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Exploring First Generation African American Graduate Students: Motivating Factors for Pursuing a Doctoral Degree

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EXPLORING FIRST GENERATION AFRICAN AMERICAN GRADUATE
STUDENTS: MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR PURSUING A DOCTORAL DEGREE

EXPLORING FIRST GENERATION AFRICAN AMERICAN GRADUATE
STUDENTS: MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR PURSUING A DOCTORAL DEGREE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Higher Education

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose for conducting the study was to examine the factors that motivate African-American first-generation students to pursue doctoral education at a four-year public university. There has been little research on the influence academic or non-academic factors have on first-generation graduate student motivation. Similarly, little research exists that explored how factors might vary by ethnicity. Based on the projected increase of post-baccalaureate enrollment each year (Aud, Hussar, Planty, Snyder, Bianco, Fox, Frohlich, Kemp, Drake, 2010), first-generation African-Americans will become more interested in attending graduate school. It is important to gain a better understanding of the factors and influences that impact this student population. Therefore, the study explored why these students progressed, who or what encouraged them, what challenges they had to overcome, why they felt it necessary to further their education, and what motivated them. Specifically, the study determined motivating factors for first-generation graduate students to pursue and attend graduate school with the intention of obtaining a doctoral degree. Overall, this study provided specific examples of influences and motivating factors that encouraged this population to pursue.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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Dr. Ketevan Mamiseishvili

DISSERTATION DUPLICATION RELEASE

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER ONE

Statement of the Problem

In American history, a high school diploma at one time was the mechanism that facilitated upward mobility for the middle class (London, 1992). As a result of society's transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy however, a high school diploma is now insufficient (Hurley, 2002). As the transition to the knowledge based economy continues, jobs will require education beyond high school (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Thus, obtaining a baccalaureate degree represents an important educational goal in terms of private and public benefits (Thomas, 2000).

As enrollment in higher education has increased, the dominant student demographic has become more diverse. A result of the increased diversity is an increase in the number of first-generation students (Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terezini, 2004). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2001 report, approximately 50% of the undergraduate student population and roughly 41% of all graduate degree-seeking students are first-generation.

The essay, *Findings from the Condition of Education 2001: Students Whose Parents Did Not Go To College* reported that first-generation students were less likely than their peers whose parents had a bachelors or advanced degree to attend graduate school. Mullen, Goyette, and Soares (2003) indicated that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were also less likely to attend graduate school, and if they did, they were more likely to attempt a master's degree.

First-generation undergraduate college students have been the focus of a growing body of research (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). This research has focused on comparing first-generation students with other student populations, understanding their transition from high school to college, and examining their persistence, degree attainment, and overall

career outcomes (Ishitani, 2006; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004; Strayhorn, 2006). For graduate first-generation students, current research has examined influences for attendance, social correlations to continuation, and the fields of study most selected by this population (Hayden, 2008; Hurley, 2002; McCall, 2007; Mullen, Goyette, & Soares, 2003; Perna, 2004; Poock, 2007). Additional research has explored enrichment programs such as the Ronald McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program that serves first-generation students and promotes placement in graduate school (Ishiyama & Hopkins, 2002).

Further research on first-generation students is relevant and needed. These students are less likely to attend graduate school as compared to continuing-generation students, and based on the *Doctoral Recipients from United States Universities Summary Report* (Hoffer, Welch, Williams, Lisek, Hess, Loew, & Guzman-Barron, 2005), only 22% of students receiving doctorates reported that their parents' highest level of education was a high school diploma or less.

There is considerable variation in parental education attainment by race/ethnicity, citizenship status, and broad field of study. Among U.S. citizens, Asian doctorate recipients were more likely than members of the other racial/ethnic categories to come from families in which one or both parents attained at least a baccalaureate degree. Black, Hispanic, and American Indian recipients' parents were less likely to have gone beyond high school and were far less likely to have attained a baccalaureate or advanced degree than whites and Asians. (p. 21)

Few studies discussed the increase in attendance for underrepresented populations' attendance in graduate school (e.g. Hall, Mays, & Allen, 1984). Additional research has suggested that these students may be less successful in completing graduate education (Seburn, Chan, & Kirshstein, 2005). Although there were studies on graduate students, there was little research that focused on first-generation student achievement and success factors. There was

even less research focused on the experiences impacting first-generation underrepresented populations or their motivating factors to attend graduate school (Hurley, 2002).

Consequently, there has not been much attention placed on why first-generation graduate students' progress further; who or what encouraged them, what barriers they had to overcome, and why they felt it necessary to further their education. These reasons suggest that it is important to examine factors that may influence their decision to pursue, persist, and earn their graduate degrees.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose for conducting the study was to examine the factors that motivate African-American first-generation students to pursue doctoral education at a four-year public university. There has been little research on the influence academic or non-academic factors have on first-generation graduate student motivation. Similarly, little research exists that explored how factors might vary by ethnicity. With the increasing enrollment of first-generation graduate student enrollment in graduate education, it is important to gain a better understanding of the factors and influences that impact first-generation students' matriculation into graduate school.

Therefore, the study explored why these students progressed, who or what encouraged them, what challenges they had to overcome, why they felt it necessary to further their education, and what motivated them. Specifically, the study determined motivating factors for first-generation graduate students to pursue and attend graduate school with the intention of obtaining a doctoral degree. This research is needed to examine the relationship between academic and non-academic variables and graduate student matriculation in order to recruit and encourage underrepresented populations to attend graduate school.

Research Questions

With a goal of understanding the persistence, motivation, and influences of African American first-generation graduate students, the study sought to address the following questions:

1. What factors did first-generation African American graduate students perceive to be the primary motivators to pursue a doctoral degree?
2. How did first-generation African American graduate students perceive their negotiation of their transition to graduate school?
3. What did first-generation African American graduate students perceive their academic and social expectations to be for the graduate school experience compared to what they perceived themselves to actually encounter?
4. Were there differences in the pursuit of graduate education based on first-generation African American graduate students' self-reported backgrounds and traits?

Assumptions

1. The participants of the study would be open and honest about their experiences as a first-generation African American doctoral student.
2. The participants of the study wanted to obtain a doctoral degree.
3. The participants of the study had a desire to obtain an advanced degree and had a level of self-reflection such that they were able to identify their self-motivations.
4. The researcher would be able to respond to all research questions listed for the study.

Limitations

1. The participants would be purposefully selected in order to obtain information from first-generation African American college students who were pursuing a doctoral degree.

2. The sample of participants was not ethnically diverse. All participants were African American; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all students.
3. All the participants were working toward a doctoral (Ph.D or Ed.D) degree. No data was collected from graduate students obtaining a Master's degree.
4. Participants of this study were attempting to obtain their doctoral degree from one public Mid-South primarily white institution.
5. There could be a range of attitudes about race relations based on Southern region perspective.
6. The personal relationships established by the researcher with some of the study participants could enhance or limit the comfort level of the study participants.

Definition of Terms

The focus of the study was to examine what factors motivate underrepresented first-generation African American students to pursue graduate school. The study accepted the following operational definitions.

A first-generation college student was defined as a student who comes from a family in which neither of their parents attained a baccalaureate degree (Billson & Terry, 1982; Choy, 2002; Ishitani, 2002); therefore, first-generation graduate students are those individuals who have enrolled in a graduate program and both parents have less than a baccalaureate degree, meaning they may have had some schooling or even attained an associates' degree.

African American is a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. The study included people who indicated their race as Black or African American. People who identified as bi-racial and of African descent would also be recognized.

Background traits of the participants included family demographical information including: who raised them, i.e., parent or guardian, number of siblings, socio-economic status, and type of education received i.e. public vs. private (Seay, Lifton, Wuensch, Bradshaw, & McDowelle, 2008).

Demographic characteristics of the participants included: age, current degrees and major selection, full-time vs. part-time student, marital status, number of dependents, and employment status (Seay et al., 2008).

Significance of the Study

There is little research on first-generation graduate students, and the research, found in the literature review, in this area was relevant and added to the body of knowledge concerning this student population. Tinto (1993) proposed several areas of research, including longitudinal studies that explored the experiences and differential outcomes of a representative sample of beginning doctoral students, understanding faculty relationships in doctoral completion, studying the persistence of students in different fields of study and institutions, and determining how commitments and relationships, such as work and family, influence graduate persistence. Tinto also wrote that research must help institutions address policy questions and provide information as to how they can increase graduate persistence and completion.

From Tinto's future research recommendations, Hurley (2002) utilized the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) for her research comparing first- generation and non first-generation college students. Barrington (2004) focused her research on first-generation college students and whether the graduate process as a form of upward mobility had an impact on identity development. Strayhorn (2005) focused research on graduate student persistence in relation to finances, but did not specifically focus on first- generation graduate students. McCall

(2007) focused his research on barriers that influenced first-generation and non-first-generation student enrollment in, and completion of, graduate education. Hall (2010) focused her research on African American doctoral student's attendance at for-profit colleges and universities, exploring their experiences academically and socially. This research differs from these studies as it focuses on first-generation African American graduate students and their influences or motivating factors to pursue a doctoral degree.

The current research addressed one of the suggested research areas of Tinto (1993), and results could benefit various constituencies in higher education. The Graduate Office staff could gain a better understanding of the reasons first-generation African American graduate students enroll and their influences to complete their graduate education. Institutions could use study findings to help improve minority recruitment and retention programs. Specifically, findings could evaluate the effectiveness of current recruitment efforts and assist in the development of new or improved programs. Different types of institutional support are related to academic achievement for minority graduate students (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004). A few of these support systems include assistance with adjustment issues, social integration, and establishing positive relationships with faculty and peers.

Student Affairs professionals could use study findings to determine what programs and services should be offered to assist this student population to feel socially integrated on the campus. By hearing directly from African American first-generation graduate students, administrators could evaluate whether existing programs and services assist them adequately integrate with the institution. Faculty members who are aware that they are teaching or advising first-generation African American graduate students could utilize this research to better understand the academic and social needs that help this population progress through graduate

studies. These results could also assist academic departments in creating or updating the curriculum or resources, i.e., seminars, mentoring programs, or professional affiliations provided for students.

Institutional leaders could use findings of this research to help build upon graduate study experience through mentoring or similar programs. For example, more emphasis could be placed on hiring African American faculty who happen to be first generation, allowing them to serve as mentors or advisors for first-generation college students. McCall (2007) stated that the absence of African American faculty members lessens the probability that African American students will complete graduate and professional programs at the same rate as Caucasian students. This research also showed that the most persistent, statistically significant predictor of enrollment and graduation for African American graduate and professional students is the presence of African American faculty members (McCall, 2007). Utilizing the experiences of African American first-generation faculty and/or administrators through advisement, mentorship, or workshops higher education institutions could create a value added cultural shift, increasing the persistence of these students (Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991).

Based on the projected increase of post-baccalaureate enrollment each year (Aud, Hussar, Planty, Snyder, Bianco, Fox, Frohlich, Kemp, Drake, 2010), first-generation African-Americans will become more interested in attending graduate school. The students interested in pursuing a graduate degree could utilize this research to understand how other first-generation African American students pursued and persisted in their graduate program. Overall, this study provided specific examples of influences and motivating factors that encouraged this population to pursue.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The purpose for conducting the study was to examine the factors that motivate African-American first-generation students to pursue doctoral education at a four-year public university. The topic of study was based on the lack of literature on first-generation African American students who proceed toward, and persist in, graduate education. A search in three main University of Arkansas library databases (EBSCOhost, Proquest, and ERIC) yielded over 200 articles, books, and dissertations on this topic. The keywords used were “first-generation”, “African American”, “Black”, and “graduate student.” The majority of the articles focused on first-generation Black students and their barriers to success, motivators to succeed, and institutional recommendations to assist in this student group’s transition. When searching “African American” and “graduate student” between years 1996-2010, more than 96 scholarly journal articles appeared. The keywords, “First-generation” and “graduate students”, including “United States”, and “higher education”, yielded 49 articles. Many of the articles focused on the social interactions of graduate students, their degree selection, and what factors were related to the success of graduate students.

The review of the literature will be divided into two sections. The first section will broadly explore graduate education. The section will provide examples of doctoral degrees, cover a history component, include trends in graduate education, provide the types of institutions and degree programs offered in graduate education nationally, and describe the enrollment and experiences of African American graduate students. The second section will explore aspects of first-generation undergraduate and graduate students and the literature related to their experiences. This section will include characteristics, statistics, barriers, and persistence for both

undergraduate and graduate students. Previous research and its application to the study will also be addressed. The section will then explore the retention and motivation models used to determine academic success factors for this student population. The chapter will conclude by summarizing how this broad body of work will apply to the study of first-generation African American graduate students.

Graduate Education

Zhang (2005) states graduate education is an important segment of higher education in America. He explains that from an individual viewpoint, obtaining a graduate degree is a prerequisite to prestigious professions, greater economic rewards, and high social status. From a societal standpoint, graduate and professional schools provide the most complex and comprehensive information to individuals that result in improved research, technological advancements, and socioeconomic gains.

According to data from *2010 The Condition of Education Report* (Aud et al., 2010) in 1976, some 1.6 million students were enrolled in post-baccalaureate programs, which included graduate and professional programs. Post-baccalaureate enrollment fluctuated during the period from the mid-1970s to the early-1980s, but between 1983 and 2008 it increased from 1.6 to 2.7 million students. The report also indicates that as post-baccalaureate enrollment has grown, the distribution of students, in terms of attendance status and the types of institutions attended, has changed. For example, the number of African American post-baccalaureate students more than tripled between 1976 and 2008 from 90,000 to 315,000 students. Their percentages increased from 6% to 8% from 1976 to 2000, and rose to 12% in 2008 (Aud et al., 2010).

Since 1995, the U.S. has seen a 14% decline in doctoral degrees awarded to domestic students. A trend reversal would require better strategies for the recruitment, retention, and

degree completion of U.S. students, particularly minorities and women (Stewart, 2005).

Graduate education has been considered the educational pipeline that has been studied least (Boatman, 1999). As a result, researchers in higher education have emphasized not only the need to understand what influenced students to pursue post-baccalaureate studies, but what caused some individuals to pursue higher levels of education more than others.

Tinto (1993) developed the Doctoral Education Persistence Theory to determine the persistence factors of doctoral students. In this theory he sought to understand the persistence of doctoral students at three stages; 1) transition and adjustment, 2) attaining candidacy, and 3) research completion. Previous literature indicates that African American students have more difficulty transitioning to graduate school than Caucasian students (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). First-generation students are less likely to pursue a graduate degree compared to second-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Due to the information documented in the current literature, the proposed study is needed to address the experiences, influences and motivators that impact the persistence of African American first-generation graduate students.

Definitions of Graduate Degrees and Programs

“Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) defines a doctor’s degree—research/scholarship as a PhD or other doctor's degree that requires advanced work beyond the master’s level, including the preparation and defense of a dissertation based on original research, or the planning and execution of an original project demonstrating substantial artistic or scholarly achievement.” (Bell, 2010A p. 5)

In addition to the Ph.D., IPEDS lists the Ed.D. (Doctor of Education), D.M.A. (Doctor of Musical Arts), D.B.A. (Doctor of Business Administration), D.Sc. (Doctor of Science), D.A. (Doctor of Arts), and D.M. (Doctor of Management) as examples of doctoral degrees in fields of research and scholarship (Bell, 2010A). The Council of Graduate Schools defines graduate education as an advanced academic degree or specifically a master's degree, MBA, Ed.D. or

Ph.D. with the general requirement that students must have earned a previous undergraduate or baccalaureate degree (Bell, 2010B). Graduate education is significant because it produces original research through the writing and defending of a thesis or dissertation. Graduate education programs are distinct because graduate students take courses that are specific to their field of study and the instruction is usually offered by senior academic staff (Wendler, Bridgeman, Cline, Millett, Rock, Bell, & McAllister, 2010). However, at the Ph.D and Ed.D, level it is common for students to take courses from a wider range of disciplines to broaden their research abilities (Nerad, June, & Miller, 1997).

