getting student leaders active and reaching out to the student body.
(Participant 1, 7, & 13 interviews)

Fifteen participants had ideas they felt could be implemented and were worth considering at the identified university to improve retention and the dropout rate. This category related to Question 9 from the interview guide: What ideas do you think might be worth considering for implementation at the university to improve the retention and dropout rate? Participants made suggestions such as having a more diverse student body to add to the majority of African American populations of the student body and mentoring programs that would help engage students and connect the student to alumni who have been successful in their educational and professional careers. Student support services such as orientation for freshman and nontraditional students, work-study programs, and mental health counseling programs would help to increase the retention

rate. Table 10 highlights the responses from participants regarding ideas that could be implemented within the identified university to help retain students.

Table 10

Ideas for Implementation and Dropout to Help Retention

Participants	Ideas For Implementation
P1	Help students before academic probation.
P2	More scholarships.
P3	Support programs.
P4	Support from professors.
P5	Support from professors and department chair/faculty.
P6	Know students/a little more about the student's background.
P7	Getting student leaders active and reaching out to the student body.
P8	Support from professors.
P9	Having a checklist to help students and support systems in place.
P10	Comradery, different organizations and activities.
P11	Good communication.
P12	Linked to upper classman/staff helping students.
P13	Faculty members need to be supportive.
P14	Open communication with students/tutoring in certain areas.
P15	Coming together with peers/tutoring in certain areas.

Note. P = the participant who answered the question relating to ideas for implementation and dropout to help retention.

The fourth core idea under Domain 4 was knowledge of available resources that related to Question 8 in the interview guide: During your four years at the university, were you aware of any programs the university used to keep students in school and to help them be successful? There were two categories that developed from this core idea; Yes, aware of available resources ($n = 8$) was variant in frequency and No, not aware of available resources ($n = 7$) was variant in frequency. Eight participants in the study were aware of programs that helped students to be successful at the university. Programs such as the Academic Success Center, Honor College, Tutoring Center, math tutors, and UNCF scholarships were resources identified by eight participants. For example:

Participant 1: Yes. Um, on my campus, it was the Academic or Career Center. Um, I know for me 'cause by the time I was getting ready to graduate they made it a requirement that you had to stop through the Academic or Career Center as part of your graduation process to be cleared. And I know they were helping out a lot, especially for the graduating seniors, with their resume building, making sure everything was okay with that so that they at least had a copy of what information they need to put on there, help with things like verbiage, length of the resume, things of that nature.

Participant 7: Tutoring program in the educational building.

Participant 12: I was aware of the writing help center, tutoring for math, um, work study opportunities, and various scholarships and prospect (participant jumbles her words), prospective majors and electives such as the choir. (Participant 1, 7, & 12 interviews)

Seven participants were not aware of any programs the university used to help students in school and help them become successful. Responses were as follows:

Participant 5: (Long pause). Um, I can't, um, right off the top of my head think of any particular programs other than um, the school of, uh, the Department of Social Work have a social work organization and we worked together within that organization helping with um, individuals who were maybe falling behind in a class who didn't have a good understanding. And since we were at a CAPE site, um, we really didn't have access and sometimes didn't have knowledge of certain things that were going on campus. But um, (participant pauses, then stutters) I

just believe that having the study groups, and (participant stutters) being a part of your social work or your math um, organization, it will be a benefit.

Participant 7: No. I not, um, I'm not aware of any programs personally um, that helped retain the students. But I'm sure that there are some there. Like I said earlier, we were just pretty much a close-knit family. So we didn't get as far as someone actually being in a crisis situation.

Participant 8: (participant pauses) No, I was not aware of any programs that helped students on campus.

Participant 9: (participant takes a long pause) Um, I don't know of any programs, um.

Participant 11: I was not. And I may not need to see this, but as uh, SGA president, I wasn't even aware of that (participant lightly chuckles).

Participant 13: Um, no I was not aware of any programs.

Participant 15: (Long pause). No, I'm not. No. Not, at all. (Participant 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, & 15 interviews)

Recommendations were developed in the fifth core idea from Domain 4 with four categories; financial ($n = 3$) was variant, mentoring ($n = 9$) variant, support ($n = 15$) typical, and preparedness ($n = 2$) variant in frequency. These categories related to Questions 10 and 12 from the interview guide: What recommendations do you have as a graduate of the university's social work program you think would keep students in school? And what are your perceptions of what alumni can do to help improve the probability of students staying in school and graduating from the Department of Social

Work? Three participants discussed students having financial support to help them stay in school, for example, money for a book loan program and funds to help students with their education.

Nine participants discussed having mentoring programs such as having a buddy that would check in with the students, encourage them to stay in school, and provide peer support. Inviting alumni to return to the university to discuss their experiences as students and success stories was also a recommendation highlighted by participants. Several participants really felt that alumni should come spend more time at the university with students and not just come back during homecoming.

Support was also an area that participants discussed that could help students be retained at the identified university. Fifteen participants stated having support from their professors such as engagement and communication with their professors, focusing on building a relationship and rapport with their academic advisors, and support from the university would help students stay in school. Furthermore, having students feel supported by engaging in organizations such as student government was mentioned. Two participants discussed students needing to be prepared for college and implementing a one-credit course to help students become adjusted to college life. Participants also discussed securing internships to help students become prepared for the workforce.

Participant 9 responded:

Um, I would (participant pauses) I think that a mentoring program would be worth considering um, for improvement at of the retention and dropout rate. Um, also (participant pauses), um, different programs such as a (participant briefly

pauses) a life skills, life skills group, and um, things along that line. (Participant 9 interview)

Participant 10 responded:

(Long pause). I would like to see more professors stress the importance of the education and not allow students to be so fly by night with their classes if you will. I would like to see attendance be mandatory and after two or three, you actually get dropped. Like, some kinds of penalties versus you have to pay your tuition, if you attend its fine. If you don't, it's up to you. This is your grade. I would like to see professors take pride and take an interest in the success of their students because then the graduates of um, I guess, (sound muffles) graduates and going on to graduate school, I see the difference in, I see the difference in the professors and I see the difference in the outcome and the success of the students. (Participant 10 interview)

Participant 15 stated:

I think that students should definitely consult with their professors. Very (participant pauses), I think it's very important to just keep in contact with them. Let them know, you know, what's going on in (participant pauses) in their life. Cause you never know what kind of support they need. (Participant 15 interview)

Participants' perceptions and recommendations for what alumni could do to improve the probability of students staying in school and graduating from the Department of Social Work stemmed from developing mentoring programs, encouraging students, offering students advice on ways to succeed and persist in their education, and self-

disclosure from alumni regarding the issues they faced when they were students at the identified university. Table 11 highlights participants' responses from their perceptions of what alumni can do to help improve the probability of students staying in school and graduating from the Department of Social Work.

Table 11

Question 12 Results: Perceptions of What Alumni Can Do To Help Students Graduate

Participants	Responses
P1	Get more involved with the alumni association.
P2	Come out and show support for students. Partner with a student to show them the ropes.
P3	Support students mentally and financially.
P4	Supportive talk to undergraduates. Let them know you understand what they are going through.
P5	Alumni can become more visible with the freshman class/talk about what the school is doing. Talk about future plans and incorporate the students in the plans.
P6	Mentoring programs.
P7	Reach back to students and mentor.
P8	Speak to students/email and phone students.
P9	Encourage students.
P10	Be more present/come around more than just at homecoming and events. Get involved with the Alumni Association.
P11	Get involved with the Social Work Association/Social Work Weekend.
P12	Alumni can give back give testimonies on ways students can succeed.
P13	Alumni can reach out and mentor the students/a pen pal or buddy that they can write to and let them know about issues.
P14	Support and mental health issues
P15	More than money and support to help students, faculty, and administration.

Note. P = the participant who answered the question relating to perceptions of what alumni can do to help students.

Summary

The goal of this section was to communicate and highlight the data gathered from personal interviews of BSW graduates to answer the research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding factors that helped to retain them and prevent their dropout at a targeted HBCU?
2. What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU?

