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The Invisible Wall: Exploring the Experiences of African-American Students at CCCU Institutions

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The Invisible Wall:

Exploring the Experiences of African-American Students at CCCU Institutions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Timothy Perry Young

2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Invisible Wall:

Exploring the Experiences of African-American Students at CCCU Institutions

by

Timothy Perry Young

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Robert Cooper, Co-Chair

Professor Linda Rose, Co-Chair

African-American students who attend a CCCU institution do not complete their degrees as frequently as other student groups. The average gap at CCCU institutions between "overall and Black graduation rates is more than 19%. This is greater than the gap at other private institutions" (Smith, 2009, p.80). While the six-year graduation rate for African-American students at private universities averages 51%, colleges and universities in the CCCU average only 36%. CCCU graduation rates are 9.5% lower than other private institutions due to CCCU affiliation alone. CCCU affiliation was the only variable to have a significantly more negative association with Black graduation rates than with overall graduation rates" (Smith, 2009, p.x).

This study examined the experiences of African-American students within the context of Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institutions. While previous research

explored African-American graduation rates, the unique spiritual context of Christian colleges and institutions in the CCCU had not been adequately studied. The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of African-American students regarding their experiences at CCCU institutions in order to identify the barriers and hindrances encountered by these students in their pursuit of a degree.

A qualitative, case-study methodology was utilized to conduct nine focus groups with African-American students at three CCCU institutions in the Western region. The sample was comprised of 51 African-American students who had completed at least four semesters at the institution. Themes unique to each school were identified and a cross-case analysis was conducted. The findings indicated the experiences of African-American students at CCCU institutions were similar to other predominantly White institutions without a spiritual affiliation. The unique context of the spiritual environment did not create an environment that promoted African-American student success and did not positively impact African-American students according to their expectations. The findings indicated there are aspects of the environment at CCCU institutions which can be improved to enhance the experiences of African-American students.

The dissertation of Timothy Perry Young is approved.

Beverly Lynch

Robert Cooper, Committee Co-Chair

Linda Rose, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

DEDICATION

To my wife—your love and support through this process was tremendous. You helped me to

discover my voice and challenged me to become the best I can be. I am forever grateful for your

love and friendship.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Most minority groups in the United States have low college completion rates when compared to White students, even though baccalaureate degree attainment remains a fundamental goal of American higher education. Four-year college completion rates continue to vary widely among different racial and ethnic subgroups of students: 21% for Mexican American students, 23% for African American students and 38% for Asian American students, respectively (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Oseguera, 2006). Even after controlling for pre-college characteristics and within-college experiences, differences remain in the persistence rates of some student subgroups. Underrepresented students of color persist at lower rates than their White counterparts (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Dey & Astin, 1993; Oseguera, 2006).

African-American[1] students who enroll at a college or university in the United States do not have a high probability of graduating. Nationally, less than half of all African-American students who start college at a four-year institution graduate in six years or less (Carey, 2008). The average number of African-American college students in the United States who complete a college degree at four-year colleges and universities in the United States is nearly 20 percentage points less than their White peers (Lynch & Engle, 2010). African-American students also "typically graduate at a lower rate than their White peers at the same institution" (Carey, 2008, p. 2). Although an increase in the number of African-American students enrolled in colleges has occurred and some gains in degree completion have been achieved since the civil rights

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[1] The term African-American and Black are often used interchangeably in the research. However for the purposes of this research, the term African-American will be used. It refers to Black students who have a primary identification with the United States and will exclude international students. If a quote utilizes the term Black, it will be maintained in its original form.

movement, enough progress has not occurred. Legal, historical and structural disadvantages prevent many African-Americans from receiving the socioeconomic advantages associated with college degree attainment (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

African-American Graduation Rates

Calculating accurate degree completion rates was difficult before the 1990 Student Right-to-Know Act. Previous to this legislation, little reliable information regarding minority graduation rates existed. The legislation primarily focused on determining accurate graduation rates for athletes but also required universities eligible for Title IV funding to calculate and disclose graduation rates for all students. This reporting became mandatory in 1995 and publicly available in 2004 through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (Carey, 2008). The data is disaggregated by ethnicity and allows for comparison between various ethnic groups.

One of the most accurate ways to compare educational effectiveness between institutions is to analyze the gaps in graduation rates between various ethnic groups at the same institution (Carey, 2008, 2004; Lynch & Engle, 2010). Six-year graduation rates are typically utilized because they are perceived to be more accurate due to student "swirl", the practice of students enrolling in multiple schools at one time, stopping out for a semester, transferring and ultimately returning to complete a degree (Adelman, 2000; Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Carey, 2008; Oseguera, 2006). To understand the graduation rates of various ethnic groups, Oseguera (2006) explored the variance in graduation rates for White, Asian, Mexican-American and African-American students. Utilizing four- and six year graduation rates, there were "significant racial disparities at every institutional type for African-American students" (Oseguera, 2006, p. 28). When disaggregated by race, the six-year graduation rate gap between White and African-

American students is most prominent at public universities with a 13% gap and at Protestant colleges with a 12% gap. While this research indicates African-American students graduate at a lower rate than White students at all institutional types, it does not give the complete picture. At individual institutions, overall graduation rates in the United States vary from under 10% to 98%. This makes comparison between institutions difficult (Carey, 2004).

The United States Department of Education found similar results at the national level. In 2007, the six-year graduation rate for African-American college students was 40.5%, considerably lower than the 56.1% graduation rate for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This problem is not isolated to schools that have low graduation rates for all students.   As Table 1.1 shows, a gap exists between African-American and White students at all Carnegie Classifications of universities using both four-year and six-year graduation rates.

Private universities are the most effective at graduating African-American students and typically do so at a higher rate than the national average (Lynch & Engle, 2010; Oseguera, 2006; Smith, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). In all categories, "when we allow for six years for degree completion, these differences are maintained for Black students" (Oseguera, 2006, p. 27).   While private universities in general have the smallest gaps between African-American and White students, private universities with a Protestant affiliation or background are generally less successful (Oseguera, 2006; Smith, 2009).

According to Oseguera (2006), "the six-year graduation rate for Black students at private universities was 70% but only 45% for Black students enrolled at Protestant colleges and universities" (p. 29). It is not yet clear why this disparity exists between Private institutions and those with a Protestant affiliation.

To study this phenomenon at Protestant institutions, Smith (2009) conducted a quantitative analysis of more than 400 private, Protestant and Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institutions. CCCU schools are "an international association of

Table 1.1

Gap between African-American and White Graduation Rates

	Percent completing Bachelor's degree within:					
	4 Years			6 Years		
	A.A.	White	Gap	A.A.	White	Gap
Public University	16	31	15	44	57	13
Private University	55	65	10	70	79	9
Catholic College	29	44	15	46	55	9
Protestant College	36	49	13	45	57	12
All Institutions	31	44	13	50	60	10

This data are from a national survey of 63,460 first-time full-time freshman undergraduates at 303 colleges and universities (Oseguera, 2006)**.**

intentionally Christian colleges and universities" (CCCU, 2012). The majority of CCCU institutions are also Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). African-American graduation rates were highest at private institutions and lowest at CCCU institutions. For the institutions included in this research, the overall graduation rates for African-American students were 51% at private institutions, 40% at Protestant institutions and only 36% at CCCU institutions. Overall, "Black graduation rates were 11% lower than the overall graduation rates at Protestant institutions and 15.1% lower at CCCU institutions (Smith, 2009, p. 83). The gap between African-American and overall graduation rates at private institutions in this research was 10.6%. An even larger 19.2% gap existed at Protestant institutions with a CCCU affiliation (See Table 1.2).

In this research, Protestant and CCCU affiliation had a negative influence on African-American graduation rates. Furthermore, "CCCU and Protestant affiliation were both significant

and negative predictors of Black graduation rates and overall graduation rates" (Smith, 2009, p.

113).

Table 1.2

Gap in Graduation Rates at Private, Protestant and CCCU Institutions

	Overall	African-American	Gap
Private	61.3%	50.7%	10.6%
Protestant	52.3%	39.7%	12.6%
CCCU	54.8%	35.6%	19.2%

(Smith, 2009)

Christian Colleges

The uniqueness of the research for this dissertation is the emphasis on Christian colleges,

CCCU institutions and the distinct educational environment at these schools. The context of

Christian universities must be understood in order to accurately understand the purpose of this

study. Over 230,000 students in the United States attend a Christian college. These schools

provide an educational experience with small class sizes, low faculty to student ratios and

significant mentoring opportunities. Keller (1988) identifies four essential characteristics of

Christian colleges: "1) The Bible is central to campus life, academic and otherwise, 2) There is

an appreciation for the sacredness of each person 3) There is a sense of community and

fellowship, and 4) The importance of social change is recognized" (p.119).   When students

enroll at a CCCU institution, they expect an intentional integration of faith, learning and living,

with an emphasis on whole person development (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006).

At Christian colleges, the theological orientation is communicated explicitly before

enrollment. Faculty members at CCCU institutions are required to adhere to the faith

commitment of the institution and all full and part-time staff and administrators are required to

have a personal faith commitment. In academics, Christian colleges prioritize character development, as schools are "deliberate in seeking to help students develop strong character traits such as integrity, reliability, honesty and honor" (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006, p. 18). One of the most common reasons for selecting a Christian college is a compatibility with his or her spiritual and theological beliefs and lifestyle. Students who attend Christian colleges also desire interpersonal relationships with the campus community and value the intentional blending of intellectual, spiritual and personal development (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006). Researchers do identify a benefit to students who attend Christian colleges. According to Henderson (2003), "church-related colleges have shown a positive impact on religiosity measures" (p.162). Pascarella and Terenzini (2006) confirm that "attending a member institution of the CCCU may help students strengthen their religious commitments". Students also believe a CCCU education will prepare them for a future career and perceive institutional strengths to be excellent instruction, knowledgeable academic advisors, and expert professors. (Noel-Levitz, 2011).

Christian colleges typically provide an atmosphere similar to what the student experienced in his or her home environment. The campus environment includes rules which prohibit or limit alcohol consumption, smoking and co-habitation. These standards are designed to create safe learning opportunities free from distractions and stress. Christian colleges also approach a liberal arts education from a Biblical worldview which impacts every academic program, co-curricular opportunity and the campus climate. As Smith (2009) indicates, African-American graduation rate gaps are larger at these schools and it is clear this environment is not conducive to African-American student success. What is not clear yet is what is happening at these schools to negatively impact the experiences and persistence of African-American students.
CCCU Institutions and African-American Students

In the United States, approximately 900 religiously affiliated institutions offer post-secondary degrees. Of these, 255 are Roman Catholic, 200 actively integrate faith into their mission, 350 are Bible Colleges or seminaries and 116 are Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The CCCU was founded in 1976 with a mission to "advance the cause of Christ-centered education and to help institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth" (CCCU, 2012). The CCCU also includes 69 affiliate institutions in 25 countries around the world. As the number of African-American students enrolled in colleges and universities nationally increased, institutions in the CCCU also enrolled more African-American students. Between 1997 and 2007, the number of CCCU colleges where African-American student enrollment was at 10% or higher more than tripled to 29 (Redden, 2008).

Benne (2001) identifies four types of religious colleges: orthodox, critical-mass, intentionally pluralist, and accidentally pluralist. Schools in the orthodox and critical-mass category have a Christian vision as their organizing paradigm (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006). To be categorized as orthodox and critical mass, a college must enroll a significant number of students who are adherents of that faith tradition. The distinction between orthodox and critical mass institutions is the additional level of commitments required by orthodox schools. Orthodox colleges offer an unabashed invitation for fellow believers to join an intentionally Christian enterprise (Benne, 2001). Most institutions in the CCCU can be accurately categorized as orthodox institutions. Students who attend these schools expect to encounter an environment highly committed to spirituality.

Most CCCU institutions in the West are predominantly White institutions (PWIs). African-American students who attend PWIs often experience a campus climate that does not

fully welcome them and does not provide adequate resources or support services. According to

Rodgers (2008), many African-American students feel as if Black culture is not "respected,

valued, or seen as relevant to the larger university experience at PWIs" (p.11). This dynamic

may be true of the African-American student experience at CCCU institutions and may

contribute to both the low enrollment and low graduation rates of African-American students.

However, more research is necessary to accurately answer this question.

African-American student enrollment is lower at CCCU institutions in the Western

region of the United States. These schools enroll a lower percentage of minority and African-

American students than schools in the CCCU as a whole. This lack of critical mass is one of the

central reasons African-American students choose not to enroll at CCCU institutions (Davis,

2010). Compared to other CCCU institutions, the Western region has the largest gap in minority

enrollment between CCCU and comparison schools. In 2009, the gap between these institutions

was 10.9% (Reyes, Robert & Case, Kimberly, F., 2011). Improving minority recruitment and

enrollment is a goal for CCCU institutions and the Western region is quickly increasing

ethnically diverse enrollment.

Statement of the Problem

African-American students who attend a CCCU institution do not complete their degrees

as frequently as other student groups. The average gap at CCCU institutions between "overall

and Black graduation rates is more than 19%. This is greater than the gap at other private

institutions" (Smith, 2009, p.80). While the six-year graduation rate for African-American

students at private universities averages 51%, colleges and universities in the CCCU average

only 36%. CCCU graduation rates are 9.5% lower than other private institutions due to CCCU

affiliation alone. CCCU affiliation was the only variable to have a significantly more negative

association with Black graduation rates than with overall graduation rates" (Smith, 2009, p.x). For CCCU institutions, whose mission is to promote social and cultural justice, this is a serious problem.

Previous research provides a variety of potential explanations for the ongoing inequality of completion rates at Protestant and specifically CCCU institutions. In general, inadequate support services, a negative campus climate, the lack of financial aid, racial microaggressions, the lack of faculty of color and inadequate high school preparation are just a few of the possible factors which may impact African-American graduation rates (Lynch & Engle, 2010). However, it was not yet known what specific factors at CCCU institutions are perceived to lower the retention and completion rates of African-American students or why the graduation rates for African-American students at CCCU schools are much lower than at other private institutions.

This study focused on the experiences of African-American students in the context of these faith-based, CCCU institutions. While previous research explored the experiences of African-American students in general, the unique context of Christian colleges and institutions in the CCCU had not been adequately studied. The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of African-American students regarding their experiences at CCCU institutions in order to identify the barriers and hindrances encountered by these students in their pursuit of a degree. One distinction of CCCU institutions is the theological values which are utilized to create the culture. These values guide the curricular and co-curricular experiences of students but it was not yet clear to what extent the academic, social and religious experiences of African-American students are impacted by the mission and theology of CCCU institutions. This research also identified how African-American students experienced the environment at CCCU

institutions and identified how the campus climate influences the experiences of African-American students at CCCU institutions.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions:

1) According to African-American students, how does the institutional mission at CCCU schools impact their academic, social and religious experiences?

2) How do African-American students perceive the campus climate at their institution towards African-American students? In what ways, if any, have they experienced microaggressions or other forms of racism or discrimination?

3) How does the theological orientation of CCCU schools and the personal spiritual beliefs or practices of African-American students impact their experience at CCCU institutions?

4) What barriers do African-American students encounter at CCCU institutions and what recommendations do they have to improve their experience?

Research Design

To answer the research questions, this study utilized qualitative research methods to identify the perceptions of African-American students. Specifically, the study utilized a case study approach at three CCCU institutions. This approach was the most effective because the problem being studied, the lower than expected graduation rates for African-American students at CCCU institutions, was a phenomenon in a unique context. A case study approach allowed the context to be explored in depth at the three institutions and for data to be analyzed across the three institutions. Interviews with key administrators as informants, focus groups with African-

American students and demographic information gathered from a background questionnaire were utilized to answer the research questions.

Research Participants

The study was conducted with junior and senior African-American students who attended three CCCU institutions. The selected institutions had a graduation rate gap of at least 10% between African-American and overall graduation rates. Each institution also had similar missions, theological orientations and spiritual expectations. The theological values were expressed uniquely through the requirement of theological classes, mandatory chapel attendance and community standards. However, each institution varied in the level of commitment to these expectations. Students at two of the three institutions were required to have a personal faith commitment to be admitted.

Significance of the Study

African-American students represent the largest concentration of students of color at CCCU institutions (CCCU, 2012). Although the schools in the CCCU have increased their overall percentage of minority students gradually from 16.6% in 2003 to 19.9% in 2009, there is still much work to be done (CCCU, 2012). For Protestant universities, where a mission exists to promote equal educational outcomes for all students, the current gap in graduation rates is neither justifiable nor explainable. While some CCCU schools are aware of the unique challenges of African-American students, others are either not aware or do not adequately address the problem.

Historically, evangelical culture has ignored structural issues of racism and often does not perceive "a societal or institutional responsibility to make up for the history of racism and inequality in America" (Smith, 2009, p. 10). This difference between the mission of CCCU

schools and the inability to provide racial equality and social justice is an ongoing and serious issue and was a central focus of this research. Previous research indicates the graduation rate gap between African-American students and other student groups can be closed quickly if institutions have accurate data and apply sufficient resources and focus to the problem (Lynch & Engle, 2010).

This research helped educators at CCCU, Protestant and other universities to understand the experiences of African-American students at their colleges and provided a voice for African-American students. This research also identified their challenges, obstacles and triumphs within the unique context of CCCU institutions. The recommendations from this research may inform future program development and may help the participating schools and other CCCU institutions to improve their programs for African American students. The findings from this research also generated new information which may advance the understanding of key administrators and be an impetus for change.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Low completion rates are a significant problem for African-American students who graduate college less frequently than do White students (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Oseguera, 2006; Smith, 2009). Lynch and Engle (2010) conducted a longitudinal study of more than 400 institutions and found that "at nearly two-thirds of the colleges and universities evaluated, fewer than half of Black students emerge with the bachelor's degrees they sought at entry; at one-third of the colleges, fewer than 35% graduate" (Lynch & Engle, 2010, p. 2).These low graduation rates for African-American students indicate other serious consequences as well. A college degree "gives people an edge in joining the workforce, particularly for disadvantaged individuals" (Myers, 2003, p. 3). As African-American students complete degrees less frequently, they become less competitive in the workforce and may not receive the economic, cultural and social advantages that occur through completing a college degree (Harper et al., 2009).

This literature review will first examine African-American student enrollment in higher education. Next, the research related to retention, persistence, first-generation college students, campus resources, campus climate, racism and spirituality will be examined. The causes for student attrition in general and specifically for African-American students will also be reviewed. Related to this issue will be a discussion of the key factors from the literature that impact African-American student success. These factors include the campus environment- culture, climate and ethos, a fit between spirituality and faith, faculty and student interaction, academic and financial challenges, support services and cultural and racial challenges. Next, research regarding strategies to promote African-American student success utilized at Historically Black

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Colleges and Universities will be explored. All of these factors which impact African-American students' college experience may intersect in a way which negatively influences retention and inhibits student persistence and success.

African-American Student Enrollment in Higher Education

Historically, African-American students did not receive the same access to higher education as White students. During the period of American slavery, African-Americans were seldom taught to read or write and were not educated in large numbers. While a few individual African-Americans were awarded degrees before 1833, Oberlin College in Ohio became the first institution to openly enroll and graduate African-American students in large numbers. However, the education received by African-American students at Oberlin was not equivalent to what White students received at other institutions (Harper et al., 2009).

In 1865, Congress passed the Thirteenth Constitutional Amendment which abolished slavery. As a result, higher education access gradually increased for African-Americans. Subsequent to this amendment, Congress implemented two Morrill Land Grants in 1862 and 1890, which lead to the establishment of seventeen Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). These schools served the educational needs of African-American students and allowed freed slaves and their children to become educated. HBCUs became a major provider of higher education for African-Americans in the United States (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).   By the 1940s, more than 90% of African American degree-holders were educated at HBCUS (Davis, 1998).

In 1954, the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision further increased access to higher education for African-American students.   This decision ended "separate, but equal" policies and declared laws which established separate schools for African-American

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students unconstitutional (Brown, 2001). Subsequently, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Higher Education Act of 1965 and Affirmative Action policies all contributed to improved access to higher education for African-American students in the United States (Bowen, 1997; Harper et al., 2009). These policies enhanced accessibility to higher education for African-American students but did not guarantee a high quality education (Astin & Oseguera, 2004).

African-American enrollment in college slowly increased during the 1960s and 1970s from 27% in 1972 to 34% in 1976 (Kelley & Lewis, 2000). The central challenge for African-American students enrolled in higher education since the 1960s has been whether or not they receive an education equivalent to White students. The access issue morphed into the challenge of enrolling in a university with equal educational outcomes. This inequality is characterized by institutions which have low retention rates, poor persistence and low overall graduation rates for African-American students.   This study was set in the context of a period of American history where large numbers of African-American students are enrolled in colleges and universities but where too few succeed.

Key Factors that Impact African-American Student Success

Key factors that impact African-American student success include faculty and student interaction, support services, academic and financial support, the campus environment, the fit between spirituality and faith and cultural and racial challenges. For students who attend a Christian college, spirituality and faith-fit and the theological and faith fit are additional factors which may impact African-American student success. Due to the increased challenges African-American students encounter at PWIs, increased levels of support are necessary to help these students succeed. Research indicates that some African-American student attrition is the result of inadequate support services, insufficient number of African-American students and staff and a

campus climate that does not adequately meet the needs of African-American students (Carey, 2008). However, research also indicates the "majority of programs and retention strategies are aimed at correcting or changing African-American students, while failing to address environmental or campus issues involved" (Harvey-Smith, 2002, p. 4).

Fit between Spirituality and Faith

Spirituality and faith fit is a significant factor which impacts African-American students at CCCU institutions. The majority of students who attend a faith-based institution with behavioral and community standards do so intentionally. It is not currently known how spirituality positively or negatively influences the persistence of African-American students at CCCU institutions. The faith fit of a particular CCCU school may also promote success or discourage persistence. Previous research by Astin (2010a) indicates the importance of spirituality for all students and specifically for African-American students.

Astin, Astin and Lindholm (2010b) describe spirituality as "the inner, subjective life of a person" which cannot be directly measured (p.4). Understanding spirituality, as described by Astin et al., is an important aspect of college student development and is especially important for many African-American students who derive a strong sense of motivation from a connection to their faith (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). A report from the Higher Education Research Institute (2005) indicated that college students have high levels of spiritual interest and involvement. According to this report, 71% of college students gained strength by trusting in a higher power, 58% placed a high value on integrating spirituality into every aspect of their lives and nearly 50% of freshmen students indicated they wanted a college that encouraged their personal expression of spirituality (HERI, 2005).

Spirituality is important for many African Americans, whose spiritualty and religion have played a vital and significant role in social, cultural and familial relationships (Giles, 2003;

Houck & Dixon, 2006; Stewart, 2009). Research supports that spiritualty helps some African-American students cope with their college environment and may provide the necessary support to increase student retention (Stewart, 2009; Watson, 2006a; Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, & Alkan, 2008). Spirituality may also help African-American students cope with the challenges of college and informs identity development (Watson, 2006a; Watt et al., 2008). Nash (2001) highlighted the increasing significance of spirituality in the lives of college students in the United States. Astin (2010) reports more than 50% of college students in the United States define themselves as spiritual and view spirituality as a significant and central part of their identity.

For students at CCCU institutions, faith also plays an important role. Longman and Schreiner (2010) analyzed data from annual student satisfaction surveys in a study of 86 CCCU institutions. For African-American students, the desire to have someone to talk to about spiritual concerns was significant. This factor was even more important for African-Americans who did not persist and may be an indicator of what goes wrong at CCCU institutions. For all students in this study, spiritual fit was the best predictor in terms of identifying which students would be retained at CCCU institutions (Longman & Schreiner, 2010).

To further explore the concept of spiritual fit, Asplund (2009) conducted qualitative research with African-American males to determine the role of faith in their decisions to persist in college. He found "the faith of each participant highly significant in the attainment of their educational goals" (p.8). At CCCU institutions, however, the spiritual environment may not align with African-American students' spiritual beliefs.

Recent research has explored the association between religious beliefs and the explanations of inequality between African-Americans and Whites (Edgell & Tranby, 2007; Emerson & Smith, 2001; Hinojosa & Park, 2004). This research indicates "certain religious

belief systems, namely Evangelical Protestantism, promote values of individualism which shape Whites understanding of the logic of inequality generally and the logic of racial inequality more specifically**" (Eitle & Steffens, 2009, p. 507; Hinojosa & Park, 2004).** An individualistic explanation of racial inequality focuses on the quality or character of the individual. This explanation will view a person who experiences racial inequality as lacking the personal motivation to better their life. The opposite explanation is to view this inequality as a structural issue- a lack of educational opportunity or active discrimination (Eitle & Steffens, 2009). Several recent studies indicate that White Protestants are more likely to embrace an individualistic explanation of racial inequality than non-Whites. Previous research indicates that "White Americans are more likely to deny structural causes of inequality, while Black Americans tend to affirm structurally-oriented responses" (Hinojosa & Park, 2004, p. 230). This contrast in the explanation of racial inequality, which results from spiritual beliefs, may lead to significant tension in African-American students at CCCU institutions.

