2000

The Relationship Between on-Campus Interactions and Retention of African American Students at Predominantly White Institutions.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ON-CAMPUS INTERACTIONS AND RETENTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Counseling

by
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B. S., Southeastern Louisiana University, 1992
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# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgments** ........................................................................................................... ii  

**List of Tables** .................................................................................................................. vi  

**List of Figures** ................................................................................................................... vii  

**Abstract** ........................................................................................................................... viii  

**Chapter**  
I. **Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 1  
   - African Americans and Education ........................................................................ 3  
   - Research Problem ................................................................................................... 6  
   - Purpose of the Study .............................................................................................. 8  
   - Research Questions ................................................................................................ 9  
   - Definitions .............................................................................................................. 9  
   - Scope and Limitations of the Study .................................................................... 10  
   - Significance of the Study ..................................................................................... 11  

II. **Review of the Literature** ................................................................................................ 12  
   - Review of Literature Procedures ........................................................................ 13  
   - Studies Related to Retention ............................................................................... 15  
   - Theoretical Models of Retention  
     - Spady’s Model .............................................................................................. 19  
     - Tinto’s Academic and Social Integration Model ........................................ 21  
   - Tests of and Reactions to Spady and Tinto’s Models ........................................ 23  
   - Studies Related to Student Adjustment ............................................................. 24  
   - Noncognitive Variables ....................................................................................... 29  
   - Faculty-Student Interactions ............................................................................... 31  
   - Student-Peer Interactions ................................................................................... 35  
   - Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 36  

III. **Methodology** ............................................................................................................... 40  
   - Theoretical Perspective ....................................................................................... 41  
   - Symbolic Interactionism ....................................................................................... 42  
   - Qualitative Research Methods  
     - Validity ........................................................................................................ 45  
     - Triangulation .................................................................................................. 46  
     - Generalizability ............................................................................................... 47  
   - Method ................................................................................................................... 48  
   - Population ............................................................................................................. 49  
   - Sample ................................................................................................................... 51  
   - Sampling Technique and Identification Methods .......................................... 52  
   - Data Collection Procedures ................................................................................. 52  

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Pre-data Collection ................................................................. 53
Data Collection ........................................................................................................................................ 53
   Autobiography Procedures ................................................................. 54
   Journal Keeping Procedures ............................................................ 54
   Forty-five Minute, Semi-structured, In-depth Interviews .......... 55
Data Analysis ........................................................................................................ 56
Limitations of the Study ...................................................................................... 59

IV. FINDINGS .............................................................................................................. 60
Sample Acquisition ........................................................................................................ 61
Data Acquisition ........................................................................................................ 63
Autobiography Findings ........................................................................................................ 65
   Melonee .......................................................................................................... 67
   Carol ............................................................................................................... 68
   Karen ............................................................................................................ 69
   Larry ............................................................................................................ 70
   Verlene .......................................................................................................... 71
   Russell .......................................................................................................... 72
   Zachary .......................................................................................................... 73
   Ann ............................................................................................................... 74
   Jennifer .......................................................................................................... 74
   Evelyn .......................................................................................................... 75
   Barbara .......................................................................................................... 76
   Elaine ............................................................................................................. 76
   Jimmy ............................................................................................................ 77
   Charles .......................................................................................................... 77
   Elnora ............................................................................................................ 77
   Faye ............................................................................................................... 79
   Elizabeth ........................................................................................................ 80
   Lorin .............................................................................................................. 80
   Kayla ............................................................................................................. 81
   Joyce ............................................................................................................. 82
   Summary ......................................................................................................... 82
Journal Findings ........................................................................................................ 83
   Student-Staff Interactions ........................................................................... 85
   Student-Peer Interactions ........................................................................... 93
   Student-Faculty Interactions ..................................................................... 101
   Summary ........................................................................................................ 105
Interview Findings and Data ...................................................................................... 106
   College Choice ......................................................................................... 109
   Considerations of Dropping Out .............................................................. 113
   College Motivation ..................................................................................... 116
   On-Campus Interactions .......................................................................... 117
   Student Interactions .................................................................................. 118
   Student Mentors ....................................................................................... 124
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Interactions</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Mentors</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Interactions</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Mentors</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for African American Faculty</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Campus Work Study and Retention</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to Assure Continuation</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Results</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Question #1</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Question #2</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Question #3</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Findings</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Studies</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: INTRODUCTORY LETTER</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: AUTOBIOGRAPHY INSTRUCTIONS</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D: JOURNAL ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX E: SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRIES</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Bachelor's Degrees Earned 1990 to 1995 ...................................................... 2
Table 3.1: Southeastern Louisiana University Undergraduate Enrollment by Ethnicity50
Table 3.2: Southeastern Louisiana University Undergraduate Degrees Awarded .... 51
Table 3.3: Undergraduate Students by Classification, Fall 1999 ......................... 51
Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Participants ............................................................. 64
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Theoretically Based Model of Undergraduate Dropout Process ........... 20

Figure 2.2: Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College ......................... 22

vii
ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships between on-campus interactions and African American retention decisions. Specifically, qualitative research methods were used to better understand how interactions between African American students and others (staff, faculty, and peers) on a predominantly white campus shaped African American students' realities and, consequently, how those realities influenced their decisions to persist through degree completion.

The population for this study was African American students attending Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU). The sample was composed of 20 African American students who were enrolled in a 4-year degree program at SLU and in good academic standing. The sampling technique utilized in this study was snowball selection sampling.

The data instruments utilized were semi-structured, in-depth interviews, brief autobiographies, and participant journals to develop a broader conception of each student’s perspective of on-campus interactions and how the interactions relate to his or her retention decisions.

The findings from this study revealed that both traditional and non-traditional students desired high quality interactions with faculty and other members of the university family. Participants reported that they had both positive and negative on-campus interactions in varying degrees. Accounts of positive interactions informed that those interactions (a) restored confidence in the probability of success in the classroom, (b) built a rapport with teachers and teaching methods in enhanced the probability of
success, (c) impacted subjective grading, and (d) impacted retention decisions by reducing feelings of isolation and alienation. Respondents reported that negative interactions generally gave them momentary feelings of dropping out. Additionally, they reported that quality interactions with staff, faculty, and students had the potential of reaffirming their decisions to remain in college through degree attainment.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This society has demonstrated to the South that the freedmen possess good intellectual abilities and are capable of becoming good scholars. Recognizing the brotherhood of mankind and knowing that intellect does not depend upon the color of the skin nor the curl of the hair, we [have] never doubted the Negro's ability to acquire knowledge and distinguish himself by scholarly attainments (Freedmen's Aid Society, 1870).

Many African American students enroll in colleges because they consider a college degree as a portal to economic empowerment (Lee, 1999). This idea is shared by thousands of students of all races as they enter into the nation's colleges and universities each year. Unfortunately, many of those students drop out prior to receiving a degree. Although degree completion rates are discouraging for students of all races (53.3 %), the low completion rate for African American students (41.9%) is more disheartening (Education Digest, 1999). Other statistics from the U. S. Department of Education reveal that in 1997 African American students received only 8.3% (Table 1.1) of the bachelor's degrees awarded in the United States. These and other statistics about the enrollment and retention of African American students have prompted researchers and college administrators to attempt to develop an understanding of this phenomenon and ultimately improve the retention rate of African Americans and other college students.

Unfortunately, low postsecondary retention rates for African American students have persisted over the decades despite African Americans' desire for an education and the studies conducted to understand their attrition rates. Other measures are needed in order to obtain a greater understanding of the attrition rates of these students and to enhance the probability that they will receive a college degree. To assist in the efforts to
understand the enrollment/retention phenomenon, this research was designed to broaden the understanding of persistence of African American students. This study examined the relationship between on-campus interactions and retention of African American students at a predominantly white institution (PWI).

Table 1.1 - Bachelor’s Degrees Earned 1990 to 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1048631</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1158788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>884376</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>91337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>61063</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>87203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>32844</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>54201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>39248</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>60478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>4392</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>6606</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


My investigation of existing retention studies revealed that most of them are quantitative with very little focus on the students’ perspectives related to persistence decisions. Furthermore, many of the quantitative studies evaluated the probability of retention based on precollege factors, such as ACT, GPA, family educational attainment, goal and institution commitment, and family income (Adelman, 1997; Astin, 1982; Sedlacek, 1996; Tinto, 1975; Westbrook & Sedlacek, 1991). Those studies provided valuable statistical and predictive information about college student retention and addressed the need for additional studies through both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
Although previous studies have assisted researchers and educators in identifying factors related to the attrition of African American students, additional studies are needed. In an effort to add to and enhance research on the attrition and retention of African American students at PWIs, this study examined the relationship between on-campus interactions (student-faculty, student-staff, and student-peer) and retention of African American students. By utilizing qualitative methodology to present students’ perspectives on their collegiate experiences, I submit data to further our understanding of the relationship. Consequently, this study is designed to offer greater insight into the phenomenon of student retention decisions. The first three chapters of this dissertation are designed to: (a) outline the direction and scope of my research on African American students at predominantly white institutions and (b) explore and reveal key issues related to the importance of this research. The last two chapters of this dissertation report the findings, conclusions, discussions, and recommendations. To lend further weight to the need for my study and to understand the importance of education to African Americans, I turn now to a brief overview of the problems they have had to overcome to enter into the educational institutions within this country.

**African Americans and Education**

From their arrival in this country, African Americans have had to fight for the right and privilege of obtaining an education. Prior to the Civil War, only 28 Blacks received a baccalaureate degree from U.S. colleges. Initially, Blacks had to rely on a few northern White institutions such as Oberlin College in Ohio and Berea College in Kentucky, which admitted Blacks and provided them with an opportunity to obtain an
education. During this period (early 1800's), three embryonic colleges were established to teach free Blacks. The earliest of the three colleges was established in 1839 and sponsored by Quakers in Pennsylvania and is now Cheney State College. The other two Negro colleges were Lincoln University in Pennsylvania (established in 1854 by the Presbyterian Church), and Wilberforce in Ohio (established in 1856 by the Methodist Episcopal Church). These colleges were primarily secondary schools, but were chartered to grant degrees (Harris, 1992; Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

African Americans in the southern region of the United States had very few opportunities to attend school. In fact, it was illegal to educate slaves in most southern states. Fortunately, there were a few people who were brave enough to defy the laws and to educate a few slaves and Black offspring of slave owners (Fleming, 1984; Pifer, 1973). After the Civil War, many southern states enacted laws to prohibit or inhibit the education of African Americans (Pifer, 1973). Despite the hardships required, a few African Americans during this era managed to obtain an education.

As a result of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 and Supreme Court rulings such as *Missouri ex. rel. Gaines v. Canada*, (1938); *Sweatt v. Painter*, (1950); *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* (1950); and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, (1954), African Americans gained entry into previously all-white educational institutions (Colon, 1991; Pifer, 1973). Their inclusion was marred, not only by resentment from the majority population, but also by overt racism and a sense of alienation and isolation. African American students attending PWIs continue to struggle with racism, alienation and isolation. Clearly, the passage of laws and
favorable Supreme Court rulings did not guarantee a smooth transition for African American students’ Acceptance into predominantly white institutions (Fleming, 1984; Neville, Heppner, & Wang, 1997).

Empirical studies from the Admittance of African American students in PWIs have consistently indicated that African American students attending PWIs are generally exposed daily to stressors which include racially insensitive comments, overt and covert racism and other discriminatory acts (Fleming, 1984; Loo & Rolison, 1986). Furthermore, due to social and cultural background differences, African American students at PWIs experience more academic, social, and psychological problems than the majority student population (Neville, Heppner, Wang, 1997; Webster, Sedlacek, & Miyares, 1979). These problems are partially due to the expectations of PWIs that African American students merge into the main culture of the college without consideration of their cultural needs (Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991; Neville, Heppner, Wang, 1997; Willie & McCord, 1973). Although African American students desired an education at PWIs, many of those institutions were unable to retain a large percentage of this population through degree obtainment (Porter, 1990; Sidle & McReynolds, 1999). The inability of postsecondary institutions to retain African American students through degree completion led researchers to explore methods to improve the retention rates. Consequently, researchers have investigated various concepts and theories in attempts to discover and evaluate factors related to retention of African American, other minority, and majority students. For the purpose of this study, I focused primarily on research related to African American students.
Research Problem

Retaining students through degree completion has been problematic for American higher education administrators since colleges began to offer degrees (Lucas, 1994; Mcneeley, 1938). During the 1960s, this dilemma expanded to include how to retain minority students who attended previously all-white institutions. Furthermore, the awareness of the cost of attrition to both students and institutions prompted research in areas of college persistence, retention, and attrition (Lucas, 1994; Mcneeley, 1938; Nagda, Gregerman, Jonides, Von Jippel, & Lerner, 1998; Tinto, 1993). Research conducted by Pantages and Creedon (1978) and Porter (1990) indicated that students who drop out do not optimize the use of their time, energy, and money toward goal and degree attainment. These researchers also suggest that in the institutional settings, high dropout rates and declining enrollments generally mean decreased funding, which affects all areas of institutions.

This study attempted to discover the role of on-campus interactions at one predominantly white institution on African American students' retention decisions. The on-campus interactions studied for this research are faculty, staff, and peer interactions. The study also examined African American students' perceptions about whether increased or different types of interactions aided them in their decision to continue at this PWI. Additionally, the study attempted to gain an understanding of why some African American students persist at one PWI in an environment where many of their peers drop out (Lamport, 1993; Roach, 1999; Sidle & McReynolds, 1999; Wilds & Wilson, 1998).
My decision to research African American student success, utilizing a qualitative approach, was based on the need for additional research on minority student success at predominantly white institutions. When I began investigating retention of minority students, I discovered that the abundance of the research on student attrition and persistence conducted since the early 1950s had little focus on the success of African American students attending predominantly white institutions. The majority of the retention research has been conducted to determine why students drop out or fail. Additionally, much of the research did not address the impact of everyday on-campus interactions on minority students' persistence toward earning a college degree. As a result, I have decided to conduct this research focusing on the success stories of African American students at a predominantly white institution. The need for additional research on minority student retention from students' perspectives to examine and explain why they persist at PWIs despite the disadvantages of isolation and racism supported my decision to conduct research on success stories.

My examination of the existing research revealed that most of the research on African American students' persistence and attrition utilized the quantitative approach. This research approach is characterized by techniques of presenting the data in numerical, statistical form, a contrast to the qualitative approach, which is characterized by techniques of data presentation in words (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989). This latter approach is designed to allow the voices of under-represented groups such as the poor, women, minorities and others to be heard from their perspective and not only through statistical inferences (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). I conducted this study
utilizing a qualitative approach, in an effort to facilitate an articulation of African American students’ perspectives.

In summary, my research investigated a phenomenon related to why some African American students attending a predominantly white institution persist and attain college degrees. The use of qualitative research methodology in this study allowed me to investigate and report the impact of everyday on-campus interactions on why and how some African American students overcame obstacles to college degree attainment.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between on-campus interactions and African American retention decisions. It was my intent to explore how interactions between African American students and others at a PWI defined and shaped African American students’ realities and how those realities influenced their decisions to remain at the PWI through degree completion.

Research indicated that many of the African American students who choose to attend PWIs are aware that they may be faced with problems of isolation and alienation at those institutions (Freeman, 1999; Flemings, 1984; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Pifer, 1973). However, it is my belief that African American students entered those PWIs with the hope that the isolation and alienation would decrease as they progressed toward degree completion. As a result, it is important that researchers discover from the African American students’ perspectives how they combated the sense of isolation and alienation and continued to reinforce their retention decisions. Therefore, this study is designed to elicit African American students’ perspectives on how they made sense of
their educational experiences and how those experiences influenced their retention
decisions.

**Research Questions**

The main research question guiding this study is:

*How do on-campus interactions influence African American students’ decisions
to persist at a predominantly white institution?*

Additional sub-questions included:

(a) What is the relationship between student-faculty interactions and persistence?

(b) What is the relationship between student-peer interactions and persistence?

(c) What is the relationship between student-staff interactions and persistence?

**Definitions**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as listed below:

**African-American** – (Afro-American) of or pertaining to American Blacks of
African ancestry, their history or their culture (American Heritage Dictionary, 1991).

Also called Negro and Black.

**Minority** – any person residing in the United States that is considered nonwhite
(examples - African American, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Eskimo).

**Non-traditional Student** - any student age 25 or older at the time of college
enrollment.

**Persistence** - the continuous enrollment in the same college and a four-year
degree program through graduation.

**Traditional Student** - any student between the age of 18 and 24 years at the
time of college enrollment.
White/Caucasian -- of or relating to the White race, as defined by law
(Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1983). Also, persons of the majority race in the United States.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study concentrated on African American students' perceptions of on-campus interactions and how the interactions shaped and defined their decision to continue their pursuit of obtaining an academic degree. This study is limited to African American students attending Southeastern Louisiana University. However, it is my intent that findings from this study will provide information and insights that could be useful in enhancing the degree completion of African American students attending postsecondary institutions throughout the United States.

This study is limited to on-campus interactions without inclusions of interactions with persons from other environments. Although it is my belief that off-campus interactions are important to African American student retention, the scope of this study does not include those interactions. This decision was based on findings of Tinto (1993), Terenzini, & Pascarella (1977), and Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hibbel (1978), which reported that weak on-campus student-student and student-faculty interactions influence student withdrawal decisions. Other studies (Allen, 1988; Nagda, et al., 1998; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987) show that social integration is a crucial factor in the retention of under-represented minorities at majority institutions. Those studies also indicate that faculty contact serves a crucial role in retention of African American students at PWIs. Others report that faculty-student contact must extend beyond the formal classroom.
setting, to include extensive advising and mentoring to achieve the desired impact on retention and academic enhancement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Stage, 1989; Tinto, 1993). As a result of the findings of those studies, I assert that there is a need to conduct and expand research related to on-campus interactions and the role the interactions play in the retention of African American students.

**Significance of the Study**

This study serves many roles in the continuing and expanding research on African American student retention. First, the study will add to the base of knowledge related to retention of African American students. Second, it will assist administrators at higher education institutions in their efforts to discover ways to enhance African American students' success through increased retention and completion rates. Third, this research will serve as a tool to gain knowledge of the relationship of on-campus interactions to retention decisions as articulated from the students' perspective. This study will also serve as a tool to give educational administrators additional insight on how different interactions define and shape the realities for African American students. As a result, this study will offer a new look at the successes and struggles of this student population.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between on-campus interactions and retention decisions of African American students at a predominantly white institution. To enhance my understanding of existing research, I examined literature related to academic experiences of minority students at predominantly white institutions. Through my examinations, I discovered that there is a limited amount of research on success stories of African American students at predominantly white institutions (Joubert-Thompson, 2000). The deficiency of research conducted on African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) led to my desire to develop a study which examines why some African American students persist at PWIs and obtain college degrees or goal completion.

To enhance the awareness of existing retention research and the need for this study, I selected six themes for literature review. The themes identified in this chapter offer an abbreviated snapshot of retention literature related to all students and an expanded view of retention literature on African American students. The student retention themes presented in this chapter are: (a) studies related to retention, (b) theoretical models of retention, (c) studies related to student adjustment, (d) noncognitive variables, (e) faculty-student interactions, and (f) student-peer interactions.

I have selected the literature reviewed in this chapter to enhance an awareness of the need for additional research on the role of campus interactions in college experiences and retention decisions of African American students. In addition, the
following review of literature discusses existing retention literature and some of the problems related to retention of minority and majority students.

**Review of Literature Procedures**

My review of the literature involved a four-tier process of reviewing, locating, reading, and evaluating research on retention and methodology research. To develop a concept of the type of research I wanted to conduct, I reviewed the retention research I had previously studied. This earlier literature was fundamental in the development of my desire to conduct research on retention of African American students at predominantly white institutions. Once I decided to conduct a study on retention, I began compiling a reference list of primary and secondary sources on cognitive and noncognitive factors that relate to African American student retention.

My next step was to gather the research from my reference list by checking the availability through computerized and manual searches. From that method, I was able to locate and gather the material from the local college library and through interlibrary loan. As I read and evaluated the research, a pattern began to emerge. I discovered that a majority of older research had been conducted using quantitative research methods to evaluate the relationship of cognitive factors (including SAT, ACT, precollege GPA, and freshman year GPA) to dropout and retention decisions. I also discovered research on noncognitive factors that included, but was not limited to (a) social integration, (b) faculty-student interactions, (c) mentoring, and (d) family background.

To aid in my investigation of noncognitive factors, I conducted a computer search of Dissertation Abstracts International. This investigation yielded a few
dissertations (Cordova, 1994; Nora, 1985; Salter, 1994) that helped me to discover other retention studies, while also defining and narrowing the scope of my study. In addition, I began to focus my study on the relationship between on-campus interactions and the retention decisions of African American students. Furthermore, I found that reference lists in those dissertations were excellent sources of related studies to be examined as potential primary and secondary sources.

The next step was to find the material from the reference list through computer searches at the local college library. I also used variables found in the source documents to search for additional information related to retention of African American students and qualitative research methodology. The computer searches were conducted utilizing the following indexes: Education Abstracts, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Sociology Abstracts, and Dissertation Abstracts. The variables I used to assist in my search were Black college student adjustment, Black college student, student peer interaction, student interaction, qualitative research methods, symbolic interaction, faculty-student interaction, college student attrition, academic persistence, and student retention. From those searches, I was able to compile research that assisted me in the discovery of a scarcity of qualitative research on African American faculty-student and student-peer interactions from the student's perspective. Therefore, I decided to conduct my research using qualitative methods and focusing on student-faculty, student-staff, and student-peer on-campus interactions.

I selected the literature in the rest of the chapter for review which served to enhance my awareness of the need for additional research on the role of campus
interactions in college experiences and retention decisions of African American students. In addition, the following review of literature discusses existing retention literature and some of the problems related to retention of minority and majority students.

**Studies Related to Retention**

Researchers have tried for decades to determine which factors are important to the enrollment-retention dilemma. The need for student retention studies became evident as early as 1938, when it was noted that an alarming number of students were not completing degree requirements (Cope & Hannah, 1975). A study by McNeeley (1938) found that more than 42% of the freshmen in 25 universities in 1931 did not complete degree requirements. In a review of 35 studies from 1913 to 1962, Summerskills (1962) found that colleges overall had only a 40% degree attainment rate. Additionally, Iffert (1958) found that there was a 25% attrition rate among the first-year students. As studies continued to predict college attrition rates, Pantages and Creedon (1978) forecasted that approximately 40% of the college students would drop out and never return.

After African American students began enrolling at PWIs, researchers began to conduct studies on their retention and attrition rates at PWIs and found that their attrition is much higher than the attrition rate of Caucasian students (Astin, 1975, 1978, 1982; Porter, 1990; Sedlacek & Pelham, 1976). An analysis of students who entered college in 1980 revealed that Caucasian students had a dropout rate at 41.5% and African Americans had a dropout rate of 63.3% (Porter, 1990).
Although many of the previously all-white colleges began including minority students through recruitment of "the cream" of the minority students (academically and athletically gifted students) to attend their institutions, many of those recruited did not have positive campus experiences (Allen, 1988). Even though many of these students were ambitious, competitive, and seeking positive experiences on PWI campuses, many did not find supportive environments to assist them in achieving their goals (Fleming, 1984; Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991; Pifer, 1973). Those unsupportive environments found at PWIs resulted in many African American students dropping out of college or, in some cases, transferring to other schools which included historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). African American students attending HBCUs expected, and in many cases found, supportive learning environments (Fleming, 1984; Pascarella, 1985; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996). Although enrollment of African American at HBCUs continue to fluctuate (an increase of approximately 1% during 1994 to 1995 and decrease of 1.9% during 1995 to 1996) the percentage of bachelor's degree earned by African American students (28%) at these historically black institutions remain stable (Wilds & Wilson, 1998).