The data was analyzed and themes were identified that addressed BSW graduates' perceptions that help to retain them at the targeted HBCU and the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU. According to participants' responses, internal issues that influenced college retention related to financial issues such as lack of scholarships for students to complete their degrees and loss of finances to complete their studies. Campus life problems, such as lack of support from peers, bullying on campus, and peer interaction, were also internal issues that hindered a positive experience that retained students. Lack of support and communication from faculty and not being prepared for academic issues added to internal pressures that also influenced college retention in a negative way.

There were external issues that affected the dropout rate according to the perceptions of BSW graduates. Twelve out of 15 participants suggested that family issues such as lack of family support and family strain were external issues that affected the retention rate. Participants also felt the image of the identified university in the community and the lack of resources the university had developed in the community added to the external issues that affected the dropout rate. The lack of community partnerships with peer institutions added to a negative experience and created limited

resources for students. Section 5 interprets the data, draws conclusions, and makes recommendations based on results of the study. This section provides an overview of the study and research questions that were addressed. The significance of the study for social change is also discussed.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter 5 includes the findings and interpretation, implications, and recommendations of the study. The consensual qualitative research study that I developed examined the perceptions of BSW graduates and the factors that helped to retain them at the selected university. In the study, I also examined what BSW graduates perceived as the internal and external factors that influenced college retention in the Department of Social Work. This chapter is organized into eight sections: (a) an overview of the study, (b) summary of findings, (c) interpretation of findings, (d) social change implications, (e) implications for practice, (f) recommendation for action, (g) recommendations for future research, and (h) conclusion.

Overview of Study

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding factors that helped to retain them and prevent their dropout at a targeted HBCU?
2. What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU?

Student retention has been a documented issue facing higher education in the United States since the 1800s. Retention continues to be a critical issue for most college campuses in higher learning education. It is also an issue at HBCUs. According to Taylor (2014), at many HBCUs, only 39 to 40% of all entering African American

students go on to earn a college degree. The low number of African American students who graduate is cause for grave concern. The low retention rate is also a problem at the identified university used in this study. There is a great deal of research that exists regarding retention in higher education. It is also a gap in research that relates to students' perceptions regarding what retains students and helps to prevent them from dropping out. This study investigated BSW graduates' perceptions of retention, dropout, and suggestions from the participants regarding these factors.

An historically Black university in the South was the selected institution used in this study. The target population included 225 social work students who graduated from the university with a BSW from 2008-2013. I personally obtained the graduation list from the chair of the Social Work Department. I invited participants to participate in the study and to express their perceptions regarding retention and dropout due to completion of their degree at the identified university from the Department of Social Work.

First, as the researcher I conducted a pilot interview to help refine the interview protocol. The pilot interview allowed me to review if questions needed to be revised and to practice using the protocol in an interview setting. I developed the pilot interview protocol for this study (see Appendix E). Member checking with the pilot interview participant was completed and no recommendation from the participant was discussed. I proceeded with the study by reviewing the graduation list for the last five years. The list was numbered and every fourth participant was chosen to participate and received an email to inform them of the study and to inquire about their willingness to find out more information about the study (see Appendix A).

The graduation list ranging from 2008 through 2013 was outdated, and several of the email addresses and contact information were not current. Several correspondence emails noting undeliverable emails to potential participants were received. The graduation list was reviewed again and the next participant on the list was selected to be emailed and informed about the study. I emailed 50 BSW graduates and invited them to take part in the research study and to contact me if they were interested in learning more about the study. Participants acknowledged their willingness to participate by email as well as by verbal request. Participants also filled out a participant's informed consent (see Appendix B) and demographic form (see Appendix C).

I conducted 16 interviews, one pilot interview and 15 interviews, which consisted of 13 females and two males who were African American BSW graduates from the identified university. The theoretical framework that supported this study was Tinto's (1975) internationalist theory of college student departure, which states that students enter college with various individual characteristics that play a role in the college student departure process. Participants were individually interviewed and all interviews were audio recorded.

The CQR research team consisted of me, two professionals, one who has a Masters in Social Work (MSW), and another who has a Masters in Human Services (MHS). Both of these members of the team had conducted their own graduate level qualitative research. A third professional on the team, holding a Doctorate in Organizational Psychology, conducted her own qualitative study. The fourth team member was a graduate student who is presently a research assistant. The auditor holds a

Doctorate in Education (PhD) and also has experience in qualitative research. I asked each member of the team to sign a Consensual Team Information and Participant Form (Appendix G).

As the researcher, I conducted the interviews, transcribed, coded, and then analyzed data. According to Hill et al. (2005):

Three steps were completed, reviewing data for Domains (i.e., topics used to group or cluster data) which was used to segment interview data. Core ideas (i.e., summaries of the data that capture the essence of what was said in fewer words and with greater clarity) were used to abstract the interview data within domains. Finally, a cross-analysis was used to construct common themes across participants (i.e., developing categories that describe the common themes reflected in the core ideas within domains across cases). (p. 10)

Summary of Findings

Based on the results presented in Chapter 4, the analysis of the data resulted in four domains, 14 core ideas, and 27 categories. The four domains were justification for college attendance, reasons for institution choice/social work major, opinions regarding university attrition, and retention.

Restatement of Research Questions

The primary research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding factors that helped to retain them and prevent their dropout at a targeted HBCU?

2. What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU?

In addition, there were 12 interview questions formulated and used during each interview to help gather data in answering the two overarching research questions.

Research Question 1. Participants' responses emerged from interview questions that helped to answer the Research Question 1. BSW graduates' perceptions of what helped to retain them and prevent dropout at the targeted HBCU related to students having support from their "community of learning." The support needed, from their perception, stemmed from administration, staff, and faculty. This was the key issue that emerged from the data that helped retain BSW students and prevented their dropout. Another issue was financial support to complete their education in the form of financial aid or scholarships. Participants also discussed that having a connection and a relationship with faculty members, academic advisors, and the department chair, who engaged and had a concern for their well-being, helped in retaining students at the identified university.

Research Question 2. Question 6 from the interview guide related to Research Question 2: What do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU? According to participants' responses, internal issues that influenced college retention related to financial issues such as the lack of scholarships for students to complete their degrees and loss of finances to complete their studies. The lack of good customer service

and not being able to develop a relationship with faculty hindered the faculty-student relationship and thus affected the retention of students. Academic rigor and students not being prepared for college level work was also an issue that affected the retention rate. Campus life problems, such as lack of support from peers, bullying on campus, and peer interaction, were also internal issues that hindered a positive experience that retained students. Lack of support and communication from faculty and not being prepared for academic rigor added to internal pressures that also influenced college retention in a negative way.

According to the participants, external issues also affected the dropout rate. Twelve out of 15 participants indicted that family issues such as lack of family support and family strain were external issues that affected retention. Participants also felt the image of the identified university in the community and the lack of resources the university had developed in the community added to the external issues that affected the dropout rate. The lack of community partnerships with peer institutions added to a negative experience and created limited resources for students.

Participants faced external pressures, such as family members, and commented that they had to attend college, wanting to also improve their current situation and be able to get a better job or select a different career. Furthermore, attending college and modeling and replicating behavior for children or family members was a determining factor to why they had to attend college. A relevant factor in this study was an issue regarding why participants decided to attend the identified university and the justification for college attendance. Seven of the 15 participants were first-generation college

students who felt that the need to attend college stemmed from external pressures such as family members reinforcing the need to further their education.

According to Pelco, Ball, and Lockeman (2014), first-generation students (i.e., students whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree) are rapidly increasing and first-generation students are at very high risk for leaving higher education before they complete a bachelor's degree. Low-income, first-generation students face struggles and are at a four times greater likelihood of leaving college after their first year. Engle and Tinto (2008) suggested that "graduation rates are low, with only 11% of low-income first-generation students finishing a bachelor's degree within 6 years, compared to 55% of their advantaged peers" (p. 50).

First-generation college students have underlining pressures to be successful in college and to obtain degrees to pursue a career that will enhance financial stability. First-generation students appear to be underprepared, both academically and psychologically, for higher education due to the economic background many of them come from (Pelco et al., 2014).

The data gathered from participants also suggested that attending college was not only for them to gain an education but also to model and replicate the behavior of obtaining a college degree for their own family and children. Many first-generation college students must pave the way for other members in their family to obtain upper-level degrees. This is done by dealing with the external pressures of obtaining a degree to enhance the financial status of their present and future family.