In support of this focus on individual responsibility as a way to explain racial inequality, Emerson and Smith (2001) conducted a nationwide survey which evaluated the perceptions and actions of White Evangelical Americans. Findings indicated Evangelicals inadvertently preserve the racial divide because the majority of evangelicals do not see structural and systemic issues of racism. According to the authors, "this is not active racism. Instead, it is the evangelical movement's emphasis on individualism, free will and personal relationships that makes invisible the pervasive injustice that perpetuates racial inequality" (The New Culture, 2008, p.1). Emerson and Smith found evangelicals neither perceive nor take responsibility for societal and institutional factors that perpetuate inequality. As they describe it, "well-intentioned people,

their values, and their institutions actually recreate racial divisions and inequalities they ostensibly oppose" (Smith, 2009, p. 5).

According to Emerson and Smith (2001), the Evangelical focus on individual choice and responsibility leads to patterns of ignoring injustice, which then further enhances structural racism. The significance of spirituality in the mission of CCCU institutions is one key difference between CCCU schools and other institutions. However, the spirituality associated with Protestant affiliation might also be one of the reasons why African-American students do not experience a campus climate conducive to their success. For African-American students on CCCU campuses, the spirituality which influenced their decision to select a CCCU institution, might also be one of the reasons they do not persist. Further, the inability of CCCU institutions to acknowledge structural causes of racism, may also create a negative racial climate for African-American students.

Campus Environment- Culture, Climate and Ethos

For those who do enroll at a Protestant or CCCU institution, they often find a campus environment which may not adequately promote African-American student success. The campus environment refers to the culture, climate and ethos which exist on a college campus. Campus culture is defined as the "normative and social glue that holds an institution together" (Museus, 2011, p. 148) Research indicates the campus environment can significantly enhance or detract from the experiences of African-American students (Davis, 1998). These are important to understand because evidence indicates, that "when racial and ethnic minority students connect to the cultures of their campus, they are more likely to succeed". Campus culture is defined as the "normative and social glue that holds an institution together" (Museus, 2011, p. 148). Campus climate is one aspect of the campus culture and may be a strong factor in the retention of

African-American students. Campus climate is defined as "a measure- real or perceived- of the campus environment as it relates to interpersonal, academic and professional interactions" (U.C. Regents, 2010). Campus culture and climate are both influenced by the campus ethos, which is more difficult to detect. The ethos of a campus is "embodied in an institution-specific pattern of values and principles that invoke a sense of belonging and helps people distinguish between and appropriate and inappropriate behavior" (Williams, 2000). The ethos of a campus describes the life and spirit of a campus and can significantly influence the experiences and outcomes for various student groups (Kezar, 2000; Museus, 2011; Pike & Kuh, 2005).

One indicator of a positive campus environment is the extent to which resources are allocated to support African-American students. Research indicates resource allocation is a strong indicator of a university's success at retaining African-American students (Oseguera, 2006). These support services are vital for African-American student success at CCCU institutions. If CCCU institutions do not actively and intentionally integrate African-American students into the community, they will always remain on the margin.

The lack of critical mass of African-American students and lack of diversity at PWIs are often cited as central reasons African-American students choose not to enroll at a CCCU institution (Davis, 2010). In a study of high-achieving African-American students, many students reported they were the only African-American student in the classroom. Most of these students indicated they experienced stereotypes on campus (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). The students interviewed indicated the low number of African-American professors on campus negatively impacted their academic experience. Other research highlights the importance of African-American professors for the success of African-American students, particularly at predominantly White institutions (Reyes & Case, 2011).

Research on institutions which successfully improve graduation rates for African-American students indicates the ethos of these institutions is "characterized by an institutional responsibility for the success of racial and ethnic minority and other underrepresented students" (Museus, 2011). This ethos is characterized by faculty who assume responsibility for helping their students to succeed and by implementing policies that require all students to complete certain expectations. For CCCU institutions, developing measures to improve the campus ethos toward African-American students may promote retention.

Campus culture, climate and ethos together create the environment which African-American students encounter on college campuses. Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler (1996) describe how important a sense of belonging is for students who are not in the majority culture. Institutions which understand the interplay of these dynamics will be able to positively influence the experience of African-American students. However, if the campus environment does not promote inclusiveness and acceptance of diverse student populations, the needs of African-American students will not be met.

Unfortunately, many African-American students encounter difficulties in connecting to the culture at predominately White institutions (Allen, 1992; Kuh, 2001; Museus, 2011). This leaves them feeling "alienated, marginalized and unwelcome in these cultures" (Allen, 1992; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Museus, 2011, p.148). In a 2000 study of 86 CCCU member institutions, student satisfaction surveys were analyzed. The study found that the environment of a campus plays a significant role in promoting or inhibiting student success. Specifically, campus climate was a major predictor of student retention (Longman & Schreiner, 2010). On CCCU campuses, the campus environment may not adequately encourage African-American student success.

Rodgers and Summers (2008) studied the campus climate at predominately White institutions. This research examined the extent to which African-American students believe racism exists at PWIs and how African-American students interpret racism. The findings indicate African-American students believe their culture is not respected, valued or seen as relevant to the larger university experience. To modify this feeling, some research suggests institutions can intentionally validate the cultural and personal experiences of African-American students to help them feel that they belong (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004).

Other research supports the idea that the campus environment at PWIs is not positive for African-American students. Fries-Britt & Griffin (2007) explored the experiences of high-achieving African-American students and found that "facing a hostile campus racial climate can adversely impact the achievement, integration, and retention of African-American students on college campuses (p. 510). The hostile climate disproportionately affects some students more than others. Research indicates that African-American students experience campus cultures that are more stressful than for White students. Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, (1993) reported that African-American students can receive minority status stressors, which include being the target of racist acts, having the legitimacy of one's presence on campus questioned, and feeling pressured to prove one's cultural identity to same-race peers.

African-American students at PWIs who desire to be connected to the campus community may not always have the opportunities to do so. Rodgers and Summers (2008) reported African-American students do not have sufficient opportunity to make social connections with students who also are African-American while at the same time expressing a desire for a strong and identifiable African-American community. This dissonance may create

further stress. On CCCU campuses, which lack a critical mass of African-American students, the campus climate may be especially stressful.

One way for CCCU institutions to improve the campus environment for African-American students is to increase the demographic diversity of faculty, staff and students. On-campus diversity among students, faculty and staff members can modify intolerance and acts of racism. Structural diversity on campuses can promote a variety of positive educational outcomes including, "reduced feelings of alienation on campus, increased critical thinking skills, and general satisfaction with the college experience" (Chang, Han, Sàenz, & Cerna, 2008; Hurtado et al., 1996; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001). These outcomes may also promote increased degree attainment for African-American students.

Some research offers recommendations to improve the campus environment for African-American students. Smith (2009) recommends that individual CCCU institutions conduct evaluations of their campus culture as it relates to graduation rates to find out why the lower graduation rates exist for African-American students. Museus (2011) explored how campus climate and culture can influence the retention and success of minority students. This research found that strong networking values, a commitment to targeted support and a belief in humanizing the educational experience were important aspects of college environments successful at improving graduation rates for African-American students.

Cultural and Racial Challenges: Racism

African-American students who attend predominately White institutions indicate that what they most need is an identifiable African-American community which offers support and encouragement (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). However, African-American students on most CCCU campuses do not encounter this critical mass of African-American students. Research

indicates that the exposure of African-American students to a sufficient number of other African-Americans on campus provides opportunities to develop a sense of community (Clewell & Ficklen, 1986). Community may be inhibited by the attitudes and stereotypes of some faculty, staff and students at CCCU institutions. Many successful African-American students report they have felt stereotyped in the classroom. Some students indicated they had to prove themselves worthy of being academically prepared in and outside of the classroom which may contribute to a negative racial environment for African-American students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007).

A positive racial environment, which is an environment free from negative racial stereotypes and active racial threats, is important for academic success (Allen, 1988; Bennett & Okinaka, 1984). Unfortunately, many college students do not encounter a positive racial environment. This may lead to increased African-American student attrition. Research indicates there are ongoing patterns of racial discrimination which occur against African-American students in the academic environment as well as in the campus community (W. A. Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Smedley, Myers and Harrell (1993) explored the stress that African-American students encounter due to their status as an ethnic minority. This research identified a number of stressors including active discrimination and a lack of trust for White faculty and students (Smith, 2009). Other research indicates African-American students experience both blatant acts of racism and subtle discrimination, which may take many forms including judgments and expectations from faculty, staff and students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 501). Overall, African-American students encounter "hostile racial discrimination that White students do not" (Smith, 2009, p. 29).

According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002), African-American students attending PWIs frequently encounter microaggressions which are subtle and often unconscious racist acts that

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cumulatively add stress. Microaggressions can take the form of "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 60). For African-American students on CCCU campuses, microaggressions may be typical of their daily experience. Although the faculty, staff and students of most CCCU institutions would not consciously engage in racist acts, racism may be more prevalent than it first appears to be. Critical Race Theory (CRT) may explain some of the experience of African-American students at CCCU institutions and PWIs.

CRT examines every day interactions and identifies the racial component in them by describing the microaggressions. DeAngelis (2009) describes the subtlety of microaggressions by indicating that "some racism is so subtle that neither victim nor perpetrator may entirely understand what is going on- which may be especially toxic for people of color" (p.1). Due to the diversity of CRT scholars, there is variance in the definition of CRT. However, many scholars agree to the following tenets, "1) Racism is a normal part of American life, often lacking the ability to be distinctly recognized. 2) CRT rejects the notion of a colorblind society and 3) CRT gives voice to the unique perspectives and lived experiences of people of color" (Harper et al., 2009, pp. 390–391).

Faculty and Student Interaction

A strong relationship between faculty and students is vital for African-American student success. In the classroom, it is important for professors to develop and cultivate a classroom climate that encourages students with different opinions to share them and to feel safe sharing opinions (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). However, Nettles (1988) research indicates that African-American students are not given the same opportunities to interact with White faculty at the same level and quality as do White students.

These relationships with White faculty members can be difficult for African-American students to navigate due to cultural differences (Dinka, Mazzella, & Pilant, 1980). Townsend (1994) explored the relationships between faculty and minority students and found that faculty indifference had a strong negative impact on the retention of African-American students. However, for African-American students especially, connections to faculty, staff and peers are associated with increased engagement and success (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper et al., 2009; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus, 2011). This relationship with faculty is so powerful for African-American students that faculty availability is predictive of retention (Longman & Schreiner, 2010).

In the Western region of CCCU institutions, less than 8 percent of the tenured faculty in 2009 were African-American (Reyes, Robert & Case, Kimberly, F., 2011). To further complicate this issue, many faculty and staff members believe that successful African-American students do not need special support services and may inadvertently discourage African-American students from accessing available services (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). These support services are essential for African-American students, many who arrive on a college campus less-prepared than other students (Bennett & Okinaka, 1984; Bensimon, 2005; Carey, 2004; Lee & Ransom, 2008).

Support Services

In spite of the many factors that work against African-American students, there are aspects of the student experience that institutions can control and improve. Research indicates resource allocation is a strong indicator of a universities success at retaining African-American students (Oseguera, 2006). Astin (1993) also found that degree completion was positively affected by the percentage of resources invested in student services. For CCCU institutions that

want to improve graduation rates for African-American students, allocation of resources needs to be evaluated.

Carey (2008) conducted a longitudinal study of 94 universities across the United States with graduation gaps of 18% or more between African-American and White students.   A significant number of these institutions achieved "small or nonexistent graduation gaps between White and Black students" in a small amount of time (Carey, 2008, p. 1). These institutions were not highly selective with large endowments. Rather, they were "low-performing institutions with relatively low admissions standards" (p.11).   These institutions were able to close the graduation gap between White and African-American students by implementing effective programs and services. This research is significant for CCCU institutions because it places the responsibility for improving African-American graduation rates more on the institution than the student.

Successful institutions implement programs by gathering "every piece of information students might need or (identifying every) stumbling block they might encounter" (Carey, 2008, p. 6). This research found the following interventions to be successful at increasing the number of African American students who graduate. Outside of the classroom, summer bridge programs, learning communities and early warning systems are important structural responses. Inside the classroom, interventions involving the faculty are especially important at promoting the idea that African-American students can succeed. These in-class interventions include activities designed to engage students in educationally purposeful activities. Students at these successful institutions are actively involved in group projects and engaged in dialogue with instructors regarding class assignments. On the personnel side, college counselors are assigned to reach out to minority students with coordinated efforts across campus to help African-American

students succeed (Carey, 2008). Most importantly, this research identifies the importance of placing an institutional focus on reducing the graduation gap for disadvantaged students as a key component of reducing attrition.

Another effective way institutions have responded to this gap in graduation rates is to modify enrollment practices. The University of Maryland had a 20% point gap between White and African-American students in 2001. In a short period of time, this gap was closed and African-American students graduated more frequently than White students. This was accomplished by placing more weight on high school grades than on SAT scores in the admissions process (Carey, 2008). The assumption was made that successful high school students were more likely to be ready for college level work.

The College Board (2008) also identified effective programs to improve the experience of African-American males on college campuses. This research focused on the importance of increasing support services which address life issues. What is most important to note about the challenges of African-American students is that all the factors, which impact attrition can be modified and improved. Sufficient examples exist of institutions that "have proved it is indeed possible to attain equally strong results from students from different backgrounds (Lynch & Engle, 2010, p. 2). These schools are able to close the gap partly be improving efforts to improve academic success.

Academic and Financial Support

For many African-American students, the challenge of paying for college creates academic stress. Research indicates "a student's ability to pay" is especially influential for students of color (Oseguera, 2006, p. 22). Finances have also been identified as a predictor of the likelihood of attrition for African-American students (Harvey-Smith, 2002). Research

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indicates that the financial aid given to these students must be maintained for their entire time at the university if they are going to graduate. This financial aid should include grants and scholarships that do not need to be repaid.   For African-American students, working off-campus is also a strong negative predictor of graduation. Paying for college, however, is only one of the challenges experienced by African-American students once they step on campus.

Many African-American college students share common characteristics with first generation college students whose academic challenges begin before enrollment in college. In high school, many first-generation college students are less likely to have a meaningful relationship with a teacher or counselor and frequently receive less assistance in preparing for college than their peers. They also attend the lowest performing schools (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Many African-American college students have lower SAT scores and lower GPAs which limits the types of schools available (Ishitani, 2003).

Once enrolled in college, the academic challenges continue. First generation college students have lower grades than their peers whose parents both graduated from college (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). They also "completed fewer first-year credit hours, took fewer humanities and fine arts courses, studied fewer hours and were less likely to participate in honors programs" (Pascarella et al., 2004, p. 251). These students also spend less time speaking with professors and a significant amount of time working. Many first generation African-American students are less confident overall about their academic performance and are less academically prepared (Ishitani, 2003, 2006). Museus (2011) suggests that academic support programs with collectivist values can foster success among students of color.   Collectivist values are contrasted with a more individualistic way of learning and instruction (Fullilove & Treisman, 1990).

In a study conducted by Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007), the experiences of high-achieving African-American students were examined. Students in this study felt judged based upon stereotypes regarding the academic ability of Black students. Specifically, they felt as if others viewed them as less capable than other students or as a recipient of affirmative action. This dynamic actively pushed students to resist these stereotypes but the stress of experiencing stereotypes, discrimination and racism took a toll on African-American students. Fortunately, a positive campus environment can mediate stereotypes.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

A historically black college or university is an institution established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary of Education (Harper et al., 2009). Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) provided the only educational opportunity for African-American students for more than a century. Today, "roughly 20% of all college-going blacks choose to attend one of the 103 HBCUs, which are responsible for 22% of current bachelor's degrees granted to blacks" (Fryer & Greenstone, 2007, p. 116). HBCUs still serve an important role in helping many African-American students succeed and their strategies for promoting African-American student success may provide insight into how CCCU institutions can improve educational success for both White and minority students (Wenglinsky, 1999). Research related to HBCUs may also provide important information regarding how to effectively recruit, retain and graduate African-American students.

The educational benefit of attending an HBCU includes increased student engagement, enhanced civic engagement, and improved educational attainment for low income, first generation students (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). A study of the National Survey of Student

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Engagement (NSSE) found that HBCUs provided a more supportive learning environment for African-American students when compared to other predominantly White institutions (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2006). This academic support may not be present at CCCU institutions. Research suggests that "a highly supportive academic environment, involving tutoring and mentoring programs and active faculty and staff support plays a major role" in student success at HBCUs (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005, p. 52). Hutto and Fenwick (2002) reported that, more than any other institutional characteristic, positive and frequent interaction with faculty increased student satisfaction with college for many students at HBCUs.

One criticism of many predominantly White institutions is the "continued operation from a monocultural, mainstream view, based on Eurocentric norms" (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005, p. 52). The dominant culture often ignores the culture and traditions of other cultural groups on campus, which may negatively impact African-American students. HBCUs by definition are less focused on the predominantly White culture and are more inclusive. One of the benefits to attending an HBCU is the large number of African-American students on campus who help to provide a strong sense of community. African-American students at HBCUs are able to be closer to other African-American students and become more involved and empowered by this community. Tatum (2007) argues that grouping students by race offers positive coping methods to college stresses. African-American students at CCCU institutions enroll in small numbers and may not benefit from the effects of a sufficient number of African-American students on campus. Other research found that "African-American students in HBCUs were more deeply engaged in the academic community than their counterparts at historically white colleges and universities" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2006, p. 31).

Many students at HBCUs are empowered by being around other African-American students. According to Fletcher (2013), "some students feel empowered by attending a university that has a history of fighting for African-American students' rights to higher education". As stated previously in the literature review, African-American students frequently perceive as if their culture is not respected or acknowledged at predominantly White institutions, leaving them feeling isolated and alone (Rodgers & Summers, 2008). African-American students encounter a different environment at HBCUs and may not experience as much isolation.

Other positive benefits for African-American students are found at HBCUS as well. According to Wenglinsky (1999)," a higher proportion of HBCU students aspire to go to graduate school than African-American students at predominantly White institutions" (p.138). When recruiting minority students, this research may benefit CCCUs when considering the types of students to recruit and may help ensure there are sufficient numbers of minority students enrolled on campuses. HBCUs are also more accessible to African-American students and also cost less to attend than many other predominantly White institutions. This lower cost might contribute to the increased enrollment and success for African-American students at HBCUs. Many African-American students who struggle to afford college indicated that "the lack of financial support inhibited persistence" (Palmer & Gasman, 2008, p. 435).

The research related to HBCUs is not all positive. Fryer and Greenstone (2007) reported that "HBCUs may have provided unique educational services for blacks in the 1970s. However, by the 1990s, this advantage seems to have disappeared on many dimensions and, by some measures, HBCU attendance appears to retard black progress" (p. 144).   Black males may also benefit more from attending an HBCU than do females. Previous research indicates that

African-American males are "more empowered, assertive and competitive" (Palmer & Gasman, 2008, p. 439).

Existing research indicates that African-American students' experiences at HBCUs are more educationally beneficial than for African-Americans at PWIs (Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Holmes, 2007). While all the dynamics and factors contributing to African-American student success at HBCUs are not fully understood, Davis (1991) perceived that, "opportunities to participate in student-centered activities at HBCUs that cater to African-Americans students' interests created social networks that also facilitated student success" (Nelson Laird et al., 2007). While not all aspects of HBCUs are beneficial for African-American students, the experiences derived from HBCUs may benefit CCCU institutions as they attempt to answer questions regarding the lower than expected graduation rates for African-American students.

Retention and Persistence Theories

The majority of African-American students attend predominantly White institutions and most CCCU institutions, with the exception of two, are also PWIs. At many PWIs, African-American students encounter significant challenges and are "in a position of being the only or "token" Black student" (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 515). In order to be successful, African-Americans must overcome these challenges.

Retention theory is useful to contextualize these experiences of African-American students in general and specifically at predominantly White institutions. While most retention models focus either on institutional or student characteristics as the primary cause of attrition, both are necessary to explain the African-American experience at CCCU institutions (Oseguera,

2006; Smith, 2009).   Other prominent retention theory identifies the characteristics of successful

students who persist to graduation (Myers, 2003).

To explore student departure decisions, a variety of variables are analyzed including

demographics, aspiration, motivation, personality, values, and institutional characteristics (Bean,

1982; Harvey-Smith, 2002). From this research, models have been created to predict student

graduation rates based upon pre-college characteristics such as SAT scores, high school

academic performance or demographics. However, these models tend to focus more on the types

of students recruited rather than on what retains these students (Bean & Eaton, 2002).

Tinto's (1975) initial retention theory focuses on the characteristics and attributes of

students when they enroll in college. These include ethnicity, achievements, family support and

socioeconomic status, which are viewed as predictors of initial levels of commitment to the

institution and subsequently to student persistence and graduation (Harvey-Smith, 2002). Later,

Tinto (1987) developed the Student Departure Theory which states that academic and social

integration are the keys to persistence. However, for African-American students, this integration

may be problematic. Tinto (1982) acknowledges it is difficult for African-American students to

integrate into the community if they do not have a positive racial and campus climate.

Astin's Student Integration Model (1975) also explores social integration as a key

component of persistence. This theory focuses on the ability of a student to become involved in

the community and evaluates how different students grow under varying environmental

conditions. For African-American students at PWIs, community integration is often a difficult

task. Milem and Berger (1997) conducted a longitudinal study using data from 718 first year

undergraduates to evaluate both Tinto and Astin's theories. The results of this study found that

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"social integration had a more influential role in predicting persistence than did academic integration" (Milem & Berger, 1997, p.2).

Oseguera (2006) explored the ways the environment and characteristics of an institution facilitated or impeded African American, Asian American, Caucasian, and Mexican American student's baccalaureate degree attainment four and six years after college entry. For African-American students, social integration into the community is a strong predictor of degree completion. This research also provides evidence that the college environment and structural elements of an institution are important to explain why students leave or persist. The constructs that inhibited degree completion most were "large institutional size, low selectivity, over-reliance on financial aid that must be repaid, and low levels of institutional expenditures" (Oseguera, 2006, p. 48).

Tierney (2002) disagrees with theories that focus on social integration as a way to promote student persistence. In Tierney's framework, a model of "cultural integrity" is viewed as a more accurate way to describe the experiences of the students most at-risk of departing- low-income, urban, African-American and Hispanic youth (Myers, 2003; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). This framework affirms, honors and incorporates the individual's identity into organizational culture. Rodgers and Summers (2008) applied this culturally framed retention model to African-American students at a PWI. The students in this research perceived there was no respect for African-American culture on campus. However, positive faculty interaction and a love of learning were factors which helped improve African-American achievement and graduation rates.

Another prominent theory which may explain the gap in graduation rates between White and African-American students is the Psychological Model of college student retention (J. Bean

& Eaton, 2002). This theory emphasizes the individual as the main factor in student retention. In this theory, "factors affecting retention are ultimately individual and individual psychological processes form the foundation for retention theories" (Bean & Eaton, 2002, p. 73). This research places the responsibility onto the student for not successfully navigating college rather than focus on the role of the institution.

Other issues also factor into the decision of students to stay or leave a college such as student relationships with the faculty. Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) model of student-faculty contact explains how student-related factors and characteristics interact with the environment of the institution to effect persistence. For many African-American students, departure is not due to low academic ability but because they experience a lack of connection to and support from their institution (Ford & Harris, 1999; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). This connection often occurs in the classroom. Most CCCU institutions do not have a large number of African-American faculty members which may prevent African-American students from achieving meaningful faculty contact.

One challenge when analyzing data is that much of the current research on student retention was conducted before minority students were a "critical mass" on college campuses (Myers, 2003; Rendon et al., 2004). There is concern these theories may not transfer from one population to another (Harvey-Smith, 2002). This may limit the generalizability of the findings to African-American student departure decisions. Some research does not support the idea that traditional retention theory is accurate for minority students. Tierney and Hagerdon (2002) argue that applying a retention theory cross-culturally is potentially harmful to ethnic minority students who typically do not have similar life experiences to White students. Other researchers believe

the standard student persistence theories do not consider the impact of minority cultures (Asplund, 2009; Guiffrida, 2005; Thompson & Fretz, 1991).

More recent retention theories place the responsibility on the institution to create effective educational outcomes for all students (Bensimon, 2005; Carey, 2008; Harris III & Bensimon, 2007; Kratt, 2004; Oseguera, 2006; Smith, 2009). This research indicates persistence can be increased for all students and specifically for African-American students by focusing on what colleges do with and for students (Lynch & Engle, 2010). When African-American student research is filtered through the retention lens, it appears that African-American student graduation rates can be significantly improved if adequate support services and programs are in place. While retention theory frames the experience of college students, there are other significant factors which impact African-American student success.