The Ed.D. was developed for practitioners and the Ph.D. for collegiate-level teachers/researchers (Redden, 2007). “In theory, the two degrees are expected to have completely different focuses, with one often designed for working educators hoping to climb the administrative chain and master the skill sets (including data analysis skills) needed for effective educational leadership, while the other, more research-oriented degree is meant to fit the traditional social science Ph.D. model” (Redden, 2007, p. 1).

The number of graduates and the number of faculty/administration with Ph.D.’s is typically higher at a research oriented institution while the number of Ed.D.’s is typically higher at a comprehensive, more educationally focused institution (Redden, 2007; Wendler et al., 2010). There are those that will define the Ph.D. as research/theory oriented and the Ed.D. as practice oriented (Redden, 2007).

History of Graduate Education

Prior to the creation of graduate education in America, scholars traveled to German universities to obtain a graduate degree (Nerad, et al, 1997). Before 1876, the beginning of the university revolution period, German universities at that time prepared graduate students for

professions in the areas of law, divinity, civil services, and teaching (Berelson, 1960). During the University Revolution of 1876-1900, several American institutions attempted to establish graduate education, but were unsuccessful due to opposition from faculty who were not ready for the rapid growth of knowledge in areas that they were unfamiliar with. Over time the expansion of programs for graduate education was essential and necessary due to a growing scientific orientation. “America was rapidly becoming urbanized and industrialized and there were needs of a practical, professional, and even vocational kind that the existing system of elite colleges could not fill” (Berelson, 1960, p. 8).

Geiger (1997) wrote “when Yale conferred the first American Ph.D.’s in 1861, it was consciously imitating the German degree, in part to spare would-be scholars from having to go abroad. When Johns Hopkins University was founded in 1876, it was perceived to be, and prided itself on being, a ‘German-style’ university” (p. 235). Many scholars who studied in Germany returned to America with the hope that they could integrate the German ideal of advanced study and research into American colleges (Geiger, 1997). Although there were challenges and local resistance, graduate education was eventually established. The individuals that led the development effort were: Daniel Coit Gilman (1875-1901) at Johns Hopkins, James Burrell Angell (1871-1909) at Michigan University, Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918) at Cornell University, William Raney Harper (1856-1906) at Chicago University, Granville Stanley Hall (1888-1920) at Clark University, Charles William Eliot (1869-1909) at Harvard, and John William Burgess (1876-1912) at Columbia (Berelson, 1960).

Types of Institutions and Degree Programs

Each year, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the Graduate Records Examinations Board (GRE) conduct a survey of graduate enrollment and degree survey (Bell,

2008). The report is designed to provide information about trends in graduate education enrollment, applications for admission to graduate study, and graduate degrees and certificates conferred. Highlighted have been three types of institutions that confer graduate degrees based on the 2000 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. *Doctoral/Research Extensive* institutions offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs and award 50 or more doctoral degrees per year across at least 15 disciplines. *Doctoral/Research Intensive* institutions offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs and award at least 10 doctoral degrees across 3-4 disciplines. *Master's and Specialized institutions* offer a range of baccalaureate degree programs and are committed to awarding master's degrees. The schools in all categories are both private and public. Graduate education remains heavily focused on research in science and technology, but, over time have evolved to other fields worthy of recognition and understanding (Green & Scott, 2003; Jackson, 2006). Currently graduate programs in the U.S. are offered in ten major categories including biological sciences, business, education, engineering, health sciences, humanities and arts, physical sciences, public administration, social sciences, and other fields (see Table 1).

Table 1

Doctoral Majors Offered in the United States

Major Field	Disciplines
Biological Sciences	Agriculture & Biological Sciences, Other
Business	Accounting, Banking and Finance, Business Administration and Management, Business Other

(Table continues)

Table 1, continued

Doctoral Majors Offered in the United States

Major Field	Disciplines
Education	Elementary Education, Evaluation and Research, Higher Education, Secondary Education, Special Education, Student Counseling and Personnel Services, Education, Other
Engineering	Chemical, Civil, Electrical and Electronics, Industrial, Materials, Mechanicals, Engineering, Other
Health Sciences	Health and Medical Sciences, Other
Humanities and Arts	Arts – History, Theory, and Criticism, Arts-Performance and Studio, English Language and Literature, Foreign Language and Literature, History, Philosophy, Humanities and Arts, Other
Physical Sciences	Chemistry, Computer Sciences, Earth, Atmospheric, and Marine Science, Mathematical Sciences, Physics and Astronomy, Physical Sciences, Other
Public Administration and Services	Public Administration, Social Work, Other
Social Sciences	Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Social Sciences, Other
Other Fields	Architecture and Environmental Design, Communications, Home Economics, Library and Information Sciences, Religion and Theology, All other fields.

Trends

Jaschik (2008) reported that graduate enrollment in the United States was up 3% on average between 1997-2007. This 2008 graduate enrollment and degree report indicated that the number of U.S. citizen female graduate students grew by an average of 3% annually, while the enrollment of men only grew by 1%. The enrollment of racial and ethnic minorities that included African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian/Pacific Islanders grew by 4%. The growth in enrollment for all minority groups was driven by the increasing number of women. The number of master's degrees awarded has increased by an average of 3% each year while the number of doctoral degrees awarded has grown an average of 2%.

Another trend over the last 10 years is the number of online degree programs offered. The National Center for Education Statistics defined distance education as the delivery of courses, academic training, or academic materials by use of live, interactive television or audio, pre-recorded television or video, CD-ROM, or computer-based systems such as the internet (Redd, 2008). McCullaugh & Megeean (2005) wrote a report called *Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States*, which states that online enrollment increased from 1.98 million in 2003 to 2.35 million in 2004, an overall annual growth rate of 18.2%. The report also indicated that online graduate programs have a tendency to be more flexible, more practical, and allow students to tailor course schedules to their hectic lifestyle. With more institutions offering online programs, there has been an increase of working professionals enrolling in graduate school (Redd, 2008). The online enrollment growth rate is over 10 times that projected by the National Center for Education Statistics for the general post-secondary student population (McCullaugh & Megeean, 2005). In the fall of 2008, over 4.6 million students enrolled in doctoral programs were taking at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2010). The U.S.

News University Directory listed the following institutions as offering the best online doctoral degree programs in 2011: Argosy University for business, Grand Canyon University for psychology, Boston University for occupational therapy, Walden College for education, and University of Florida for pharmacy. The table below highlights the type of online learning processes available in higher education institutions.

Table 2

Types of Online Learning Processes

Proportion of Content Delivered Online	Type of Course	Description
1-29%	Web Facilitated	Course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. May use a course management system (CMS) or web pages to post the syllabus and assignments.
30-79%	Blended/Hybrid	Course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings.
80+%	Online	A course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically have no face-to-face meetings.

Content from *Learning on Demand: Online Education in the U.S., 2009*.

African Americans in Graduate Education

African Americans were denied access to even basic education for many years in the U.S.

and therefore the phenomenon of African Americans receiving graduate degrees, masters or a doctorate, is relatively new (Manning, 1998). Harvard College, now known as Harvard University, was established in 1636 and represented the beginning of formal and organized higher education in the United States. The first college degree awarded to a person of African American descent occurred in 1826, nearly two centuries later (Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991). The first African American to earn a doctorate is thought to be Edward Bouchet from Yale University in 1876 (Manning, 1998). W. E. B. DuBois would be the first African American to obtain a doctoral degree from Harvard College in 1895 (Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991). Forty-five years from the time Edward Bouchet earned a doctorate in 1921, the first three African American women earned doctorates in 1921. They were Georgiana Simpson from the University of Chicago, Sadie Alexander from the University of Pennsylvania, and Eva Dykes from Radcliffe College (Schiller, 2000).

According to the 2009 National Center for Education Statistics (NECS) report, the number of master's degrees awarded to African Americans has consistently increased over the last decade. In 1998-99, 7.4% degrees were conferred to African Americans. Ten years later, 10.4% of master's degrees awarded were to African Americans. According to the American Council on Education (ACE), Higher Education and National Affairs report 27,622 doctoral degrees were granted in 1999. Of this, 5.9% or 1,596 were granted to African Americans. The report also states that twenty years prior only 4.4% or 1,058 African Americans received doctoral degrees and that in 2002 African Americans earned 6.3% of all doctoral degrees awarded to U. S. citizens. Since 1987, the number of African American who earned masters' degrees and doctorates has more than doubled (NECS, 2009; National Opinion Research Center, 2003).

Previous research on African American graduate students has used qualitative data analysis to describe their academic and social experiences (Daniel; 2007; Gasman, Hirschfield, & Vultaggio, 2008). Participants in these studies have included African Americans who matriculated in doctoral and professional programs that include nursing, physical education, education, psychology, social work, the natural sciences, and engineering (Daniel, 2007; Gasman et al., 2008; Lewis et al., 2004; Maton & Hrabowski, 2004). Additional qualitative research included undergraduate students, particularly to determine what factors would be important in their decision to pursue graduate study at Research I institutions (Davis, 2007). The common themes that emerged through this research included graduate students' perceptions of faculty-student and peer-interactions, along with perceptions of their program curricula, faculty support, and other factors (i.e. stereotype threat, feelings of isolation) shown to be associated with academic well being (Taylor & Antony, 2000).

Other studies have shown that some graduate students are challenged with feelings of isolation. Lewis et al., (2004) found that cultural and social isolation in a doctoral program at a predominately white institution was the major theme discussed among African American graduate students. Many of these studies do not produce themes that actually speak to the personal or psychological factors that actually facilitate graduate student success, despite their perceived institutional and environmental barriers (Taylor & Antony, 2000). Similar findings have been reported in other qualitative studies (Daniel, 2007; Gasman et al., 2008; King & Chepyator-Thomson, 1996), but their findings could not be generalized beyond their participants (Uqdah, Tyler, & DeLoach, 2009).

Motivation for Doctoral Study

According to King and Chepyator-Thomson (1996), the factors that influenced entry to graduate school and success in pursuit of the doctoral degree could be grouped into three categories: institutional, environmental, and motivational. Institutional factors included programs and policies of universities related to graduate admissions requirements, financial aid, availability of assistantships, and other forms of support. Environmental factors included elements such as the campus climate and availability of role models and mentors who could serve in areas of academic and social support. Motivational factors included students' attitudes, beliefs, and values that were important in maintaining the level of intrinsic and extrinsic achievement impetus necessary for the rigors of doctoral study (p. 171). The majority of the participants in this study felt that obtaining a terminal degree was necessary for employment as a college professor, or to become eligible for an administrative position. Others felt they needed a doctorate in order to pursue more lucrative job opportunities (King & Chepyator-Thomson, 1996).

Mullen, Goyette, and Soares (2003) researched the academic and social correlates of postgraduate matriculation. Their findings determined that parental education had the strongest influence on matriculation into a doctoral program. "Every year increase in parents' education increases one's odds of enrolling in a doctoral program by over 20 percent" (p. 150). Additional factors included students' scores on college admissions tests, characteristics of students' undergraduate institutions, the type of undergraduate institution (private versus public) selected, and student's college GPA and undergraduate major. The study summarized that a student's

undergraduate academic performance was a significant determinate of postgraduate enrollment independent of parent's educational background.

Wellington and Sikes (2006) examined the motivations of students pursuing a professional doctorate (Ed.D.) and the impact it had on their personal and professional life. The results of the data collected determined that researchers' were unable to make generalizations. However, "we gained insight into the professional doctorate experiences of these particular individuals, and these insights are in themselves of value" (p. 732). This study identified that the skills developed in the professional doctorate are not perceived as being directly relevant to profession. Instead it benefited the individual participants by helping them make up for previous failures, allowing them to prove their abilities, and/or gaining family affirmation.

There are few studies that discussed motivation in the pursuit of graduate education for first-generation or African American students; more focused on persistence, attrition, and retention (Morehouse & Dawson, 2006; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Ivankova & Stick, 2006). Many researchers stated in their discussion sections that more research is needed in this area.

First-Generation Undergraduate Students

Characteristics

First generation students are defined as those whose parents have less than a baccalaureate degree (Choy, 2002; Ishitani, 2002; McConnell, 2000; Pascarella et al., 2004). These students have a tendency to be older, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, work full-time, and participate in fewer extracurricular activities than other college students (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). The 2005 NCES report stated, "The family and background characteristics of first-generation college students were typically associated with characteristics that placed

them at risk for attrition” (p. 6). For example, compared with second generation students, first-generation students are more likely to be African-American or Hispanic and come from low-income families. They are less prepared academically for college as demonstrated by their lower rates of taking higher-level mathematics courses in high school, their lower achievement test scores, and their lower college entrance examination scores (NCES, 2005).

There are five areas in which first-generation college students seem to have a different demographic profile than other college students. These differences include lack of parental experience with the application process, preparation for college personally and academically, reasons for attendance, their personal experiences, and their overall personality traits (Gibbon & Shoffner, 2004). Horn and Nunez (2000) found that first-generation college students tended to be from low-income families and were more likely to be Hispanic or African American. They also documented that first-generation students are less academically prepared for college than other students. Despite these demographics, first-generation students represent 27% of all graduating high school students that attend college. Therefore, the needs and challenges of this student population should be addressed so they may have the opportunity to be successful at a higher education institution (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004).

Statistics

The increase in diversity among undergraduate students includes many first-generation college students. Since 1995, first-generation students have comprised 34% of the students in four-year institutions and 53% in two-year colleges (Choy, 2002). The NCES First-Generation Students in Postsecondary Education Report (2005) provided statistics on the specific population of students who enrolled in postsecondary education between 1992-2000. Of all students entering college during this time period, 22% had parents who did not go to college. Twenty-four

percent of first-generation students who enrolled actually completed a bachelor's degree while 43% of them dropped out [or stopped out]. First-generation students who do succeed in attaining a baccalaureate degree are just as likely as second-generation students to enroll in an MBA or other master's degree program, but less likely to enroll in a doctoral or professional degree program (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The increased number of first-generation students entering higher education in both undergraduate and graduate programs has become important for institutions and as a result has become the center of a growing body of research (Pascarella et al., 2004).

African-American Students

According to the latest statistics retrieved from the 2010 Digest of Education Statistics, undergraduate enrollment rose 39% between 1999 and 2009. The percentage of African American students from 1976 to 2009 rose from 9% to 14%. (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). “Approximately 57% of first-time students seeking a bachelor's degree or its equivalent and attending a 4-year institution full time in 2002 completed a bachelor's degree or its equivalent at that institution within 6 years” (p. 284). The graduation rate for African American students in the 2002 cohort was 40%; the rate for Caucasian students was 60%. Although these percentages provide an indication of the growing number of African Americans seeking a college education, the fact remains that there is still a disparity in enrollment rates between Caucasian and African American college students (Bennett, Xie, & Michigan Univ., A.R., 2000). There have been improvements in the graduation rates among African Americans yet their college completion rates continue to lag behind other ethnic groups (Stoops, 2004). Given that there was a large percentage of African Americans entering college that are also first-generation students, these statistics have implications for this student population when entering colleges or universities

(Owens et al., 2010). It should then come as no surprise that African Americans were awarded only 5% of doctoral and professional degrees conferred in 1999-2000 (Perna, 2004).