First-generation students need support across the systems of their community of learning within the university or college they attend. Research has shown that low-income and first-generation students face barriers to successfully make the transition to enroll and be retained in college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The evidence suggests, therefore, that first-generation and low-income students are likely to face obstacles such as lack of information, limited academic preparation, support, and money which hinder students from completing their degree and untimely affect retention.

Bearing in mind the previous points, regarding participants from the study attending college and being first-generation college students, one can also review the data that relates to the reason why participants selected the institution and why they majored in social work. Five of the participants attended the selected university due to scheduling and flexibility of courses and time offerings, which helped the students to obtain their degree while having other responsibilities such as working and family. Financial support and financial aid were also relevant factors for why participants attended the identified university. Lack of financial support is an obstacle that many students face that can hinder the completion of their degree. According to Stuart (2012), the Department of Education imposed tighter eligibility requirements for the Parent Plus Program (PPL) loan applicants, causing several colleges and universities to lose students and millions of dollars in anticipated revenue. The new standards affected and hurt low-income students at HBCUs, causing many of the students to have limited resources to complete their degrees or to be retained at the university.

Another relevant point from the study was the fact that nine of the participants decided to major in social work because they had a passion for working with others and helping people. This related to having altruistic desires, which involved helping people and having an unselfish concern for people. According to Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2014), the purpose of social work is to help people in need by using ethical means when possible. In addition to helping people, seven of the participants wanted to give back to the community and to become change agents in society. This finding from the collected data enhances our understanding and adds to why the participants were persistent regarding the completion of their degree in social work at the selected university. Participants worked hard to complete their degrees to obtain an upper-level education but also to give back to the community and to help other populations at risk.

It is worth noting the data collated from participants in this study suggested their opinions and perceptions regarding university attrition. The most crucial point made regarding the participants' perceptions about attrition related to financial reasons. Lack of financial resources is a deterrent for many students at HBCUs. Students who faced financial hardship and monetary issues such as financial family issues resulted in dealing with extra stress, which affected the dropout of other students. Wade (2014) conducted a nonexperimental, quantitative research study involving secondary data from first-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students who were enrolled during the August 1999 to May 2005 academic years at four public historically Black colleges and universities in North Carolina (Fayetteville State University, North Carolina A&T State University, North Carolina Central University, and Winston Salem State University).

Participants in the study that I developed included 56.3% female participants and 43.7% male participants. The findings suggested that all types of financial aid positively influenced the decision to persist and not to withdraw. Any reductions in financial aid options and packages would reduce the graduation rate of minority students. Furthermore, in addition to student withdrawal because of financial aid was the issue of parental income. The study concluded that students at public HBCUs in North Carolina whose parents earn \$35,000 or less are more likely to withdraw and are less likely to persist to degree completion. Students who received some financial aid were more likely to persist in the education than those who received none at all.

Another key aspect of the data I gathered regarding university retention resulted in participants stating that students were not prepared to attend college and factors such as campus environment affected retention. According to Roberts and Styron (2010), students who are not engaged in college life and do not have a positive experience with the campus environment most likely will not stay at the university. Moreover, failing to become involved in campus activities, organizations, and extracurricular activities will hinder college social integration. Lack of students feeling connected to the campus environment will isolate them, resulting in a feeling of marginalization and believing that they do not fit into the campus environment. The limited social integration into campus life results in the students dropping out of school. Campus experience has a direct effect on student learning and outcomes.

The data I gathered in this study appeared to suggest that the findings illustrated in the last domain related to the area of retention. Ten participants discussed their idea of

contemplating exiting the institution before completing their degree because of social and family support issues. Social issues such as not enjoying campus life and lack of support from family and the community of learning made them contemplate leaving the university. Furthermore, internal and external factors played a major part in the retention of students. Twelve participants responded that the lack of family support and family strain were external issues that affected the retention issue at the identified university. Eight participants related campus life to the internal issues that affected the dropout and retention rate at the identified university. The lack of customer service and communication on campus was an issue. Ross (1998) as cited by Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2011) conducted a qualitative study at a private HBCU investigating factors relating to the success of 37 Black males, which revealed that participants' relationship with their family, mainly their mothers, was an important factor to their college success.

All of the findings from the research study relates to the theoretical framework of internationalist theory of college student departure (Tinto, 1975), that was used to help guide the study conceptually. The study aimed to examine the perceptions of BSW graduates regarding factors that helped to retain them and prevent their dropout at a targeted HBCU and to examine what BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU. Tinto's theoretical framework of student departure comes from principles of sociology (e.g. Durkheim, 1951, theory of suicide) and the field of social anthropology (e.g., Van Gennep, 1960, *The Rites of Passage*). Students who persist to completing their

degree follow a process of transitioning relationships as one moves to groups marked by ceremonies and rituals.

There are three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation of the internationalist theory of college student departure (Tinto, 1975). These stages relate to a process as students complete their undergraduate degree. The results and findings of this study support this theory. As students enter and take on the challenge of obtaining a degree, they must separate from the negative external issues such as lack of family support to focus on persisting through to matriculation and obtaining their degree. Students began to transition into the college atmosphere, adjusting and needing support from the community of learning at the university to help them become integrated into the college process. Transition also includes ironing out the issues that might affect retention, such as financial support in the form of financial aid or scholarships. The last stage of Tinto's college student departure theory (1975) is the incorporation stage, when students began to become socially and academically integrated by establishing contact with faculty and other peers.

Participants in the study I developed discussed having a connection and relationship with faculty members, academic advisors, and the department chair, who engaged and had a concern for their well-being, which helped in retaining students at the identified university. Incorporation and faculty student interaction has a direct effect on the overall success of students. Tinto's (1998) view of academic integration suggested that integration should not only occur in the classroom but should also include faculty interaction.

Tinto (1993) also suggested that fraternities, sororities, residence halls, student unions, contact with professors, support services, extracurricular activities, and intramural sports all foster incorporation and support from internal factors that help students persist in degree completion. The results of the study I developed relate to internal factors that stem from participants discussing internal issues such as financial issues, lack of good customer service, and limited relationship with faculty that hindered student retention. Academic rigor and students not being prepared for college level work was also an issue that affected the retention rate.

In 2006, Tinto revised the theory to take into consideration students' support networks outside of the college, concluding that some students may need to maintain engagement with systems. He also found it important to take into account the unique support of minority students that lies outside of the institutional environment. The results from the study regarding external issues that affected retention relate to Tinto's revision of the theory and participants concluding that external family issues such as lack of family support and family strain, image of the identified university in the community, and the lack of resources the university had developed. The need to have a connection and support from external factors, Tinto concluded, helps with the retention process. I found in the results the same issues were concluded.

Interpretations of Findings

The analysis of the overarching research questions in this study yielded four domains, 14 core ideas, and 27 categories. The four domains were identified as "justification for college attendance," "reasons for institution choice/social work major,"

“opinions regarding university attrition,” and “retention.” This section discusses the findings for each domain in light of the literature presented in Section 2. The first section discusses participants’ reasons for attending college; the second discusses why they selected the identified HBCU and the social work major; the third discusses participants’ opinions on why other students had dropped out of the program; and the fourth section discusses the participants’ opinions on why they themselves had been retained and had persisted to degree. In each section, the findings are related to the relevant literature.

Justification for College Attendance

The data regarding “justification for college attendance” emerged from the responses to three interview questions: “Why did you decide to go to college?” “What factors led you to choose to attend the identified university?” and “What led you to major in social work?” These three questions elicited data on both negative and positive justifications that the participants used in choosing to attend college. The participants reported that they were faced with negative external pressures such as family members forcing them to attend college, feeling overwhelmed, and wanting to improve their current situation. Additionally, the participants expressed feeling a constant pressure to attend college and to model behavior for younger siblings or other family members. Positive factors such as pursuing a degree to ensure better employment, emulating others’ positive behavior, being the only one in the family to earn their degree, and desiring to be a role model for one’s own children also played a key role in how the participants chose to attend and remain in college. In short, the participants attributed their retention to

academic preparation, academic engagement, social engagement, demographic characteristics, and their ability to finance college.