Summary

The gap in graduation rates between White and African-American students at CCCU institutions is a significant educational problem that can be closed if appropriate changes occur. The key factors which impact African-American student retention at CCCU institutions are faculty interaction, support services, academic and financial support, the campus environment, fit between spirituality and faith and the racial climate on campus. As CCCU institutions are predominately White institutions with strong Protestant Evangelical affiliations, the majority of faculty and staff will utilize individual explanations for racial inequality more than structural explanations. These individual explanations may prevent CCCU leaders from recognizing these key factors as influences on African-American graduation rates. Individual explanations for racial inequality may also prevent leaders from implementing the structural changes necessary to improve the experiences of African-American students at CCCU institutions.

This study generated new knowledge and information regarding the challenges of African-American students at CCCU institutions. The knowledge generated from this research will improve the educational experience of African-American students and help CCCU schools to close the gap between overall and African-American students. Without the details provided by this research, CCCU schools lack the specificity necessary to make the necessary adaptations to their educational programs.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, an overall gap in graduation rates exists between White and African-American students in the United States at many institutions (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Oseguera, 2006; Smith, 2009). This problem also exists at a higher rate at institutions in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). The common denominator at CCCU institutions is a Protestant affiliation, one of the factors linked to this gap (Smith, 2009). This problem is statistically documented but the nature, influences and dynamics of the problem are not fully understood.

A central reason students choose to attend a Christian college is the fit between the institutional mission and theological orientation of the school with their own belief system. At CCCU schools, the lower than expected graduation rates for African-American students do not correlate with the theological imperatives of Christian institutions to promote equality, justice and reconciliation. Prior to this research, it was not clear if there were some other yet undefined interactions which decrease persistence for African-American students or if other explanations exist.

While much research exists on the experiences of African-American students at predominantly White institutions, little research exists exploring the experiences of this population at CCCU institutions. Thus, this study examined student's experiences in order to give voice to the nature, influences and dynamics of this problem in a unique context. The purpose of this study was to examine how the academic, social and religious experiences of African-American students were impacted by the context of CCCU institutions. A secondary

purpose was to understand the specific barriers and challenges encountered by African-American students in the pursuit of a baccalaureate degree.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions:

1) According to African-American students, how does the institutional mission at CCCU schools impact their academic, social and religious experiences?

2) How do African-American students perceive the campus climate at their institution towards African-American students? In what ways, if any, have they experienced microaggressions or other forms of racism or discrimination?

3) How does the theological orientation of CCCU schools and the personal spiritual beliefs or practices of African-American students impact their experience at CCCU institutions?

4) What barriers do African-American students encounter at CCCU institutions and what recommendations do they have to improve their experience?

The research questions emerged from the literature review themes. The first question explored the perceptions of African-American students regarding their academic and nonacademic experiences within the context of a Christian college. It was not known what impact, if any, the theological orientation or mission of the school played in the experiences of African-American students. Experiences included all campus interactions such as what is taught in the classroom, how it is taught, and the types of student activities and co-curricular educational experiences.

The second question explored the campus climate towards African-American students at CCCU institutions. Previous research indicates the campus climate may be a significant factor which impacts African-American students' graduation rates. Other research, discussed in the literature review, also indicates evangelical explanations of racism may prevent CCCU schools from acknowledging issues of race at predominantly White Institutions. The answers to this question revealed important details regarding aspects of the campus climate related to racism, microaggressions and diversity.

The third question focused on spirituality. For students who come from a faith background, "faith influences the way they look at life and may impact virtually everything they do" (Muntz & Crabtree, 2006, p. 17). This makes the idea of "fit" very important for college selection. Previous research indicates spiritual development may influence a minority student's level of persistence through college. By exploring the experiences of African-American students in relation to their spirituality, a key factor which may influence success was further understood. It is possible that students who come from a predominantly White worship experience, regardless of their race, may transition more easily into the institution than students whose worship experiences are different.

The fourth question examined specific barriers to success encountered by African-American students and elicited recommendations for improvement and change. African-American students enrolled at a CCCU institution for a particular kind of education, but what they expected was not what they received. Although the environment appeared to be the same for everyone, students from diverse ethnic backgrounds experienced the environment differently and had different ways of coping and responding to this environment. African-American students also utilized different coping mechanisms or strategies to succeed than other students.

Research Design

A review of the literature related to retention theory, research-based factors that impact African-American student success and spirituality literature framed the structure and background of this research. Lacking from the literature was research regarding the experiences of African-American students at Christian colleges and explanations of how African-American students were impacted by faith-based institutions. This research examined the experiences of African-American students in the unique context of CCCU institutions.

As discussed previously, Smith (2009) utilized quantitative rather than qualitative measures to explore the graduation rate gap. While both qualitative and quantitative methods were appropriate ways to explore this issue, this research was more suited to a qualitative design because the research questions elicited the perceptions of the personal and lived experiences of African-American students. Qualitative research is especially helpful to understand perceptions and experiences about phenomena (Maxwell, 2004). Qualitative research is "an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, 1997, p. 5). While quantitative research utilizes random sampling, statistical tests and prediction to obtain results, qualitative research, in contrast, focuses on "symbolic interactionism, nonrandom sampling, theoretical sampling, and inductive, holistic, and descriptive findings" (Merriam, 1997). Combined, this data provided rich and detailed answers to the research questions most suitable for qualitative research.

Qualitative research views the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection, aims at understanding meaning, utilizes fieldwork, employs inductive research strategies and focuses on the process of developing rich description (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1997, 2009).

Qualitative research is particularly useful when the research questions are interested in "understanding how people interpret their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). While surveys and other methods of quantitative research are useful to explore student experiences from a global view, the in-depth, thick and rich description desired emerged better from qualitative research. This design allowed me to answer the "why" and the "how" of the research questions by capturing the voices, thoughts and experiences of African-American students within the context of CCCU institutions.

In order to answer the research questions, a number of qualitative research approaches were considered including narrative analysis, phenomenology, field study, case study and inductive research. Each was considered as a credible method to answer the research questions. However, after careful analysis and thought, a case study approach was selected. Merriam (1997) describes case studies as heuristic, particularistic and descriptive. The case study approach focuses on understanding the experiences of the participants and develops an accurate portrayal of these experiences. By using personal experiences, the deep and rich information required to answer the research questions was captured.

The case study approach allowed for investigation of this problem in great detail and in context (Yin, 2008). In this situation, the problem was the low graduation rates for African-American students in the context of CCCU institutions where otherwise higher graduation rates were expected. Some scholars "recommend using the case study method when examining particular situations in which the phenomenon being examined is unique" (Perna et al., 2009, p. 6). Case study methodology was also appropriate given the desire to understand the context in which African-American students exist at CCCU institutions (Yin, 2002). The case study approach allowed for "a rich and holistic form of data collection which offers insights and

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illuminating meanings that expands its readers' experiences. These insights will help structure

future research and will play an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base" (Merriam,

1997, p. 41).

The case study included three institutions. At each institution, three focus groups with

African-American students, interviews with key administrators as informants and a background

questionnaire were utilized to understand the essence of their experiences (Creswell, 2008). The

goal of the focus groups and questionnaires was to explore how African-American students

succeeded in spite of the challenges within the context of a CCCU institution. The case study

approach provided a detailed and rich description of the context which would not have occurred

using other forms of data collection (Merriam, 1997). To portray the environment and the

experiences honestly, data was collected on site (Creswell, 2008).

Using a case study approach with three sites also provided the ability to contrast the

findings and to identify differences and consistencies between sites. The replication of these

findings was one of the central goals of cross case analysis (Yin, 2008). Merriam (1997) defines

this as "collecting and analyzing data from several cases"(p. 40). Other literature supports this

strategy of conducting multiple case studies and comparing them to make the findings more

robust (Besikof, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2008).

The goal of this case study was not to generalize the findings to all CCCU institutions.

Instead, the goal was to identify what in the environment at these institutions impacted the

academic, social and religious experiences of African-American students. To this end, this

research identified the effective strategies utilized by African-American students to persist.

Findings from this research will help to improve the campus climate and support services for

African-American students at CCCU institutions.

Site and participant selection

Three CCCU campuses in Southern California were chosen as the research sites for this study (see table 3.1). The sites were selected on the basis of membership in the CCCU and at least a 10% gap in the six-year graduation rate between African-American and overall graduation rates. Each of the sites was a private liberal-arts, predominantly White institution, and had less than 8,000 undergraduate students. Outside of academic success, the three institutions also emphasized personal development and growth as a primary goal for students. The identities of the schools were confidential and pseudonyms were used.

The first institution, Woodson University, is a small liberal arts college in California with less than 3,000 undergraduate students. Woodson is a denominationally affiliated CCCU institution with a mission to develop students who live out the values of the university and serve the community. The small size allows for close personal attention and creates an environment where it is difficult for a student to get lost. The university enrolls fewer than 20% Latino students and approximately 5% of the student enrollment are African-American students. In 2010, the six-year overall graduation rate was 59% for all students, 62% for White students and only 27% for African-American students. The gap at Woodson between African-American and overall graduation rates was 32% in 2010 (Collegresults.org, 2012). Students who enroll at Woodson are required to complete the SAT or ACT, have a personal faith commitment and must either actively attend a church or receive a pastoral interview to be admitted. There are few faculty of color at Woodson and chapel is required for all full-time undergraduate students.

The second institution, Clegg University, is a liberal-arts university with less than 3,000 undergraduate students. The mission of the university is to provide excellence in higher education and to train students to engage in service. In 2010, the six-year overall graduation rate

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was 53%, for all students, 57% for White students, and 46% for African-American students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The gap between African-American students and White students at Clegg was 11% in 2010. Clegg enrolls 15% Latino students and 4% African-American students. Clegg has a student to faculty ratio of 15 to 1. To be admitted to the university, being a Christian is not required. However, a faith fit is preferred. Involvement in church, school, and community activities are reviewed as a part of the admissions process. Chapel is not required but encouraged for all full-time undergraduate students.

The third institution, Bentley University, is also a predominantly White private institution with approximately 4,000 students. Bentley is not associated with any specific denominational affiliation. In 2010, the six-year overall graduation rate was 65% for all students, 68% for White students, and only 30% for African-American students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Bentley views itself as having an academic basis broader than that of the standard college of arts and sciences. Bentley's mission focuses on implementing biblically centered education and scholarship. An emphasis is also placed on developing Christian thought and character. Students who enroll at Bentley are required to be an evangelical Christian believer and fulfill basic GPA and academic requirements. Students are also required to submit a pastoral reference, which comes from the pastor of their church or its equivalent. To graduate, students are required to complete at least 25 theology units. Neither of the other two sites have these requirements.

Although CCCU schools in the Western region have low diversity and graduation rates for African-American students, each site offered programs designed to promote diversity and student success (see table 3.2). These programs create pathways to success for all students with a special emphasis placed on students of color. The programs are housed in offices titled diversity programming, multicultural affairs and multi-ethnic programming. While the

approaches are different, each institution attempts to develop a positive campus climate for non-White students. Some of the strategies include campus clubs, interracial dialogues, cultural events, and programs. These activities are designed to intentionally develop cultural proficiency for all students and the campus community. Programs encourage interaction between White students and students of color. It is not known how effective these programs and services are to enhance the experience of African-American students at these schools.

Table 3.1

Site Enrollment and Demographic Information

	Clegg	Bentley	Woodson
Enrollment Range	1-3000	3-5,000	1-3,000
PWI	Yes	Yes	Yes
% of African-American students	4%	3%	5%
% of Students Ethnic Minority	25%	32%	36%
African-American Graduation Rate	46%	30%	27%
White Graduation Rate	57%	68%	62%
Overall Graduation Rate	53%	65%	59%
Faculty who are ethnic minority	9%	14%	11%

One strategy utilized by all three sites is campus clubs, which allow students of various ethnicities to connect with other students who have similar interests. A specific club or group for African-American students exists at all three institutions. Alpha Phi is a club for students interested in learning about African American heritage. Another club, Mosaic, provides opportunities for the student body to appreciate cultural differences. Other strategies intended to enhance African-American student success are dialogues focused on issues of race and ethnicity. At all of the institutions, students can also receive a mentor through the department which oversees diversity programming. Other strategies utilized to promote African-American student

success include scholarship programs, leadership opportunities and student leader programs designed to help students become leaders of intercultural understanding and racial reconciliation.

To understand the unique context at each of the three institutions, it is essential to understand how they are different. While the mission of each institution is similar, all three

Table 3.2

Institutional Support Services and Requirements

	Clegg	Bentley	Woodson
Co/Curricular Requirements			
Prohibitions on all alcohol use	No	Yes	Yes
Units of Bible classes required to graduate	6	30	15
Hours of chapel required per semester	None	38	30
Admissions Requirements			
Pastoral Reference	No	Yes	Yes
Faith Commitment	No	Yes	Yes
Support Services			
Office of Diversity/Multi-Ethnic Programming	No	Yes	Yes
Black Student Alliance	Yes	Yes	No
African-American Club	Yes	No	Yes
Ethnic Clubs	Yes	Yes	Yes

schools expressed the mission uniquely in terms of admissions and academic requirements, co-curricular opportunities, chapel requirements and community standards. Once enrolled, each institution offered chapel for students. Bentley and Woodson required students to attend chapel, Clegg did not. The average number of times required at each institution was three times per week. At each institution, students were also guided by community standards which limit or prohibit the consumption of alcohol and provide restrictions regarding how often interactions occur between men and women within the residence halls.

The three sites varied as to whether or not a student was required to be a Christian to enroll at the school. However, the general enrollment requirements were similar- standard GPA

scores, standardized test requirements and essays. What was unique to two of the three institutions in this research was the requirement of a personal faith commitment as a requirement for admission. The third institution did not require a faith commitment but did communicate its commitment to faith in it application process.

Another difference between the three institutions was the number of mandatory Bible classes required to graduate. The theology requirement to graduate ranged from six to 30 units. This expression of the theological mission influenced the type of student who enrolled at the university and also impacted persistence.

Research Participants

The population for this study was junior and senior African-American students at three CCCU institutions. As a goal of the research was to understand the experiences of African-American students in the context of CCCU institutions, juniors and seniors who already had successfully navigated the culture for at least two years had a deeper understanding of the institutional ethos and culture. At each institution, 20% of the African-American student population were included in the recruitment process. The participants selected to participate in the research represented a diverse group of African-American students in terms of gender, major, hometown and other demographic characteristics and included students from diverse denominational and spiritual backgrounds.

The primary choice in recruiting participants to explore the experiences of African-American students was to either focus on student persistence or attrition. This research focused on successful students progressing towards graduation because they experienced the same campus environment as African-American students who did not persist but were able to successfully navigate the culture at CCCU institutions. Thus, this research avoided a deficit

framework, and focused on what went right for African-American students rather than on what did not work.

In order to gain access to these students, professional relationships were established with the staff members who oversee the programs and services for African-American students at each institution. These individuals served as gatekeepers to the participants and assisted in the identification of African-American students willing to participate in the study. They also assisted in participant recruitment.

To recruit participants, I conducted interviews with the gatekeepers at each institution and identified their perceptions of the challenges encountered by African-American students at their institutions. The findings from these interviews were utilized in the development of the semi-structured focus group protocol. After these interviews, the gatekeepers assisted in identifying the most effective strategies to recruit successful African-American students willing to participate in the research. Each gatekeeper was also invited to identify specific students who fit the research criteria. Due to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), information about these students was not given to me directly, but the recruitment information was sent to students by the gatekeepers.

By involving the gatekeepers in the process and with their support of the research, the participants were more willing to engage in the research. Students identified by this process were contacted by the gatekeepers or administrators and sent an electronic recruitment packet. The questionnaire ensured a diverse pool of participants in the research and the responses informed the development of the focus group protocol.

Data Collection Methods

In order to gather the information necessary to complete this case study, three data collection strategies were utilized: 1) a brief background questionnaire to be completed by students who participated in the focus groups; 2) three in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured focus groups at each institution and 3) an interview with each of the three gatekeepers at each campus.

Interviews

The data collection process began with a series of interviews with the gatekeepers at each campus. The interviews explored the administrator's perceptions regarding how the mission and theological orientation of the school impacted the experiences of African-American students. A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized based upon the literature review and the research questions.

Background Questionnaire

After reviewing the responses from the gatekeeper interviews and coding the information, a brief online background questionnaire was distributed to students invited to participate in the study. The questionnaire was sent as a part of a recruitment packet and was in the form of a link to an electronic survey. The recruitment packet contained a personal invitation to participate, a consent form and a link to an online questionnaire. The questionnaire inquired about basic demographic information and allowed participants to indicate their desire to participate in the research. The questionnaire also invited participants to respond to questions regarding the campus climate and challenges related to race or ethnicity. The questionnaire took approximately five minutes to complete.

After reviewing the responses from the students who responded to the recruitment packet, purposive sampling was utilized to ensure a diverse participant pool (Patton, 1990). Student

responses were categorized before the focus groups in order to ensure a diverse pool of African-American students participate in the focus groups. Information from the background questionnaires was also incorporated into the focus group protocol.

Focus Groups

After reviewing responses from the background questionnaires, selected participants were invited to participate in a focus group. At each institution, three focus groups were conducted in a confidential setting with six to eight students in each group. The groups lasted no more than 90 minutes each. The focus groups were conducted in-person at the participant's school site in a confidential setting. A semi-structured focus group protocol was used to ensure consistency between the groups. The protocol was informed by the information which emerged from the analysis of the initial background questionnaires and the interviews. The protocol was developed based upon a review of the relevant literature, reflecting Yin's (2002) emphasis on allowing theory to guide case study research. Stake (1995) recommends that prior to conducting case study research, the data collection protocol will be developed, critiqued and analyzed. This analysis was done with the protocol which was pilot-tested before its use to ensure it appropriately answered the research questions.

Each focus group with six to eight participants was audio-recorded and transcribed and a verbatim transcript created to ensure the voices of each student were accurately captured. This addressed a validity threat to this research resulting from a misinterpretation of the data. After each focus group, the data were reviewed to familiarize myself with the themes which emerged before the next focus group was completed.

In the first half of the focus group, trust was established with participants in order to facilitate asking more difficult questions in the second half of the focus group. In the first part of

the focus group, information was explored related to research questions one and two. These questions focused on how the mission of CCCU institutions impacted the academic, social and religious experiences of African-American students and on the campus climate. A focus was placed on identifying what at the institution contributed to their educational success, the hindrances encountered and recommendations to improve the graduation rates at CCCU institutions.

The third and fourth research questions were the focus of the second half of the focus groups. These questions focused on how personal spirituality impacts experiences and also explored experiences related to the campus climate. A goal of the questions was to determine to what extent microaggressions occurred and to name forms of racism or discrimination on campus. Due to the complex and potentially emotional nature of the questions asked in this portion of the focus group, a positive rapport with the participants was important.

In order to encourage the involvement of participants in the focus groups, participants were offered a $20 gift card. After each focus group, the audio recordings were placed on my computer and backed up in the cloud. All of the digital files, transcriptions and audio recordings were securely and confidentially stored. All names of all participants were confidential and had a code.

Data Analysis Methods

In qualitative research, the process of data collection and data analysis are not separate processes; they are a simultaneous activity (Merriam, 1997). Data were analyzed through a process of constant comparison as it emerged from the various data collection methods. Guided by principles of grounded theory, where findings emerge from constant interaction with the data from the study, the coding emerged from the data, guided by the framework of the literature

review (Maxwell, 2004; University of Iowa, 2011). Codes are the labels placed on units of research that emerge during a study (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

In order to incorporate this concept into the data analysis process, an ongoing process of reviewing and coding data after each interview and focus group was used. By analyzing information as the data was collected, I was able to identify the trends and patterns of the case study. I was also able to identify data which differed from the rest of the findings. This process of analysis included reducing data, displaying it, and drawing conclusions from it (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Not only did this process help verify findings; it also strengthened the conclusions.

In order to begin the process of reducing the data into meaningful themes, I developed a code sheet which contained the themes and definition of themes which emerged from the interviews, focus groups and background questionnaires. The literature review and the research questions served as a guide for the development of the codes. This was completed before the research began. The code sheet was flexible and more themes were added as they emerged through the research process. Responses and findings were initially categorized based upon predetermined themes which emerged from the literature review such as "racial microaggressions", "effective support services", "fit between spirituality and faith", "barriers to success" and "recommended changes". However, due to the nature of qualitative research, new codes were also developed on the basis of emerging information from participants (Creswell, 2008). As Stake (1995) indicates, researchers should remain open to new insights and discoveries throughout the case study process. Ultimately, the codes were developed into themes, which helped to organize the findings.

Background Questionnaire

The information gathered from the background questionnaires was used to categorize participants based upon their background, educational experiences and the types of challenges encountered in college. Responses form the background questionnaires were organized, coded and compared to the interviews and focus groups.   This information was included in the findings of the research.

Interviews and Focus Groups

After each interview and focus group, the digital recording was uploaded to a computer, transcribed and coded to identify the relevant themes. A summary sheet for each interview and focus group which recorded my initial thoughts and reflections immediately after each conversation was used. These forms are termed contact summary forms by Miles and Huberman (1984). This process allowed me to capture thoughts, ideas and concepts which emerged as I interacted with the students and interviewees.

Process of Data Analysis

The themes which emerged at each institution were placed into a case study matrix, which allowed the findings and themes to be placed in a manner which aligned with the research questions. This matrix allowed for the rich and nuanced descriptions of each site. It also helped to compare and contrast the three institutions.

At the end of the research process at each site, the themes that emerged from the coding of each data collection method were used to develop conclusions, findings and implications. Triangulation of the data gathered from the background questionnaires, interviews and focus groups was used to verify the findings. Through this process of analyzing and coding the data, an in-depth understanding of the experiences of African-American students at each CCCU institution was developed.

After identifying the themes and findings for each site, I identified over-arching themes relevant to all three institutions. To compare the three case studies, I placed findings into one matrix which allowed for comparison. The purpose of this matrix was to easily identify where the findings were consistent and where they diverged. Data were triangulated based upon an examination of the information from each site and common and divergent findings were discussed and explored. This process also assisted in developing conclusions and findings.

The final component of analyzing the data was to develop conclusions based upon the findings. Conclusions were made for each institution as well as for the entire case study. I used rich description to describe the findings and described the population well so that other CCCU institutions may be able to compare themselves to this research.

Ethical Issues

Due to the sensitive nature of this study's topic, confidentiality was an important issue. In order to safeguard the names of the colleges and individuals involved in the research process, pseudonyms were used and identifying information was blurred to alleviate identification. Confidentiality included modifying any language that could be used to identify an individual institution. In order to ensure the confidentiality of participants, interviews were conducted in a confidential location. Data from the research were stored in a confidential environment and were destroyed after data analysis.

The nature of this research also involved gatekeepers and African-American students discussing positive and negative experiences around the issues of race and ethnicity. Themes related to race, microaggressions and discrimination emerged. These issues involved emotional risks to the participants and were difficult to discuss. In order to prepare participants for this possibility, the consent form clearly identified the nature of the research and the potential

emotional risks inherent to this research. The consent form stressed that the study was voluntary and that the participant could end participation at any point. In addition, interview protocols were well developed with questions designed to minimize harm to the participants. As required by UCLA and all three institutions, all documents, protocols and consent forms were submitted and reviewed by appropriate Institutional Review Boards before the research began.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

The credibility of this research depended significantly on the integrity and honesty of the researcher, the process through which the data was collected and analyzed and the methods of analysis. As a White male, establishing credibility and trust was an essential part of the research process in order to gain access to this population and safeguards were necessary to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Several strategies were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of this research.

Construct Validity

In order to ensure the validity of the study and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness, several strategies were utilized. Examining the study in terms of internal and construct validity addressed some of the threats to validity. Construct validity began by establishing the correct way to study the phenomena (Yin, 2008). To enhance construct validity, various forms of data collection were utilized and data were collected from multiple sources at multiple institutions. Each interview, focus group and questionnaire reflected different perspectives and represented varied viewpoints. Strategies such as using protocols and conducting member checks addressed the criticism that subjective judgments were utilized to gather data. The use of the pre-determined protocol and codes also ensured reliability (Yin,

2002). These strategies ensured the actual effects of the phenomena at CCCU institutions were recorded rather than just the subjective comments of the researcher.

The design of this case study also enhanced the internal validity of this research. Three CCCU institutions were identified. Each of these institutions, through data self- reported by IPEDS, had an empirical gap in graduation rates between overall and African-American students. By asking the students and administrators about the sources of this problem, themes common to each institution emerged. The number of administrators and students involved in the study also reduced the likelihood that external factors provide other explanations.

Triangulation of Data

In order to ensure the credibility of this research, three methods of data collection were utilized: a background questionnaire, focus groups and interviews. A characteristic of the case study which increased consistency was the opportunity for triangulation, which was achieved through gathering multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2008). Using this process of triangulation allowed for convergence of themes from a variety of sources of information (Creswell, 2008). The process of triangulation produced rich, thick data which brought credibility to this research (Maxwell, 2004).

Triangulation occurred in a number of ways. Findings emerged from multiple research participants at three institutions. Three sources of data collection were utilized. During the process of research, participants were given the opportunity to provide additional reflections which enhanced the credibility of the findings. In addition, the interview protocols developed were consistent to ensure all respondents were asked the same questions. I also field tested the interview and focus group protocols with African-American students before they were utilized in the study.