Recent research on African American students at both predominantly white institutions and historically Black colleges and universities have included areas of study that explored and examined analyses of: (a) college experiences at PWIs and HBCUs, (b) race relations in higher education, (c) effectiveness of retention programs, (d) effectiveness of research partnerships on retention, and (e) role of identity, stressors, coping styles, and discrimination on college adjustment (Neville, Heppner, & Wang,
A substantial number of the student attrition and retention research have been conducted during the period of the end of the freshman year and the beginning of the sophomore year at PWIs. Studies by Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) and Tinto (1975) determined that this time frame is the period of the highest student attrition. Their premise is that students who persist past this time frame have a greater commitment to degree completion. Tracey and Sedlacek (1984) reported that different factors contributed to the persistence of African Americans throughout the students’ enrollment. They also reported that during the initial year of college enrollment, two factors had the greatest influence on retention of African American students. Those factors are: (a) having family and peer support of college plans and (b) having a preference for long-term goals. The persistence of African American students at PWIs after the freshmen year was attributed to their ability to understand racism and develop involvement in community service. Other studies also cited those variables as influential in African American retention decisions (Bean & Hull, 1984; Fleming, 1984; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984, 1985, 1987, Woods & Sedlacek, 1998). Some researchers expanded those findings to state that students who persist developed mechanisms to help them cope with experiences of racial prejudice by depersonalizing prejudicial incidents (Arbona & Novy, 1990; Hendrick, Smith, Caplow, & Donaldson, 1996; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). A recent study by Joubert-Thompson (2000) examined the success stories of African American men and women and found that non-cognitive variables had an important role in the retention of participants of that study.
Although attrition and persistence rates continue to be important issues for all institutions of higher education, those issues are especially important for institutions receiving public funding. Research shows that a high percentage (78%) of college students are enrolled in public colleges and universities (Wilds & Wilson, 1998). The economic impact of enrollment-retention trends motivated colleges and universities to attempt to find ways to increase the retention/completion rates of students (Pascarella, 1980, 1982; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Pounds, 1987; Tinto, 1975). These trends have continued to prompt the need for additional research in areas of retention, persistence, and attrition of students to offset the cost of attrition to students and institutions (Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Porter, 1990). Administrators at PWIs and researchers began to investigate the various causes of high attrition rates of minority students in efforts to understand minority college students’ experiences (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Fleming, 1984).

A report by the American Council on Education also suggested that additional research on African American students is needed. The report cited both enrollment rates and the low retention/completion rates of African American students in public institutions as indicators of this need (Wilds & Wilson, 1998). The report also indicated that while minority student enrollment at public institutions increased by 3.1% during the 1995-96 school year, the retention rate for that same period decreased by 6%. The discrepancy between enrollment and degree completion rates of African American students continues to challenge educators to find ways to retain this population.

Another interesting fact related to the completion/graduation rates for African American
students is that in 1996, African American women continued to graduate at a higher rate than African American men. In 1997, an analysis of the data on students attending college at NCAA Division I institutions revealed that African American women had a 42% graduation rate and the African American men had a 33% graduation rate. Other retention facts are that independent Division I institutions reported a 51% graduation rate for African American students in 1996, while public Division I institutions had only a 35% graduation rate during a six-year time frame (Wilds & Wilson, 1998).

The next section offers a review of theoretical retention models to give an overview of how researchers have attempted to develop theories to understand the patterns and trends related to retention. These theories were designed to understand student retention and suggest solutions for retaining both majority and minority students to degree or goal completion.

**Theoretical Models of Retention**

This review gives an overview of theory-based research related to retention focusing closely on models developed by Spady and Tinto. The discussion considers the evolution of retention studies and the role of interactions in the retention of students. The bulk of the earlier attrition studies used quantitative methods to conceptualize the attrition process. Two models of the attrition/persistence process are included in this section to provide information about variables related to the attrition/persistence process.

**Spady’s Attrition Model**

In an effort to develop a theoretical model to describe the dropout process, Spady (1970) used Durkheim’s theory on suicide as a model. Durkheim’s theory on
suicide postulated that shared group values and friendship support reduced the probability of persons committing suicide. Spady (1970, 1971) used the shared group value and friendship concept to explore and explain retention and dropout patterns in the development of his attrition model. However, Spady believed that Durkheim's model did not account for what he considered an important factor — family background. Therefore, he made family background the central component of his model (see Figure 2.1) (Bean, 1982; Lenning, Beal, & Sauer, 1980; Spady, 1970, 1971). Furthermore, Spady posits that if students had shared group values, friendships, and support they would have higher levels of grade performance and would become more socially

Figure 2.1: Theoretically Based Model of Undergraduate Dropout Process
Source: Dropout from higher education: Toward an empirical model. Interchange 2, 1971

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integrated. He postulated that the social integration of students would lead to higher levels of student satisfaction. Subsequently, higher levels of student satisfaction would lead to higher levels of institutional commitments, therefore, reducing the likelihood of students dropping out of school (Spady, 1970, 1971; Bean, 1982).

**Tinto’s Academic and Social Integration Model**

To further examine and explore student retention and dropout rates, Tinto (1975) developed a longitudinal, predictive model (Figure 2.2) that explained the process that students go through prior to dropping out (Eimers & Pike, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983). His student attrition model was designed to expand the ideas and concepts of Durkheim and Spady. Instead of focusing primarily on social integration, Tinto’s model focuses on the premise that persistence in college is a function of both academic and social integration. Tinto defined academic integration as the full range of individual experiences which occur in the formal and informal domain of academic systems of the university. Social integration is referred to as formal and informal social interactions that students experience at the university. Tinto postulated that academic and social integration are the key factors in dropout and retention decisions (Lenning, Beal, & Sauer, 1980; Tinto, 1975). Academic integration is defined by Tinto (1993) as, “the full range of individual experiences which occur in the formal and informal domains of... the academic systems of the university” (p.118). Tinto describes social integration as the formal and informal social interactions that students experience at the university. The idea that integration is important was further supported in studies by Tinto (1993)
and Pascarella and Terenzini (1977), which reported that the lack of integration or isolation of students within institutions is an important factor in attrition.

Another postulate of Tinto’s (1975) model is that students enter colleges with a variety of precollege experiences or attributes and background characteristics that help to determine their initial commitments and expectations related to college. Those initial institutional goals or commitments change during the course of matriculating through college as students integrate into the academic and social environments of the institution. Tinto posits that the following are key factors in student retention and persistence: (a) grades, (b) parents’ education, (c) encouragement, (d) academic integration, (e) social integration, and (f) institutional/goal commitments (Tinto, 1975, 1983). Students integrate into the academic and social systems of the colleges and universities through both formal and informal peer-group and student-faculty

Figure 2.2: Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College
Source: Dropout from higher Education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. Review of higher Education Research, 1975

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interactions. Tinto (1993) postulated that the degree to which students integrate into the social and academic systems determine their final commitment and the likelihood they will continue at the university. Subsequently, the level of a student’s final commitment to an institution and their goals are determinative of the dropout decision.

**Tests of and Reactions to Spady and Tinto’s Retention Models**

Pascarella and Terenzini (1977, 1978, 1979) tested the hypotheses of Spady and Tinto in several studies at Syracuse University. The data for the studies was collected during three successive fall semesters, through the use of three independent random samples of freshmen attending Syracuse. The data instrument was a thirty-four Likert-item questionnaire designed to measure various dimensions of academic and social integration. These studies examined (1) the relationship of precollege student characteristics to attrition and interactions between precollege traits and freshmen’s experiences; (2) frequency of student-faculty informal contact; (3) quality of student-faculty informal contact; and (4) both frequency and quality of academic and social contacts between faculty and students. Results from their studies indicate that there is a positive relationship between academic achievement and the social integration of students during their college years. They further found that this relationship is influential in student persistence and retention decisions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 1975). The outcomes of the studies by Pascarella and Terenzini support Tinto’s theory, and their findings have both theoretical and practical implications.

The relationship between African American students and factors found in the theoretical models of both Spady and Tinto have been addressed in various studies
(Eimers & Pike, 1997; Fleming, 1984; Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie & Sanders, 1997). These researchers found evidence to support the premise that African American students’ success (as measured by retention) is enhanced by strong faculty and peer interactions. Terenzini, Pasarella, and Blimling (1999) offers support for the benefits of faculty interactions through in and out-of-class interactions. Research by Eimers and Pike (1997) reported that academic and social integration is also important to retention of African American students. However, they reported that minority and nonminority students have a different perspective on the importance of social and academic integration. Eimers and Pike also found that minority students are more concerned with academic integration than social integration, whereas nonminority students are more concerned with developing friendships and social integration.

On a final note, Lenning, Beal, and Sauer (1980) wrote, “a major hallmark of theories of Spady (1971) and Tinto (1975) is the attention given to relationships between students and peers and students and faculty, a primary influence of retention and attrition” (p 61). Furthermore, both the frequency and quality of student-faculty interactions are important to retention and attrition. This idea is also supported in studies by Terenzini and Pascarella (1977), which reported that the absence of significant interactions with persons within the institutional community was the single leading predictor of college attrition.

**Studies Related to Student Adjustment**

A study conducted by Fleming (1984) revealed that many African American students who attended PWIs discovered that they were expected to blend into the
existing socio-cultural life of the campus. As a result, the students did not find a readily
available oasis where they could immerse in their own culture during their tenure at the
PWI. This lack of access to places or groups to provide cultural identity and affiliation
often led to feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction. Consequently, when minority
students are in settings where a nurturing socio-cultural environment is minimized or
not available, attrition rates are high (Allen, 1988; Fleming, 1984; Savitz & Walls
1986). More recent studies have reported that feelings of isolation or not belonging, and
a lack of external support have been linked to attrition of minority students at PWIs
(Bean & Vesper, 1992; Gloria, Robinson-Kurplus, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999; Nora &

To furnish additional weight to this argument, studies by Loo and Rolison
(1986) and DeSousa and Kuh (1996) reported several findings related to alienation of
minority students at predominantly white universities. Five of those findings are as
follow:

1. First, sociocultural alienation of minority students is greater than that of
Caucasian students, and feelings of cultural domination and ethnic
isolation are forms of alienation. DeSousa and Kuh gave two major
reasons for minority students' sociocultural alienation: (a) the cultural
dominance of White, middle class values at PWIs and (b) the ethnic
isolation from being a small part of the student body. On many of the
predominantly white campuses, Black students were excluded from the
major campus social networks such as campus based clubs, informal
functions with faculty, and academic/social gatherings which enhanced the feelings of isolation and alienation.

2. Second, unlike Caucasian students, ethnic students’ sense of sociocultural alienation may be as much a factor in retention as are academic factors. At many institutions, more African American students have dropped out or transferred from PWIs more so because of psychosocial problems than academic problems.

3. Third, lower socioeconomic status and parental educational attainment of many African American and Chicano students’ families magnify the problem of academic alienation. In many cases, parents who have not attended college are unable to provide support and advice related to on-campus social and academic requirements. This lack of parental support frequently left minority students without a vital resource needed to increase coping skills and the probability of degree and goal completion.

4. Fourth, some institutional factors can counter academic and sociocultural alienation and promote academic success for minority students. Often, strong institutional programs designed to assist first-year students through providing information and same-race mentoring can minimize potential sociocultural and academic problems.

5. Fifth, the studies found that Caucasian and minority students have different perceptions of student activities. One such difference is the interpretation of ethnic clustering: Caucasians described ethnic
clustering as “racial segregation,” while minorities described ethnic clustering as necessary “cultural support” within a larger unsupportive system (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996).

Allen (1985) stated that minority students have a different perspective on social integration than Caucasian students at predominantly white universities. Due to the abundance of same-race faculty and students at PWIs, Caucasian students have more opportunities for both quality and quantity faculty-student, student-staff and student-peer interactions than African American students attending the same institution. Allen further suggests that due to the limited number of same-race faculty and students, African American students at PWIs have a greater level of psychological distress, social distress, and overall dissatisfaction with the college experience than do their Caucasian counterparts. Feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction often caused some African American students to have lesser degree commitment at PWIs (Thompson, Neville, Weathers, Poston, & Atkinson, 1990).

Some African American students have successfully completed postsecondary degrees at PWIs despite their perceived personal, psychological, academic, and institutional impediments. Additionally, the success of many African American students can be directly attributed to their persistence, talent, and self-confidence (Allen, 1985; Patterson-Stewart, et al., 1997). During the early inclusion of African American students at previously all-white institutions, many college administrators expected African American students to abandon or reject their own values and culture and acquire White middle-class values and culture. Many college administrators at PWIs did not
consider cultural conflicts or isolation as a factor in dropout decisions. Therefore, they did not attempt to aid minority students during the acculturation process (Allen, 1985; Loo & Rolison, 1986).

While some African American students successfully persist and obtain college degrees, Allen (1988) reported that many African American students at PWIs experience psycho-sociological distress and do not have totally satisfactory college experiences. Other researchers have also reported that minority students attending PWIs are less satisfied with their college experiences than Caucasian students on the same campuses (Allen, 1988; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991; Savitz & Walls, 1986; Thompson & Frietz, 1991; Thompson et al., 1990). Those researchers have also reported that a sense of alienation, anger and frustration, powerlessness, and normlessness (without a sense of what is considered as normal and acceptable) causes many minority students to dropout or “stop-out” before degree attainment.

Furthermore, the lack of same-race faculty and administrators does not provide minority students with valuable opportunities to develop same-race mentoring relationships necessary to enhance retention (Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991). This, and other integration problems were instrumental in the drop in African American student enrollment at PWIs during the 1980s (Astin, 1982; Pounds, 1987; Trent, 1991; Wright, 1987). Findings of research related to problems encountered by African American students at PWIs resulted in some administrators re-evaluating services and needs to this population.

Research on African American students in higher education indicate that they have higher attrition rates, longer completion rates, and less satisfactory experiences
from college experiences than their Caucasian counterparts (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Nettles, 1988; Porter, 1990). Other researchers have substantiated the findings by Loo and Rolison, Nettles, and Porter and found four recurring themes that intensify the potential of African American students dropping out (Long, 1996; Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991; Nagda et al., 1998). In summary, African American students have: (a) uncertainties about what to expect from college and its rewards, (b) transitional adjustment problems, (c) academic under preparation, and (d) the lack of same-race faculty, staff, and mentors (Long, 1996; Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991; Nagda et al., 1998).

The high attrition rates of minority students at predominantly white institutions highlights the importance of identifying factors related to retention of those students. Nettles (1988) reported that African American students are consistently at a disadvantage on the nation’s college campuses. He also stated that African American students have higher college attrition rates, receive lower college course grades, progress through college at a slower pace, have less satisfying college experiences, and fewer career opportunities than many of their Caucasian counterparts.

**Noncognitive Variables**

Historically, researchers examined the influences of academic factors on college success and have determined that academic factors are not the best indicators of potential success for all races (Fleming, 1990; Gelson & Rowell, 1967; Messick, 1979). Some researchers have found evidence that noncognitive dimensions are as important or more important to academic success than the traditional academic dimensions (Astin,
Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) hypothesized that noncognitive dimensions are more important to the success of minority students than for majority students. Tracey and Sedlacek (1984) developed a Noncognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) to test the dimensions of noncognitive variables within Sedlacek and Brooks' hypothesis. The NCQ consists of 23 items and a dimension of general academic familiarity. The format includes two categorical items pertaining to the expected educational attainment levels, 18 likert-type items on expectations of college, and three open-ended items to list goals, past accomplishments, and extra-curricular activities (Arbona & Novy, 1990).

Tracey and Sedlacek (1987) reported that a comparison of outcomes from a study utilizing the NCQ on Black and White participants revealed that some variables, like (a) "understands and deals with racism" and (b) "demonstrated community services," are better predictors of retention of Black students than academic ability. Another finding was that persistence and grades were often independent of each other for Black students. The noncognitive variables related to persistence of African American students are: (1) positive self-concept; (2) realistic self-appraisal; (3) preference of long range goals over more short-term, immediate needs; (4) demonstrated community service, and (5) leadership experience (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987). Additionally, the findings indicated that while noncognitive dimensions have a strong influence on the persistence of Black students, the same does not apply for Caucasian students. The research also indicated that the ability to meet academic
demands was the best predictor of persistence for Caucasian students and other noncognitive variables found in the NCQ had little effect on persistence of Caucasian students (Arbona & Novy, 1990; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987).

**Faculty-Student Interactions**

A dominant theme for retention research is that retention and attrition decisions are linked to interactions between students and persons within the institutional settings (Eimers & Pike, 1997; Lenning, Beal, & Sauer, 1980; Long, 1996). Researchers have acknowledged the significance of successive, meaningful contacts between students, faculty, and staff members to increase retention rates through meeting the needs of the students. Research conducted by Neumann and Finaly-Neumann (1989) on the persistence of juniors and seniors revealed that students’ perceptions of quality of the learning experience, academic involvement, and contact with faculty predicted their retention one semester later. Additionally, researchers have found that increased faculty-student interactions not only provide students with opportunities to obtain additional academically-related information, but the interactions also had an impact on students’ general ways of thinking, methods of problem solving, and interests in various careers and life goals (Chickering, 1969; Eimers & Pike, 1997; Endo & Harpel, 1981; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Long, 1996; Mayo, Mirguia, & Paquilla, 1995; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1980; Tinto, 1993).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1978) posit that various types and frequencies of student-faculty interactions impact three educational outcomes during the freshman year: (1) grade point average, (2) intellectual development, and (3) personal.
development. In an earlier study, Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) found that high interactors (students who interacted frequently with faculty and staff members) withdrew at a lower rate (14%) and low interactors withdrew at a 27% rate. Research by Bean (1985) and Brawer (1996) supports the hypothesis that formal faculty interactions and peer interactions enhance students’ persistence.

Lamport (1993) reported that questions related to student-faculty interaction are moving from what happens and the quantity of the interactions to how, why, and the quality of the interactions. This idea supports Pascarella, Terenzini and Hibel’s (1978) claim that there is a strong correlation between quality student-faculty interactions that focus on intellectual and career concerns and student claims that faculty members had a positive influences in their intellectual and personal development. Newman and Newman (1978) supported this claim by reporting that the primary agents of influence for college students are college faculty members and some administrative personnel.

A study by Endo and Harpel (1981) was conducted to determine which types of faculty-student interactions raise student degree aspiration. Their study revealed four variables that are important predictors of higher degree aspirations for undergraduate students: (1) spending more hours with the faculty, (2) working on a professor’s research project, (3) becoming a guest in a professor’s home, and (4) being satisfied with the opportunity they have to talk to professors and the contact they have with the faculty and administration. Each of these variables allows students to have quality interactions with faculty members; thereby, providing opportunities for mentoring relationships to form that enhance the probability of student retention (Endo & Harpel, 1981; Fleming, 1984).
Many researchers support the premise that it is important to have a combination of both frequent and quality interactions with faculty members to positively impact retention (Brawer, 1996; Mallette & Cabrera, 1991; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1978). Premises related to the impact of student-faculty interactions on retention of students are not new to academic research. Earlier studies by Jacob (1957) and Chickering (1969) stated that faculty-student formal and informal contact had a significant positive correlation between intellectual and personal development in college. The frequency of informal student-faculty interactions and how those interactions influence student satisfaction and enhance both academic and non-academic aspects of college continue to be supported and researched (Patterson-Stewart, et al., 1997).

In their research, Martin and Williams-Dixon (1991) expanded the concepts of faculty-student interactions to include same-race interactions. Relationships built on same-race student-faculty interactions are reported to enhance student feelings of confidence, cognitive processes, and student retention. Through same-race student-faculty interactions, African American students feel that Black faculty members can facilitate their understanding of the cognitive processes on the college setting. Mayo, Murguia, and Paquilla (1995) also acknowledged that same-race mentors and role models are consistently important to African American and other minority students. Through same-race mentoring relationships, African-American students are able to reduce feelings of alienation and isolation. Unfortunately, research also indicated that most minority students lack the opportunities to build same-race faculty-student
relationships due to the relatively small number of minority faculty at PWIs (Fleming, 1984; Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991; Education Digest, 1999). Subsequently, this valuable instrument to assist in the enhancement of African American students retention is minimized on many PWI campuses.

Another factor which affects the effectiveness of same-race minority faculty-student interaction is the duty assignments of many minority faculty members. In many instances, African American faculty/staff members are given additional duties beyond their normal teaching and advising assignments. African American faculty/staff members are often assigned and expected to serve as counselors and mentors to many African American students in additional to their normal teaching duties (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie and Sanders (1997) proposed building mentoring relationships through cross-cultural training and interactions to decrease the effects of limited same-race faculty members for minority students attending PWIs. They recommended that faculty members who wish to become involved in cross-cultural mentoring should develop a sense of cross-cultural competence to enhance the interactions with other-race students. Furthermore, they suggest that quality cross-cultural mentoring enhances students’ professional development through the formation of personal relationships that includes trust and respect. These cross-cultural mentoring relationships also present opportunities to enhance student-faculty interactions and reduce minority students’ sense of isolation.

Although most of the research on faculty-student interactions was not conducted on African American and other minority students, a few researchers found that similar
results for other student populations relate to the African American student population. A national survey of African American undergraduate students revealed that good relationships with faculty and others contributed to academic success (Allen, 1985). Other studies found that quality relationships with a strong support person, such as a faculty or staff member, and positive in-class and out-of-class relationship are important to the academic performance and success of African American students (Mayo, Murguia, & Paquilla, 1995; Romando, 1998; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987).

**Student-Peer Interactions**

The influence of student-peer interactions is relevant to both the academic and social interaction of students and by its nature impacts retention decisions. Researchers offer evidence that supports the claim that the interactions also influence a wide range of college outcomes that include career choice, critical thinking, political orientation, social activism, self-confidence, openness to diversity, appreciation for cultural and social differences, problem-solving skills, and choice of major (Astin, 1993; Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996).

A study by Kuh (1995) found that students peer interactions impact both in- and out-of-class experiences. The interactions also impact the cognitive development of students. The study also found that peer interactions through Greek organization affiliation for African American students were able to enhance feelings of friendship and belonging. The students often found that the Greek organizations provided a place for them to find friendships, study partners, a place to hang out, and a place for them to feel less alienation and isolation (Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999).

35
Peer interactions can also be instrumental in helping African American students to develop cultural and mentoring bonds with other-race students. Some colleges have developed peer mentoring programs to enhance interactions to improve retention of African American students. During the orientation process, students are often the first elements of impending peer interaction. Through this process, student interactions are critical to the enrollment of students. After enrollment, the importance of peer interactions moves from orientation to social and cognitive information dissemination. This exchange of information is central to friendship development, academic enhancement, and the reduction of feelings of isolation and alienation (Mueller, 1993). From those exchanges student are constantly evaluating retention decisions. As a result, peer interactions are important to the retention decisions and process for all students.