These findings are corroborated by the literature. In particular, research shows that African Americans are drawn to HBCUs as a symbol of opportunity and upward mobility. HBCU graduates enjoy greater financial success in their careers than noncollege graduates (Price et al., 2011), and U.S. rankings consistently show that HBCUs are among the top producers of students who persist through graduate and professional schools (Fletcher, 2013). President Obama in his second term has vowed to allow federal actions to help HBCUs strengthen their efforts to recruit, retain, and graduate larger numbers of students (Toldson, 2013). These students are drawn by the promise of economic opportunity and of setting an example for their communities.

Reasons for Institutional Choice/Social Work Major

Data regarding the reason for institution choice and selecting a major of social work were due to external issues that affected their educational process. Participants decided to major in social work in order to help other people, to serve others, and to become a change agent in society. Location and size of the institution and alumni encouraging students to attend the institution because of the family atmosphere were factors in their decision to attend an HBCU. Participants discussed the importance of attending a university that had a variety of majors for students to study, the flexibility of location, and an evening program. These were the determining factors for selecting the identified university.

In the study that I developed, the research suggested that the identified institution, as an HBCU, would be appealing for its historical identity. The HBCU was, according to its mission statement, committed to providing its diverse population with a solid educational foundation. Its mission was to facilitate student learning, advance knowledge and achievement, enhance spiritual and ethical values, and transform a diverse community of learners into future world leaders. The university fostered special interest in the education of minorities who had been denied educational opportunities in the past. The literature also indicates that students are drawn to the social work major by a sense of compassion and idealism. Barsky (2006) noted that “social work is a profession that draws people from a broad range of socioeconomic and ethno cultural backgrounds” (p. 32). Social work is a profession that empowers people in the process of helping individuals (micro), families and groups (macro), and organizations and communities (macro; Zastrow, 2011, 2013).

Opinions Regarding University Attrition

Under the domain “opinions regarding university attrition,” the participants identified several factors that, in their perception, could lead students to drop out of college. Factors included being a first-generation college student, lack of family support, family strain, and the perception that the identified university lacked partnerships with institutions in the community and thus had limited resources for students. The literature corroborates that attrition occurs frequently; Ventra (2009), noted that only 58% of entering freshman follow through with degree completion from the same college within six years. African American students complete college at the lowest rate compared to

other ethnic subgroups (Gilliam & Kritsonis, 2006, p. 2). According to the literature, a major reason for attrition in HBCUs is that many students who attend HBCUs come from low-income families, and a number of them are first-generation college students. These students are at risk for dropping out of college not only because of academics, but also for the lack of financial resources (Johnson, 2013). This is one reason why the present study's focus on African American students is significant.

Craig and Ward (2007) noted that finding ways to end the problem of attrition and reduce the dropout rate is very important because of the money invested by both institutions and individual students. The theoretical foundation for this study, Tinto's 1975 student departure theory, explains that students arrive at college with certain expectations and aspirations, and when students are not integrated into the college environment, degree completion can be affected. According to Jones and Braxton (2009), while research has produced literature regarding retention and dropout rates, statistics indicate that there is very little research relating to understanding students' perceptions of retention and the attempt to increase persistence.

The literature indicates that a major reason for attrition among social work students in particular is the high stress associated with these programs. Milner and Criss (2006) noted that social work students experience multiple stressors that impact their ability to effectively learn, complete social education, and practice social work. They also examined student stress and gathered students' own stories regarding the way they experienced stress and the impact it had on their degree completion. The role of faculty as mentors and advisors also helped to improve student stress and student success, and

the presence of such support made a difference between students persisting in their studies and dropping out of school (Milner & Criss, 2006)

Opinions Regarding University Retention

The BSW graduates in this study had a range of perceptions regarding the factors that had helped their HBCU to retain them. Liu and Chang (2014) suggested that individual background and family background have a direct influence on degree completion, and indeed, the participants expressed that academic preparation, demographic characteristics, and family background were associated with their degree completion. According to Liu and Chang (2014), “Parents’ educational level and annual income influence a student’s educational expectations, self-efficiency, sense of mattering, goal; development, interpersonal relationships, emotional management, and self-identity” (p. 1387). The findings of my study confirmed the views of Liu and Chang (2014). Many of these factors that affect persistence to degree are predetermined by one’s environment or system, and thus they are best understood through the ecological perspective. The evidence suggests that in order for universities to improve retention, students need assistance in the following areas:

1. Holistic support:
 - a. Know the background of students and the struggles they face.
 - b. Have a checklist to help students put a support system in place.
 - c. Foster a community of learning characterized by open communication with students.

2. Academic support: Tinto (1997) found that academic involvement led to increased social integration. In addition, findings suggest that students could benefit if universities would encourage some of their most passionate and patient instructors to teach introductory-level courses and thus help to engage freshman. Students who feel encouraged rather than pressured, who are offered choices, fulfilling relationships, and feel competent in their roles as students are motivated to succeed and to take responsibility to complete their degrees (Brown, 2012).
 - a. Help students before they are placed on academic probation.
 - b. Solicit support from professors and department chair/faculty.
 - c. Offer tutoring in different academic areas.
3. Financial support: When students do not have the ability to acquire assistance or support or services needed to overcome the obstacles of college, their survival rate is affected (Seidman, 2005).
 - a. Offer more on-campus work programs, allowing students to work in exchange for tuition reimbursement or stipends (Brown, 2012).
 - b. Fund more scholarships.
4. Social support: According to Roberts and Styron (2010), an important factor that affects student success, is not feeling socially connected or integrated to the college or university.
 - a. Offer support programs such as mentorships between faculty and small groups of students (Landry, 2002).

- b. Encourage new students to get to know student leaders.
- c. Link upperclassman to underclassman and staff to students.
- d. Partner with different organizations and have activities for students.
- e. Foster positive relationships with professors, social involvement, and a sense of connection to the university (Kelly et al., 2012).

Overall, the findings of this study supported prior research, which suggested that in order for students to persist at a university, they need support services that range from academic, to financial, to social integration.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this research study I developed serve to inform minority-serving institutions, the educational community of higher education, and the Department of Social Work at the identified university. The information in the research study related to the perceptions of BSW graduates of what helped to retain them and prevent dropout at the targeted HBCU and what BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU. The information is significant for the audiences that follow.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

As noted earlier in this study, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are distinct and are a source of pride for African American people. They have played a major role in developing educational opportunities for underrepresented groups since 1837. HBCUs try to support and understand the social and academic needs of low-income and minority students. Today, research has demonstrated that HBCU graduates

enjoy greater financial success in their careers (Price et al., 2011), and U.S. rankings consistently show that HBCUs are among the top producers of students who persist through graduate and professional schools (Fletcher, 2013). Retention and dropout of students who attend HBCUs can and will reduce the amount of educated, trained professionals in society.

Therefore, the recommendation from data I gathered in this study adds to the body of knowledge for the educational community and minority higher education institutions. Educational communities can begin to implement and fund programs that will engage and promote retention within the higher education system and at HBCUs. By implementing programs and suggestions, for example, student-faculty engagement that fosters students feeling connected to the university, and effective campus life, which promotes a sense of student's incorporation into the university setting, it can lead to effective degree attainment that will help students increase their economic competitiveness in society.

Department of Social Work/Identified University

Social work is a professional and academic discipline that seeks to improve the quality of life on three different levels: micro level, which is working with individuals; the mezzo level, which is working with small groups; and macro level, which works with large organizations. According to Zastrow (2011), the profession is dedicated to social justice and the well-being of oppressed and underprivileged individuals and communities. Social workers at the BSW level are generalist practitioners who are prepared to help people with individualized personal issues and with very broad problems that affect whole communities. According to the university mission statement (2014), the identified

university exists to advance knowledge, facilitate student learning and achievement, to enhance the spiritual and ethical values of its students, and to transform a diverse community of learners into future global leaders. In addition, the Department of Social Work's mission statement (2014) states that the baccalaureate social work program is to prepare and graduate competent and principled social work majors at the generalist practice, entry level of the profession for service, advocacy, and leadership and to prepare students for successful graduate education.