Reactivity

One serious threat to the credibility of this research was the issue of reactivity due to the fact that I was a White man asking difficult racial questions to African-American students. Were the participants honest about these issues and did they truly report their perceptions? This threat was addressed in two ways. The first strategy to minimize reactivity was to build relationships with key gatekeepers at the institutions where I conducted the research. By building trust, rapport and establishing myself as a trustworthy, honest individual with these gatekeepers, I was in a stronger position to begin the research with willing participants who trusted me. I further minimized the threat of reactivity by involving participants in member checks. Since I conducted multiple interviews and focus groups at each institution, the findings reported were from multiple sources.

Summary

In this chapter I explained why a qualitative research design was the most effective strategy to explore the experiences of African-American students at CCCU institutions. I also reviewed the research questions, areas of inquiry, research site and participants, data collection and analysis methods and issues of credibility and trustworthiness. African-American students at CCCU institutions who survive the challenges and persist to graduation are shining examples who needed to be highlighted. While much research was previously conducted on this problem at public and private institutions, little was known about the experiences of successful African-American students at CCCU schools. By learning the strategies utilized by these students to successfully navigate difficult terrain, CCCU institutions will be able to develop better support services for these students. By giving voice to the experiences of African-Americans students, individuals in positions of influence and power may be moved to bring about change that data alone would not motivate them to implement. By linking the findings and themes from the three

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institutions, this research identified ways for CCCU institutions to improve the academic, social

and religious experiences of African-American students.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African-American students within the context of CCCU institutions in order to better understand the barriers and challenges encountered by these students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. The institutions included in this research were CCCU institutions in the Western region with at least a 10% gap or greater in graduation rates between African-American and overall degree completion rates. Although the students at CCCU institutions are similar to other private institutions, completion rates for African-American students are lower at CCCU institutions. While the lower than expected graduation rates for African-American students have been documented, it was not yet clear why this problem existed. This investigation sought to identify factors in the environment that negatively impact the retention, persistence and success of African-American students. This investigation addressed the following research questions:

1) According to African-American students, how does the institutional mission at CCCU schools impact their academic, social and religious experiences?

2) How do African-American students perceive the campus climate at their institution towards African-American students? In what ways, if any, have they experienced microaggressions or other forms of racism or discrimination?

3) How does the theological orientation of CCCU schools and the personal spiritual beliefs or practices of African-American students impact their experience at CCCU institutions?

4) What barriers do African-American students encounter at CCCU institutions and what recommendations do they have to improve their experience?

To answer these research questions, three CCCU institutions in the Western region were identified: Bentley, Woodson and Clegg. At each site, interviews were conducted with informants to describe their perceptions of the institutional context and the environment for African-American students. Focus groups with junior and senior African-American students were then conducted to identify, from their perspective, what in the environment at CCCU institutions impacted their persistence and success. The first section will provide background information about the three institutions: Bentley, Clegg and Woodson.

Background Information

Christian colleges typically provide an atmosphere similar to what students experienced at home. CCCU institutions typically prohibit or limit alcohol consumption, smoking and co-habitation. These standards create a safe learning environment free from distractions and stress. Christian colleges also approach a liberal arts education from a Biblical worldview, which impacts every academic and co-curricular program. At Bentley and Woodson, chapel is mandatory and students are required to complete 30-40 hours per semester. At Clegg, chapel is not mandatory but it is offered three times a week. Students at both Bentley and Woodson are required to complete 15-30 units of Bible classes. At Clegg, students are only required to complete nine units.

The findings from this study are presented in four sections. The first three sections include a case study for each of the three predominantly White colleges, demographics of the participants are reported and distinctive themes that emerged from each site are also presented. There were findings unique to each institution. The last section presents a cross-case analysis of the three sites and identifies themes common to each institution. The findings will be organized according to the research questions.

Case Study One- Woodson University

Woodson University is a small liberal arts institution with less than 3,000 students in the Western region of the United States. It is more than eighty years old. Woodson is a denominationally affiliated institution with a mission to develop students who serve the community. The small size allows for close personal attention and creates an environment where it is difficult for a student to get lost. The most recent enrollment information for Woodson indicates approximately 30% of the undergraduate students are Hispanic and approximately 7% are African-American. In 2010, the six-year overall graduation rate was 59% for all students, 62% for White students, 61% for Hispanic students and only 27% for African-American students. The gap at Woodson between African-American and overall graduation rates was 32% in 2010 (Collegresults.org, 2012). This case study includes information derived from interviews with informants on the campus as well as data collected via a background questionnaire and focus groups with African-American students. This case covers the demographic information about the participants and findings organized by the research questions.

Student Demographics

Eighteen students participated in three focus groups at Woodson. This group of students stands for 20% of African-American undergraduate students enrolled at Woodson. The participants represented a diverse group of students in terms of gender, major, residency status and reasons for selecting Woodson. Thirteen women and five men participated in the focus groups, which is consistent with the gender breakdown of African-American students at Woodson. These numbers correspond to the percentage of women, 68% and men, 32% at Woodson. Table 1 provides the demographic and academic profile of the participants reported using pseudonyms.

Table 4.1: Participant Demographics & Academic Profile: Woodson

Name	Gender	Major	Housing	Hometown	First Generation	Semesters Completed
Erina	Female	Psychology	On-Campus	N. California	Yes	4
Julius	Male	Theatre	On-Campus	S. California	No	6
Nikola	Female	Sociology	On-Campus	Other State	No	4
Underhill	Male	Literature	On-Campus	S. California	No	7
Rose	Female	Communication	On-Campus	N. California	No	5
Casey	Female	Education	On-Campus	S. California	Yes	4
Kaylin	Female	Liberal Studies	Off-Campus	S. California	Yes	5
Kimberly	Female	Theatre	On-Campus	S. California	No	4
Derick	Male	Sociology	On-Campus	S. California	Yes	5
Shevon	Female	Sociology	On-Campus	S. California	No	5
Balin	Male	History	On-Campus	S. California	No	7
September	Female	Communication	Off-Campus	Other State	No	4
Halle	Female	Communication	Off-Campus	S. California	Yes	5
Avery	Female	Anthropology	On-Campus	Other State	No	5
Benjamin	Male	History	On-Campus	S. California	No	5
Maya	Female	Kinesiology	On-Campus	Other State	No	5
Lisa	Female	Business	With Parents	S. California	Yes	5
Majestic	Female	Biology	On-Campus	S. California	No	5

Fourteen (78%) of the students lived on-campus, three lived off-campus and one lived with her parents. At Woodson, 70% of the traditional undergraduate students live on-campus. The students also represented similar characteristics to other undergraduate students in terms of place of residence before enrollment. Twelve (67%) students were from Southern California, two were from Northern California and four were from another U.S. state. Each participant had completed between four and eight semesters at Woodson before participation in this research.

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Environment

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Focus group participants were asked how the environment at Woodson influenced their experiences socially, academically and spiritually. Thirteen (72%) participants described a difference between what they expected the institution to be like and what they encountered once they arrived on campus. Halle described her positive perceptions of the environment at Woodson when she visited during a pre-enrollment visit:

Everyone was super sweet here, everyone had gigantic smiles on their face and everyone was just friends and it was such a community. I thought it would be exciting to go to a school where there was this over-abundance of happiness all the time.

Avery described her expectation versus the reality, "I feel like it's a facade, what they advertise on the website and even in the commercials, people are nice to you, but then when you get here, it's something different". The term "façade" was expressed by four students to describe the difference between their expectations of the environment and the reality. This façade was based upon the difference between what they expected the institution to be like and what it actually was. Benjamin described how he felt in this environment at Woodson:

I feel like we're unwelcome, to be honest, or to a large extent, like we're not really accepted, like we're still outsiders. We're in a minority and we're going to stay that way, we're not going to be brought into the mainstream of the campus life.

September described her isolation at Woodson, "When you visit the campus, everyone is nice to you because they want you to come here, but once you're here, you're on your own". Erina also shared her experience of the environment, "a few of the details are definitely exaggerated and not very honest".

Fourteen (78%) participants described an environment, which did not welcome African-American students and negatively impacted how they perceived themselves. Words like "on guard" and "judgmental" were used to describe the African-American student experience. Shevon described the environment from her perception:

I think the environment makes you feel like less of a person, or for me, of how different I was. I felt so isolated and like I was less for some reason. I felt like I couldn't fit anywhere because with White people I was too angry, so I felt isolated, I felt alone and I felt like I didn't matter.

 Maya also commented on how the environment at Woodson influenced how she felt about herself, "since I came to Woodson, my self-esteem has plummeted".

Strategies for Navigating the Environment

Within the environment at Woodson, sixty percent of students identified specific strategies they utilized to navigate their social, academic and spiritual lives. Participants indicated that in order to persist, African-Americans would commonly adapt who they were or how they acted around White people. They felt as if they needed to "adjust", "filter", "conform", and "prove themselves" in order to fit in and to navigate the social environment at Woodson. Maya said, "You either have to fit in with the Black students or you fit in with the non-Black students, you can't just be in the middle, and you have to be able to switch". These participants believed the environment requires African-American students to adapt themselves to fit in. Jerod described this tension:

> I remember asking my freshman year, where does Jerod belong? I'm trying to fit in with the White kids. It was like, I don't fit in here. I remember saying, I'm like too White for Black kids but I'm too Black for some of these White kids, so it's kind of like, where do I fit in?

The challenge of switching back and forth between two cultures was identified as a strategy by six (33%) students. Julius said, "I definitely had to tailor who I am, to fit certain expectations. I remember changing who I was to not be seen in a certain way". Students also isolated themselves from the community as a strategy to respond to their loneliness and isolation. September described this process of separation, "I've just been separating myself completely. Now I live off campus so I literally come here for school, homework and I go home".

Spirituality and faith were another strategy utilized by eight students to navigate the difficult environment. Shevon described her response to the difficult environment at Woodson, "I've used spirituality when I was feeling alone, like sometimes all you have is prayer, when you're like, I can't believe you just said that." Erina also utilized spirituality to navigate difficult racial tensions in Woodson's environment:

I spend more time praying about them than I do anyone else, about the people who feel like they can't speak or they feel like they have to be somebody different, I just hope and pray that, like, they find comfort here.

Social Experiences

Focus group participants were asked to describe their positive social experiences and challenges. Specifically, students were asked how their social experiences contributed to their persistence and success. The data were mixed in terms of the impact on their experience. Ten (56%) students indicated social relationships created a support system but for seven participants, the social environment created the most tension. The students described social relationships in complex and nuanced terms.

Due partially to the low numbers of African-American students, eight (44%) participants reported a strong sense of isolation and loneliness on campus. Casey said, "I don't have a lot of Black friends here and I've always just felt that, like, separation". The low number of African-American students was obvious to participants. Benjamin told the story of his parents visiting the campus and noticing how few African-American students they saw, "My step dad came and visited last year and he was like, where are all the Black people? He would make jokes, you know, that he was seeing the same person over and over". Halle commented:

> You feel alone because the staff doesn't completely understand you, like, two people here that you can go to and talk to about things. The girls on your floor don't understand you; in fact, they mock some of the things that you do. Or they ask really weird, strange questions, you feel aggravated, you feel defensive, and you feel alone. It's just a horrible environment to be in, why would you stay?

Students responded to loneliness and isolation in different ways. Halle described an experience her freshman year:

> I called my mom crying and I was like, I can't do this anymore. I felt alone, and it's just that feeling of being alone, being the only one, just not being able to have anyone to understand you and identify with you.

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Ten (56%) students were negatively impacted by the ongoing isolation and loneliness.

Five students reported feeling worn down by the daily battle of being on the outside. Words

such as "less than", "not beautiful enough", "not dateable", and "I just don't fit in" were used to

describe the negative impact. Derick described a strong awareness of how few African-

Americans are on the campus. He said,

> Almost every single African-American person I see, I act like I know them. When I'm
> walking to classes and I'll say, hey what's up man? If I see someone White, I won't have
> that same reaction.

Five African-American women described other challenges unique to their gender. They used

words such as "lost self-esteem", "lower self-confidence" and an "overall lower sense of feeling

pretty" after being in the environment at Woodson. Maya said:

> I just feel like here, I don't feel smart. I did at home. I don't feel accepted here like I do
> at home, a lot of things have beaten me down, and I know it shouldn't. I feel like I
> walked into the school thinking I was on top of the world and now I feel like I'm on the
> bottom of the mountain, and it kind of sucks.

This sentiment was supported by three other students. For example, Benjamin said:

> I can walk around campus and I will wave at someone and I will try to go out of my way
> to be nice. I'll say hi and they give you this look like, what is this black guy doing trying
> to talk to me? It's like okay, then, move on, and it doesn't help when people try to say,
> oh, racism is dead, well, bull crap, just because I'm on a Christian campus doesn't mean
> it doesn't happen.

In line with the theme of isolation, nine (50%) students reported feeling as if no other student

looked like them and as if they do not fit into the environment.

Unintended Outcomes

Eighty percent of participants also reported beneficial positive unintended outcomes.

Shevon described her growth and development since coming to Woodson, "I've become a

stronger person, I've become more self-aware, I've learned a lot about myself through these

experiences". Five students commented on the strength they acquired as they navigated the difficult social environment. September described this growth, "it's taught me to be such a better person, I'm way more compassionate".

Ten participants believed they developed new skills by navigating the environment at Woodson. Student perceived they would carry these skills into their post-college life. The students also believed that White students were not learning the same skills and strategies, as they were not required to navigate difficult racial tensions. Five participants reported a sense of pride at setting an example for non-Black students in the community. Halle commented:

> It's the opportunity to be an example, because a lot of people here, because of their upbringing, they're not used to being around African-American people, and we get to be the first ones they interact with and that are completely the opposite of the stereotypes.

Twelve (67%) students also reported learning to appreciate the differences of others and appreciate themselves more, which they attributed to being different in the environment at Woodson. These participants realized that if they survived at Woodson, they could thrive after college as well.

Academic Experiences

Students were also asked to describe their experiences with Woodson's academic environment and to identify what contributed to or hindered their success. Participants reported a mix of positive and negative experiences in the classroom and also offered recommendations for improving their academic experience. Two-thirds of the students discussed being the only African-American student in a classroom as a barrier to their learning and described how this racial isolation negatively impacted the learning environment. Casey said, "I'm always reminded that I'm Black. Ninety percent of the classes I have, I'm the only Black person".

Participants in all three focus groups described this reality. September explained why the low number of African-American students frustrated and challenged her,

> I was always that one Black girl in everything, so I'm kind of used to it, but sometimes I think, like, I'm in college, with 2000 whatever other students and I'm still the only Black girl in class, it kind of makes me a little sad.

> Not only were participants frequently the only African-American students in the class, they also experienced low expectations placed upon them by other students and professors. This finding is consistent with previous research from the literature, which describes the challenges encountered by high-achieving African-American students. Jerod described his experience as a high-achieving Black student,

> I get looks, people are shocked, I walk into the classroom, people are like, do you go here? And it's like yeah, I am a student here, just accept that, and it's also like, people are shocked if you get better grades than them. They're like, oh, you're black and you got an A on a test? It's like…yes. They think oh, you're Black, you're supposed to be dumb, you're supposed to be ignorant, why are you getting better grades than me? And it's like, I'm gonna keep shocking you.

> In the classroom, participants were challenged by being frequently asked to speak for all Black people. Seven (39%) students reported being asked to speak for their entire race. Erina commented,

> It's very hard for me to learn when the minute the person says 'black' in the classroom, everybody looks at me, everybody starts talking about slavery, everybody's looking at you, like they're ready for you to get offended.

Students were also frequently asked to answer any question about Black issues or race relations. Avery reported avoiding class when she knew a topic like slavery was going to be discussed due to the pressure of having to answer questions related to the Black experience. Participants perceived this high-pressure negatively impacted their academics.

Other challenges reported by seven participants were related to the professors themselves. Halle described the challenges she encountered in a class when a professor made a racial comment,

> I think the worst part is when people on campus in higher authority, like professors, say derogatory things to you, and they say it in a joking manner, and people are giggling with it, and you're just sitting there, and you're the only one of that ethnicity in the room, you're looking at them like you want to get up and punch them in the face…and not one of you can possibly understand how much that offended me, how much that hurt me.

Halle also told a story about her forensics coach, "I had my coach tell me that my hair is really unprofessional, and it won't look good when you compete, so you have to make sure it's straight, you know, it's like the whiter, cleaner look". She reported feeling as if her blackness was not sufficient and that she was being asked to act more White in order to succeed.

Eight (44%) students also perceived the examples used by professors during lectures did not represent their background or experience. They reported feeling an inability to relate to these examples. This dynamic further distanced and isolated African-Americans students. Lisa commented, "They use these conventional examples and they think everyone in the classroom is going to understand and I'm looking at them like, I have no idea what you're talking about because my upbringing and culture was not like that at all".

There were also a number of positive aspects of the academic environment at Woodson specifically for African-American students. When an African-American student really feels seen and heard by a professor, it can make a difference. Shevon said, "I think when you find professors that care, they really care, and I feel like when they understand how much it takes for an African-American student to succeed, the support that you get from this is really great". Lisa added, "I think the support you can get sometimes from professors is really great. The professors that get it, and the professors that just say thank you for being you and succeeding, I think that's been the best part."

Spirituality

Students were asked to identify the top factors, which contributed to their college selection. The fit between their faith and the spirituality of the institution was an important factor for two-thirds of the students who indicated "I wanted to attend a Christian college" and "I received a scholarship" as the central reasons they chose Woodson. Table 4.2 presents the reasons students identified for choosing Woodson.

Table 4.2: Factors in College Selection: Woodson

Reason for Selecting Woodson	Number of Students
I wanted to attend a Christian college	12
I received a scholarship	12
The school had my major	4
The school is close to my home	3
I had friends attend here	3

Although spirituality was identified as important, once arriving on campus, half of the students reported their expectations of the spiritual environment were not met. These students described a difference between their expectations of the spiritual environment and the reality. Halle said,

> My church background is an all-Black church, so the music was completely different, the people were different and we were dancing, screaming, and it would be Black church. When I came here, I was really confused because I thought the way we worshiped was the only way to worship.

Two-thirds of the students reported difficulties navigating the spiritual climate. Confusion and dissonance consistently described the experiences of students whose spiritual expectations were not met. Shevon agreed with Halle, "I thought the way I did church was the way everyone did church". Maya added, "I feel like chapel is aimed at one type of person".

To further explore spiritual experiences, participants were asked to identify words which described their spiritual development since arriving at Woodson. Ninety-five percent of

participants used positive words associated with growth and development such as "growing", "transformation", "developed" and "reconstruction". Five students described their spiritual development as both growing and challenging. One student described her spiritual development with only negative words. Table 4.3 reports the words used by participants to describe their spiritual development.

Table 4.3: Words to Describe Spiritual Development Since Coming to Woodson

Name	Words
Erina	Complicated, strained, growing
Julius	Intellectual growth by challenging and questioning tradition
Nikola	Learned to love everyone no matter where they came from
Jerod	Amazing, astonishing, caring, compassion
Rose	Life-changing, transformation
Casey	Evolving, changing, challenging, growth
Kaylin	Growth
Kimberly	Tedious, yet transforming
Derick	Somewhat developed
Shevon	Confusing, cultural clash, is this the same God?
Balin	Contemplation and reconstruction
September	Challenged, tested, support myself
Halle	Speed bumps, growth
Avery	Work in progress
Benjamin	Assimilation and growth
Maya	More open
Lisa	Growing
Majestic	Diversity, opened my eyes to new ways of worship

Students were also asked to describe how they developed spiritually from chapel and through their own personal spiritual beliefs and practices. Even though tension was in the spiritual environment, sixteen (89%) students reported they had grown spiritually; they believed it was largely the differences which helped them to grow. Benjamin articulated this concept well, "Being in this environment made me think and it made me really come up with my own ideas. I really had to learn my own identity and really become spiritually independent".

Pre-college worship experiences were significant in preparing students for Woodson. Nine students whose previous worship experiences were similar to Woodson's had a more

positive experience. These students were comfortable and more able to adapt to the spiritual

climate. Nine students who attended a Black church before Woodson, with a worship style

characterized by joy, hopefulness and praise were challenged by the introspective Evangelical

worship style at Woodson. Shevon contrasted the Evangelical and Black styles of worship:

> Here I learn a lot of vulnerability and brokenness, I felt like I had to be sad all the time in order to seem spiritual, but at home, it was like, find joy and happiness in God, and so had a lot of clashes.

Students who came from a predominantly Black church also perceived rigidity in the

predominantly White worship environment. They believed the spiritual climate was not open to

change. Casey described this inflexibility:

> If you're coming from a type of church background and you have to come to school where what they have is not what you're used to and they're not trying to make you feel comfortable, then that's a reason for people to just be like, I'm out.

Campus Climate

Racism and Microaggressions

Students were asked about their experiences at Woodson in terms of stereotypes, racial

discrimination and microaggressions. Twelve participants identified specific examples of

receiving a microaggression from White students and discussed how they were impacted

emotionally by the experience. Benjamin described how his White friends would frequently

make racial jokes and then justify their comments. Benjamin responded, "You referencing a

Black friend doesn't save you from being a racist".

Derrick discussed the prevalence of microaggressions at Woodson in the residence halls,

walking around campus and attending class. He said, "Things get really out of control because

there are so many African-American jokes". Eight students reported hearing frequent references

by White students to chicken and waffles, watermelon, Black History month, Black males and

hip hop, and Black women being loud when referring to African-Americans. Majestic described her feeling set apart from other students in her residence hall, "freshman year, my floor was named Baby Compton by my RA, because our floor was more Black and Hispanic than White". Underhill was told by his roommate, "I'm scared of Black people". Shevon recounted a story of a friend who joked about his black colored car that used a lot of gasoline. Her friend told her, "Well yeah, of course my car is black. It steals gas from me all the time". Kapree recounted the constant use of the stereotype that African-American women are loud, "One of the girls said to me, don't be so ghetto". Shevon was told, "You're pretty for a Black girl". Julius described a microaggression derived from his physical appearance after taking out his braids, "This guy saw me after I took out my braids and I had a fro and he said, oh, I like this look better, it's like your IQ went up a couple of points, and I was like, wait, what? Because now my hair is an afro instead of corn rows? Somehow smarter? That didn't' make sense at all".

Other African-American students also described microaggressions. Erina and Derick were called whitewashed by their friends. Derick said, "Does this mean you shouldn't be respectful, you shouldn't be smart, you shouldn't be nice? Only White people have those qualities? That's how I interpret that".   Erina described her feelings about Woodson's marketing materials, which portray no students of color, "It's a microaggression because you look at the advertisement, you don't see us. And in my eyes it's because you're not pretty enough to be on the cover, you don't look nice enough to advertise our school". Halle described a classroom experience, "I've had professors talk about African-American history and I say, that's not right, and have them completely shut me down and say Halle, you don't count, you're not fully Black".

Participants were asked if they encountered racist comments on-campus at Woodson.

Nine students described experiences of direct racism, racial slurs and racially motivated

comments. Three students recounted incidents where the 'N' word was used on campus. Jerod

described what really bothered him at Woodson:

> The constant use of the 'n' word, by people who aren't African-American. They were
> thinking it was cool to say around me, and it was like, who are you to even think of
> saying something like that? And they say, I'm kidding, and I'm like, no, it's not a joke. It
> bothers me enough when African-Americans say it, but…it offends me.

Benjamin also reported his experience of the consistent use of the 'N' word at Woodson and its

impact on him emotionally,

> Someone will say, I can use the 'n' word, because I have family members who are Black.
> And I'm like, my mom doesn't even let me say it. If I said it in my house, my mom
> would slap me in the mouth and I'm 21 years old. We don't even use that word in my
> house. Why would they try to use that word?

Jonathan recounted a time this past year when he encountered a direct racial experience that

negatively affected him,

> I was walking with a friend, and she happens to be White, and someone from Woodson's
> parking lot just happened to pull out, and deliberately stopped their car, in the middle of
> traffic and yelled out, 'we don't want to see any mixture of interracial 'n' babies, any
> 'n(s)', and they used the term, and drove off. I was really heated and that pissed me off
> the whole day.

Racism, microaggressions and stereotypes negatively impacted the experiences of ten

participants who reported emotional responses from embarrassment to anger. Derick said, "It

personally bothers me, it really bothers me". Jerod added a stronger response, "It offended me.

People don't understand how it affects us".   Five participants reported internalizing the

frustration, pain and anger from being in an environment where microaggressions were

consistently used. Benjamin said, "They kind of hurt me". Derick acknowledged they were

"confusing and upsetting". Shevon felt "frustrated". Underhill said,

> We're always going to face that indirect racism. No one will come to your face and directly say something to you, there's always that snide, kind of hidden remark that people will do, and I feel like that's what hurts the most, to be honest.

Eight students reported fighting microaggressions alone. Halle described this sense of aloneness, "it was just the most shocking thing because I was the only one who stopped and got offended, no one else was able to identify that it was wrong she said that".