Conclusion

My literature review identified six retention themes and discussed how the themes related to retention of African American students. The retention themes were: (a) studies related to retention, (b) theoretical models of retention, (c) studies related to student adjustment, (d) noncognitive variables, (e) faculty-student interaction, and (f) student-peer interactions. In discussing each of the themes, I interwove the findings as related to student-faculty and student-peer interactions and retention.

My literature review of the studies related to retention uncovered that researchers reported a need for retention studies as early as 1938 because of the number of students who were not remaining in college through degree completion. The review
of literature further revealed that when African American students were admitted into previously all-white colleges and universities, they had a higher dropout rate than White students. This led to an acknowledgment of a need to conduct research on the enrollment and retention of this group of students. My next theme for discussion was theoretical models of retention.

The discussion of theoretical models of retention centered around two models, Spady’s Attrition Model and Tinto’s Academic and Social Integration Model. I chose to review these models because they related to my proposed study. Spady’s model used shared group values and friendship concepts to explain retention and dropout patterns. Tinto’s model expanded the concepts of Spady and explored the relationship of academic and social integration to retention. As a part of the student integration process, his model accounts for on-campus interactions and retention. In both models the student interactions were an important part of the retention and dropout process. Spady examined the friendship concept and retention, which involve contact and interactions. Tinto examined academic and social integration, which could not happen without some form of interaction and contact. Although there are other retention models available, I decided to limit my review to these two models because of the general acceptance and testing of them.

I then reviewed studies related to student adjustment, which led me to studies that discussed the problems that many African American students encountered resulting from their enrollment at PWIs. A few of the problems were academic and social isolation, covert and overt racism, sociocultural alienation, and other personal and
psychological problems. Many of the reviewed studies suggest that some of these problems can be substantially reduced through increasing the number of same-race faculty/staff member or cross-cultural training and mentoring.

My review of retention literature involved reviewing studies on noncognitive variable and the relationship to retention of African American students. This review addressed historical findings that stated that academic factors are not the best indicators of potential success of all students. Evidence was given to address the use of noncognitive variables to identify factors related to African American student retention. Tracey and Sedlacek (1984) developed a Noncognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) to test Sedlacek and Brooks’ hypothesis that related the importance of noncognitive variables to the success of minority students. Tests of the NCQ found that some of the variables were better predictors of retention and persistence of African American students than academic grades.

The review of literature on faculty-student interactions indicated that successive, meaningful contacts between students and faculty/staff members are important to retention of students. Over the last decade, the emphasis on student-faculty and student-staff contacts and interactions began to shift from quantity to quality of the contact and interaction. Some researchers have begun to examine the influence of student-faculty interactions on retention through evaluating a combination of frequency and quality of the interactions.

The review of research on student-peer interactions indicated that quality interactions impact retention decisions of all students. Student-peer interactions often
began during the orientation process and extended through graduation. Many colleges and universities have developed programs to enhance same-race and other-race interactions to further culture awareness and appreciation in an effort to combat high dropout rates.

In summary, the findings from the reviewed studies suggested that both the quality and quantity of student-faculty interactions can impact student academic and social integration into the institutional culture. The discussions also encompass how African American students need same-race or quality cross-cultural interactions and mentoring to overcome psychological and social distress related to isolation, alienation, and racial incidents to continue their enrollment at PWIs. The perceived problems and issues related to enrollment and retention of African American students have prompted a need for additional studies to develop an understanding of the social, academic, and personal needs of this population to increase the persistence rates and quality of college experiences. This review of the existing literature reinforced my belief that there is a need for additional research on retention of African American students. Furthermore, I believe that there is a need for additional research that presents findings on retention of African American students utilizing research methodology that allows the voices of this under-represented group to be heard so that we can have a better understanding from their perspectives as to what motivated them to remain in college.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to provide an examination and understanding of African American students’ on-campus interactions, and how they affect their retention decisions at a predominantly white institution. The main question that guided this study was: How do on-campus interactions influence African American students’ decisions to persist at a predominantly white institution?

The sub-questions were:

(a) What is the relationship between student-faculty interactions and persistence?

(b) What is the relationship between student-peer interactions and persistence?

(c) What is the relationship between student-staff interactions and persistence?

This qualitative study was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant journal keeping, and brief autobiographies. This chapter of the dissertation includes information regarding theoretical perspective, qualitative research methods, research design, data collection methods, setting, population and sample, and data analysis procedures.

This study was conducted employing a qualitative research method utilizing symbolic interactionism to gain a perspective of how African American students define their reality of on-campus interactions. Through this research, I hoped to better understand the role of those realities in college persistence. This method of inquiry assisted in the attempt to provide a broader understanding of why student-faculty,
student-staff, and student-peer interactions are important to student retention decisions. It was also the intent of this study to provide insight that could be useful to higher education administrators to aid in the retention of African American students throughout the United States.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical perspective for this study was based on my understanding of symbolic interactionism gained from the works by Blumer (1969/1983, Bogdan and Biklen (1998), Denzin (1992), Denzin and Lincoln (1998), Donmeyer (1990), LeCompte and Preissle (1991), Marshall and Rossman (1995), and Taylor and Bogdan (1984). Symbolic interactionism is commonly used in qualitative research because this approach focuses on subjective understandings and perceptions individuals take and make meaning of, and about people, objects, and symbols (LeCompte & Preissle, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These authors suggest that qualitative research is used to find meanings, definitions, and characteristics of things and events that impact the life of the people who are investigated. The overall purpose of research is to discover (or uncover) answers to questions about the phenomenon under investigation through systematic procedures. Qualitative research is often characterized as descriptive because the data is collected in the form of words or pictures, and results include quotations to illustrate and add richness to the presentation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Additionally, qualitative research focuses on social settings and how participants interpret interactions and make sense of the social environment and their surroundings.
Symbolic Interactionism

In an attempt to discover and understand the meanings of events and how participants used those meanings to shape and define their reality, this study used the symbolic interactionism approach (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Taylor and Bogdan stated that in research utilizing the symbolic interactionism approach, the social meaning people attach to the world is the primary importance.

To gain further understanding about symbolic interactionism, it is crucial to examine information from Herbert Blumer because he is referred to as the father of symbolic interactionism (Donmeyer, 1990). Blumer argued that people act toward things based on the meaning things have for them. Furthermore, he asserted that meanings are a product of social interactions and not external causes. To further explain this idea, Blumer (1969, 1980) gave three basic premises upon which symbolic interactionism rests: (a) people act toward other people and things based on the meaning people and things have for them; (b) meanings are social products from interactions (people learn how to see the world from interactions with other people); and (c) social actors attach meanings to situations, others, things, and themselves through a
process of interpretation (p. 2). Therefore, from the symbolic interactionist perspective, meanings are not static, but are constantly in the process of being constructed and reconstructed as people attempt to interpret the world around them. Moreover, from this perspective, meaning does not come from things, people, situations, or events, but rather from the interpretation given by a person (Stainback & Stainback, 1988).

After reviewing the three premises Blumer (1969, 1980) gave relating to symbolic interactionism, I decided to use this approach to study African American retention decisions. This approach allowed me to examine from the African American students’ perspective the relationship between on-campus interactions and retention and how their perspectives shaped and defined their decision to remain in college. Furthermore, during the progression from enrollment to goal completion, students are constantly defining and constructing the meaning of actions, words, and situations to develop their concept of realities during their enrollment at PWIs. A symbolic interactionism approach can be used to evaluate and examine the process of African American students defining their realities and reevaluation of their persistence and dropout decisions.

Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research methods have a rich history in sociology studies in the United States (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Generally, the “Chicago School” (researchers using these methods were associated with the University of Chicago) is credited for making qualitative research methods popular for studying urban life during the period of
1910 to 1940 (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). During the 1950s, quantitative research methods grew in prominence and comprised the methods of choice. The 1960s marked the beginning of a re-emergence in the use of qualitative research. Increasingly, qualitative research methods are identified as valuable tools to investigate phenomena within many disciplines, such as education, the social sciences, management, and regional planning (Taylor & Bogdan, 1994; Stainback & Stainback, 1988). The 1990s have witnessed an emergence of qualitative methods in educational and social science research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The rich history and wide range of disciplinary applications of qualitative research methods were instrumental in my decision to conduct this study utilizing this research method. To further aid in the understanding of my decision to utilize qualitative methodology for this study, I interject a thought from Taylor and Bogdan (1984). They contend that qualitative research methodology produces descriptive data that is a representation of people’s own written or spoken words and observable behavior. Through the use of in-depth interviews, autobiographies, and journal keeping, one of the goals of this study is to produce data that is rich with descriptive data to examine the relationship between on-campus interactions and retention decisions.

The design for this study incorporated certain guidelines to assure that the data are valid and relate to the phenomenon to be studied. According to some qualitative researchers, the validity of the data is the strength of qualitative studies that examine
and explore a phenomenon or pattern of interaction (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The next sections of this study describe validity, generalizability, and triangulation and how they are addressed in this study.

**Validity**

Researchers who support the relevance of validity in qualitative research argue that qualitative research has its own procedures for attaining validity, which are different from quantitative research (Crowson, 1987; Denzin, 1978; Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 1990a). Whereas quantitative research tends to focus on the ability to replicate or reproduce the findings, qualitative research tends to focus on presentation of data that represent a true and full picture of the phenomenon under study (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). In quantitative research, data is collected, statistically analyzed, and reported in a format that predicts the probability that if the study was replicated utilizing a similar group, the outcomes would primarily be the same. Validity in symbolic interactionism studies is generally attained utilizing methods found in qualitative studies. Data in qualitative studies is collected through use of actual words of the participants or from direct observations. Often this data is presented in a format that utilizes the words of the participants to aid in the description and analysis of the data. Furthermore, replication of the study is not a major goal of qualitative research. One of the goals is to present data that can offer insight into a particular phenomenon.

In qualitative research, researchers seek to ensure a close fit between the data and what the participants actually say and do to emphasize validity in the research.
(Taylor & Bogdan, 1994). Furthermore, validity is centered around efforts to present data that represent a thorough, rich and deep understanding of a topic of study. One of the criteria for validity in symbolic interactionism studies is triangulation of data (Stone & Feberman, 1970). In this study, the process of attaining validity included triangulation of the data methods as described in the next section.

**Triangulation**

The triangulation of data methods can best be described as multiple techniques of gathering data and investigating phenomena and/or theories (Denzin, 1978; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 1990b). The triangulation of data for this study was accomplished by gathering and examining data from multiple sources which include in-depth interviews, journal keeping, and autobiographies. These data gathering methods enhanced the triangulation of data and assured the richness of the data representing the phenomenon under study.

Various researchers support the use of the triangulation of data to increase validity in qualitative research studies. Maxwell (1996) suggests that triangulation is collecting data from a diverse range of individuals and settings through the use of a variety of methods. Denzin (1978) and Patton (1990b) state that triangulation means the combination of methods or sources of data in a single study. Triangulation is thought of as a way to verify accounts from different sources and to guard against researchers’ bias (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Maxwell (1996) refer to the sharing of the data with participants as member-checking, which adds to the trustworthiness and credibility.
of the report. To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of data gathered in this study, the data was available to be shared with the participants in the study (member-checking). To further enhance the validity of the data gathered in this study, the data was available for examination by the participants before and during final revisions. Through employing this technique, participants have additional opportunities to interject their perceptions of their interactions and how the interactions are instrumental in retention decisions.

**Generalizability**

To address generalizability, I submit an idea from Maxwell (1996) suggesting that generalizability refers to the extent the results from a particular study are applicable to other persons or situations outside of the study. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not draw conclusions to phenomena that can be generalized to a specific population. The two primary reasons for this difference are (a) people are complex and have unique characteristics and (b) people’s characteristics, perceptions, and situations change over time. As a result, it is difficult to generalize about a population or phenomenon that is not static (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). The concepts of symbolic interactionism suggest that meanings derived from social interactions are constantly being constructed and reconstructed by participants. It is the objective of this study to examine various periods of college enrollment to gain an understanding of how one group of African American students perceived interactions with faculty, staff, and peers to have assisted in their decisions to persist at this PWI.
Although findings in this study cannot be generalized for the entire African American student population, they can offer insight on the phenomenon studied. The finding can be utilized to assist college administrators in understanding why members of this population often drop out prior to degree completion. Also, the finding can be useful in developing new programs and in understanding what is important to the students from their perspectives.

**Method**

This study utilized semi-structured, in-depth interviews, autobiographies, and participant journal keeping to develop a broader conception of the students' perspectives of on-campus interactions and how the interactions relate to retention decisions. In this study, participant journal keeping was used as a method to encourage participants to reflect on their interactions during the process of writing up their accounts. These journals were completed before scheduling interviews and provided deeper insights from the participants about the phenomenon under study. The data gathering techniques employed in this study were designed to give participants flexibility on what information would be shared. A full description of the instructions and directions given to participants is in the data collection section of this chapter.

In-depth interviews are an important tool for qualitative researchers because they allow researchers to probe for understanding of meanings related to the phenomenon that is to be studied. In qualitative research, in-depth interviews are modeled on conversations between equals instead of formal question and answer sessions (Seidman,
1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Since researchers conducting in-depth interviews are not characterized as robot-like data collectors, the in-depth interviews in this study entail more than a collection of answers to pre-selected questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Instead, interview sessions consisted of initial questions to aid in the process of learning which questions should be asked of the informants (Appendix F). The sessions also included researcher note-taking to record impressions of interviewee nonverbal responses. During in-depth interviewing, the researcher begins by establishing rapport with informants to learn what is important to the informant before focusing on the elements of the research study (Seidman, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). One of the goals of qualitative researchers is to establish interaction with the informant in a natural, unobtrusive, and non-threatening manner. Consequently, the incorporation of in-depth interviews in this study enhanced the quality and quantity of the data collected and the understanding of the role of African American students’ perceptions and retention decisions at PWIs.

**Population**

The population was composed of African American students who were successfully working toward a bachelor’s degree at Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU) during the Fall 1999 and Spring 2000 semesters. SLU is a four-year public university, with a total student population of approximately 15,000 students. The university is located in the southeastern part of Louisiana in a town of approximately 19,879 citizens. The university is located in a semi-rural region of Louisiana which is well-known for its strawberries and bottled water.
The African American student population at SLU, in 1999, was approximately 1756 (9.2% of the total student population). Although African American students earned only 5.5% of the bachelor’s degrees for the 1998-99 school year (Table 3.2), in 1997, both the enrollment and graduation rate of African American students began a steady increase. The enrollment for African American students during the period of 1997 to 1999 increased by 21.6% (Table 3.1) and the graduation rate for increased from 3.9% for 1997 to 7.4% for 1999 (SLU Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2000). As a result of this growth, I decided to investigate this phenomenon from the students’ perspective. My investigation will attempt to discover what motivated the African American students to attend a PWI and specifically SLU. I will also attempt to gain their perspectives on their enrollment experiences through examining their on-campus interactions in relationship to their retention decisions.

Table 3.1 - Southeastern Louisiana University Undergraduate Enrollment by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1,086</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>1,375</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td>1,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/ Alaskan Native</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11,612</td>
<td>11,583</td>
<td>11,888</td>
<td>11,555</td>
<td>11,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13,046</td>
<td>13,121</td>
<td>13,640</td>
<td>13,591</td>
<td>13,485</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Southeastern Louisiana University, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2000
Table 3.2 - Southeastern Louisiana University Undergraduate Degrees Awarded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>1,163</td>
<td>1,351</td>
<td>1,428</td>
<td>1,536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Southeastern Louisiana University, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2000

Sample

The sample consisted of 20 African American students who were enrolled in a degree program at Southeastern Louisiana University. Student participation in this study was voluntary. Participants for this study (a) were currently enrolled as full-time students in a degree program at SLU, (b) identified as African American, and (c) had earned a cumulative or adjusted grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.5. To be considered academically successful, each participant had to have a GPA of at least 2.5.

Table 3.3 - Undergraduate Students by Classification, Fall 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Classification</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>5,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>2,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>3,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniors</td>
<td>1,715</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Southeastern Louisiana University, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2000
In order to enroll in some of the degree programs at SLU, students are required to have at least a 2.5 GPA. Therefore, this criterion was incorporated as one of the criteria for this study.

**Sampling Technique and Identification Methods**

The sampling technique utilized in this study was snowball selection sampling. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) stated that snowball selection sampling is a useful strategy for selection of participants for studies in education. Initial recommendations of potential participants were gained from the director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Educational Opportunity Center, Veterans Upward Bound, and faculty/staff members. Each of the potential participants recommended was evaluated to assure that he/she met the criteria set for the study. The snowball selection sampling allows selected subjects to identify and recommend other potential participants.

Potential subjects who were referred and identified were asked to participate through notification by U. S. mail, via telephone, email, or personal contact. This initial contact occurred after official approval was given to conduct the study by both Louisiana State University and Southeastern Louisiana University to assure that proper protocol and procedures were followed to protect the students.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data collected for this study was in three formats: (1) in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes, (2) participant journals, and (3) autobiographies. This section will address procedures related to pre-data collection and data collection.
procedures. The data was collected and analyzed during the Fall 1999 and Spring 2000 semesters.

**Pre-data Collection**

An informed consent form (Appendix A), a letter introducing the researcher, the study, and the relationship to the dissertation requirements (Appendix B), and a self-addressed, return addressed envelope were mailed to each of the identified potential participants. The potential participants were informed of the type of data gathering methods to be employed for this study and confidentiality procedures employed. Potential participants were also informed that after the data collection was completed, a $10.00 Gift Card would be given to each participant who successfully completed the data collection requirements of the study. These gift cards were not intended to compensate participants for their participation in the study, but as a declaration of gratitude for sharing their time, efforts, and perceptions. After potential participants returned the informed consent forms and agreed to participate in the study, preliminary data regarding academic standing, grade, gender, and race was obtained from the SLU student database. These data were used for basic descriptive information and to verify whether the students were enrolled in a degree program.

**Data Collection**

The qualitative data were collected in three stages, which included initial semi-structured interviews, journal keeping, and autobiographies. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) suggest that interviews should be kept broad to allow participants to tell their stories and
allow the interviewer to target information gained for a deeper understanding of themes identified during the interview process.

Autobiography Procedures.

The first step of the data collection process was the request for a brief autobiography from participants. These autobiographies were designed to gather personal data about participants that otherwise may not have been forthcoming through the other data collection procedures utilized in this study. Additionally, the autobiographies allowed the participants to have control over what is included in this collection procedure. Participants’ data collection packets included instructions on the type of data requested in the autobiographies (Appendix C).

Journal Keeping Procedures.

Before writing personal autobiographies and conducting interviews, the participants were given a journal with detailed information related to the types of interactions to be recorded within a given week. The journals given to the participants consisted of: (1) an informed consent form, (2) a letter of introduction, (3) an autobiography instruction sheet and journal entry instructions, (4) samples of journal entries, and (5) a minimum of 40 lined, blank pages to record interactions and perceptions. The participants were instructed to record daily in-class and out-of-class student-faculty, student-staff, and student-peer interactions and perceptions of the interactions that may influence, enhance or dissuade the student’s retention decisions (see Appendix D for instructions). The participants were requested to record
interactions involving teachers, staff members, peers, and classmates who may have
some influence on retention decisions as soon as possible after the interaction has taken
place. This aided in the accuracy of the data and gave the students additional insight for
reflection on the interactions.

The participants were instructed to keep a journal for a week recording
interactions that may have related to their retention decisions. The completed journal
was expected to have detailed accounts of the interactions and their impact on retention
decisions (see Appendix E for examples of interactions). I requested that participants
record their feelings about the interactions, their reactions to the interactions, and
explain germane observations related to the interactions. Additionally, participants
were requested to record verbal exchanges and conversations in near-verbatim accounts.
To assist participants to understand the type and in-depth nature of journal entries
requested, two samples were included in the instructions.

Forty-five Minute, Semi-structured, In-depth Interviews

One of the data collection tools employed for this study was in-depth interviews.
This type of interviewing technique is frequently used in qualitative research and is
sometimes referred to as purposeful conversations (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In-depth
interviewing does not generally require a set, rigid question and answer format. Most of
the questions asked during in-depth interviews are as a result of information learned
during the process of the interview.

To meet the criteria for this process, I outlined a list of potential interview
questions to prompt participant discussion about on-campus interactions (Appendix F).
Other questions were developed as the interview progressed. The evolution of additional questions surfaced as my attempt to probe the initial responses to gather information pertinent to the study unfolded.

Nineteen (19) of the interviews were conducted in my office at Southeastern Louisiana University in West Stadium, Room 213, and one (1) was conducted at my home as requested by the student. In addition to audio recording the interviews, I took interview notes to help me formulate follow-up questions to expand on and gain a richer understanding of the information given during the interview process. The interview notes were also used to highlight responses that appear to be of importance to the participants. This use of interviewer notes added to the richness of the data for this study and aided in the triangulation of the data. The journals were also reviewed by the researcher prior to scheduling the interview. The interviews were semi-structured to examine data gained from the research data techniques previously employed during this study. Many of the questions asked were centered on information gained from the autobiographies and the journal. The purpose for the interview was to gain a richer understanding of the participant retention decisions and to assist participants with an understanding of their retention decisions and how various interactions shape their perceptions of the phenomenon related to their decisions.

**Data Analysis**

This study was designed to provide an interpretation of participants’ perceptions of interactions between selected African American students who persist toward degree...
and goal completion and other individuals on the college campus. The qualitative data
generated from this study were analyzed using multiple analytical methods identified by
other qualitative researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The
analytical techniques used in this study were coding, reviewing of data, cross-checking,
and recoding. After each interview, the data were transcribed and coded to identify
themes, categories, patterns, and explanations of the data. Marshall and Rossman
(1995) identified that these methods of data collection and analysis lead to a richer
understanding of the data collected. Data from this study were analyzed using a
combination of structures suggested by Taylor and Bogdan (1984), Maxwell (1996),
and Seidman (1998).

1. Copied and transcribed raw data. The initial data gathered from audio-
recorded in-depth interviews were transcribed by the researcher utilizing a computer-
based word-processing program. Before the audio interview tapes were transcribed, a
copy of the tapes was made to avoid loss of data due to faulty transcribing equipment or
other unforeseen problems.

2. Checked for accuracy by researcher. Once the data were transcribed, it was
for checked for accuracy by researcher.

3. Read and reread data. After the data from the interview had been checked for
accuracy, I read and reread the data from interviews, autobiographies, and the
participant journals. Next the data were studied for reducing and analyzing. The data
were then coded to identify themes, categories, patterns, and explanations of the data.
4. Keep track of the themes and patterns. As I reviewed the data, I noted the themes and patterns that were evident in the data, and they (the patterns and themes) informed me of the participant’s perspectives and allowed me to utilize the participants’ own words whenever possible. Those emerging themes and patterns assisted me in developing a richer understanding of the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, through employment of this method, I attempted to gain a richer knowledge from the participant perspectives on the role of on-campus interaction and retention decisions.

5. Develop coding categories. This involved listing every theme and concept found within the data. Once I completed that task, I reexamined my coding categories.

6. Code all data. I coded all the data using Corel WordPerfect 8.0 and Quattro Pro 8 software programs. The corresponding codes were listed in columns preceding the interview data.