First and Second Generation Students

Previous literature has highlighted first-generation undergraduate students and their persistence and degree attainment, their transition from high school to postsecondary education, and compared first-generation college students and second-generation college students' success (Pascarella et al., 2004). Multiple studies have established that first-generation college status is highly correlated with parental education level (Mullen et al., 2003; Nevill et al., 2007; Stolzenberg, 1994). Additional research (Hall, Mays, & Allen, 1984; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004; Strayhorn, 2006) has discussed the variables that need to exist in order for this population to succeed in college.

Numerous studies have reported on first-generation students and their differences when compared to second-generation students (Esprivalo-Harrell & Forney, 2003; Kuh, Pace, & Verper, 1997; Naumann, Bandalos, & Gutkin, 2003; Terenzini, Springer, Yeager, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). These studies have revealed that second-generation students are more likely to have higher ACT/SAT scores, higher GPA's, take more rigorous high school courses, have higher family income, and have taken fewer remedial courses. First-generation students are more likely to work more hours, drop out of college by the end of their second year, live off campus, and attend less selective institutions (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Although these students have relatively lower educational expectations compared with their second-generation counterparts, early credit production, academic performance, and fewer withdrawals from courses are strongly related to this population's success in postsecondary education (NCES, 2005).

Previous and current literature has focused on first-generation college students' academic and social challenges and low self-efficacy to succeed, yet there is little research that provides data on why those that do obtain a bachelor's degree continue to further education. Research has indicated that prior to entering college, first-generation students' educational aspirations are less likely to include an advanced degree (Hurly, 2002). Therefore, first-generation students who have invested in graduate study, specifically to obtain a doctoral degree, are rare (Billson & Terry, 1982; Suarez, 1997; Terenzini, et al., 1996), and the factors that influence this decision should be determined.

Barriers

For students who are the first in their family to go to college, the issues involved with college adjustment can be complex. There are several barriers that these students may face that the literature highlights (Fischer, 2007; Ishitani, 2003; King, 2002). First-generation students are less likely to live on campus, develop relationships with faculty members, and tend to work more hours off campus (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). In addition, first-generation students are less likely to develop strong relationships with other students, become involved in student clubs and organizations, or feel satisfied with the campus environment (Terenzini et al., 1996). Because African-American and Latino students and are more likely to be first-generation students and heavily dependent on financial aid to attend college, they face multiple challenges that may affect their adjustment to college (Fischer, 2007). There is research to suggest that difficulties with financing college may put undo strain on these students in ways that affect performance and satisfaction (King, 2002).

Financial aid availability has been the most extensively examined in the literature as a determinant of college choice. A number of studies (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999;

McDonough, 1997) have suggested that financial aid is a critical factor for students. Kern (2000) wrote that financial aid is specifically an important factor for ethnic minority students, many of whom are first-generation. However, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that financial aid had no bearing on students' college choice. Kim (2000) found that African American and Latino first-generation students were less influenced by the availability of financial aid and instead the location and size of institution were factors that most influenced their choice. Cho et al. (2008) determined that first-generation students were most sensitive to safety, social climate, the ethnic makeup of the campus, and having friends present on campus.

First-generation students generally enter college with limited understanding of what higher education entails and end up with a distinct undergraduate experience when compared to other students (Pascarella et al., 2004). Terenzini et al., (1996) suggested that first generation students had lower critical thinking abilities, less support from their family, and did not socialize with peers and faculty. Strayhorn (2006) indicated that first-generation students will earn lower grades and are likely to drop out of college altogether before the end of the first semester. Ishantini (2006) determined that first-generation students are more likely to drop out during their second year, indicating that attrition for first-generation students is a concern beyond the freshman year. Ishitani (2003) also found that first-generation students were less likely to complete their four-year programs in a timely manner than non-first-generation students.

Undergraduate Persistence

Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) examined and compared persistence factors between first-generation and second-generation students at four year institutions. Their findings suggested that academic performance, high educational aspirations, work-study aid, and a satisfying social life affected the persistence of this student population between the first and second year of college.

Somers, Woodhouse, and Cofer (2000) documented that first-generation students were more likely to persist if they took a full course load, lived on campus, and attended a research based institution.

Strayhorn (2006) also researched factors that influenced the academic achievement of first-generation college students. He found significant relationships between college GPA and persistence. Results indicated that high educational aspirations and academic integration were associated with high increases in students' cumulative GPA, specifically among African American first-generation students. First-generation students who persist in college, despite the barriers faced, are impacted by their academic and social engagement in college (Pascarella et al., 2004). "This level of engagement has been found to provide greater outcomes for critical thinking, writing skills, openness to diversity, learning for self-understanding, and internal locus of attribution for academic success" (p. 280).

Lessons for Graduate Education

African Americans in the United States, especially in the South, have a complex view of their state universities (Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009). More than 50 years have passed since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision established that separate schools for African American and Caucasian students were inherently unequal, yet both populations continue to have very different educational experiences which are shaped by their ethnicity, for example (Bailey et al., 2009; Nettles & Millett, 2006).

According to Nettles and Millett (2006), socialization has a positive impact on African American students' performance, satisfaction, and success, particularly in doctoral programs where there is a lack of representation of African Americans. The retention rates for African American students transitioning from undergraduate studies to graduate studies drops

dramatically and is respectively 50-75% lower than the rates for Asians and Whites (Nettles & Millett, 2006). Yet the number of African Americans at Predominately White Institutions (PDI) has steadily increased despite research attesting to the fact that African Americans struggle with isolation, loneliness, discrimination, and indifference (Cokley, 2000; Nettles, 1988).

Several factors impact African American students' performance and completion in college, whether they are in undergraduate or graduate programs. These factors include participation in campus organization and activities, integration with peers and faculty, campus culture and environment, and overall student satisfaction (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). Issues such as being in a hostile college environment, not having the support of faculty, or not being engaged with peers can result in withdrawal or self-doubt which could have a negative impact on the retention and progression rates for these students (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009). Strayhorn (2006) states that "Black first-generation college students' face unique challenges that negatively impact their achievement levels, adjustment, and persistence in college" (p. 102). These challenges included a delayed entry into college, the time taken to obtain a degree, taking remedial classes, and social integration. Ishiyama & Hopkins (2002) indicated that first-generation college students that were from low-income backgrounds are at a higher risk to not complete college unless strategies are created to promote academic and social integration to the institution. As previously stated, social and academic integration is more of a consequence for African American and/or first-generation graduate students because the literature shows that there is a direct correlation between graduate student connection to their program and their ability to finish their graduate studies (Barrington, 2004; Gasman et al., 2008; Golde, 2005; Johnson-Bailey et al., 2009).

First Generation Graduate Students

Statistics

For the purpose of this study, first-generation graduate students are individuals who are the first in their immediate family to attain a 4-year, undergraduate degree. Hoffer, Welch, Williams, Lisek, Hess, Lowe, and Guzman-Barron (2005), provided statistics in the *Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) Doctoral Recipients from United States Universities: Summary Report* on first-generation graduates who received doctorates, categorized by sex, race/ethnicity, citizenship, and broad field of study. Since 1963, the SED has included questions asking new doctorate recipients to report their fathers' and mothers' highest level of educational attainment. Responses are grouped into four categories: high school diploma or less, some college, earned baccalaureate, and advanced degree, including the master's, doctorate, or a professional degree. The data shows that 28% of recipients' fathers had earned a high school diploma or less, 13% of recipients had a father who had attended some college but had not attained a baccalaureate degree, 25% of the recipients indicated that their fathers had earned a baccalaureate degree, and 36% of the recipients indicated that their fathers held an advanced degree. For the mothers of these recipients, the percentages were 36%, 17%, 25%, and 21% respectively (Hoffer et al., 2005).

The report also documented a variation in parental education attainment by race/ethnicity. Asian doctorate recipients were more likely than members of other racial/ethnic categories to come from families in which one or both parents attained at least a baccalaureate degree. Specifically, African American, Latino, and Native American recipients' parents were less likely to have gone beyond high school. They were even less likely to have attained a baccalaureate or

advanced degree. Over the last 30 years, there has been a trend of parents of doctoral students being more educated. Specifically, the report stated,

In 1975, 44% of doctoral recipients reported that neither of their parents had attained an education beyond a high school diploma and less than one in five (19%) reported that either parent had an advanced degree. By 1990, the proportion of doctoral recipients whose highest parental educational attainment was a high school diploma or less and those whose highest parental educational attainment was an advanced degree had nearly equalized (33% and 31% respectively). By 2005, the proportions in the most and least educated groups had almost completely reversed; with 22% of doctorates reporting highest parental education of a high school diploma or less and 39% reporting at least one parent with an advanced degree. The proportions of doctorates reporting highest parental education of 'some college' has shown a gradual decrease (16% in 1975 to 13% in 2005). At the same time, the proportion indicating an earned baccalaureate degree as either parent's highest education has shown an increase of about the same magnitude (21% in 1975 to 25% in 2005) (Hoffer et al., 2005, p. 21-22).

Influences of Graduate Student Enrollment

In *Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cures of students' attrition*, Tinto (1993) proposed several areas of research and an agenda to address the lack of research on graduate student persistence. These four research areas included a longitudinal study of graduate student persistence, how institutional behavior may influence doctoral completion, contrasts of student experiences within different fields of study, and what influences their commitment and community have on graduate persistence (Tinto, 1993). Several dissertations have addressed first-generation graduate student research including Barrington (2004), Hall (2010), Hurley (2002), and McCall (2007). These studies included the overall experiences first-generation graduate students have at their institution; their influences to attend graduate school, graduate degree selections, and the perceived barriers to attend graduate school. Several themes emerged in these studies.

Barrington (2004) determined that first-generation college graduate students felt alone through their graduate studies. Family members were proud of their accomplishments but were unable to relate to their experiences. Hall (2010) determined that African American doctoral students chose to attend for-profit colleges and universities because these institutions had flexible admissions processes and no standardized exam requirement. Hurley (2002) concluded that first-generation student's primary factors for pursuing a doctoral degree was earning power and who had a goal of writing original work. McCall (2007) focused his study specifically on the educational background, socioeconomic status, and total undergraduate debt enrollment and completion of a graduate program. Several results emerged: undergraduate majors impacted the decision to pursue a graduate degree, first-generation students who enrolled in graduate school majored in education, first-generation students were less likely to enroll in graduate education if their educational career began at a two-year institution, and those students who attended a comprehensive institution increased their likelihood to graduate with an undergraduate degree and enroll in a graduate program.

Additional research by Ishiyama & Hopkins (2003); Mullin et al., (2003); Seburn et al., (2005); and Seay et al., (2008) discussed first-generation graduate students' preparation for graduate school, the effects of social background and academic achievement, and factors that might impede graduate degree attainment. Zhang (2005) completed a study on the effect of college quality and selection of major to graduate school enrollment. He found that students from high quality colleges are about 16% (private) and 18% (public) more likely to enroll in a graduate program within four to five years after receiving a baccalaureate degree. Other variables included in the study were academic performance, family income, first-generation graduates, age, and ethnicity. First-generation graduates had a 2.8% decrease in their likelihood to enroll in

a graduate school program. Results of this study concluded that being a first-generation college graduate, female, or a black student not only reduced the probability of enrolling in graduate programs, but also lowered the probability of enrolling in doctoral programs or attending a research university. Mullen, Goyette, and Soares (2003) determined that family background had the strongest influence on graduate enrollment. “Students of well-educated parents have higher educational expectations, which translate into a greater propensity to enroll in graduate programs” (p. 160).

Previous research concerning first-generation underrepresented graduate students has been conducted, comparing students in the Ronald E. McNair Scholars TRIO program to other peer graduate students (Seburn, Chan, & Kirshstein, 2005). The goal of the McNair Scholars program is to increase the number of doctoral degrees earned by underrepresented populations (Seburn, et al., 2005). Regulations by the U.S. Department of Education require that two-thirds of program participants be first-generation and low-income; the other one third would be from an underrepresented group in graduate education (Seburn et al., 2005). Data provided in the report, *A Profile of the Ronald E. McNair Post baccalaureate Achievement Program 1997-1998 through 2001-2002* (Seburn, Chan, & Kirshstein, 2005), gave an overview of first-generation graduate student persistence. The combination of low-income and first-generation students represented 70.4% of McNair participants. Of the 131 McNair students who completed the first year of graduate school, 76% persisted through the second year, compared with 95% national and 94% similar sample students (Seburn et al., 2005). By the end of the third year, 60% persisted, compared to 85% national and 84% similar samples, respectively (Seburn et al., 2005). This indicated that although McNair participants gained acceptance into graduate school at a higher level they persisted at lower rates once enrolled. This result is similar to that of first-generation

undergraduate students who persisted at lower rates than their second-generation peers (Terenzini et al., 2006).

Barriers

Several studies have focused on the lack of faculty mentors for African American graduate students (Brown et al., 2000; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001; Ellis, 1997). According to Walker, Hanley, and Wright (2001), “African-American students require successful persons with which they can identify in order to succeed academically” (p. 582). According to Cheatham and Phelps (1995), “Graduate students develop professional identities from a composite of professional models and individuals, both positive and negative” (p. 95). Brown et al. (2000) stated, “Mentoring programs exist to provide graduate students structured interactions with faculty and administrators geared toward increasing the probability of degree program completion and career success” (p. 110). Additional research indicated that students attributed their academic success to three primary factors: personal ambition, supportive family, and supportive faculty (Brown et al., 2000; Van Stone et al., 1994). Positive mentoring relationships among all graduate students, but particularly African American students, can enhance the likelihood of student success. Graduate mentoring programs are designed to provide close, supportive relationships and assist with student adjustment in terms of both academic and nonacademic aspects of graduate school (Brown et al., 2000). Therefore, it is recommended that faculty members increase the quality and frequency of interaction with African American graduate students.

Doctoral students from lower-income backgrounds tend to be less successful in graduate education (Seburn et al., 2005). The lack of financial resources is the most frequent reason for graduate school withdrawal and it is common knowledge that students from low-income

backgrounds usually have financial difficulties (Lovitts, 2001). After financial resources, the lack of social support is the next reason given for leaving doctoral programs (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). As stated by the previous research listed, the persistence and completion rates for undergraduate and graduate students are influenced by multiple factors including, students' grade point average, undergraduate and graduate institution attended, chosen major, financial resources and social support. For this reason, it is important to examine these and other factors to determine the influences of first-generation students and their desire to advance to, and achieve, a graduate degree.

Retention, Motivation, & Persistence

Prospero & Vohra-Gupta (2007) researched the motivation, integration, and academic achievement factors of first-generation college students. In her quantitative study she combined the Integrated Model of Student Retention and the Self-Determination Theory of Motivation to determine academic success factors among first-generation students compared to their second generation counterparts. In this study, it was determined that, "the association between the motivational dimensions (intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation) and integration dimensions (academic and social) differed between first-generation students and their second generation counterparts" (p. 972). Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) stated through their *Integrated Model of Student Retention (IMSR)*, that academic integration and social integration increased the likelihood of college retention. Cabrera et al., (1993) defined academic integration as a student's assimilation into the academic life of the institution. Examples of academic integration included faculty-student contact outside the classroom, good study habits by the student, and academic supportive services. The model defined social integration as a student's assimilation

into the social life of the institution. Examples of social integration included close friendships with other students and involvement in student activities or events.

