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Seeking Success: A Case Study of African American Male Retention at a Two-Year College

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Seeking Success
A Case Study of African American Male Retention at a Two-Year College

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy

by

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Abstract

There is a problem in higher education in the United States. African American students, specifically males, are not being retained and graduating. This problem is even more evident for students that attend two year colleges. African American male students lag behind white males, Hispanic males and African American females, in retention and graduation rates. This problem has caught the attention of many leaders. Policy makers and college leaders are among those who seek to understand the why and find solutions to the challenge of African American male student retention at two year colleges, as two year colleges are becoming the first choice of college enrollment for African American males. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the impact that a federally-funded program has on the retention and academic success of Black males at an urban, predominantly-African American two-year college. Because it is important to know what works, versus what doesn’t work, the study used the Anti Deficit Model, to focus on successes rather than non-successes.

The qualitative study used a purpose sampling strategy and five students from the federally funded program and three administrators who were affiliated with the program, that were selected as case study participants. While the study used various methods of data collection, face to face, semi structured interviews were the primary source of data for the study. The study focused on four research questions to determine the student’s perspectives on the program and its impacts on their retention. An additional question for the staff members was added to gain their perspective on how the program benefited the students and fit within the goals and mission of the college.

The student participants provided insight into the how they were retained, relevant to the program and institution. Suggestions from the administrators who participated in the study
provided insight as to how institutions can weave this information into future planning, goals and mission, of institutions of higher education. These findings will be helpful to college administrators and policy makers, as they review and devise strategies that will support the retention of African American males at two year colleges.
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late grandmothers, Sarah Jane Moss and Aline Culp.

You were the real MVP’s.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Far too many African American males with academic promise have failed to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by higher education. At the same time, many Black males who have entered into postsecondary education have struggled to succeed academically. As the United States enters into the second decade of the 21st century, African Americans (AA), specifically males, are entering colleges in increasing numbers. The most recent data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education System (IPEDS) maintained by the US Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), demonstrates the context of concern in retention and graduation rates of AA males. According to NCES (2015) over 14 million students of all races and genders, enrolled and attended some type of public institution of postsecondary education for the Fall of 2014. Furthermore, over six million students of those enrolled, almost half of all students in public postsecondary institutions, chose to enroll in a two-year college. When the data is broken down for African Americans, the path to furthering their education is clear – two-year colleges. There were almost two million students of color enrolled in in public postsecondary institutions in the Fall of 2014 according to NCES (2015). Of that number, less than 200,000 were in enrolled in a four-year college, while nearly one million were enrolled in two-year colleges. Two-year colleges are the path for a majority of African Americans entering college.

African American males have had an unusually hard time succeeding in postsecondary education. African American males lag far behind their male counterparts in retention. NCES data for the Fall of 2009 showed that 43.9% of African American (AA) male students were no longer enrolled in college. Nearly the same number (43.0%) were still enrolled or retained in 2014 but had not earned a degree. This is in stark contrast to male students of other races. When
compared to Caucasian males, 31.5% were no longer enrolled, and over half (54.4%) were still enrolled or retained in 2014 but had not yet earned a degree. AA males were also outpaced by Hispanic males in the area of retention with 34.6% of Hispanic males not enrolled and the number still enrolled or retained by 2014 at 48.1%.

The graduation rates for AA males entering college in the Fall of 2009 lagged behind their male counterparts as well. When the same time frame for enrollment is used, NCES data showed the AA population graduated at a rate of 7.1%. Of males, 93.5% had not obtained a degree, while only 6.5% had obtained a degree. By contrast, Caucasian males are graduated at a clip of 11.2%, and Hispanics graduated at a rate of 7%. When compared to females within their own race, AA males are a full percentage point behind; AA females had a graduation rate of 7.5%. This rate exceeded both AA males and Hispanic males, but was still well behind Caucasian males.

The retention and graduation rates for African American males clearly show that two thirds of Black males that begin college do not finish (Harper, 2005; McClure, 2006). The question is why have Black males struggled to succeed as college students? As these students come to college, they face a myriad of obstacles that affect their retention and graduation rates. Obstacles like not being prepared for college (Adelman, 1999), being a first generation college student, (Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998), and experiencing a lack of family support (Palmer, Davis & Maramba, 2011) are among some of the factors for this lack of success. Lack of intrinsic motivation, lack of interaction with campus faculty, and non-cognitive skills (Palmer & Young, 2009) have also hindered the retention and graduation of Black males at postsecondary institutions. Research has shown a range of variables that challenge success, especially for students of color who attend a community college. These variables include background (low high
school GPA’s and no educational goals), social (engagement in nonacademic activities), academic (not spending time with faculty, poor study habits, not visiting with advisors) and environmental (lack of financial resources, high number of hours worked, and other life stressors) (Wood & Williams, 2013).

**The Policy Context**

Since the election of President Obama in 2008, there has been increased national attention on growing the number of students who attend and graduate from postsecondary institutions, with much of the emphasis placed on community colleges. In 2009, President Obama announced the American Graduation Initiative (AGI). This initiative was designed to raise awareness and to help achieve one of the goals of the Obama administration: to increase the number of college graduates by the year 2020. The initiative had several goals that were to be accomplished that related specifically to community colleges. These included in increasing the number of community college students by five million, creating the Community College Challenge Fund, and funding innovative strategies to promote college completion.

In addition, AGI, President Obama also convened a summit at the White House on community colleges in October of 2010. At the summit were several presentations and papers, most with an emphasis on student success and persistence. Michelle Cooper of the Institute for Higher Education Policy stated that minority students are more likely to drop out or not persist than students from other demographics. Additionally, Cooper (2010) stated that for there to be an increase in persistence, institutions should look at strengthening their student support services.

On the federal level, Congress authorized the Higher Education Opportunities Act in 2008 and reauthorized the amended Higher Education Act of 1965, which began the process for a program dedicated to address the issue of African American success in college. These
Congressional actions direct the Department of Education to issue Title III, Part F, Section 371 of the amended Higher Education Act of 1965, also known as the Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI) Undergraduate Program. Through this program, the DOE eventually awarded 26 PBI colleges and universities funds that totaled $14.9 million for fiscal year (FY) 2011 to support institutions’ efforts in helping African Americans succeed in college (DOE, 2011).

The PBI funds allowed institutions of higher education to develop programs focused in one of the following areas: science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM); health education; internationalization or globalization; teacher preparation; or improving educational outcomes of African American males. All of these are areas in which Black students have traditionally been underrepresented. According to the DOE website, a PBI is defined as an undergraduate school that has at least 1,000 students; is at least 40% black; has at least 50% low-income or first-generation students; and at least 50% of the students are taking courses that lead to an associate’s or Bachelor’s degree. The institutions that received grant awards included two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities.

The Achieving the Dream (ATD) Initiative that began in 2004 with funding from the Lumina Foundation, has a similar mission, to improve the educational outcomes of low income and underrepresented students (Rutschow, Hayes, Brock, Orr, Cerna, Cullinan, Kerrigan, Jenkins, Gooden, & Martin, 2011). While not directly aimed at African American males, this initiative has helped highlight the challenges that non-Caucasian students have in higher education. The ATD initiative asked colleges to measure student success on five variables: successful completion of remedial courses; enrollment and completion of gateway courses such as math and English; passed courses with a C or better; persisted from one term to the next; and attained a degree or certificate. The leaders of the ATD Initiative believed that in order to be
effective, change must occur in policy and change must occur in the institution. Achieving the Dream has created a postsecondary policy network that works with colleges and universities to “design administrative, system, and legislative policies” to support change at the institutional level that fosters increased retention and graduation. It should be reemphasized that this initiative has been funded through a nongovernmental entity, the Lumina Foundation, which has shown that African American college success is not just a concern within the vacuum of higher education, but of concern to the broader community as a whole and to the private sector of the United States (Rutschow et al., 2011).

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), an advocacy group for community colleges, has developed an archive, the Minority Male Student Success Programs at Community Colleges, that is a database of programs “whose objective is to improve the success of minority male students” (AACC, 2016) According to this database, there are 79 community colleges with programs specifically created to increase the success of male students of color. Some of the programs are funded under the Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI) grant while others are funded by individual institutions or other external sources. With recognition of the problem and support from various levels, the issues of African American male success in higher education have a starting point and the support to create programs and initiatives that address this challenge.

Statement of the Problem

Creswell (2008) stated that there must be a justification of a problem to necessitate conducting research, and the justification must come from literature on the topic by other experts; workplace experiences; or a deficiency in what is known about a topic. This research seeks to examine a federally funded program that is designed to increase the retention and
graduation rates of African American males in two-year colleges. African American males are going to college in larger numbers than ever before. Although these males are entering college, when compared to their Caucasian male and African American female counterparts, they are being surpassed at a rate of almost three to one in terms of retention and degree completion (see Tables 8 & 9 in Appendix A). Why are African American males not being retained and graduated, specifically those attending two-year colleges? While there is a large body of research in the areas of African American male retention at four-year colleges, there is less literature as it pertains to two-year colleges and African American males, although gains have been made.

The Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) at San Diego State University, houses Minority Male Community College Collaborative (MMCCC). The MMCCC is a repository on college students of color, specifically African American males, while the umbrella of CCEAL, has a focus on all students of color. The CCEAL lists over 40 peer reviewed articles related specifically related to African American males and community colleges. While this is not an exhaustive list of literature on this subject matter, it does show the need to add to the body of research on this subject matter area. The CCEAL also lists twelve chapters, in various books, that specifically address the phenomenon of African American males and community colleges. This dissertation attempts to add to this research.

The retention challenges that African American (AA) males face at community colleges are best summed in this way:

…the community college emerges as the postsecondary river African American male students must navigate through in order to succeed in higher education. The problem that arises from this current condition is that for many African American males, this river is perceived to be infested with more mines than bridges. (Bush & Bush, 2010, p. 44)

The researchers concluded that lack of institutional support causes Black males to not be engaged in the college community. This lack of engagement has been identified as a key cause of
why the Black males do not seek out services or programs on campus that can aid in their academic success (Bush & Bush, 2010).

While support systems for success have existed at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), African American students, especially males, still face retention and success barriers. Factors such as not seeking help with academics, financial aid challenges, and issues at home are just some of the challenges cited by Palmer, David, Hilton (2010). The researchers noted the students have access to the resources for academic help but waited until it was too late or did not access the resources because of a phenomenon referred to as “cool pose.” According to Major and Billson (1992), “cool pose” is defined as “a façade used to display confidence and masculinity.” In other words, African American male students want to appear more knowledgeable than they really are, and as a result do not seek help when needed. In the largely African American population at HBCUs, it is important to stay “true to the game” or be strong and not ask for help. Unfortunately, this could be a key as to why some students are not being successful or are being less successful than they could have been in college.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the impact that a federally-funded program has on the retention and academic success of Black males at an urban, predominantly-African American two-year college. Since community colleges continue to serve as the primary entry point for African American students into post-secondary education (Hagedorn, 2002), it is increasingly more important to examine why Black male students choose to enroll in two-year colleges, to investigate how targeted support initiatives enhance these students’ success, and to understand the institutional commitment to the successful retention and graduation of African American males.
**Proposed Research Questions**

The research from this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. Why did students in the study elect to attend the institution, an urban, predominantly-Black institution?
2. What are the students’ perspectives on how participation in federally-funded program helped them stay enrolled at The College?
3. From the student’s perspective, how did participation in the federally-funded program impact the future career and life goals of the students?
4. What recommendations did the students have to strengthen the program and increase participation?
5. What were the college administrators’ perspectives on how this program benefited students, and how did the program fit within the mission and goals of the college?

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations are parameters placed on the study by the researcher. This research is limited to African American male students who enrolled at an urban, two-year college. Furthermore, only students who were enrolled in the College’s Predominately-Black Institutions Program were selected for participation in the study. Additional delimitations included that participating students must: (a) have successfully completed a minimum of 12 hours for the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters, (b) have been enrolled in Fall 2012 and persisted to Spring 2013, and (c) have been in good standing and eligible to return the college in Fall 2013.

Limitations, on the other hand, are often considered weaknesses of a study that are associated with study design (Cresswell, 2008). As the researcher and students have interaction as staff member and student program member, response bias for the student must be considered.
Although this study is limited to one college and uses a small sample size, the findings and conclusions can be transferred beyond the bounds of this current study. This study can be used by community colleges in urban areas not just in the south, but in other areas of the country. The external validity of this study will allow this research to be replicated at other institutions, including urban four year colleges. External validity will be addressed in more detail, later in the study.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant as it will help college administrators examine a particular program aimed at increasing the retention rates of African American male students, a demographic that has traditionally had trouble being retained and graduating from college. This program was aimed the participation and involvement of students in gaining needed academic and life skills. Understanding what works in this specific instance may contribute knowledge to the national conversation on increasing the college graduation rates of African American males.

Retention at two-year colleges presents its own set of challenges because of the very nature of its purpose, students, and admission policies. Unlike four-year colleges that can easily define retention and tie it to graduation rates, two-year colleges cannot. Fike and Fike (2008) in their research stated that the strongest predictor of retention among community college students was their passing of developmental courses such as reading, writing, and math. The strongest predictor of these three was the successful completion of reading or testing into a non-developmental course. Developmental course work is a precursor to taking for credit courses. Failure to complete the very basic courses can be a factor in the non-retention of a student.

In his research, Wood (2014) argued that while some of the challenges experienced by African American males are external forces not related to academics, student involvement and
engagement with the institution is a key factor in retention. At the heart of his argument on academics and retention is the lack of faculty-student interaction. The students studied did not see the faculty as approachable and were therefore hesitant to ask them for help. These same students stated this treatment by faculty led them to feel “academically inferior” (Wood, 2014 p. 794). It would stand to reason that if a student feels he cannot approach a faculty member, especially if he needed help, the lack of interaction will affect his academics and subsequently, his retention. It also stands to reason that a combination of negative academic and social factors will have a negative effect on retention. It is hoped that this study will shed light on how to build trusting relationships between black male students, faculty, and staff.

Strayhorn (2012) noted that for community college students, factors such as being underprepared; experiencing lower socioeconomic conditions; and having family responsibilities have a negative effect. In his study, Strayhorn concluded that for AA male community college students, satisfaction with the college and social integration were bigger predictors of retention than being able to succeed academically. This is important to note as it distinguishes the differences concerning AA students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), those at HBCUs, and those who attend two-year colleges. While this research focused on African American males at two-year colleges, the African American male retention crisis transcends across all types of higher education institutions.

This study will provide critical information and insight to policy makers, educators, funders, and students. The research will discuss relevant literature that highlights the problem of Black male retention and graduation in higher education, as well as the policies that have been created to help with this situation. The research will also detail experiences of students and administrators at a two-year college that are actively involved in a PBI program in an urban, two-
year college campus. Additionally, it will provide solutions and avenues for improved strategies for the retention and success of Black males maneuvering the path to success in higher education.

Solutions and improved strategies for retention for African American males, such as those to be examined in this study, were examined by Glenn (2004) at two public community colleges in Texas. He examined successful retention polices at those schools, and how those policies translated to the retention of African American males. Glenn (2004) used a qualitative case study for his research, a format that this study will follow. The study found that intuitions that were successfully retaining African American males implemented strategies such as freshman orientation; counseling programs for at risk students; required tutoring for those students; identified students upon their enrollment at the college; and had an engaged and friendly faculty. Other related strategies for improved retention of Black males will be examined in more detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

**Conceptual Framework**

In many studies, researchers often focus on negative aspects of the subject matter instead of examining the positive aspects of the subject, i.e., what does not or has not worked. Much of previous research has focused on why students were not successful instead of why they were successful (Allen, 1999; Glenn, 2004; Bush & Bush, 2005; Strayhorn, 2008). This research took the positive approach to the study of African American male retention at an urban PBI. This present study is based on the anti-deficit framework by Dr. Shaun Harper (2010). In his research, Harper studied students in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields and asked how these students were able to “thrive and negotiate environments that are culturally foreign, unresponsive, politically complex, and overwhelmingly Caucasian” (p. 71). Harper
asked “how” and “what” made the students successful versus “why” they were successful.

Harper’s framework is similar that of an algebraic equation. Equations can look like X+Z=Y. Research can often be focused on the Y ie; the answer, but not how the Y occurred. There is no focus on X or the Z, ie, the problem. In using the Anti-Deficit framework, here is a focus on the X and Z, the “how and “what” of what made the student successful, that led to the student’s Y or success.

Harper’s (2010) anti-deficit framework is comprised of three distinct components that are used to explain what factors contribute to the college success of African American males. Harper stated there are three pipelines that make up the basis for the framework: pre-college socialization and readiness; college achievement; and post college success. Within those pipelines are eight dimensions of achievement: family; k-12 school forces; out of school college preparation resources; classroom experiences; out of class engagement; enriching educational experiences; graduate school enrollment; and career readiness. As the students in the study were not post graduate, the research focused on the second pipeline of the anti-deficit framework, college achievement.

Harper updated his research in a 2012 report, The National Black Male College Achievement Study, to focus all majors not exclusive to STEM. In this study, Harper found that

Participants did not deem themselves superior to or smarter than their less accomplished, disengaged same-race male peers. In fact, most believed lower-performing Black male students had the same potential, but had not encountered people or culturally relevant experiences that motivated them to be engaged, strive for academic success, and persist through baccalaureate degree attainment… (Harper, 2012. p.15)

In addition to this, Harper (2012) also found that “…no participant attributed even a fraction of his college achievement to a program that systematically matched him with faculty, staff, or peers with whom he was to routinely meet” (p. 16). These two findings will guide this
research. The students in this study are involved in a program in which they routinely meet with staff members and with peers who are similar to them, but may or may not be successful as a student in higher education.

Definitions

The following definitions are included to provide better clarity for terms use in this study:

**Achieving the Dream** - National reform network dedicated to community college student success and completion; focused primarily on helping low-income students and students of color complete their education and obtain market-valued credentials (www.achievingthedream.org).

**African American** - A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as ‘‘Black, African American, or Negro,’’ or provide written entries such as African American, Afro-American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian. (United States Census Bureau, Census 2000. In this study, the terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably.

**Community College** – any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as the highest degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

**Historically Black College and University (HBCU)** – Colleges and/or universities established before 1964 whose main purpose is educating African Americans (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

**Predominately Black Institution (PBI)** - Colleges and/or universities that are at least a 40% African American or black student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

**Predominantly Caucasian Institution (PCI)** – Institutions of higher learning in which Caucasian account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Lomotey, 2010). This type of
college is also referred to as a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

Public Policy – The sum of government activities, whether pursued directly or through agents that have an influence on the lives of citizens (Peters, 2001).

Student Retention – Tracks the full-time student in a degree program over time (6yrs/4yr college, 3yrs/2yr college) to determine whether the student has completed the program (Center for the Study of College Student Retention, 2012).