Other Barriers

Funding

Two-thirds of the participants indicated "I was given a scholarship" as a central factor in selecting Woodson and participants identified finances and the ability to pay as another barrier to success for many African-American students. Jerod recalled the reason he chose the school, "Woodson was the school that gave me the most money and it was a school that my parents could afford through loans." Erina described her athletic scholarship as a central factor in selecting Woodson, "I came for athletics because they offered me a lot of money". Majestic also added, "I felt called here, plus they gave us more money".

Funding was identified in every focus group as a large barrier for African-American students. Casey described the financial reality for African-American students once they arrived on campus, "I think that finances are a huge part of why students leave". Halle described the impact of finances on African-American student enrollment, "I had a pretty strong African-American group my freshman year, and it was so much fun, and come next year, none of them got the same financial aid package and none of them returned". Erina concurred with Halle's assessment, "I feel like my class started with a lot of minorities, I think we lost a lot, I want to say that half of it is financial".

Some participants believed that finances were a significant factor for students who did not persist and were also described as a constant concern for participants who remained at the institution. When asked why finances were such a challenge for African-American students, four students reported the low socio-economic status of many African-American families as one of the factors. Also identified were the hours many African-American students needed to work in order to remain at the institution. See Table 4.4, which reports the number of hours per week participants worked.

Table 4.4: Hours Worked Per Week

Name	Gender	Hours Worked Per Week
Erina	Female	0-5
Julius	Male	0-5
Nikola	Female	0-5
Underhill	Male	6-10
Rose	Female	6-10
Casey	Female	0-5
Kaylin	Female	16-20
Kimberly	Female	0-5
Derick	Male	20+
Shevon	Female	6-10
Balin	Male	0-5
September	Female	11-15
Halle	Female	6-10
Avery	Female	16-20
Benjamin	Male	11-15
Maya	Female	6-10
Lisa	Female	0-5
Majestic	Female	0-5

Recommendations to Improve the African-American Experience

Support Systems for Faculty, Staff and Students of Color

Students were asked what suggestions they had to improve their experience at Woodson. Six students identified the need to expand support systems for both African-American students and African-American professors. Avery discussed the levels of support for faculty of color,

I feel like African-American professors don't really have a good support system behind them to be like, I have a right to say something, because they're going against how many other professors that won't even begin to understand how they feel about certain issues? If I was in their shoes, I would be like, maybe I shouldn't step on egg shells, because at the end of the day, who's going to support me?

Increase the Number of Faculty and Staff of Color

Eleven (61%) students mentioned the importance of increasing the number of faculty and staff of color at Woodson and were only able to identify three African-American faculty members. The participants reported positive experiences with African-American faculty. Jerod said:

I've actually had an African-American professor, it was actually really interesting, and it was actually fun, because she was using some of the phrases that my mom uses and I'm like, ha, this is tight, and something different, that I hadn't really experienced in a class at Woodson.

These eleven students expressed a desire for more experiences in the classroom with African-American and Hispanic professors. Rose recommended hiring 20% more Black faculty. Shevon agreed, "Having more African-American and Hispanic and minority, people of color" would improve her academic experience.

Majority Allies

Eight students also expressed the importance of non-Black faculty and staff members confronting issues of racism and microaggressions. These students felt a burden of having to be the only person who confronted racism. Eight students expressed fatigue with the ongoing and pervasive nature of the problem. September expressed her desire for others to combat racial issues with her:

I just wish it could come from the teachers. If the teachers could instill some knowledge about either how to approach certain subjects, and how to just live together, that would probably help.

Avery agreed that faculty and staff members need to speak up more and felt that if majority

faculty and staff members actively confronted racial situations, the environment could change:

> It takes the White, the Hispanic, saying, no, that's not okay, it takes the faculty saying, no, that's not okay for you to say that, because I feel like if only Black teachers on campus say it, they're going to be like, oh, they're the Black teacher…but if they have the other professors saying no, that's not okay, they're thinking, oh, I'm hurting, and this teacher's sticking up and that's when things will start to change.

Expand Mentoring Opportunities

Seven students believed mentoring of African-American students by faculty and staff

would increase persistence. Benjamin described how a mentor would help African-American

students to succeed:

> When somebody has an understanding of, the hard work and the determination that it takes of where we've reached, they do take the time and they do give you that encouragement and they do push you to keep going. When you find those people that are willing to invest in you and if they know your story, it does something for you.

Jerod also described what a mentoring relationship would look like, "I would like some who

helped me to grow on this campus, who helped me and actually took the time to walk with me

and hold me accountable for certain things and would teach me". Participants also recommended

partnering junior and senior African-American students with freshman and transfer students to

help these students transition well into the environment.

Expand Diversity Training and Awareness

Participants recognized that many problems encountered in the environment came from a

lack of training and awareness. Eighty percent of participants recommended that more bridges

be created between African-American students and White people. Julius recommended to

"create something that bridges the gap. You educate people and make them aware, and I think

it's not a one-time event, something has to be more consistent". Kimberly agreed, "There's such

a big divide on this campus because people lack knowledge and education." Eight participants in three focus groups also recommended training professors regarding cultural differences in the classroom. Benjamin said, "I think it's important for professors to be aware of the culturally different people in the class and to use different examples".

Summary of Woodson College

The students at Woodson identified barriers in academic, social and religious experiences that hindered their success but some also identified successful strategies they have used to navigate the environment at Woodson. Microaggressions, stereotypes and racism were prominent factors negatively influencing the experiences of African-American students and the experiences identified diverge significantly from the institutional mission. In the classroom, participants identified the isolation of being the only African-American voice and cultural differences with professors as significant barriers. College funding also emerged at Woodson as a significant and ongoing barrier which inhibited African-American student success.

Case Study Two- Clegg University

Clegg University is a small institution in the Western region of the United States with a traditional undergraduate enrollment of approximately 2,000 students. Clegg is a predominantly White private institution with a strong denominational affiliation. Its mission is focused on developing students who are life-long learners who actively engage in community service. According to the 2010 enrollment information for Clegg, approximately 13% of traditional undergraduate students were Hispanic and approximately 3% of students were African-Americans. In 2010, the six-year overall graduation rate at Clegg was 57% for White students and 46% for African-American students, a gap of 11% (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). *Student Demographics*

Seventeen students were selected and invited to participate in one of three focus groups at Clegg during the spring semester. These students represented 20% of the African-American undergraduate students at Clegg and were identified through collaboration with the university gatekeepers. An intentional effort was made to include students from a variety of majors and involvement levels across campus. Participants represented a diverse group of African-American students in terms of gender, major, residence status and reason for college selection. Fifteen women and two men participated in this research, a proportion similar to the entire African-American population at Clegg. Focus groups took place in a confidential location on Clegg's campus. Table 4.5 describes the participants' demographic and academic profiles.

Table 4.5: Participant Demographics & Academic Profile: Clegg

Name	Gender	Major	Housing	Hometown	First Generation	Semesters Completed
Hilda	Female	Communication	Off-Campus	Other State	No	4
Malaysia	Female	Communication	On-Campus	S. California	No	5
Holly	Female	Business	On-Campus	S. California	No	7
Sam	Female	Communication	On-Campus	S. California	No	4
Darnell	Male	Exercise Science	On-Campus	S. California	N/A	4
Scarlett	Female	Biology	On-Campus	Other State	No	4
Rena	Female	Psychology	On-Campus	S. California	No	4
Julie	Female	Psychology	On-Campus	N. California	No	4
Harper	Female	Liberal Studies	On-Campus	S. California	N/A	9
Janet	Female	Biology	On-Campus	N. California	No	4
Victoria	Female	Biology	On-Campus	Other State	No	7
Ciara	Female	Communication	On-Campus	S. California	No	4
Louise	Female	Communication	On-Campus	N. California	No	6
Lailah	Female	Biology	On-Campus	S. California	No	9
Vanessa	Female	Business	W/Parents	S. California	Yes	4
Amber	Female	Biology	On-Campus	S. California	No	4
Jonathon	Male	Sociology	On-Campus	S. California	No	6

Fifteen (88%) participants lived on-campus, two lived off-campus, one with parents. The majority of traditional undergraduate students at Clegg live on-campus for four years. Eleven (61%) participants identified their hometown as Southern California, three participants were

from outside of California and three were from Northern California. Participants had completed

between four and nine semesters prior to participation in this research.

Environment

Participants were asked how the mission and environment at Clegg influenced their

academic, social and religious experiences. Ten (56%) students used terms such as "façade",

"cliquey" and "no exposure to diversity" when asked to identify their main perceptions of the

environment. Ciara described her initial semester at Clegg, "At orientation, everyone says hi and

in a couple of months, people are talking about you behind your back". Although this façade

was not specifically identified as being racial, the dissonance contributed to a negative

perception of the environment for these participants. Rena also discussed her perceptions of the

environment:

> It's like everybody wants to fit in to the Clegg family and everyone wants to put on the
> façade that we are this happy family, that we all love each other, but that's not always
> true.

Focus group participants were asked to identify the reason they selected Clegg and

whether or not their expectations were met. Eight (44%) students indicated their primary reason

for selecting the institution was due to receiving good financial aid or because a scholarship was

offered. It is important to note that only two participants selected Clegg primarily because it was

a Christian institution.

Nine (50%) students indicated their expectations were not met when they first arrived on

campus. Holly expressed her disappointment, "My first thought when I stepped onto this

campus was, I'm transferring, all these people are White and they're all fabulous and White, this

is not my culture". Clegg's low number of African-Americans was identified by nine

participants as one of their first impressions.   Students also perceived that faculty, staff and

students were not exposed to diversity and did not understand the needs of diverse student populations. Holly described her experience of the Clegg environment, shared by Victoria, Ciara and Louse:

> It's a whole different environment when you can tell most people here don't grow up in an environment of diversity. It's a very rich neighborhood, it's a private school so you have to have the money to afford it, and you're used to a single ethnicity world, so for me to be here, they're not used to African-Americans.

All of the participants identified an implicit association at Clegg between being an African-American and being an athlete. Although only five of the participants were actually involved in a sport, the twelve participants who were not athletes said they were negatively impacted. Louise described her perception about being an African-American student at Clegg, "Anyone who approaches me, they're like, oh, you're an athlete, so you feel people place this label on you that you have to constantly fight off".

Participants were also asked to identify their perceptions of why African-American students leave Clegg. Nine (53%) students perceived students primarily leave the university because they do not fit with the predominantly White culture. Terms such as "I wasn't fitting in", "I wanted more diversity", "uncomfortable", and "I can't make it" were characteristics of the descriptions of why African-American students leave Clegg. Hilda described why she perceived students leave:

> If you don't play sports, you just leave, because you don't feel comfortable. If you came from a place where you were comfortable, why put yourself here where you are uncomfortable? You can choose to go to a school that is more diverse and feels comfortable.

Strategies for Navigating the Environment

Ten students indicated their primary strategy to deal with the challenges in the environment at Clegg was to ignore the problem. These participants indicated they were

accustomed to "brushing off the frustration" and frequently told each other to "just let it go".

Harper described how she responded to comments made to African-American students, "People are going to say things that offend you, you can't take it personally, I kind of just brush it off and say I can't really say anything right now". Seven other participants also reported changing their behavior around White students in order to fit into the environment at Clegg.

Social Experiences

Participants were asked to identify how the institutional mission impacted their experience, persistence and success socially. Words such as "sheltered", "spotlight", "difficult", "different" and "minority" were used to describe how students felt due to the low numbers of African-American students on campus. Eighty-eight percent of participants were aware of being one of the few African-American students on campus and felt isolated and set apart on campus. Ten (56%) participants described the importance of having other African-American students on-campus who could share their experiences. These desired other African-American friends who could relate to what they were going through. Darnell described the positive impact of a supportive community of African-American students:

> It helps for new students to see that there is a Black Student Union on campus because it does give you comfort. If you realize you're the only person or you're maybe one of three, you feel secluded, you don't feel comfortable, you don't feel accepted.

Eight (47%) participants also described difficulty finding friendships and community with other African-American students on campus due to the low number.

Unintended Outcomes

Focus group participants were also asked to identify aspects of the environment at Clegg, which positively impacted their persistence and success. Eighty-two percent of students indicated that being an African-American student at Clegg caused them to grow and develop as a

person in a way that they would not have at a different institution. Janet described her personal development, "I've learned so much, it brought me together as a whole person".   Students also perceived the social environment at Clegg would prepare them for life after college. Hilda described this growth,

> We get to interact with people that we're going to interact with in the work force and the world, because you need to be multicultural, you need to meet people who are diverse, you need to know how to act, wherever you are, so I think it's a positive.

The challenges encountered in the environment were also perceived as an opportunity to help White students learn. Janet described her desire to change African-American stereotypes, also similar to seven other participants:

> I think being an African-American student at this campus offers an educational opportunity because we can really teach those who look at us with stereotypes, we can really teach them something.

Academic Experiences

Participants were asked to describe their academic experiences and to identify the positive experiences and barriers. Ten (59%) students perceived the academic environment positively and did not identify specific academic challenges related to being an African-American student. These students felt they had received a great education at Clegg. Sam described her academic experience:

> I've been blessed with professors that know what they're talking about. I feel like I wouldn't have been successful if I had gone anywhere else. This was a good choice; I think it's a good education, a good school.

However, students also believed that professors and students had lower expectations for them in terms of achievement due to being African-American. Ten students identified specific experiences where a professor or student acted surprised they were achieving at a high level. Amber described the comments she received as Biology major, "They'll say things like, how are

you getting this stuff so well? And I'm like…it's because I'm studying. I feel like it's just always that stereotype where you're not expected to be intelligent".

Thirteen (67%) students identified the low number of African-American students in class as a factor, which affected their academic experience. Although the majority of participants experienced being the only African-American student in class in high school, students were mixed in terms of how they experienced being the only African-American student in class at Clegg. Vanessa described this tension, "You're just a small number and whether that helps or hurts you in the classroom, that depends on the person". Harper described another perspective, "Talking to faculty, they know us, they know we stick out, and so we have to always be mindful of what we do and how we act". Nine participants also identified the low number of African-American professors as a factor they would like to see changed at Clegg.

Spirituality

Each focus group was asked to identify how Clegg's Christian mission impacted their spiritual experience and whether or not the spiritual environment differed from what they expected. Nine participants reported that when they enrolled at Clegg, spirituality was not a main factor. They perceived the spiritual environment to be an added benefit but they did not have high expectations before they enrolled.

Students were asked to identify the factors, which contributed to their college selection. Thirteen (66%) students indicated "I received a scholarship" and six students indicated, "I wanted to attend a Christian college" as the main factor in college selection. Clegg does not require students to have a faith commitment in order to be admitted to the university. Table 4.6 presents the reasons participants identified for selecting Clegg.

Table 4.6: Factors in College Selection: Clegg

Reason for Selecting Clegg	Number of Students
I received a scholarship	13
I wanted to attend a Christian college	6
The school is close to my home	3
I had friends attend here	3
The school had my major	2

Once arriving on campus, though, ten participants perceived the spiritual environment could be improved. They also believed the spiritual climate was worse than what they would like it to be.   Amber discussed the perceptions of her friends regarding the spiritual environment, "The consensus of everyone at Clegg, not just those of us who are non-denominational, is that we are missing out".

As students are not required to attend chapel, the chapel experience was not identified as a central component of the African-American student experience. However, eight participants did discuss their frustration with chapel. Darnell described his frustration, "At Clegg, it's like boom, boom, boom, really quick. Sometimes I want to do more worship, or I want someone to elaborate on a message, but they stick to the schedule." This same sentiment was also expressed by Lailah, Julie, Harper and Hilda.

To further explore the spiritual growth which occurred in the lives of participants during their time at Clegg, they were asked to identify words which described their spiritual development, see Table 4.7. Nine participants described their spiritual development in positive, growth-related terms, four described their spiritual development in negative terms, two were neutral and two participants did not respond.

Spirituality was identified by participants as an important aspect of their success at Clegg. Eight (44%) students believed they had grown spiritually and did view it as important. However,

spiritual growth was described as a personal process. Scarlett described growing spiritually on her own, "I grow by myself, we'll just listen to worship, pray and then talk about how it relates to our life".

Table 4.7: Words to Describe Spiritual Development Since Coming to Clegg

Name	Gender
Hilda	NA
Malaysia	Strengthened
Holly	Increased faith
Sam	Growth, movement, change
Darnell	Feel alone
Scarlett	Self-employed growth
Rena	On my own
Julie	Intellectual growth
Harper	Involved in church/religion
Janet	Unchanged
Victoria	Significant, continual
Ciara	NA
Louise	Individual, in process
Lailah	It continues to grow
Vanessa	Closer, more full
Amber	Stagnant
Jonathon	NA

Seven participants also discussed the spiritual expectations that White students placed upon African-American students. Lailah described how other students responded to her, "People don't expect us to be non-denominational. Every time I tell someone I'm non-denominational, they're like, really? I expected you to be Baptist. And I'm like, really guys, what? Stop watching TV, okay"?

Campus Climate

Racial Environment

Focus group participants were asked about their experiences in terms of stereotypes, discrimination, racism and microaggressions. They were also asked to identify the impact, if any, on their persistence and success at the institution. Twelve (63%) participants believed the topic of race was largely avoided by Clegg's faculty, staff and students. Nine participants

described a racial environment where the prominence of race was noticeable due to the silence

regarding race and ethnicity on campus. Jonathan described an experience of friends who stop

talking when race comes up:

> People will be talking about an encounter with a Black person at some point in their life and then they'll say, and they were Black, and seriously, if we are in the room, they stop all conversation and they look at us and they go….ahhhhm, like they're afraid that were going to get mad if they said the word "Black".

> Eight participants described evidence they perceived to demonstrate that the racial

environment and climate at Clegg was improving. Rena and Julie described how they had seen

the racial environment improve during their four years at Clegg:

> It's starting to get more diverse, so having to deal with race and diversity wasn't ever an issue before, you didn't hear about trying to diversify the school, but now, especially with the campus survey about stereotypes, it was brought to their attention.

Stereotypes

The prominence of stereotypes at Clegg was identified by eighty-two percent of

participants who reported that other students frequently referenced racial stereotypes in daily

conversation. Eight students described discomfort and frustration when asked questions by

White students about being an African-American. The participants identified frequently being

asked about Black hair, dancing, gangsters and guns. Malaysia described her frustration, "it is

very interesting because, not hanging out with Black people very much, you get a lot of

questions, very interesting and awkward questions." Stereotypes negatively impacted students.

Harper described the sentiment of the other students who experienced stereotypes at Clegg:

> Why do you have to question why I talk in such an educated manner? Why do you ask how my SAT score was that high? Why is my braid like this? I do not like always having to explain myself for my intelligence and I don't understand why that is an issue or why that is so shocking to you.

Ten (59%) students described an environment where little campus education occurred regarding stereotypes and said that stereotypes were rarely confronted or challenged. These students described an environment where no education occurred for White students to become aware of the impact of racial stereotypes. Hilda described her experience at Clegg with stereotypes:

> They place stereotypes on you, and they have jokes, it's a hard thing to adjust to, especially if you come from a diverse background like I do. I'm used to being around people who are used to being around African-Americans and then here, people will be like, aha, where's your gun? That's not funny; it's just a whole different dynamic.

Racism and Microaggressions

Participants were asked about racism and microaggressions and to identify how they were affected. None of the participants were able to define a microaggression, so a definition was offered to each focus group. However, during the focus groups, thirty-one specific microaggressions were described and discussed by eighty-two percent of the participants. Explicitly racist comments were also identified in the focus groups but participants were most cognizant of these statements.

Eleven (65%) participants identified specific microaggressions which negatively impacted their experience. Students discussed comments that ended with the statement, "for a black person". Ciara described an experience with her roommate similar to Amber, Louise, Scarlet and Malaysia, "There's been instances where people approach her and say, you're pretty for a Black girl". Another common microaggression at Clegg identified by nine participants was references to how African-Americans speak. Sam said, "Some people make offensive statements like, you speak well for a Black person". Rena added, "I've had people come at me like, oh my God, you talk like a White girl".

Other comments identified by participants passed the level of a microaggression and were explicitly racial comments. Twelve participants were able to identify at least one racist comment they had encountered during their time at Clegg. The use of the 'N' word was identified as a common experience. Julie recounted a comment after her friend used the "N" word, "She said it once and then she was like, wait, are you okay with that?" Racial jokes were also identified as a common experience at Clegg. Scarlett discussed one of her friends who frequently made racial comments in front of her:

> I have this specific friend who thinks it's the funniest thing in the world to come up to me and say, what's up? Where's your gun? And it's like, I'm sorry, Have I ever insinuated that I have a gun to you or acted that way? But he always makes jokes about being Black. But for Black people, it's very frustrating…..very frustrating.

Impact

Ten students described the impact of the racial environment using a negative word such as "frustrated", "irritating", "defensive", "closed off", and "not accepted". Malaysia described this impact for her personally, "It keeps happening and it's perpetual, so I'm numb to it". Students were impacted in different ways by the racial environment but all seventeen participants did describe a negative racial experience even if they were not describing it as such. Sam acknowledged the different experiences of her and her friends,

> I think it's just really interesting to see how being African-American on this campus has impacted people differently. Some people have had more of a negative experience than others and some are more positive. Some people are aware of the things people say, or not aware. I think it's very interesting.

These differences perceiving and naming the challenges in the racial environment were articulated by participants in all three focus groups.

Other Barriers

Funding

Nine participants perceived that educational funding was a challenge for both the students who leave Clegg and also for those who remain. These students discussed how the initial financial aid package, which brought them into the university was not what they received in subsequent years. Hilda described her challenges with affording college:

> It's a challenge for us to find money. It's not like we have parents that are going to pay; we have to find loans and financial aid and scholarships. We have so many White friends here where it's not a big deal to them; it's like nothing to them. They say, we're just going to come back and our parents are just going to take care of us. But for me, that's not my story.

Students were also asked to identify how many hours they worked per week outside of class. Nine participants worked more than ten or more hours per week. The extra hours of work were identified as a challenge and are described in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Hours Worked Per Week

Name	Gender	Hours Worked Per Week
Hilda	Female	16-20
Malaysia	Female	16-20
Holly	Female	11-15
Sam	Female	0-5
Darnell	Male	20+
Scarlett	Female	0-5
Rena	Female	0-5
Julie	Female	0-5
Harper	Female	0-5
Janet	Female	20+
Victoria	Female	6-10
Ciara	Female	0-5
Louise	Female	11-15
Lailah	Female	6-10
Vanessa	Female	0-5
Amber	Female	0-5
Jonathon	Male	20+

Recommendations to Improve the African-American Student Experience

Training

Nine (53%) participants discussed the importance of developing more awareness and training events at Clegg in order to educate the campus about issues of race, ethnicity and diversity. They recommended various formats to accomplish this with the primary goal to expand the awareness of faculty, staff and students about the issues of African-American students. Participants also recommended teaching faculty, staff and students how to respond to racial issues when they arise on campus. Lailah described the opportunity at Clegg to expand this type of dialogue:

> One of the biggest opportunities that we have is to educate more people, because some of us come from very diverse backgrounds, but we're in an area where that's not the case. All they see about Black and Hispanic people is what they see on TV shows and this gives us the perfect opportunity to teach people.

Recruit and Enroll a More Diverse Student Body

The low number of African-American students and the lack of diversity were identified by participants in all three focus groups as a negative aspect of their experience. Nine (53%) students recommended increasing the number of African-American, Asian and Hispanic students on campus. Scarlett described her perspective about diversity, "I think we need to add more diversity, just period, not just African-American students".

Expand Campus Dialogue

Participants at Clegg described recent open forums which discussed campus racial issues as important to improve their experience. Eleven (65%) students recommended engaging the campus in more open forums, which discuss the challenges of diverse students. Jonathan said:

> We need to be open at Clegg in general, to make race something easier to talk about so that it's not a hush hush thing. More open forums so people understand that it's not okay, to open people's minds to stop being so narrow minded about everything.

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Vanessa added her perspective about the benefit of this type of dialogue, "this can make people feel more comfortable being at a Christian school, to make us more welcome and to improve the campus".

Summary of Clegg University

The students at Clegg were asked to identify how the institutional mission impacted their academic, social and religious experiences. Students perceived they were one of few African-American students on campus and believed the majority of faculty and staff were not prepared or equipped to meet or respond to the needs of African-American students. Students were also asked to discuss how the campus racial climate impacted their experience. Students discussed how stereotypes were a prominent part of their experience and expressed a desire for White students to understand the negative impact of stereotypes. Students were also asked to identify how the campus spirituality impacted their experience. Participants identified that their own personal spirituality helped them more than the campus spiritual environment. Students recommended increasing the number of African-American students on campus, to expand campus dialogue about racial issues and to provide training for faculty, staff and students to equip them to respond more effectively to the needs of diverse students.