Self-Determination Theory of Motivation (SDT) is comprised of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000). “intrinsic motivation is defined as being engaged in an activity for the satisfaction derived from participation, extrinsic motivation originates outside the individual and extends beyond the activity itself, and amotivation describes individuals who perceive their behavior as caused by forces out of their control, meaning they cannot reach their goals because of real barriers” (p. 966). Vohra-Gupta (2007) used multiple regression analysis as a method to find out if academic integration and intrinsic motivation had a strong correlation. The results revealed that motivational and integrative dimensions were significant predictors of academic achievement among first-generation students (Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Based on this study, recommendations to higher education professionals were to transform college environments to promote academic and social integration of first-generation students. By understanding first-generation students’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivations while systematically integrating academic and social factors as most important, this student population may become more academically successful which may increase overall retention and graduation rates (Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

King & Chepyator-Thomson (1996) researched the enrollment and persistence of African American graduate students. They documented that enrollment and degree attainment trends fell into three categories: institutional, environmental, and motivational.

Institutional factors are those related to the programs and policies of higher education institutions (i.e. admissions requirements, financial aid, and academic support), environmental factors refer to outside forces that serve to influence enrollment decisions and degree attainment (i.e. campus climate, mentors, family support), and motivational

factors include attitudes, beliefs, and values which prompt individuals to achieve goals.
(p. 2)

This study determined that (a) most participants were extrinsically motivated to enroll in a doctoral program because they wanted to advance professionally; (b) several of the participants were encouraged to seek the doctoral degree through environmental factors such as a family member or mentor; (c) other participants, though unprepared for graduate level work, were intrinsically motivated to meet the academic challenges of doctoral study, (d) and the most relevant institutional factors to assist with persistence were financial aid and academic support services (King & Chepyator-Thomson, 1996).

Chapter Summary

Graduate education in the U.S. is important to the fields of technology, science, engineering, and math along with other programs that focus on research and development. There are ten major categories in which graduate programs are offered including: biological sciences, business, education, engineering, health sciences, humanities and arts, physical sciences, public administration, and social sciences. Graduate school enrollment of first-generation African American students has steadily increased over the last 20 years. There are several studies that explore the factors of persistence, motivation, and influences for first-generation students as well as African American students but only a few have combined these two factors. These studies highlight the attrition, success, and overall experiences for this student group (Morehouse & Dawkins, 2006; Perna, 2004; Walpole, 2008).

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The methods used to complete the study of first-generation African American graduate students are presented in this chapter. The purpose for conducting the study was to examine factors that influenced first-generation African American students to pursue a graduate degree. The chapter contains descriptions of the research design and data collection process, the participants, the case study institution, and analysis of the data.

Research Design and Data Collection

In an effort to investigate graduate students' motivating factors or influences for pursuing a doctoral degree, a narrative study was conducted as the methodology best suited for collecting and telling stories about people's lives (Creswell, 2008). Creswell wrote that qualitative research emphasizes an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon. Therefore, the narrative research design was selected to write and record the overall experiences of the study participants. The aim was to describe their stories, analyzing them for key elements (Creswell, 2008). The intent of the research was to gather data from the perspectives of research participants in an effort to understand their graduate school persistence and give meaning to their experiences. These shared experiences will be explored from the perspective of first-generation African American graduate students who attended a predominately white institution and the influences that led to their pursuit of a doctoral degree. As defined in Chapter I, first-generation graduate students are those individuals who have enrolled in a graduate program and both parents have less than a baccalaureate degree, meaning they may have had some schooling or even attained an associates' degree. African American is a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

Data Collection Process

To gain access to the participants and the site, the project outline was forwarded to the University of Arkansas' Institutional Review Board. Once approval was received, the University of Arkansas Graduate School was contacted to obtain a list of graduate students working toward their doctoral degree who identified as African American. A call to participants' letter was drafted and emailed describing the proposed study and why they were solicited (Appendix A). Once responses had been received from interested parties, a follow up email was sent to answer participants' questions and schedule their interview. Of the 2010-2011 underrepresented graduate students attending the University of Arkansas, 263 were African-American. Of the 263 graduate students listed, 66 were doctoral students. Of the 66 doctoral students, 9 were interviewed. Creswell (2008) states that in qualitative research only a few individuals should be studied. "The overall ability of a researcher to provide an in depth picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual or site" (p. 217). The researcher must also provide a report of each individual meaning a large number of cases could result in superficial perspectives (Creswell, 2008).

The interview questions involved specific open-ended questions intended to obtain participants' experiences at their undergraduate institutions as well as their current experiences relating to the influences or motivators to obtain a doctoral degree (Appendix D). Participants completed a short questionnaire that was used to collect demographic and background information. (Appendix C). Participants also signed a consent form acknowledging their understanding of the study's purpose and process (Appendix B). Permission for the study was obtained through submission of the *Institutional Review Board Protocol Form* to the University of Arkansas Human Subjects Review Board.

This study began by piloting the interview questions with current first generation African American doctoral students. The researcher interviewed five students for the pilot to determine if the questions asked were being interpreted correctly and if they covered the important issues addressed in previous literature. Minor changes were made to the interview questions that were used in the study to address researchers' concerns. These changes included limiting the amount of questions asked, restructuring the questions to inquire about participant's pursuit of a doctoral degree versus persistence in a doctoral degree program and streamlining the questions to focus on participants anticipated experiences while obtaining their doctorate. The 12 interview questions examined the academic and social experiences of first-generation African American graduate students and the influences that assisted them in their pursuit of a doctoral degree. These questions corresponded to the primary research questions.

Identification of Participants and Research Setting

Purposeful sampling was done to select people who were working toward a doctoral degree, were first-generation college students, and identified as African-American. Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) argued that most qualitative research employs the use of homogenous purposeful sampling. The participants were selected from the case study institution - University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. The researcher requested the name, email address, and class status of all African American graduate students from the Graduate School at the case study institution. From this list, a call to participants' letter was sent requesting the participation of anyone who met the research criteria. The selected sample was considered homogenous because the participants possessed similar traits: first-generation students, of African American descent, had completed their baccalaureate degree, and were enrolled in a doctoral program (Creswell, 2008). The range of participants the researcher sought to obtain was 8-10. The rationale for choosing this number

range, according to Boyd (2001), is that 2 to 10 participants in qualitative research are sufficient to reach saturation. Creswell (2008) agrees by recommending that researchers who use qualitative research designs use no more than 10 people to obtain diverse perspectives. The sample included 9 participants.

The interviews took place at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, the location at which each participant is working toward or had completed their degree. The interviews were informal to foster a comfortable and conversational atmosphere. Therefore, the interviews took place in a location, on campus, selected and agreed to by the participant and researcher. The interview included a 30-60-minute audio-taped face-to-face interview. Prior to the interview, each participant was emailed the consent form (Appendix B) and demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) to have signed and completed before arrival. The researcher encouraged each participant to provide personal reflections during the interview. The questions focused on undergraduate experiences, mentors and support systems, and personal motivators leading to pursuit of a doctoral degree. Additional questions asked what services were provided to them as graduate students, which of those services were of value to them in their success, and what were their challenges faced while working toward the degree (see Appendix D).

Throughout the research process, the researcher kept a journal documenting what was observed, heard, and thought throughout the course of this process. More specifically, the researcher focused on: participants' memories; comparing participants' shared experiences; noting the commonalities with personal experience as a first-generation graduate student; noting commonalities as an African American student and referencing new research that emerged throughout the process. The researcher also addressed her personal experiences, preconceived assumptions, hunches, and ideas so as not to influence the participants. The researcher did this by

responding to the questions prior to interviews taking place. This reflective process assisted the researcher when interpreting or analyzing the data so as not to make preconceived judgments of the participants prior to their interview.

Case Study Institution

For the purpose of the study Ph.D. and Ed.D. candidates at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville were included in the data collection. The University of Arkansas was founded as a land grant college and state university in 1871, and has developed nine schools and colleges, more than 900 faculty members and over 20,000 students. The university houses more than 200 programs and offers 87 bachelor's degrees in 78 fields of study. In addition, the University offers a wide range of graduate degrees, including 75 Masters, 3 Educational Specialist, 5 Doctor of Education, 38 Doctor of Philosophy, and 12 graduate certificate programs. These professional degrees include the arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences; agricultural, food and life sciences; architecture; business; education; engineering; human environmental sciences; and law (University of Arkansas Graduate Catalog, 2010-11). In its 2008 edition, the *U.S. News and World Report* ranked the University of Arkansas 134th among the top tier of institutions of higher education. As of January 2011, the University of Arkansas was elevated to the highest classification (RU/VH) among U.S. Universities and Colleges (Diamond & Voorhies, 2011). The new category is defined as a doctoral-granting, research university with very high levels of research activity. This elevation was the result of sustained increases in the number and diversity of doctoral degrees awarded and in research grants and contracts received (Diamond & Voorhies, 2011). As of 2011 the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board approved the following doctoral degree programs to be conferred at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville.

Table 3

Doctoral Degree Programs Offered at the University of Arkansas - Fayetteville (2011)

Advanced Degree Offered	Degree Programs
Ed.D.	*Educational Leadership; Higher Education; *Workforce Development Education; Recreation and Sport Management; Education Statistics & Research Methods
Ph.D.	Animal Science; Poultry Science; Food Science; Crop, Soil, & Environmental Sciences; Computer Science; Curriculum & Instruction; Education Policy; Counselor Education; Engineering (Biological, Chemical, Civil, Computer, Electrical, Industrial & Mechanical); Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies; English; Biology; Plant Science; Cell & Molecular Biology; Entomology; Mathematics; Kinesiology; Philosophy; Space & Planetary Sciences; Chemistry; Environmental Dynamics; Physics; Microelectronics-Photonics; Psychology; Public Policy; Anthropology; Economics; Rehabilitation; Health Science; *Business Administration; History
J. D.	Law

(* Designates on-line graduate program)

Graduate Students

According to data from the 2009 Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board report, from 2005 to 2009 there was a 28.8% increase in graduate enrollment in the state of Arkansas. Graduate enrollment by race/ethnicity in the state also increased during this 5 year period. In 2005, 33,524 students from ethnic backgrounds enrolled in graduate school while in 2009 enrollment numbers increased to 43,600. For African American students specifically, enrollment

numbers increased from 23,395 to 26,350 respectively. The total graduate enrollment for fall 2009 in all sectors of Arkansas higher education (public universities, public colleges, as well as independent colleges and universities) was 16,532. At the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, there was a 12.7% increase in graduate student enrollment. Of that 12.7%, 8% were African American. Below is a table that indicates the number of African American graduate student enrollment for a two year period. The researcher only highlights the past two years because of the new Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) race/ethnicity indicators. These indicators allow people to document whether they are bi-racial, African American, Hispanic, or Asian/Pacific Islander. These new classifications went into effect officially October 2007 by the U.S. Department of Education Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data (Bell, 2010B). The institution must report any new students or staff using the new categories for both Fall enrollment and Human Resources reporting in the 2010-11 IPEDS data collection (Bell, 2010A). This means that any student or staff new to the institution as of Fall 2010 must be asked to identify their race and ethnicity using the new 2-part question and the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville began using the new guidelines in the Fall of 2009. Table 4 provides enrollment data for African American graduate students who utilized the new self-identifying category “Black”.

Table 4

University of Arkansas Fayetteville African American “Black” Graduate Student Enrollment 2009 & 2010

Age Range	Fall 2009			Fall 2010		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
20-21	0	1	1	0	0	0
22-24	22	22	44	18	30	48
25-29	19	33	52	30	16	46
30-34	15	30	45	20	25	45
35-39	16	29	45	16	29	45
40-49	19	28	47	20	37	57
50-64	6	15	21	6	16	22
Total			255			263

Information Retrieved from University of Arkansas Institutional Research Website

Researcher Bias

As cited in Creswell (2008), “The researcher should be self-reflective about his or her role in the research, how he or she is interpreting the findings, and his or her personal and political history that shapes his or her interpretation” (Creswell, 2007 p. 266). The researcher brought a certain bias to the study considering she is a first-generation African American graduate student. The researcher was able to attend private schooling because her single mother worked two jobs to be able to afford it. The researcher did well academically in high school, and was afforded the opportunity to attend college because of a financial aid package that paid for 80% of the tuition cost. Though the undergraduate college experience was a good one, there was no desire to obtain a graduate degree upon completion of the baccalaureate. The researcher worked six years before realizing that the career path selected was not the correct option. Understanding that no other options existed for her to change careers without experience or a

diploma, she decided to return to school. The researcher selected a different discipline of study in hopes of working in a field better suited for her personality and career interest. Upon obtaining a Master's degree in education she began working in the field of higher education in the state of New York.

Currently the researcher works with freshman engineering students on academic and social transition issues with the goal of helping them meet their academic, career, and personal aspirations. While working in this area, the researcher completed all coursework toward a doctorate in education and passed comprehensive exams. The decision to pursue a doctorate was influenced by the researcher's desire to have additional career opportunities in the field of higher education as well as the encouragement of mentors in the field, and supportive family members. The motivation for this study involves having an interest in the increased enrollment of first-generation African American graduate students. The researcher observed an increased interest from this student population, yet current research does not reflect this change. As an African American who experienced some of the circumstances the research revealed impactful for this group, i.e., the need for financial assistance, low family support, and attending a predominately white institution (PWI) and not receiving faculty encouragement, the researcher could have a certain bias that may shape her views and understanding of the data collected.

Validation of Data

In order to validate the study, triangulation of the data occurred. "Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in the descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2008 p. 266). This will assist the researcher with curtailing her personal bias and assist in accuracy because the information will be drawn from a variety of sources (Creswell, 2008). For the study, the

researcher will use transcripts from interviews, notes taken during each interview, member checking, and documents study participants were asked to provide, for example, their resume/C.V., and demographics questionnaire form.

A transcriber was hired by the researcher. Once the transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher, the participants received a copy for their review. Each person was asked to look for accuracy of their responses and was given the opportunity to convey any details that were missed during the interview. Notes from the interviews were used to highlight the participants' body language, common responses heard throughout the interview process, and information provided while the audio-tape was turned off. These notes, along with the interview transcriptions identified common themes. Each participant was asked to provide a copy of their CV/resume. Combined with the demographics worksheet, this information also identified common interests, career paths, and organizational affiliations of the study participants.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis will consist of developing a general sense of the data, and then coding description and themes about the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2004, p. 244). Transcripts, interview notes, and member checking from the individual interviews and those of the researcher served as the primary data source for the study. Member checking is the process through which the researcher asks participants to check the accuracy of the responses from the interview (Creswell, 2008). Additionally, research questions and previous literature on influences of first-generation and/or African American students' college persistence were used to identify the key points and themes. Once the interviews were transcribed they were coded for common themes. Creswell (2008) supports this process stating that major themes arise through extensive discussions and this approach will provide rich details to support the emerging themes.

Therefore, the researcher grouped the responses by the interview questions asked, compared them to recurring responses, and then related those responses to the primary research questions.

The research questions used in the study identified factors related to influences and motivators for first-generation African American graduate students. Below are the research questions as well as the specific interview questions that are related.

1. What factors did first-generation African-American graduate students perceive to be the primary motivators for pursuit of a doctoral degree?

Data for this question came from interview questions 1, 2, 3, 7, and 11 (Appendix D).