Summary

African American males are persisting and graduating from college at lower rates than other ethnicities. Less than 10% of Black students that began college at their first school graduated with a bachelor’s degree. Of that 10%, only 1/3 of are males. The data for student attainment of associate degrees paints the same picture for Black males, with only 1/3 graduating. This issue has caught the attention of those concerned about the future of higher education of this population, such as college administrators and policy makers. African American students who attend two-year colleges face greater retention challenges, and the institutions they attend must be supported with programs and adequate funding in order to help address lack of retention.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The following section offers a review of literature of the retention of African-American males attending an urban two-year college. This review of literature examines components of the (a) policy and the background, (b) community colleges and their students, (c) college choice, (d) remediation, retention and graduation, (e) student support services, (f) African American college students, (g) and the role of the researcher and includes a chapter summary, focusing on the state of knowledge on the topic.

Scope of the Review

The review of literature provides a basis for the theoretical framework and the research questions used during the interviews for this study. It should be noted that there is little research-based literature focused on African American males attending two-year colleges. The researcher reviewed various forms of available literature such as books, peer reviewed journals, white papers, college surveys, and policy briefs to come to this conclusion. This review of literature was conducted using resources at the Mullins Library at the University of Arkansas, the Ottenheimer Library at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, the Ottenheimer Library at Pulaski Technical College, and the William F. Laman Library, a public library in North Little Rock, Arkansas. Research databases consulted from these libraries included EBSCO Academic Search Complete, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Department of Education, ProQuest Research Library, America History and Life, and JSTOR (Journal Storage). These databases were used to gather literature on these three topics: (1) African American students in college, (2) education policy in the United States, and (3) community colleges.

While conducting the search, the following keywords or phrases were used, either alone or in combination: African American, black, college, community college completion, drop out,
females, graduation, males, success, higher education whites, Hispanics, historically black
colleges, predominantly black institution, remediation, retention, students, success, two-year
college, and university.

Given the limited literature on African American male retention at two-year colleges, the
researcher has provided an in-depth analysis of studies that when combined give a better
understanding of higher education, community colleges, African American males, and the
policies associated with higher education.

Public Policy

Policy Background

On November 8, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law what is known as the
Higher Education Act of 1965, as part of his Great Society agenda. This act was designed to
“strengthen the educational resources of colleges and universities and to provide financial
assistance for students in post-secondary and higher education” (PL 89-329). The original act has
eight titles, six of which were funded by the federal government: Title I – Community Service
and Education Programs; Title II – College Library Assistance and Library Training and
Research; Title III – Strengthen Developing Institutions; Title IV – Student Assistance; Title V –
Teacher Program; Title VI – Financial Assistance for the Improvement of Undergraduate
Instruction; Title VII – Amendments to Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963; and Title VIII –
General Provisions. The act has been reauthorized eight times since then in 1968, 1972, 1976,

Congress authorized the Higher Education Opportunities Act in 2008 and reauthorized
the amended Higher Education Act of 1965, which began the process for a program dedicated to
address the issue of African American success in college. These congressional actions directed
the Department of Education (DOE) to issue Title III, Part F, Section 371 of the amended Higher Education Act of 1965, also known as the Predominantly Black Institutions (PBI) Undergraduate Program. Through this program, the DOE eventually awarded 26 PBI colleges and universities funds that totaled $14.9 million for fiscal year (FY) 2011 to support institutions efforts in helping African Americans’ succeed in college (DOE, 2011). The champion for this legislation was a Senator from Illinois, Barack Obama, and Danny Davis, a congressman from the same state.

The PBI funds allowed institutions of higher education to develop programs focused in one of the following areas: science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM); health education; internationalization or globalization; teacher preparation; or improving educational outcomes of African American males. All of these are areas in which Black students have traditionally have been underrepresented. According to the DOE website, a PBI is defined as an undergraduate school that has at least 1,000 students; is at least 40% black; has at least 50% low-income or first-generation students; and at least 50% of the students are taking courses that lead to an associate’s or Bachelor’s degree. The institutions that received awards were two-year colleges as well as four-year colleges and universities. It should be noted that PBIs are not the same as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). HBCUs are defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965 as “any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association.” The key difference is what the mission of the institution was when the institution was established. PBIs are not defined by their mission; however, a pre-determined percentage of their student population must be African American for an institution to be considered a PBI.
Setting of the Agenda

An agenda is part of a set of processes that goes on to formulate public policy (Kingdon, 2003). Kingdon stated that an agenda is a list of problems or issues that government is “paying close attention to” (pg 3). Gupta (2001) agreed with Kingdon, in his argument that “…the policy cycle starts when government pays close attention to a matter” (p. 47). In the case of the African American male retention, the case can be made that then Senator Obama, saw the lack of African American males not graduating from college as an issue. Among community college students, African American (AA) males have a 16% graduation rate, which is the lowest of all minority groups (Strayhorn, 2012). This is clearly a problem.

The bill was passed in 2007, but this issue had been on the radar of the constituents, such as university and college presidents, college faculty, and community leaders, much longer than that. Agendas are set based on problems, politics, and visible participants (Kingdon, 2003). In this case, the problem is African American male retention, specifically at community colleges. When the Higher Education Opportunities Act was passed, the Democratic Party had control of both chambers of Congress. The policy window, as Kingdon (2003) called it, was ripe and open for this bill to be passed with little, if any, opposition. The Senate Majority Leader and Speaker of the House controlled the agenda and determined which bills were called to the floor for a vote. The politics of the controlling party allowed for the bill to be passed out of committee and to the floor for a vote. Once passed, the bill went to the President’s desk for signage. Although Bush was a member of the opposing party, his party too saw an issue with the lack of African American males not completing college, as the bill passed with only 12 no votes in the Senate and only 97 no votes in the House of Representatives, in September of 2007.
Once the problem was identified and politics removed, the visible and invisible participants must be identified (Kingdon, 2003). In this instance there are number of affected participants: the students, the Department of Education, colleges, universities, and the general public. The students benefitting from the program after enrollment; the Department of Education, which is responsible for dispersing the funds and is accountable to Congress, the colleges and universities which have to meet the objectives set forth in the funding, and the citizens who are concerned with the responsible use of government funds.

As one examines public policy, one must look at policy outputs. Peters (1999) stated that at this level of government activities, the spending of funds occurs as a policy output. The legislation allocated $14.9 million in FY 2011 to be spent on solving the challenge of African American male retention. Each institution that receives funding must be accountable to the Department of Education for the success or failures of the program.

**Policy Research**

Kingdon (2003) noted that there are non-governmental actors who play a role in the formation and implementation of policy, such as interest groups, academics, the media and consultants, among others. Kingdon stated that academics “…affect the long term [policy] directions more than short term outcomes” (p. 68). He also noted that academics and researchers do not set the agenda, but usually are the experts on an issue and are who policy makers turn to when they need answers. Researchers are known to policy makers because of their ability to find solutions and to provide the expertise needed in the policy area. But researchers want to find the real impact. In other words, is it the policy that is having the positive impact on student retention or is there something else moving the needle? In this instance, the research seeks to find out if a
federally funded program designed to increase the retention of African American males at community colleges actually works.

As a policy maker, this is very important. Policy makers want to know if their funds being spent correctly and have an impact. If it is working, then policy makers are interested in replicating the success and potentially increasing funding. Conversely, if the program is not having the desired outcome, what is the cause? As a researcher, one becomes the expert in an area, and policy makers feel comfortable continuing to rely on researchers for answers. In turn, the researchers continue to receive funding for their work.

On the state level, this research is very important to policy makers. As public intuitions of higher education look for additional sources of funding to support their schools and programs, they are subject to increased accountability from the state government. One of the measures that states are now using to determine funding deals with retention. Research by Dougherty, Natow, & Vega (2012) discussed what is called performance-based funding, which they define as funding directly tied to measures such as retention, graduation, or job placement. The authors noted that in Washington State a change in the legislature from Republican to Democrat led to a lack of support for this type of funding formula. Additionally, the two and four-year colleges in the state were not supportive of the idea. They applied pressure to their representatives to end support for this policy and return to the previous funding policy. Under the law, Washington held back 1.2% of its total higher education funding for two and four-year schools. The schools would be able to recover the funding if they meet performance indicators. Missouri had a similar policy and ended their policy for similar reasons, which included lack of support from law makers and a down turn the in the state budget. Local colleges and universities look for ways to shore up
decreasing revenues and shortfalls. State level policy makers on the other hand, are holding institutions more accountable and using graduation and retention rates as the measure.

College level leaders and federal and state policy makers should find this research useful. If retention programs such as the one targeted in this study are successful, they can be replicated. College administrators with budget shortfalls can use this research to implement similar programs to increase the retention of the challenged demographic of African American males. When examining the retention and graduation rates for African American males, it is clear that two-thirds of Black males that begin college do not finish (Harper, 2005; McClure, 2006). The question is why have Black males struggled to succeed as college students? As these students come to college, they face a myriad of obstacles that affect their retention and graduation rates.

Challenge to their success, especially for those students of color that attend a community college, include variables such as background (low high school GPA’s and no educational goals), social (engagement in nonacademic activities), academic (not spending time with faculty, poor study habit, not visiting with advisors) and environmental (lack of financial resources, high number of hours worked, and other life stressors) (Wood & Williams, 2013). Policy makers should be interested in determining the reasons for such abysmal success rates and finding a solution. This research can contribute to helping policy makers with information on efforts to find solutions and allow them to make informed decisions on constructing policies to support those solutions.

**Policy Implementation**

After the policy is passed, how is it supposed work? How is the policy to be implemented so those who need it can benefit from it? Very rarely do those making the policy have a clear view of this process or provide direction for implementation (Cobb & Ross, 1997; Gupta, 2001). Implementation of the policy usually falls to the agency or career bureaucrat. In this instance, the
agency responsible for the policy is the U.S. Department of Education. This huge department has the task of identifying who would receive the funds, how to measure success, and what to do if the funds are not used as given or the successes fall short. Agencies often rely on interest groups, researchers, and the media to help to formulate the implementation of the policy (Gupta, 2001). The task of allocating over $14 million dollars is no small task. Implementation is simply putting the programs into action (Peters, 1999). Peters stated that the biggest challenge with implementation is producing the desired effect of the policy. He identified several barriers to successful implementation which include communication, unclear goals, and interest groups.

The clear communication of the policy is possibly the largest barrier to a successful policy. In the case of African American retention, what defines success? Which interest group or career bureaucrat has defined success for the colleges receiving the funding? This particular policy is implemented as a grant and to be applied for. Success of the policy depends on achieving the measurable objectives that the institutions committed to achieving as part of the grant application process. The clear communication of expectations from the granting agency to the institutions had to be established first. The challenge then becomes, who established the expectations? Peters (1999) has provided clarity on why this is so hard: goals change and as goals change, the initial target that was being used has moved or been totally changed.

**Community Colleges**

**History of Community Colleges**

In 1947, President Harry Truman commissioned “Higher Education for Democracy” a report on higher education. World War II had just ended which meant thousands of service men would be returning home and begin enrolling in college using the new created GI Bill (Kim & Rury, 2007). The Truman Commission, as the report is commonly referred to, could be called the
genesis for the formation of what are now known as community colleges. The commission summarized that students should have a good base of general education, that college teaching should be improved to educate this new crop of students, and that higher education should be accessible to the masses. The commission also found that approximately half of the nation’s citizens were “capable of completing the first two years of college.”

Gilbert and Heller (2013) examined two facets of the six volume Truman Commission report: improving access to college and the expanding role of community colleges in that endeavor. The authors noted that the report stated that in order to increase access and enrollment in college discrimination practices toward blacks, women, and Jews should be removed, and scholarship and fellowship opportunities should be increased in order to remove the financial hardships of attending college. Community colleges provide the avenue for achieving these goals.

The Truman Report laid out its vision for community colleges. Community colleges would be an affordable means for students to attend college and would increase the number of students enrolled in higher education. This would mean increasing the number of colleges. Furthermore, the Commission wanted two-year colleges to be fully integrated into the life of their communities, which made the term “community college” more appropriate than “junior college” (Vol. III, p. 5).

What is a Community College?

Community colleges are known by various names across the United States such as, two-year colleges, junior colleges, community colleges, and technical colleges (Boggs, 2011). According to Boggs (2011), these schools have evolved from strictly providing courses leading to Associate’s degrees and courses that transfer to a four-year college/university into providing
technical education and training for those students who wanted to immediately enter the workforce. Since these schools have many names, they have varied missions and purposes. Ewell (2011) listed the following as some of the missions of community colleges:

- Associate degree instruction in many vocational fields that also carries transfer credit
- Terminal occupational credentialing that has immediate workplace value (both associate level and certification) but does not carry transfer credit
- Remedial and developmental instruction to render students college ready
- Noncredit instruction such as literacy training and English as a Second Language
- Contract training for employers and local businesses.

With so many varied missions, the impact and true purpose of the community college is different across states and across cities. Community colleges, by their name, are colleges for the community. Community colleges tend to have lower tuition costs compared to traditional four-year colleges, open admission standards, and flexible class schedules (Boggs, 2011, Calcagno, et al, 2008). In addition to lower costs, community colleges, by their name, are more aligned with the needs of the community. The “community” part is key to ensuring that the plans of study are germane to the population they hope to serve. This can only happen by being engaged with the community during the formation of the academic master plan and course offerings.

**Who Are Community College Students?**

Community college enrollment is very fluid. Institutions of higher education set their budgets, salaries, and strategic plans based on enrollment projections. For community colleges, the recent influx of students has increased enrollments beyond their projections. Open door admission policies of community colleges have allowed college students with limited resources,
and academic challenges have been reasons for the increases in enrollment for community colleges (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Community colleges comprise roughly 11 million of college going students and approximately 46% of the undergraduate population (Jurgens, 2010).

Community college students do not have the same demographics as traditional college students. Calcagno (2007) completed a research study on the success rates of older and younger students who were enrolled in community college in the state of Florida. He found that students who enroll in community colleges are a mixed batch. They are between the ages of 25 and 64, enrolled part time, and are less likely to seek credits for transfer, choosing instead to enroll in courses dealing with their current occupation. This research also found that these students are also more likely to enroll in remedial courses, have below average reading, writing and math skills, and are more likely to receive financial aid as means to pay for course work. Another key factor in the study found that older students were who enrolled in remedial classes were more successful toward degree attainment than their younger, more traditional, college aged peers.

Older students/nontraditional students, while more likely to be enrolled in remedial courses, also might deal with balancing school, work and family, which makes their success in the classroom even more extraordinary.

Bahr (2010), completed a study on groups of community college students or “clusters”. Clusters were defined as a grouping mechanism for those participants involved in the study. Bahr was able to examine first-time entering community college students and cluster them based on why they chose to enroll in a community college. These clusters were defined as transfer, vocational, drop-in, noncredit, experimental, and exploratory. Bahr’s work builds upon previous cluster research and found that the largest group of students in the study were drop-in students at rate of 32%, who took one course, which was normally work related. Experimental students
comprised the next largest group of students at 30%. These students, according to Bahr (2010), were “testing the waters” of college life. Transfer students made up 13% of the group and enrolled in courses such as science, math, and English. These are courses normally needed for a baccalaureate degree. The vocational cluster made up about 3% of the students studied and were enrolled in course that were non-transferrable and were career related.

**How Students Choose – College Choice Selection**

**The College Going Pipeline Process**

A discussion on college choice must first begin with Hossler and Gallagher’s Model of College Choice (1987). Hossler and Gallagher’s research on college choice was spawned as colleges and universities entered into “competition for a declining pool of traditional age students” and “ushered in an era of market-oriented research which studies student college choice as a means of developing more effective market strategies” (p. 207). Even in the late 1980’s, colleges and universities had to deal with enrollment challenges that affected how they attracted students. This provides a historical context that the traditional student enrollment challenges being faced now are not just a 21st century issue.

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) divided the college choice process into three phases – predisposition, search, and choice. The authors identified that students in the predisposition stage had several factors that affect college choice, including the socioeconomic status (SES) of the student. Students with low SES are less likely to attend college. Additional factors in this stage include peers and if those peers planned to attend college. The study found that students who live close to college campuses and students who have a challenging high school curriculum, such as STEM related courses, also have a predisposition to attend college. After predisposition, students move to the search phase. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) stated that in this phase, both the student
and the college/university are searching for each other. It is in this phase where students make college visits, complete applications, seek information from various institutions, and begin to examine costs of attendance. Conversely, the institutions are seeking students who fit their college or university. Communication by the college or university to the potential applicant is key for both parties in this process to move to the next phase. The final stage of the selection process is the choice. In this stage, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) noted that after the student has evaluated all the information in the search stage, the students and the parents make the choice together. It should be noted that “institutional quality, net price and academic programs” are key factors in the choice stage (p. 218).

For students of color, the phases of the college choice process is similar, but different than the phases for non-Black students. SES plays a larger role when students of color choose to attend college. African American college students are at the lower end of the SES scale. Freeman (1997, 2005) noted in her research that in addition to the college choice model used by Hossler and Gallagher, students of color also use cultural supports of the institution, family, and high school counselors as factors in the college choice process. These cultural supports can be surmised as programs, faculty or other students of color that can help the student feel a sense of belonging on a campus. Freeman (1997, 2005) noted that students of color did not want to feel as if they were isolated on campus, so that feeling of isolation or non-isolation has a role in the choice process.

Many African American college students are still first generation college students, and as a result, they rely on school counselors to assist in the choice process. Muhammad (2008) concluded that mothers were more engaged and influential in the choice process than fathers. Even with that strong maternal influence and due to a lack of knowledge about the college
process, high school counselors had a major impact in the selection process. The counselors gave students an expectation of attending college and the college going process.

Critics of the Hossler and Gallagher model stated that the model is flawed because it does not account for a deep understanding of the challenges of the African American students in the college choice process (Muhammad, 2008; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008; Freeman, 2005). These critics have argued that an inclusion of critical race theory into the Hossler and Gallagher model could better support the model as it relates to African American college choice.

Undermatching

The term undermatching has been defined as students, usually high school, who choose to attend a college and university that is less selective than their academics indicate, or they have the academic achievement to attend college, but they do not (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Bastedo & Flaster, 2014). Undermatching has been shown to affect those on the lower end of the economic scale and minorities. Tiboris (2014) asked whether there is anything wrong with undermatching. Undermatching isn’t limited to those with lower SES or minorities, but this section of the student demographic seems to be impacted the most. He surmised that while undermatching was a challenge, there are factors that must be considered before the choice can truly be correlated with undermatching. There were several factors Tiboris (2014) listed, such as, was a student’s choice of college selection autonomous, was the student aware of other funding options at other colleges and universities, and was the college selection made in alignment with the student’s value system. Tiboris goes on to argue that one of the real challenges that needs a solution is if the students knows the benefits of attending a college better matched for them, but chooses not to attend anyway, even if they know the potential long term benefits of attending that college or university.
Undermatching is not limited to students who make choices to attend various four year colleges and universities. This phenomenon has trickled down to community colleges. Research by Lowery (2017) examined college choice and undermatching and its impact on African American community college students. The 19 students Lowery (2017) researched were from a southern, urban community college.