Case Study Three- Bentley University

Bentley University is a mid-size liberal arts institution with approximately 5,000 undergraduate students, also in the Western region of the United States. Bentley is not associated with a specific denominational affiliation. It focuses on implementing biblically centered education which promotes intellectual and academic engagement. According to the 2010 enrollment information for Bentley, approximately 12 % of traditional undergraduate students are Hispanic and approximately 3 % are African-Americans. In 2010, the six-year overall graduation rate was 65% for all students, 68% for White students, and only 30% for

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African-American students with a gap in graduation rates between African-American and overall graduation rates of 35% (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This case study includes information derived from interviews with campus informants as well as data collected via a background questionnaire and three focus groups with sixteen African-American students. This case study begins with the demographic information of the participants, followed by a description of the findings unique to Bentley, organized by the research questions.

Student Demographics

Sixteen students were selected and invited to participate in one of three focus groups at Bentley during the spring semester. This group of students represented 15% of the African-American undergraduate students at Bentley. An intentional effort was made to include students from a variety of majors and levels of involvement across campus. The participants represented a diverse group in terms of gender, major, residence status and reason for college selection. Thirteen women and three men, a proportion similar to the entire African-American population at Bentley participated in the focus groups, which took place in a confidential location on Bentley's campus. Table 4.9 provides the demographic and academic profile of the participants involved in the focus groups.

Eleven (69%) participants lived on-campus and five participants lived off-campus. These numbers corresponded to the residency status of the overall undergraduate population at Bentley, with approximately 65% of undergraduate students living on campus. Ten students originally came from Southern California, one was from Northern California and five participants were from another state. The participants had completed between four and six semesters at Bentley prior to participating in this research. Six of the students in this group were first-generation students.

Table 4.9: Participant Demographics & Academic Profile: Bentley

Name	Gender	Major	Housing	Hometown	First Generation	Semesters Completed
Hillary	Female	Religion	On-Campus	S. California	No	4
Ryan	Male	Religion	On-Campus	S. California	No	6
Sierra	Female	Communication	Off-Campus	Other State	No	6
Lee	Female	Religion	Off-Campus	S. California	Yes	5
Kenna	Female	English	On-Campus	Other State	No	4
Hub	Male	Communication	Off-Campus	S. California	Yes	4
James	Male	Communication	On-Campus	S. California	No	5
Alexa	Female	Biochemistry	On-Campus	S. California	No	4
Laura	Female	Sociology	On-Campus	Other State	No	6
Tattoo	Female	Music	On-Campus	Other State	No	4
Sarah	Female	Urban Studies	On-Campus	Other State	Yes	4
Dana	Female	Communication	Off-Campus	S. California	Yes	4
Kayla	Female	Intercultural S.	On-Campus	S. California	No	6
Sharonda	Female	Education	On-Campus	S. California	Yes	6
Crystal	Female	Psychology	On-Campus	N. California	Yes	4
Jackie	Female	Art	Off-Campus	S. California	No	4

Environment

At the beginning of each focus group, participants were asked to describe their experiences on campus. Words like "out of place", "culture shock", and "confusing" were used to describe the environment. Two-thirds of the participants described a type of culture shock they encountered when coming onto Bentleys campus for the first time. This shock was described as both confusing and disorienting. Crystal described her first experience of Bentley after moving into the residence halls her freshman year:

> It's not what you're used to and because you're in this new environment, you feel like everything's wrong with you, because everything's being catered towards the majority and you feel like you're out of place, and you're not intelligent enough.

Focus group participants were also asked the reasons they initially chose to enroll at Bentley and if their expectations were met. Ten (63%) students reported their expectations were not met when they first arrived on campus. These participants were surprised at how few African-Americans were at Bentley. Jackie described seeing prospective African-American

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students visit the campus, "you always know when there are African-American visitors, because you can say, she's new or he's visiting or doesn't go here".

When asked about the changes in the campus racial climate, more than two-thirds of students reported positive improvements from the previous year. These students also perceived positive changes in terms of the numbers of African-American students on campus. Hillary described her perceptions of the increased number of African-American students, "My freshman year, there were only a few of us that came in and then as the years went on, there were more and more Black students here".

Strategies for Navigating the Environment

Participants were asked to describe the challenges or barriers they encountered in the environment. In all three focus groups, a variety of responses were offered but no consistent finding emerged during the initial portion of the focus groups. However, when participants were asked to identify the strategies they utilized to navigate challenges they encountered in the environment, two strong findings emerged.

Seventy-five percent of students reported hiding or repressing their emotions about the racial climate at Bentley. These students utilized emotional repression as a strategy to respond to difficult situations in the racial environment at Bentley. Sierra described her process of resolving her emotional tension, "I push a lot of it down and kind of laugh at a lot of it too, because you can't just keep internalizing stuff, you know?" Lee concurred, "I had to tell myself, just let it go and kind of like, ignore it." The participants utilized this strategy to avoid appearing angry. They reported not wanting to fulfill the stereotype of the angry Black person. Dana processed her strategy for responding to her feelings:

> I've gotten to the point where people will try to say something to me and I will step back and question, do you want me to be angry? Do you want me to be hurt? I am not sure

what kind of emotion you're trying to trigger but I have the ability, if someone comes at me, I neutralize, and I just go against how they're trying to make me feel.

Eight (50%) participants also cultivated a strong community of African-American students as a strategy to combat challenges in the environment. These students identified their African-American student gatherings as a strategy which helped to isolate and protect them from negative aspects of the environment. Three students reported engaging almost exclusively with African-Americans in response to their frustration and tension with other White students at Bentley. Kena discussed how her social life protected her from frustration with the campus climate at Bentley:

> I found the African-American community and I was involved with some ethnic clubs on campus and I made them my group of friends and my community, and that was just it, I didn't branch out of my own little diverse community.

Hub described the benefit of community interactions with African-American students, "I feel like, when I'm with the Black community and I'm able to talk about things, I'm not as bitter and I release my feelings and they affirm me, because they have the same experiences".

Social Experiences

Focus group participants were asked to identify factors which contributed to the lower than expected graduation rates for African-American students at CCCU institutions. In all three focus groups, the negative social experiences of African-American students were considered to be the primary reason why African-American students do not remain at Bentley. Nine (56%) students reported students leave Bentley because they feel misunderstood and unnoticed on campus. Sharonda described her perceptions of why students leave Bentley:

> I know a bunch of people that didn't come back, people that are moving off-campus, people are feeling like they're not being heard, like the barriers are too thick to get through, so they're just dropping out, you know?

Seventy-five percent of the participants also identified their current frustrations with the social culture and reported specific ways they felt isolated by the predominantly White culture. James discussed these challenges:

> For me, it's hard to relate to other students, to their family backgrounds. I don't come from a perfect family with two parents. I didn't have two parents. I didn't even have my real parents. And it's so hard to find someone here who can relate to that.

This difference between the African-American student experience and the White student experience was reported by three focus groups.

Ten (63%) students in three focus groups reported feeling isolated socially due to cultural misunderstandings between White and Black students. Jackie described her perceptions of the problem, "It's just ignorance of a lot of White people. I understand so much of your culture, why can't you just take some time to understand me?" White culture not being open to learning about African-American culture was articulated by three focus groups as a challenge. Eight students believed White students neither desired nor made an effort to learn about Black students or Black culture. Alexa described this tension, "I feel like I've experienced this double-consciousness, I have to balance between being myself and being understood by the greater majority, but the majority doesn't have to understand anyone else".

Nine (56%) students attributed this cultural tension to the low number of African-American students on campus. Kayla described being African-American in a predominantly White environment, "Every day, I have to be defined by my blackness, and (White students) don't have to be defined by that, they're defined by what they do". Students also perceived the majority of faculty and staff members do not desire to understand African-American culture.

As participants described their difficulties finding community with other students, ten (63%) students perceived that efforts to create conversation between ethnic groups no longer

originated with students. Rather, they believed, it was generated by faculty and staff. Students

perceived this change as a detriment to the development and cultivation of cross-racial

relationships. They believed students were not learning how to cultivate relationships on their

own with students from a different culture or ethnicity.

Unintended Outcomes

Ninety-four percent of students reported specific positive unintended outcomes from living

and learning in the environment at Bentley related to personal development and growth. Hillary

described how she internalized a new identity during her time at Bentley:

> Your black is beautiful. For real, I'm not trying to be cliché, but knowing what that
> means for you and embracing it because what you stand for, it's not a race, it's not
> urban or suburban, I am an African-American person, and all the beauty that comes
> with that.

Participants also described the strength they acquired through the challenging

environment. The comment by Sarah is similar to four other participants, "I'm forced to learn

these things and understand what's going on, and I think it's preparing me for the real world

more than staying unaware and oblivious to what's really happening". Similarly, five participants

identified their growth, which came through the isolation of Bentley. Lee described the benefit

of this isolation for her:

> I feel like I'm able to relate with people a lot better, I'm able to look outside
> myself and maybe see what other people are going through and I now have a heart
> for people who are marginalized.

Academic Experiences

Focus group participants were asked to describe the academic environment at Bentley

and to identify what contributed to or hindered their success. While participants described an

appreciation of the academic environment, one-hundred percent of participants also identified

specific challenges. Challenges included the low number of African-American students in class,

their own emotional response to the environment, a fear of speaking in class, the pressure of being the only African-American in class and the low number of African-American professors.

The low number of African-American students in class was identified by nine (56%) participants as a barrier to academic success. Sarah described her challenges in class, "I am always the one Black person in the classroom and I feel like I represent Black people, like I'm placed to represent Black people, like my opinion is the Black opinion". While many participants were accustomed to few African-American students due to a similar high school experience, participants expected a different environment at a Christian college. Kena described the pressure she encountered in class, "It's very uncomfortable walking into class and then you're the only one and you definitely stand out and you can't relate to someone. And, I can't speak for all Blacks".

Eight (50%) participants also identified a strong emotional reaction to the classroom pressure they experienced when a professor attempted to make sure African-American students felt a part of classroom discussion. These attempts frequently increased the pressure. Laura recounted how a professor expressed his appreciation for the African-American students in class by saying, "I'm glad that you people are around". Crystal described her fear of speaking in class:

> I hate when teachers require for us to speak, because I might say something stupid, even though the girl right before me said something even more stupid. You have to be on your game in class, to be intelligent, or else they're going to look at you like you're stupid, which they're expecting of you anyway.

Seven participants identified the examples utilized in class as a barrier to their success. Jackie discussed her perceptions of the examples used by one of her professors,

> I'm noticing the negative examples they're giving are all African-Americans. I thought at first I was just noticing the African-American ones, but as I looked at my notes and it

was Oprah, Michael Jordan, Michael Jackson and I saw a pattern going on. That made me uncomfortable.

Spirituality

Focus group participants were asked how the spiritual environment affected their persistence and success and to identify the top factors which contributed to their college selection. Twelve (75%) students said "I wanted to attend a Christian college" as an important factor. Nine (56%) students also stated, "The school had my major" as the other most important factor which contributed to why they selected Bentley. Table 4.10 presents the reasons students identified for choosing Bentley.

Table 4.10: Factors in College Selection: Bentley

Reason for Selecting Bentley	Number of Students
I wanted to attend a Christian College	12
The school had my major	9
I received a scholarship	6
The school is close to my home	2
I had friends attend here	2

Although spirituality was identified as important, once arriving on campus and experiencing the spiritual environment, seven students reported their expectations were not fully met. These students identified their previous worship experience as a prominent factor that either prepared them for or hindered them from growing in the spiritual environment at Bentley. Students whose previous church experience was a predominantly White church one were more able to adapt to the spiritual environment than those students who came from a Black church experience. Relating with the spiritual environment helped students feel connected more quickly. Sierra described her experience coming from a predominantly White worship experience, "I grew up in a White church, so coming here, where it is very White culture, the way the speaker talks, that is how my church was". Students who did not come from a similar

worship background to Bentley encountered more difficulty entering into the spiritual

environment. Alexa summarized what six other students identified:

> I cannot fully understand why it's so frustrating, I definitely see the difference, in terms
> of how the preacher is, and we have a whole different kind of worship style. I feel like
> when people, their culture is challenged, and they come to a new environment and they're
> told, this is the way thing are, cause this is how everyone does it, you start to doubt
> yourself as a Christian.

Since the desire to attend a Christian college was important for Bentley students, frustration in

the spiritual environment was identified as an important negative aspect of the spiritual

environment.

Students described their growth and development since arriving at Bentley. Ten (63%)

students described the worship experience with terms such as "it is so bad", "it's all the same",

"they're up there to look cool" and "it's worship from the dominant race". Although seventy-

percent of participants reported spiritual development during their time at Bentley, eleven (69%)

participants also identified specific frustrations they encountered with the chapel worship

experience. These students perceived the music prioritized one ethnic group over another and

indicated to African-Americans they were unimportant in the community. They also could not

recall many African-American worship leaders or speakers. Kayla described this cultural

tension regarding chapel, "I wish there would be different styles of worship, but it's obvious that

Whites are the dominant race, and that's what we listen to".

Eight (50%) participants also identified the worship environment as a hindrance to the

development of community for African-American students. James described the sentiments of

seven other participants:

> It can be difficult under this framework of conservative, White evangelicalism, which
> isn't bad, just foreign to me. So worship, chapels, I don't know the songs, so I have to
> read every single slide. It is a spiritually challenging place for me.

To further understand the spiritual growth and development participants encountered during their time at Bentley, they were asked to identify words, which described their spiritual development. Fourteen students responded. Ten (71%) students used only positive words in their descriptions, three students used all negative words and one student used both positive and negative words. Table 4.11 reports the words used by participants to describe their spiritual development since coming to Bentley.

Table 4.11: Words to Describe Spiritual Development Since Coming to Bentley

Name	Gender
Hillary	Challenging, embracing
Ryan	Spiritual growth
Sierra	Sadness
Lee	Growth, obedience, integrity
Kena	Matured, learned, validation
Hub	NA
James	Significant, important
Alexa	Learning to love, accept myself, embracing diversity
Laura	Learning, closer relationship
Tattoo	Challenging, steady, frustrating
Sarah	Challenged, reflective
Dana	NA
Kayla	Out of comfort zone, growing
Sharonda	Impatient, frustrating
Crystal	Frustration, distance
Jackie	Closer with the Lord

Campus Climate

Racial Environment

The 16 participants were asked about the campus racial climate at Bentley. Eighty-eight percent of participants described the racial climate in negative terms and identified racial profiling, stereotypes, racism and microaggressions as prominent experiences of African-American students in the Bentley community. They also perceived that some White students were afraid of African-American students, largely due to negative racial stereotypes. Hillary

recounted an on-campus incident of one of her African-American friends similar to what was

reported by seven other participants:

> He doesn't feel accepted or welcome. He was walking around to go to his car and then
> the girl behind him, she saw him walking, you know, and he's pretty tall and very fit and
> he looks like an athlete, and he said she was pretty nervous and started walking more
> slowly, and picked up her phone. I don't know if she was calling someone or if she just
> felt afraid by him. He feels like he's not supposed to be here and doesn't feel welcome,
> He takes his classes and he leaves. He doesn't even eat here.

Ten (63%) students identified racial stereotypes as a prominent aspect of their daily

experience. Examples included, "Are you going to preach like Black preachers preach?", "Are

you going to eat chicken and waffles during Black history month?", "Can you teach me to be

hood?" and statements such as "You're black so you are good at dancing".   Students also

reported the existence of variety of stereotypes related to "hair, food and music".

Twelve (75%) participants in two focus groups perceived that one source of the racial

tension at Bentley comes from those in the majority not wanting to give up their power. They

concluded that Whites do not experience racism in the same manner as do African-American

students and also believed Whites feel uncomfortable if their dominant culture is challenged.

Sarah articulated the sentiments of the two focus groups regarding the differences between the

White and Black experience:

> I guess the struggle that White people have with giving up power and making it so that
> we are all on an equal footing is that since you do have the upper hand, you don't want to
> give it to anybody else; you don't want it to be equal back.

This tension between the predominantly White culture and African-American culture were

perceived to negatively impact the persistence and success of African-American students.

Racism and Microaggressions

Incidents of racism and microaggressions were reported by all three focus groups.

Microaggressions at Bentley were related to feeling racially profiled on campus and often came

from professors and students in the classroom. Seven students identified microaggressions from

their peers as a particularly troubling part of the racial environment at Bentley. Sarah described a

conversation with her roommate which was similar to six other students, "She said, I don't know

why Bentley is working so hard towards diversity, because America belongs to White people".

Crystal described a similar racial comment from a friend, "All dark people look the same,

Mexicans, Black, I can't tell the difference between any of you all".

Participants also identified the prevalence of microaggressions in the classroom. Seven

participants described experiences where a professor made a racial comment that made them feel

uncomfortable. Jackie described one professor who commented on African-American students:

> He said, it's just so nice to have you people around. People turned around when he said
> that and asked, are you okay? We should be looking at the professor saying, did he just
> really say that?

Five participants described being followed on campus by security. They perceived this

behavior was solely due to being an African-American.   Hub described one encounter with

campus security:

> For me and a few other Black male students, you always get the same thing. They come
> up smiling, saying, hey, how are you doing? So...do you go here? I say, yes, then they
> always say the same thing. They say somebody called and said that somebody suspicious
> or somebody that looked out of place. Then they ask for my I.D. I'm like yeah, I go
> here. I got the loans to prove it.

This experience was not restricted to males. Kayla, a petite, quiet-spoken female African-

American student described a similar experience of walking with a group of all African-

American females across campus late at night and being followed by campus security. She said,

"I feel like they had no good reason to follow us across campus".

Seventy-percent of the participants identified comments, that they identified as direct

racist comments. These students reported either receiving or directly hearing a racist comment

during their time at Bentley. Sharonda described a disorienting experience with her roommate who said, "Did you know the KKK is actually good?"   Five other students reported similar racial comments made within the context of residence halls. Three participants experienced racial comments focused on the "N" word. Ryan talked about the confusion of being around people who acted like your friend but would then call you a name, "You're smiling in my face one day and you're calling me "N" the next".

Impact

Twelve (75%) participants described the profound negative impact of living in the racial environment at Bentley. Terms such as "shocked", "annoyed"," hurtful", "painful", "angry", "mad", "confused" and "isolated" were used to describe how the racial environment impacted them on a daily basis. James described his anger at the constant barrage of racial comments, "It just gets so tiring, being mad at everyone all the time".

Ten (63%) participants described the pressure of adapting themselves to the majority culture. These students discussed either modifying their personality, switching from one way of speaking to another or acting more White in response to the racial climate. Alexa described her tension in the environment at Bentley, "I do feel a lot of pressure being an African-American just because I don't want to live up to what people think I should be". Four other participants were negatively impacted by a diminishment of their self-esteem and self-confidence by living at Bentley. Lee described how she was impacted by the racial climate at Bentley:

> It causes you to internalize a lot because there are not a lot of outlets to let out your anxiety or validate it. It makes you feel like you don't have a voice. I have a lot of insecurities now, because I have to push a lot of it down and just laugh at a lot of it too, because you can't keep internalizing stuff, because you would be broken down from constantly taking negative stuff in.

Other Barriers

Funding

Eleven (69%) participants identified funding as an ongoing barrier to African-American

student success. James made comments representative of this finding:

> It's hard for any individual to afford the education here, let alone minorities that don't
> statistically come from high income brackets. A lot of African-American students are
> working two jobs, are maxed out on loans, and don't have the privilege of great financial
> aid.

The challenge for African-American students who must work more than one job to afford

Bentley was also identified by eight students as a major barrier to success. Seven students

worked on average more than 6 hours per week, see Table 4.12

Table 4.12: Hours Worked Per Week: Bentley

Name	Gender	Hours Worked Per Week
Hillary	Female	0-5
Ryan	Male	20+
Sierra	Female	6-10
Lee	Female	11-15
Kena	Female	0-5
Hub	Male	0-5
James	Male	0-5
Alexa	Female	0-5
Laura	Female	6-10
Tattoo	Female	6-10
Sarah	Female	0-5
Dana	Female	6-10
Kayla	Female	11-15
Jackie	Female	0-5
Sharonda	Female	0-5
Crystal	Female	0-5

Six participants also discussed the pre-college characteristics and socioeconomic status of

Bentley students as a factor, which contributed to their difficulties with finances.

Inadequate Support Structures

Although an entire department exists to support the needs of diverse student populations,

eight students agreed that this office inadequately met and addressed these needs. Jackie

described her disagreement with multi-ethnic programs, "I don't want to go to anything that classifies us by race, to be in a group of all the same color".

Recommendations to Improve the African-American Student Experience

Support Systems for Faculty, Staff and Students of Color

Bentley students recommended expanding the support system for African-American students. Ten students identified the need to expand multi-ethnic clubs and services on campus by improving how they develop, implement and evaluate programs and services. Jackie described her desire for support systems that bring students together in meaningful ways, "there's nothing really that brings us together solid as a unit. I think that if we build a strong African-American community, we will be stronger as a group".

Eight (50%) participants also recommended enhancing the training offered to faculty members in order to better equip them to respond to the unique needs of African-American students in the classroom. Laura commented:

> Maybe if I felt more supported by my professors. I think it's the idea of understanding how to meet the other person where they are at. It has to be professors and students working together to support Black students.

Expand Campus Dialogue

Eight (50%) students expressed the desire to expand campus dialogues regarding issues of race and ethnicity. Specifically, these students wanted to bring together the administration and students of color to talk about the campus racial challenges. They also recommended bringing together White and non-White students to engage in meaningful dialogue about race and ethnicity. Hillary described her perceptions about the goal of these conversations:

> Having a dialogue where people are able to get to the root of how they feel towards a certain culture is important because people have baggage and people have stories. I just want to be able to vent and be real.

Students also expressed a desire to meet with the administration to share what it is like to an African-American student at Bentley.

Majority Allies

Eight (50%) students also recommended cultivating White allies who can facilitate improving the experiences of African-American students at Bentley. These students discussed the important role that other races play in improving the experiences of African-American students. Ryan described what he would want from a majority ally:

> People who are passionate about this topic, who are in the majority, not bending down and reaching your hand out to help someone, but making sure that it happens because it's the right thing to do.

Promote Racial Reconciliation

Bentley students also recommended creating conversations about racial reconciliation between different ethnicities on campus. Nine students discussed the process of racial reconciliation and believed it was a conversation that did not occur frequently enough. James described the importance of racial reconciliation for Bentley students:

> If anyone should be ahead in racial reconciliation, it should be the church. I feel like putting that as the number one issue. To have so many different churches with so many different ethnicities, why can't we have diverse communities in church? Why are we so segregated? The church is the most segregated place and I don't understand that.

Summary of Bentley University

Students were asked how the institutional mission impacted their academic, social and religious experiences. Students identified barriers in the social and academic environments and the negative influences, which occurred due to the predominantly White culture as the primary barriers. Participants also identified the pervasive nature of stereotypes, microaggressions and racism at Bentley as a significant challenge and perceived there was an insufficient effort to address these issues. Inadequate support services were also identified as a hindrance and barrier

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to their success. Participants recommended expanding campus training and dialogue and to

promote racial reconciliation as strategies to resolve the campus racial challenges.

<div align="center">**Cross Case Analysis**</div>

This investigation into the case studies at three separate institutions demonstrated there

are factors in the environments at CCCU institutions, which negatively impact the experience,

persistence and success of African-American students. At all three institutions, common

challenges, barriers and recommendations emerged but to varying degrees. Positive outcomes

were also evident for African-American students at each institution. This cross-case analysis of

the findings will first discuss the similarities and differences between the schools in terms and

will then present findings common to each of the three institutions.

Summary of Common Findings

Research Question 1- According to African-American students, how does the institutional

mission at CCCU schools impact their academic, social and religious experiences?

The first research question explored how the institutional mission at CCCU schools

impacts the academic, social and religious experiences of African-American students. Christian

colleges aim to provide students an experience, which integrates spiritual values into all aspects

of the student experience. One way to detect whether or not the mission is successfully

integrated is to examine students' academic, social and religious experiences.

Students at each institution described an environment, which was neither welcoming nor

inclusive for African-Americans. Participants perceived the low number of African-American

students as a barrier. They also believed many faculty, staff and students lacked cultural

proficiency and were not able to facilitate an environment, which promoted African-American

success. At each institution, students did not consistently experience the institutional mission of

<div align="center">112</div>

inclusion, acceptance, love and support and were negatively impacted by this. Students also

reported a disconnection between the institutional mission and their experience at the university.

Students at all three institutions expected to find an environment different from what they

actually encountered. Students at Bentley and Woodson perceived they were entering into an

environment of Christian community and believed that spiritual beliefs and values would

permeate their experience. This was not always the case. Students at Clegg, which does not

require a faith commitment to enroll and does not have a chapel requirement, also reported a

difference between expectations and the reality. Bentley and Woodson students were frustrated

both by the racial climate and the spiritual environment. Clegg students were more frustrated by

the racial climate than the spiritual environment. The following were the findings common to

each institution.

Unmet Expectations

At each institution the pre-enrollment expectations of students were not met. Students

discussed visiting the campus prior to enrolling and believing they would enter a community that

would accept them as an African-American student. What they encountered was a different

reality. The term most used to describe the reality was "façade". The environment did not

adequately support African-American students and did not promote their success. Primarily, the

low number of African-American students and the low cultural proficiency of faculty, staff and

students contributed to unmet expectations.