It is necessary for the social work profession to retain and graduate competent social workers who will enter into the profession helping to promote problem-solving and coping issues for people, link people to resources, and advocate for effective social justice for the broader society. The study educates the identified university and the Department of Social Work in the area of retaining students and preventing dropout. The participants in the study were considered experts because they successfully completed their education and were retained at the identified university. They established having a connection and a relationship with faculty members, academic advisors, and the department chair, who engaged and had a concern for their well-being, which according to their perception helped to retain them at the identified university. The Department of Social Work and the identified university should review this information and suggestions to help establish a retention plan for both the department and university.

President Obama's Educational Goal

Noted earlier in this study, President Obama, in his American Graduation Initiative 2009, identified the importance of our nation increasing the number of college

graduates. When a student fails to complete a college degree, it has financial implications for the student, their family, and for society. It also influences the economy through the loss of the individual's skills, knowledge, and future earning potential (Crosling et al., 2009). According to President Obama's (2010) State of the Union Address, he reiterated his goal for America becoming the world leader in college graduates by 2020.

Gramling (2013) noted that Undersecretary Martha Kanter (2011) suggested that in order to reach this goal, America must graduate 47 million students from U.S. colleges. This goal will require the increase of students graduating with a four-year degree and students being retained in the educational system. As the researcher in this study, the internal and external factors such as a student's background, academic preparation, and finances are all odds that affect graduating from the target university. It is important that federal student loan providers and federal policymakers realize that finances have a direct impact on the goal of retaining students. Sharing the findings of this study will help inform the educational system and add to the body of knowledge relating to the social change issue of increasing a productive workforce. President Obama has a goal for the United States to graduate and produce competent members of society, which will improve the economic stability of the United States by 2020.

Implication for Social Change

Findings from this study provided insight into the perceptions of what retained BSW graduates and prevented their dropout at the targeted HBCU. Information also provided relevance to what they perceived as the internal and external factors that

influenced college retention in the Department of Social Work at the identified HBCU. All of the participants who were part of the study successfully graduated from the identified university with a BSW degree. Participants' perceptions relating to retention were treated with high regard due to their experiences of being retained at the identified university. The completion of their degree added to the retention rate at the identified university.

This study that I developed contributes to the field of education by providing specific details and recommendations perceived by BSW graduates relating to retention. The results of the study that I compiled also provided insight into student experiences during their educational process and allowed for their perceptions regarding internal and external factors that influenced college retention. Evidence added depth to the research regarding retention in higher education and at HBCUs from a graduate's perspective. There is a gap in research regarding student perceptions about what works in higher education to retain and prevent dropout.

Information from this study will benefit administration in higher education, faculty, students, and alumni in that it will offer suggestions from the findings to help develop strategic institutional and department wide retention plans. Findings will also help to put forth institutional and societal actions that can enhance retention and graduation rates. Retention plans should provide support, connect students and faculty, engage students in their learning communities, and improve transition and adjustment to social integration on campus.

The overall social change implication of this study established by me was to investigate ways to increase retention and decrease dropout rates at the identified university. Because of the findings, key recommendations and strategies can be used for educational enhancement within the university and the higher educational arena. In addition, the results can also help to translate the research findings and empirically based knowledge in the field of retention into organizational models that can guide higher learning institutions to enhance student retention.

The purpose of the study I established was to gather knowledge to help increase the retention rate at the designated university, and enhance the body of understanding that discusses external and internal elements that retain students. The result of the study may add information and highlight the importance of higher education transforming lives, as suggested by President Obama's American Graduation Initiative (Russell, 2011). When students complete their goal of obtaining a degree, they also increase their lifetime economic earning potential. When BSW students who affect society by working to empower and change people's lives on a micro, mezzo, and macro level, and successfully complete their degree, they become professional social workers. They use their skills to resolve problems such as human well-being, human rights, and social and economic justice. These areas of intervention are also effective on the global and macro levels that President Obama states are needed to assure the country's economic stability and growth.

Recommendations for Further Study

Recommendation for Action

Successful retention in higher learning education requires collaboration from every aspect of the university, which includes every area that encounters a student, to improve the quality of learning and life for that student. Retention should be an institutional goal rather than departments and individual programs working on the issue alone. While developing educational and service programs to combat retention, universities should engage in needs assessments to review what is working to retain students and to foster resources to enhance these areas. Furthermore, higher learning institutions should focus on areas that are important to the “customer” (students) to enhance student success and satisfaction, which results in retention.

Findings from the study I developed answered the question: What ideas did participants have that would be worth considering for implementation at the university to help improve the retention and dropout rate? Suggestions such as having a diverse population of students, mentoring programs, and contact with alumni who are successful in their careers resonated throughout the participants’ responses. Furthermore, increasing support services, work-study programs, and mental health counseling programs were important also. Recommendations from alumni discussed financial support, mentoring buddy/peer support programs, and more contact with alumni, not just at homecoming.

Students are engaged when they are exposed to quality educational programs, positive service, and their environment is inviting. Presenting at faculty meetings, professional conferences, and educational summits regarding the findings of the study

and recommendations from participants regarding retention are the next steps in educating higher education and the community regarding what retains students from their perception. The results from the study I developed may add knowledge in the academic arena relating to the identified university, the Department of Social Work, HBCUs, and the educational community. These results connected three areas that can enhance student success, which equals student retention: students' learning, which translates from the results as the connection between students and faculty; student engagement, as related to the study, requires positive experience with campus life and feeling connected; and student satisfaction, such as financial support, mentoring programs, and support from the community of learning. When a university fails to meet the need of a student on one or more levels, students leave the institution. Retention is a complex and continually changing problem and process that needs the attention of all levels of authority to implement action to change the success of retention in higher education.

Recommendations for Further Research

The consensual qualitative study that I developed contributed to the barrier in research that addressed the perceptions of students regarding retention and dropout. It lends itself to further research in the area of exploring an increase in the population and how ethnic and racial backgrounds of students influence their perceptions of what retains students in a university. The research was limited to BSW graduates at an identified university that was an HBCU. All of the participants were African American. Further research may include a predominantly White institution to study if the perceptions of

students from different races are different from students who are African American when it relates to retention.

Further research may also look at the perceptions of adult learners versus the traditional age students regarding retention, and if the internal and external factors are different for these two populations. Seven participants were adult learners and eight were traditional students in my study. Another area for further research could explore an area from the study that stood out, which was the area of student-faculty engagement and connection that participants felt helped to retain students. There is research that suggests faculty engagement with students promotes a positive atmosphere and adds to the student feeling like they are a part of the community of learning. Further research, such as a case study, could be done focusing on a sample population and encompassing supportive faculty-student services such as academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, and in and outside the classroom engagement between students and faculty to see if the intervention and connection between faculty and students really helps to retain students at a university.

Mentoring and connecting with alumni who were and are successful in their profession was another concept that was drawn from the results of the study. Students felt that a connection to a former student who went through the educational process would help with retention. Further research could be explored to investigate how effective the role of mentors at HBCUs are in cultivating students to become professional in their chosen field.

Researcher's Reflection

“The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it is the same problem you had last year.” John Foster Dulles

This affirmation reflects my view and sparked my interest in my research study regarding the perceptions of BSW graduates relating to retention and the internal and external factors that examined what BSW graduates perceived influenced college retention in the Department of Social Work. As a member of the community of learning for the past eight years, retention and preventing student dropout has been an area that resonated with me. In 2009, the entire university received a decrease in salary due to the lack of students graduating and being retained. I had knowledge of the retention issues because during the withdrawal process the common theme that students shared was financial difficulties.

This study informed me of a different perspective regarding facts from students who made it through the process and what they felt helped to retain them at the identified university. I was not aware of the bullying on campus as well as students feeling a lack of support from campus life and faculty. In addition, I repeatedly discussed with my colleagues that students feel they need a connection to faculty and I am trying to implement a training regarding how to foster faculty-student engagement to improve retention.

The BSW graduates were very happy to engage in the study and share their views and recommendations regarding retention. The number of participants who wanted to share their perspective on the topic astonished me. Several of the participants felt a sense

of ownership for the target university and wanted to help share anything that could help to retain students and improve the graduation rate of their alma mater. I also explored the possibility of facilitating a meeting between faculty and alumni to discuss their insight regarding what works to retain students at the selected university.