Lowery (2017) concluded that the 19 African American students in her study had a “predetermination to attend college and believed that going was to college was their only option” (22). She also concluded that students who undermatched were influenced by their families in their college selection process, which was a point also discussed by Freeman (2005). The family influences the student to select the community college, either because another family member had attended there and were encouraged by other members to not only attend college, but to attend the same institution as other family members. The student chose to undermatch and attend a community college, despite being qualified to attend a four-year college. While the students choose to undermatch on their own, some of those in the study did note they missed the social experiences of a four-year campus and expanding their social network.

**Retention, Remediation and Graduation**

Retention at two-year colleges presents its own set of challenges due the very nature of the purpose, students, and admission policies of community colleges, such as open admissions, and lower college entrance exam scores. Fike and Fike (2008) in their research stated that the strongest predictor of retention among community college students was their passing of developmental courses in reading, writing, and math. The strongest predictor of these three was the successful completion of reading or testing out that course into a non-developmental course. The authors also noted that the amount of financial aid a student received and the number of
hours a student enrolled in their first semester impacted the likelihood of being retained, while a high number of dropped classes decreased the likelihood of retention.

In addition to the students in remedial courses, Hoyt (1999) lists students who he classifies as “at risk”, as having a higher dropout rate than others. Students in the category were non-traditional (over the age of 24), minority, and part time. This is the description of most African American community college students. The research concluded that the more remediation classes a student was enrolled in, the less likely the student would be retained. Hoyt (1999) also noted that almost 2/3 of minorities in his study required remedial education, which as twice as many as their white counterparts. The majority of the minorities, including African Americans, needed to be remediated in math and English. In addition to remediation being a factor in retention of the community college students in this study, students who were first generation college students, who lacked lack financial support, and who had non-school related commitments were more likely not to be retained.

There are students who persist through these challenges to continue their education. What makes those students persist? The factors in low persistence can be attributed cultural capital, academic underpreparedness, and access (Martin, Galentino, & Townsend, 2014). The researchers found that those factors can be overcome if students have certain characteristics, such as ability to manage external demands, clear goals, self-empowerment, and motivation (p. 238).

Students who persisted in this study had a clear plan and also found support programs, which aided in their success. Faculty in the study said students with clear goals also avoid financial aid issues because they are able to stick to a predefined academic plan. Martin, Galentino, and Townsend (2014), also found that students with strong motivation to succeed was the theme shown most by the successful students in the study. Students and faculty agreed that
the most successful students had an internal motivation to succeed. Contrary to previous research that listed social integration as a factor in student success and retention, Martin, Galentino, and Townsend (2014) stated that successful students in their study did not find being socially engaged on campus had a major factor in their retention at the college. One of the many factors that can impact student retention is faculty-student engagement.

The goal for a majority of students that enter college is graduation. This can be a difficult for anyone, but especially students of color. A study by Tolliver and Miller (2018) that examined how to improve African American male graduation rates found that there were four themes that emerged from the 11 participants in the study, related to their graduation from a four-year school and why they were successful. The themes were mentorship, socialization, on campus support and family and community expectations. Students noted that the mentors helped them navigate the institution and figure out college life. These mentors provided relationships and encouraged engagement with the institution. The authors noted that students discussed socialization as an important part of their success and helped them feel engaged.

Among community college students, African American (AA) males have a 16% graduation rate, which is the lowest of all minority groups (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2012) noted that for community college students, factors such as being underprepared; lower socioeconomic conditions, and family responsibilities have a negative effect on these students. In his study, Strayhorn concluded that for AA male community college students, satisfaction with the college and social integration were a bigger predictor of retention than being able to succeed academically. This satisfaction and social integration not only plays a role in the retention of the student, but also is rooted in the college selection process. Students ask “Do I feel welcome here?” which is an argument also supported by Freeman (1997; 2005)


**Student Retention Support Services**

College students, no matter the race, gender, or type of college/university they are attending, could be in need of some type of support services. These services range from academic, disability, or developmental support. The programs may be initiated by the institution or may be state or federally funded programs at the institution. These services have one thing in common: they are designed to help the student progress from term to term (i.e., be retained) and proceed to graduation. In addition to the programs or services offered to students when they enroll in college, there are many pre-college, or “bridge” programs that help prepare students for college life, socially and academically. African American students need supports to succeed academically and to reach their eventual goal of graduation. In examining what type of support services can best serve in this role for African American students, there are several Title III programs in place available to students at the community college level.

One of the best known student support programs for underrepresented students is the federally funded TRiO program. According to the Department of Education’s (DOE) Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE), the TRiO program is a mix of eight programs, that are designed to “to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs.” These include pre-college programs, which expose students to the option of college attendance.

Pre-college programs can be effective in the success and retention of College students. “Bridge” programs are “structured interventions intended to ease the transition from high school to college” (Slade, Eatmon, Staley, & Dixon, p. 126). The authors stated that there is no set length for these programs, although most are the length of a summer session. The purpose of
these types of programs is to address deficiencies in academics and advance student from developmental studies into for credit courses while helping acclimate them to college life. The authors studied a bridge program at North Carolina A&T University that focused on student retention and academic success with African American students (p. 133). The results showed that two cohorts that went through the Bridge program were in good academic standing at the end of the 2011 and 2012 school year, with several of the students earning places on the Dean’s List in their first semester. The results were met with some pushback. One key criticism is that the program “…provides too much support for students. The criticism is that the academic and social support AISP wraps around its participants in the summer is not likely to happen in the fall” (p.137).

One additional look at those concerns about too much support and sustained student progress in the Fall semester, is a bridge program at the University of Arizona’s New Start Summer Program (NSSP). The program used the academic resilience framework, as laid out by Waxman, et al (2003). This student defined academic resilience as “students who preserve in school despite adverse circumstances” (p 1). Persistence and retention are predictors of student success, which has been one of the reasons the summer bridge is listed as a need for their programs. The six-week program has a 35 year history and is open to all incoming freshman, although it was initiated as a service to minority and low income students (Cabrera, Miner, & Milem, 2013). Researchers studied students in the program from 1993 through 2009 to measure the success of the program. The researchers concluded that the data did not prove that there was a clear correlation between students who took part in the NSSP and went on to be retained. The authors stated that more research on the impact of summer bridges should be completed, but also worried that this additional research may find that some programs are not successful.
Researchers and policy makers alike have asked if summer programs not only impact student retention, but whether that retention translates to the ultimate goal of degree attainment. Douglas and Attewll (2014) conducted a study that examined degree attainment for students at two and four-year colleges who did and did not take part in a Bridge program. Using data from NCES, the researchers found that overall, students of any race and gender significantly benefited from taking part in a bridge program, and the program could be positively associated with increased graduation rates for those students. Additionally, the researchers found that while male and female students showed a 10% increase in degree attainment over their peers who did not, students of color (Black and Hispanic) were 12% more likely to attain a degree when attending a summer bridge program.

**African-American College Student Attendance**

There are certain factors that affect the successful college retention of African American students, specifically males. While this research is centered on success and retention at two-year colleges, it is important to have an overview of African Americans in general. This section of the literature review will be in three sections: African American Students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs); African American Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); and African American males at Two Year/Community Colleges.

**African Americans Students at Predominantly White Institutions**

There are many explanations why African Americans (AA) succeed or fail at PWIs. Allen (1992) concluded that “…characteristics of the individual and characteristics of the institution combine to influence academic performance, extent of social involvement and occupational goals” (p. 39) While Allen makes an attempt to show positive aspects of African American experiences at PWI’s that is offset by a statement in the text. Allen (1992) states “On
predominantly White campuses, blacks emphasize feelings of alienation, sensed hostility, racial discrimination, and lack of integration. On historically Black campuses, Black students emphasize feelings of engagement, connection, acceptance, and extensive support and encouragement” (p. 39).

While the factors listed for success can be turned into positives, there are barriers that impede the success of African American males at predominately white institutions. According to Feagin (1992), discrimination toward African American males by certain classes of whites on campus plays a role in the retention or non-retention of those students. Feagin broke down the groups into four categories: white students; white faculty; white administrators and staff; and white alumni. White students, for example, told racist jokes while not realizing how offensive those jokes were to the African American students. White students also saw their black counterparts as inferior students and treated them differently. Only after the Black students proved their intellect were they treated as equals. Along those same lines, white faculty assumed that all Black students were from the ghetto and couldn’t handle coursework as successfully as their White counterparts. Based on Feagin’s research, it could be stated that the negative interaction between Black students and those they see on a daily basis, their fellow students and faculty, could cause a feeling of alienation and therefore lead to them not being retained at their respective college or university.

Harper (2009) gives examples of African American male experiences at PWIs. One such example of a student who stated “he felt Black men were all viewed as Niggers on his campus” (p. 706). To combat this, the student joined the Student Government and other organizations on campus to “present a more positive view of black men” (p. 706). Others in the study used bolder approaches such as “call ’em on it immediately” if a racist comment was made or inferred (p.
Some became active in the NAACP on campus, to make sure that African American students were noticed on campus. Harper’s article does not answer one critical question, though – was the college experience enhanced by their efforts to be seen as equals, or did their efforts contribute to an unhealthy facade? A larger question is – would these students have had to do similar things at a HBCU to be seen as equals? Are African American students, specifically males, seen as “niggers’ at HBCU’s? 

African American Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

The origins of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) provide a unique perspective on enrollment and attendance by African American students. The Land-Grant Agricultural and Mechanical College Act of 1862 (P.L. 37-130), commonly known as the Morrill Land Grant Act, established land grant colleges in the United States. The act stated land be used to establish and maintain a college that would teach military tactics, mechanical arts, scientific studies, and agriculture. These schools were for white students only. The second Morrill Act of 1890, formally known as the Agricultural College Act of 1890 (P.L. 51-841), established schools for African American students. The act states that “that no money shall be paid out under this act to any State or Territory for the support and maintenance of a college where a distinction of race or and maintenance of such colleges separately for white and colored students…” (p. 418).

According to the Higher Education Act of 1965, the mission of HBCU is and was the education of African Americans. It could be assumed that African Americans attending an HBCU have would have greater success and not face the same challenges as their counterparts attending PWIs because they are at a school established for educating African Americans. One study found that students who attended HBCUs listed factors such as “…faculty, role models, per support, and racial uplift…are the very same factors that are absent for Black students at
PWI’s” (Palmer, Davis, Maramba, 2010). Thus, this type of support system and faculty engagement is encouraged to produce avenues for student success. In other words, the students wanted to appear smarter than what they were and did not need any help. This unfortunately leads to the students not being successful or not being as successful as they could have been.

Support systems are very important to the successful retention of AA males. Research by Palmer and Davis (2009) found three common challenges to the success of AA males: financial support; pride; and having healthy relationships at home and at school. When students don’t have funds, they can’t pay for school. Most of the students in the study either received financial aid or worked to supplement their aid. When there were challenges with the aid, often the student didn’t have the means to pay for classes, and therefore was not retained for that semester. As stated in earlier sections, AA males often do not seek academic help, due to the “cool pose”. In addition to this, students felt that seeking help as a sign of weakness because of a past or current situation, either because they did not have support at home, or they were the support at home. Lastly, when a student had an unhealthy relationship at home, they were unable to concentrate on school as much as they should. One student noted that worrying about his home life affected his sleep patterns. Singularly, these challenges are tough for any student to overcome, but when a student is dealing with more than one of these, it will have a negative effect on their retention and graduation.

**African American Males and Two Year Colleges**

There is a small, but growing body of literature on African Americans and their attendance at two year and community colleges. The literature that is available shows that African American (AA) students have similar challenges in terms of retention and remediation as those attending PWIs or HBCUs. Among community college students, African American (AA)
males have a 16% graduation rate, which is the lowest of all minority groups (Strayhorn, 2012).

Why are AA males not being retained? Strayhorn (2012) noted that for community college students factors such as being underprepared, lower socioeconomic conditions, and family responsibilities have a negative effect. In his study, Strayhorn concluded that for AA male community college students, satisfaction with the college and social integration were a bigger predictor of retention that being able to succeed academically. This is important to note as this begins the distinction and differences in literature covered in previous sections concerning AA students at PWIs and HBCUs and AA males at two year colleges.

In addition to factors of that challenge the success of AA males at two year colleges, what are the characteristics of these students? Do they vary much from their counterparts at four-year colleges and universities, whether they are HBCUs or PWIs? African American community college students have been shown to be older, married or have dependents, and delay enrollment into college after high school (Wood, 2013). These are characteristics are similar to those of other community college students. The study also found that while AA males share similar characteristics, there are some that can challenge the success of these students. African American male students at two-year schools have low degree expectations and are less prepared in subjects such as science and math. These factors can contribute to less success in the classroom and affect the successful retention and graduation of these students.

Some factors contribute to the success of African American community college students. Wood and Harris (2013), review research on five domains that impact the success of AA males in community colleges. The domains are academic; environmental; noncognitive; institutional; and social. The success of the student in the academic domain relies on the student being engaged with the faculty, and vice versa. Students who repeated a course or received an
incomplete grade or repeated a course had better persistence rates than students who withdrew from the course. This was attributed to the forced interaction between the student and the faculty with the repeated or incomplete course. In the environmental domain, the success of the student relies on the student’s ability to manage factors outside of the classroom, such as family commitments, or other factors that could negatively impact the student’s success in the classroom. Students face the biggest challenge in the domain of noncognitive. In this domain, social supports such as family and institutional engagement with peers on campus, and faculty are very important to the success of the student. Students who lack the social supports from either peer or faculty, can have a negative impact a student’s success. Conversely, students with strong social supports are successful. The final domains, institutional and social, build upon one another. For students to achieve success in these domains, the institution must provide supports for the student, though various services, as well as promote faculty-student engagement. Students who were engaged by the institution tended to spend time on campus, outside of class time and engage in social activities. When these domains are satisfied, they can have positive impact on student success and retention.

The Role of the Researcher

Advocacy or Analysis

Yannow (2000) stated that the “policy analyst provides to the policy maker information that the latter lacks and is unable, for various reasons, to obtain personally” (p. 1). Gupta (2001) went one step further as he discussed policy analysis and research. He stated researchers should be objective and should show “objective professionalism” (p. 71). He defined this as “an outlook free of prejudice, feeling, or subjectivity” (p. 71). Researchers have an obligation to themselves and the research community to remain objective in their research. To not do so places a
credibility challenge in all of academia. At the conclusion of the research or analysis, the researcher should present the findings and allow the policy maker to view the results and make a decision based on the results, not based on the bias of the researcher. The research and data has been clear that African American males have a retention problem. What is not clear is whether the programs that have put into place have been of a benefit to the student and institution to stave off the tide of declining retention. As much of a social problem as the retention of African American males are, it is not the job this researcher to present findings that are strictly beneficial to the continuation of funding, but for the betterment of society.

**Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact that a federally-funded program has on the retention and academic success of African American males at an urban, predominantly African American two-year college. This chapter was a review of literature relevant to this study. The review also provided a background of the policy that set in place the appropriations and funding for thePredominantly Black Institutions grants, as well as the criteria for eligibility. Additionally, this review provided a history of community colleges and their impact on higher education, the demographic characteristics of those students, and the retention and graduation challenges faced by those students.

What is known, based on the literature, is that undermatching is a factor in college choice selection for African American students. While African American students may qualify to enroll at four-year institutions, they choose to enroll at a community college, due to factors such as family, finances, or lack of knowledge about options. While these students may be more academically prepared than their peers, they still face the same challenges as other African American community college students. This summary of literature indicates that when African
American college students have institutional supports, such as student support service programs, those students who engage in those programs are more successful than those who do not.

What is also clear from the literature is that they type of institution (two year, four year PWI, or four year HBCU), African American students, particularly males, share the same retention challenges. They faced challenges such as paying for college, family, living environment, lack of academic preparedness, and higher remediation rates when compared to their non-Black peers. The African American students that were successful, shared common factors as well. Those students had faculty who engaged them; felt a connection to the institution and were engaged in some type of academic support services. What is not known is why some students take advantage of these opportunities for success when offered, as well as the simple question of what drives students to want to persist, and can that be transferred to other students or institutions? This research attempts to fill that gap.
Chapter III: Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine perception about the retention and academic success of African American males at an urban, predominantly African American, two-year college that participates in a federally-funded PBI program. A case study format was used to conduct the study.

This section covers (a) qualitative research, (b) the definition of a case study, (c) sampling procedures, (d) data collection methods, (e) the researcher as instrument, (f) the field test, (g) how the interviews were conducted, (h) analysis of documents, (i) data analysis process, (j) how the data was coded, (k) credibility, and (l) a summary of the chapter.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a methodology that focuses on the study of social and cultural phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This research methodology examines a particular research problem that typically involves people or a group of people and meaning is given to those involved (Cresswell, 2007). According to Darlington and Scott (2002), qualitative research can be classified as “in-depth interviewing of individuals or small group; systematic observation of behavior or analysis of documentary data” (p. 2).

In qualitative research, Merriam (2009) suggests that the researcher is “interested in…how people make sense of their world and their experiences in the world” (p.13). In this study, the world is college, and the researcher attempted to make sense of what caused this group of African American male students to be retained from year to year while others were not, using Harper’s Anti Deficit framework (2012) as a backdrop. The focus is on what aspects of a federally-funded PBI program helped Black males students persist from the first to the second year in a community college. What is the “it” that made them successful students?
Qualitative research also allows for the researcher to paint a picture of what is being studied in order to give a more detailed description and understanding of who or what is being analyzed. In this study, the research examined the phenomenon of African American males who successfully persisted to their second year of college. Gallagher (2012) stated that phenomenology is the study of human experiences from the first person point of view. This study will examine the phenomenon of African American male college students, as viewed by them and the researcher. According to Cresswell (2008), using a qualitative research design allows the researcher to develop an understanding of a social phenomenon within an ensuing higher education context. These students have beaten the odds. That being the case, the research took on another layer of qualitative research—that of a phenomenological study.

Case Studies

Case studies are often used in higher education research because much of the work done in this field focuses on gaining an understanding of situations or events and adding meaning to them (Jones, Torres, & Armino, 2006). A case study is a research design of qualitative research that involves examining a single, complex case (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) indicates that “for the most part, the cases of interest in education and social services are people and programs. Each one is similar to other person and programs in many ways. We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality. We seek to understand them.” (p. 1). The cases studied in this research are common in that they are all African American males that are part of the same retention program, but each student is unique in their background and purpose for attending college. Case studies have “proven particularly useful for studying education innovations, evaluating programs and informing policy” (Merriam, 2009, p. 51). In this study, the education innovation and policy are one and the same—a federally funded program directly aimed at
increasing the retention and graduation of African American males. A policy with this direct aim has never been adopted and implemented, and is an innovation because it attempts to be a change agent for this population of students.

According to Cresswell (2008), “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system of (i.e., a setting, a context)” (p. 73). For this study, a multiple case-study approach guided this research. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) defined a multiple or collective case-study as an occurrence when there are “at least two or more individuals or two or more instances of a phenomenon, selected either to be similar to each other or different from each other in some way that is of interest to the researchers” (p. 178). In this study, the issue/problem is the retention of Black males, the cases involve multiple African American male students, and the bonded system is participation in the PBI program at an urban two-year college.