Participants were asked why they decided to attend graduate school. Questions in this area addressed the participants' feelings on attending graduate school, who/m encouraged or helped them to decide, their perceived motivators and intent for enrolling into a doctoral level program, and any barriers identified.

2. How did students negotiate the transition to graduate school?

Data for this question came from interview questions 4, 5, and 6, (Appendix D). The questions in this area addressed the undergraduate experiences of the study participants. Were there people who influenced their decision to enroll, how they came to select their graduate school, and in what activities were they were involved?

3. What were first-generation African American students' academic and social expectations for graduate school compared to their actual experiences?

Data for this question came from interview questions 8, 9, 10, and 12 (Appendix D). Participants were asked to describe their educational and social experiences at their doctoral institution. The questions coincided with the influences of goal attainment, social and academic involvement, and support received. An alignment of expectations and actual experience is provided.

4. Are there differences in the pursuit of graduate education based on first-generation African American graduate students' backgrounds and traits?

Data for this question came from interview questions 1, 2, 3, 11, their resume and/or CV, and the demographics worksheet (Appendix C & D). This section focused on prior schooling, choice of major, overall challenges and pursuit factors. Demographic information such as age, marital status, family dynamic, and organization affiliations were described.

Chapter Summary

The current chapter provides a summary of the research methods, data collection, instrument, and analysis of data used in the research study. The participants consisted of first-generation African American graduate students from the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. Guided questions were used in each individual interview. The researcher collected the data using an audio-recorder, note-taking during each interview, and personal journaling throughout the process. Each interview was transcribed and validated through a member checking process. Upon receiving verification from each participant, the data was analyzed using the thematic approach described in Creswell (2008).

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Described in this chapter are the major findings from the study. To identify these findings data was transcribed, coded for common themes, and then commonalities were identified from the participant's experiences. A summary of the interviews has been provided, data described, and an in-depth analysis of the data provided.

Summary of the Study

The purpose for conducting this study was to examine the factors that motivated African-American first-generation students to pursue doctoral education at a four-year public university. Previous research surrounding graduate students explored the factors of persistence, motivation and influences. Only a few of these studies researched first-generation students self-identified as African-American. The research that focused on this student group highlighted their attrition and overall graduate experiences (Morehouse & Dawkins, 2006; Perna, 2004; Walpole, 2008). Little research has focused on first-generation student achievement and success factors, the influence academic or non-academic factors have on first-generation graduate student motivation, the experiences impacting first-generation underrepresented populations, or their motivating factors to attend graduate school (Hurley, 2002). In addition, little research exists that explored how factors might vary by ethnicity. With the increasing enrollment of first-generation graduate students, it is important to gain a better understanding of the factors and influences that impact first-generation students' matriculation to graduate school. Further research is needed and relevant therefore, the current study specifically focused on the motivation factors in the pursuit of a doctoral degree.

Data for the study were collected through an interview process with nine first-generation, African American doctoral students attending the University of Arkansas- Fayetteville. The narrative research design was used to describe the story of each participant in relation to the educational experiences that led them to pursue a doctoral degree. The design was selected so that the researcher could write and record their experiences, gathering their perspectives, and analyze the key elements that emerged. After receiving approval from the Institution Review Board, a call to participants' letter was drafted and emailed describing the study. Of the 66 African American doctoral students attending the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, 10 responded, and of these, nine were interviewed.

Introduction of Participants

Each participant shared their individual life story with tremendous ease. As they shared their own unique experiences they were open, honest, and willing to provide any information needed to help with the success of the study.

Alicia

Alicia is married with two children, and she is in her late thirties. She is originally from Chicago, Illinois. She obtained her bachelor's and master's degree from a university in Illinois with a focus in political science and college student personnel, respectively. She is a full-time employee and part-time student. She is in her 8th year as a doctoral student in an interdisciplinary program with the plan to graduate in May 2012.

Carl

Carl is married with two children, and in his late thirties. He is originally from rural Western Kentucky. He earned his bachelor's degree in administration for justice, and then enlisted in the military. Upon completion of his military service, he earned his master's degree in workforce development. He works full-time while working toward his doctoral degree, and is in his third year as a doctoral student in an education specialization program with a plan to graduate in December 2011.

Josh

Josh is in his mid-20's and is originally from a small rural town in southern, Arkansas. He is married with no children and earned his bachelor's and master's degree in Journalism and completed his doctoral degree in a education specialization program in May 2011. He began his program in the Fall of 2009, attending full-time while working part-time as a graduate assistant.

Larry

Larry is married with 6 children and he is in his late-20's. He is originally from eastern Texas and graduated with his bachelor's and two master's degrees from a university in Massachusetts. His academic disciplines were economics, sports management, and business respectively. He is employed full-time while working on his doctorate on a part-time basis and is in his third year in an education specialization program. He anticipates graduating in May 2012.

Lisa

Lisa received her bachelor's degree in marketing in finance at a university in Nebraska. She obtained her master's degree in higher education at the University of Arkansas and is currently a doctoral student in an education specialization program. She is in her eighth year of

part-time study and anticipates graduating in May 2012. She is married with one child, and in her mid-30's.

Ray

Ray, originally from Florida, is a single father in his late-30's. He earned his bachelor's degree in criminal justice and his master's degree in public administration. He graduated from the University of Arkansas May 2011 with his doctorate in an interdisciplinary program, which he earned over a four-year period as a full-time student on a doctoral fellowship.

Robert

Robert is married has no children and is in his early-30's. He graduated with his bachelor's degree in health and physical education from a university in the University of Arkansas system. He earned his master's degree in higher education from the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville and is currently a doctoral student in an education specialization program. He is originally from a small rural Arkansas town and plans to graduate from his program in December 2011.

Sarah

Sarah is from West Memphis, Arkansas, is married with no children, and has earned two bachelor's degrees, one in computer information systems and one in transportation and logistics, both from the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. Her master's degree is in human resource management from Webster University. She is currently in her second year in an education specialization doctoral program and plans to graduate May 2012.

Steve

Steve is married, has 6 children, and is in his late-40's. He is originally from Ohio and graduated with a bachelor's degree in finance from a public university in Ohio. He enlisted in the

military and served as an officer for two terms. Twenty years later he earned his MBA. He was recently accepted into an education specialization doctoral program at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, and began taking classes in Fall 2011. He anticipates graduating in May 2014.

Each of these participants were the first in their immediate families (i.e. parents and siblings) to attend college, many were the first in their extended family to obtain a master’s degree, and all of them are the first to enroll and potentially earn or have earned a doctorate. Shown below is a table that summarizes the participant’s demographics.

Table 5

Study Participant’s Demographics

Name	Age	Male/ Female	Marital Status	# of Children	Full/ Part-time Student	Doctoral Program
Alicia	37	F	M	2	Part-time	Interdisciplinary
Carl	36	M	M	2	Part-time	Education Specialization I
Josh	26	M	M	0	Full-time	Education Specialization II
Larry	28	M	M	3	Part-time	Education Specialization II
Lisa	33	F	M	1	Part-time	Education Specialization I
Ray	37	M	S	1	Full-time	Interdisciplinary
Robert	30	M	M	0	Part-time	Education Specialization I

(Tables continues)

Table 5, Continued.

Study Participant's Demographics

Name	Age	Male/ Female	Marital Status	# of Children	Full/ Part-time Student	Doctoral Program
Sarah	30	F	S	0	Part-time	Education Specialization I
Steve	49	M	M	6	Part-time	Education Specialization II

Analysis of Data

After contacting participants who expressed an interest in participating in the study and scheduling the interview, each received a written consent form (Appendix B) and demographic questionnaire (Appendix C), to be completed and turned in on the date of their interview. They were also asked to bring a copy of their resume that would be used to find common interests, similar career paths, or any additional data that could be applied to the study. At the beginning of each interview, participants were again told the purpose of the study, were given the opportunity to ask any questions they might have had, and were reminded that participation was completely voluntary. The consent form, demographic questionnaire, and resume/CV were collected. Participants were also reminded that the interviews would be transcribed and quotations could potentially be included but their identities would remain confidential. Each interview was audiotaped. The interviews ranged from 25 minutes to a little over an hour. All of the meeting locations were in private rooms determined between the researcher and participant. Table 6 highlights the date, location, and length of time of each interview.

Table 6

Interview setting and length

Name	Interview Date	Interview location	Interview Time
Alicia	May 23, 2011	Alicia's office	38:09 minutes
Carl	May 18, 2011	Carl's office	40:10 minutes
Josh	May 24, 2011	Multicultural Center	39:59 minutes
Larry	May 20, 2011	Engineering Hall	24:39 minutes
Lisa	June 1, 2011	Engineering Hall	56:11 minutes
Ray	May 18, 2011	Engineering Hall	25:01 minutes
Robert	May 25, 2011	Robert's office	29:31 minutes
Sarah	June 1, 2011	St. James MBC	29:04 minutes
Steve	May 20, 2011	Ella's private room	61:15 minutes

The focus of the study was to be based on the participants' experiences, and it was important to allow the interviews to flow in a manner that allowed for the most spontaneous and non-directive discussion. Therefore, 12 open-ended questions were developed to summarize participants' experience prior to and during the pursuit of their doctoral degree programs. Based on the participant's responses, in some cases additional questions were asked or statements were made that clarified the participant's responses and encouraged elaboration. The goal of the interview was to allow the participants to share experiences without interjection from or assumptions made by the researcher. At the conclusion of the interview, each individual was

thanked for his or her participation and was given a tentative time frame for when they would receive a transcript of the interview for review.

The participants were asked during the interview to provide detailed descriptions of their educational experiences prior to their enrollment to graduate school, as well as the experiences that took place after their programs began. Their responses were then studied for similarities and common themes. First, the notes taken during the interviews were reviewed and supplemental themes were documented. Second, the transcribed interviews were coded to confirm and add to the themes that emerged from the researcher’s notes. Next, the analysis moved from supplemental themes to more specific themes by examining further the participant’s responses and making correlations to their shared experiences. The themes are described and categorized within the main interview questions. Table 7 provides a summary of the themes identified from the external resources used.

Table 7

Verification of Themes by External Source

Theme	Resume	Demographic Survey	Interview Notes
Career Advancement	x		x
Educational Advancement	x	x	x
Familial/Financial Stability		x	x
Military Influence	x		x
Athletic Influence	x		x

(Table continues)

Table 7, continued.

Verification of Themes by External Source

Theme	Resume	Demographic Survey	Interview Notes
Fraternity/Sorority Influence	x		x
Faith	x		x

The themes that emerged from the review of the researcher’s interview notes and the demographic questionnaire and resume from the participants are summarized by the seven themes listed above. By coding these external resources (i.e. resumes, demographic surveys, and interview notes) and identifying their commonalities, the researcher then solidified the themes that emerged from the 12 interview questions. These themes are described in detail below.

Question 1: Why did you decide to attend graduate school to obtain a doctoral degree?

Six out of nine participants stated that the reason they decided to attend graduate school to obtain a doctoral degree was for career mobility.

Larry: I wanted to have all my bases covered as far as the educational level is concerned so I could have the ability to move upward on a collegiate level.

Ray: I wanted to gain knowledge in my area of expertise and enhance my earning potential.

Sarah further confirmed this mode of thinking by stating: To further diversify myself it would be beneficial to have a doctorate, too. Obtaining a degree in [education specialization program] would allow me to be more marketable and help make my long-term career aspirations possible.

The other study participants’ responses entailed gaining an appreciation and hunger for education as they were pursuing their degree, fulfilling a dream, and establishing credibility in their fields

of study. The main theme was the desire for upward mobility in terms of future career aspirations, and each also had the desire to serve as a positive role model to family members and other African Americans interested in furthering their education.

Question 2: What role did your undergraduate/graduate experience play in your decision to pursue a doctoral degree?

The most common response for this question was that participants' undergraduate and/or graduate college experiences essentially helped them to determine their future career path. The words used to describe their experiences were "guided" and "encouraged."

Lisa: Because of my student involvement and leadership on campus people encouraged me to pursue more higher education.

Robert: Getting my master's degree in higher education guided me in determining what I wanted to do so I knew eventually I would go back and get my doctorate.

Steve mentioned that his undergraduate and graduate programs were "stepping stones" to where he is now. "All the various experiences I've had have led to my decision to pursue this doctorate." Alicia, Carl, and Larry's responses indicated that their previous educational experiences did not impact their decisions at all. Instead it was their previous work experience or their realization that to further their career aspirations a doctoral degree was necessary.

Alicia: My master's degree is in higher education and once I began my graduate assistantship I really liked working with students. So I think what it did was it gave me the desire to want to progress in student affairs.

Whether it was educational or professional experiences that guided the decision, the participants' main objective for wanting to pursue a doctoral degree was to be in a good position for career movement.

Question 3: Whom or what influenced, guided, and supported your decision?

The overwhelming response to the question of who influenced the participant's decision to pursue a doctoral degree was family (mothers and spouses), mentors (advisors and previous faculty members), and colleagues.

Carl: Everybody from my wife to my mother. I've even reached out to an old academic counselor who at the time had achieved his doctoral degree and I reached out to him to ask him for support.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the spiritual influence that played a role in decision making. Lisa shared an in-depth story about her relationship with God and how much of an influence her spirituality had in all decisions she made for her life. She also talked about the relationship she has with her sister and the importance of their family dynamic.

Lisa: I pray about a lot of things and I discuss major decisions with my sister. When I talked to my sister about me pursuing my doctoral degree she was excited and said she even had a dream about it. In my family that is a very prophetic sign.

Steve is also very spiritual. His immediate response when asked this question was "God." He felt his support system, guidance, and decision making all came from God.

Steve: Keep in mind that it has been 20 years between my bachelor's degree and my master's and though I realized I needed my master's degree it was Him that finally opened the door, and now it's been almost 7 years since my master's degree to now going into my doctoral degree.

Steve also talked about the people God placed in his life once he and his wife moved here from Ohio. He joined a local church in the Fayetteville area, became a Deacon, and began connecting with individuals who worked at the University of Arkansas and encouraged him to apply to the program. Because of these relationships, doors began to open that would allow him to pursue a doctoral degree.

Steve: I wasn't even looking for a job at the University of Arkansas and one day it just happened, within a day I had a job and through this avenue it allowed me the financial resources to work toward the doctorate. God has made it possible and has carried me through very challenging things in my life. I don't know how my wife and I are going to balance work full-time, school part-time, along with everything else life brings but through God all things are possible.

Question 4: What programs or services at this institution supported the transition to your doctoral program?

There were no programs or services that supported the transition of these doctoral students. Each participant was able to discuss a program or service they were aware of within their graduate program, i.e. quality writing center, multicultural center, and center for educational access; however, there was a distinction among the full-time graduate students and part-time graduate students. Most part-time students did not utilize these services or if they did it was on a limited basis. Each participant mentioned some form of service, primarily financial assistance, that was beneficial to their pursuit and overall attendance, yet this was not recognized as a service. Five of the nine participants are employees of the University of Arkansas. As employees they were eligible for the tuition waiver program that allows any full-time employee to receive a 90% discount for themselves and a 50% discount for their spouse or dependent on any university class. Alicia, Carl, Larry, Robert, and Steve all mentioned the tuition waiver program as a benefit to the pursuit of their doctoral programs but not necessarily as the main motivator to pursue the degree.

Carl: I'm on a college campus and I know that the tuition is a little cheaper than normal so why not go ahead and further my education? I'm working on a college campus and I want to move up. I guess it ultimately was personal goals and personal drive that was the main reason.