The research I found during my literature review was already shared with Student's Affairs staff when I was asked to make a presentation titled "Being Responsible for Your College Success." The Vice President of Academic Affairs has already asked to present the study at the university faculty monthly meeting when I have completed my dissertation process. I am truly excited about further research regarding retention and continuing to add to the body of research knowledge for higher education institutions.

Conclusion

I conducted this study in an effort to examine BSW graduates' perceptions regarding retention and the internal and external factors that BSW graduates perceived influenced college retention in the Department of Social Work. As the researcher, I collected data from interviews and then used the consensual qualitative research model to analyze data. The study took place in North Carolina. The results indicated that participants' perceptions such as having support from the "community of learning," administration, staff, and faculty were key issues that helped retain BSW students and prevented their dropout. Other issues that helped in retaining students were financial support to complete their education in the form of financial aid or scholarships and

having a connection and a relationship with faculty members, academic advisors, and the department chair, who engaged and had a concern for their well-being.

Internal issues such as lack of finances, for example, lack of scholarships offered by the university for students to complete their degrees, loss of finances to complete their studies, the lack of good customer service, and not being able to develop a relationship with faculty hindered the faculty-student relationship and thus affected the retention of students. Academic rigor, students not being prepared for college level study, campus life problems such as lack of support from peers, bullying on campus, and peer interaction were also identified as internal issues. External family issues such as lack of family support and family strain, image of the identified university in the community, the lack of resources from the university, and lack of community partnerships with peer institutions were also results from the study.

The study I developed tackled the serious problem of student retention that is presently one of the main issues that President Obama is addressing. By 2020, he is optimistic about America becoming the leader in graduation rates. Universities must develop retention plans that establish goals that demonstrate key strategies and action plans. The overall goal for retention is to enhance the quality of students' success by improving their life and learning so they can be positive additions to society. This study was an important addition to research conducted in the field of retention.

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doi:10.1080/03075070903545074

Appendix A: Recruitment Email #1

You are invited to take part in a research study. The primary purpose of this study is to identify and examine Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) graduates' perception of what factors helped to retain them at a Historically Black College or University in the south. In addition, the study will explore what BSW graduates' perceive as the internal and external factors that influenced college retention in the Department of Social Work.

The researcher, Monique Holsey-Hyman, is a doctoral student at Walden University, Doctor of Education - Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning, and is conducting this study. Interviews will be conducted to learn about students experiences that relate to college retention. The Chair of the Dissertation Committee is Dr. Jesse Washington. I am looking for BSW graduates who are willing to share their experience regarding what worked to retain them at a HBCU in the south in the Department of Social Work at the selected University.

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

Monique Holsey- Hyman, Doctoral Student

Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. You are invited to take part in a research study because you are BSW graduate from the selected university from (2008-2013). The primary purpose of this study is to identify and examine BSW graduates' perception of what factors helped to retain them at an HBCU in the south. In addition, the study will explore what BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influenced college retention in the Department of Social Work. The researcher is inviting (BSW) Social Work graduates from (2008 through 2013) from the selected university to take part in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. The estimated time frame for your participation will be two to three weeks. This study is being conducted by a researcher, Monique Holsey-Hyman, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, Doctor of Education - Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning: Chair of the Dissertation Committee, Dr. Jesse Washington.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine what works in retention to help the dropout rates in HBCU'S

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Sign a participant informed consent form.
- Complete interviews which will last sixty minutes regarding your perception of retention and what factors impact and contribute to the dropout rate at the proposed University in the Department of Social Work.
- Complete a demographic profile. It will take about five minutes to complete the form.
- Complete a follow-up questionnaire. It will take about twenty minutes to complete the form.
- Review final draft copy of the findings of the study. The benefit of your review and conducting this member check is to allow you and opportunity to verify the accuracy and completions of the findings which will help to improve the validity of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to participate in the study. If you decide to join the study, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

If you are interested in participating in the study, ask the researcher any questions that will help you decide whether to participate. Taking time to share your concerns will help you feel safe if you do decide to volunteer. I do not foresee any risk of harm relating to your participation in this study. The benefit in participating in the study will be your contribution to the field of academia.

Compensation

There will be no monetary compensation for participating in this study. A thank you note will be issued at the end of the research study.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the researcher's main priorities. Information participants provide will be held in complete confidence. Names or any identifying information will not be used in the study. However, because of the research method being used in this study, team members and an outside auditor will review data without identifying information. Information gathered will be handled with strict confidentiality.

The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by locking data in a secured file cabinet and on a folder on desk top computer with the researcher only having access to files, and secured by the use of a confidential username and passcode. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions regarding your participation in this research study, you may ask the researcher at any point of this research study. You may contact the researcher at (xxx) xxx-xxxx (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxx.xxxx@xxx.xxx. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Walden University representative at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxx.xxxx@xxxx.xxx to discuss any concerns. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB _____ and it expires on IRB will _____. The researcher will give you a copy for face to face interviews or please print or save this consent form for your records for telephone and Skype interviews.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below and or replying to this e-mail with the words "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Print Name

Researcher's Signature

Signature of Participant

Date of Consent

Appendix C: Demographic Form

Please indicate your answer for each of the following best choice

1. Gender : Male _____ Female: _____ Age: _____
2. Self-Identification:
 - White _____
 - Black, African American _____
 - Asian Indian _____
 - Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander _____
 - Chinese _____
 - Filipino _____
 - Japanese _____
 - Korean _____
 - Vietnamese _____
 - Guamanian, Chamorro _____
 - Other _____
3. First Generation College Student: No: _____ Yes: _____
4. Did you utilize the Academic Success Center for tutorial services during your enrollment at the proposed University? : No: _____ Yes: _____
5. What year did you graduate from the targeted University?
 - 2008 _____
 - 2009 _____ 2010 _____ 2011 _____ 2012 _____ 2013 _____
6. Are you employed in the field of Social Work? : No: _____ Yes: _____
7. Are you pursuing a graduate level education? : No: _____ Yes: _____

Appendix D: Interview Transcript and Guide

Date of Interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Topic:

Research Questions: Factors Impacting BSW Graduates' Perceptions of Retention at an HBCU, Consensual Qualitative Study.

- I. Introduction
 - a. Define terms:
 1. Retention
 2. Drop-out rate
 3. Former Student Perception
 4. Internal Factor's
 5. External Factor's
- II. I am Monique Holsey-Hyman, a student at Walden University. I will be conducting this interview and follow-up questionnaire of which the goal is to elicit information from former students who graduated regarding factors which helped to retain them at an HBCU in the south. In addition, what do BSW graduates perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work.
- III. You would begin by signing participant's consent form and demographic form?
- IV. General Information
- V. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this research study. I would like to explain the process of this research study. You will be asked to participate in a 30-60 minute interview, complete a demographic profile, follow-up questionnaire and review final draft copy of the findings of the study. The benefit of your review and conducting this member check is to allow you an opportunity to verify the accuracy and completions of the findings which will help to improve the validity of the study. The study will be audio recorded and later transcribed for partial completion of a qualitative research study that I am completing while a student at Walden University. The interview will be recorded to accurately capture your experience in your own words. The interview will later be transcribed and all proper

names and places will be coded to protect your identity and privacy. Your name will not be shared.

Appendix E: Pilot Study Interview Questionnaire

In this Pilot Interview, the researcher would like to ask you some questions about:

Factors Impacting BSW Graduates' Perceptions of Retention at an HBCU Consensual Qualitative Study.

1. Why did you decide to go to college?
2. What factors led you to choose to attend the identified University?
Probe: What led you to major in social work?
3. In your experiences, why do some students decide to leave or drop out of the University before graduating?
Probe: Do you think the reason is financial, campus life, or not being prepared for the academic rigor?
4. Did you have a classmate who dropped out of the University? Why did this student decide to drop out and not complete their degree?
Probe: Please explain any other factors you think might be important?
5. Did you ever think about discontinuing your education at the University and at what point in your educational process did this occur?
Probe: 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?
6. What were your perceptions of the internal/external factors that affected the dropout and retention rate at the identified University during your enrollment period?

Probe: Internal factors relate to issue(s) at the proposed University; for example, relationships with professors.