Sampling

African American males at an urban, southern, predominantly African American, two-year college served as the target population for this study. Hatch (2002) recommended that when focusing on a small group of participants should have similar or common characteristics. Therefore, specific criteria was used for selecting student participants. As of Spring 2013, there were 1,727 African American males attending the community college, with 226 students enrolled in the federally-funded Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) program at The College. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to contact student and administrative participants for the study. Purposeful sampling allows for the “information rich cases that hold the greatest potential for generating the insight about the phenomenon of interest.” (Jones, Torres, & Armin, p. 66,
2006). The transferability of this type of sampling with this study will be discussed in a later section.

Criteria for the sample consisted of the following: (a) be a member of the PBI program at The College; (b) be a first-time entering student beginning in the Fall of 2012; (c) have completed at least 12 semester hours; (d) have been successfully retained for the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 terms; and (e) be eligible to return to the College in the Fall of 2013. Once those criteria were factored in, there were 16 students who met the sample criteria. As part of the study, selected administrators with knowledge of the program and academic policies of The College were also interviewed. The criteria for the administrators who took part in the study included: (a) at least one-year employment with The College; (b) understanding of the objectives of the PBI grant; and (c) engagement in the retention and graduation policies at the institution. There were a total of five administrators who met the criteria to be included in the sample.

I initially contacted the school’s Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness (IRPE) to determine if there would be enough students in the sample who met the criteria and would result in an effective study. A letter was sent to the President of The College (see attachment) to request permission to conduct the study on their campus. After the letter was received, a meeting was held between the researcher, Associate Vice President for IRPE, and the President to discuss the study. After the meeting, the President granted the researcher permission to conduct the study and approved of the methodology. The College requested that, once approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Arkansas, The College receive a copy of the approval letter, research questions, student consent forms, and upon completion, a copy of the research study. After receiving permission from The College to conduct the study, the Office of IRPE provided numerical data that determined there would be
sufficient students in the target population for an effective sample to be taken. Cresswell (1998) stated that a sample size of 5 to 25 would be an effective size for a phenomenological study.

A request to conduct the study was sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Arkansas for approval. The researcher completed the IRB protocol form and submitted the following supporting documentation: (a) informed consent form, (b) interview guides for students and administrators, (c) a copy of the invitation to participate in the study, and (d) a copy of the letter to The College requesting permission to conduct the study.

Upon approval of the IRB protocol by both institutions, the study was conducted during the early part of the Fall 2013 semester. The study participants were contacted by phone and their student email accounts. If the prospective participant did not answer, a voice mail, when applicable, was left on the student’s phones. Students were contacted by phone with a scripted invitation to participate in the study. The same verbiage was used in an email to the students. In both instances, it was explained that based on certain criteria, they were eligible to participate in a research study about their experiences as an African American male college student. After being contacted, students either met with the researcher in person or replied with an email confirming their willingness to take part in the study. Of the 16 students who were contacted, seven inquired about the study and five agreed to take part. The two students who declined to take part in the study did so for personal reasons. One declined to participate in the study and the other student stated they did not have the time. It should be noted that the study participants all stated they received the email, but not the voice mail. They also stated they are more apt to check and respond to an email to their student accounts versus answering a phone call or checking a voice mail from an unknown phone number. After students agreed to the study, interview dates and times were set. Informed consent forms were reviewed and signed before the students began
the interviews. Students were given a copy of the informed consent for their review once they agreed to take part in the study. The researcher read the form aloud as the student followed along and stopped after each paragraph to allow the student to ask any questions about what was just read to them. It was important for the consent form to be explained in detail so that the students fully understood the study and had the opportunity to decline participation before the interviews. The researcher and subject reviewed the consent form once more before the interviews began. It was at that point that the students signed the form, formally agreeing to take part in the study.

Administrators of The College were asked to participate in the study via email. Due to their busy schedules, the researcher determined this would be a more effective form of contact and response within this group. A list of five administrators was compiled, using the criteria cited earlier, and all were contacted on the same day. Three administrators responded and agreed to take part in the study. Informed consent was gathered from the administrators using the approved informed consent forms. Interviews with administrators took place after student interviews were completed. In order keep identities anonymous, pseudonyms were used throughout the study in place of the actual names of the participants and the location of the school.

**Collection of Data**

Data for this study were derived from a number of sources: participant interviews, federal and college documents, observations, and journal notes. Interviews were the primary source data used in this study and were conducted over a two-month time period. These interviews were used to find common themes and differences among the students in terms of what caused them to be retained at the college. The administrators in the study shared their experiences about the program and how it fit into the College’s mission, goals, and retention initiatives.
In preparing for and conducting the interviews, the researcher followed Hatch’s (2002) recommendations, (a) “follow the rules of polite conversation, (b) interview in a comfortable place, (c) plan well before the interviews begin, (d) learn how to listen, (e) explore informants understanding, and (f) transcribe interviews right away” (p. 114-116). The researcher also limited the interviews to 60 minutes. Semi-structured interviews usually have a time limit, according to Hatch (2002). The interviews in this study lasted approximately 60 minutes and were conducted at the College.

**Researcher as an Instrument**

I became interested in this topic for two primary reasons: my own experience as an African American male college student and my employment as an administrator for a PBI grant-funded program. I was in the 66% of African American male students that entered college, but did not earn a bachelor’s degree from the first college I attended. I did not earn my bachelor’s degree within a six-year timeframe. While I was retained for eight continuous semesters at my first four-year college, I was on continuous academic probation, which led to my eventual academic suspension for one semester. This experience provided me with a unique understanding of the value of a retention program and the benefits it could provide if properly implemented by the institution and utilized by the students.

Additionally, I am employed by a two-year college and serve as an administrator for the PBI grant-funded program. My interactions with the student and administrative participants, as well as past experiences, provide a unique perspective on the subject matter being researched. In having this perspective and personal history on the topic, I realized the need to remain objective in how I analyzed and interpreted the findings in the data. According to Creswell (2008), “… qualitative researchers believe that your personal views can never be kept separate from
interpretations, personal reflections.” (p. 265). Given my experiences as a student and my role as a researcher, I realized that keeping my personal reflections out of the findings would not be an easy task.

Field Test

Before I conducted interviews with the students and administrators, the interview questions were field-tested with two students who were in the PBI program but had not been selected for the study because they did not meet all the criteria. These students had attended school for longer than one year and have been involved with the program since their enrollment at The College. Both students were knowledgeable about The College and the program. The field test helped to ensure that questions were properly vetted and were clear to the person being interviewed. Based on Cresswell’s (2007) recommendation to gain experience, the field tests were conducted as if it were the actual student interviews. Modifications were made to the student interview guide based on these field tests. For question one, changes were made to specific words from “selected” was changed to “choose” and in sub question (a) the word “obstacles” was changed to “challenges.” Modifications were also made to question two, sub question (h) in changing the word “prevent” to the word “stop.” These changes were made based on feedback from field test participants to make the questions feel more like a student conversation than a teacher-student interaction. The field testers stated this would make the student feel at ease during the interviews. Additions to the interview guide included sub questions (d) on interview question one and sub questions (c) and (f) on interview question two. The researcher noticed there should be other questions added to strengthen the analysis. While conducting the field test with the students, the researcher added these questions to gain more depth about the students’ success while at The College.
Field tests for the administrator’s interviews were also conducted following Cresswell’s (2007) recommendations. These tests were conducted with administrators on two separate campuses, one of which had a PBI program at their institution. The initial interview guide for the administrators consisted of sub questions (a) through (e). After field tests with both administrators and receiving their feedback, sub questions (f) through (i) were added. These sub questions were added to gain additional information and gauge the impact of the program at The College.

**Interviews**

Interviews were the primary source tool used for data collection. As Hatch (2002) explained, “qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their world” (p. 91). For this research, the researcher attempted to understand the “what and why” of these students who had persevered and remained in college. The interview questions were semi-structured, open-ended questions that were constructed using sources such as previous research studies, journal articles, and other literature on this subject, including books, white papers, and federal grants, to provide the most useful data. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask probing questions that focused on the interview and the study (Hatch, 2002).

Face-to-face interviews were used to collect the data. Phenomenological interviews are in-depth and focus on the past and present experiences of the subject being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Additionally, phenomenological interviews have “the primary advantage…that it permits an explicit focus on the researcher’s personal experience combined with those of the interview partners” (Marshall & Rossman, p. 148). In other words, it allowed me combine my past experiences as a college dropout and present experiences as an administrator of the PBI program into a unique a perspective that allowed a richer story to develop.
Creswell (1994) noted that interviews have an advantage in their use when the subject cannot be observed and allows the researcher to “control the line of questioning,” meaning the researcher controls the interview, not the subject (p. 150). Creswell also recommended using some type of audio device to record the interviews and take notes during the interview in case the recording equipment should fail during the interview. During this research, a Sony Mono digital voice recorder was used to collect the data during the interviews.

Unlike the students, administrators were sent a copy of the interview guide prior to their scheduled interviews. This was done to help facilitate a more efficient interview meeting due to their schedules and kept the interviews within the selected timeframes. Copies of the interview questions were given to the students at the time of the interview for use as a guide for the path of the interview and as tangible reference during the interview. Copies were also brought for the administrators, although two of them printed the electronic copy of the questions and made notes on them prior to our interview. Student interviews ranged in length from just under 15 minutes to just over 53 minutes, while administrator interviews lasted between 27 minutes and 45 minutes. This was well within the 60 minutes allotted for the interviews.

**Document Analysis**

Interviews were the primary source of data collection, but supplemental documents from The College were used to help provide background on the program. Hatch (2002) referred to this type of data as “unobtrusive data” because it does not interfere with those being studied (p. 116). Hatch (2002) stated that there are various forms of documents, such as policies, news releases, records, personal communication or school records. This research used the program grant that was submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, Achieving The Dream reports, program brochures, and The College’s strategic plan to gain a better perspective of the PBI program, how
it fits into the overall mission of The College, and why the PBI program was needed. These documents also helped to validate the information collected during the interviews.

**Data Analysis**

When defining analysis, Hatch (2002) states, “Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques or generalize theories” (p. 148). Analysis also allows the recounting of events as remembered by the interviewee and recorded by the person collecting the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The data in this instance were the student interviews, with the events being their experiences as a student and how being a participant in the PBI program helped them to remain in school. Based on the data analysis, certain themes emerged that will allow the researcher to understand the student’s retention and provide answers to the research questions posed in this study. Additionally, an analysis of these themes will lead to a discussion of the policy implications, based on the results in this study and will facilitate a discussion of African American male student retention.

**Coding**

The interview transcripts were analyzed and coded by hand. Given the small number of pages that were transcribed, hand-coding was an appropriate method for analyzing the data (Creswell, 2008). Coding allows for the data to be segmented and divided from broad data into smaller, more manageable themes in order to begin understanding and processing the data collected (Creswell, 2008). During this process, I examined the transcripts for common words or phrases and began separating and labeling these codes with colors, highlighting them within each interview transcript. The coding was done for each of the five research questions. Each research question had their own codes, and some of the research questions had several codes, based on the
responses of those being interviewed. Once the examination of each question and their codes was completed, I took the codes and placed them in groups based on the codes, which allowed me to categorize the numerous codes to a few broad, common themes based on the coded groups.

**Themes**

The codes for each research question were sectioned into themes. Once the codes were narrowed down into several themes by research question, they were grouped into smaller themes in order to write about a “few themes rather than provide general information about many themes” (Creswell p. 252), similar to a funneling effect. By narrowing down the codes into themes, I was able to provide a richer study that focused on the true indicators of student success from the student’s perspective and the administrator’s perspective in the study. These codes and themes form the basis for the data analysis, which will be discussed in chapter four. While I could have written about all the codes and themes found, I focused on including the most relevant themes pertaining to retention. I felt these themes would be of better benefit to myself, future researchers, and policy makers in addressing the challenge of African American male retention.

After a narrowing of the codes for each research question, there were themes and subthemes which emerged. Research question one had three themes, research question two has two major themes and a total is six sub themes associated with those two major themes. Research questions three and four had one theme each, while the final research question contained three major themes and six sub themes.
Research Rigor

Credibility

Credibility of the research study should be shown in a way that “the inquiry is conducted… in such a manner…to ensure that the subject was appropriately identified and described” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 251). Those in the study were allowed to review the notes and data to ensure their descriptions and interviews were depicted correctly. In addition to the interviews, member checks of the interviews and documents from the school were also used as part of the data collection to ensure credibility and help with triangulation. Triangulation will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. Each participant was given a date to respond to any changes or inconsistencies in the transcribed notes and informed that if no response was returned by said date, it would be assumed that the transcripts were true and accurate and would be used in the study as transcribed. Two of the student participants and one administrator responded and stated the transcripts were true and accurate. No response was garnered from the other participants, so based on previous contact, it was assumed that no changes were needed to those transcripts.

Triangulation

Triangulation, also known as verification, is “the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data or methods of data collection…this ensures the study will be accurate because the information draws on multiple sources” (Creswell, 2008, p. 266). In this study, the different individuals include the students and administrators at The College, while the notes taken during the interviews and school documents are the types of data collected. The combination of these sources allowed the information collected through the interviews to be verified. Triangulation strengthens the creditability of a research study.
There are many forms of triangulation for researchers to select from when conducting qualitative research. The four types of triangulation, as discussed by (Carter et al., 2014; Mayer 2015) are data, investigator, theoretical, and method. For this research study, the data type of triangulation was used. Data triangulation utilizes interviews (structured and unstructured), field notes, and other sources, and is best used when the study has a variety of respondents or cases to validate the data. For this study, observations, interviews transcripts from semi structured interviews, and non-interview data from the institution (the federal grant, demographic data, student enrollment, etc.) were used to form the triangle for validation and corroboration of evidence.

**Transferability**

Trochim, Donnelly and Arora (2016) state that transferability is “…the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings” (p. 72). Research that is transferable should be “…useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 252). In other words, other researchers, administrators, or policymakers should be able to apply this research in similar situations in their environments. Merriam (2009) explained it is up to others to determine “whether the finding can apply to his or her particular situation” (p. 226). In this study, this was accomplished through descriptions that provided a very detailed account of the data collected. Bitsch (2005) explains this even further as “…the transferability of judgement by a potential user through ‘thick description’ and purposeful sampling” (p. 85). Both of these methods were employed by the researcher in this study.

The extent to which this study is transferable can be seen in the construction of this study. This study uses a purposive sample. Given that this research seeks to understand African
American male retention, this sampling strategy is fully transferrable to this demographic that attend other urban two-year colleges, two-year colleges with a high African American male demographic, or four year colleges. The challenge of African American male retention is not an issue limited to the South, where this school is located, but the location of the school could affect the sampling strategy. While two year schools would share a similar pool of students to sample from, the region of the country the institution is located could affect the pool. Institutions and students do have differences, based on the region All things considered, the location of the institution should not affect the transferability of this research. Other researchers should be able to replicate this research at their institution through the use of the sampling method, as well as the qualitative case study format used in this research.

**Dependability**

Shenton (2004) described dependability as a process in which if the same people in the study are used and the same methods and process are replicated, the study should produce the same or similar results, no matter how many times it is replicated. The researcher must take care to ensure that how the study was conducted is “reported in great detail” so that if attempted by another researcher, the study can be replicated (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). In this research, great care was taken to ensure that the research notes and records, documents gathered, and interview tapes were collected and stored in a system of files kept secure yet accessible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to this type of record keeping as an audit trail. In this study, all relevant data, such as interview recordings and transcripts, notes taken during the interviews, and emails and documents from the school were cataloged in such a way that an external check could be made, making the dependability and rigor of the research stronger.
Confirmability

Confirmability, seeks to address the issue of the objectivity of the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The research must be “the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). This present research attempted to reflect the thoughts and words of those in the study, not the biases or perceived biases of the researcher. To help remove those perceived biases, the interview data was transcribed word for word to clearly show in great detail the thoughts of the participants and not researcher. Despite the nature of the work the researcher does and interactions with those in the study, every attempt was made to provide the experiences and stories of those in the study, not the biases of the researcher. The researcher allowed study participants to tell their own stories through the interviews and utilized member checks to help confirm the accuracy of the data.

Summary

This study followed a qualitative case study methodology. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact that a federally-funded program has on the retention and academic success of African American males at an urban, predominantly African American two-year college. A purposeful sample strategy was used to select participants for the study, which were then interviewed using a semi-structured interview format for collection of the data. After completion of the data collection, it was then analyzed and coded by hand. These codes were next grouped into broad themes that would address the overall study and research questions. Research rigor and trustworthiness was addressed by using a set of criteria that examined creditability, triangulation, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.
Chapter IV: Data Analysis

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the impact that a federally-funded program has on the retention and academic success of African American males at an urban, predominantly African American two-year college. The data that were collected and analyzed to support that purpose is presented in this chapter of the study. Interviews with study participants were conducted over a six-week timeframe during the Fall of 2013. It should be noted that while the interviews were conducted in that timeframe, data were collected during the previous 14 months. The challenge of conducting face-to-face interviews with students and administrators during the early portion of a Fall term was a daunting task. The students, along with the administrators who took part in the study, all had schedules that proved to be very full. All who agreed to participate in the study were very excited to be part of it and have their words and thoughts go toward a research subject that was important to them.

In the following chapter, profiles of students and administrators in the study, data collection methods, and the analysis of the data will be presented. A semi-structured interview format with an open-ended question interview guide was the primary source of data collected in addition to documents collected from The College. In addition to the study participant profiles, a brief profile of The College will be presented to help with the context of the study.

Description of Study Participants and Profile of The College

With qualitative research, Cresswell (2008) stated, “the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (p. 213). Creswell (2008) also stated that this type of research is characterized by small samples and may also be limited to one location or site. This research sought to follow that recommendation, and in this
study, five students who were members of the school’s PBI federally-funded retention program and three administrators from the school were identified to be a part in the study.

To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of those in the study, all were given pseudonyms. Additionally, The College was given a pseudonym as well to further ensure anonymity of the participants. Students in the study were assigned the following pseudonyms based on the order of their interview: S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5. They will be referred to in that way throughout the study. The students in the study had no connection to each other prior to enrollment at the College or the PBI program. However, the students did have a connection to PBI Program Director. This connection was either direct, due to a previous contact prior to enrollment at the College, or indirect, due to a family member having direct connection with the Program Director. Once the students enrolled at the College and joined the PBI program, they developed a connection and friendship. Administrators who took part in the study were assigned pseudonyms in the same manner as the students and are as follows: A1, A2, and A3. The first table (Table 1) gives a brief description of the student participants while Table 2 gives a brief description of the administrative participants. The College was assigned the pseudonym of River Community College (RCC).

Profile of the College

RCC is one of the largest community colleges in its state as well as one of the largest of all community and four-year colleges in its state. RCC has a main campus and seven sites in a two-county area to help meet the needs of the students and the community. RCC’s main campus is located in a suburb just north of the state’s capital city. Academically, the institution offers 36 Associate degree programs, 21 Technical Certificates and 15 Certificates of Proficiency. Some of the Associate degrees are: Associate of Arts; Associate of Arts in Teaching; Associate of
Science; Associate of Science; and Associate of Applied Science. The Technical Certificates have areas that range from accounting, to drafting and design, to practical nursing. Lastly, the Certificate of Proficiency are in disciplines such as computer information systems, office technology, and welding technology.