8. Sort the data. The data was sorted according to data code. The coding and sorting process utilized Corel WordPerfect 8.0 word processing and Quattro Pro 8 spreadsheet software programs.

9. Analyze data. The sorted data was analyzed to compare different pieces of data from the three data sources.

10. Findings were synthesized. After all of the data had been reexamined, each segment was analyzed until theoretical saturation occurred. The next step was to draw conclusions based on the themes and patterns that emerged during the data analyses. These findings and conclusions were reported in chapters IV and V.
After all of the data had been collected, coded, analyzed, and reported as findings, I had informal encounters with some of the participants. During those encounters I offered them an opportunity to evaluate the data for accuracy. In each case the participants declined the offer to read the study, but they requested a verbal report of the finding. They stated that had they not trusted me to accurately tell their stories, they would not have agreed to participate in the study. After I summarized the conclusions in chapter V, the participants agreed with my conclusions.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study focused on the relationship between retention of African American students and their on-campus interactions on a predominantly white university campus. The study was limited to African American students currently working toward a bachelor’s degree at Southeastern Louisiana University. Another limitation of the study was that some of the potential participants could not participate because of overburdened class and work schedules.

Although only students at this university were studied, it is hopeful that information gained from this study is applicable to understanding the retention of African American students at other postsecondary institutions. Despite my awareness that this research was not designed to answer all of the questions related to retention of African American students, it is my hope that it will provide new insight into the attrition/retention phenomenon.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Summarized in this chapter are the major findings of the study that examined the relationship between on-campus interactions and retention of African American students at a predominantly white institution. The chapter begins with a brief section containing information related to sample and data acquisition. The rest of the chapter presents results from data gathered through autobiographies, participant journals, and in-depth interviews. These data collection methods were designed to aid in a richer understanding of retention decisions from the student participants’ perspectives.

Responses from participant interviews and journals provided in-depth, retrospective perceptions regarding interactions with persons on campus and the effects those interactions had on their college persistence. The autobiographies provided a forum for the participants to paint word pictures of who and what motivated them to attend college and why they chose to attend a predominantly white university.

This study was conducted at Southeastern Louisiana University, a predominantly white institution in the southeastern region of Louisiana. This four-year college became the fasting growing university in the nation during the 1990’s. Along with the growth of the general student population, the African American student population also witnessed a growth period that has continued into the year 2000. The African American student population has increased by 21.6% for the period 1997 to 1999. This growth in the student population has also been marked by an increase in the

60
graduation rate of African American students. The graduation rate for this population has increased from a 3.9% of degree awarded in 1997 to 7.4% of the degrees awarded in 1999. These facts about this African American student population have served to enhance my desire to conduct a study to investigate one small segment of the college retention story. As I began my investigation for this study, I became excited about the probable outcome of the study as it relates to the unfolding of the retention stories from the students perspectives.

Sample Acquisition

Forty-seven students were recommended by staff members and other potential participants through snowball selection technique. Of this sample, thirty-nine were eligible, based on requirements of race, class standing, and grade-point average. Twenty-seven of the 39 students agreed to participate in the study. The other 12 eligible students cited overburdened class and work schedules and other social obligations as factors that prohibited their involvement in the study.

Contact with potential participants was initiated through letters sent out via U. S. Mail. The contact packets included a letter of introduction, an informed consent form, and a self-addressed, stamped return envelope. This initial form of contact did not yield any returned letters from the proposed participants. A week later, a follow-up email was sent to each potential participant. From this form of contact, 27 students agreed to participate in the study. Some of the participants requested to come to my office to pick up the research packets. Others requested that I bring the packets to various sites on
campus. All of the participants stated that they would like the interviews to take place in my office. In the end, 19 interviews were conducted in my office and one interview was conducted in my home.

As a follow-up to understand why none of the potential participants returned my initial request to participate in this study, I asked each student why they did not mail the informed consent forms to me when they received them through the mail. The students stated that they were not aware that I was an African American, and they did not want to talk about their enrollment experiences to anyone who wasn’t African American. They also stated that because of their heavy class and work schedules they did not want to waste their time telling someone their enrollment experiences just to be misquoted. They further indicated that since I am an African American they would be willing to talk to me and to assist me with my research. Several students stated that it was time an African American decided to conduct research on other African American students.

Of the 27 students who agreed to participate in the study, 20 completed the data requirements. Five of the seven participants who did not complete the data requirements were male. During pre-data collection discussions with me, both via telephone and email, seven students stated that requirements of their class and work schedules and/or other obligations did not permit them to participate in the research. Additional demographic data in Table 4.1 provides background information describing the sample population. During the Fall 1999 and Spring 2000 semesters, each of the students in the study was in good academic standing and had a group grade-point average of 3.1 on a 4.0 grading scale.
Data Acquisition

Each of the data gathering methods employed during this research had unique properties that were met with eagerness or reluctance by the participants. The request for brief autobiographies was approached with eagerness because each person had a story to be told and appeared to want their personal story heard. The journal request was approached with much trepidation for several reasons: (a) the students thought the task would require too much of a time commitment in their already busy lives, (b) some participants did not initially understand what was required, and (c) others did not want to see their private thoughts and conversations in print for others to identify them as the source. The interview process was met with both enthusiasm and impatience. However, once the interview process began, the participants relaxed and were eager to continue with the interview. In fact, some of the interviews extended past the initial designated 45 minutes requested.

Furthermore, during the process of collecting data from the participants, I learned that several students were initially hesitant to participate in the study because they were unaware that I am an African American. Further investigation revealed that they were reluctant to share intimate details about their college experiences with non-African American researchers. When questioned about why it was important to have an African American researcher, the participants stated that they were uncomfortable with sharing data of this nature with anyone outside of their own race. They did not feel that others could readily relate to how they feel about their experiences at a predominately
White institution. Although they believed that their experiences were not based on their individual prejudices, they were not sure that persons from other races would be able to comprehend the difference.

Data collected from the autobiographies, journal writings, and interviews are presented in the rest of the chapter. The names used in the subsequent pages have been changed to protect the identity of participants and all persons mentioned in this and the next chapter.

Table 4.1 - Demographic Profile of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Demographic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>First generation college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Transfer students (from other Louisiana universities)</td>
</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>Junior classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Senior classification</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Non-traditional students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Members of Greek organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student from out of state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Track members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>SLU Gospel Choir members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Members of organizations based on college majors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=20
Source: Participant autobiographies, March 2000; Participant interviews, March 2000
Autobiography Findings

Participants were requested to complete a brief autobiography and to include anything they considered important in relationship to their college entry and degree completion. Data from this instrument yielded a plethora of information to aid in the understanding of students and their motivation to attend college. The autobiographies also offered a view of what motivates this group of students to persist in environments often foreign to them. Many of these students were first generation college students. Generally, first generation college students have no immediate family members or friends to rely on to provide them with information about college enrollment and college life. Therefore, they are normally left without someone to serve as a reference or resource person during their attempts to join and continue in this unknown world of college.

As I reviewed the autobiographies of the participants, I noticed patterns that began to emerge in relationship to why the students decided to attend college. There were basically four patterns or themes related to why they enrolled in and remained in college. The four themes or patterns were enrolled in college (a) to increase their chances of economic wealth, (b) to fulfill parental desires for children to earn college degrees (c) to serve as role models to others in similar situations, and (d) to prove their self worth. Additionally, the students discussed how they were determined to overcome the obstacles that prevented so many other African Americans from reaching their goal of obtaining a college degree. Research on college enrollment decisions of African Americans.
American students suggest that these factors are key to why this population of students persists (Jackson, 1990; Perna, 2000).

Demographic data extracted from the autobiographies provided me with a portal to view a fragment of the participants’ lives. From this portal I discovered that most of them were first generation college students who wanted an opportunity to increase their economic status. They indicated that they believed that a college degree was part of their ticket to success. Along with economic gain, many of the participants wanted to be successful so that they could serve as a role model to other members of their family. The participants who were second generation students had witnessed the degrees of success their family members had achieved as a result of a college degree. They noted that other members of their families, who had not graduated from college, often did not reach the same level of achievement and economic gain. This fact served as a motivator to attend college.

The remainder of this section contains a summary of each participant’s autobiography. I have presented the data in summary form to assist the reader in getting a snapshot view of the participants’ background and other factors related to their enrollment/retention decisions. I would like the reader to understand why the participants enrolled in college, who influenced their decisions, why they chose this college, and the level of their determination to remain in school. For the purpose of this study, the participants have defined a mentor as a person who is caring and willing to share time and thoughts related to enrollment at a PWI. A mentor is also someone who
can address college involvement from the perspective of race and culture. In an effort to protect the identity of the participants and others, I have changed the names of both the participants and people mentioned throughout this chapter. This sampling of the data assisted me in gaining an understanding of who these participants are. I have learned that they are a determined group of people willing to work to achieve their educational goals.

Melonee

Melonee is classified as a junior and has the potential of becoming the first person in her family to obtain a college degree. She contributes her parents’ desire for their children to have better opportunities through education as the main initial motivator for her to consider enrollment in college. Melonee states that although it was initially the desire of her parents that she obtain a college degree, she is fully committed to obtaining a college degree. She also acknowledged that she could not have begun to make her dream a reality without financial assistance. As a result of her eligibility for a Pell Grant and SLU Honors Scholarship, she was able to attend college and begin the process of making her dream become a reality.

Melonee attended a small high school where her graduating class was all-Black until the last month of her senior year. During her final month of high school a White male enrolled and changed the dynamics of the class. This was viewed by Melonee as an opportunity to become accustomed to having classes with other race students prior to attending college. That student’s enrollment provided Melonee with an opportunity to
learn about diversity and another culture. Melonee believed that she was better equipped to live and attend school in a diverse setting as a result of the other-race student’s enrollment in her high school class.

As a traditional college-age student and the oldest of her siblings, Melonee cited that the desire to be a role model for her sibling continues to motivate her during her pursuit of a college degree. She currently has retained her honors’ scholarship and receives need-based financial aid. Although both of her parents and other extended family members briefly attended SLU and other universities, none of her family members was successful in obtaining a degree. When she attempted to discover what motivated her family members to drop out of college, she initially thought it was because of problems they encountered related to enrollment at a PWI. She later discovered that other factors caused them to drop out. Additional investigations led her to discover that her uncle attended an HBCU, and he too did not graduate. As a result, she decided to attend this PWI because it was close to home and she could remain in touch with her siblings and extended family.

Carol

Carol is a first generation, non-traditional student, who began college immediately after high school. Although her parents did not attend college, they always wanted their children to obtain a college degree to assure them of a chance at a successful life. Carol was an academically gifted child who began college at age 17. Unfortunately, she discovered that she was not academically motivated or mature
enough to attend college away from home at that time. As a result, she transferred to SLU to be closer to family members. Once there, she realized that she was just not at a point in her life to settle down to the discipline required to obtain a college degree. Therefore, she decided to stop attending college for a few years while she decided what she wanted to do with her life. During the ensuing years, she married, had children, and had several false starts at resuming college life. A few years ago, Carol felt that she was finally ready to commit to the rigors of college and has been very successful. Although she attributes a family group decision as the final decision for her to return to school, she knows that it is up to her to have the mental, physical, and emotional stability to succeed. She also feels that the desire to provide a stable financial environment for her family served as reinforcement of her determination to complete her goal. Carol also considers her spirituality as a strong support element in her arsenal of positive reinforcements. Carol states that this entry into college has been both successful and stressful. She also feels that for once, she finally knows the path she wants to follow.

Karen

Karen is an only child from a two-parent home who always knew she would be attending college. When she graduated from high school, she attended a PWI in the northwestern section of the state. She continued to be involved in extra-curricular activities during her college enrollment. She joined a sorority and organizations related to her major. After completing two weeks of an internship, she decided that she had chosen the wrong major. Furthermore, the idea of working in her chosen field and the
possibility of starting her college studies over, depressed her and led to a bout of crying, not eating or talking to friends. During her search for ways to resolve this dilemma, she entertained the idea of attending a commercial college before realizing she wanted to attend a traditional college. This realization led her to SLU, where she and her family were impressed with the welcome and services she received from the orientation and enrollment office.

Karen is currently classified as a senior and is happy with her progress and new major. In addition to working full-time off-campus, she carries a full course load of an average of fifteen (15) credit hours per semester. Although she has no siblings, she feels that by completing a college degree she will be given an opportunity to serve as a role model to her younger relatives. She stated that a college degree will also assist her in the desire to become a head administrator of a hospital.

Larry

Larry is a first generation college student who was reared in a single parent home. He has had the dream of becoming a professional businessman since his early childhood. Larry always knew that in order to make his dream a reality, he would have to attend college. Therefore, he used his early school years as a foundation for his college entrance. Although none of his immediate family ever attended college, his grandfather served as a role model who always encouraged him to keep his eye on his lifetime goals. Larry’s mother served as a motivator for his determination to earn a bachelor’s degree.
When Larry graduated from high school, he knew that his single parent mother could not afford to send him to college and support his three younger siblings. Therefore, Larry enlisted in the military in order to qualify for the GI Bill to pay for his college tuition. While in the military, Larry took a few courses and decided that he wanted to be a full-time student. Unfortunately, both his grandfather and mother died before his term of enlistment was over. Larry never forgot the lessons his mother and grandfather taught him about seeking ways to obtain his goals. Upon his discharge from the military, he enrolled in college and obtained an associate’s degree and is currently working toward a bachelor’s degree. Larry plans to graduate in December 2000 and work for the Veterans Administration to help other veterans.

Larry was able to finance his education through Pell Grant, the GI Bill, and by working on campus part-time. His part-time work provided him with not only necessary funding, but also role models and mentors. He states that the values his grandfather taught him still serve to motivate him toward obtaining his goals.

Verlene

Verlene is a non-traditional student and a single parent of three children whose ages range from 6 to 13. Although her parents did not attend college, they believed that a college education was important for the success of their children. Through their encouragement and support, Verlene’s three siblings enrolled in college after high school and obtained their bachelor’s degrees. Verlene also enrolled in college immediately after high school and states that although she believed that she was serious
about college, her grades told a different story. When she reached junior status, she had a GPA of 1.9 on a 4.0 scale. As a result of her low GPA, she decided to drop out of college and work. After sixteen years of working in retail, she decided to attempt to complete her degree.

Her parents are happy about her current college enrollment. They believe that her re-enrollment is an answer to their prayers which would mean that all of their children have a college degree. Verlene believes that despite the additional responsibilities of being a single parent of three children and working full-time, she will be successful and obtain her college degree. She cites the assistance and encouragement of her family, friends, and instructors as motivators that empowered her with the strength to continue. Her final statement of her autobiography was, “I will graduate in the spring of 2001 with a BA in Social Work.” This powerful statement indicates her desire to succeed and not fail at this attempt to graduate from college.

Russell

Russell is a non-traditional student who enrolled in college after serving in the military for nine years. He stated that although he had opportunities to travel to many places around the world while in the military, life in the military became boring and stagnant. Furthermore, although he had no doubts that he could have remained in the military and retired, he stated that he did not want to end up with a boring job like that of a high school janitor after retirement. He further stated that his mother was the main force behind his desire to attend college.
His decision to attend Southeastern was due to his mother and sister's previous enrollment. Russell, like many other African Americans, believes that a college degree will provide both financial and mental enrichment to his life. He also believes that attending SLU (a predominately white university) will offer him both diversity and challenge. Russell decided to attend SLU because it is closer to home than LSU. He is currently a finance major with a desire to learn to speak Spanish.

Russell also admits that he had some preconceived ideas about college life that he happily discovered were untrue. One of those ideas was that college teachers were uncaring people who only disseminate information and leave the learning process up to the students. He later discovered through faculty-student interactions that this was not true and some of his college teachers were helpful and encouraging. Although LSU was his first choice of colleges, he has learned to like SLU and has decided to stay through graduation.

Zachary

Zachary is a traditional age, first generation college student. Zachary lives with his mother and stepfather who, along with his grandmother, encouraged him to pursue his dream of becoming a college graduate. Along with his desire to attend college, he wanted to become a doctor from a very young age. Although he is currently a social work major, he has not ruled out the possibility of one day becoming a doctor. Zachary also writes that his desire to obtain a college degree is based on his desire to achieve goals that will make his family proud and put him in a position to provide everything
his mother, sister, and grandmother ever wanted. Zachary stated that he is aware that
through degree completed he will accomplish this goal better than he can without a
completing college.

Ann

Ann is a traditional age, first generation college student. Although Ann’s father
did not attend college, he worked hard to provide for his siblings so that they could
obtain their college degrees. Ann further stated that after overcoming numerous
obstacles, she survived high school and was able to begin her dream of earning a college
degree. Despite her early beginnings in a dysfunctional family, she was able to enroll in
college.

Ann attended an HBCU immediately after high school, but later decided to
transfer because she wanted to experience college life on a campus with various ethnic
backgrounds. She selected several majors before discovering that she felt an affinity
for the field of social work. This was grounded by her innate desire to assist less
fortunate persons. Ann plans to graduate in the Spring of 2002. She also anticipates
immediate enrollment in graduate school while working full-time.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a traditional student and the last member of her family to attend
college. As a result of being a member of this family of college graduates, her only
decision about college was which university to attend. Her parents attended HBCUs
and her sister attended a PWI. Their experience gave her accessible resources about the
pros and cons of both types of universities. Although she chose to attend a PWI, she states that she would like to know what campus life is like on an HBCU. Despite the fact that her friends tell her that she will never know what it is like to live in a Black world at a PWI, she is happy with her choice of schools. Additionally, she feels that because corporate America is not all Black, people should begin preparing to function in the real world while they are in college.

Jennifer is very involved in the social aspects of college life. She lives in a dorm and is an active member of several college-based organizations. She also belongs to a Black Greek sorority. An added bonus for her is that her sister works on campus and she can always turn to her for support and assistance.

Evelyn

Evelyn is a communications major whose parents both graduated from a junior college. In preparation for both her and her brother’s entry into college, their parents sent them to the best available school in the city. Evelyn grew up in an environment where it was unacceptable for them not to consider attending college. Although her parents did not graduate with four-year degree, they have always instilled the values of a four-year degree to their children.

After working at a fast food restaurant, Evelyn is aware that a college degree will provide her with a better opportunity of obtaining a decent job. With the fast food job as a reminder, Evelyn has worked hard to complete her bachelor’s degree and plans to graduate at the end of Spring 2000.
Barbara

Barbara is a first generation/traditional student who always knew she wanted to go to college. The problem was, she did not know how she could afford the tuition and other fees associated with college enrollment or which major to choose. During her last year of high school, her counselor explained the procedures on how to apply for PELL grants and student loans which are available to low income college students. To help keep expenses down, she decided to attend a two-year college. After the first year, she decided to transfer to SLU when some of her friends told her about their experiences there. Barbara believes that this was an important step for her because by attending a PWI she will be better prepared to function in real world situations that involve a diverse society.

Barbara’s aunt, who is also her godmother, has always supported her decision to go to college. Although there are other members in Barbara’s family who are not very supportive of her decision to attend college, she is sure that they will be proud of her when she graduates. Barbara’s desire to earn a college degree is also economically based. After witnessing how several of her family members have had to struggle to provide a home for their children, she has no desire to work that hard for so little reward.

Elaine

Elaine is a first generation college student and the first grandchild in her family to graduate from college. Elaine is a transfer student from another PWI in northeastern...
Louisiana. Her decision to transfer was based on the fact that this was the only school in Louisiana that offered an accredited degree in her field.

Based on her belief that she would be stifled in a one-race environment, Elaine stated that there was never a choice of whether to attend a PWI or HBCU. She believed that because of how she was reared and her personality, she could not have made any other choice. Although she has not always had positive relationships involving other races, she still would not enjoy confining herself to a one-race environment.

Jimmy

Jimmy is a traditional age student who always knew that he would be attending college. Both of his parents graduated from HBCUs. He also has an older sister who is currently attending an HBCU. Many of Jimmy’s family members have college degrees. This list of college graduates can be traced back to his grandparents and continue through his aunts and uncles. Jimmy’s decision to attend college was based on both the family history of college graduates and the evidence of the comfortable lifestyle college degrees have provided for his family.

When it was time to choose a college, Jimmy had no idea he would end up at SLU, but when he attended orientation he was impressed with the warm and friendly atmosphere. During his three years of enrollment, he has not witnessed anything that would make him want to graduate from any school other than SLU.

Charles

Charles is a first generation college student who had no point of reference when it came to choosing a college. During orientation he was so impressed with the
openness of the orientation staff and their willingness to answer his questions, he decided that SLU was the school for him. The nearness to his home is another feature that is important to Charles’s decision to attend SLU. By living at home, Charles can reduce the cost of college expenditures, which is very important to him.

Throughout high school, Charles did not seriously consider attending college, but after working at fast food restaurants and grocery stores, he decided that he wanted a better life for himself. Charles is currently an economics major. He says that although each semester continues to be a challenge, he will not stop until he graduates. Charles currently works as an on-campus student worker and part-time off-campus retail clerk to finance his college education.

**Elnora**

Elnora is a first generation/traditional age college student who did not plan to attend college until her last year of high school. During her last year of high school, she had a teacher who convinced her that she had the academic potential to succeed. Luckily, her ACT scores were high enough to further convince her that she could possibly succeed in college. Although there are several colleges in her hometown, she decided to attend SLU because of its reputation of being a friendly campus. She also chose to attend this college because of the diversity of the student population. After three semesters at SLU, she too was convinced that she could succeed and earn a college degree. She is currently a senior, with plans to graduate in the Fall 2001.

Elnora has three older siblings who did not attend college. She hopes that her completion of college will prompt her siblings to get a college degree. Elnora stated
that sometimes the weight of being the academic role model for her immediate and extended family becomes a bit hard to carry. However, she is determined to succeed and make her family proud of her.

Faye

Faye is a first generation student and is the first of her five siblings to attend college. Faye enrolled in college one year after high school. At the time of her college enrollment, she was a single parent of two children. As a result of the "trials and tribulations" of her childhood and early adulthood, Faye decided to attempt to make a better life for her children than she had. After witnessing the hardships her mother had to endure while rearing six children without a college degree, Faye decided that there had to be a better way.

While working as an assistant manager at a local fast food restaurant, Faye decided to enroll at SLU. Her initial major was nursing, but after being placed on a waiting list, she decided to change her major to biology education. This change of major will allow her to graduate at least one year earlier and to work at a job that would allow her to have more quality time with her children.

Faye attributes the mother of one of her close friends as the inspiration for her to attend college. When her friend’s mother became a single parent, she decided to attend college and obtained a bachelor’s degree and master’s degree. Faye also admired this woman because both of her children enrolled in college while the mother was still attending college. As a result, she realizes that no matter how long and hard the road may be, people can still reach their goals by traveling on that road.
Faye cites her determination to provide for her children and her desire to make her family proud of her as motivators to help her continue toward a bachelor’s degree. Her anticipated graduation is December 2000.

**Elizabeth**

Elizabeth is a first generation college student who is originally from a different country and state. Although only one of her parents graduated from high school, they always had an understanding that both she and her siblings would obtain college degrees. Elizabeth attributes her father as being most influential in her decision to attend college. She has witnessed the hardships of her family both in this country and in her native land (Africa). This has served as an additional motivator for her to obtain a college degree. Both she and her family believe that a college degree will equip her with both skills and opportunities to build a more productive life.