Probe: External factors relate to issue(s) such as family support.

7. What are your ideas about ways to help students complete their degrees? What do you feel works in retaining students? And in the Department of Social Work?
8. During your four years at the University, were you aware of any programs the University used to keep students in school and to help them be successful?
9. What ideas do you think might be worth considering for implementation at the University to improve the retention and dropout rate?
10. What recommendations do you have as a graduate of the University's social work program you think would keep students in school?
11. Did you use the Academic Success Center, if yes did you find it helpful?

Probe: Please explain and give an example.

12. What are your perceptions of what alumni can do to help improve the probability of students staying in school and graduating from the Department of Social Work?

Appendix F: Interview Guide

Questions will be reviewed after the results of Pilot Interview

1. Why did you decide to go to college?
2. What factors led you to choose to attend the identified University?
Probe: What led you to major in social work?
3. In your experiences, why do some students decide to leave or drop out of the University before graduating?
Probe: Do you think the reason is financial, campus life, or not being prepared for the academic rigor?
4. Did you have a classmate who dropped out of the University? Why did this student decide to drop out and not complete their degree?
Probe: Please explain any other factors you think might be important?
5. Did you ever think about discontinuing your education at the University and at what point in your educational process did this occur?
Probe: 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?
6. What were your perceptions of the internal/external factors that affected the dropout and retention rate at the identified University during your enrollment period?
Probe: Internal factors relate to issue(s) at the proposed University; for example, relationships with professors.

Probe: External factors relate to issue(s) such as family support.

7. What are your ideas about ways to help students complete their degrees? What do you feel works in retaining students? And in the Department of Social Work?
8. During your four years at the University, were you aware of any programs the University used to keep students in school and to help them be successful?
9. What ideas do you think might be worth considering for implementation at the University to improve the retention and dropout rate?
10. What recommendations do you have as a graduate of the University's social work program you think would keep students in school?
11. Did you use the Academic Success Center, if yes did you find it helpful?

Probe: Please explain and give an example.

12. What are your perceptions of what alumni can do to help improve the probability of students staying in school and graduating from the Department of Social Work?

Appendix G: Consensual Team Information and Participant Form

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

You are invited to take part in a research study: Factors Impacting BSW Graduates' Perceptions of Retention at an HBCU, Consensual Qualitative Study. Consensual Qualitative Research Method will be used in this research study. According to Hill (1997), the essential components of CQR are the use of (a) open-ended questions in semi-structured data collection techniques (typically in interviews), which allow for the collection of consistent data across individuals as well as a more in-depth examination of individual experiences; (b) several judges throughout the data analysis process to foster multiple perspectives; (c) consensus to arrive at judgments about the meaning of the data; (d) at least one auditor to check the work of the primary team of judges and minimize the effects of group thinking in the primary team; and (e) domains, core ideas, and cross-analyses in the data analysis (p. 2). The method also consists of a team of appropriate members who will review data and follow the Consensual Research Method. The team will consist of a researcher, team members, and an auditor. You are being asked to become a part of the consensual research team.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to identify factors which helped to retain students at an HBCU in the south. In addition, what do BSW graduates' perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work. This form is a part of a process called "informed consent," which will allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part and be a part of the Consensual Qualitative Research team. This study is being conducted by a researcher, Monique Holsey-Hyman, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, Doctor of Education - Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning: Chair of the Dissertation Committee, Dr. Jesse Washington.

Procedures

The researcher will meet with team members and auditor to discuss the format of the consensual research model pertaining to the study. Hill (2005), suggest that the team members read the article Hill et al. (1997), on CQR research to become well-versed in the terminology utilized (e.g., domains, core ideas etc.) and the procedure (p. 79). There is also a suggestion that the team also read the article Hill et al. (2005), update on CQR to understand and incorporate the author's recommendations for modifications of the method.

Confidentiality Agreement/ Participation

If participants consent to be a part of the team, each member will have to sign this document consenting to their participation. In addition, team members will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. The research team will be able to ask any questions during the process regarding the study and the process of the consensual research study. Questions concerning the research study should be directed to Monique Holsey-Hyman at (xxx) xxx-xxxx xxxxxxxx.xxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxx.xxx the Chair of this dissertation committee Dr. Jesse Washington at (xxx) xxx-xxxx xxxxx.xxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxx.xxx who can discuss any concerns. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Consensual Team Participant's Name (Printed or Typed):

Date: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: Factors Impacting BSW Graduates' Perceptions of Retention at an HBCU, Consensual Qualitative Study. I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge copy, release, sell, and loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I: Letter to Proposed University

IRB Department

Dear IRB:

I am a doctoral student in the Walden University Doctor of Education - Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning and I am currently an Assistant Professor of Social Work/Curriculum Quality Coordinator at the targeted University. Currently, I am writing my dissertation on Factors Impacting BSW Graduates' Perceptions of Retention at an HBCU, Consensual Qualitative Study.

Student retention is an important issue facing higher education. Increasing student retention remains a critical issue for most United States colleges and universities. The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to identify and examine factors, which helped to retain them at an HBCU in the south. In addition, what do BSW graduates' perceive as the internal and external factors that influence college retention in the Department of Social Work. The potential significance of the study is to assess external and internal factors that contribute to the dropout rate and factors that contribute to withdrawal of students, which result in a retention rate of 48% at the proposed University. I am proposing to interview participants with a follow-up questionnaire. I am requesting your approval to engage in interviews with former identified University students. All participation is voluntary and all information will remain confidential. Refusing to participate or discontinue with participation involves no penalty on behalf of the participant.

These interviews and follow-up questionnaires relate to students' perception of retention and what factors affect and contribute to the dropout rate in the Department of Social Work at the targeted University. When my dissertation is completed, I will share my research conclusions with the University and the Department of Social Work that I hope will add to the body of knowledge in academia. Questions concerning the research study should be directed to Monique Holsey-Hyman at (xxx) xxx-xxxx xxxxxxxx.xxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx or the Chair of this dissertation committee Dr. Jesse Washington at (xxx) xxx-xxxx jesse.washington@xxxxxxx.xxx who can discuss any concerns. Thanking you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Monique Holsey-Hyman, Doctoral Student

Appendix J: Member Check Form

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study. Thank you for your enjoyable and insightful participation in this study. Attached, please find a draft copy of the findings of the study. The benefit of your review and conducting this member check is to allow you and opportunity to verify the accuracy and completions of the findings which will help to improve the validity of the study.

If you have any comments, suggestions or clarifications about the reviewed draft copy of the findings of the study please email Monique Holsey-Hyman at xxxxxxxx.xxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx (xxx) xxx-xxxx or this dissertation committee Chair Dr. Jesse Washington at (xxx) xxx-xxxx xxxxx. xxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx who can discuss any concerns.

Again, thank you again for your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Monique Holsey-Hyman, Doctoral Student

Appendix K: Interview Follow-Up Questions

Follow-up questions help the researcher gain clarity needed from the data collected in the first interview. Please email the answers to the follow-up questions from the interview on _____ to xxxxxx.xxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx or xxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx

If you have any questions about the follow up questionnaire please contact Monique Holsey-Hyman at (xxx) xxx-xxxx monique.holseyhyman@xxxxxxx.xxx or the Chair of this dissertation committee Dr. Jesse Washington at (xxx) xxx-xxxx xxx.xxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx who can discuss any concerns. If you feel that you answered the questions in your interview and which not to elaborate on the below questions please sign below stating you have no further elaboration from your interview on _____.

1. Can you tell me more about your perceptions of internal/external factors that affected the dropout and retention rate at the identified University during your enrollment period?
2. Can you elaborate about are your ideas about ways to help students complete their degrees? What do you feel works in retaining students?
3. Can you elaborate on your perceptions of what alumni can do to help improve the probability of students staying in school and graduating from the Department of Social Work?
4. Can you elaborate regarding any concepts of ideas that you feel you didn't share in the last interview?

I have no further elaboration from my interview of _____.

Signature of Participant: _____.