RCC’s enrollment for Fall 2013 was just over 10,500, with 49% of the students being classified as African American. The males attending RCC made up 36% of the total population. African American males made up 32% of the total African American population. In Spring of 2013, RCC had a total of 815 students to graduate with a certificate or associates degree, with 34% of those graduates being male. African Americans made up 44% of the total graduates while African American males made up 28% of those graduates.

Table 1
Selected Biographical Information of Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age at Time of Interview</th>
<th>Proposed College Major</th>
<th>College Hours Earned</th>
<th>Degree Type</th>
<th>Employment Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Associate of Science</td>
<td>Part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Associate of Science</td>
<td>Part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>24 (9 developmental)</td>
<td>Associate of Arts - Teaching</td>
<td>Part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Associate of Applied Science - Business</td>
<td>Part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>27 (12 developmental)</td>
<td>Associate of Arts</td>
<td>Part time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student 1

Student 1 (S1) was a nineteen-year-old student who was completing requirements for an Associate of Science degree with plans to transfer to an in-state engineering program in the Fall of 2014. S1 graduated from one of the local high schools near RCC and comes from a two-parent
household with four other siblings, and he lives at home. S1’s mother attained a Bachelors and Master’s degree while his father did not attain a four-year degree. S1’s parents both work full-time, and S1 works part-time. Unlike the other students in the study, S1 took classes at one of The College’s other campuses. S1 did so because of the campus’s proximity to his home as well as the availability of classes at that site. S1 did own a car to help him to get from home to his classes at the site. S1 is now taking classes at the College’s main campus because the courses he needs are not being offered at the previous site. This change increased the student’s travel and fuel costs by approximately 20 minutes a day and $20 per week. S1 stated in the interviews that although he has incurred time and travel costs, he had the opportunity to be more involved in the activities of the PBI program. S1 stated there were little to no PBI program activities at the previous site where he attended classes. S1 was a participant in the school’s Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) program.

**Student 2**

Student 2 (S2) was another nineteen-year old student, who was also completing a degree for an Associate of Science degree with plans to transfer to the same in-state school as S1 and major in engineering. Unlike S1, S2 was an out-of-state student and a graduate from a high school in Illinois. S2 moved to the state to attend college due his paternal grandmother and other paternal family members living in the state. S2 is also from a two-parent household. His mother remarried after his father was killed when S2 was a toddler. S2 is the oldest of nine siblings, all of whom still live in Illinois. S2 lived with his aunt and her two children while attending RCC. Since his enrollment, S2 had taken all his courses at the main campus of RCC not only because he lived close to it, but also because he had more choices in course offerings. S2 had a truck, which he drove to campus each day. S2 also has been highly-decorated academically since his
enrollment. S2 received RCC’s two-year transfer scholarship in his second semester, the first African American student to earn that honor in the history of RCC. Like S1, S2 was a member of the LSAMP program.

**Student 3**

Student 3 (S3) was the first non-traditional student to be interviewed. Unlike the previous two students, S3 was a high school dropout. He attended one of the local high schools before dropping out and eventually completed his diploma through home schooling. S3 planned to complete his associate of arts degree and transfer to one of the three four-year universities in the county. S3 also differed from the other students in that he has used drugs and viewed college as an opportunity to change his life. S3 also came from a two-parent household, even though his parents divorced when he was nine. Neither of his parents earned a bachelor’s degree, but his mother did earn her associate’s degree to become a licensed practical nurse. S3 did not have a car to get to class his first year of college so he caught the city bus to get there. This was an hour and a half ride to and from school each day he had classes. S3 schedules his class on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to alleviate the number of days he had to ride the city transit bus. S3 was involved in the College’s federally-funded Title III TRiO program. S3 was awarded a scholarship from the TRiO program for the 2013-14 academic year as well two other academic scholarships from The College’s foundation.

**Student 4**

Student 4 (S4), much like S1 and S2, was a traditional student and was 19 as well. He attended one of the area high schools with plans to transfer with S1 and S2 to the same in-state, four-year institution. He comes from a two-parent household; his mother has a bachelor’s degree, and his father, who does not have a four year degree, has taken classes at RCC in the past to
increase his earning potential. S4 lives at home with his parents and a younger sibling. S4 took classes at the Main campus with S2 and S3 during his first year and will continue to take classes there until he transfers in the Fall of 2014. S4 drives to campus for his courses and works part-time at a local law firm. Prior to Fall 2013, S4 only took classes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday due to his work schedule. A former high school football player, S4 plans to walk on as a member of the football team at the four-year school to which he will transfer. Although he plans to major in accounting, S4 also has other math aspirations, which qualified him to become part of the LSMAP program.

**Student 5**

Student 5 (S5) was the second non-traditional student to be interviewed for this study. A veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, S5 served four years in the United States Army. At age 24, he was the oldest of the students in the study. S5 was a high school dropout and received his GED prior to joining the military. S5 has taken all of his courses on the Main campus since his enrollment. S5 grew up in a single-parent household and was raised by his mother. Neither of his parents received a four-year degree, but his mother is now enrolled with him at RCC. S5 also was a new parent at the time of the interview, and his daughter was born shortly before Fall classes began. S5 took a full-time job working nights to prepare for his new role as a father. He stated since his father was not involved his life growing up, he wanted to be there and provide for his child. S5 has reduced his work hours since school started. S5 would like to be a counselor and open his own private practice. S5 did not own a car his first year of college so in order to get to class, he walked, caught a ride with other students or caught the city transit bus.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Position/Title</th>
<th>Years in Position/Years in Higher Education</th>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>4 years/4 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>5 years/21 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science in Education Master of Science in Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>Executive Vice</td>
<td>1.5 years/18 years</td>
<td>Associate of Applied Science in Avionics Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>President</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in Human Resource Management Master of Arts in Management Educational Doctorate in Adult Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Administrator 1**

Administrator 1 (A1) was the Director of the PBI grant. He was the first to be interviewed. A1 has been employed with the RCC since the grant was initiated. Prior to serving as the Director of the PBI program, he served as the director of an afterschool program for at-risk youth for 10 years. Prior to that, he served as gang intervention coordinator in the neighboring city of RCC. His background with at-risk youth gave him a unique, non-academic perspective to the issues and challenges facing African American youth. That background allowed him to employ non-traditional methods for retention in the PBI program and in choosing the program’s staff. A1 had a unique background; he had lived in large and small northern and southern cities before he finally settled with his mother in a small rural town in the same state as RCC. A1 attended college on an athletic scholarship at one of the four-year institutions in the state. The PBI program staff was all African American, with all male success coaches and a female serving as project coordinator. A1 stated that this staff make-up had proven to be very successful for the program because the students feel “comfortable.” A1 believed that the program was a benefit to
the students because it instilled a sense of confidence in them because the program was committed specifically to African American male students.

**Administrator 2**

Administrator 2 served as the Dean of Enrollment at RCC. She was the second administrator to be interviewed and was interviewed on the same day as A1. She has served in various roles at the school, which have included counselor and adjunct faculty member. Prior to her coming to work at RCC, A2 was employed in the public school system. The longest tenured administrator interviewed, A2 helped write the PBI grant and bring it to campus. A2 has a very critical role in the admissions process, which is the first step to retention. Under her umbrella are the departments of recruitment, advising, admissions and records, and the PBI grant. A2 was the longest serving member of RCC of the administrators interviewed. She was able to provide a unique perspective about RCC from a historical standpoint.

**Administrator 3**

Administrator 3 (A3) was the final administrator to be interviewed. Due to his schedule, his interview was conducted approximately three weeks after the first two administrators. A3 was fairly new to the school as he assumed his role there in April 2012. A3 previously worked at another in-state community college in the capacity of Vice President for Academics before moving to RCC as the Provost/Executive Vice President.

**Research Questions**

The study sought to address five research questions dealing with retention:

1. Why did students in the study elect to attend the institution, an urban, predominantly-Black institution?
2. What are the student’s perspectives on how participation in federally-funded program help them stay enrolled at The College?

3. From the student’s perspective, how did participation in the federally-funded program impact the future career and life goals of the students?

4. What recommendations did the students have to strengthen the program and increase participation?

5. What were the college administrators’ perspectives on how this program benefited students, and how did the program fit within the mission and goals of the college?

There were two sets of interviews conducted for this research: one set with the five cases in the PBI program, and another set of interviews with the administrators. This was done not only to gain a student’s perspective on his retention, but also RCC’s institutional viewpoint as well. Each student who participated in the study was asked a total of 17 questions, all of which were open-ended. The interview guide and questions can be found in Appendix B of the study. Each question was followed up with probing questions to ensure the researcher was clear on the responses given by the student. A separate interview guide and set of questions was created for the administrators in the study, which can be found in Appendix C. A total of 10 open-ended questions were asked by the researcher, which were followed with probes for clarification.

Data Analysis

There are many ways to analyze data when a qualitative research study is conducted. As the researcher, I was reminded that Cresswell (2008) stated that qualitative research is “interpretive” (p. 245). The analysis of the interview transcripts is what this researcher has interpreted and when viewed by another researcher, may be seen in another way. Neither analysis would be right or wrong, just viewed through a different set of lenses.
There were five research questions that were the foundation for the categories used to code and analyze the data collected, which were: why was the College (RCC) selected for attendance; did the PBI program help the student be retained; the impact of the program on the student; program improvement; and program benefits to the student and the College. These research questions are discussed below. The research questions were further organized by themes, emergent theme and sub themes, followed by participant responses to particular topics in research questions.

Research Question 1

Why did students in the study elect to attend the institution in the study, an urban, predominantly-black institution?

There were five questions the researcher selected to delve into the reasoning and background surrounding the students’ selection and satisfaction with the RCC after their first year. Research question 1 is shown in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, there were three themes that elevated themselves among the responses. This research question yield three themes from the students, related to their selection of RCC. Those themes included price, a prior relationship with the program’s director, and a general satisfaction with RCC.

Table 3
Emergent themes from research question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Price/Finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Relationship with Program Director/Staff Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Satisfaction with College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Price.** The first theme that emerged from the interviews with the students was price. The rising cost of college is a concern to all college-going students so it was not surprising that one of the themes to emerge was price. When this question was presented, most of the
students expressed their answers in several ways. Most of the answers centered on the ability to pay for courses at a reasonable rate.

Student 1 stated:

   It was a good price, and I felt I would get more of a hands-on experience here versus at a university.

Student 2 answered in this way:

   I ended up here because it was cheaper, a cheaper route to go. I came here out of state so tuition was higher at any other school I would have attended. That’s what impacted my decision in attending RCC.

Student 3 explained his reason in this way:

   A list of things. I chose RCC first because, I think, it caters to African American males overall, and it’s cheaper and… diverse as far as the other schools surrounding central Arkansas.

And Student 4 had this reason:

   Um, actually, I had initially intended on going to the [College]. But um, I had some problems with my scholarship going, so I uh, came here to take my classes and get me ready for [College].

**Theme 2: Relationship with the Program Director.** The second theme that arose from the student interviews with this research question was the relationship with the Director of the PBI program, Administrator 1 who was interviewed in this study. Four of the students cited a relationship, either directly or indirectly, with the program as a reason for their attendance at RCC. This is significant because of those four students, three applied to other colleges in the area.

Student 3 had this statement:

   I was working with this lady at [community organization], because at one point in time I was staying in a shelter…and I had met her and she introduced me to options as far as college. And when I got under her wing, she introduced me to RCC and took me through a financial aid process…from there I met [staff member], through [PBI program] that organization, at a workshop she had available.
Student 4 said:

Actually, I knew [Administrator 1] because he worked at [name of afterschool program]. And my dad knew that he was over some program over here so my dad wanted me to get affiliated with [Administrator 1] because he’s a good inspiration to young, black males.

Student 5 stated:

Actually [Administrator 1], uh, he was over this [name of afterschool program] program when I was little kid. When I just trying to get in any school at the time and when I came up to apply and see what I needed to do, I ran into him, and we talked, and he told me about [The PBI Program]. He told me about school and everything that you guys had to offer so I decided that this was the right place for me, because of the past relationship I had with [Administrator 1]. And I knew I would have a lot of help in my corner.

**Theme 3: Satisfaction with College.** The third theme that arose from this research question was satisfaction with RCC. While not a direct factor in what led the students to select the College, it is important in what led them to return for the Spring 2013 semester. Additionally, satisfaction with the College and the education they received were factors in them being successfully retained. The students in the study expressed their satisfaction in various ways.

Student 1 expressed it in this way:

I feel that it was a pretty good choice versus going to another school because like I said, I’ve had more hands-on experiences. The teachers are more understanding, I guess… I feel that way because people here help you better than I feel that they would have helped me at a university because they have more time to sit and address my personal situation and what steps I need to take to achieve my goal.

Student 2 stated:

I think it’s a great institution. It’s helped me a lot since I’ve been here. It opened up my eyes, broadened my horizons and has given me a lot of opportunities… I think it’s been one of the best decisions I’ve made because (pause), because I’ve been faced with a lot of opportunities I don’t think I would have had anywhere else.

Student 3 said:

Yes sir. Like I said earlier, I have a 4.0. I took advantage of that. I applied for three scholarships. One of them was the [name scholarship]. Another was through a program I am in called the TRiO, and another was the [name scholarship], which paid tuition for
both semesters, Fall and Spring. And I just came back from DC and New York through the [name of PBI program].

Student 4 gave this reason:

I would say after I first got here, I would say it wasn’t, but after being here for a year and going into my second year, I really do think it has been a good one… Initially, I wanted to go to Fayetteville, that’s where my mind was….and RCC grew on me so it’s been a good experience.

Student 5 stated:

Well, I feel like it’s a good school… for me it is because I have chemistry with people that are trying to be successful so for me it’s good… Oh, most definitely, it’s been good. Because it’s really changed my life, changed my outlook on life. Changed how I carry myself around people. Exposed me to different environments. I’m networking with different people, I’m learning new things. So yeah, I mean, it’s been a good one. Best decision, really, outside joining the military, that I’ve made.

**Research Question 2**

**What are the student’s perspectives on how their participation in a federally funded program helped them stay enrolled at The College?**

For this question, the researcher used eight questions to determine if the federally-funded program was a factor in the students being retained at RCC. As seen in Table 4, there are two themes and five sub themes drawn from the interviews. In answering research two, the students stated that their reasons for being in the program and its effect on their retention. The student stated that: the program was a factor in their retention; their desire to successful; and their own determination and self-belief were all factors in them staying enrolled at RCC.
Table 4
Emergent themes from research question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Engagement</td>
<td>Staff/Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Success</td>
<td>Desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Engagement.** The first theme to arise from these research questions were keys to the students’ academic success. The students cited being engaged with the program’s staff and other student members as major reasons for their academic success at RCC. This theme produced two sub-themes related to what the students interviewed experienced in the program that helped with their retention.

*Sub-Theme 1: Relationship with Staff/Program.* The students in the study expressed a relationship with the staff as a key factor to their retention.

Student 5 stated:

> Well, I have this Coach, named Mr.____, and he is significant, a very, very, very important in my role here at RCC. He helps me with my classes, makes sure I am on top of my classes, he holds me accountable. I don’t like that, but he holds me accountable, and no excuses, so I feel that the [name of PBI program] keeps me focused, it keeps the camaraderie, you know? Like the people I’m around, it makes it easier to come to school and do what I have to do to stay focused.

Student 3 replied:

> Man, uh without the [PBI program], I really wouldn’t have an academic career…Man…I got a couple people. First of all I got a Coach, which is Coach ______. He played a significant role…Coach ______, he ain’t no chump. He don’t allow me to…he just don’t allow me…he put me in boundaries where I’m able to be structured. Prior to me being in the [PBI program] I really didn’t have no structure with my potential. I knew I had potential; I didn’t have the right discipline to focus it.
Student 4 said it this way:

It [PBI program] helped me because it makes me want to do good. Like, last year, we had challenges to get the best grades and all that type stuff. So I mean it’s really, it’s really, good for me.

Student revealed 3:

It helped me get the classes I need and kind of planned my schedule; it was like a more personal advisement… I wouldn’t be as near as close (to graduation) as I am now… Well, I would say me as far as putting myself in control versus, basically keeping focus, but [PBI program] did aid me as far as keeping track. I was paying attention. I know if I had gotten in class and messed around, I would end paying for it myself.

Sub Theme 2: Other Students. The student participants stated that other students, whom they met while through their membership in the PBI program, played a role in their retention as well. The students interviewed cited examples of those interactions and how they affected their academic success and retention. The participation of students in PBI-related activities was cited as helpful in keeping them active participants in the program and school as well. The students participated in various program-related activities, which offered a mix of social and academic engagement.

Student 2:

It gives you that… social element that you get in college… when you need help with homework, or somebody else needs help, inside of [PBI Program], you always got somebody that will help you or somebody that you can help. It’s like a brotherhood… you pulling somebody up with you, propelling each other forward.

Student 5:

I would have to say [Student 3], [Student 3] would be the most significant person who has played a role in my academics. Because we study together, to compete against each other, try to get As and Bs against each other so I feel that drive and motivation comes from him. Because I’m on top of him, he’s on top of me, and it’s all positive, we never really looking down on each other. If we do make a bad grade, we try to fix it together. I feel like he single-handedly played a major, significant role on how it impacted my work ethic, my study effort, my process, everything I do at school…and some way he has affected my attitude of “Either I do it or don’t do it.” It [PBI program] provides that brotherhood, and at the end of the day, that’s what keeps me
going is the brotherhood. In fact, I can come here and tell someone my problems, and they are not going to turn their face up at me. They are going to be like, “oh man, what I need to do to help you get through this.” So for me, I couldn’t wait to get back to this circle.

Student 3 shared this:

Another person who played a role is [name of Program Student]. My first semester, I kinda saw [Program Student] being a leader, but not only that, I saw myself being in his position. So…every day I bothered him about money, about scholarships, about what I needed to do to go to New York; what I need to do to be plugged in. I was just hungry and he fed me…

Student 4:

Me, [Student 5], [Program Student], [Student 2], we had challenges to see who could get the highest GPA and stuff like that… it made me want to do good just to show my intelligence.

Student 3 listed the following:

Ah…I like the Freestyle Friday….That’s something I have a passion for. Freestyle Friday is something put on by [Student Success Coach], where he allowed students of RCC to showcase their talents, which can vary from a painting to artwork to a piece of poetry by Maya Angelo. It’s just one of the things [PBI Program] does to let them know we are here and plugged in and involved in the community. The Tie Game….normally a set of older guys who have been in the school or [PBI Program]for a reasonable amount of time…they come in and teach guys who probably have never tied a tie to give them the upper hand when it’s time for interviews…it’s more of a bonding thing, but also a tool to motivate guys to put on ties and feel good because when we go in the business world, that’s the attire…so it’s giving us a feel for being in that world. I was part of a mock interview. We were challenged to dress in suits, we were challenged to use our intellectual skills and present ourselves for who we are and what we are going to school for. And on the other side of the table wasn’t a black dude…..Even though the [PBI program] caters to black guys, the perspective is not just from black guys. I got confidence from it.