Not a Fit

Students at all three institutions felt they did not fit in to the environment. Participants

perceived the predominantly White culture was not inclusive of their experience and many were

not able to manage the negative experiences they encountered. Not fitting in contributed to a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence and an overall feeling of being on the outside.

Strategies to Navigate the Environment

Students who persisted developed strategies to navigate the environment and overcame both their unmet expectations and other environmental challenges. Participants were cognizant of and able to identify these strategies which provided a way for African-American students to persist. The most commonly reported strategy was to modify their personality, appearance or manner of speaking or repress their emotions in order to fit in to the predominantly White culture.

Unintended Outcomes

Students at all three institutions believed that although the environment was difficult, there were surprising positive outcomes. The tension in the racial environment and the low number of African-American students developed skills and abilities which helped students navigate difficult situations. Participants reported personal growth and development as an outcome of attending their institution. Students also perceived they were more capable of relating with individuals from diverse backgrounds and more prepared to enter a diverse world after attending a CCCU institution than if they did not attend a predominantly White institution. The students also perceived they were better prepared to navigate the post-college work environment than White students, who often avoided difficult interactions with diverse cultures.

Isolation and Feeling Alone

Students felt isolated and alone as an African-American student. The low number of African-American students on campus and how other students responded to them contributed to feeling alone and isolated. The questions African-American students were asked about cultural and racial issues, the inexperience of White faculty, staff and students and the effects of the

White majority culture also contributed to these feelings. The spiritual climate also contributed to isolation for some African-American students whose spiritual expectations differed from the reality.

Support System is Necessary

African-American students believed a support system was necessary for them to succeed. Students discussed the importance of other African-American students who support their experience and identify common challenges and barriers. At each institution, the support system was in place but to varying degrees of success. The successful support system described by students included developing spaces to create common dialogue, campus training regarding diverse student populations and a community which actively confronts racial microaggressions and other racial tension.

African-American Students Feel Unique

Participants discussed a positive aspect of the social environment. When asked what was the best part about being an African-American student, participants in all nine focus groups indicated they felt special, unique, different and noticed by other students, at times, in positive ways. When this special attention was positive, it helped to develop positive feelings. This finding was not consistent with other aspects of the environment, which decreased feelings of self-confidence.

Low number of African-American Faculty Members

Participants also identified the low number of African-American professors as a negative part of their academic experience. Students reported rarely seeing an African-American teaching a class. More importantly, students perceived the majority of professors did not understand their experience, which contributed to feeling alone or misunderstood in the classroom. Students also

perceived African-American students would be more successful if there were more professors who understood their experience.

<div align="center">Classroom Comments which Negatively Impact African-American Students</div>

Students identified comments made in class as a factor, which negatively impacted their academic experience. African-American perceived professors had low perceptions of their abilities, which isolated them in the classroom. They also discussed how the questions received from other students questioning their academic abilities distracted and frustrated them. The stereotypical references were also not confronted or addressed by the professor, which created further isolation and frustration.

Research Question 2- How do African-American students perceive the campus climate at their institution towards African-American students? In what ways, if any, have they experienced microaggressions or other forms of racism or discrimination?

The second research question focused on how African-Americans perceived the campus climate impacted their success. Bentley and Woodson both had well-developed student development offices which supported multi-ethnic populations. Students from two schools were more aware of their challenges as an African-American than Clegg students. Bentley and Woodson students also possessed the language to describe racial experiences as microaggressions and racism. In contrast, Clegg had a less-developed program for multi-ethnic student populations and the students at Clegg were less able to use accurate definitions and terms to describe their experiences. However, Clegg students still described experiences similar to students at Bentley and Woodson without using terms such as microaggression. There was one finding common to all three institutions.

<div align="center">Racism and Microaggressions</div>

Students at all three institutions identified the common use of stereotypes and microaggressions as a daily experience. Participants also reported either receiving or hearing an explicitly racist comment during their time at the institution. In all nine focus groups, experiences of stereotypes, microaggressions and racism were a strong negative factor in their educational experience and on their success. Students also perceived that microaggressions and racial comments were surprising for Christian institutions.

Research Question 3- How does the theological orientation of CCCU schools and the personal spiritual beliefs or practices of African-American students impact their experience at CCCU institutions?

The third research question focused on understanding how the theological orientation of CCCU schools impacted the experiences of African-American students. A specific focus was placed on identifying how the spiritual environment positively or negatively impacted persistence. The other focus was on identifying what helped them to grow - the spiritual environment or their personal spiritual beliefs and practices.

Students at Bentley and Woodson described similar spiritual experiences. An African-American student from a predominantly White church experience felt more comfortable in the spiritual environment than students whose experiences were with a Black church. These students encountered challenges and discomfort with the spiritual environment.

Clegg students reported a different spiritual experience. As Clegg students were not required to be a Christian to attend the institution and chapel was not required, the importance of the spiritual environment was less important. Clegg students wanted more from the spiritual environment but also grew spiritually but more from their own efforts and their own personal

spiritual beliefs and practices than through chapel. In contrast, Bentley and Woodson students

grew more from the spiritual environment than through their own spiritual practices.

Students at Bentley and Woodson were frustrated by the music in chapel, the length of

the service and the types of speakers. Students perceived the spiritual environment was geared

culturally towards a predominantly White audience.. Even those who came from a White church

experience identified the low number of African-American worship leaders or speakers as a

frustration. Bentley and Woodson students believed the spiritual environment was not inclusive

of the African-American student experience.

Research Question 4- What barriers do African-American students encounter at CCCU

institutions and what recommendations do they have to improve their experience?

The fourth research question focused on identifying other factors in the environment,

which created barriers to success for African-American students. A specific focus was placed on

identifying how these barriers could be removed by developing recommendations to improve the

experiences of African-American students. One common barrier was identified at all three

institutions.

Funding

Educational funding was an important barrier to success to students at the three colleges.

They perceived that CCCU institutions recruited students by offering large scholarships that had

to be renewed every year. They also reported that many students lost their scholarships after the

first year. The students perceived that because many families are already struggling to fund

college, African-American students were particularly vulnerable to a change in financial aid or

the loss of a scholarship. Students also believed that due to the difficult racial environment at

CCCU institutions, the first year was particularly difficult for African-American students. They

believed these challenges negatively impacted students' ability to succeed academically and therefore renew their scholarship.

Recommendations

Participants were asked to develop recommendations to improve the African-American student experience at CCCU institutions. Students identified a wide variety of recommendations and improvements at each site. To be a finding, more than 50% of participants needed to make a recommendation. Expanding campus dialogue and promoting awareness of racial issues were mentioned in various forms at each institution. At Clegg, students recommended cultivating campus dialogue by implementing open forums to discuss issues of race and ethnicity. At Bentley and Woodson, students recommended more faculty and staff training. Other recommendations mentioned at each site but not rising to the level of a finding were to increase the number of African-American students enrolled at the institution and to increase the number of African-American faculty members. One common recommendation occurred at all three institutions and was made by more than 50% of the participants.

Expand Diversity Training, Awareness and Dialogue

Students strongly recommended a continuation of efforts already started at each school and to expand campus dialogue, which promotes awareness of the challenges encountered by African-American and other diverse student populations. Students believed that faculty, staff and students were not intentionally creating a hostile environment but were uneducated about the African-American student experience. To develop awareness and to help them see how racial reconciliation is connected to the institutional mission, participants also recommended creating more training opportunities for campus dialogue to occur.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the experiences of African-American students at three CCCU institutions. The barriers to success within the environment and the ways these barriers impact the experience of African-American students were reported. Within the context of the three sites, the campus climate was discussed. A discussion regarding how spirituality helps students to navigate the environment was also discussed and challenges were identified. Barriers to success and recommendations for improvement were also reported. Findings were organized according to themes from the focus groups and according to the research questions. The next chapter will discuss these findings in more detail and provide recommendations to improve the experiences of African-American students.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study examined the experiences of African-American students within the context of CCCU institutions. Although the findings were specific to the case study schools, they may assist all CCCU institutions improve the success of African-American students. The case study institutions were located in the Western region of the United States and enrolled students similar to those at other predominantly White institutions. The schools differed in admission requirements and behavioral expectations. Both Bentley and Woodson required a faith commitment to enroll, mandatory chapel attendance and 24-30 units of Bible classes to graduate. Clegg required neither a faith commitment to enroll nor mandatory chapel and only required two Bible classes to graduate. This chapter begins with a discussion of the context in which this research was conducted. Next, themes from the case studies and how they connect to previous research will be discussed. The limitations of the research and opportunities for future research will then be explored. Finally, recommendations for improving the experiences of African-American students at CCCU institutions will be discussed. This chapter concludes with a personal reflection and a discussion of how the research findings will be disseminated.

Context

This research occurred within the context of Christian colleges. It is important to note that the spiritual environment at these schools is the primary difference between CCCU institutions and other predominantly White institutions. The findings provide evidence that Christian colleges have not sufficiently met the challenges of race and racism. What is most troubling about the findings is how little the institutional mission and Christian environment positively affected African-American students' perceptions of their educational experiences.

The findings raise questions regarding how Christian colleges should best respond to race and racism in a way that improves the experiences of non-majority students in the future. Historically, evangelical culture ignored structural issues of racism and often has not perceived "a societal or institutional responsibility to make up for the history of racism and inequality in America" (Smith, 2009, p. 10). As Emerson and Smith (2001) discussed, Evangelicals, the majority of whom are White, typically do not see structural issues of inequality. Evangelicals also typically offer individual explanations for success or failure. This prevents White Christians from seeing or acknowledging structural issues of racism and contributes to denying the existence of racism within society.

A typical Evangelical response is to attribute success to individual choice and hard work. Failure is perceived to be a lack of effort. This perspective places the onus of responsibility for success or failure on the individual but does not consider from where a person has come, what challenges he or she has encountered, and whether or not he or she is able to influence any external or structural barriers. Previous research supports the idea that "certain religious belief systems, namely Evangelical Protestantism, promote values of individualism which shape Whites understanding of the logic of inequality generally and the logic of racial inequality more specifically" (Eitle & Steffens, 2009, p. 507; Hinojosa & Park, 2004). It is this individualistic attitude that removes any organizational or structural responsibility from churches or colleges to improve the reality of African-Americans. This is short sighted and damaging to students of color. However, it has historically been the approach of the church and many institutions of Christian higher education as well. This difference between the mission of CCCU schools and the inability to provide racial equality and social justice is an ongoing and serious issue and was a central focus of this research.

Evangelical Christians perceive themselves as welcoming to everyone, including others and accepting differences. This research confirms, however, that at Christian colleges, acceptance, openness and appreciation of differences was not a reality that African-American students perceived. The findings provide a unique opportunity for Evangelicals to reflect on how open, accepting and welcoming they are to non-White people in both churches and Christian institutions of higher education.

The findings also reveal another aspect of Christian culture that contributes to the African-American student experience- the segregation of churches. Unfortunately, the current racial tension within the spiritual environment at CCCU institutions parallels and reflects the historical tension between principles of faith and race in this country. Many Evangelical churches in the United States are not diverse institutions. Although it is a cliché, it is true that Sunday mornings are the most racially segregated hours of the week. During the Civil Rights movements, when many barriers to African-Americans were removed legally, many churches did not quickly change. Christian colleges are comprised of Christian individuals who frequently attend White Christian churches with little exposure to diversity. Christian higher education parallels the reality of Evangelical Christianity and solutions to one will impact the other (Gilbreath, 2008).

The campus and racial environments at the three research sites reflect the culture of the predominantly White Evangelicals who run them. Unfortunately, this culture does not create an environment which helps African-American students succeed. While CCCU institutions are obviously not churches, they do share similar traits and characteristics; Evangelical leaders often do not see or understand the challenges of non-White individuals and are often not aware that

racial challenges still exist. For CCCU institutions to develop capacity to meet the needs of the next generation of college students, these perspectives on race and ethnicity need to change.
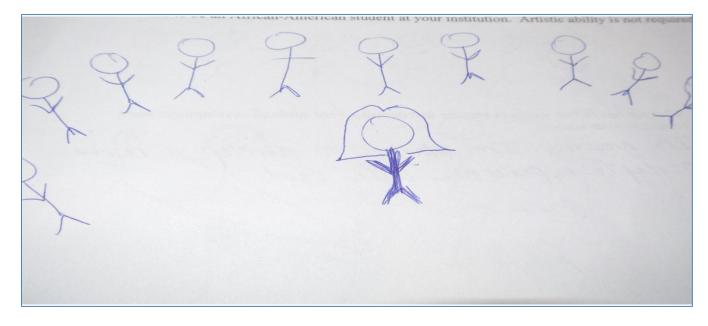
Discussion of the Themes from the Findings

Four central themes emerged in this research common to African-American students at the three CCCU institutions. They were: 1) Awkward Spirituality, 2) The Invisible Wall, 3) Swimming Upstream, and 4) Your Black is Beautiful. In each section, the major findings from each theme will be discussed.

Awkward Spirituality

The first theme, "Awkward Spirituality", refers to what many African-American students encountered in the spiritual environment at CCCU institutions. Students who selected a Christian college for the spiritual environment were disappointed once they arrived on campus because they encountered a reality different from what they expected.

Figure 5.1 Awkward Spirituality

Lisa was asked to describe what it was like for her as an African-American student on campus. She drew a picture of herself, alone, surrounded by other White people in the middle of

a chapel experience, see figure 5.1. In the drawing, she is separated from other people and is

standing alone. In the focus group, she talked about how this drawing represented her

experience of the "Awkward Spirituality" at her institution.

Spiritual Environment

Previous research indicates the fit between spirituality and faith is important for African-

American student success. The majority of students who attend a faith-based institution do so

intentionally (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2010). However, participants at all three institutions

wanted something from the spiritual environment they did not experience. Woodson and Bentley

students were disillusioned by the spiritual environment and Clegg students, while not a primary

factor in their college selection, still desired an improved spiritual environment. CCCU

institutions have an opportunity to develop a spiritual environment which promotes the success

of students from a variety of cultures but to do so requires effective processes of evaluation and

planning.

As the main difference between CCCU institutions and otherwise similar private

institutions is the spiritual environment, one would expect to see a stronger impact of spirituality

on student experiences. However, this was not what students encountered. This is a troubling

reality for CCCU institutions.   Successfully integrating spirituality and faith into the curricular

and co-curricular experiences of African-American students does not happen by chance; it

requires changing what has been done in the past in order to meet the needs of students today and

in the future. As student demographics continue to change, the spiritual environment must

change as well.

Students did report spiritual growth amidst the spiritual environment at the three

institutions but it was often in spite of the environment, not because of it. At predominantly

White institutions, it is common to assume the experience of the majority culture is the same as what minority cultures experience. However, this is often not the case. Administrators and other campus leaders who believe the spiritual environment impacts all students in the same ways may be surprised to hear the actual experiences of minority students. Indeed, it would benefit all administrators at CCCU institutions to seek out and listen to the spiritual frustrations of their African-American students. Seeking to listen to and hear the experiences of non-majority students is the first step towards positive change.

Spiritual Environment and Expectations

Previous research indicates that spirituality helps or hinders African-American student persistence and success based on whether or not he or she feels included or excluded (Watson, 2006b; Watt et al., 2008). Institutions like Bentley and Woodson whose students selected the institution primarily for the spiritual environment and who are required to engage in mandatory spiritual practices are negatively impacted when these spiritual experiences marginalize and exclude them. This reality can be changed, however, by developing spaces on campus where the voices and spiritual practices of minority students can be expressed. By implementing consistent, methodical and progressive improvements to the spiritual environment, minority students and specifically African-American student experiences can be more included in and supported by the spiritual environment.

Intentional efforts are necessary to create space for African-American students to feel welcome. Students whose pre-college worship experiences were similar to their institutions were more able to fit into the spiritual environment. This finding has implications for the types of students recruited and for the support offered to students once they arrive on campus. As recruiters become cognizant of the spiritual experiences of students, they will be more equipped

to recruit students who are a better fit and who feel less disconnected spiritually. As campus ministers begin to understand how their non-majority students are isolated by their spiritual practices, they will be more open to change. If CCCU institutions desire to enroll and retain diverse students, they need to ensure the spiritual environment is inclusive.
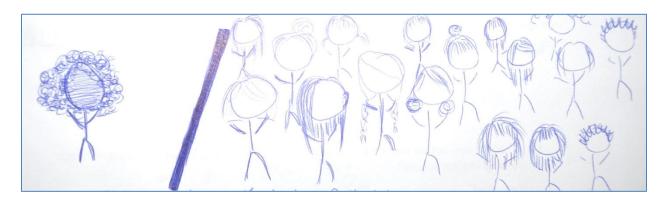
The Invisible Wall

The second theme, "The Invisible Wall", refers to what many African-American students encountered when they arrived at a CCCU institution. Students could feel a wall but they could not see it, especially when their White friends were not experiencing the same barriers. Others examining the environment may also not be able to detect the wall without closely listening to the experiences of non-majority students. Yet the wall hinders African-American persistence, marginalizes them and enhances their loneliness and isolation. This theme may be a strong contributor to the lower than expected graduation rates at CCCU institutions for African-American students (Smith, 2009).

This theme was first articulated by Kayla when asked what it was like to be an African-American student at her institution. She drew a picture, figure 5.2, which portrays her, the lone African-American, on one side of the wall. The other individuals are on the opposite side of the wall, which as she described her picture, was a barrier she was unable to see but could not reach through. The picture depicts the resistance encountered by African-American students in classrooms, residence halls and around campus. Racism and microaggressions strongly contribute to the invisible wall.

The surprising aspect of this theme was how strongly it was felt by African-American students and how little was being done to remove the barriers that contributed to the wall. While the gatekeepers were able to articulate these challenges, few people outside of those individuals were perceived by African-American students to either be aware of or care about their

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challenges. Again, the Christian mission of the school was not adequately influencing the racial experiences of African-American students who were isolated by this wall and separated from others. For the wall to be removed, the entire community at each institution must first acknowledge its existence and then work together to dismantle the barriers to success for African-American students.

Figure 5.2 The Invisible Wall

The Facade

This research confirmed that the campus environment significantly impacts the experiences of African-American students (Davis, 1998; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Students at three institutions described the environment as a façade. They believed the institution wanted to be inclusive of their experience but also perceived the individuals in the environment were not equipped to successfully understand how to relate to their experience. The support structures and allocation of resources, which the literature review indicates are important, were not focused on retaining African-American students, further enhancing the barriers (Oseguera, 2006).

Each of the three institutions intentionally recruited diverse students, presumably because they believed it was important to enroll a diverse student population. Unfortunately, though, institutional behavior did not go beyond recruitment. According to participants at all three

institutions, many of their African-American friends left after their freshman year due to the resistance they encountered once they arrived on campus. This façade was an unfortunate reality for private institutions which would do well to focus on degree completion for all students. Consistent with previous research, participants also frequently felt misunderstood or devalued by the predominantly White culture (Allen, 1992; Kuh, 2001; Museus, 2011). While CCCU institutions can remove this barrier by engaging in diversity training, there does not currently seem to be great openness for change.

Stereotypes, Microaggressions and Racism

This research confirms that cultural challenges, racism and microaggressions negatively impact African-American student success (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). While each institution had an identifiable African-American community, there was variance in the extent to which support and encouragement were offered. As the literature review indicates, a positive racial environment, largely free from negative racial stereotypes, microaggressions and racism is essential for success (Allen, 1988; Bennett & Okinaka, 1984). For administrators and leaders at CCCU institutions, the goal of intentionally diminishing the quantity of microaggressive statements should be a priority. Unfortunately, students at all three institutions reported the prominence of stereotypes, microaggressions and racism and perceived their culture was not respected, valued or seen as relevant to the larger university experience, further contributing to the invisible wall (Rodgers & Summers, 2008).

While the presence of microaggressions was not a surprising finding, their pervasiveness and the extent to which they created a negative racial environment for African-American students was. During the focus groups, many racial incidents were reported only after hearing other participants recount their experiences. This surprised me but also indicated that many of

the students in the focus groups had not adequately processed the impact of these racial experiences. It was clear that sufficient support of students as they respond to difficult racial situations was lacking from the three institutions. Previous research indicates this support is essential for African-American student success as individuals within the environment who help students process and understand their experiences may help to remove the barriers contributing to the invisible wall (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007).
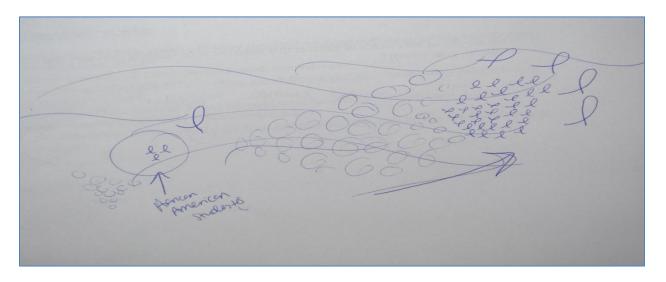
Swimming Upstream

The third theme, "Swimming Upstream", refers to the ways African-American students perceived themselves working harder than White students to achieve the same results. While this may not be the reality, in an environment where there are so few African-American students, it is easy to understand why this was a strong perception. In one focus group, Halle was asked to describe what it was like for her as an African-American student at her institution. She drew a picture, see figure 5.3, of African-American students in a river with a strong current. Ahead are White students, swimming together in unison. Behind, are fewer African-American students who appear unable to keep up. This image was a strong depiction of many of the experiences described by students in the focus groups.

Three factors which contributed to African-American students feeling as if they were swimming upstream were the academic environment, the lack of effective support services and ineffective funding. Previous research indicates that academics, support services and effective funding are vital for African-American students to succeed (Harvey-Smith, 2002; Bensimon, 2005; Carey, 2004). This research confirmed that both academic experiences and funding were strong barriers for African-American students and that extra support services are necessary for African-American students, who may arrive on campus less-prepared than other students (Lee & Ransom, 2008). These three factors were perceived by participants to put them at a disadvantage

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and behind the majority students.   This caused them to "swim upstream", further alienating and isolating them.

Figure 5.3 Swimming Upstream

Academic Experiences and Classroom Challenges

The literature review indicates that faculty and student interaction powerfully impacts African-American student success (Museus, 2011). This research confirmed African-American students were deeply impacted by their professors and also confirmed the conceptual framework. Faculty and staff do contribute to the lower than expected graduation rates for African-American students, who perceived faculty lacked the ability to effectively work with students from various cultures within the classroom. Students also perceived faculty were not accustomed to navigating difficult racial and cultural experiences. This further isolated African-American students from the experience that White students have with professors, another reason they are swimming behind White students.

The participants perceived the majority of faculty members to be interested in being inclusive in the classroom. However, their attempts at being inclusive often resulted in further isolation. Improving the classroom environment for African-American students may not require

a significant undertaking; providing better training to faculty regarding how to be culturally sensitive in the classroom might significantly improve the classroom experience.

Participants also reported they were frustrated when their professors did not confront microaggressions in class. While students may have experienced racial tensions in classrooms in previous high school or college experiences, they did not expect to experience this dynamic at a private Christian institution. While their expectations were not explicitly communicated, students expected professors in a Christian environment to treat them differently than they would be treated in a secular classroom. This lack of teacher advocacy further increased the feeling of working against the current and isolation from the majority. Again, to improve this reality for African-American students may simply involve empowering majority professors to be aware of their experiences and encouraging them to confront racism and microaggressions when they occur in their classrooms.

Funding

Finances have been identified as a predictor of the likelihood of persistence or attrition for African-American students (Harvey-Smith, 2002). Students in all nine focus groups mentioned finances as a barrier to their success and were surprised when they perceived White students had a seemingly endless supply of money and did not worry about finances. While these perceptions may not be correct, as many White students also struggle financially, this finding does further suggest the isolation African-Americans experienced from the majority culture. Participants also perceived African-American students who leave do so because they did not receive the same financial aid package their second year. While finances alone were not the problem, Halle asked, "Why would you stay if you can go to a public institution and not deal with all of the racial issues"?

Thirty-one (61%) participants reported receiving a scholarship as either their primary or secondary reason for selecting their college. This finding suggests how important financial aid and ability to pay are for African-American students. This also indicates how little margin many African-American students have financially when they enroll in college. CCCU institutions would be wise to develop research based programs to advise and counsel incoming first generation, minority and African-American students who may need extra support and guidance. This support should include ongoing advisement regarding the cost of college, ability to afford it and strategies to graduate with the lowest debt load possible. To support success, institutions must think through and promote funding strategies which promote degree completion.

 Further creating a challenge and barrier for African-American students was the environment they encountered once they arrived on campus. The environment was neither inclusive nor culturally sensitive. While all new college students encounter challenges transitioning to college, African-American students at a predominantly White institution encounter more difficulties.   In order to help first year African-American students navigate this environment, CCCU institutions must focus on developing a first-year environment which is sufficiently supportive and inclusive.   This environment needs to promote academic and social success which will lead to the maintenance of scholarships. Support of this nature may lead to increased retention and graduation rates for African-American and other minority students.