Elizabeth has witnessed first-hand the hardships of life without a college degree and believes that she will have an opportunity to experience a better life with a degree. She feels that very few people of color succeed in life without a college degree. Therefore, since she wants to be a success story, she will continue to push herself to earn a college degree. Her anticipated graduation date is May 2001.

**Lorin**

Lorin is a single parent of one child and is a first generation student. Lorin decided to attend college after working in retail for two years. She was dissatisfied being called to work at odds hours by the retail store manager. Her choice of an
education major is based on her desire to work hours that will allow her to be at home
with her child.

Lorin’s mother is the main supporter in her efforts to obtain a college degree. Her mother does not want to see her work long, unproductive hours as she (Lorin’s mother) had to work to make ends meet. Lorin believes that without her mother’s support, she would not be able to continue working towards her degree. Lorin also wants to be a role model for her young relatives and neighbors.

Lorin decided to enroll at SLU despite the daily one-hour commute that would be required. During her orientation session, she was impressed with the willingness of the orientation staff to answer questions. She was also impressed by the friendliness she witnessed during her campus visit. Lorin also stated that upon closer observation, she found that SLU was not as friendly as she first thought, but she would not consider transferring to another college.

Kayla

Kayla had made an attempt to graduate from college five years earlier, but could not adjust to college life. During her hiatus from college, her mother constantly nagged her about returning to college. After two of her siblings graduated from college and one of them enrolled in graduate school, Kayla decided to listen to her mother and return to college. Kayla said, “She (her mother) always told us that she wished that she had gone to college and gotten a better education; but after getting married at a young age and having children, she never got the chance, because her time was spent working, and
raising us." Not only did her mother's encouragement help her to re-enroll, but the fear of remaining in dead-end jobs helped to convince her that obtaining a college degree was worthwhile.

Kayla is a general business major and has an anticipated graduation date of December 2000. Kayla hopes to utilize her college degree to get a "pretty decent job."

Joyce

Joyce is a traditional/first generation student whose parents did not finish high school. She grew up in a rural community and is one of seven children. Although her parents and two of her siblings did not finish high school, Joyce was determined to not only finish high school, but to graduate from college.

During her first year at SLU, Joyce had many family problems that interfered with her school progress. As a result, she had to drop out due to a low GPA and family economic needs. After her family situation had stabilized, her mother continuously encouraged her to return to college. Her mother used her life and her economic status as a motivator to convince Joyce to return to college. Finally, she realized that she should make another attempt at getting a college degree.

Joyce is currently a social work major with plans to graduate in the Fall of 2001. The choice of attending SLU was based on the desire to remain close to home.

Summary

The background characteristics of the participants (first generation college students, Black, low income, second generation college students, traditional age college
students, non-traditional age students, and underachievers) influenced their desire and determination to obtain a college degree, while also indicating some of the obstacles in their path. Some of the participants’ background characteristics found in the autobiographies influenced their academic and social integration and influence their desire to persist in college.

The data from the autobiographies gave me a brief look into the lives of the students in this study. From the brief look, I was able to see what motivated these students to face the hardships that may await them on a predominantly white campus. The participants were motivated by the desires and encouragement of family members and the craving for economic gain. Although participants shared some motivators for their college enrollment/retention, each had additional factors or variables that influenced their enrollment/retention decisions. All participants are firm in their decision to remain at SLU through degree obtainment.

Journal Findings

When I decided to make journal keeping a part of my data gathering procedures, I thought this would be the easiest part of the research. Instead, I found that some of the participants did not fully understand the procedures related to gathering this data in such a manner. One of the participants scheduled interactions with persons on campus. Another used the journal to write journal entries about his/her life at SLU in relationship to others who have interacted with him/her. Some wrote very brief accounts of interactions, while others wrote detailed descriptions of their interactions. One or two
could not think of anything to write until they arrived at my office for the interview. At that point, they wrote about a couple of interactions.

Although the participants were apprehensive about the interview sessions because they did not know what type of question would be asked, once the interview session began, they were excited about completing the interview process. The awareness of the participants’ enthusiasm and openness to questions assisted me during data analysis to understand the depth of their convictions to receive a college degree. Furthermore, I became aware of the participants’ desire to assist in the process of developing an understanding of what would benefit future African American students to succeed.

Despite the participant’s initial lack of enthusiasm for completing the journals, the outcome contained informative accounts of on-campus interaction. I believe that the major problem with this data request was the time the participants believed that they would have to commit to this effort. Many of the participants stated that when they finally committed time and effort to the completion of this part of the data, it was not as time consuming as they had anticipated. In fact, some said it gave them a chance to look closer at relationships they have built since enrolling at SLU. Some of the participants used this as an opportunity to describe their personal feelings, emotional concerns, psychosocial needs, and how they defined themselves during their enrollment.

The journal entries included both positive and negative interactions. Each journal entry provided the participants with a forum to express the feelings related to
persons on campus. Some of the topics of discussion found in the participants’ journals were:

a. Racial jokes
b. Teacher’s willingness to assist students
c. Non-recognition by staff members
d. Helpful students
e. Being accepted as a fellow student not just a Black student
f. The importance of sorority/fraternity relationships
g. Staff members’ willingness to assist students

Most of the journal entries are included in this section. A few entries were not reported because the participants wrote about interactions with family members and friends that did not occur on campus. Those interactions are not included because they were not in compliance with the data request. Additionally, when the journal entries were similar in nature and outcome, the entries were not repeated. In reporting the data, I grouped data by types of interactions (student-staff, student-peer, and student-faculty) in an attempt to aid the reader in understanding the data. As in the report of the data from the autobiographies, I have changed the names of the participants and persons mentioned in the journal to protect their identities.

**Student-staff Interactions**

The student-staff interactions yielded mixed results based on different interactions with various staff members. The negative interactions were a result of the
individuality of staff members, not necessarily the race of the staff members. The
student-staff interactions touched on a variety of topics that included, but were not
limited to: (a) willingness to assist students through proofreading papers, (b) giving
unsolicited information about available scholarships, (c) non-recognition by staff
members, and (d) forming mentoring relationships.

The next few pages include examples of and information about student-staff
interaction that were found in the journal entries. As stated earlier, not all journal
entries are reported in this segment. It is my belief that the selected entries presented in
this segment allow the reader to view the participants’ general perspectives on student-
staff interactions on this campus.

As I read the journal entries, I discovered that most of the participants reported
positive interaction. Two of the participants wrote entries about positive interactions
with secretaries on campus. One wrote about how a secretary in the Division of Student
Affairs was always willing to assist her by proofreading papers and taking time to talk
to her when she needs a friend to talk to and get advice. The secretary was always ready
and willing to give encouragement during the times when the respondent believed that
obtaining a degree and being a single mom was more that she could handle. This
participant stressed the importance of having someone on campus whom students can
interact with and get spur-of-the-moment assistance, encouragement, and advice.

Another participant wrote an entry on how an interaction with a staff member
helped her to feel good about her academic ability. This participant was happy that a
secretary in the history department acknowledged her academic accomplishments through providing her with information about an available scholarship. Although this interaction helped her to reinforce the desire to remain in college, it also enlightened her that none of the faculty in the department informed her of the availability or her eligibility for the scholarship.

Whereas those two participants reported on positive interactions with staff members, Karen’s accounting was primarily about a negative interaction with a secretary that “left a bad taste in her mouth.” Her journal entry related to how she went to various campus offices requesting information about how to change her major. In the first office she was warmly received, assisted, and referred to another office to get the final paperwork completed to change her major. When Karen followed through and went to the other office, she received a different welcome. The staff member was cold and impatient. The secretary requested her name and social security number, then she promised to complete the requested paperwork as soon as possible. When Karen visited the office several times during the week, she found that not only had her paperwork not been completed, but the paper with her name and social security number was in the same spot on the desk during each visit to the office. Her reaction was the following:

This went on for the entire week. Each time I went to the OA office I saw my name and social [security number] on the same piece of paper in the same spot. Yes, I was very upset! I told the student worker to please put my name and social [security number] in an unseen place. Anyone who walked in and looked at the desk could see it! Well, she did move it and finally, the request was completed. It made me feel unimportant. I wonder if it was a White student requesting info
Ms. Jane was not friendly at all to me each time I went back. She really left a bad taste in my mouth.

Although Karen was dissatisfied with her interaction with that secretary, she had other on-campus interactions with faculty members which served to reinforce her decision to remain at SLU.

Karen's negative interaction with a secretary was not the only negative staff interaction reported. Jennifer's journal entry reported a story about a negative interaction concerning a secretary with whom she believed that she had formed a bond.

She was surprised when the secretary asked her what her name was after working in the next office for three years and occasionally eating lunch together. The interaction occurred when Jennifer attempted to leave a message for the university president's executive assistant with her secretary. Jennifer reported that the secretary responded as if she had no knowledge of who Jennifer was nor did she acknowledge that Jennifer worked in the next office. Reflection from the student on the interaction is as follows:

I need to do a little explaining for this one. I work in the _____ office on campus and have worked there since 1997. In order to maintain a friendly atmosphere, I make a special effort to at least say hello to everyone in the building. So here's the thing [situation], I speak to this woman everyday, talk to her about correspondence coming through the office and even eat lunch with this woman and she doesn't even know my name. You would think after 3 years that would mean something. That crap really bothers me. And, she's not the only one who does it.

This student is noticeably upset over a situation where she thought that she had built a relationship, only to find out later that the person could not remember her name after three years of acquaintance. Her reference to the secretary not being the only person to
behave in this manner led me to surmise that she has had other negative encounters. Although Jennifer did not address whether the interaction impacted to her desire to remain in college, I have to assume that because her enrollment continued, the interaction did not impact her decision to remain in college.

Despite the previous two negative interactions between students and staff members, some of the participants recorded positive accounts of interactions with staff members. Larry reported on three positive interactions that impacted his decision to remain in college. The staff members in the journal entries were of two different races, Black and White. Two of the interactions were with males, and one was with a female. This was noted because during the interview process, other participants commented on the lack of quality interactions with other-race individuals.

One of Larry’s journal entries recounted a positive interaction with an African American staff member who served as a mentor and a friend. Larry is a non-traditional student who has no remaining immediate family member to serve as a mentor since his mother and grandfather are deceased. Larry stated that interactions with this staff member are generally positive and serve to motivate him to remain in school through accenting the importance of an education. Larry reported that the staff member stressed that, “An education means the difference between management and being the low person on the totem pole.” The staff member stated that he believes that African Americans can make a difference on campus. Larry wrote that he frequently seeks out this staff member for advice and guidance.
The reinforcement of beliefs that education is a valuable tool to success was emphasized by another staff member during an on-campus interaction. Larry reported that during an interaction, a Caucasian staff member characterized his belief that education is the key to opening doors that would otherwise remain closed. This staff member stated that he believes that a college degree is the first step toward building a good life. He also believes that a master's degree would offer greater assurance that a person could claim his or her piece of the pie. These staff members served as role models for Larry and helped to re-enforce his desire to reach his goal of obtaining a bachelor’s degree.

Within the journal entry about his interactions with a female staff member, Larry commented on how the two of them often compare reflections about different classes and test grades. During those interchanges Larry states that he enjoys the camaraderie between them. This staff member is one of Larry’s supervisors (Larry is a student worker at the computer help desk on campus) and she is also a part-time student. Although Larry did not state whether she serves as a mentor, he did say that he enjoyed their interactions and having someone who empathizes with him about the stresses of attending college.

Larry’s journal entries addressed the quality of his interaction with staff members on campus. Those three staff members were able to provide necessary interactions with Larry to make him feel as if someone on the campus cares about his well-being. These journal entries help to validate findings of Allen (1995) that stated...
that good relationships with faculty and others contributed to academic success of African American students. Studies by Mayo, Murguia, and Paquilla (1995) and Tracey and Sedlacek (1987) also stated that quality relationships with staff members are important to the academic performance and success of African American students.

Another positive interaction with a staff member was reported by Charles who wrote that he always looks forward to going to the library because one staff member is always willing to provide assistance. Charles considered his interactions with this staff member as positive and helpful. Charles believes that without this type of assistance, a routine trip to the library could be anything but routine. Charles made the following statement about students and the library:

As a student [average student] the library is probably one of the most confusing places on campus, but it is the most helpful. When you have people that work in the library willing and happy to help you, research doesn’t seem so foreign and it makes school that much more enjoyable. Although Charles did not specify whether this interaction reenforced his desire to continue in college, it is my belief, based on this journal entry and interview data that those positive interactions, such as this one, had a positive influence on Charles’s retention decisions.

This next journal entry relates how a student felt after she did not take advantage of an opportunity to have a positive interaction with an African American whom she believed was a visitor on campus. The student related that one day she was walking to lunch with her friends and she failed to speak to a Black man who was walking with a Caucasian woman. The relationship between the two strangers appeared as if it was
between two colleagues visiting the campus. Her journal entry revealed how she put
herself in the place of the stranger and, therefore, empathized with what she perceived
were his feelings. Her reflection in the missed interaction was:

There have been several times that I've said hello to a Black person and they
didn't acknowledge my existence. There have also been times I've been greeted
with a warm smile and a hello. I still say hello to most Black people I see, not
letting my bad experiences make me bitter. This is why I wish I had said hello
to that man. He probably was a visitor to this campus, just happy to see some of
his own kind. Do I let minute things bother me? No, but this incident is not
minute.

This student’s journal entry was about her feeling on incidents that happened to her
when she spoke to other African American persons on campus, and the guilt she felt for
not treating an African American as she wanted to be treated. However, I think that her
overall experiences will be enhanced by her reaction to the incident because it will serve
to heighten her awareness of isolation and alienation others feel on a college campus.

Elizabeth wrote a journal entry concerning how she was informed about a
federal program that could assist her financially and would allow her to allow to apply
for entry into graduate school. She wrote that she had a positive interaction with this
male staff member who went beyond simply telling her about the program by calling the
director of the program and setting up a date for an interview. Elizabeth stated that
since she is an out-of-state student on a financial scholarship, she does not know many
people in the educational community. Although she was unaware of the recommended
program, she was pleased that this staff member was willing to assist her. Elizabeth's
reflections on the interactions were the following:
I did not know too much about the McNair program, but if it would help me pay for graduate school I would send the application. Dave was able to tell me more about the advantage of joining the McNair Program. I’m looking for opportunities to financially reduce payments for graduate school, so programs like these are just what I could use.

Although this interaction may have not impacted Elizabeth’s decision to remain in college through obtaining her undergraduate degree, it did potentially have a positive impact on her desire and ability to attend graduate school.

Many of the participants reported positive interactions with staff members. These interactions involve assistance with term papers, serving as mentors, providing information about scholarships, federal programs for graduates, and friendship. The participants generally reported that the interactions helped them to want to stay in school because someone at the university cared about them. Research has shown that African American students involved in on-campus interactions have less sense of isolation and alienation. This factor generally impact retention decisions of students (Romando, 1998). Negative interactions reported in this study, however, did not enhance the respondents’ desire to remain in college, nor did they lessen their determination to obtain a college degree either.

**Student-Peer Interactions**

The student-peer interactions yielded mixed results based on interactions with various same-race and different race students. The interactions ranged from Greek organization membership and unity to students’ interactions during group homework assignments.
Elaine wrote a journal entry related to the importance of sorority/fraternity relationships. She reported that on-campus interactions between sorority sisters/fraternity brothers are important because they give African American students at least one group of people they can turn to for companionship, friendship, sisterly/brotherly bonds, someone with whom to share fears and triumphs, and someone with whom to attend parties and other social functions. The interactions recorded for this research reported contradicting reactions. Although most of the interactions about Greek organizations expounded on the benefits of belonging to a Greek organization, there was one interaction that reported that Black Greek organization members were people first and Greeks second. Therefore, they (Black people) still had not reached the desired level of unity as promised through membership in the Greek organizations. The journal entry included this reflection on the interaction:

The Black fraternities and sororities that are supposed to represent unity cannot get along. How can you open doors to new members and not like members of your sorority or fraternity? For two or more sorority members to talk about other members says a lot about this organization. If I saw this, I would not want to be a part of this organization that thrives on keeping up mess and not taking advice from older and wiser sorority sisters. This hurts the population of Black students working to make things better for them [Black students] on campus.

Another participant wrote about interactions he had with Greek organization members and how those interactions assisted him with his desire to remain in school. Russell wrote that he had observed how fraternity members always were in a group and appeared to share a camaraderie that he had not found on campus. Through his interactions with members of a Black fraternity, he was made to feel that he would be a
welcome member of the group. Russell feels that with his membership in the organization, he will be about to form bonds that will enhance his determination to remain in school through degree attainment.

Another participant reported that through membership in her sorority, she had positive interactions with other students. This participant wrote an entry in her journal about how through membership in her sorority she was able to find companionship and friendship when she transferred to this university. Her journal entry was not an isolated entry. Several participants wrote about how through their [sorority] sisterhood they were able to develop networks and mentoring relationships with students and staff members. Those mentoring relationships served to remove some of the feelings of isolation and loneliness they felt at this PWI.

The benefits of membership in Greek organizations are expressed in this journal entry. This participant related how her sorority sisters assisted in eliminating some of the feelings of displacement and isolation when she transferred to SLU. The student’s reflection on the interaction was:

This relationship is good for me because I just moved here a year ago. Evie and Mae were the first two people I met in Hammond. They have made my move and going to school here more comfortable. Those friendships could keep me in this area longer than I anticipated.

This student was able to find friendship and forge bonds with her sorority sisters to lessen the sense of isolation often associated with transferring to a new campus and leaving old friends behind. Several participants wrote of interactions resulting from membership in on-campus organizations. Although some of the interactions were
negative, their membership gave them an opportunity to interact with other students they may otherwise have not encountered. Furthermore, none of the journal entries stated that interactions led to a desire to drop out of college.

The next journal entry is an example of covert racism that minorities often face on PWI campuses. Tracey and Sedlacek (1987) reported that the ability of African American students to “understand and deal with racism” is one of the predictors of retention. In this journal entry this student wrote about how she felt about the situation she was in at an on-campus organization meeting. The participant wrote that she had joined an on-campus organization to increase the Black representation in the organization. When she arrived at the meeting, she noticed that three out of the 20 people there were Black. She stated that during the course of the meeting, a lot of racial comments were made and the advisor told a few racially biased jokes which everyone, except Black students, thought were funny.

Her reflection in the interaction was:

I guess they thought that since the comments weren’t racially biased against us [Black people], we wouldn’t care. Wrong! It didn’t hurt my feelings or make me feel militant or anything. It did disappoint me. I thought they were more intelligent than that.

The student wrote that although those interactions did not make her want to leave college, they did prompt her to drop out of that organization. She wrote that she did not want to be a member of any organization where the membership and advisor projected that telling racially biased jokes was acceptable behavior. According to Tracey and Sedlacek (1987), this student journal relates an incident in which she was able to
understand and deal with racism; thereby demonstrating one of the predictors of her college retention. Therefore, this journal entry suggests that this interaction had a positive relationship on her retention decision.

In the next set of journal entries, the participants wrote about how interactions with friends assisted in remembering to register on time for classes and gave assistance with homework assignments. Zachary wrote about an interaction with a friend who reminded him to pre-register for his classes. Although the procedure only takes a few minutes, the friend insisted that they find a computer and pre-register then. Zachary’s reflection on the interaction was, “With close friendships, you are always pushed to accomplish more than if you did not have friends that cared about your education.” This interaction was a positive interaction that had an impact on Zachary’s continuation in college.

Jimmy also had an interaction with a friend that positively impacted his desire and ability to remain in college. This journal entry told of an interaction between two friends who are also classmates. During this interaction, Jimmy wrote of how his friend is always willing to assist him in understanding concepts he did not initially grasp. The participant further stated that, “When you have other people in the classroom who are willing to assist you, it makes school life a lot easier to handle. It also makes the stresses of college life a little more bearable.”

Both of those journal entries told of how friendship can impact a student’s daily experiences on a college campus. The impact of student friendships was reported in
another journal entry that told of how two students discovered that they both had the
same ideas about the rewards of obtaining a college degree and how college years were
to be the best years of their life. A journal entry related to an interaction between two
friends as they discussed why they had decided to attend college. They both arrived at
the conclusion that the main reason they enrolled in college was to have an opportunity
to live above average lives and to be more sound economically than their parents.
Potential for economic gain was an important factor related to enrollment decisions of
both majority and minority students (Perna, 2000). The participant and his dorm mate
also discussed that they had both heard that the college years were supposed to be the
best years of their lives, so they came to college to see if that were so. The reflection for
this interaction was brief. The student realized that he was not the only student who
feels a certain way about school and has particular goals.

One of the participants is a student trainer in the athletics department, and she
wrote about an interaction with another student trainer. The interaction was about the
students’ shared interest and their hopes for the basketball teams. The participant also
wrote about familiarity with people of different backgrounds [races] and how other
African American students are not generally able to find that type of relationship. The
ability to form other-race friendships and mentoring relationships is often a key factor to
social and cultural integration on a college campus (Bean, 1990; Happner & Wang,
1997). The student’s reflection on her interaction was:

Tom is also in clinical with me where we worked together for the past 3
semesters. I am used to a mixture of people of all backgrounds being together
and working together. This type of relationship is what is hard to find on a
campus for some Black students, but it is possible.

Another student wrote about an interaction with a student of another race. For
this interaction, race was not the main topic. The topic was that the other student had
chosen to drop out of school after six years of college. The student believed that
dropping out and working on the campus police force was a better option for him than
completing college. An excerpt from the interaction is as follows: “He said, ‘Well, I’m
getting ready to leave and join the campus police force.’ I asked him, ‘why?’ He said,
joining the police force was a better option for him than staying in school.’”

The participant gave the following reflection on this interaction: “Although
having a college degree is important, there may be other opportunities that may come up
that may be better than staying in school forever. This tells me to weigh every option
that is available.” The participant realized that a college degree may not be the best
option for everyone. Individuals should investigate other options based on their abilities
and interest. While the participant maintained that people have options other than
obtaining a college degree, he did not indicate that this interaction convinced him to
explore new options, just give the option consideration before discarding them.

The next two journal entries are about interactions with classmates. The first
entry pertains to a conversation between two classmates who disliked the teacher’s
method of teaching the class. The two students felt that the teacher wasted too much
time teaching the class (a computer science class) on a level lower than necessary for
college students. As a result, they had less in-class time to complete assignments. The
participant wrote that the interaction helped her gain an awareness that at least one other student felt as she did about the class and reaffirmed that she hates to take “easy classes.”

Another participant wrote about how she hates group assignments because there is always one member of the group who will not do their share of the assignment. In this journal entry the participant wrote of how the group had scheduled a meeting time around one particular student’s schedule to accommodate her obligations to her family. The following is the participant’s reflection on the interactions with her classmate and group member:

I don’t believe that she wants to get together next week when the assignment is due two weeks from today. Each and every time I try to get with this person on the assignment she is always making an excuse about what she has to do. I realized that she is married and has three children, but man, this is working on my last nerve. I really don’t like working in groups and doing group presentations. This, to me, is so stressful. I really hate school and I can’t wait until I get out. I really hate those classes where the instructor wants you to do group presentations, because you are always going to run into someone who wants to leave all the responsibility on you.