Robert: What supported me in my transition? I would say being a full-time employee you know the tuition <laughing> the tuition waiver is huge for employees. You only have to pay 10% the university pays 90% so that was huge. I was like while I'm here I do have plans of being a university president and why not go ahead and get that degree and just having that incentive was huge. So I think that's a great program that the university has.

Josh and Ray received a graduate assistantship and doctoral fellowship respectively. Ray noted that a friend told him about an [interdisciplinary] program at the University of Arkansas which led him to apply, and therefore, he was not aware of any of the programs or services that existed before attending. His main goal was to find the financial resources needed to pay for his doctorate. When asked why he selected the University of Arkansas he replied:

Ray: Well one thing, they had the money, fellowship dollars to tell the truth. Because I knew I couldn't necessarily pursue a doctoral degree if I did not have the resources to do so.

Lisa and Sarah worked at corporations in the Northwest Arkansas area but they were both graduates of the university. They knew which major they wanted to pursue for their doctorate because of previous relationships and connections with faculty and staff, along with positive experiences they had when they attended. Lisa was able to obtain a fellowship through one of those relationships.

Lisa: My mentor was the director of graduate recruitment and she encouraged me to apply for the Lever Fellowship. At the time I was working full-time on campus and receiving a discount on my tuition and didn't think I could qualify for any fellowships or scholarships because I wasn't a need-based student but I got the fellowship. Knowing that the office of recruitment for the graduate school was available, having people that I knew who would give me information on when things were coming up and saying, "hey you need to apply" helped me stay engaged, stay involved without disconnecting.

Question 5: In what way was the sense of connectedness with other faculty, students, and staff on campus to assist you in your decision?

Six out of the nine participants indicated that they each had established connections with faculty, staff, and students prior to beginning their doctoral experiences. Four of the nine obtained either their bachelor's degree, master's degree, or both from the University of Arkansas and were familiar with the campus climate, programs and services, and they had mentors on campus encouraging them to apply to a doctoral program.

Sarah: Just personally knowing some of the students that had or that were taking the steps to obtain the same degree, [education specialization] education, or that had even attended school here to get their doctorate, they kind of influenced me definitely.

Josh: I think being able to have connections, strong connections with, you know, I would say multiple faculty members in the university you plan to attend is a very, very strong and critical factor in your deciding to pursue a doctoral degree. These individuals believed in me and encouraged me and sometimes when I found it hard to find the confidence needed, their positive attitude allowed me to believe I could actually do this.

As indicated earlier, five of the nine participants were full-time employees at the University of Arkansas. Their responses were similar in that they had established relationships with colleagues and other professionals who had already obtained their doctorate or were working toward the degree. In a few situations, supervisors encouraged and supported them in their decisions. These connections helped in the participant's comfortability to pursue a doctoral degree knowing that they had access to individuals who served as resources. Robert's story included references to several faculty and staff members on campus that he felt served in the role of mentor and role model. One person in particular met with him monthly to discuss his career aspirations while he was working toward his master's degree.

Robert: I think when I first got here in the graduate school, she took the time to get to know me and we used to have one-on-ones every semester and we talked about my goals to become a college president. She made it very clear that if I wanted to be president to get to that next level I would have to have a doctorate.

Alicia had worked at the university for two years prior to thinking about applying for a doctoral degree. Several individuals she worked with felt she embodied the skill set needed to progress in the field of higher education and encouraged her to think about earning a terminal degree.

Alicia: I think those individuals that pushed me to start down the path of a terminal degree were continuously asking the question, when are you going to do this? You have the skill set to move up. You have the vision to move up. You need to do this.

Alicia also felt that these individuals saw something in her that she did not necessarily see in herself. She indicated that she would have eventually gravitated toward pursuing the degree because of the example she wanted to set for her sons.

Alicia: It's not that I wouldn't have went down the path of a terminal degree but having the boys I think, you know, for them to be raised in a household where education is important and where they have parents that have progressed to the level of having terminal degrees or have gone beyond just an undergraduate education is really important.

There was only one participant who had no ties to the university prior to enrollment in his doctoral program.

Ray: I only spoke to the individuals who assisted me with my application process. There wasn't anything specific or in depth about the individuals on this campus that encouraged me to come or that helped me get here.

Question 6: Share with me one or two challenges you faced in pursuing this degree.

The challenges the participants faced ranged from time management, lack of preparedness, confidence, lack of guidance from advisors, and experiencing health issues.

However, the most commonly mentioned were managing their families, work and school obligations, and the ability to write from a scholarly perspective. Larry, Sarah, and Steve provided stories about their family and work dynamic and the stress it caused them while working toward their degree. Larry and Steve were the two participants who are married with 6 children and working full-time so they could provide for their individual families.

Larry: Time management is my biggest challenge especially with my job, as much as we have to do and the many hours we put in. Being a young married man with lots of children, all girls, you reach burn-out quickly. So sometimes I've had to actually take vacation days in order to be able to go to class to keep moving on with the program.

Steve was fearful of how he and his wife would manage all their responsibilities while in school. His wife is a master's student in the workforce development program at the University of Arkansas and also works full-time.

Steve: The number one challenge is work-life balance. With my wife working full time, in school part-time when she gets home she's got to study because she's got to maintain her grades. And then trying to etch in some time with our kids, time with each other along with the responsibilities we have within our community. Whoo! Now I'm working and going to school. I mean our challenges is to ensure that our daughters do not feel slighted and that their development, that their education, does not suffer.

Though Sarah's family life was completely different from that of Larry and Steve (single female with no children) her job responsibilities and office dynamic were a challenge. Her supervisor hindered her from taking the personal time allotted to her (vacation days or lunch time) to do homework or research by giving her extra work or asking her to change her regular work hours to meet a deadline.

Sarah: I will be honest, at one point I was thinking about taking a break from it (school) just because things at work were getting kind of crazy for me and it was really stressful and I didn't really think

that I could handle it just because of the stress that was involved in me taking my lunch hour to do homework. In me leaving work some days to go to the library and make sure that I could do what I needed to do.

Sarah was asked to change her work schedule to match everyone else in her department (8 a.m.-5 p.m.) about a year ago, when for the previous four years she had worked from 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. She asked for this schedule so she could leave to meet with professors or classmates if necessary. Though this time frame would not have posed a problem while she was taking courses (her classes were primarily offered online), she was in the proposal stage of her doctoral program and needed to meet with her advisor at a reasonable time. She felt the main reason she was denied her request was because she is the youngest person in her department, the only African-American, and the only person who would earn a doctoral degree.

Sarah: I am the only minority, female, and African American in my office. I would also say that I'm probably the most educated person in my office and in some situations I kind of feel that has maybe caused tension for me at work.

Josh, Lisa, and Robert all talked about their challenges of writing, research, and feeling as though they did not have the skills to get through the dissertation phase of their degree programs. Having a journalism degree did not curtail Josh's fears and he felt that writing from a scholarly perspective would be difficult.

Josh: But I think a significant challenge was like many situations, the writing piece. I think writing, it can be a very tough thing for many people when you are making that transition from bachelor's to master's and even master's to the doctoral process. So I think trying to consistently develop as a person that can write extremely well, write scholarly, and be able to write to the point where it's understood by the masses is something one would consistently try to juggle with and try to manage as a person with a doctoral degree.

Lisa felt that had she been given the advice to have a general idea of what she might want to research when beginning her program, she could have written on and researched that topic throughout her program. She also expressed that she may have completed her program much earlier had she not had communication misunderstandings, such as selecting a topic, between her and her dissertation committee.

Lisa: I make sure to tell anybody considering a doctoral program to get a general idea of what you want to do when you start the program because then every assignment, every paper, every statistics class that you do, you'll already have a general idea of how to write it because you already have. Nowhere in my graduate curriculum does anyone tell you how to write. Now I had a professor tell me to get a book on surviving your dissertation but writing a paper for a course and writing the dissertation are completely different processes and no one ever tells you that. The first dissertation process, I'll call it the first. I had three topics that I had gone through and 120 pages. I should have graduated. The first topic was 50 pages. I presented the proposal at my proposal meeting or what I thought was my proposal meeting to find out later that it wasn't. But they told me I was on the waterfront. It was too broad. I was blind-sided because I took the research techniques class in that last semester and spent the whole semester working on the first 3 chapters so I thought I was ready. My chair at the time led me to believe I was ready. I was told to start over.

Robert agreed that research was one of his challenges. Particularly, he did not like reading articles, summarizing them, and having to give a presentation every week about the articles read in each class session.

Robert: Researching, I had to do it and I didn't like it at first. My first three classes helped me out the most. Every week my professors had us summarize articles weekly, write up a summary and turn those in along with the other assignments given such as presentations. Doing those articles and presentation over prepared me for the work to come.

Question 7: How strong is/was your intent to pursue a doctoral degree at this institution or any other institution?

Once each of the participants applied, were accepted to their graduate program, and began their courses, they felt a very strong internal motivation to complete their degree. Through their many challenges, each of them felt that this was something they needed to do to be a role model to their family and increase their earning potential, but mostly gain self-assurance. Regardless of the unknown future, they would have achieved the highest level of education that would make them marketable in their professional fields.

Larry turned down two job offers from other higher education institutions primarily because of the tuition waiver program at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. Although those other institutions were offering more salary, he would have had to pay full tuition costs to work on his doctorate.

Larry: I turned down two other job offers that were \$20,000 or more than what I'm making now only because they didn't have tuition assistance or an employee assistance program. So the determining factor for my family that I to come specifically here to the University of Arkansas was my desire to get my doctoral degree as well as assist my wife obtain her bachelor's degree. I had already been accepted to Texas A & M but the money they were asking was ridiculous so I felt like I was getting a paycheck and turning right around and giving it back to them to go to school.

Ray made the decision to be a full-time student because of his goal to complete the program as quickly as possible. He had watched many individuals go through the process of obtaining a doctoral degree, but they did not complete their programs.

Robert: When I got here in January 07', I basically made a promise to myself that I would not leave Fayetteville until I at least defended my dissertation. That was one of the things that I kind of held strong to because I know a lot of people who finish their coursework, leave the school they're at and tend not to finish or it takes them 7 years to finish. And when you look at African American's its 10 years. So that was one of the things I always kept in the back of my mind so I knew I needed to stay here at the

University of Arkansas to finish. I just really had a strong conviction for making sure that happened. I like to complete what I finish and that's in everything that I do. And that would have been an awful waste of money!

Question 8: Did you have any particular expectations for your doctoral study?

Many of the participants had no idea what to expect from their doctoral programs. A few felt that it would be challenging based on the stories that they heard from other doctoral students. Several expected to have strong connections with the faculty members in their program along with their advisor, and they felt their doctoral program would help them to become more knowledgeable in the areas needed to ensure upward mobility in their careers.

Josh: You know I felt like I would grow intellectually. I felt like I would also be allowed to kind of express my opinion and my perspective in a legitimate manner of course, meaning using sources and facts and things like that but express myself later on and have the credibility that comes along with those types of degrees. My goal is to learn how to better use that situation to advance the agenda, different agendas in society.

Sarah: No honestly I didn't know what to expect. It was like, that anxiety and that nervous feeling of oh my gosh, I'm really about to do this and I'm embarking on this massive journey that I have no clue as to what's going to happen so I had no expectations whatsoever.

Ray: I actually wanted to pursue a doctoral degree simply because I did want to gain that theoretical knowledge behind policy. How do you develop policy? How do you define policy? It was the knowledge aspect. A lot of theoretical knowledge that I didn't know before that I know will be beneficial in the future.

Question 9: What were your academic expectations of your doctoral program? In hindsight how accurate were they?

The main two themes to emerge from the participants' academic expectations were exceling academically and engaging interactions with faculty. Many of the participants felt that their expectations were met; however, Lisa was the one participant who had the most challenges

throughout her doctoral process. She felt that she was misled by her program based on how they advertised the opportunities student's would encounter and be exposed prior to graduation. Her experience, overall, was not a positive one. Several life altering situations took place once she began the program, including the death of a close friend, marriage, and then later the birth of her daughter. Prior to these events, she was truly disenchanted with her experiences.

Lisa: When I did my interview, they indicated that the program was going to be a Ph.D program not an Ed.D program and that was an important part of my decision to apply. The Ph.D. option never took place. I wanted to be published before I graduated because I knew that made for a successful career as a faculty member if that was the path you choose. The only other thing I could add is exposure to tenured faculty, experts in the field. The way they described and promoted the programs, students would have the opportunity to meet experts in the field. I presumed all of these things would happen. I think it happened for some but not for everybody. There were inconsistencies in that process. If you were not a graduate assistant in the department those opportunities were not necessarily extended to you. If I sought them out, I probably would have gotten one or two (opportunities to publish, work with faculty) but again I expected that every student would be given those opportunities equally and that wasn't the case.

Alicia was not disenchanted with her program but there were experiences she had hoped to have in the classroom and in selecting her topic area that did not occur.

Alicia: I wanted a program that somehow merged my professional experience (student affairs) with kind of my personal interest (law). It really didn't happen. I think the [interdisciplinary] program could be stronger in a number of areas. For example, I think there should be a focus on methods. I only had to take 12 hours of methods and one stats class which would not prepare me for higher-level statistical programs. I think that is one of the shortcomings of the [interdisciplinary] program that I think they're in the process of changing. I also don't think they should allow people to come up with their own focus area. I made up one because it didn't exist – justice policy. I don't think they should let people make up stuff because they want them to be in the program and this isn't a slight at the program. I think I got in when it was kind of in its inception so things are changing. I think for the most part I've managed to get a number of different things out of the program which are going to be very beneficial to my professional career. I think I could have been more, that is I probably

could have made it more as well as my professors could have done a better job.

Question 10: What were your social expectations of your doctoral program? In hindsight how accurate were they?

Social engagement was not a priority for any of the participants. The majority worked full time, worked on their doctorate part-time and had family obligations. Therefore, social connections outside of their faculty advisor and course professor/instructor were not important. The two participants who were full-time doctoral students indicated that social connections and networking were desired, but if it did not occur, they would be ok. It was not a priority to make friends, but instead to network and make connections that would help get them through the program.

Ray: I thought there would be an established social group, academic study group. I guess I could say there wasn't. That has been established since I've been here. That was one of the expectations that wasn't met when I got here and it didn't seem as though anybody was interested in establishing that. Then 2 years later a group of students kind of initiated that group and put it into play on their own. I pretty much conducted research and established my own study group and if I had questions I could always consult with my advisory chair or my dissertation chair but outside of that it was all, you know me.

Josh: My social expectations were that you know here she is going to take care of their business and I was going to take care of my business. And I mean it is pretty much as simple as that. I didn't expect to have this undergraduate collegial atmosphere where everybody was going to work collaboratively in order to advance each other intellectually. I think that happens in seldom circumstances. I think people are just very different (in graduate school). People have different responsibilities. Look at me. I was a doctoral student, younger and didn't have any children. Many people in my program had children or had a family to take care of. So in the evening, they had to be at home you know as opposed to myself who could spend extra time in the library or do something that was more recreational. So socially I was just like hey you take care of your business,

I take care of mine and if we could help each other along the way, no problem.

Question 11: As a first generation African-American graduate student what is the one word you would use to describe your motivation to pursue a doctoral degree?

Each participant provided a different perspective through their responses, the themes that emerged were making a better way for their family, being a positive role model for those students coming behind them, having the drive and determination to overcome obstacles, and believing in a higher power or spiritual being. Table 8 provides a synopsis of each participant’s response to the question.