Appendix L: Retention and Completion Rates of Fall Semester First-Time, Full-Time,
Degree-Seeking Freshmen

Retention rates	Fall 2007 cohort	Fall 2008 cohort	Fall 2009 cohort	Fall 2010 cohort	Fall 2011 cohort
Fall-to-fall retention rates	58%	42%	55%	49%	38%
Fall-to-spring retention rates	83%	86%	85%	81%	78%
Completion rates	Fall 2003 cohort	Fall 2004 cohort	Fall 2005 cohort	Fall 2006 cohort	Fall 2007 cohort
6-year graduation rates	34%	29%	28%	23%	30%

Note. Retention and completion rates of fall semester first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen. Years fall 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011. Adapted from the University's Office of Institutional Research–Retention Summary Report (2013).

Appendix M: Bachelor's Degrees Conferred and Percentage of University Total

	2008-2009		2009-2010		2010-2011		2011-2012		2012-2013	
Degree Program	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total	No.	% of Total
Social Work	41	10.4%	26	7.6%	48	12.2%	58	16.8%	49	17.63%

Note. Social work degrees conferred and the relationship to degrees conferred in the University. Reporting years 2008-2013. Adapted from the University's Office of Institutional Research–Retention Summary Report (2013).

Appendix N: Unduplicated Undergraduate Student Enrollment and Tutorial Center

Visitation, Fall and Spring 2012-2013

	Number enrolled	Number visited tutorial services	% visited tutorial services
All undergraduates	2,212	560	25.32%
Raleigh day	1,613	509	31.56%
Social work majors	269	64	23.79%
Raleigh day social work majors	113	47	41.59%

Note. Undergraduate students' percentage of who attended the Tutorial Center. Adapted from the University's Office of Institutional Research–Retention Summary Report (2013).

Appendix O: Unduplicated Undergraduate Student Enrollment by Career GPA Range at

End of Spring 2012-2013

All Undergraduates		
Career GPA	No. enrolled	% of total
2.25 or above	1,316	59.49%
Under 2.5	896	40.51%
Grand Total	2,212	100.00%
Social Work Majors		
Career GPA	No. Enrolled	% of Total
2.25 or above	185	68.77%
Under 2.5	84	31.23%
Grand Total	269	100.00%

Note. Undergraduate student enrollment by career GPA compared to social work majors ranging from spring 2012-2013. Adapted from the University's Office of Institutional Research–Retention Summary Report (2013).

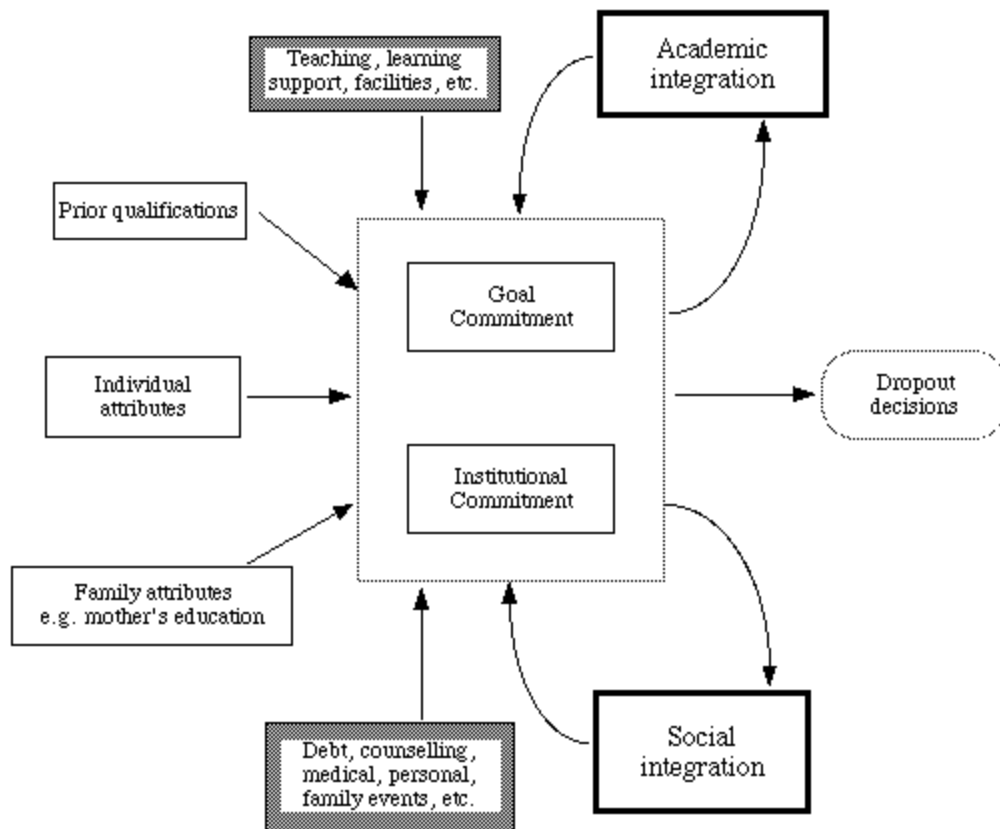
Appendix P: Fall Retention of Fall 2011 First-Time, Full-Time, Degree-Seeking

Freshmen

Major/concentration	No. enrolled fall 2011	No. who returned for fall 2012	% who returned for fall 2012
All undergraduates	533	205	28.46%
Social work majors	40	22	55.00%

Note. Retention of fall 2011 first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen for all undergraduates and social work majors. Adapted from the University's Office of Institutional Research—Retention Summary Report (2013).

Appendix Q: Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent
Research



Adapted from "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research," by V. Tinto, 1975, *Review of Educational Research*, 45, p. 89-125. Copyright 1975 by the Review of Educational Research.

Appendix R: Modernity and Suicide (A Heuristic and Pedagogical Synthesis)

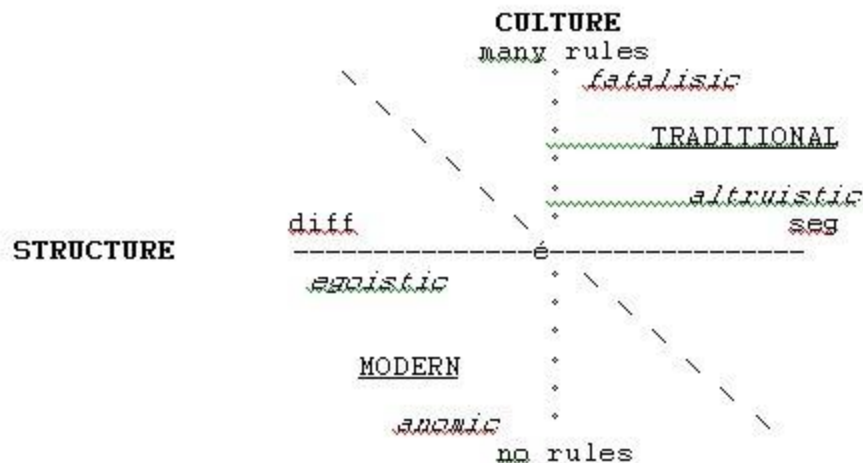


Diagram depicting the relationship between two major pieces of Durkheim's social theory: his analysis of modernity and tradition (contained in "The Division of Labor") and his analysis of the forms of suicide (contained in "Suicide"). Adapted from

Adapted from "Social Theory Pages," by J. Spickard, 2001. Copyright 2001 by Jim Spickard.

Appendix S: Letter of Agreement

May 5, 2014

Xxxxx XXXXXX, M.Ed., CIP
Associate Director
irb@XXXXXXXX.XXX

Dear xx. XXXXX XXXXXX, M.Ed., CIP, Associate Director,

xxxx University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) is presently having technical difficulties and in the process of reapplication. We will defer IRB approval to xxxxx University. Previously I signed and approved The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Authorization Agreement form. As the Acting President of xxxxx University who is the community partner I am granting approval and permission for Mrs. Monique Holsey- Hyman to move forward with her research.

xxxxx University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved Monique Holsey- Hyman's application for the study entitled, "Perceptions of Retention among Bachelor of Social Work Graduates at an HBCU". According to xxxxx University's current policies and procedures we are granting approval as a community research partner. xxxxx University will allow Mrs. Monique Holsey – Hyman to engage in interviews with former identified University students and the use of xxxxx University data.

Please feel free to contact me for any further information regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Acting President of xxxxx University