The student’s comment, “I really hate school and I can’t wait until I get out,” appears to mean that she can’t wait to graduate because she registered for the Fall 2000 semester. Writing the journal entry provided the participant with a forum to tell how she feels about group activities.

The journal entries covered an array of interactions with students about topics that ranged from friendships to class assignment. The interaction with friends and the formations of friendships reinforced the participants’ desire to complete the degree
process. One participant wrote of interactions with one member of her group (during a group assignment) that left her frustrated to the point that she could barely wait to obtain her degree. She did not write of how she interacted with other group members. These and other interactions did not lead to any students dropping out or stopping out from college during the semester after the data were collected for the study. The review of the interactions did indicate that participants generally used interactions to form friendships and the bond with various members of the student body.

**Student-Teacher Interactions**

The journal entries related to the student-teacher interactions yielded varying results. The interactions range from teachers assisting a student with difficult subjects to teachers who are not available to assist students after class. The journal entries reported here present from the students' perspectives how they interpreted their interactions with various members of the faculty. The entries revealed from the participants' perspectives how student-faculty interactions support researchers claim that those interactions are linked to retention decisions (Pascarella, Terenzini, 1983; Woodside, Wong, & Wiest, 1999). The next few pages are designed to assist the reader in understanding how different interactions are interpreted by the student.

This first journal entry recounts an interaction between a participant and his mathematics teacher. The participant wrote of how he had difficulties with Math 161 and had to drop it last semester because he could not understand how to solve the problems. When he approached the teacher about the class and his concerns, the teacher
explained to him that his normal teaching procedure was to break the problems down into segments to assist with comprehension of how to solve similar problems.

The student wrote in his reflection on the interaction that he was happy to have had a positive interaction with the teacher because he cannot afford to drop the class again. He also wrote that he is confident that if he needs additional assistance in understanding how to solve the problems, the teacher will be willing to assist him.

The next journal entry did not report positive student-teacher interactions. This participant wrote of a computer science class that was challenging for her; therefore, she attempted to get help from the instructor. When she went to the instructor's office for assistance, the instructor was not in during his normal office hours. Next, the participant went to the computer lab to seek other assistance from the lab assistant or other students utilizing the lab. While she was in the lab, she met another student from her class who assisted her with the completion of the assignment. During a later in-class discussion with the teacher, the student voiced her concern that the teacher was presenting the new material on the board too fast for her to listen and write it down.

The instructor informed her that he wrote it that fast so that they (the class) would still have to read the book to understand the lesson.

The student's reflections were: (a) she is so frustrated that she may have to drop the class so that she can have time to dedicate to her other classes, (b) the computer class is making her so burned out this semester, and (c) she has begun thinking about getting a full-time job and dropping out for a year before returning to get her degree.
Although this student wrote that her frustration with the instructor made her entertain ideas of dropping out of college, she enrolled for the Fall 2000 semester. A positive note was that although the participant was upset with the instructor, she was able to have a positive interaction with a member of her class in the computer lab. It is possible that the interaction with that student may assist her in her future decisions to remain in college through degree completion.

This participant wrote a journal entry about whether her teacher remembered her for her academic ability, race, or other factors. She wrote that she came to class a little late and right after the teacher had finished passing out the papers from their last test. As soon as she sat down, she was given her test paper by the teacher. Her grade on the test was an A.

The student’s reflection on the interaction was:

This may not seem like a big event to some, but things like that really catch my attention. So how did he know who I was? [Did he know because](1) he has memorized all of his students names and faces, (2) since I made A’s on my last two test and all my quizzes, I stand out amongst all the other students, or (3) since there are only 2 Blacks in the class, it’s easy to recognize us. I doubt seriously [if it was] 1, [I] wish it was 2, but [I] know in my head it’s 3. But I’m not sweating it as long as he respects me and gives me the grades I deserve.

Although this participant stated that she was not “sweating it” about the interaction, it is obvious that she is concerned about the interaction since she chose to write about it in her journal. Her choice of possible scenarios, “he has memorized all of his students names and faces” indicates that she would like to be remembered as an individual and not just a smart student or a Black student. It is doubtful that this interaction will cause
this participant to decide to drop out of school, but it does express the participant’s
desire to be recognized as an individual with other characteristics that are secondary to
her individuality.

Individualized assistance is the topic of this interaction. This participant wrote
her journal entry about how one of her teachers solicited her assistance in locating
another student so the teacher could give him some information he would need within
the next couple of days. The student was happy to assist the teacher because of prior
positive interactions with the teacher. The student reflection on the interaction was:

Connie is my clinical instructor. She is Jewish, and we are double minorities
and I get to learn about the Jewish religion. She does not mind helping you if
you need it. With a professor like this, a person does not mind staying at a
school if he has a good support system.

The participant and the teacher were able to form a bond based on working experiences
and minority status. Because the teacher has proven to be a supportive person to the
participant and other students, the probability of future positive interactions exist. The
interactions have provided the participant with a sense of belonging and support. The
participant also believes that interactions with the teacher have increased her desire to
remain in college.

Although deans are not generally considered as faculty member by students, this
journal entry is included because its positive nature and the potential of providing
reinforcement in degree completion decisions. When Karen went to an academic dean’s
office to get transfer credits for required science classes, she received an extra bonus of
a positive interaction with the dean that reinforced her confidence in her academic
abilities. After the dean assured her that she would not have to take additional science classes, he noted how many science credits she had and asked about her future plans based on her science credits. He discussed the probability of her considering pharmaceutical sales. He further informed her that he had several friends in that field, and he would be happy to speak to them on her behalf. The student’s reflections were that it was nice to have the dean take extra time to talk to her about her future plans and goals. The student left the interaction feeling as if the dean cared about her future. This interaction positively impacted her desire to continue in college and to continue at SLU.

Summary

Most of the participants wrote of positive interactions that either impacted their retention decisions or had no effect on their decision. None of the interactions left the students with decisions to drop out of school permanently. One student wrote that a computer science teacher and his teaching methods made her want to drop out, but she remained in school.

My interpretation of interactions between the participants and the teachers, staff, and peers is that none of them caused the participants to drop out from college during the length of the study. I believe that participants were making a statement that although this is not an ideal college, they are determined to remain through degree completion. Through their journal entries, they have written various peer interactions that were positive and a few that were negative. They also wrote about teachers who positively impacted their college experience and some who did not. Other entries were

105
about staff members who were always willing to assist and some who were reluctant. In the end, all of the participants remained in college through the completion of this study.

There was one part of a journal that did not directly relate to any specific type of interaction, but I believe that it should be included as a part of the research. The interaction summarizes how this participant and possibly others feel about SLU. The participant’s statement seems fitting as a summary of all of the other interactions:

Despite the incidents I have stated, whether positive or negative, they have not affected my choice to remain at SLU. It would have to take something really major to make me leave. Besides, I only have 6 hours left, I can’t graduate anywhere else!

**Interview Findings and Data**

During the process of gathering data by conducting semi-structured interviews, I was able to obtain an awareness of how the participants made meaning of their everyday on-campus interactions and how those interactions shaped their realities while attending college. The participants were able to consciously verbalize their sense of self in the areas of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-motivation. Furthermore, they were able to verbalize both their expectations and needs. The participants also theorized what they perceived as expectations and needs of other African American students at a PWI. One of the major threads running through several of the participants’ perceptions was the realization that enrollment at a PWI is generally quite lonely, with very little connection with other African Americans. Some of the participants reflected that the lack of same-race students had a positive impact on their retention because they did not have many social distractions from academic committals. The participants believed that
additional same-race students would encourage them to party more or commit to other activities that would cause them to neglect their studies. Although the participants did not consider lack of same-race students as paramount for them, they did think that the lack of same-race faculty and staff had a negative impact on the retention and potential achievement of African American students.

The interviews generally began utilizing some of the 14 questions in the interview protocol form in appendix B. As the interview progressed, the interview protocol continued to serve as a guide to reflect the general direction for the interview to follow. Additional questions were developed as the data demanded further investigation.

At the beginning of the interviews, most of the participants were apprehensive about the potential questions I would ask during the interview process. To help reduce the participants' apprehension, I limited the initial questions to generic inquiries about college choice and motivation. As the participants began to relax, I was able to move into the realm of on campus interactions. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984 and Bogdan and Biklen (1998) in-depth interviews are modeled after conversations between equals. Although some of the participants did not initially respond with in-depth answers and gave short responses, as the interview progressed, they relaxed and began volunteering in-depth information about their college experience. This led to the generation of data related to many aspects of college life of the African American student participants and their experiences at this predominantly white university.
The duration of the interviews ranged from 35 to 60 minutes. Nineteen of the interviews were conducted in my office on campus. One participant could not work the interview into her schedule during normal daytime hours; therefore, she requested to conduct the interview at my home.

The interview process began with semi-structured format that included 14 questions. As patterns and general themes of discussions began to emerge, the interview queries changed to explore the emergent data. Some of the initial structured questions related to the areas of college enrollment and retention were: (a) Why did you choose to attend SLU? (b) Have you been satisfied with your decision to attend SLU? (c) What prompted your desire to attend college? (d) Who or what was most influential in your decision and desire to attend college? (e) Tell me about one interaction you have had on campus. (f) How did this interaction influence your decision to remain in college? (g) Have you ever considered leaving college?, and (h)If you could change anything here at SLU, what would it be? These questions and other follow-up questions led to discussions that promoted the development of themes related to the retention of African American students on PWIs. Some of the themes were: (a) college choices, (b) consideration of dropping out, (c) college motivation, (d) on-campus interactions, (e) need for additional African American faculty and staff, and (f) on-campus employment.

These themes, participant thoughts, and analysis of the data will be presented in the remainder of this chapter and in the next chapter. Each theme will be offered to provide the reader with insight into the college life of African American students at a
Additionally, the next chapter (discussions, conclusions and recommendations) will offer an overview of my understanding of the data and the meaning of the data from the perspectives of the student participants. This analysis will be limited to my understanding of how these African American students made sense of their experiences at a PWI and what motivates them to continue, while many others drop out.

College Choice

The participants in this study cited several reasons for their choice of attending a PWI over HBCU’s and this school in particular. The primary response to the question related to school choice was the proximity of the school to home and family networks. The students wanted to remain close to home, which would allow them to be accessible to family support groups and to remain as a role model for younger siblings and extended family members. Many of the students stated that they chose SLU because it is a PWI; therefore, they knew the African American student population would be small. They believed that a small same-race student population would eliminate most of the temptation to party and participate in other activities that inhibit good study habits.

Another reason the participants gave for choosing SLU was financial. By remaining close to home, the students could live at home without the added expense of dormitory fees and meal plans. The benefit of reduced college expenses served as a powerful motivator in college choice.

Several participants stated that they did not intend to attend SLU until they visited the campus and encountered the recruitment/orientation staff. The friendliness
of the staff convinced the participants that SLU was a friendly campus where people cared about the students. Some of the participants later stated that they learned that not all members of the campus are as friendly as the orientation staff, but they desire to remain despite this fact.

Listed below is a sampling of quotes from the participants' responses to the question, "Can you tell me why you choose to come to SLU?"

1. It was due to [the] location because I think Kentwood is just about 15 to 20 minutes away [from SLU] and I wanted to be close to home.

2. It was [a] close [decision]. Both of my sisters graduated from here and they told me that SLU has a pretty good curriculum. So I thought, since it's close [I would enroll]. When I first started [college], I went down to UNO and the ride just got pretty rough for me.

3. I was suppose to go to LSU, my original major was nursing. I needed to work. SLU was a good school for nursing.

4. It was more convenient to commute from Amite than going to Southern or New Orleans.

5. I did not intend to come to SLU. I was going to a Junior college. I was recruited for my running ability and given an [athletic] scholarship.

6. I came to Southeastern because of the athletic training programs. SLU has the only curriculum program in the state and as of year 2003, NATA [the program] will likely be an accredited curriculum based program.
7. When I came, at the time in 1996, it was the only school in the area accredited in business. I live close to Baton Rouge and LSU was not accredited at the time. So the only two schools close, Louisiana Tech and here. So, this was the best in the area.

8. Southeastern was, when I first graduated, my first choice to come, but because I had come from a kind of strict background with my parents, I decided to go to USL at the last minute. So, I attended USL, and it was too far away from home so I came back home and went to UNO. UNO was too fast. I went back to my original choice, Southeastern. The city had too much, too much attractions, so I wasn’t doing my school work like I should.

9. I decided to come when we came for college day. Of course you know when you’re going around to college day at different schools, you’re just going just to go. I kind of fell in love with the friendliness of everybody trying to do anything for you. Just taking you places with them, just trying to make it be your home. That’s why I decided to make SLU my college home.

10. I chose SLU because and Ponchatoula and Hammond is home to me. So it was an obvious choice as my school. It was pretty much the location, right here at home and you know I was familiar with the area.

11. It was the only college in town.

12. I decided at the last minute, two days before classes started. I was just chatting with a couple of friends, who said that the business department was really good.
I wanted to be close to home so that I could continue to help other members of my family and so that I can be a role model and mentor to my younger cousins.

To help assess why African American students chose to attend a PWI over an HBCU, I asked the participants if they had ever considered attending Southern University or another HBCU. Their responses ranged from “I had considered attending Southern because of their ROTC program, but at the last minute I chickened out.” to “My friends questioned why I did not go to Southern, but I started at Southern and I did not like the type of environment.” One participant stated that during her enrollment at Southern, she had so much on-campus interactions with students that she was unable to find time to devote to her studies.

Because many of the responses to the question “Why SLU?” were linked to the desire to remain near home and to minimize college expenditures, I expected most of the responses about the decision not to attend Southern or other HBCUs to have similar responses. Instead, I received responses about the suspected party atmosphere and the need to learn to blend (interact) with members of a society that is more indicative of the U.S. population. Another area of concern for the participants was their perceived value of a degree from a “White school” over the value of a degree from an HBCU. The participants felt that if they were attempting to earn a degree in a field that Southern graduates have excelled in such as engineering or law, they would choose to attend there. For other areas of study, they stated that they would have a better chance of employment if their degree was from SLU.
When questioned about satisfaction with the college choice, without exceptions, the participants responded that they were satisfied with the decision to attend SLU. Although they found areas where they were not totally satisfied throughout their enrollment, if they had to make the choice of colleges again they would choose to attend SLU. Some of the participants were aware of the probability of the negative interactions that stemmed from covert racism prior to their enrollment at SLU. This fact did not stop their enrollment, and they were willing to endure the negativity to obtain their goal.

Considerations of Dropping Out

Since several participants stated that they were aware that they would have negative encounters during their enrollment at SLU, my next question asked if the participants ever considered leaving SLU. Most of their responses indicated that they did not have considerations of dropping out of college or transferring from SLU. Their statements inferred that once they enrolled and became acquainted with the college culture, they did not want to start over at another college. When I posed this question, I expected lengthy responses that would explain why the participants considered or did not consider dropping out. Instead I received mostly short responses such as: “No” and “No, ma’am, I can’t really say I thought about it.” A few of the students had previously attended other colleges and believed that this was the time and place for them to complete their education. One participant was so committed that she stated that she will probably enroll in a master’s degree program after she completes her undergraduate
program. The main theme for the responses to this question was: now that I am here, I will remain through graduation.

In order to further demonstrate the level of commitment to degree attainment and retention, a sampling of the participants’ responses to the question, “Have you ever considered leaving SLU?” is necessary. One participant responded by stating that he only considered leaving SLU because of his earlier desires to attend LSU. After his initial enrollment at SLU, transferring no longer held an interest. His statement is as follow:

Yes I have [considered leaving SLU], but not because of any negative things toward Southeastern, it was just that when I was in the military I planned to attend LSU. I had planned to stay here for 2 years then transfer to LSU, but now that I have gotten used to everything here and I don’t think I will transfer. Either way, I am going to stay in college no matter where I go.

Another participant told of how her friends did not understand her decision to attend a PWI where there was a limited number of same-race students enrolled.

No, ma’am, I can’t really say, I haven’t actually thought about it. I have been questioned by my friends as to why come to Southeastern since there are so many White people here.

This student also addressed the issue of the limited number of same-race students. He stated that he would like his enrollment to include campus involvement and making a difference on this campus.

No. I plan to graduate from here. I want to focus on, how do you say this, I don’t think there are enough Black people here. That’s the main concern. To make me stay, I have to be involved in the university, do something about the university where I have a cause not only to graduate, but a cause to make a difference. So I can help plan what goes on at Southeastern especially when it involves Black people.
Stability is another reason given for remaining at this PWI.

I don’t really like change. I wouldn’t want to leave. I’m used to everything. I know where everything is, if I have any problems, I know who to talk to. I like that stability. I’m not trying to go anywhere. I’ll probably go to grad school here.

This student expressed that she did not like change or instability. She further stated that she will probably remain at SLU through graduate school. Another participant stated that he will probably attend graduate school at an HBCU. He further implied that he would be mature enough to attend an HBCU after his undergraduate years.

No. But, I will probably go to grad school at Southern or another HBCU. By then I will be mature enough to deal with the temptations and choose not to attend the parties or just hanging out with my friends.

A transfer student expressed her desire to remain at SLU in a few words suggesting that despite the difference between this university and Northeastern, she will remain. She told how she witness incidences of overt racism and of the administration’s indifference to the racial acts. She stated, “No, I haven’t thought about leaving. Nothing has happened to me to make me want to leave, but I know one thing that it is a little different from Northeastern.”

Other participants’ responses were simply, “No” or “No, not really.” Many stated that because nothing drastic happened to them or because they did not want to be the new kid on campus again, they would remain at SLU. Others stated that although they had problems that made them want to drop out for a few minutes, they are determined not to leave until graduation.
College Motivation

In order to amass a broader understanding of why African American students entered into the college environment and who motivated them to attend college, I posed the next question, "Who or what motivated you to attend college?" Although the majority of the responses related that family members prompted them to attend college, feedback from this question offered an array of responses.

One male participant stated that he was motivated by his desire to become a business man, and he believed that in order to achieve that goal he had to earn a college degree. He also stated that prior to their deaths his mother and grandfather motivated him to attend college. As a way to honor his mother and grandfather and their desires, he enrolled in college. One interesting fact is that after college, his plans involve working in a field that is generally not considered a business position. He plans to work for the Veterans Affairs Office to assist other veterans in their attempts to enroll in college.

Several participants both male and female stated that their motivation to attend college was the desire to earn a better living for themselves and their families. After witnessing how hard it was for their parents and other family members to struggle to support their families without a college education, they decided that they needed a college degree to provide for a decent life. One male participant stated that all of his relatives who are well-to-do have a college degree, and the relatives who are floundering to make ends meet do not have a college degree. Therefore, since he has no
desire to struggle all of his life, he knows that he has to have a college degree.

Another participant stated that alone with the desire for economic gain, she is motivated to attend college and to attain a college degree to be a role model of her siblings and younger extended family members. She wants to have an opportunity to demonstrate to them that just because you are born in a situation, you do not have to remain in that same situation. She stated that she is a part of a poor, dysfunctional family where drug abuse is prevalent among family members. She also considers completion of each semester as a personal triumph for her.

The most frequent responses to this question involved comments regarding parents and economic gain. Although each participant stated one of the two responses, they each had other underlying factors that also served as motivation to attend college. Whatever the motivation to initially enroll in college, they all have a desire to continue through graduation. Throughout the interview process, I sensed that this group of students was so motivated to attend college that they would not allow negative on-campus interactions to impact their decisions to remain in college through degree attainment.

On-Campus Interactions

Once I had established a rapport with the participants through solicitation of general enrollment information and college motivation, I was able to move into the area of on-campus interactions. My questions addressed three areas of the college community: students, faculty, and staff members. I discovered that most of the
participants did not report many negative interactions with staff members. However, the participants did report negative and positive interactions with students and faculty members. I will address student interaction first, next staff members, and follow-up with faculty interactions. The decision to end my discussion of on-campus interaction with faculty interactions is because the participants had more to say about those interactions.

Student Interactions

The responses from the participants often reflected the different views of traditional and non-traditional student participants. Both groups had separate points on the need for and the expectation of student on-campus interactions. Although both the traditional and non-traditional participants reported that student interactions were not paramount to their college retention, both groups voiced a desire to form relationships through on-campus interactions. Both groups voiced different benefits of on-campus interactions to their college enrollment experiences. Many of the traditional student participants stated that student interactions enhanced the quality of their enrollment experiences. Non-traditional student participants generally stressed that on-campus student interactions did very little to enhance their enrollment experiences, but they did see the value of those interactions of traditional students. However, the data indicate that non-traditional students valued on-campus same-race and other-race interactions as a way to enhance their learning experiences. The data also suggest that the non-traditional participants generally do not engage in after-class activities. Several of the
reasons given for non-traditional students not remaining on campus after their classes to participate in social interactions were accounted to other commitments to family or work.

Many of the non-traditional participants made general statements that indicated that on-campus student interactions were not significant to them because they were in school to attain a degree and not to make friends. They also stated that if they needed outside assistance, they would see the instructor after class or study harder. In short, they did not feel that interactions with the traditional student population had much to offer them because they are at a different period of their lives. Many of the older students believed that they have made their mistake related to college enrollment and false starts. This implied that they believed that younger students have not experienced or gained from similar mistakes and cannot identify with the older students. The non-traditional participants also stated the belief that they are in college for the sole purpose of obtaining a college degree. Staying focused on their goals appeared to be the general theme of most of the non-traditional students. One non-traditional student participant stated the following about negative interactions and negativity on campus:

I have heard a lot of negative talk and stuff, like this. Sometimes I talk negative, you know. I [would say] like man, this teacher really is boring he sucks, you know and etc., etc, & etc. But as far as what I mean, I will remain here until I get my degree. I just kind of, if I am in a good mood and I hear somebody else that’s not in a good mood that’s talking about, man I got to get out of here this is my last semester, whatever. I don’t really pay attention to that and I really don’t try to focus on that (their negative thoughts) because if I try to focus on a lot of negative things that other people say then I can be influenced. If I am influenced then I am just wasting my time here so you know what I try to do is I try to stay positive, it’s hard, it’s really hard because I am a complex person.
This participant believed that he could be influenced by negative interaction about the teachers and the general conditions of minority enrollment at this PWI. He further stated that he attempted to stay away from people who generated negative interactions and thoughts because he does not want their negativity to influence his retention decisions.

One non-traditional student participant told of how she attempted to interact with several traditional students without much success. She stated:

I tried to talk to a couple students, but there seems like [as if] there is such a great distance that their peers and everything about them were over there and I am over here. I have tried to talk to a couple of people a couple of times, but it seems like when you talk to them and you have different values from them. With certain people it is hard for you to relate to these people, you can try to, you know, bridge some gaps, but every bridge . . . some bridges are gonna collapse.

From those statements, I understand that the non-traditional participants believed that interactions with traditional students would be beneficial. After several attempts to find common grounds to increase or continue interactions with traditional students, they gave up.