Table 8

Word Describing Participant’s Motivation to Pursue a Doctoral Degree

Name	Word/Phrase	Description
Alicia	“Beating the odds”	Strained upbringing; overcoming health issues; wanting to support her family; and be a role model to her children
Carl	“Stability”	Long term wealth; security for self and family
Josh	“Significance”	Evaluating what we mean to the world; making contributions to make change
Larry	“Responsibility”	Taking advantage of the opportunities afforded me and my family; become an educated African American man to make positive contributions to the community
Lisa	“Faith”	Understanding that challenges complete who I am and divulge my purpose, self-esteem, and self-worth

(Table continues)

Table 8, continued.

Word Describing Participant’s Motivation to Pursue a Doctoral Degree

Name	Word/Phrase	Description
Ray	“Tenacious”	Having the drive and determination to get through the roadblocks
Robert	“Prayer”	Guides through each major decision
Sarah	“Fear of Failure”	Knowing there is more I could be doing to help myself and others
Steve	“Value”	Being the role model I’m expected to be for my family and those who are watching me

Question 12: Where are you in your doctoral program?

At the time of the interviews, two of the participants had completed their doctoral program, six had completed their coursework, passed their comprehensive exams, and were working on their dissertation, and one had just been accepted to their program of interest. Table 8 below provides a detailed description of the stage of the doctoral process that each participant was working toward during their interviews and their anticipated or actual graduation date.

Table 9

Graduation/Tentative Graduate Chart

Name	Stage in Doctoral Program	Anticipated/Actual Graduation Date
Alicia	completed coursework; working on qualifying exams	May 2012

(Table continues)

Table 9, continued.

Graduation/Tentative Graduate Chart

Name	Stage in Doctoral Program	Anticipated/Actual Graduation Date
Carl	completed coursework; working on dissertation	December 2011
Josh	defended dissertation in April 2011	May 2011
Larry	completed coursework; working on dissertation	Not stated
Lisa	completed coursework; working on dissertation	December 2011
Ray	defended dissertation in April 2011	May 2011
Robert	completed coursework; waiting on qualifying exams results	December 2011
Sarah	completed coursework; working on qualifying exams	May 2012
Steve	began coursework Fall 2011	Not stated

Research Questions

The first research question was: What factors did first-generation African American graduate students perceive to be the primary motivators for pursuit of a doctoral degree?

Supplemental themes emerged regarding this question. These themes included:

- a. The undergraduate and/or graduate experiences that paved the way for the participants to realize their potential.
- b. Once they were accepted to a doctoral program there was an internal, strong drive to complete their program.

- c. The phrases used to express their motivation to pursue their degree were to “beat the odds”, “bring significant to their community”, “have faith that all things were possible”, and “be tenacious and have the determination to go through their challenges and roadblocks.”
- d. There was a fear of failure because they were the first in their family to obtain high levels of education and there was unspoken pressure.

The main themes that emerged were:

- a. To enhance their opportunity for upward mobility and provide stability to their family environment.
- b. Having the encouragement of family members, mentors, and colleagues support them in their decision to pursue and persist.

The main factor that motivated the pursuit of a doctoral degree for the participants in this study was the enhancement of the level of professional skill in hopes of securing upward mobility potential in their career path.

The second research question in this study was: How did students negotiate the transition to graduate school?

Two main themes and one supplemental theme emerged from this question.

- a. The consensus for how participants transitioned to graduate school was through financial assistance. Many of them were able to utilize the tuition waiver program because they were full-time employees at the case study institution. Others were able to secure funding resources through scholarships, fellowships, or graduate assistantships.

- b. Another main theme was that the connections and relationships developed during the participants' educational and professional life supported, encouraged, and even assisted them in their decision to pursue.
- c. The supplemental theme was the type of challenges faced by the participants. These challenges included the struggle of scholarly writing, managing family and work obligations, and not having supportive and engaging faculty members to help them through the doctoral program.

The participant's primary form of negotiation in transitioning to graduate school is to secure financial resources that would assist them pursue a doctoral degree.

The third research question was: What were first-generation African American students' academic and social expectations for graduate school compared to their actual experiences?

There were supplemental and main themes for participants academic and social expectations compared to their actual experiences.

- a. Initially the participants had no particular expectations for their doctoral study. They planned to remain open minded, take advantage of every opportunity presented, and be challenged academically.
- b. Academically the main theme to emerge was faculty engagement. Participants wanted to be exposed to faculty not only to learn, but to have the opportunity to do research and publish. For the majority of the participants this was not their actual experience.
- c. The supplemental theme to emerge from their academic expectation was the doctoral program, in general, would be intense, challenging, and stressful. Each of the participants agreed that this was the case.

- d. Socially, participants did not expect to build friendships or relationships with other doctoral students in their respective programs; however, they thought it essential to have a great relationship with their faculty advisor. The majority of the participants worked full-time and attended classes part-time. Their focus was on completing their coursework. Many stated that they studied and worked on projects alone.
- e. The supplemental social theme to emerge socially was that the participants, while going through this process wanted to make an impact on others, especially other African American students and family members.

The academic expectation for participants was to experience positive faculty engagements and have the opportunity to research and publish. There was no social expectation for social engagement.

The fourth and final research question was: Are there differences in the pursuit of graduate education based on first-generation African American graduate students' backgrounds and traits? The themes emerged are subtitled by family traits, educational background, and career aspirations.

Family traits

- a. Eight of the nine participants have at least one sibling; four of them were not the eldest child.
- b. Five of nine were raised in a two-parent household two were raised by single mothers; two were raised by their grandmother.

Educational background

- a. The participants shared similar educational career paths in that they were the first in their family to pursue an undergraduate and graduate degree. The most common path

followed was for the student to obtain their bachelor's degree, then their Master's degree, enter the workforce, and then enroll into a doctoral program after a few years of work experience.

- b. Of the nine participants, two chose to obtain all three degrees without interruption, only one was a full-time student through their entire academic career.
- c. Six of the nine participants had undergraduate and graduate experiences in other states (Kentucky, Illinois, Ohio, Nebraska, and Texas).
- d. Three of the participants obtained their Master's degree from the case study institution and then decided to enroll in the doctoral program; only one participant obtained all three degrees from the case study institution.

Career Aspirations

- a. Of the two individuals who selected an interdisciplinary program as their doctoral degree, one of them would like to pursue a law degree in the future, and the other is more interested in working as a tenured faculty member.
- b. Two of the four education specialization I majors want to pursue a career in higher education, the other two wanted to remain in a corporate environment and focus on human resource management.
- c. The remaining three participants focused on educational specialization II; one wanted to pursue a career in athletics, one in development, and the other was uncertain.

Though the participants each experienced different family dynamics, backgrounds, and career aspirations, their path to the pursuit of a doctoral degree remained the same.

Validation of Data Findings

To assure accuracy of interpretation, the researcher used: a) transcripts from audio-taped interviews along with written notes taken during each interview, b) the process of member checking, c) external sources provided by the participants (i.e. resume and demographic questionnaire form), and d) an external method entailing confirmation of transcription themes by recent doctoral graduates.

The researcher used notes from the interviews along with the transcription to code the data and identify themes. Several things shared with the researcher after the audio-tape was turned off helped the researcher understand the true emotion of each participant regarding the topic. There were additional commonalities that emerged from this group through their resume and demographic questionnaire that will be addressed in Table 10.

“Member checking is the process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account” (Creswell, 2008, p. 267). Upon completion of each interview, the researcher informed the participants that they would receive a copy of the transcript. They were asked to review the transcript for accuracy of the information they provided. Four of the nine participants responded with a brief email to state that there were no major changes to note. The other five participants sent a corrected version of the transcription for the researcher’s review. No changes were made to the syntax of the narrative and the majority of the edits were grammatical in nature.

The researcher sent an email (see Appendix E) to four recent graduates of the higher education doctoral program asking for their assistance in identifying themes in the transcribed interviews. Upon confirmation of their participation, the reviewers were asked to read the nine

transcribed interviews and identify broad or major themes based on the research question. Of the four solicited, three replied. In order to assure the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher removed any information (names, titles) from the transcriptions that could potentially reference the person’s identity. These interviews were uploaded to a digital dropbox and the external reviewers were instructed on how to retrieve the documents. They were given 10 days to review the transcripts and provide the researcher their themes. The findings were given in three different formats. The first reviewer provided a one sheet summary of the broad themes identified, the second reviewer submitted broad and major themes for each of the 12 interview questions, the third reviewer did not follow the specified guidelines and instead they documented words or phrases perceived to be important in each individual interview. The researcher did not specify how to submit the results but felt each method used was helpful in determining the commonalities in the two reviews utilized. A summary of the researcher and reviewer’s themes have been shown in Table 10.

Table 10
Summary of themes by interview questions

Question Theme(s)	Researcher	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2
IQ1			
Upward Mobility	x	x	x
IQ2			
Guided professional interests	x	x	
Encouragement from others	x		x

(Table continues)

Table 10, continued.

Summary of Themes by Interview Question

Question Theme(s)	Researcher	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2
<hr/>			
IQ3			
Family, mentors, colleagues	x	x	x
Spiritual Influence	x	x	x
IQ4			
Financial Assistance	x		x
Previous Relationships	x	x	
IQ5			
Connections with faculty			
staff and students	x	x	x
IQ6			
Balancing family/work	x	x	x
Academic challenges	x		x
Overcoming obstacles	x	x	
IQ7			
Strong intent to complete	x	x	x
IQ8			
No idea what to expect	x		x

(Table continues)

Table 10, continued.

Summary of Themes by Interview Question

Question Theme(s)	Researcher	Reviewer #1	Reviewer #2
<hr/>			
IQ9			
Excel academically	x	x	x
Connections w/faculty	x	x	x
IQ10			
No expectations	x		x
Networking/Influence	x	x	x
IQ11			
No phrases were the same	x	x	x
Driven	x	x	
IQ12			
All will complete their doctoral degree	x	x	x

In utilizing external reviewers, the researcher was able to validate the themes for the study. For each interview question, the theme(s) highlighted by the researcher was confirmed by at least one reviewer and therefore, the triangulation process that involved transcribing the interviews/notes, member checking, and obtaining feedback from outside reviewers was effective.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has identified the themes that were present in this study. The supplemental themes encompassed historical implications of doctoral study by indicating the challenges of this student population and how these challenges could hinder their persistence in obtaining a doctoral degree. Within those supplemental themes, main themes were identified to help categorize the experiences of the first generation African-American graduate students in this study. Each participant's story provided details of the motivating factors for why they chose to pursue a doctoral degree. From these stories, an understanding of this population can be achieved.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter, the results of the study are related to the research questions. This is followed by conclusion of the findings, recommendations for future research, recommendations for practitioners, and a critique of the method of research.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that motivated African-American, first-generation students to pursue doctoral education at a four-year public university. There had been little research on the influence academic or non-academic factors have on first-generation graduate student's motivation. Through this study, I hoped to contribute to the knowledge base and literature related to the academic experience of first-generation African American graduate students at a predominately white institution of higher education. With the increase of first-generation graduate student's enrollment in doctoral programs, it is important to gain a better understanding of the factors and influences impacting these students' matriculation to graduate school.

The study explored why these students pursued, who or what encouraged them, what challenges they had to overcome, why they felt it necessary to further their education, and what motivated them. Specifically, the study uncovered motivating factors that led first-generation graduate students to pursue and attend graduate school with the intention of obtaining a doctoral degree. The information gathered on the experiences of the student population was used to answer the following research questions:

Question #1:

What factors did first-generation African-American graduate students perceive to be the primary motivators for pursuit of a doctoral degree?

The main factor that motivated the pursuit of a doctoral degree for the participants in the study was enhancement of their professional skill levels in hopes of securing upward mobility in their careers.

Question #2:

How did students negotiate the transition to graduate school?

The participants' primary form of negotiation in transitioning to graduate school was to secure financial resources, implying that graduate school affordability was one of their top transitional concerns.

Question #3:

What were first-generation African American students' academic and social expectations for graduate school compared to their actual experiences?

The academic expectation for participants was to experience positive faculty engagements and be given the opportunity to research and publish. There were no significant social expectations.

Question #4:

Were there differences in the pursuit of graduate education based on first-generation African American graduate students' backgrounds and traits?

The participants experienced different family dynamics, backgrounds, and career aspirations even though their paths to the pursuit of a doctoral degree remained the same. This

path included being encouraged and supported by mentors and family members throughout their educational experiences.

Conclusions

The study was designed to explore the factors affecting first-generation African American students who pursued a doctoral degree at a predominately white institution. Individual stories of the participants were created through the data gathered from in-depth interviews in order to convey their educational experiences through a narrative design. Their stories revealed interesting and varying perspectives that disclosed the rationale for their pursuit of a doctoral degree. Five conclusions have been identified.

1. The majority of first-generation African American graduate students who participated in the study were married with children and wanted to ensure upward mobility in their careers hopefully enhancing their earning potential and providing a better life for their family. They were encouraged and supported by professional and personal mentors, and family members who, in some cases, pushed them to pursue a doctoral degree. Previous studies (Brown et.al.,2000) found that positive mentoring relationships among African American students' could enhance their likelihood for success. Additional research (Walker, Hanley, & Wright, 2001) indicated that the three primary factors to attribute to graduate students success was personal ambition, and supportive family and faculty mentors.
2. Previous research (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997) indicated that first-generation students typically came from low income families. African Americans were more likely to come from low-income families when compared to their Caucasian counterparts. The ability then to secure financial assistance in order to obtain a bachelors'

degree was critical for the first-generation African American student. This factor was consistent for the participants in this study, as many indicated that securing financial assistance was one key element in their ability to pursue a doctoral degree. Each participant utilized some form of financial aid assistance.

3. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) noted several factors that impacted African American students' performance and completion in college; these factors included academic and social integration with peers and faculty. These studies suggested that if first-generation students had high educational aspirations, financial assistance, and a satisfying social life in college, they would persist. Other studies (Strayhorn, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004) confirmed that level of engagement both academically and socially have impacted academic success. The participants desired academic engagement, especially with faculty members and their advisors. Having a social network with other doctoral students in their respective programs was less important. Due to the participants' familial and professional obligations, there was limited time allotted for the development of social relationships; therefore, engaging in extracurricular activities, or taking advantage of programs and services offered on campus were not relevant to their interests.
4. Previous research (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007) indicated that family background characteristics of first-generation college students typically placed them at risk for not completing college degrees. These characteristics were described as low-income and less academically prepared. However, the participants in the study overcame those risks and challenges. Whether it was their family financial challenges, health disparities, or missed career opportunities, college degree obtainment was essential to their personal success and growth. The majority of the participants grew up in low-income families, but it did

not preclude them from attending college to obtain their undergraduate degree. Today they are more self-sufficient and have obtained financial assistance through tuition employee waiver programs, loans, and fellowships. Some shared that they were not as academically prepared in certain areas, primarily writing, but this also did not preclude them from completing their bachelor's and master's programs or pursuing a doctorate. When needed, they would utilize services such as the Quality Writing Center.

5. Previous research (Vohra-Gupta, 2007; King & Chepyator-Thomson, 1996) indicated that the enrollment and persistence of first-generation students and African-American graduate students were defined by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Based on the responses of the participants in the study, their extrinsic motivation was professional advancement, and their intrinsic motivation was to meet the academic challenges through the support of faculty. These motivators were consistent with previous literature.

Recommendations for Further Research

Most of the research explores the matriculation of first-generation African American students has been similar to the participants in the study. The literature discussed the small number of African Americans who earned a doctoral degree, but did not discuss in detail their pursuit of the doctoral degree. This study looked at those motivating factors. The nine participants provided their personal motivators, internal and external challenges, and their hope for the future.