Student 4 said:

Last year I did the book club, I do other things, like, chess club. Found out I wasn’t all that good at chess or good as I thought I was. Just participating in anything they want me to do, volunteering, speaking, anything that may come up. You [Interviewer] were recruiting, and recruited me to add more people [to the book club] and I don’t really read many books so I thought it’d be a good thing for me to get started back on reading books.
Student 2 gave this statement:

I take part in the Debate Team, Book Club, Tie Game … Models of Success and various other [activities]… I took ’em on because I thought it would be fun. Uh, debate team taught me how to research better and use good sources. Book club teaches you how to have a decent conversation, uh, educated conversation besides something along the lines of basketball, women. Although they are fun to talk about, but, it’s a time you have to be able to talk about other things beside those things.

Student 5 listed:

Tutoring. That’s the most important thing that I feel like [PBI program] provides for me, but I also go out and talk to the students at the [public] schools because I’m trying to give back….I’ve learned a lot over my 24 years. We gotta give back to help other people make it. That’s the process. We gotta tell ’em, we gotta be there. The [PBI Program] also provides chess. I ain’t good at it, but I play it.

Theme 2: Desire for Success. While study participants did cite the PBI program as a theme in retention, they did not list the program as why they were successful and other African American male students were not as successful. Each gave a different reason for their desire to be a success in school.

Sub theme 1: Desire. The students in the study expressed a desire to be more successful than their peers.

Student 1 said the following about his desire for success:

Kinda the cost because I hear about people paying out of pocket. School is very expensive and my whole goal, I know I get distracted very easily, and I need my school time to be dedicated to school, but at the same time I know I need money, too. So basically having like where I can work less and focus more on school, um so I can keep my grades up so I won’t have to worry about it.

Student 2 stated this about motivation:

Hmph, what’s motivating me to succeed at [RCC]? Uh…. [long pause]. Um, it has to be, being able to graduate and take care of a family of my own. Not just create a family, but be able to take care of that family and be the man I’m supposed to be, to whoever it may be. A father to whomever it may be.
Student 4 stated it this way:

I’m trying to get my degree. I’m trying to do something good in my life so I can make good money and have a great life and not have to live in the slums.

Student 5 listed this for his motivation:

Right now…well. at first it was self-motivation, because I was tired of doing the same thing over and over again and getting the same result…that’s also the definition of insanity. So, uh, I didn’t want to be insane anymore so I decided I wanted to do something different that was just self-motivation… I would say now that my motivation is the fact that I have a daughter, the fact that she needs me, depends on me…my daughter is motivating me because I grew up without a father. So I have to do everything in my power to do give her all 70 percent of me because I’m not going to have her 100 percent of the time….this (school) is improving me, making me a better…it’s making me a better father. I can teach, I can help her with her homework when she gets home. I’m seeing the bigger picture now that I have a daughter. It’s like everything I do trickles down and affects her. So I just want to make sure that I’m making the best example to never quit…I’m not going to quit. That’s my motivator right now.

Student 3 summed up his motivation in this way:

Man, I have to credit Jesus Christ, straight up. He promised me something when I was 15, when I was in a situation where I was hopeless…I chose to go to school, personally because nothing else was going to be worth more than me getting an education as far as this world…..It’s to be Jesus as a motivation.

Sub theme 2: Determination. Each student exhibited a strong determination to stay enrolled in school at any and all costs. Only one student stated a reason for why he would not be able to continue his education.

Student 4 said it this way:

What would stop me? Nothing would stop me. I would never not come back to school.

Student 2 gave this statement:

I don’t see too much of anything stopping me from coming to school. I got my mind set on one thing. and I’m going for it … Nothing. Not even financial problems.

Student 3 gave this passionate explanation:

If I die. If I stop breathing….I done been in situations about life. I didn’t have a home, and I had a scenario where I had a choice to go to the military, get a job or struggle to get
a roommate and stay in school. I had a bunch of stuff that could have stopped me, but I got through it…

Student 4 gave this:

Death. I can’t come if I’m in that box. I honestly don’t know what would stop me until it happened. But I’d have a full-time job if I ever stop coming, and they are going to be paying me $60-70k a year.

**Sub theme 2: Themselves/Accountability.** The students in the interview had a strong internal desire to do well in school. They made it clear what are the biggest differences between themselves and other African American males that are not successful.

Student 4 said this about what made him successful:

I follow directions. I mean, straight up personally…before I came here, I had no structure. I wouldn’t listen to the person who had what I was trying to get. I saw a black male in a position that I see myself in, but in order to get in that position, I got to listen to what he gotta say. Regardless…I hear what he says, do what he says, that’s the kinda relationship me and [Success Couch] have. You do this. I do it and come back. I need you to do this. I do and come back. If I don’t do it, we can’t talk about nothing else…so it’s a strict…almost a, like I’m being coached, but at the same time, I’m willing to play.

When asked how to get more students like him:

You pray. My position was already established before I got here.

Student 2 stated why he was successful:

It’s, uh, it’s a focus factor. You have to be able to focus; you can’t be hanging out. You can’t be not going to class. You have to make that effort to get to class. Even if you have four days that you can miss class, don’t miss those days because you might actually need’em. So you have to make that effort to get to class and focus and balance your time effectively, time management again. Put time aside for work and put time aside for play.

On how to recruit more students like him:

Well, it’d be hard to get more students like me because I’m one of a kind.

Student 4 gave this account:

I would say I’ve succeed because I’ve gone in classes with my confidence high. I would say I’m knowing I wanna get an A, my eyes are set on an A and I really don’t want to get anything less… I don’t wanna just go through my classes and not learn anything. Because
you are supposed to learn; that’s what the classes are for. So, I go through every class with my confidence high. And say that I’m gonna make an A and I’m gonna study and I’m gonna do all, everything to get an A.

On recruiting more students like him:

I would say, I’m not one of a kind as far as a student, but um, just recruiting, going around talking to students, they have to have that mindset, be ready to achieve, just like me.

Student 5 stated this on his success:

For me, it’s personal. I have personal drive; I have a personal reason why I’m here. Everything is personal for me. I really don’t let outsiders affect my goals in life. So me, I have a need to be here; it’s not a want. And for some people, they come and they get caught up in the school, college life environment itself, because nobody is making you go, nobody is making you do anything….you have a lot more freedom than in high school. No more raising your hand, etc. I look at school as an opportunity and chance to change my life. I can’t tell you why they aren’t successful, I can’t tell you why I’ve been successful, or if I have been more successful. I just know that I try hard, and I work hard and if you are going to be around me, you are going to have to do the same thing or get from around me. I’m just dedicated.

How to get more students like him:

Oh, it’s only one of me. That’s a lost cause, it’s only one of me. How we get more students like you is show yourself accountable. I have an extra initiative to show people I can. I guess you gotta find people that’s hungry. Make’em show you. That’s how you find people like me.

Research Question 3

From the student’s perspective, how did participation in the federally-funded program impact the future career and life goals of the students?

For this question, the researcher asked two questions of the student participants to determine if the federally-funded program impacted their future career goals. There were two questions the researcher used to address this situation. These questions brought about one major theme and with one sub-theme, as can be seen in Table 5. In providing an answer to this question
the students responded that transferring to a four-year school was a goal of theirs and that the program’s staff helped with them with their plan and college selection.

Table 5  
*Emergent themes from research question 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Transfering</td>
<td>Staff/Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Transferring.** All the of the students in the study stated they planned to transfer and attend a four-year college/university after they complete their studies at RCC. These students had this goal in mind before they entered RCC or joined the PBI program. How the PBI program helped with those plans was brought out in the sub theme.

*Sub theme Staff/Program:* The students all gave the PBI program or their staff as keys to assisting them in their pursuit of transferring and obtaining a four-year degree.

Student 5 gave this statement:

I plan on transferring to [Transfer College]. Get my bachelors, then an extra year to get my masters, then intern under a doctor who has a doctorate in psychology, then study a year at that practice, then hopefully get a job as a social worker, then open my own practice and do individual therapy on the side…

He went on to explain:

Oh well, the [PBI program] has shown my manifest of what I need to do to get to [transfer college]. Showing me which associates route to take because without that, I was just walking around saying I want to help people; I wanna give back. The [PBI Program] gave me a sense of direction; put me in the right areas.

Student 4 stated:

I plan on enrolling at the [transfer college]. Uh, going through their accounting program up there.

He further stated:

Yes they [PBI program] have. I mean they got me in the right classes that will transfer up there. Um, they might tell me something I need to know about the college life and things like that.
Student 3 gave this reason:

I plan to utilize my contacts at RCC to make sure the school I’m going to is going to take care of me with scholarships….I’m going to transfer to a four-year university. Finish my BA and from there teaching and going back and getting a masters and being a principal. And from there, like, catering to a certain group of schools and people.

He also said:

They [PBI program] already kinda have [helped]. They got everything established where I have to fall in line with criteria’s already established. They got high expectations.

Student 2 expressed things in this way:

I plan to go the [transfer university] and get my degree in civil engineering. And intern various places, work in the field and eventually work toward owning my own firm. Engineering firm.

And also stated:

Uh, the [PBI program] makes things happen for you. If you say you want to go to _________State or University_______, they make sure you get plugged in with the right people. And you get the campus visit. And hook you up with the right people that can help get you into the school…tell you what you need to do in order to take care of the financial parts of going to those schools.

Student 1 stated this on his transfer plans:

Transferring to [city name] to major in mechanical engineering,

On the PBI program:

They [PBI program] showed me a schedule of classes I need to take before I go over there, and they suggested I should get all the math out before I go up there because they say it’s much harder. Not that I didn’t want to challenge myself, but why go up there and pay more when you can pay down here for less.
Research Question 4

What recommendations did the students have to strengthen the program and increase participation?

There were two questions asked of the students by the researcher as to how they would improve the PBI program - if at all - and get more students involved in the program. There was one theme that arose from the two questions that were asked, with one major theme that arose from those questions, seen in Table 6. The students summarized that the program should focus on being more visible if it wanted to strengthen.

Table 6
Emergent theme from research question 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Being Visible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Visibility.** The students expressed a desire for the program to be more visible as their way to strengthen the PBI program and increase enrollment. The students conveyed this sentiment through various descriptions.

Student 1 described it this way:

Uh, I think as far as like broadcasting they can like, reach out more as far like posters, having a street team as far going to talk to people and letting them know what it is. Because, like if I didn’t hear about it at [his high school], I probably would have gone into school on my own. And kinda lost… They [PBI program] should visit more high schools and technical schools and have more presentations because I know outside of school people get pretty busy like with jobs and events and stuff and personal stuff, they should make more events like during school when people are at school and at different times.

Student 5 stated it in this way, but with a spin on the students at RCC:

Do better? Uh, let me come up with something. We [RCC] need to promote more. It needs to be a brand. Not accidently walk into the building. I feel that it should be a brand. I feel that you should have to do certain things, present certain things, to hold yourself accountable to be in the [PBI Program]. We’re trying to set a standard. There should be more “have to’s” to be in the [PBI Program]. Show up for [program] events. I tried to show up to all the events, I came to like 10 and tried to bring people with me. It’s on the
students. The students should do a lot more. I appreciate [PBI Program]. I would like to see a lot more dedication from the students.

Student 3 gave this version:

I felt like it could be promoted more. And when I say that, I mean….first I’ma talk about RCC, then I’ma talk about the [PBI Program]. I feel like RCC, it shows us that they care about us [African American males] in a sense, but information given to students is not clear. There is not communication between the students and the school….The [PBI Program] needs to be out in the forefront and promote its events better. Almost like the school needs an intercom system to promote what’s going on because everything is on paper.

Research Question 5

What were the college administrators’ perspectives on how this program benefited students and fit within the mission and goals of The College?

There were 10 questions asked of the administrators by the researcher on their perspectives on the benefits of the program and how it fit with the mission and goals of The College. Three themes emerged, with five subthemes associated with those themes. In answering the final research question, the administrators stated the program must become part of the college; must show its’ impact on student retention through data; and show its impact on African American male retention by the use of data (see Table 7).

Table 7
Emergent themes from research question 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Support</td>
<td>Become Part of The College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Data</td>
<td>Staff/Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Retention</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 1: Support. There was overwhelming agreement that for the program to continue its mission and have longevity, there had to be support for the program. Making the commitment
to the program in turn shows a commitment to the students and that the program is beneficial to their retention.

Sub theme: Become Part of the College. There was widespread agreement from the administrators that the program should become part of RCC, not just “a part” of RCC. This could be interpreted as being integrated into the fabric of the College. This was expressed in various ways.

From Administrator 3:

If we can get your guys full time, off the grant, that’s what I’m wanting to do, and what we’re trying to move toward. We took a hit in enrollment this year and had to adjust our budgets. Next year, we’ll budget for fewer students. If we have more, then we’ll be able to feather our nest a little more and start bringing in programs like yours. Full time.

Administrator 1 gave this statement on financial support:

I think for this federally-funded program to be institutionalized, it would almost mandate the work that we do be incorporated into the day-to-day fabric [of The College].

He added:

I think from a confidence standpoint, if you have secured long-term or institutional funding, meaning we’ve made a case to the community at large that we are important enough for you to put the dollars behind us, then that would strengthen our ability to forecast in the future and really get down in the trenches.

Administrator 2 shared this:

[PBI Program] really…this a grant-funded program, I feel that it needs to be institutionalized so that we’re not dependent upon that grant money

Theme 2: Data. In order to determine if the PBI has affected retention of the students it has served, the administrators stressed the need for data in order to determine impacts and changes to make improvements or provide more support for the program.

Administrator 2 gave this:

Be able to collect the data on a long-term basis to really show what they are doing makes an impact on campus. To create a clear picture that students in [PBI program] are
retained, they have better student satisfaction, they’re completing degrees and certificates and transferring on to other colleges. That piece. To show that data. Also be able to show some clear data that you’re changing the culture of The College.

She goes further to say:

… [it] has to start with the data and making sure that we have some things that work well enough, that we want to start looking at how we want to infuse those into some other groups. And that’s a hard thing because the PBI Program is only supposed to serve 300 African American males, even though the PBI Program serves far more students than that. You know, how can you take what you’re doing and what you’re learning and what the data shows, and help the campus move that into helping some other groups?

Administrator 1 stated:

I think internally, as data is made available and people start to understand the impact that we’ve had, I think you can expect that. Go back to the data. Do a better job of capturing the data and telling the story and connecting with IR. Being consistent and teasing out the things that really work and focusing more on those things

**Theme 3: Retention.** One of the major themes that emerged was retention. There were two sub themes on what affected student retention.

*Sub theme 1: Engagement.* The administrators had various thoughts on engagement and its impact on student retention.

Administrator 3 stated this about engagement:

Well, two things – people and process. In our environment today, and actually it’s always been this way, but it’s only been recognized the past 20 years or so that the more you touch a student, the more of a chance they are going to stay and going to complete.

He also stated:

The more you touch a student, and the more process you have in place to facilitate that dialogue and make things happen with that student, the more of chance you have to retain that student.

Additionally:

But we have to be more cognizant of what’s going on in our students’ lives and just ask the questions: what’s wrong? How can I help you? It only takes a minute. That’s paramount to starting the retention process.
Administrator 1 gave this on engagement:

I think that when students see a face that is similar or familiar, or a face with a certain attitude, that’s inviting. I think you pull them into you. They like talking to you, they connect to you, so I think there is a foundational level of engagement that happens right there. And then right there, you are able to transfer it to others. So I find a student that connects to me, likes what I’m talking about, he likes how I communicate with him, how I carry myself, and he spends time talking to me and I can introduce him to some of the other activities that we do.

Administrator 2 thought about engagement:

I think it [PBI program] helps students stay enrolled because it keeps them engaged, for one thing, in The College. It gives them people to be engaged with, that they feel comfortable talking about some of their issues and some of their needs and some of the ways they need assistance so it gives them a support network to stay enrolled. And then the connection of [PBI] staff with the faculty on campus gives an opportunity for those students to have some direct assistance in within their classroom. I think that combination helps keep students in class. That’s what any program we have needs to accomplish. It helps students become enrolled in college, it helps them navigate college, it gives them the support structure, it helps them in their classroom, it keeps them engaged on campus, and if you can do all that, I think you have a good chance of keeping those students and getting them to completion.

Subtheme 2: Stereotypes. The administrators gave accounts of the impact of the program on the stereotypes of Black males on the campus and the effects on the retention Black males.

Administrator 1 gave this about stereotypes and how they affect retention:

And just based on conversations and observations that I’ve had, I think some of those perceptions are negative, and I think it’s more of a class negativity. Like there is a general veil in race relations…But speaking with faculty and staff on campus, people tend to segment African American males, and you have a certain type of African American that is overwhelmingly seen as negative, meaning that guy who is rough around the edges or who is really in need of a college education based on background….and those people are seen as negative. Where there is more a mainstream Black male who is on campus that kind of fits the mold, and in those instances is not seen as much negative. I would probably say, as a third rung of the question, is there is more of indifference where I think, often times. black males are seen as invisible, and its not seen as positive or negative. It just people are invisible, their presence just isn’t felt. Generally speaking, I would say negative if you talk polling across the board.

He also said:
One of the things we [PBI program] try to do is create an image. We want to show people or have our students accomplishments highlighted…For us, the more academic success our students have as students to change the way they think, and are able to voice those concerns, and able to model or see strategies that are in place that speak to the image of black males, then other folks campus-wide see that, and it complicates the stereotypes, because it’s not what that they’ve heard or they’ve thought. By giving black males a voice on campus; a presence, and a place where their accomplishments can be seen, then it does tend to complicate stereotypes to some degree.

Administrator 2 stated this about stereotypes:

Yes, there are definitely stereotypes and perceptions, and those perceptions are probably overall negative.

But she clarified why there are stereotypes:

Probably more preconceived. Part of it is students. Black males tend to interact in some ways that some people on campus feel uncomfortable with or threatened by. I think that’s just kind of the reality…the [PBI program] has helped to change some of that, with some of the students that come in, which has been very positive, but I think part of it is just perceptions of black males overall.

As for how the PBI has impacted those stereotypes:

I think they’ve helped a lot with those attitudes; it’s a step in the right direction. I think the [PBI] staff are all such professional role models. And not just for students, but probably for our other staff, in terms of their attitude and presentation on campus. I think that has helped a lot with some of those attitudes. I think their dedication to students and trying to create the right expectations for students has positively impacted the approach, at least the staff in my department, in working with black males.

Administrator 3 had a different take on this:

I’m sure that there are probably some folks. People are human, and some folks have some kind of feeling about different kinds of folks. Professionally, I have never picked up anything derogatory about African American students.

He went on to state:

I’ve never heard that there has been any negative attitude toward anybody. I’m sure there are some rumors out there about some faculty or staff member treating somebody different than the other. We usually deal with that pretty quick if it gets up to us [administration]. We don’t put up with that, and have zero tolerance for that kind of stuff. I personally haven’t heard anyone talk negatively about any gender or race. As
far as administration is concerned, we don’t have that attitude and have zero tolerance for those who do.