During an interview with a non-traditional student, she told of how she felt about encountering other African American students in her classes. She spoke of how she looked forward to opportunities where she could build a relationship with another Black student centered around academic needs. As a non-traditional student, she implied that her desire for a relationship with other students is not centered on social interactions, but academic interactions. Her response is the following statements:

When I meet a Black student in my major, we try to take classes together so we have a relationship built as far as with the courses here and different things
which you know we don’t go out or do hang out like that, but when it comes to school we all can call each other. So yeah, they have really made the transition smooth for me and opened up the doors and made me feel happy that I met them.

Although non-traditional participants often stated that they did not need nor desire to interact with other students, many of them reported attempts to interact or a desire to interact through other African American students in the class. This form of interaction would give them a sense that they are not alone and reduce the sense of alienation in class.

The traditional student felt that same-race and other-race student interactions were important to their college adjustment and degree of success. Although they all believed that they would be successful in attaining their degree without on-campus interactions, they believed that bonding with other students would enhance their experiences. Through these bonding sessions with other students, the participants stated that they could have (a) a source of information about which classes or instructors to take, (b) a resource for campus related activities and requirements, (c) someone to exchange ideas with, (d) someone to commiserate with about unfair treatment or grades, and (e) a study partner.

A traditional student participant stated that she is aware that the racial climate at SLU toward Black students is neither warm nor cold. Although she has sensed both coldness and warmth during her enrollment, she stated that everywhere a person goes there is some degree of warmth and coldness to contend with. She believed that the degrees of warmth found in interactions are based on who you choose to interact with and how their opinions impact your decisions.
Class related interactions are reported as positive interactions to gain information and to alleviate the feeling of aloneness in the class settings.

It was just me and Mark, we were, of course, the only African American students in that class and after class he came up to me he was just like my name is Mark I am from Cedar Grove, I have been here all my life I will be happy to show you around. He said that I can help you register or whatever you need to do, help you out with certain things tell you which teachers to take not to take. I can introduce you to a couple of people and stuff like that.

A participant told about his interaction with a classmate who addressed his academic needs through early registration. Although he was not looking for a bonding relationship, it was good to have someone look out for him. His statements were:

I call her "friend" because I am friends with a lot of people because you know we are not friends outside of the class it's just that we talk and stuff like that after the class and that is pretty much as far as it goes. She mentioned to me about registering for the next semester. I told her I would do it soon because there was no rush, but she insisted that we find a computer right then and register my classes before all of the good classes filled up. It was a good thing that someone just cared enough that they said, "hey, you need to register." I did not even thank her, but it was good that someone cared that I got into the classes I wanted.

Several of the participants made statements to explain why they had not attempted to form many friendships on campus and do not have many student interactions. A female participant informed me that she did not attempt to make many friends because she has not had much luck in forming many close friendships. She stated, "I don’t really interact with students that much because I have a very small circle. I like to keep it that way because, you know, that’s less people that can stab you in the back, you know." A male participant commented on his lack of interactions by suggesting that most of the students are just kids. Although this student can still be classified as a traditional student, he was older than some of the traditional students.
His statements supported his belief that traditional students did not have much to offer him. He said:

No, I don’t have many interactions because the people that I see in school from their actions, are too immature. They are, I mean, I am not the most mature person in the world, but it’s almost like a generation gap because a lot of these kids are like [pause], their interest, their mind set, their moral standing is different from mine. I didn’t grow up in the puritan age, but you know there are some things that shouldn’t happen.

Another male participant attributed his lack of on-campus interactions to his realization that interactions with his fraternity brothers provided him with most of the interaction and socialization he needs.

There are only, like, a few [people I talk to]. I’m in a fraternity and those are the only guys besides my roommate that I have a relationship with. Everybody else you just speak to and walk on. Not many know me or I know them. You just recognize them by face. That’s it, I was in the Campus Activities Board a while ago, but not anymore.

A transfer student participant communicated to me how her affiliation with her sorority assisted her to begin various on-campus interactions with other students. Those interactions occurred one day when she decided to wear her sorority paraphernalia to class. Various members of the local chapter approached her and invited her to exchange telephone numbers and get together during their off hours to go shopping and parties. Those interactions led to other sharing interactions which later developed into firm friendships.

In relationship to interactions with other-race students, most participants stated that they did not generally attempt to interact with students outside of their race. They believed that their efforts to interact would be unwelcome. A few participants recalled
interactions with other-race students that were beneficial and enjoyable. One account was:

One semester I met a White female and it was as if we have been childhood friends and we had so much in common and we just clicked with each other and ever since then, right now today we have taken several classes together, helped each other out, and right now I go to her house, she goes to my house and study and, you know, we keep close contact together about professors and different situations on campus.

Another account of cross-race interactions was:

No, I don’t let that [negative interactions] get to me. That’s minor stuff you have to deal with when involved with people from other races. Just like classes have maybe at least thirty people in them, so you don’t have to waste your time worrying about one person. If they don’t want to do [interact], then the next person [may want to].

Although both traditional and non-traditional participants expected to have limited contact with African American students because of the small percentage in attendance at this PWI, the traditional student participants desired more direct interactions. The traditional students wanted to attend classes where enrollment of African American students would not be limited to one or two per class. A student mentor was an area of student interaction often missing in the participants’ educational experiences.

Student Mentors

Participant comments led me to discover the potential value of interactions through student mentors to the retention decisions of African American students attending a PWI. Their comments addressed how the quality of student enrollment experience would be enhanced if there were student mentors to assist them during the initial years of college enrollment. When the topic of student mentors became a part of
the interview, I incorporated this area of discussion into the interviews. Because of their belief in the importance of student mentors to enhance the retention of students, I have decided to report their insight on the needs and benefits as a separate subsection of student interactions.

When I posed the question of whether student participants have served as a mentor to other students or have had other student mentors, very few students were able to state that they have been in a student/peer mentoring relationship. Some of the participants stated that they had not served as a mentor nor had a mentor. However, they acknowledged that there is a need for students mentors, especially for freshmen students.

Most of the participants stated that although they have not had an opportunity to form mentoring relationships with other students, they stressed that this type of same-race interaction is important to improve enrollment experiences. They suggested that through the formation of mentoring relationships, African American students could eliminate most of the feelings of isolation and alienation on campus. They also suggested that in many instances, students just needed someone on campus to talk to and someone to teach them about college expectations. They further suggested the role of a mentor could serve as a guide in the transition from high school to college. For Black students at a PWI, a mentor could also serve as a guide for the transition from a predominantly Black culture to a predominantly white culture.

One student informed me that when she was a beginning freshmen, she would have loved to have had a student/peer mentor. As a result, when she became a resident

125

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assistant, she worked hard to form mentoring relationships with all of the students she was assigned. She described the need for student mentors in the following statement:

Yeah, [they need mentors] at least for their first semester because all of the residents do not know where the [different] building [s] or the classes are. So they were totally lost. They didn’t know about registration [or] food; they didn’t know anything, especially African Americans, I had two suites of African American students, eight to twelve girls, and I just took one week-end and we went just step-by-step through everything. They didn’t know anything. They just knew they had sent in their enrollment and that was it.

This participant did not limit her mentoring relationships to Black students after she discovered that most incoming students needed a mentor on some level. She further informed me that Black students are in particular need for mentors because they have few role models and mentors who have college degrees or can relate to college life. With the White students assigned to her, she found that although some of them have parents who have college degrees, the generation gap exists and peer mentoring is still needed. She also attempts to conduct sessions on cross-culture interactions to increase cultural awareness for both Black and White students. She disclosed that in many instances, Black and White students do not form bonds or friendships because they do not understand the cultural differences of each other’s race. She also feels that colleges should develop mentoring programs to develop cross-cultural interaction and awareness which has the potential to be beneficial to all members at the college.

Although most of the participants’ initial statements related to on-campus interactions suggested that they have little or no use for interactions nor did they impact their retention decisions, many participants made statements to the contrary. Some used
the "others may need interactions, but not me" approach to describe their perceptions of types of interactions needed for African American students on college campuses.

Another participant indicated that he did not need interactions because he received all of the interactions he needed from his small circle of friends and fraternity brothers.

Although the participant did not acknowledge the impact of those interactions on his retention decisions, his statement indicated interactions with this group was important to him.

Several students acknowledged the impact of student interactions on retention through friendships, mentoring, and sorority affiliations. They understood the value of having someone to discuss both the good and bad times during college enrollment.

One participant summed up his feeling and the need for on-campus interactions by stating: "Get to know somebody. Have somebody on campus - a person you can talk to about anything, whether faculty, roommate, whatever - have somebody. Don't come here and not get anybody to talk with about your problems besides your parents."

Staff Interactions

The participants reported to have a higher level of satisfactory on-campus interactions with staff members than with faculty interactions. The staff interactions reported involved interactions with (a) a dean's secretary, (b) departmental secretaries, (c) federal grant program personnel, (d) the director of adult and commuter students, and (e) other campus staff members.

Although many of the participants welcomed positive interactions from all staff members, they stated it would have been nice to have more Black staff members to talk
to. When questioned about how many Black staff members were on campus other than working in the physical plant, most of the participants stated they did not know of many. In fact, very few knew I was on campus. Furthermore, when they discovered that seven other African American professional staff members worked with me, they were at a momentary loss for words. They stated that they had no way of knowing SLU had that many African American staff members with whom they could potentially interact. Most of the participants estimated that there were only three African American professional faculty and staff members currently hired at SLU. They were surprised to learn that there are fifty-one African American professional faculty and staff members employed at SLU. Additional dialogue about African American professional faculty and staff members led to participants stating that they would like to have a list of all the African Americans employed on campus so when they have a need to talk to someone or a need to feel less isolated on campus, they could call or visit with them.

Most of the non-traditional students stated that they do not have a strong need for student-staff interactions, and it does not have any bearing on their retention decisions, whereas traditional students stressed a need for staff interactions to form mentoring relationships. Traditional student participants particularly stressed the need for African American staff members to serve as mentors and role models. One student stated that she had to stumble through her first year of college because none of the staff members assisted her through the maze of first-year experiences. She attributes her strength and determination to graduate from college as her motivation to persevere through that first year. Also, her grandmother’s daily calls reminded her of her goals.
Many of the participants began by implying that they did not need student-staff interactions to obtain their goals. However, by the end of the interview most of them told of instances where interactions would have enhanced their experiences. One of the most common benefits the participants gave from student-staff interactions was just knowing that someone on campus cared about them and their success.

During an interview with a female participant I was informed of how an unexpected positive interaction with the department head’s secretary of her major field of study made the student feel good about herself and her abilities. The participant was surprised and honored when the secretary informed her that she was eligible to apply for a scholarship based on her academic standing. Although she knew her grades were good, she never expected to have someone take the time and effort to inform her of eligibility for a scholarship and to provide her with the necessary paperwork to apply. This interaction helped to heal the scars left over from other negative on-campus interactions. It was good to know that she was finally getting recognition for her academic record. Although she stated that she had no intention of dropping out of college, this went a long way toward helping her feel better about attending a PWI.

Two other students recounted how interacting with staff members, who are also members of the same sorority, helped them with their transition from one PWI to another PWI. For these students, those interactions served to help them decide to remain at this school. One of the students stated that the interactions had such a positive impact that she will probably enroll in graduate school at SLU.
In another instance, a student recounted the effects of a negative student-staff interaction. The detail of this interaction was given in the journal section of the finding. During the interview the student stated that although she has no proof that the interaction was racially motivated, she could not totally discount that possibility. She was convinced that if she had been White the secretary would have offered better service. During her interaction, the secretary was rude and did not provide the requested service in a timely manner. The participant was tempted to ask a White friend to request the same services, then later compare notes to confirm whether her prior treatment had been racially motivated. In the end, she decided to just let the matter drop. When I asked if the incident made her consider dropping out of college, I was informed that she would not let one problem with a staff member stop her for getting her degree.

When I queried other participants about whether negative interactions with staff members generated thoughts of dropping out or leaving SLU, I received mixed answers. Some of the students reported those negative interactions sometimes caused them to consider leaving or dropping out for a few minutes until they would remember their goals and why they chose to attend SLU. Others reported that they are accustomed to negative or no interactions; therefore, they would have been surprised to have received otherwise. Furthermore, although they acknowledged there was a need for positive interactions to enhance the enrollment experiences and retention of African American students, they did not retain high hopes for it becoming a reality.
One student recounted how his roommate is a first generation college student with no one in his family to assist or advise him about college life; therefore, he has a need for on-campus staff interactions. He explained it this way:

Definitely. I'm going to use my roommate as an example. He likes to stay in an apartment, but he knows everybody stays in that one house. When we were talking about it this morning, he said he did not have that direction, that guidance. His parents don't call and say, "Well, how are you doing, how is everything going?" He has to go for himself. He has to handle all of his financial aid, all of that stuff. I don't know anything about finances. All I know is to go ahead and make the GPA, handle business and come out. If my parents weren't doing the things that they were doing, I definitely would need someone on campus that knows what's going on and when it's going on, that type of thing.

When further questioned about the needs of his friend, he stated that he felt the friend needed a same-race mentor. His statement was, "I would say an African-American because I'm sure he would feel more bonded toward them than if he were talking to someone else." Many of the participants indicated that they felt the same way. They, not only wanted positive interactions with staff members, but interactions with persons of the same race to form bonds and possible mentoring relationships. Overall they just wanted to know that someone on staff cares whether they succeed or not. However, they believed that they would remain in college without the interactions or mentors because of their determination to succeed.

**Staff Mentors**

As stated in the above section, most of the African American students thought that there are only three African American professional staff members employed on the SLU campus. As a result, they do not expect to have opportunities to form mentoring
relationships or to have opportunities to interact with them. When I asked them about the possibility of forming mentoring relationships or interacting with them outside-of-the-classroom with other-race staff members, they stated that they would not feel as comfortable with persons from other races.

The data suggest that African American students in this study had several positive interactions with staff members on this campus. Although non-traditional students concede that there is a need for younger students to have positive interactions that enhance their enrollment and possibly their retention, they stressed that they have little time or need for on-campus interactions.

Further examination of the data offered few contradictions to the non-traditional students’ claim that they did not have time or need for on-campus interactions. One of the contradictions reported related to how a student was able to form mentoring relationships with two full-time staff co-workers. As a result of these two relationships, he felt that he always had someone he could talk to about problems related to school in general or class work. He stated how fortunate he was to have a job that not only provided him with needed income, but equally needed mentors. This was not the only student who reported having a strong mentoring relationship from co-workers. Another student reported that she had a mentoring relationship with her work-study supervisor. She felt that because of her mentoring relationship, she was able to interact with someone to assist her in working through her stress. The participant stated that those interactions allowed her to work through her problems and continue in college.
Faculty Interactions

In response to the questions related to faculty interactions, the participants were more outspoken. Some of them could barely wait to tell about positive or negative interactions. Although none of the negative interactions were reported to have been directly linked to racial problems, the students often indicated that they would have preferred to have African American faculty members to interact with. Many of them linked the overall lack of faculty-student interactions to the low number of African American faculty at this university.

I have selected a sampling of excerpts from participants’ statements about teacher interactions and why they did not attempt to form a type of mentoring relationship with the teachers on campus. These excerpts are offered to enhance understanding about why students chose whether to interact with teachers and the role interactions or lack of interactions play in their retention decisions. In cases where the student stated that there was no need for teacher-student interactions, the statements are offered to broaden that understanding of the students’ perception of why they feel that interactions are unnecessary.

A participant offered the following statement to explain why he had not had informal interactions with his teachers outside of the classroom.

No, because I really never got to know any of my teachers. Because I have always been fine [able to complete my assignments] without them anyway. I never had the opportunity where I needed to sit down and talk to them. I felt that if I needed help, I would either go to somebody in my class, and if they did not help me, I would then help myself.
Another participant stated that he did not believe the sincerity of his teachers’ offer to visit out-of-class. His statement was, “I never got the impression that they were the type to want to talk to me and help me out-of-class. They always say ‘come talk to me, come talk to me,’ but I never felt that they meant it.” Others voiced their disbelief that they needed additional assistance that was offered by the teachers. The reasons they gave are listed below:

- All of them basically said if you have any problems and that type of thing, come see me. They were there, but I just didn’t need to go to them.

- It depends on the person. Some Black people have the worst attitudes. But, I mean it would depend upon the person because I know I have talked to some people who had Black teachers who said the teachers were no help to them. I don’t know, it just that it would depend on the individual.

- I don’t really need too much interaction with my teachers. I try to say hello, but, not one-on-one relationships. I don’t too much do that unless I am really having a problem in class. I don’t go to them or anything.

One student responded to the question about the importance of student-faculty interaction in this manner:

I would say that [I have had] more positive interactions especially with the teachers, since they are the biggest influence as far as my staying in school. The more positive feedback I receive from teachers the more apt I am to stay in school. I feel that students and [post] secondary members, people that aren’t teachers [staff], I feel that kind [of student-staff interaction] is important, but not as important [as student-faculty interactions]. Just like, you know, relationships between students are important, but you can have the best relationship with [other] students. But if you don’t have a good relationship with your teachers,
you are going to have a C or D or F. As far as you understanding [that] you not just seeing a relationship with the teachers, but you are not understanding what is being taught. If you don’t know what is being taught and you do not have a relationship where you could go to that teachers and say I have a problem with it. I believe that it’s probably the best relationship with teachers [a relationship where you can go and discuss problems with your teacher]. The relationship with teachers is the most important.

In response to how forming a relationship with teachers can help enhance grades and the desire to remain in school, one student stated:

The more you understand what is being said, the more you are flowing with the teacher. If you are flowing with the teacher, when you are understanding the information that’s being given. If you do have a problem, you can talk with the teacher easily about it and they can help you with it. This way it is easier for you to make a better grade.

The majority of the participants reported that they had not had, nor do they expect to have an African American professor prior to graduation. Many of them were surprised to learn that there were African American teachers in at least five departments on campus. They only knew of one African American who was an academic department member, the assistant dean of Arts and Sciences. Others had heard of other former teachers, but because some departments are requiring potential professors to have a Ph.D. to teach, they did not expect to see many African Americans hired. The participants further stated that a greater number of African American teachers would have greatly enhanced their college experiences, especially during the first two years of college. The participants also stated that a greater number of African American students may have remained in college if they have had African American teachers and faculty members to discuss problems encountered in the classroom. They suggested that some
of the students needed someone to help them understand how to survive in the White
culture that they are in while enrolled at a PWI.

A student participant emphasized her desire to have an African American
teacher and why she chose to attend this university over attending on of the HBCUs in
the following statements:

If I go the way, I am going now, I probably won't see any. As a matter of fact, I
was wondering if we have African American teachers, I was seriously
wondering that. I think it was last semester [when] I was thinking that because I
was going through my classes and every teacher, there was not one Black
teacher. That kind of [pause], I don't think it really have a negative effect on
me, but I know if I had a Black teacher it would be a more positive, am I
sounding racist here? It's just that they would understand me a lot better. And I
think that they would probably want to help me more. I am not saying this is
ture for everyone, it is just my perception from African American teachers I
have had in high school. As a matter of fact, I think I had very few in high
school also.

Where are the African American teachers? That's what I would like to know; I
am serious I would like to know are they just migrating to Southern, Grambling
and Atlanta. Are the going to schools where there are predominately African
American students? I actually thought about going to Southern, but when I saw
that I could not get as much diversity as I could at a predominately white school
because that is pretty much who I will have to deal with. I am going to be out
there in the business world. In finance I am going to have to deal with more
Whites than Black unless I am in a predominately Black corporation or
something like that. Which is not as likely unless I went to Atlanta. I just think
that it is better, I am not trying to put any gray clouds over any Black school like
Southern or any other HBCU, but I think it's an educational thing when you
have the diversity that you have at this school.

Actually, I would like to see more Asian Americans because I have been to
Korea and places like that, it would be familiar to me. So I would like to see
more different kinds of people like Asian and stuff like that. I would like to see
a big ole melting pot.

The next student wanted to share his negative feeling about interactions he had
with one of his teachers, and how he thinks her subjective grading system is unfair.
Although he acknowledged that the teacher had the right to her type of grading system, he does not feel that she was fair with his grade assignments. His statement is listed below:

I can not remember her name, she was my communications teacher and for some reason we [did not get along]. I am a very outspoken person when I am given the arena to be an outspoken person. She said that in our communication class if you disagree with anything she says or something, you [the students] have the right to voice your opinion. I guess after all of my disagreeing there was a point of no return and she kind of got this thing [upset], you know.

She is very unfair, I mean for example, I would do my introduction for my speech. Then I would have a speech and I would show something, I would say, for example, I had a speech on the stock market and the benefits of the stock market compared to a saving account as far as investing money. So I would say if you have $2,000 and you put $1,000 in stock market and you put a $1,000 in saving account that’s simple interest. There is compound interest [in the stock market]. Then I had a chart to show growth in 20 years of that $1000 without touching it or anything like that. Next, I showed how the stock market on any average, not all the time (laugh), on an average is a lot better than the savings accounts.

[After my speech] What she did was after that she asked me if I could have shown something that where someone had a nest egg, how their money could work for them. I was like, I just did that and she then talked about how small the little sheet was. This was a persuasive speech. [The requirements were] like as far as pictures and stuff was optional. It wasn’t a necessary for it to be a part of grade, you did not have to have pictures according to her. Then I was shown that and then how small it was. She gave me out of 200 points, she gave me 175 and I knew I deserved much than that a better grade than that.

I was [just] sitting there thinking, I just showed them that and she was just going around in circles trying to prove me wrong. Because we have had some arguments [discussion] in the class, you know and stuff like that. [I] Don’t really have any hard feeling, but if you are going to ask me to pick her as a teacher and a mentor, I would have to say, I say I wouldn’t go to her class. That’s what I would say.

Yet another student gave a strong response to negative teacher-student interactions. He felt that through his long association with his teacher, he had built a
rapport and trust, only to witness a betrayal of that trust at the end of the semester.

During the semester all of his assignments were returned with a grade of an A or B. Toward the end of the semester he felt confident that he would pass the English proficiency test because of his 85% average in the class. When he received his final grade report that included his assignment portfolio grade and proficiency grade, he discovered he had an F for his final grade. He could not understand how he could have an average in-class grade of 85% (B) and not pass the course. The participant stated that not only did he feel that the teacher betrayed his trust, he lost a bit of trust in the academic system, but not enough to drop out of school. The student felt that one negative encounter and loss of faith in a teacher would not cause him to give up his dream of obtaining a college degree. This participant, like other participants, stated that although everything is not ideal at SLU, he will not give up his goal of obtaining a college degree.

It might have been with my English teacher back when I first got here Dr. Fossman, who is a White professor. That semester, my first semester, my first semester I did well in everything, and it came down to proficiency tests. When the day of the test came, I came into the test late. Then I had written a paper then I re-wrote it, but I guess I did not space it the way they wanted it. [I did not] break it up in paragraphs because I was, kind of like, in a rush. And when I got my grade [I discovered] I had failed English 102 and I said that this doesn't make any sense. So I immediately I went to Dr. Fossman, the English professor and he said that my work was not good enough. I'd like, I had a 85% B in there, how are you going to all of a sudden give me a F. That kind of gave me ill feeling right there off the bat. And I had to end up taking English over again and I made a B. That kind of, excuse my French, ------ me off.

A participant, who is a client of a federal TRIO grant program designed to assist veterans prepare to attend a post-secondary education program and support them
through the first couple of years of college enrollment, gave his feelings about on
campus interactions with his part-time tutor. This student attributes his ability to
continue at SLU to the persistence and dedications of his mathematics tutor.