Support Services

This research indicates the three CCCU institutions did not provide adequate support services. Previous research indicates effective support services are essential components of both closing achievement gaps quickly and promoting success for African-American students (Carey, 2008; Longman & Schreiner, 2010). To promote persistence, support services should be

implemented in the midst of a campus community which is widely aware of the challenges of minority students. CCCU institutions that want to immediately and quickly improve the African-American student experience must highlight their challenges and provide adequate funding for support services.

Subsequent to providing services, they must be promoted by all members of the community. The types of services which have been demonstrated to help African-American students succeed include expanded offices of multi-ethnic programming, enhanced financial aid, developing minority leadership scholarships, expanding campus clubs, enhanced advising and recruiting more African-American students, to name just a few. These changes would help to reduce the isolation felt by African-American students "swimming" behind the massive school of White fish.
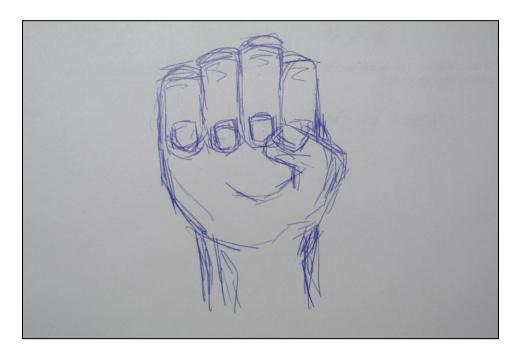
Your Black Is Beautiful

Preston was asked to describe his experience as an African-American student at his institution, see figure 5.4. He drew a picture of a fist in the air. During the focus group, he described the strength he experienced in isolation; the power in being one of the few. The fist, to him, represented the power he acquired specifically from being in the environment at Woodson. Preston also explained how these experiences prepared him to relate better to a diverse world and perceived that White students did not receive the same benefit. He believed White students did not have to navigate difficult racial experiences in the same manner that he did.

Later, Hilary used the phrase, "Your Black is Beautiful", to describe how she felt about herself after experiencing racial challenges at Bentley. To her, this was a statement of empowerment. She then described the positive, unintended and surprising outcomes of being an African-American student at Bentley.

These reflections by Preston and Hillary represented one of the most surprising and consistent findings of this research, which were the unintended positive outcomes for African-American students who persisted. At each institution, students described the ways they were stronger because of the difficult environment they encountered. This finding was not indicated in the literature review.

The challenges discussed in the previous themes contributed to the strength found in the midst of diversity. In swimming against the current, African-American students acquired confidence the majority students did not possess and also reported feeling proud they were able to survive in spite of the challenges. In being behind the invisible wall, students gained strength which was derived from having to fight harder than other students to achieve the same results. The awkward spirituality encountered by African-American students at the three institutions forced them to grow in spite of the environment. This ultimately made students spiritually stronger due to their response to the environment.

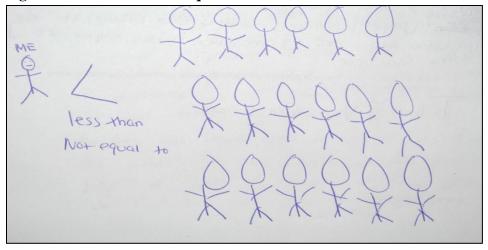**Figure 5.4 Your Black Is Beautiful**

For many African-American students, the overall isolation which occurred in various spaces on campus ultimately turned into empowerment and strength. Unfortunately, these factors were only relevant for African-American students who persisted. It was not clear from this research if the students who persisted had certain unique qualities or attributes which helped them succeed which other African-American students did not possess. This research also did not explore what institutional services or support systems were accessed by the students who persisted to determine if one or two institutional characteristics made a difference in terms of persistence. Further research needs to be conducted to identify both why African-American students leave and also why they stay in spite of negative experiences. Also, research can be conducted on institutional and personal characteristics which contribute to persistence and success.

Recommendations to Improve the Experiences of African-American Students

Kimberly was asked to draw a picture of what it was like to be an African-American student at her institution, see figure 5.5. She drew herself in front of a "less than" symbol. On the other

Figure 5.5 Less Than Not Equal To

side of the symbol were other White students. As she explained the image, she sounded dejected and sad, almost as if there were not hope that this reality would change. She also described how

her self-image had diminished after being at her institution. This picture represented the reality that many African-American students encounter at their school but also became an image for me of why that reality needs to be improved. After reviewing findings from the three case studies, three additional recommendations for CCCU institutions emerged which, if implemented, would help to improve the African-American student experience.

Understand the Minority Student Experience

African-American students represent the largest concentration of students of color at CCCU institutions (CCCU, 2012). Although the schools in the CCCU have increased their overall percentage of minority students gradually from 16.6% in 2003 to 19.9% in 2009, there is still much work to be done (CCCU, 2012). For Protestant universities, where a mission exists to promote equal educational outcomes for all students, the current gap in graduation rates is neither justifiable nor explainable. While some CCCU schools are aware of the unique challenges of African-American students, others are either not aware or do not adequately address the problem.

The literature review indicated that pre-college factors do influence college success (Bean & Eaton, 2002). This research supported the idea that pre-college factors, while not ultimately determining whether an African-American fails or succeeds, do impact the likelihood of success. Indeed, some of the challenges African-American students encountered were related to socioeconomic status, religious differences, family background and levels of family support.

More recent research also indicates that institutions can improve the success of minority students in spite of pre-college characteristics if they acknowledge there is a problem and allocate sufficient resources necessary to address these problems (Dey & Astin, 1993b; Lynch & Engle, 2010). However, research also indicates the "majority of programs and retention

strategies are aimed at correcting or changing African-American students, while failing to address environmental or campus issues involved" (Harvey-Smith, 2002, p. 4). In order to improve the minority student experience by changing institutional practices, effective data is necessary. According to the perceptions of the gatekeepers and students in this research, administrators do not possess adequate information about or understanding of their experiences. Although students may appear similar, some need extra help or support.

Unfortunately, students themselves will rarely ask for the assistance they need. To ameliorate these burdens, institutions must be aware of the challenges their students will encounter and proactively support them as they navigate college. This practice includes providing services and strongly encouraging students to access these services. Developing pathways for students to receive support even if they do not request it is a strong pathway for CCCU institutions to ensure their students graduate.

In order to accomplish this goal, accurate data is necessary to help educators understand the needs and challenges of their students. Ongoing and sustained data-collection efforts focused on understanding the experiences of African-American and other minority students will help CCCU institutions improve outcomes for African-American students. As Daniel said,

> I don't think it's going to do well to just increase the number of Black students, because that doesn't address why people are leaving or why they're not coming in the first place. Why is it they're not coming? Let's talk to the students here, let's talk to the students they may have offenses against; let's see where the divide is, and then bridge the divide.

As CCCU institutions gather data which identifies the unique experiences of students of color and disseminates this information to campus constituencies, persistence can be improved and enhanced for African-American students. Smith (2009) recommends that individual CCCU institutions conduct evaluations of their campus culture as it relates to graduation rates to find out why the lower graduation rates exist for African-American students.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Previous research highlights the importance of African-American professors for the

success of African-American students, particularly at predominantly White institutions (Reyes &

Case, 2011).   In this research, the academic experiences of African-American students were

tainted because professors and students lacked the cultural proficiency in the classroom that

would be desired and expected. Professors can strongly improve the experience of African-

American students in the classroom if they begin to modify their teaching practices by learning

about the cultural differences of their students. Participants reported that microaggressions made

the classroom a less effective learning environment for them. Students in seven focus groups

also reported that professors at times make hurtful comments about race which negatively

impacted their academic experience.

The participants perceived that if professors were to utilize teaching practices which, "use

the cultural characteristics of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more

effectively", they would have a more positive academic experience (Gay, 2002, p. 160). This

practice of culturally sensitive and responsive teaching has been successful when implemented at

all academic levels.   Specific culturally relevant strategies include honoring cultural differences,

creating a respectful tone and being aware of cultural dynamics in the classroom (Kerr, 2013).

The participants believed that professors who acknowledge culture and ethnicity in their

classroom are more effective than those who ignore it.

To improve the African-American student experience, CCCU institutions must train

faculty and staff to utilize culturally responsive teaching practices. Using these principles,

professors use the experiences of real students to facilitate class discussions in such a way that

students from all cultures feel included. Professors using culturally diverse examples also utilize

classroom books and materials authored by African-American or minority authors, find ways to

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have diverse student voices heard and display cultural respect. These practices, while often subtle, can make the classroom environment more inclusive and respectful for all students.

Many faculty members at CCCU institutions would be surprised to discover their African-American and perhaps other minority students feel this way about the academic experience. Professional development then becomes an important strategy to help faculty change and adapt their teaching practices to the students in their classrooms. To create openness to learning these practices, CCCU institutions should share data from research such as this with faculty in order to help them understand more fully the experiences of their students.

Majority Allies

The African-American student experience cannot be improved without the help, support and commitment of the entire community. One of the strongest recommendations to improve the experiences of African-American students that emerged at all three institutions was the need to develop majority allies on each campus who view it as their own cause to improve the experiences of minority student groups. Faculty, staff and students who are in the majority can make a profound impact on the campus culture and climate; African-American faculty, staff and students cannot alone change the culture. Majority allies view the challenges of African-American students as their own problem and become a part of the solution.

Students in six focus groups expressed frustration with faculty, staff and students who remained silent when they encountered racial stereotypes, microaggressions or racism. Students perceived that if majority allies would speak up and address microaggressions, the environment would quickly improve. Only when racism and microaggressions are tolerated will they occur in the culture. Eventually, if confronted, racism and microaggressions could become a less prominent part of the African-American student experience at CCCU institutions.

Majority allies view racial challenges as their own problem which impacts everyone. They defend underrepresented student populations, advocate for their needs and make a positive difference in a way that minorities cannot. There is power in the unity of the majority but frequently, African-American students at CCCU institutions fight the battle of racism and microaggressions alone.

Limitations of the Study

The goal of this research was to provide readers and users of this research with rich and thick descriptions of three case studies which described in detail the experiences of African-American students at three CCCU institutions. Through triangulation of the data which emerged from nine focus groups and from interviews with gatekeepers, data were cross-analyzed and findings emerged. While the themes which emerged from the data regarding the perceptions of African-American students may have important implications for leaders at CCCU institutions, this study also has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the sample size was a limitation of this research. The sample size was limited to 18-21 students at each institution. Although the study was designed in a manner which reduced the likelihood that external factors influenced the results, the findings are not generalizable to the experiences of all African-Americans at all CCCU institutions.

A second limitation of this research was due to the research focus on African-American student perceptions alone as the source of data and information. Other data sources such as document review, surveys of the entire African-American student community and interviews with White faculty, staff and students may have provided different insights into the experiences of African-American students. The perceptions of other stakeholders in the community as well as a quantitative assessment of the campus climate may also have added additional insight.

A third limitation of this research was due to the nature of participant selection. Although a wide-range of African-American students at each institution was given the invitation and opportunity to participate in this research, not all of the students participated. Other participants would have contributed a different perspective to the research and certain perspectives or points of view may not have been presented by this research. Students who participated in the research were also volunteers and may have been more engaged in their critique of CCCU institutions than other African-American students. This limited my ability to determine if the findings were consistent across more students or if they speak only to the participants' experiences.

Opportunities for Future Research

This research focused on successful junior and senior African-American students who survived in the environment in spite of barriers. To further explore the experiences of African-American students at CCCU institutions, perspectives from freshman and sophomore students should also be considered. It was not clear what, if any, differences existed between the perspectives of first year students and those who were on track to graduate. Freshman and sophomore students may have provided a different perspective on the African-American student experience at CCCU institutions.

A second opportunity for future research is to study the experiences of African-American students who do not persist. While students who leave a school are difficult to find, the information gathered from them would be valuable. A fuller picture of what it is like to be an African-American student could be developed. This line of research would inform administrators regarding why students leave and would give insight into how decisions to leave are made. Although this information can be difficult to obtain, it is essential to understand more fully the experiences of African-Americans at CCCU institutions.

Research supports that spiritualty helps some African-American students cope with their college environment and may provide the necessary support to increase student retention (Stewart, 2009; Watson, 2006a; Watt et al., 2008). Further research can also be conducted into the spiritual experiences of African-American students at CCCU institutions. Participants in this research reported they were negatively impacted by their spiritual experiences but these students did not leave. A more thorough and nuanced investigation into how spirituality impacts the persistence and success of African-American students would provide helpful information for administrators. .

Final Reflections

The students in this research were amazing individuals who, in spite of the challenging environment, were surviving at their institutions. I was consistently impressed with their self-awareness, reflection and intelligence as I conducted this research. I was saddened to hear how difficult it was to be an African-American student at a CCCU institution. Not until actually listening to the stories told by these amazing students did I realize the depth of their challenges.

An important lesson I learned through this research was the importance of majority allies who advocate for the needs of underrepresented students. As a White male at a predominantly White institution, I have the ability to speak about the challenges and barriers of African-American students in a way and to an audience that others do not. The advocacy of others in the community can positively change and improve the experience of African-American students and other minority groups as well. It is important to me that African-American students, as well as other minority student groups, thrive at CCCU institutions. In order to help facilitate this goal, I plan to disseminate this information to individuals who have the ability to implement change. I will also present the findings from this research to the institutions that participated, at the CCCU

diversity conference and the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education conference and will also share this information with faculty, staff and students at my own institution.

APPENDIX A
Introduction letter

March 2013

Dear Student:

You are invited to take part in an important research project that will be used to investigate the experiences of African-American students at CCCU institutions.

My name is Tim Young and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. I have requested your institution to send this invitation packet to you on my behalf. I am conducting a research study to understand how the unique context at Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institutions impacts the experiences of African-American students.

I am requesting your participation with the data collection process for this research. Should you choose to participate in this research, you will complete a background questionnaire and, if you meet the research criteria, attend one 90-minute focus group. If you are invited to a focus group, you will receive a $20 gift card for attending. Your participation in this study will prove extremely valuable to improve the experiences of African-American students at CCCU institutions.

If you are willing to participate in this research, I ask that you do two things: 1) review the consent form for this research and sign it; and 2) complete the brief background questionnaire. Please return both forms to me by using the self-addressed, stamped envelope that is included in this packet.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of participation in this study. If you have any questions concerning this study, please e-mail me at timothy.perry.young@gmail.com or contact my advisor, Dr. Linda Rose at rose@gseis.ucla.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Tim Young
Educational Leadership Program, UCLA

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
OFFICE FOR PROTECTION OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS
GENERAL CAMPUS HUMAN SUBJECT PROTECTION COMMITTEE

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Exploring the Experiences of African-American Students at CCCU Institutions

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Timothy P. Young, a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles under the direction of Robert Cooper, Ph.D. (UCLA) and Linda Rose, Ph.D. (UCLA). The results of this study will be included in Timothy P. Young's dissertation, a requirement for the doctoral degree. You were selected as a possible research participant because you are a student who meets the criteria for this study. Your participation in this research is voluntary.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of African-American students within the context of CCCU institutions in order to identify the barriers and hindrances encountered by these students in their pursuit of a degree. One distinction of CCCU institutions is the theological values which are utilized to create the culture. These values guide the curricular and co-curricular experiences of students but it is not yet clear to what extent the academic, social and religious experiences of African-American students are impacted by the mission and theology of CCCU institutions. This research will identify the ways African-American students experience the environment at CCCU institutions and will also identify how the campus climate influences the persistence or attrition of African-American students. Barriers to success and opportunities to enhance success will also be identified.

PROCEDURES
If you volunteer for this study, you will be asked to complete and return a brief background questionnaire (included with this packet) along with this consent form. This questionnaire inquires about your general background at the college, educational history, and general experiences at your institution. Once these two forms are collected, if you fit the research criteria, you may be invited to participate in one 90-minute focus group. The date of the focus group will be based on your availability and will take place at a departmental office located on your campus.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
A portion of the focus group will ask you to reflect on your experiences as an African-American student at your institution. Discussing issues of race, ethnicity and potential discrimination or racism you have encountered could remind you of possible negative experiences you may have had.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECT AND/OR SOCIETY
Your participation in this study may have the potential to improve the persistence and success of African-American students at CCCU institutions. In addition, the information from this research may help campus leaders to provide enhanced or improved support for the challenges and barriers encountered by African-American students in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. The findings that emerge from this study may be shared with the following audiences: current and former African-American students at CCCU institutions; higher education leaders who can shape policies and enhance practices to improve

access and retention of African-American students; and the general public since very few are aware of the issues that impact this population.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION
If you are invited to participate in a focus group, you will receive a $20 gift card for participating in the focus group session. If you choose to leave the focus group at any time once it has started, you will still receive your gift card.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your identity will remain undisclosed during and after the focus group process. To ensure confidentiality, a pseudonym will be used in all drafts and the final report of this study. The interviews will be digitally recorded and all contents will be deleted at the conclusion of the study. You have the right to review the digital recordings made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

PARTICIPATION WITHDRAWAL
If you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATOR
If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:
Timothy P. Young, UCLA Doctor of Education Candidate at timothy.perry.young@gmail.com

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS
You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office of the Human Research Protection Program at (310) 825-7122 or write to Office of the Human Research Protection Program, UCLA, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 102, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694.

Participant's Name and Signature:
I understand the information presented above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I acknowledge that I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject: _____

Signature of Subject (+18 years old): _____

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator or Designee:
In my judgment the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Signature of Investigator or Designee Date: _____

Background Questionnaire

Instructions:

This research is being conducted by Timothy P. Young, a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles under the direction of Robert Cooper, Ph.D. (UCLA) and Linda Rose, Ph.D. (UCLA).

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of African-American students within the context of CCCU institutions. This research will identify the ways African-American students experience the environment at CCCU institutions and will also identify how the campus climate influences the persistence or attrition of African-American students at CCCU institutions.

You were selected as a possible research participant because you are a student at a CCCU institution who meets the criteria for this study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. The results of this study will be included in Timothy P. Young's dissertation, a requirement for the doctoral degree.

If you consent to being a part of this research, please fill out this background questionnaire.

1) Gender: Male: _____   Female: _____

2) Major: _____

3) Current GPA: _____

4) Age: _____

5) Class: Freshman: _____ Sophomore: _____ Junior: _____ Senior: _____

6) Ethnicity: _____

7) Where are you from? (Circle one)	Southern California Northern California

	Other U.S. State International
8) Where do you currently live? (Circle one)	On Campus Off Campus (not with parents) With Parents or other family members
9) How many semesters have you completed at this university? (Circle one)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9+
10) What was your status upon entering the university? (Circle one)	First Time Freshman Transfer
11) How many hours per week do you work? (Fill-in)	Hours per week: _____
12) What type of church did you attend before college? (Fill-in)	_____
13) Are you the first person in your immediate family to attend college? (Circle one)	YES NO
14) What was the reason you selected this college? (Circle all that apply)	I received a scholarship I wanted to attend a Christian college The school had my major The school is close to my home I had friends who attend(ed) here Other: (Please fill in)

I am willing to participate in a 90-minute focus group. If I participate, I will receive a $20 gift card. If yes, please include the following information:

Name: _____

Phone:_____

Email: _____

Administrator Interview Protocol

Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that will provide your campus as well as other CCCU schools with important information about the experiences of African-American students. As you know, I am a UCLA doctoral candidate and I have been collecting data that will provide your campus with important information about the factors that enable African-American students to succeed in college in spite of the challenges they may encounter. You signed a consent form to participate in this interview before the study commenced. If you would like to review the consent form, I have it available.

This interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If there are points during the interview where you would like the recorder off, please feel free to simply press the off button on the machine. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

I. **GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION/MISSION**
1) The purpose of this research is to learn about the experiences of African-American students within the context of CCCU institutions.   From your perspective, what is it like to be an African-American student at your institution? (RQ1)

2) When you think about the successful African-American students at your institution, what makes them successful? (RQ 1)

3) What in the environment at CCCU institutions do you think helps African-American students to succeed? What in the environment at CCCU institutions are barriers to success unique to African-American students? (RQ 1)

4) When an African-American student leaves your institution, why do you think they leave? (RQ 1,4)

5) African American students on average persist and graduate from CCCU institutions at a lower rate than White students. Why do you think this is? (RQ1,4)

II. **ACADEMICS**
6) What strategies does your institution utilize to equip faculty and staff to meet the needs of diverse student populations? (RQ 1,4)

7) What qualities and or knowledge do African-American students bring to the classroom environment?

8) What unique challenges, if any, do you think African-American students experience in the classroom at your institution? (RQ1,4)

9) How do you think the faculty responds to students from diverse backgrounds in the classroom? (RQ1,4)

III.   SPIRITUALITY

10) How do you think African-American students experience the spiritual environment here? (RQ1,3)

11) From your perspective, if I were to ask an African-American student about the spiritual environment here, how would they describe it? What would they say are the strengths of the spiritual environment and what are the frustrations or weaknesses encountered with the spiritual environment here? (RQ1,3,4)

IV.   CAMPUS CLIMATE/MICROAGRESSIONS

12) How do you think that the school view issues of race relations and racial reconciliation? (RQ 2)

13) In what ways, if any, do you see racial reconciliation occurring on your campus? ? (RQ1,2,4)

14) What is the campus climate like for African-American students in terms of racism and discrimination? (RQ1,2,4) What about microaggressions- racial insults that might be less subtle or hidden?

V.   CONCLUSION

15) What do you think are the opportunities to create success for African-American students do you see at your institution? (RQ 4)

16) What barriers to success, if any, would you like to see changed or removed for African-American students at your institution? (RQ 4)

17) What else do you want me to know about the African-American student experience that that I have not yet asked you?

APPENDIX E
Focus Group Protocol

<u>Focus Group Protocol</u>

Introduction:
As students enter, students will be given one handout and a pen.

 Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in today's focus group. It is good to have you here and I look forward to hearing your thoughts, perspectives, and experiences. As you know, I am a UCLA doctoral candidate and I have been collecting data that will provide your campus with important information about the factors that enable African-American students to succeed in college in spite of the challenges they may encounter. You signed a consent form to participate in this focus group before the study commenced. If any of you would like to review the consent form, I have them on hand.

The focus group is expected to last approximately 90 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this focus group is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. This focus group includes one handout which will help to stimulate your thoughts. The handout will also give you space to write your thoughts during the focus group. The handout will be collected at the end of the focus group, please feel free to write whatever information you think is important on these pages. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

    I.   **CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT**

       1) To begin, there will be a brief reflection activity. Please look at the Focus Group Reflection handout you were given. Please read the questions and take a few moments to respond. (Wait 5 minutes). *Once participants are finished writing*:

       2) What was the reason you chose this college? Were your expectations met? (RQ 1)

       3) What has your experience been like on campus as an African-American student? (RQ1,2,4) What are the good experiences? What are your challenges?

       4) Are there ways in which the campus racial climate has changed during the past few years? If yes, how?   (RQ 1,2,4)

       5) African American students on average tend to persist and graduate from CCCU institutions at a lower rate than White students. Why do you think this is? (RQ1,4)

    II.   **SPIRITUALITY**

6) Are there ways in which the Christian mission of the school impacts your experience? If yes, how? (RQ1,3)

7) Are there ways in which the spiritual environment at your institution differs from what you expected before you came? If so, how? (RQ 3)

8) In thinking about how you can grow spiritually, what would have the most influence on you? Probes- Personal beliefs? Campus experiences? Off-Campus experiences? Chapel?   (RQ 3)

III.   ACADEMICS

9) What are your experiences like in class as an African-American student? (RQ1,2)

10) What challenges, if any, have you encountered academically? (RQ 1,2,4)

11) What, if anything, would improve your academic experience? (RQ1,4)

IV.   MICROAGGRESSIONS, RACISM, DISCRIMINATION

12) What types of racial discrimination or microaggressions, if any, have you seen or experienced at your institution? Please give specific examples (RQ2,4)

    Probes:
   a. Where do these occur? Who or what is involved?
   b. How do these microaggressions affect you socially? Academically? Personally? Your spirituality?

13) How have you responded to these experiences? (RQ1,3,4

14) Have you been in a class where something uncomfortable was said about race? If yes, what was said?

V.   CONCLUSION

15) What is the best part about being an African-American student at your school? (RQ1)

16) What suggestions, if any, do you have to improve your experience here? (RQ1,4)

17) Are there things that I haven't ask asked about your experiences at the college but you think should be included? If there are, what are they? (RQ 4)

Focus Group Reflection

Your Name: _____

In all written findings from this focus group that refer to you a pseudonym (a different name of your choosing) will be used. What would you like your pseudonym to be in the findings of this research?

Your Pseudonym: _____

Think about your experiences on this campus and answer the questions based upon your experience.

1) Take a couple of minutes to draw a picture that in your mind best represents what it is like to be an African-American student at your institution. Artistic ability is not required.

2) If I was a new African-American student at this institution and you were helping me to understand the environment, what types of things would I need to know or do to succeed?

3) What are one or two words or phrases that describe your spiritual development since coming to your school?

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