Summary

This chapter answers five research questions, each with its own set of themes, and in some cases, subthemes. The results and themes of the research questions, summarized here, will be discussed in full detail in chapter five of this study. Research questions one and two focus on the students’ perspectives on their involvement in the program, in three areas: college choice, retention and future goals. Research question one asked the students about their reason for attendance at RCC, an urban predominantly black institution. Three major themes emerged from this question (a) cost of attendance; (b) prior relationship with the PBI program’s director; and (c) a satisfaction with institution, which was a factor in their returning to the institution for year two of their studies. The second research question sought answers from the student on how they think the federally-funded program helped them be retained from year one to year two. As with the first research question, there were three major themes that resulted from the interviews. Those themes were (a) the PBI program; (b) a desire to be successful; and (c) their own determination and belief in self.

Research questions three and four focus on the students’ perspectives on their goals and how to make the PBI program stronger. Each of question yielded one major theme. Question three’s theme dealt with transferring to a four-year institution, and the factors that surrounded the schools they selected, as well how the program helped them in their choice. The students who participated in the study stated in research question four that the program should increase its visibility to be a stronger program and increase the number of students participating.

The final research question is directed at the administrators at RCC and their perspectives on the program and how it fits into the mission and goals of the institution. This question
produced three major themes, which were (a) the program must be institutionalized; (b) the program must show impact through data; and (c) the program’s impact on the retention of African American males.

The major themes outlined in this research should be of value to college leaders, policy makers, and others in the decision making process related to student retention and success. This research provides the reader with perspectives from the students and administrators to allow decisions makers to make informed decisions about the support or addition of student service programs such as this one, on their campuses. These themes and results of research questions tie back to the purpose of the HEOA, which is strengthen the educational resources of college and universities. These results also link back to the purpose of the PBI grant and funding, which is to improve the educational outcomes of African American males. The students expressed what they saw as the benefits of the program and how the program helped them persist semester to semester.
Chapter V: Summary and Recommendations

This study examines the impact that a federally-funded program has on perceptions about the retention and academic success of African American males at an urban, predominantly-black, two-year college. The participants or cases in the study included five students enrolled in The College’s federally-funded retention program as well as three of the school’s administrators. There is a lack of research in the area of African American male retention, specifically at two-year colleges. There is very little research in the area of federally-funded programs with a primary focus on retention in this area as well. One of the goals of this study is to begin a thread of research in this area that policymakers and administrators can use as they employ programs and funding for programs that are specific to addressing the challenge of African American male retention versus the retention of other males, or female African American students. This chapter provides a summary of the findings as well as a discussion on the findings based on the five research questions. Additionally, recommendations for future research and implications of the research are discussed.

Study Summary

This qualitative research study employed interviews and written documentation, such as the grant and institution’s catalog (which contained the retention policies) to triangulate the data. The findings from the study were organized according to the research questions and presented in this section along with a summary of the findings that emerged during the analysis of the data in Chapter 4.
Research Question 1

Why did students in the study elect to attend the institution in the study, an urban, predominantly-black institution?

In response to the first research question, the study participants revealed three main reasons why they elected to attend and stay at RCC, which were the cost of attendance, external relationships with the director and staff of the PBI program, and their satisfaction with the education they were receiving at The College.

Cost of Attendance. The results of the interview showed that the cost was a major factor in the students’ decision to attend RCC. The College catalog listed the cost of attendance at the institution. This cost was compared with other institutions in the area. RCC’s cost of attendance was lower than other schools in the area. The study participants’ answers fall in line with the national data on student enrollment. Noel-Levitz (2012) in their National Student Satisfaction survey found that cost was the number one factor for students at community colleges in their decisions to enroll at a school. The students in the study stated that the price, when compared with other schools, was affordable and cheaper. When compared with the cost of attending a four-year school, two-year colleges are much more budget-friendly. Nationally, for the 2011-12 academic year, the cost of tuition and fees for a full-time student for one academic year at a public four-year institution, was just over $7,000. By comparison, the same student would pay just over $4,000 in tuition and fees at a public two-year college (NCES, 2013). Tuition and fees for the students at RCC for the 2013-14 academic year was just over $2,800. When compared with the nearby public four-year school, a student would pay $7,600 in tuition and fees.

It should be noted that two of the students received scholarships that helped cover their tuition and fees in their first year of attendance, which were renewed in their second year.
Additionally, two more of the study participants earned RCC tuition scholarships in their first year of attendance that were applied in the second year. These scholarships were also a contributing factor to them returning to RCC after their first year at the school. These scholarships helped to defray the cost of attendance and helped to retain the students. The program participants stated that without being in the PBI program, they would not have known or applied for the institutional scholarships received.

**Relationship with the Director.** Another result of the study was that the students indicated that a relationship with the director of the PBI program was also a factor in their decision to attend RCC. These students had a prior relationship with the director, and this external relationship helped to support the student and ease transition of the study participant’s into college. Supportive relationships with faculty and staff have shown to be keys in the retention of African American males. Strayhorn (2008) concluded that there is a positive correlation between a supportive relationship with college staff and student retention and satisfaction in college, especially among African American males. The PBI program provides a direct and important link for African American male students at RCC that helps with the integration, retention, and satisfaction of the students.

**Satisfaction with The College.** The study participants noted that their satisfaction with RCC lead them to return for their second year of college. Factors such as happiness with their initial choice of RCC, the relationships with other students and the opportunities they were able to take advantage of were leading factors in their satisfaction with RCC. These factors listed by the study participants can fall under the umbrella of campus climate. Nasim, et al (2005) listed campus climate as a key non-cognitive predictor of student success. These students had the option not only to attend another school initially, but also transferring to another school. The
participants noted how much they liked The College as well as what a great choice attending RCC was.

Research Question 2

What are the students' perspectives on how participation in federally-funded program helped them stay enrolled at The College?

In answering the second research question, there were three key factors that the data collection from Chapter 4 yielded: the program itself; engagement (with students and staff); and personal success and desire.

The PBI Program. The study participants who were interviewed stated that the PBI program itself helped them stay enrolled at RCC. It was not only the PBI, but the staff and other student members of the program that the students felt aided them in their retention. The relationship with the staff was the first factor to appear from the student interviews. The respondents often referred to the staff member by name as having the biggest influence on them. Additionally, they listed why the staff member was such a big factor in their success as a college student. From courses planned, to accountability, to being mentored, the students gave these as just a few of the reasons the PBI program helped them stay. The study participants also listed the relationships built with the students in the program as a factor in their retention. The students listed camaraderie, accountability to each other, and support from each other as factors in encouraging and inspiring them to be successful students.

Brockman (1989) surmised that the role that a faculty or staff member plays in student retention is another key to their success. While the study participants listed the staff and other students as playing a role in their successful retention, would these students have found relationships such as these if the PBI program did not exist? In Harper’s Anti Deficit Framework
(2012), he notes that students in the college achievement pipeline tend to persist at a higher rate when they have interaction with peers and faculty. This section of the pipeline combined with out-of-class engagement with peers and faculty is a similar dynamic to what the students in the study experienced.

In Harper’s Anti Deficit Framework (2012), he listed a link between a student’s peers and faculty with persistence and student achievement. The students in this study exemplify the key component of out-of-class engagement with peers and relationships with the staff of the campus. The study participants made an effort to engage students outside of class.

Based on this dynamic, it could be argued that the PBI program was a common bond among the students, and without the program, these out-of-class engagements with students and staff would not have occurred. Given that two of the students were engineering majors and would have met each other in that course of study, it could be reasonably assumed these students would have engaged with each other anyway. These students may have engaged, but would they have been challenged to be successful or become involved in other campus programs without the staff or the PBI program linking them together? The study participants stated that the PBI program provided them with other students as a resource and motivation to do well in their course of study and be the very best in there academics. This camaraderie among others as well as providing a group of like-minded students to provide encouragement, peer mentoring, and study groups was a heavy factor in the retention of the students in the study. The question must be raised that if the program provides such a rich environment, should this model not be replicated across the campus and to other colleges and universities?

Desire to be successful. When reviewing the data from Chapter 4, the students in the study stated that the desire to be successful was a factor in their retention. Many of the students
cited motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, to be successful, so that they could be providers for their family or even to be the first in their family to graduate from college.

Young et al. (2011), found that African American students’ only sense of intrinsic motivation for college success came from social support from faculty, family, and friends. This is in contrast to participants in this study. The study participants stated reasons such as personal drive, being focused, and following the advice of their success coach. This persistence or desire to succeed is one of the tenets of Harper’s Anti Deficit Framework (2012). For the study participants, this drive and focus in the short term would translate into bigger riches in the long term. Additionally, the inner desire to be successful translated to the extrinsic motivation the students cited. This type of motivation has a goal to be reached or a result at the end of an event (Cokley, et al, 2001). The desire to obtain a degree was a goal for them attending college. The end result of them attending college and being successful there would be for them to provide for their future family, to be not just the man but a man.

**Determination/belief in self.** An element from the study that played a role in the participants’ desire to be successful was their sheer determination. Only one of the participants stated that, while they were very determined to complete their education, the lack of financial support - either in federal student aid or scholarships - would curtail their efforts for degree completion. The other participants stated that there was nothing that would stop them from returning to school or completing their education, with two stating that their death would be the only reason they would not return to school. Those strong words echo the desire to be successful in achieving their degree. The student’s desire or determination bolsters the study by Zimmerman, Bandura, and Pons (1992) where they examined a student’s motivation and surmised that a student’s determination to reach their academic goals is deeply rooted in their
belief that they can achieve those goals they personally set for themselves. The study participants had a goal of college completion, which can only be obtained by meeting and completing the prescribed academic regulations at their present and future academic institutions.

These findings relate to the heart of intrinsic motivation. The participants had a strong accountably not only to their fellow students, but to themselves most of all. This sense of being accountable to themselves was shown in their common use of the pronouns “I” or “you” in reference to themselves throughout this section of the interview. Examples of this include phrases such as “I follow directions,” “I’m willing to be coached,” “You gotta make the effort to go to class,” or “I wanna get an A.” The participants took special pride and sense of accomplishment knowing that it was because of their hard work that they were successful. This sense of accountability or self-efficacy eliminated any blame for any shortcomings they may have had in the classroom, but yet gave a small amount of room for others who may have played a role in enhancing their intrinsic motivation, such as faculty or staff.

**Research Question 3**

*From the student’s perspective, how did participation in the federally-funded program impact the future career and life goals of the student?*

In answering the third research question, there were three key factors from Chapter 4 that the data collection yielded: transferring to another college or university, the impact the staff and program had on the students’ decision, and the college/university of choice.

**Transferring.** As these students attended a two-year college, they entered RCC with the goal of transferring to a four-year college. None of the students enrolled at RCC for a terminal degree. With that mindset, the participants sought guidance and advice from the PBI program and staff about the selection of the next college or university. The participants emphasized that
the guidance they received was needed and was helpful. While RCC has a department dedicated to advising students, one of the features and benefits of the students being in the PBI program is the ability to have more intrusive advising for student support. This intrusive advising allows for the relationship to be developed between the student and staff as well as aid in the retention of the student until they are ready to transfer.

The participants went on to explain the individual, one-on-one type of help they received, which consisted of course selection at RCC that aligned with the program they would be entering at their next school, made a significant difference. The participants also stated that the relationships that the program staff had with other faculty and staff at the institutions the students would be transferring to, were a very important benefit to them of being in the PBI program. The preparation of students to transfer is imperative to student success at the next level and requires the institution to have measures or advisors in place to meet those needs. Gard, et al (2012) found that students value quality advising in preparing them to transfer to a university or college. The research further showed that when students have advising that is inadequate, it delays their transfer and their ultimate goal of a bachelor’s degree. The PBI program should continue to ensure that staff attend regular trainings and meetings with four-year colleges to provide the best knowledge-based advisement as possible. It should be noted that none of the students in the study listed an intention to attend a historically black college or university.

Research Question 4

What recommendations did the students have to strengthen the program and increase participation?
In answering the fourth research question, Chapter 4 yielded one major theme from the data collected, which was the visibility of the program as a factor in their enrollment in the program.

**Visibility.** A program needs to be visible to be effective in attracting students. This can be accomplished in a myriad of ways. The fact that the program has an entire staff that is African American is one approach to making the program visible and attractive to African American students. The study participants listed several ways for the program to be more visible in the community and at the institutional level of RCC. As 40% of the students in the study were recruited from local high schools, participants stated the PBI program needs to have more visibility at the high schools. Study participants commented that the visits that the PBI staff made to their high schools played a role in their decision to attend RCC and/or enroll in the Summer Bridge program offered. While the participants stated that seeing the staff was impactful, they would encourage the PBI staff to make more visits to the high schools at times that were more convenient for the students, not necessarily when it was convenient for the staff.

Participants stated that being able to see staff from the PBI program on their high school campus prior to enrollment was impactful to the other students at their schools that didn’t enroll. The participants also noted that the program should be promoted more at the college, with signage at the college about the program, promotional materials such as flyers around the campus, and communication with newsletters and emails to the students.

**Research Question 5**

*What were the college administrator’s perspectives on how this program benefited students and fit within the mission and goals of The College?*
In response to the final research question, interviews with the administrators of the College in Chapter 4 yielded themes that dealt with the institutionalization of the PBI program, collection of data from the program, student retention and engagement, and student stereotypes.

**Institutionalization.** The administration participants stated the PBI Program has been very beneficial to the institution. In order for the program to reach its full potential, it should be supported by The College. For the administrators who took part in the study, support of the program meant fiscal support. The PBI program is a federally-funded grant through the Department of Education. The grant is in its second year of a four-year cycle, which ends in 2015. If the grant is not renewed for any reason, the program and support for the students goes with it. By making the program “hard funded” as a line item in The College’s budget, the program will have the support to be a sustainable entity at The College. Without this type of support, the growth and success of the program and the students its serves will be severed.

All of the participant administrators used the word “institutionalized” to illustrate how the program should be woven into the foundation of The College. The participants went further to state that if the program was institutionalized, it would show a commitment to the campus community and demonstrate The College is committed to the success of African American male students. It should be noted that, if the PBI program at RCC was to lose funding and be dismantled, it does not reflect on the commitment of The College to the success of African American males, but only a lack of funding to support those efforts.

The term institutionalization has been defined as “…the process whereby specific cultural elements or cultural objects are adopted by actors in a social system” (Clark, p. 1). In this study, the cultural object is the PBI grant, with the social system being the institution. The author states that there are four models of institutionalization: the organic growth model; the differential
model; the diffusion model; and the combined process model (Clark, 1968). For this study, the combined process model, would be a good model for those at RCC to examine as they begin looking at how to institutionalize the PBI program. This model looked at the timing of the introduction of an innovation, in the case, the PBI grant, into an institution. For this study, the timing of the introduction innovation was critical. Not only was RCC not retaining Black males, but there was a grant that would help with this challenge. One of the biggest challenges noted by Clark (1968) related to the institutionalization of an innovation is funding. He also notes that the lack of funding restricts the ability of university to institutionalize an innovation. Clark (1968) goes on to list that funding from an institution’s foundation, government agencies and industry, among others, are sources a university can use to institutionalize an innovation. The author notes most innovations are funded by grants, and that grants are competitive, and often leaves the university with a struggle to institutionalize the program, most notably because the institutionalization of the innovation may not align with the university’s goals. The PBI program is grant funded. The College must decide to continue to seek grants to support the work that it does. The College must also decide if the grant fits within the mission of RCC.

The institutionalization of the program is of importance to the administrators interviewed, but none gave any concrete plans for the sustainability of the program to make it a part of The College. Research by Boerner (2017) on a grant program at her college, stated that for a program to sustainable, it must build off the strengths of the college, have buy-in from the administration, and integrate into the institution. In this research, the strength of RCC is that is an affordable two-year college, which has a large population of African American students. RCC must continue to recruit those students, and successfully retain them, which is the genesis of the PBI program. While administrators appear to have buy-in, what the administrators have not
committed to is additional funding past the exhaustion of grants at the end of the five years of funding. A commitment to funding the program, through adding a line item to The College’s budget, would be how to best to sustain the PBI program once it becomes institutionalized.

**Data.** One of the best ways to illustrate program’s impact is though data. The administrative participants stressed the need for the program to implement or develop a measure for data collection. The inability to clearly show the impacts of the program has been one challenge for the program and gives credence for the institutionalization of the PBI program. The participants stated the PBI program impacts more than the 300 students in it, which has had a positive effect on the culture of the campus. In order to show those impacts, data needs to be collected, and once collected, presented to the campus community to show impacts. The participants all agreed the “story” needs to be told. Use of such data collection platforms as the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM) could be used by this program and others, or used as a guide for programs to create their own data collection tools. There must be clear measurement tools established in order to show the value of the program to campus leadership, future funders, and community stakeholders.

Measurements for success or value of the program to the institution can include, but not be limited to: semester-to-semester retention of Black males; year-to-year retention of Black males; increased enrollment of Black males in the PBI program; increased Black male enrollment at the institution; gains in the grade point averages of Black males enrolled at The College; and increases in the certificate and degree attainment of Black males enrolled at RCC. These are measurable goals that the program and The College can use in the decision making process about the viability of the program and its future at RCC. Clear data, that shows impacts,
improvements, and growth, such as semester-to-semester retention of students in the PBI program, year-to-year retention of students in the program, and graduation rates of students in the program, are some of the data that can validate the need to institutionalize the PBI program.

**Retention.** One of the challenges for The College has been student retention. There were two main factors that the administrator participants listed as challenges to the retention of the students, specifically African American males: engagement and stereotypes.

**Engagement.** The administrative participants stated that one of the keys to student retention was engagement of the student. As a commuter school, the campus of RCC presents unique challenges to student engagement. A majority of the students at the institution take classes, then leave campus, leaving little or no time for engagement with other students, faculty, or staff unless necessary. All college students, including two-year students, face these issues in terms of engagement with the faculty and staff on their campuses. Yearwood and Jones (2012) surmised that students who “…interact with faculty are often significantly more engaged in the areas of active and collaborative learning, enhanced educational experiences and supportive campus environment than those who do not interact with faculty often” (p 117). The student participants in the study who were in the PBI Program seemed to reflect the results of Yearwood and Jones (2012) study.

The student participants stated that the PBI Program has been a key in helping with the engagement of African American males and keeps them on campus past their class hours. The participants commented that the program allowed students to engage with staff members who “looked” like them and were able to have a better “connection” with the student compared to a white staff member. The study participants also commented that this connection enabled the students to seek out assistance from other service providers on campus to help with their
enrollment and retention that otherwise would not have been sought out. It was also noted that
the effect of the engagement has reached beyond the PBI Program. The students in the PBI
Program have taken their new-found knowledge about services and programs offered by RCC
and engaged other students about those programs. This ability to reach other students, through a
“each one reach one” unofficial plan of action, further shows the impacts of the PBI Program on
student engagement and retention. The students in the PBI Program no longer see the campus
staff as unapproachable, like they did when they first entered the institution.