1. A few of the participants had negative experiences during their application and interview processes. One indicated that during the interview process several faculty members were not welcoming, and acted as if he was not an ideal candidate for the program. Despite the treatment received, he was accepted to and did well throughout the program. Though the

researcher does not know the perspectives of the faculty members, if the story shared is accurate, these factors could have potentially affected the participant's decision to pursue the degree. There should be research on the application process and factors that could deter this population from pursuing or persisting toward a doctoral degree.

2. At the point of data collection, one participant was in the beginning stages of the doctoral process, i.e. taking courses, and all others were writing their dissertation. There should be a study that selects doctoral students who were recently accepted to determine if their motivators are similar.
3. Each of the participants' were first-generation students, yet they all stated their primary motivation was career enhancement and upward mobility. There should be a study that surveys a wider range of doctoral students by ethnicity and generation classification (Caucasian, Latino/a, Asian, first-generation and second-generation) to determine if career advancement is a consistent motivator.
4. Research could be done on a more diverse category of doctoral students. Most of the participants were obtaining their degree from the college of education, and all but one had aspirations to work in the field of higher education. This may be a challenge considering previous research indicates that most African American doctorates are in the field of education. However, it would be interesting to research different motivators by fields of study.
5. Another recommendation is to study the differences among married and non-married doctoral students and full-time and part-time doctoral students. As indicated previously, there were two participants in the study who were single, yet they encountered similar challenges academically that were similar to married students. Full-time students were

able to complete their programs at a faster pace, but still shared common experiences with those who were enrolled on a part-time basis. These similarities and differences should be further explored.

6. Four of the nine participants enrolled in an online doctoral program. A study could address the enrollment and completion along with the successes and challenges of first-generation African American students that select this type of doctoral program.
7. The final recommendation is to explore the selection of terminal degree interests (Ph.D., Ed.D., J.D., M.D., M.F.A.) among first-generation African American students to explore whether there are differences in their motivation to pursue based on the terminal degree they would like to attain.

Recommendations for Practice

1. The majority of the participants were attending the case study institution because they were employed there or had received their undergraduate or master's degree there. There was only one participant who had no previous ties to the institution and he was told about the program by a friend. The measures in place in graduate admissions offices that effectively reach out to African American students for doctoral programs need to be examined and institutions must learn how to effectively recruit minority graduate students.
2. Since one of the primary challenges and/or concerns in attending graduate school was affordability, institutional leaders should consider alternative programs outside of employee benefits to address aspects of financial assistance for graduate students.
3. Faculty members/academic departments should focus on engagement with diverse student groups. Though it would be difficult to determine if a student is first-generation,

it is feasible to determine their employment, student, and marital status. Understanding that one of the motivators of success is positive interaction with faculty, academic units should plan programs to increase awareness of research opportunities, the publication process, and effective networking so that part-time doctoral students feel they have been offered the same opportunities as full-time doctoral students.

4. Student Affairs professionals should address the specific needs of working with doctoral students. This group should be viewed as non-traditional, as they are similar in nature to the undergraduate student who has to work full-time, attend classes part-time, and make it through their program without much access to supportive services. Student affairs leaders might benefit from expanding the times services, such as tutoring or writing assistance could be offered.
5. Based on the responses of the participants in the study, having or not having an African American faculty member or mentor in their programs was not a major concern. However, previous data indicate that African American students are less likely to complete graduate or professional programs in the absence of an African American faculty. Therefore, institutional leaders should continuously explore mentoring as a tool for student recruitment and retention.

Discussion

The study was inspiring and motivating because of the stories shared by first-generation African American doctoral students regarding their upbringing, family dynamics, college experiences, and ultimately, what led them to want to achieve the highest level of education possible. In some aspects this study was disappointing. When I chose to research this topic, I assumed my research would conclude in a mind-blowing, never-before-discussed, over-the-top

finding that would essentially put my name in lights. This was not the case. Instead, I interacted with nine positive, intelligent, sincere, and motivated individuals who solidified for me the importance of education. I also realized that first-generation African American students can achieve academically when given encouragement, support, and opportunity.

Removing my experiences and decisions to pursue a doctoral degree were not as challenging as I initially thought. I wanted to remain open to the possibility that the participants would have completely different perspectives than I as the researcher had I listened attentively and actively participated in the interview process so each person was comfortable sharing with me how they truly felt.

I found that the participants' motivating factors for pursuing a doctoral degree were similar in nature to my own. Though our paths were different, we arrived at the same conclusion: in the society in which we live, education is one of the most important assets for career advancement. Participants felt that by obtaining a doctoral degree, the doors to better opportunities professionally, financially, and personally, would open. For many of them, there was a desire to go back to their communities, specifically churches, community agencies, and their alma mater, to share with other African Americans that this degree is attainable. There were four underlying characteristics for the participants and their experiences that also played a role in their decisions to pursue an education.

Family Influence

The participants mentioned most frequently that the people they wanted to help were family members. All of the participants were the first to obtain a bachelor's degree in their families. Several participants acknowledged that they had parents, siblings, and other relatives who had only earned a high school education and in some cases less. Therefore, they hoped that

their actions would encourage family members to attend college also. Several participants also mentioned the desire to take care of their parents, and they wanted to be in a financial position to assist them.

Military Influence

Two of the participants were veterans and had potentially lucrative careers in the military but chose to pursue another career. They stated that the military, though they proud of their service to their country, was a means to an end. One of the participants joined the military soon after obtaining his master's degree. He chose to go through the infantry unit versus becoming an officer because of his desire to learn how to be a follower before leading his own troop. The other participant joined the military because his family expected it, as his father, grandfather, and great grandfather were all in the military. Though the military was the path chosen by his family, this participant felt education was the best path for him.

Sports Influence

Four participants in the study were recruited to play sports at their undergraduate institutions. Two of them also enrolled for graduate level courses because their eligibility had not expired. As athletes, they had a support network in place to get them through their undergraduate experiences. One participant stated that he felt underprepared after completing his bachelor's degree and chose to enroll in a master's program so that he could prepare himself for better career opportunities.

Fraternal Influence

Each of the participants was involved in professional organizations based upon their career interest; however, what was most surprising as that all but one of the participants were members of a National Pan-Hellenic Council Greek letter organization. The breakdown of the

membership is: five members of Omega Psi Phi fraternity Inc., one member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., one member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., one member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., and one non-Greek member. These historically Black fraternal organizations highlighted academic excellence and scholarship in their respective mission statements, and it can be assumed that a support system for these participants was their affiliation with these organizations.

Spiritual Influence

An underlying theme related to pursuit and persistence toward a doctoral degree for the participants in the study was their faith. Several of them mentioned God as their source of strength. They believed that God would not have allowed them this opportunity if it were not part of His divine plan. Many of them served in their churches as deacons, ministry leaders, and auxiliary volunteers. They each felt that they had grown spiritually and established a closer relationship with God by going through this process.

Methodology Review

There were nine participants in this study. This allowed for collection of rich, detailed information about each. The interviews were created to be as unstructured as possible so as to record topics that were important to them impose limits on the topics participants might discuss and rather than introducing topics that were not relevant to the study. However, for every choice of method there are advantages and disadvantages. With a small group, generalizations to a larger group cannot be made; specifically, the results cannot be generalized to all first-generation African American graduate students who are enrolled in doctoral programs. For example, the participants in this study all attended a public graduate school, and were pursuing an Ed.D or Ph.D. When I solicited participation, I asked for interviews from first-generation African

American students who had attained a bachelor's and master's degree. All the participants self-selected to participate in the study and could be classified as more successful than other first-generation African Americans. Likewise, the study did not include a comparison group, i.e., a group of graduate students in the same program who were not the first in their families to attain a bachelor's degree. Thus, it is not known whether or not the experiences of the participants in the study are unique to first-generation African American graduate students attending a graduate school.

If this study were replicated there are three things I would do differently in order to gain richer information. First, I would have added more sections on the demographic questionnaire to include number of siblings, who raised them, i.e. parent or guardian, and in what type of community (rural vs. urban) they were raised. Some of these variables were mentioned during the participant's interview but I was unable to explore commonalities within the participants because these areas were not addressed.

Second, I would have asked specific interview questions that could have identified differences between full-time and part-time doctoral students by their selected discipline and doctoral degree pursued. The interview questions used in this study focused on the participant's overall academic and social experiences but did not ask them to address their experiences from the perspective of a Ph.D. or Ed.D. candidate, or as a full-time or part-time student.

Third, I would have asked the participants to write a journal of their academic and social experiences in comparison to their home life. Information from a journal they kept over the course of a semester would give a more detailed picture of how they spent their time both inside and outside their doctoral program. These journal entries would also allow the participants to

observe their experiences in detail to allow a more in-depth analysis of their path toward the doctorate.

Chapter Summary

The participants I interviewed were engaging, thought provoking, and entertaining. The stories they chose to share about their past and present experiences allowed me to understand the seriousness of the journey for each of them. They were able to articulate their experiences in a manner that lead me to believe that no matter the challenge encountered, they would graduate. As they reflected on their experiences, they discussed high and low points. During those low points they thought about leaving their programs but something made them change their mind. In certain cases it was a family member or a mentor; in most cases it was their internal motivation that pushed them forward. They knew that a doctoral degree would help them achieve career advancement and financial stability.

Obtaining this degree was not just about financial growth but also their families and the community they serve. The parents in the study wanted to see this through for their children. They wanted their kids to understand the importance of education through their persistence. The African American males in the study discussed wanting to serve as role models for other African American males in their family, neighborhoods, churches, and place of employment. They had role models to show them that there were more ways to attain success than through sports and music - they too wanted to share that message.

The participants in the study were similar to several descriptions offered in previous research. They came from low-socioeconomic families, academics did not come easy for them, and many of them worked their way through college or needed financial support to stay. However, they overcame their challenges because of a supportive network, their internal

fortitude, drive and determination, to provide a better life for their families, and to be a role model to their children and other young professionals.

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APPENDIX A

Call for Participants

My name is Stephanie Adams. I am a graduate student at the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville. I am conducting exploratory research on what motivates first-generation African American college students to pursue an advanced graduate degree.

The study is meant to gain an understanding of what motivates this student population to pursue and persist in graduate school. Much has been written about first-generation college students; however there is not as much written about them attending graduate school or pursuing advanced degrees.

I am now looking for participants.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are the first in your immediate family to obtain a bachelor's degree, Master's degree (if applicable) and pursuing a doctoral degree. In other words, neither your parents nor siblings should have completed a 4-year college degree before you finished yours.

You are eligible to participate in this study if you identify as African American.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and involves one audio-taped focused interview of approximately 60 minutes in duration. The audiotape will be transcribed and quotations from the interview may be included in the dissertation, but no information that could identify you with that material will be used. The interview will take place in person.

If you meet the two stated criteria and would like to participate in this study, please email me at xxxxxx@uark.edu with your name and phone number(s), with best times to call.

Thank you for your time.

Stephanie Adams
Doctoral Student
Higher Education Leadership Program
University of Arkansas

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Title: Exploring First-Generation African American Graduate Students Motivators for Pursuing a Doctoral Degree

Description: Many studies have written about first-generation college students however there is not as much written about them attending graduate school or pursuing advanced degrees. You are being asked to participate in an effort to learn more about this population. To qualify for this study, you must be working toward a doctoral degree (i.e. Ph.D. or Ed.D,) classify as a first-generation graduate student (parents have/had a high school education or less or you are the first in your immediate family to obtain a 4 year degree), and identify as African-American.

Risks and Benefits: The benefits include contributing to the knowledge base of this student population. There are no anticipated risks to participating in the study.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. There are no payments for college credits for participating. There will be one audio-taped focused interview of approximately 60 minutes. The audiotape will be transcribed and quotations from the interview may be included in the dissertation, but no information that could identify you with that material will be used. The interview will take place in person.

Confidentiality: It is important to understand that the questions may be personal and sensitive. You will be assigned a new name that will be used to match the demographic surveys. All interviews will be recorded in private. Your name will only appear on this consent form and will not be linked to your responses in any way. Your responses will be transcribed anonymously and all information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. Results from the research will be reported as aggregate data.

Right to Withdraw: You are free to refuse to participate in the research and to withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences — no penalty to you.

Informed Consent: I, _____ (please print), have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Each of these items has been explained to me by the investigator. The investigator has answered all of my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand what is involved. My signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this experimental study and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the investigator.

Signature

Date

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Stephanie Adams at (479) xxx-xxxx or Dr. Michael Miller at (479) xxx-xxxx or by email at xxxxx@uark.edu or xxxxx@uark.edu. For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Coordinator, at (479) xxx-xxxx or by email at irb@uark.edu.

APPENDIX C

Demographics Questionnaire

Age _____

Marital Status _____

of Children _____

Hometown _____

Undergraduate Institution _____ Annual Income _____

Please check one of the following:

___ At this time I have a bachelor's degree and am working toward my doctorate/professional degree

___ At this time I have a bachelor's and master's degree working toward a doctorate/professional degree

Comments _____

Selected Major _____

Current Occupation/Assistantship _____

Please explain your educational history i.e. attendance dates of undergraduate institution; (immediately after high school); attendance dates of graduate school (1 year after completing 4-year degree, etc.)

APPENDIX D

Interview Process for Exploring First-Generation African American Graduate Students Influences for Pursuing a Graduate Degree

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Each participant will be asked to review the letter of consent, ask any questions they may have, and then sign the consent. Upon that time we will begin with the interview. After all questions have been asked and answered I will share with participants the process time for follow up. I will contact each participant after all interviews have been transcribed so they can review the material. I will contact them by email and submit the final notes for their review. After they have had a chance to review their comments I will write my analysis.

Interview questions

1. Why did you decide to attend graduate school to obtain a doctoral degree?
2. What role did your undergraduate/graduate experience play in your decision to pursue a doctoral degree?
3. Whom or what influenced, guided, and supported your decision?
4. What programs or services at this institution supported the transition to your doctoral program?
5. In what way was the sense of connectedness with other faculty, students, and staff on campus to assist you in your decision?
6. Share with me one or two challenges you faced in pursuing this degree.
7. How strong is/was your intent to pursue a doctoral degree at this institution or any other institution?
8. Did you have any particular expectations for your doctoral study?
9. What were your academic expectations of your doctoral program? In hindsight how accurate were they?
10. What were your social expectations of your doctoral program? In hindsight how accurate were they?
11. As a first generation African-American graduate student what is the one word you would use to describe your motivation to pursue a doctoral degree?
12. Where are you in your doctoral program?

APPENDIX E

Email Request to Recent Doctoral Student Graduates Triangulation of Data

Hello,

I hope this email finds you well.

I'm contacting several graduates of the higher education leadership program to ask for your assistance. I am in need of 2-3 individuals who are willing and available to assist me triangulate the data obtained from my research.

My study is on first generation African American graduate students' motivation to pursue a doctoral degree. My dissertation chair, Dr. Michael Miller, has recommended that I have third party participants review my interviews and select common themes you find within the data provided. If you are able and interested in assisting me I will send you the 9 interviews, which range between 9-12 pages each. I only ask that you review them as quickly as possible and submit to me your comments/themes by Friday September 16th.

I know I'm asking a lot of very busy professionals but I thank you in advance for your willingness and assistance. I look forward to hearing from you.

Stephanie Adams
Doctoral Student
Higher Education Program
University of Arkansas