Stereotypes. Negative stereotypes can affect the enrollment and retention of students of
color. Negative stereotypes can be in the form of how a staff or faculty member perceives,
receives or interacts with a student. Two of the three study participants indicated there was a
negative perception of African American males on the campus of RCC. The administrators
indicated that negative perceptions of African American males from faculty and staff may stem
from how a student dressed or talked or the individual may have felt intimidated or threatened by
the size of the student. These stereotypes or perceptions may be a product of a negative
experience with an African American male, personal or professional, which has carried over into
the workplace. A negative perception of African Americans, particularly African American
males, is a challenge that a college with a 53% African American population needs to overcome.

The PBI Program has made an impact on the perception of African American males on
campus. One factor that has helped change the perception of African American males is the staff
of the program. One administrator commented that the PBI staff served as role models for not
just for the students, but for the staff as well. The ability for staff and faculty to interact with
“non-threatening” African American males has changed some of the attitudes of faculty and staff
in how they deal with that demographic of the student population at RCC.

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**Recommendations for Future Research**

There is a small but increasing body of research on the retention of African American males, specifically those attending two-year colleges. As policymakers examine the funding streams in the federal budget and how those funds are to be allocated, they must examine how those funds are being spent on programs such as the PBI Program. Additional research in this area will not only prove vital to educators, but to policymakers as well.

This unique but growing area of research will require more study and results to help this demographic of college students. These students often have the desire to attend college and be successful, but often do not have a support system in place or do not feel comfortable approaching those at their college who can support them. If there is any substantial or meaningful movement in this population, then additional work should occur in this area.

One of the first recommendations is that this study be replicated at other schools, specifically those with PBI Programs or programs with an intense focus on the retention of African American males. The concept of external validity is one that is sometimes overlooked in research studies, as there is too much focus on the internal validity of a study. External validity is where the results or findings of a study can be transferred to multiple settings or environments (Lavrakas, 2008; Jonsson, et. al, 2016). A replication of the study would be one way to test the external validity of the current study. Utilization of case studies of students in PBI Programs on other campuses, with similar samples, would prove valuable for administrators and policymakers. If the PBI program is removed and replaced with a similar student services project, that would focus on African American males, the results from the study should be similar. The takeaway for administrators and policy makers should be the results of this study and how to achieve similar results, using the same methods.
Secondly, using the research questions in the current study and a different sample of students within the program might provide a more insight into the program and how students are achieving academically. For example, a sample of students with lower grade point averages would prove helpful in examining why these students, while in the PBI program, are not as successful academically. Results from this sample of students, with similar results and outcomes, would increase the validity of this study.

**Implications for Improved Practice**

This study offers insights to stakeholders associated with higher education and policymaking. These groups include: (a) national, regional, and state organizations offering opportunities for continuing education to faculty and staff of institutions of higher education; (b) boards of trustees, presidents, and chancellors; (c) recruitment and retention divisions of two-year colleges; (d) policymakers; and (e) foundations and grantors of funding organizations.

No discussion of implications for improved practice can begin without an examination of the role of Harper’s Anti-Deficit framework. The Anti-Deficit framework, which looks closely at the “how and the what” versus the why of student success, should be baseline for any stakeholder in higher education or any policy maker. A clear understanding of how and what impacts a policy, positively or negatively, should be at the forefront for decision makers.

National, regional, and state organizations, such as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and their affiliates, could use these findings in their efforts to increase the knowledge base of their members for retention of African American male students. This could be accomplished in several ways. Given the unique student demographic being examined, trainings and workshops offered by research experts in this field and at national conferences are ways to
increase this knowledge base. Additionally, follow-up trainings at regional and state meetings, combined with webinars, would allow for more knowledge and methods to implement lessons learned, which would be of great benefit to those in the field when put into practice. Administrative study participants noted there were some issues of racism that needed to be addressed. Trainings on cultural sensitivity should be addressed by these organizations for the members who support these students at their campuses.

The leadership of college campuses, which includes Boards of Trustees, presidents, and chancellors, could use the information in this study to better position their institutions to support African American male students. This could be accomplished with new policies and hiring practices that specifically address the needs of these students. As all study participants stated, there is currently a lack of faculty and staff of color who have an understanding of the challenges of African American students. The findings in this research could be used by campus leaders to address these issues through policy change and hiring practices at their respective institutions. After viewing these findings, institutions may see the need to create new positions that specifically address the needs of minority students, such as an Office of Diversity or a Chief Diversity Officer. Additionally, this research could be used in the budgeting process by campus leadership. As stated in the research, the institutionalization of PBI programs will allow for continuation of the program should federal funding be reduced or eliminated. Determining the value of such programs to the institution will play a prominent role in the budgeting process. The inclusion of the salaries of the staff, program budget needs, and other incidentals should be on the minds of the campus leadership for the continuation of these programs.

At the institutional level, this research could affect divisions of advising, recruitment, and retention. These divisions could use this research to develop recruitment and retention goals and
strategies. With personnel on staff that understand the challenges of African American males completing college, the ways in which those students are recruited changes. During the recruitment process, students can be informed of what support systems are in place to ensure the student is fully aware of and comfortable with the array of academic support services. Additionally, those in advising should understand that in order to maximize student advising for African American male students, advisors will have to gain more trust and be more intrusive in their advising. Again, trainings will be needed on the best practices to accomplish this successfully. Lastly, and probably most importantly, those involved in retention can implement programs like the PBI program to work with students who have been identified as in danger of not being retained. Early alerts from faculty about student progress can help retention programs and sections address these challenges, sooner rather than later.

Policymakers could benefit from this research on several levels. Beginning at the federal level, elected leaders can use the information in this research to determine funding for similar programs. Given that this program is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Education, showing the value of such programs is imperative as policymakers begin the budgeting process. The success, failure, or potential of either looms large as policymakers and their staff determine the continuation, reduction, or withdrawal of funding. Groups such as the AACC can lobby their policymakers with this research to support the continuation of funding. The impacts to policymakers on the state level could benefit from this research as well, in much the same way as those on the federal level. As state budgets become tighter and the ability to fund higher education at previous levels decreases, funding for special projects, such as this one. This research could be used by the colleges and universities to lobby their local policymakers to fund projects that support success of African American males in community colleges. This and
similar research on the retention of African American males shows policymakers at all levels the value of this and similar programs.

Finally, as it relates to foundations and nonprofit grantors, this research can be of use in the evaluation of grants that are submitted for their support. In much the same way that policymakers can use this research to determine funding, grantors and foundations can use this research in a similar manner. Funders want to maximize the dollars they have. In order to do so, they need information on viable projects to support. Institutions and grantors can use the research to determine how to leverage funding from the grantor to begin or continue a PBI program that benefits student retention.
References


Center for the Study of College Student Retention. http://www.cscsr.org/


United States Department of Education. [http://www2.ed.gov](http://www2.ed.gov)


Appendices

Appendix A: Tables and Figures

Table 8
National Center for Education Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>White (%)</th>
<th>Black or African American (%)</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated total</td>
<td>68.201</td>
<td>15.282</td>
<td>16.517</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

Cumulative retention and attainment at first inst 6-yr total 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Total</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 9
Gender by Cumulative retention and attainment at first inst 6-yr total 2009, for Race/ethnicity (Black or African American)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Total</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cumulative retention and attainment at first inst 6-yr total 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No degree, still enrolled</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No degree, transferred</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No degree, left without return</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BPS:2009 Beginning Postsecondary Students
## Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-College Socialization and Readiness</th>
<th>College Achievement</th>
<th>Post-College Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Familial Factors**  
- How do family members nurture and sustain Black male students’ interest in school?  
- How do parents help shape Black men’s college aspirations? | **Classroom Experiences**  
- What compels one to speak and participate actively in courses in which he is the only Black student?  
- How do Black undergraduate men earn GPAs above 3.0 in majors for which they were academically underprepared?  
- Which instructional practices best engage Black male colleagues?  
- How do Black men craft productive responses to stereotypes encountered in classrooms? | **Graduate School Enrollment**  
- What happened in college to develop and support Black male students’ interest in pursuing degrees beyond the baccalaureate?  
- How do Black undergraduate men who experience racism at predominantly white universities maintain their commitment to pursuing graduate and professional degrees at similar types of institutions? |
| **K-12 School Forces**  
- What do teachers and other school agents do to assist Black men in getting to college?  
- How do Black male students negotiate academic achievement alongside peer acceptance? | **Out-of-Class Engagement**  
- What compels Black men to take advantage of campus resources and engagement opportunities?  
- What unique educational benefits and outcomes are conferred to Black male student leaders?  
- How do achievers foster mutually supportive relationships with their lower-performing same-race male peers? | **Career Readiness**  
- Which college experiences enable Black men to compete successfully for careers in their fields?  
- What prepares Black male achievers for the racial politics they will encounter in post-college workplace settings? |
| **Out-of-School College Prep Resources**  
- How do low-income and first generation Black male students acquire knowledge about college?  
- Which programs and experiences enhance Black men’s college readiness? | **Enriching Educational Experiences**  
- What developmental gains do Black male achievers attribute to studying abroad?  
- How do Black men cultivate value-added relationships with faculty and administrators?  
- What do Black male students find appealing about doing research with professors? |  |

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**Figure 1**
Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

August 23, 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: Richard Moss
    John Murry

FROM: Ro Windwalker
       IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 13-08-037

Protocol Title: Seeking Success - A Case Study of African American Male Retention at a Two Year College

Review Type: ☒ EXEMPT ☐ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 08/23/2013 Expiration Date: 08/22/2014

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (http://vprd.uark.edu/210.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 8 participants. If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

210 Administration Building • 1 University of Arkansas • Fayetteville, AR 72701
Voice (479) 575-2208 • Fax (479) 575-3846 • Email irb@uark.edu

The University of Arkansas is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.
Appendix C: Request to Institution to Conduct Research

From the Desk of Richard Moss

May 28, 2013
Attn: [Name and Title]
[Institution Name]
[Address]

RE: Approval to Conduct Research

Dear Dr. Ellibee:

My name is Richard Moss and I am a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas in the Public Policy program. I am also employed here, at Pulaski Technical College, as a Student Success Coach. The purpose of my study is to examine factors that contribute to the successful retention of African-American males who are enrolled in an urban community college and are part of a federally funded retention program, The Network for Student Success. I will also examine how the program contributes to the academic success and successful retention of African-American males at the college.

I am writing to make a formal request and to receive written permission, as required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), to use Pulaski Technical College (PTC) as a site for my study. My dissertation research will require the participation of African American male students on the campus who: are enrolled in The Network for Student Success; are first time entering students beginning in the Fall of 2012; have completed at least 12 semester hours; have been successfully retained for the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 terms; and are eligible to return to PTC in the Fall of 2013.

My study will also require the participation of campus administrators and staff. I will be conducting a qualitative research study that will require in depth interviews with campus administrators about the retention efforts on campus and with students about their experiences at PTC. Additionally, I may need to examine documents from PTC which may include: program reports; program brochures and policies; other institutional policies pertaining to PTC’s retention efforts, and efforts to retain African American male students.

Your permission will allow me to interview 5 students who fit the criteria listed and up to 3 campus administrators. The identities of the students, administrators, and the school will be kept strictly confidential. [Name], as well as all students and administrators taking part in the study, will be assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. Additionally, the study participants will receive a letter of informed consent, and if necessary, a FERPA waiver.
Upon completion of the research, the information will be shared with [Name]. I will secure approval from the IRB at the University of Arkansas before any data collection will begin. I will supply [Institution] College with a copy of the protocol form from IRB once submitted and a copy once approved to begin data collection.

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for considering my request. Should you have questions or concerns, you may contact me at [Email] or [Phone], or my dissertation chair, Dr. John W. Murry, Jr., at [Email] or [Phone].

Sincerely,

Richard L. Moss, MPA
Public Policy Doctoral Student
University of Arkansas

cc: [Name], Provost/Executive Vice President
    [Name], Vice President, Learning
    [Name], Vice President, Student Services
    [Name], Dean, Enrollment Management
    [Name], Director, Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness
    [Name], PBI Program Director
    Dr. John W. Murry, Dissertation Chair
Appendix D: Email Invitation to Student Study Participants

Hello: My name is Richard Moss and I am looking for African American Male Students to participate in a one hour, face-to-face interview on campus to talk about your experiences as an African American Male student at a community college.

All interviews will contribute to a doctoral dissertation entitled: *Seeking Success - A Case Study of African American Male Retention at a Two Year College*. You have been contacted because you meet certain criteria that make you eligible for the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You must at be at least 18 years old to take part in the study.

If you are interested or would like to know more about this study, please contact me at rmoss@pulaskitech.edu or 501-812-2825
Appendix E: Email Invitation to Administrator Study Participants

Good afternoon

My name is Richard Moss and I am a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas in the Public Policy program. I am also employed here, at Pulaski Technical College, as a Student Success Coach. The purpose of my study is to examine factors that contribute to the successful retention of African-American males who are enrolled in an urban community college and are part of a federally funded retention program, The Network for Student Success. I will also examine how the program contributes to the academic success and successful retention of African-American males at the college.

I will be conducting a qualitative research study that will require in depth interviews with campus administrators about the retention efforts on campus and with students about their experiences at PTC. You have been identified for inclusion in the study, based on criteria in the study. While I understand that your schedule is extremely busy, I hope that you will consider participating in the study in order to further research in this area. Participation will include a one hour, face to face interview to discuss retention efforts on campus. It is my desire to conduct interviews during the month of September, at a time that your schedule will allow.

Should you have any questions or need further clarification regarding my study, you may contact me at rmoss@pulaskitech.edu. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Moss, MPA
Public Policy Doctoral Student
University of Arkansas
Appendix F: Student Interview Guide

1. Why did students in the study elect to attend the institution in the study, an urban, two year college?
   a. What led you to choose Pulaski Technical College (PTC)?
   b. Did you apply to any other school?
   c. What challenges have you faced SINCE enrolling at PTC?
   d. How do you feel about PTC after being a student here for one year?
   e. Has your decision to attend PTC been a good one?

2. What were the student’s perspectives on how did participation in the federally funded program help the students stay enrolled and retained at the college?
   a. How did you hear about The Network for Student Success
   b. How has The Network for Student Success helped you in your academic career?
   c. Who or what has played a significant role in your academic success here at PTC?
   d. What is motivating you to succeed at PTC?
   e. What is the biggest factor affecting the success of African American males on campus?
   f. Why have you succeeded at PTC and other African American males have not?
   g. What activities do you take part in that The Network provides?
   h. What would stop you from returning to school?

3. From the student’s perspective, how did participation in the federally funded program impact the future career and life goals of the student?
   a. What are your plans after PTC?
   b. How has the Network helped you with those plans?
4. What recommendations did the students have to strengthen the program and increase participation?
   a. What can The Network for Student Success do better?
   b. Use one word to describe The Network?

5. What were the college administrator’s perspectives on how this program benefited students, and fit within the mission and goals of College?
   a. What is your title? Please describe your roles and responsibilities in this position?
   b. How would you describe the effect your role has on student retention?
   c. How has this program fit within the mission of the College?
   d. From your perspective, how has this program benefited the students?
   e. How has this program affected policy changes at The College?

   Is there anything that you would like to add that I haven’t asked?
Appendix G: Administrator Interview Guide

1. What were the college administrator’s perspectives on how this program benefited students, and fit within the mission and goals of College?

   a. What is your title? Please describe your roles and responsibilities in this position?
   b. How would you describe the effect your role has on student retention?
   c. What do you feel impacts student retention?
   d. How has this program fit within the mission of the College?
   e. From your perspective, how has this program benefited the students?
   f. How has this program affected policy changes at The College?
   g. Besides the PBI program, what are other retention strategies used by The College for minorities?
   h. Are there perceptions or stereotypes of African American males on campus? If so, are they negative or positive?
   i. What are the attitudes of faculty and staff toward African American males?
   j. How do those attitudes help or hinder retention efforts?
   k. What would you like to see it do that it is not doing?

   j. What can The Network do better?

Thank you for your time. Is there anything you would like to add that I haven’t asked?
Appendix H: Informed Consent Form

Seeking Success: A Case Study of African American Male Retention at a Two Year College
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Principal Researcher: Richard L. Moss
Faculty Advisor: Dr. John W. Murry, Jr

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE
You are invited to participate in a research study because you are a student at Pulaski Technical College in North Little Rock, AR, and you participate in The Network for Student Success program, a federally-funded initiative to assist African American males succeed academically in community college.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Who is the Principal Researcher?
Richard L. Moss
501-960-1704 (mobile)
mossr@uark.edu

Who is the Faculty Advisor?
Dr. John W. Murry, Jr
479-575-3082 (office)

What is the purpose of this research study?
This is a case study intended to help examine factors that contribute to the successful retention of African-American males who are enrolled in Pulaski Technical College and have participated in The Network for Student Success, a federally funded retention program and how the program contributes to the successful retention of African-American males at Pulaski Technical College.

Who will participate in this study?
It is anticipated that the total number of individuals participating in the study will be 5 students and 3 PTC administrators. Participants will include African American male students that were first time entering freshman in Fall 2012; who were enrolled in at least six hours (part time status) at PTC in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013; will have completed at least twelve hours by the end of Spring 2013; and are eligible to return to PTC (good standing) in Fall 2013.

What am I being asked to do?
Your participation will require that you discuss your experience as a student at Pulaski Technical College and involvement with The Network for Student Success. You are being asked to allow the researcher to view your academic records to verify your college hours. In addition, you will be asked to participate in a one-hour interview based on semi-structured questions, which will be audio recorded.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?
There are no anticipated risks to participating in the study.
What are the possible benefits of this study?
The benefits include contributing to the knowledge base of the effects of public policy on the retention of African American males.

How long will the study last?
The study will take place over a six week period, but your involvement will be limited to a one time interview, that will last approximately one hour. There will be an opportunity for you to perform”member checking” which will require a review of the interview transcript to ensure its accuracy.

Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?
No. There is no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

Will I have to pay for anything?
No, there are no fees associated with your participation.

What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?
If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you decide to withdraw from the study at any time. Your status as a student at [redacted] or status as a member of [redacted] will not be affected in any way if you refuse to participate.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
The Principal Investigator, (Richard L. Moss), will attempt to keep all information confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law. Your participation in the study will be known, but your responses will be recorded anonymously and kept confidential to extent allowed by law and [redacted] policy. All information will be recorded anonymously and the researcher will have sole physical control and access to the data, which will be stored securely. Recordings of the interviews will be destroyed after the interviews have been transcribed. Your name will not appear in the research document and pseudonyms will be used for each participant and will not link your identity to the study.

Will I know the results of the study?
At the conclusion of the study you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You may contact the faculty advisor, Dr. John W. Murry, at [redacted] or [redacted] or Dr. John W. Murry, at [redacted] or [redacted]. You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study?
You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or faculty advisor as listed below to discuss any concerns that you may have.

Richard L. Moss, [redacted]
Dr. John W. Mury, Jr., [redacted] or jmurry@uark.edu

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Research Compliance
University of Arkansas
ADMN 210
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
479-575-2208
irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.