Mrs. D was the reason I got an A on my first math test, she is the reason I keep
striving. She loves math which I really don’t understand why. She’s there [to
help you to learn]. Even if she doesn’t know something she is so determined to
help you discover the answer. If we can’t find a solution during our session, she
just will not give up. She is a real go-getter with math. She’s just like, she
wants to know the answer. And I am sitting there [thinking], okay we can pass
up the answer it really does not matter. But she wants to get down to the bottom
of it [the solution to the problem]. Sometimes when I use my calculator, the
teacher [my regular math teacher] says that we can use our calculator on his
problems, she wants to solve the problems on paper. She is so kind and even
though I don’t think I will ever love math like she does, you know, she has
helped to me look at math in a little bit more of a positive light. So I would say
that she is like a role model for me as far as math and as far as looking at the
bright side and not looking at the half empty or something like that. She is a
good role model and teacher.

When questioned about the lack of African American faculty members and the low
retention rate of African American students, this student responded with these
statements:

That could be the reason [for the low retention rate]. I mean that it is not a
negative thing against the teachers. It’s just that they might not know how to
interact with African American students as an African American teacher would.
And it’s just not a slight on their part, it’s just that they might not have had that
much interaction with African Americans as they were growing up and in
college and etc., etc.

Other students offered different views on teacher-student on-campus interaction.

One student stated that he would like to have contact with people who can assist African
American students prepare for the diversity of the job market.

I would like to have exposure to more other-race people that will help African
American students be more prepared to deal with the fact that there are more
other-race people out in the job market. In addition to hiring additional African teachers, I would like to see more of a melting pot of diversity on campus.

Another participants spoke of how much she enjoyed a class taught by an African American teacher who was no longer employed at SLU.

My favorite teacher was Mrs. Peters (she doesn’t work here anymore). I was in her Social Work class, the first Social Work class. I liked the class, it was all right! She didn’t really do too much teaching, but it was all right. She pulled me to the side one day and told me that she wanted to talk to me. She told me that I reminded her of herself when she was in college and if I ever needed anything, I should come and talk to her. Whether it was academic, she would help me out in whatever I needed if she could.

When questioned why students would prefer to have African American teachers over other-race teachers, the participant responded in this manner:

Because we would feel more comfortable. I think people feel more comfortable in the class and would not feel as pressured to over exceed. I think it is added stress to have someone of opposite color all the time because you feel a need to overdo your work. A lot of teachers look down on that. And, it’s going to help the students out to say, well, I’m not by myself on this campus — there are people who can help me.

Others stated that faculty hiring interviews should be open to minority students in an attempt to hire persons who are culturally sensitive to the needs of minority students.

I think when choosing their staff, they [the interviews] should be open to the minority students on this campus as far as finding teachers who can and are willing to teach everybody. Have some of the minority students talk with those potential teachers during the selection process. A professor can go in an interview and sound all good and when they get into that classroom, and they have these other students that are not of the same race. You can not only feel the animosity or whatever they are feeling toward you, but you can see it in some of the things they do and how they grade you.

When questioned about how they know if a teacher was caring and considerate of the needs of minority students, the participant gave this response:
It's just, it's something that I think you can't really put into words. You probably can [put it into words] if you are very articulate, which I am not. It's like with some of these teachers, you can tell if there is genuine caring and consideration for their students. [They do] not just say, ok, this is the information, do it; if you don't do it, you fail. You know, it is more or less there are certain teachers I have noticed since I have been here that will actually go out of the way to help you. They want you to know [what they are teaching] and you can kind of sense it. You know it is kind of weird, but you can kind of sense that they want you to know this information. Not just, just saying that, they want you to get it right on the test. They want you to know this information because it will help in your development in life.

I picked those two teachers because it seems like there is more to it than just their getting a pay check and it is more to it than them saying okay here are the answers, you got it right on the test. Okay that's good. You know, it seems like it's more or less that they are trying to help you develop. And so that is what I like about these teachers here.

A female participant informed me of a special teacher who took time to interact with her. The participant felt that the teacher cared about her well-being and was interested in her academic progress.

Ah, I did have one professor who took out the time to communicate with me, to introduce herself to me. It was like [she was] a fellow student which was a White female. I asked her to tell me who is the best accounting professor to take for the second level of accounting class. She said, 'oh take Miss Stella she is great, she is one of the full-time teachers. I am going to introduce you to her before the semester is over.' So at the end of that previous semester, she introduced me to Miss Stella. Then Miss Stella said, 'I have an open door policy come see me. As long as I see you trying, I am here to help you. If my office hours are not good for you, we can always do something to get the help you need.' She just made me feel welcome to come into her class. She made me feel good to know that, okay, not all accounting teachers are bad. Some of them do care. Then to know that she is giving me this open door policy.

Although she may tell this to everybody, she told that to me and that made me feel good that I can always go to her outside of office hours. I [sometimes] chat with her and we talk. Now that I have already taken the class last semester and I see her this semester and she tells me about her grandbaby and about her niece and you know we just talk about other things and not just school. So we have, you know, a friendly relationship.
Although many of the students initially stated that they did not have a need for nor
desired on-campus interactions with faculty members, most of them had interactions
which were reported in this section. Many of the participants did retain their belief that
on-campus interactions negative did enhance the sense of alienation in the classroom.
Nevertheless, the non-traditional students maintained that they would still remain in
college without positive faculty interactions.

Faculty Mentors

The need for African American mentors was also mentioned during the
interviews to enhance the quantity and quality of the interactions. Several participants
stated that there was a need for African American mentors on campus to help young
African American students adjust to college life, to give them a same-race faculty
member to discuss potential problems with and to provide them with role models.
Many of the participants stressed that they believe additional student-faculty
interactions through on-campus mentors and role models would have enhanced their
college experiences and the probability of degree completion. Unfortunately, most of
the participants reported that they have never had the opportunity to form mentoring
relationships on this campus.

One student suggested SLU should have cross-cultural training for all members
of the staff and faculty. He further stated that since other-race faculty members were
teaching African American students, they should put forth some effort to learn about the
students and their culture to help understand the perspectives of the students. This
would enable the faculty members to have a better understanding of the students during interactions and subjective grading of papers. The student also suggested that cross-cultural training could lead African American students to feel better about forming cross-culture mentoring relationships.

Although the lack of available mentors was echoed throughout many of the responses, one participant reported a different view on the mentoring story. She stated the following statement:

I would like to think so (SLU needs a strong presence of African American teachers to form mentoring relationships); but, if you need help, Southeastern is a friendly campus. If you need help, you can find help. Some people just don’t take that initiative. I’m sure in some instances where it probably would have been better. But in my experience, they have helped me. It probably would be good to have more Black people teaching.

Another student responded to the inquiry about whether mentoring relationships enhance the probability of retention of students in a positive manner. This student sums up the general feelings of most of the participants about developing mentoring relationships. This is especially true for non-traditional students. His statement was:

It is kind of interesting that you would say that [the probability that mentoring relationships would enhance retention], no, I don’t think so. There are teachers that I look up to and it’s kind of weird that because of their busy schedules and everything like that. Once you are out of that class, he [the teacher] has other classes to go to and the next thing you know the semester is over and you have another semester and so on and so on. So if you kind of remember those teachers, you remember good things about them and everything.

This might sound weird, but I don’t think the semester is long enough for that kind of relationship to exist as far as the whole of mentoring [process] unless there was a lot of one-on-one contact. You know interactions between the teachers and students and if there is not that much there is not much room for that kind of relationship.
Need for African American Faculty

Throughout the section on teacher interactions, the participants emphasized a need for additional African American faculty members. They believe that additional African American teachers would have enhanced their college experiences. I have entered a few of their statements to promote an understanding of why they believe that their educational experiences would have been enhanced through the addition of African American teachers at SLU.

In this first entry, the student told of how she believed that many teachers are only in the classroom to disseminate information and get paid. The participant suggested that the addition of Black teachers would provide African American students with a teacher to talk to.

Because you know how some teachers are, they know they're going to get paid whether you learn and they really don't care. So, if a Black teacher whose interest is more than just getting paid, then yeah, it would help me a little bit. They can talk to you about the sort of stuff that you don't hear from White people [race related issues].

The next entry is from a participant who stated that the addition of African American teachers would also give him someone to talk to about race related issues that African American students would not feel comfortable talking about with White teachers. The participant said, “Probably, because you could say a little more than you could if you’re talking to a White person. Yes, I would have felt more comfortable with an African American teacher.”

Participants also voiced their belief that African American faculty would boost retention of African American students. One participant offered his view of the benefits
of additional African American teachers. He said, “I feel that more African American
teachers/staff members, would help the retention rate of Black students. It would help
them to respond more in class.”

The need for African American teachers on campus was based in the need for
teachers who would be able to understand and value teaching from the Black students
perspectives. This participant address writing from the Black perspective and the
inability of White teachers to understand their essays. The participant wrote the
following statements:

We need more Black teachers because I have friends who are taking English
classes, and they say when they write an essay and the White teacher will not
look at it from a Black point of view. So they [White teachers] don’t know
anything about what they [Black students] are talking about. So their grades are
much lower than if it had been from a White student’s point of view. So I have
a lot of friends who don’t like that.

The students voiced their opinions about the need for same-race teachers on
campus to boost the retention rates of Black students and to provide the students with
someone they could talk to about problems they would not feel comfortable discussing
with White or other-race teachers. The student participants also stated that they needed
additional Black teachers to give them someone who, (a) cared about them and their
progress, (b) encouraged them to voice their true thoughts in class, (c) could garner
increased retention rates of African Americans, (d) encourage mentor relationships, and
(e) would value papers and reports written from the Black prospective. Research by
Tinto (1993) and Terenzini and Pascarella (1995) has shown that the factors the
participants stated are related to academic integration, which leads to higher retention rates.

**On-Campus Work-Study and Retention**

This section was entered in the finding because the participants contended that on-campus jobs provided African American students with interaction opportunities that may not have been available to them otherwise. On-campus jobs also provided African American students with financial assistance and opportunities for developing network systems. The participants inferred that without on-campus jobs, many African American students would not have access to staff and faculty that they have through their on-campus job assignments. These on-campus networks enhance the probability that Black students will have quality and quantity on-campus interactions. The participants suggested that on-campus jobs can also provide students with real world work experiences to assist them with their first post-college job.

The participants further emphasized that although any on-campus job can provide students with additional income, not all jobs are created equal with equal benefits for the students. Other ideas submitted included the following:

1. If the main objective is to gain financial assistance, students should take the first available job, whether in food service or working with the Dean of Students.

2. If one of the student’s goals is to form networks within the college campus, the student should look for an on-campus job in one of the many academic and administrative campus offices.
3. Jobs in offices within the student’s major will offer more opportunities to learn more about jobs related to that discipline. The jobs will also provide students with networking opportunities related to their majors.

4. If the student’s objectives are to learn how to relate and blend into cross-cultural groups. The student should look for jobs in offices where other races are predominantly represented.

Some of the participants offered other tips related to on-campus work and campus interactions and networking. Their tips are included in the following text to provide further insight into how they believe that on-campus jobs are important to the retention of African American students.

I approached the [Computer Service] Help Desk as if it was something like a learning experience. I have been [working] there since 1997. So any group that work there after 1997, we grew a bond and it [centered] pretty much [around] what did you make on this test and how are you doing [in this class]? I think that the one person who [was the most helpful] was a staff member, Wanda, because she has an extremely high GPA and we always compared grades. [We ask] what did you make on this [test] and sometimes we have the same classes but at different times. During those times, we help each other out [with homework assignments].

Another participant offered advice about the need to work with other-race people to learn about diverse populations.

I was saying that the exposure to more other-race people will help African American students to be better prepared to deal with the fact that there are more other-race people out in the job market. Because when you’re working in these offices [on-campus offices] everybody comes in. Everyone from all places are looking for this, needing this and that. Your boss could come in and ask you for that pen or something like that. You meet a lot of people pertaining to school.

When you’re [working] at a place like Wendy’s, you don’t know where they [the customers] work or what they need school-wise. When you’re at school, people
are really talking about things related to school. You get to know what’s going on, what office they work in and if you need something from them later on, you know where to go to.

One of the participants expressed the belief that any African American student who has an opportunity to work on campus should because campus jobs offer more that just financial gain; the jobs offer opportunities to network and learn what to expect in a real world work place.

Any African American student that has an opportunity to work on campus should, even though it’s fast food. Well, like I told my sister, a job is a job and you have to start out somewhere. It was a like that [food service] isn’t the only place they can get a job here on campus, but that is the easiest. So yes, as far as [is it better to work in a] business [office], yes. But for me to go to any office to ask for a job, I would not get it [the job], I probably wouldn’t.

The ability for students to get their work hours centered around class schedules was also given a positive reason for working on campus. Many students have experienced working at off-campus work places and know how difficult it is to find time to study. Another benefit to working on-campus is the increased opportunity to interact with faculty and staff members. Through their on-campus jobs students generally have increased access to faculty and staff members. This increased access could serve as an opportunity to develop mentoring relationships with other-race faculty and staff members.

I know I have a support system [through my on-campus job]. I know if I have any problems, I don’t have to worry about it. I work in one of the vice president’s offices. I know if there is any drama, I’ll just go cry to him and he better help me. People that would normally not say anything to me know me by name, like the other vice presidents. I think that’s a good thing [to have a support system] when anything can go wrong when you’re in college. I believe that since they [upper administration] know me, they will make special...
accommodations [to assist me] because they know who I am and that I am sincere about getting an education.

Another participant stated:

Working on campus, 3-4 hours a day that helps me, because if you’re not at work, you’re not going to be in the room studying. You’re going to be in your room sleep or watching TV. You need to be doing something, because when I’m at work, that’s when I do my homework. It keeps you going. If it wasn’t for work, half my homework would not be done, because I do it there. Also, [if you do not work] when you graduate, you will be so accustomed to not doing anything. You need to keep yourself busy and not lay down all day. I think I’ve been doing better [academically] since I’ve been working. I’ve been working on campus for three years.

On-campus jobs also provide the students with opportunities to go to conferences where
they are afforded opportunities to interact with other person working in their selected or
future career fields. These interactions enhance their awareness of available job
opportunities, which in turn enhance their desire to graduate.

While working closely with Mr. Zadon, I have had the opportunity to attend a
few conferences and meet some of the people that we talk about in class. That’s important, I guess networking. I have learned more about the positions available in our area for social work, and I probably would not have that opportunity if I were not working for him.

Other participants discussed how on-campus jobs helped them to learn about the
benefits of interaction with others on campus to learn about available opportunities.
They also discovered that interactions through their jobs heighten their awareness of
how those interactions can reinforce their desires to obtain a degree.

Changes to Assure Continuation

Several students answered the question, “What changes would you like to see at
SLU to assure you and other African American students’ continuation?” with comments
that had one major theme. The theme was, they would like to see a stronger presence of African Americans on campus in positions other than at the physical plant and in food service. They would also like to see more of an African American presence in the socio-cultural segments of the campus environment. One student summed up his wishes with the following statement:

I would like to see them [campus administrators] take a more active role in not just greeting African Americans. On Black history month, I would like to see more of an acceptance throughout the school. It seems as if African American courses could be taught. Is there an African American course? I think it is taught in the fall, I don’t remember what it is like, but I’ll say it’s not integrated.

It would be better if they were to have more things for Black students to make it more appealing. I mean not just in February the coldest month in the country. I could say [thinks like] Black people like to barbeque and who wants to have a barbeque in February. So [I suggest to] do things like hiring more Black teachers and such like that. That would make it more appealing to Black students. As far as that I would like to see, [I would like to see] a Black teacher teaching me one time in my four years. I would [also] like to see a little bit more diversity as far as the faculty and as far as welcoming students with a little bit more openness toward African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics and things like that.

The main thing is Blacks are not getting involved in college activities. That’s just it point blank. They not getting in college activities, they are worrying about back that thing up and all that juvenile kind of stuff. And that’s what they are concerned about drinking alcohol and having promiscuous sex stuff like that. And that is not the White faculty’s fault. That’s not [the school] that’s on them [the Black students]. And until Blacks get more actively involved and it can’t be just one person, it has to be a significant group. A big group that gets involved that has the urge and desire to get involved in activities besides [other then saying] oh they are just going to do this any way. With that type of attitude we [Black people] will never get anything accomplished and things will never change. So it’s like you have to have an active minded African American student body, which we don’t have right now. So it’s just like people, we just blame everything on the government. You know it’s just like we are going from one stage unto another. We can’t always blame it on somebody else. As college students, we blame it on [someone else by saying], oh well, they are going to do what they want to anyway. And as adults, in the real world, well
they are going to do what they really want to anyway. Instead of trying to play an active role in anything, we just sit back and let people do what they want to do and then we sit there and complain about what has happened to us. And so a lot of African American students need to get involved and if we don’t get involved we are going to get left out again.

Another student responded about the need for Caucasian teachers to gain a better understanding through attending African American campus functions.

I make it a habit to go see African American functions, if I have the time. I went to see Joe Clark and I went to see Yolanda King. It’s like I really am glad that I saw that a good bit of White faculty there. But you know, there is a lot more out there who chose not to come. But it is just like, they were actually getting a chance to see part of us. And that’s kind of opening them up to accept and to see what we are about instead of staying in their box, I like that. And I think the college president should make that mandatory for all teachers to see stuff like that. If you are teaching Black students, you should know a little about Black students. And I think that, I could sit here and talk forever, but I am not going to do that.

Summary

Presented in this chapter are the findings from this study that examined the relationship between on-campus interactions and retention decisions of African American students at a predominantly white institution. The data from this study was gathered from participant autobiographies, journals, and interviews. The findings were presented in narrative form to provide the reader with an opportunity to read the participants’ perception from their words.

The sample consisted of 20 participants, 15 females and 5 males. Each was currently enrolled in a degree program at a PWI and had a group GPA of 3.1 on a 4.0 scale. Table 4.1 supplied a demographic profile of the participants.

The participants responded to the data requests with mixed levels of anticipation and enthusiasm. They provided information related to their motivation to attend college
and complete college degree programs. Many participants chose to enroll in college for three main reasons (a) to increase their chances for economic wealth, (b) to serve as a role model for siblings and others in similar situations, and (c) to prove their self worth. The autobiographies also served as an instrument to give the reader a snapshot of the lives of the participants and their enrollment/persistence decisions. Most of them enrolled in college because their parents wanted them to obtain a college degree. Some of their motivation expanded to include the desire to achieve in an arena where many have failed.

The journal entries centered around interaction with faculty, staff and peers. These entries told stories of how the students make sense of their enrollment and their determination to succeed and obtain a college degree. Many of the entries told of positive and negative interactions that sometimes enhanced the students’ desire to remain in college through degree attainment. Others told of negative interactions that reminded the participants that they were minorities on a PWI. Fortunately, the negative interactions did not make them want to drop out for longer than a couple of minutes. Some of the entries held discussions about inappropriate racial jokes, helpful teachers, non-recognition, helpful students, staff members’ willingness to assist students, the importance of sorority/fraternity relationships, and acceptance by fellow students.

The section about on-campus interactions was presented in several subsections. Each subsection discussed the relationship of the subsection to on-campus interactions. The subsections student-staff interactions had reports of interactions where staff members assisted students with papers, scholarship application and other activities to
enhance and assure the students’ continuance in college. Several accounts have entries that told of negative interactions that momentary made the students consider dropping out, although none of the participants actually dropped out.

The subsection on student interaction included data that told of how the non-traditional participants suggested that they did not need or desire on-campus interactions because they could succeed without it. However, the data revealed that many of them welcomed on-campus student interaction and those interactions served to increase the quality of their enrollment. The traditional students stated that although on-campus interactions did not cause them to want to drop out, the interaction did, in some instances, provide them with additional motivation to remain in school.

The subsection on student-faculty interaction had entries about both positive and negative interactions. While the positive interactions often held pleasant surprises for the students, the negative interactions did not. Additionally, the participants told of how they interpreted faculty statements about their availability and desire to interact out-of-the-classroom. The participants generally believed that those offers were insincere and did not follow through with office visits.

The participants also stress a need and desire for additional African American teachers to interact with and serve as provide role models and mentors. One student offered another alternative to use in conjunction to hiring additional African American teachers. It was suggested that minority students should be a part of faculty search committees to evaluate the sincerity of teachers who will be entrusted to teach minority students. Another alternative offered was the development of cross-cultural training to
all faculty members. This training will allow other-race faculty members to learn about
the cultures of the students they will be required to teach.

The subsection of on-campus interactions addressed the need for additional
interactions through on-campus jobs. This subsection informed of benefits of on-
campus jobs to African American students and those jobs to increase the probability and
opportunities for on-campus interactions and future job networking. The participant
told of how their jobs have created opportunities for interacting with persons on-campus
that they would have not otherwise have encountered.

Another subsection discussed some changes to assure continuation. In the
subsection changes to assure continuation of African American students, the
participants suggested additional culture related activities and mandatory requirements
that staff and faculty attend other race events and activities to learn about the student
population.

Although the data requests were for information pertaining to the enrollment
experience and retention decisions of the participants, many of them utilized the
opportunity to provide insight on African American student needs at a PWI.
Furthermore, most of the data entries and participant suggestions were geared to
enhance the probability of retention of this population of African American students at
this PWI and others in the future.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was an attempt to examine the relationship between on-campus interactions and African American student retention decisions. In this chapter, I have included a discussion of results, conclusions, and recommendations for future studies drawn from the data collected from the study. The results are further divided into several subsections that include discussions related to the main research question, sub-questions, and other ideas from the data.

The main question that guided this study was: How do on-campus interactions influence African American students’ decisions to persist at a predominantly white institution?

Additional sub-questions included:

(a) What is the relationship between student-faculty interactions and persistence?

(b) What is the relationship between student-staff interactions and persistence?

(c) What is the relationship between student-peer interactions and persistence?

It was my intent to explore how retention of African American students at a PWI is linked to both positive and negative on-campus interactions. The need for this study was evident through current statistics from the U. S. Department of Education that indicated that in 1997, African American students received only 8.3% of the bachelor’s degrees awarded in this country. Additional information about African American students reveals that they have a 41.9% completion rate (Digest of Education, 1999).
My review of the literature revealed that although there have been studies that examined the relationship of on-campus interactions to college persistence and retention, very few utilized qualitative methods (Endo & Harpel, 1981; Fleming, 1984; Brawer, 1996; Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie, & Sanders, 1997). Although my review of the literature did not uncover any studies that linked student-staff, student-faculty, and student-peer interactions in one study, the earlier research assisted me in understanding the importance of on-campus interactions to retention decisions. Earlier works by Tinto (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) linked weak on-campus interaction between student and peer and student and faculty to student withdrawal decisions. A study by Martin and Williams-Dixon (1991) reported that same-race student-faculty interactions impact the retention decisions of African American students enrolled at PWIs. The results from these and earlier studies on the importance of on-campus interactions prompted the desire to conduct this study to expand and explore this area of research.

Discussion of Results

Results for this study are presented in relationship to the research question, sub-questions, and participant opinions about on-campus interactions and retention. The three sub-questions will be addressed first, followed by the overreaching research question. The section will conclude with conclusions and recommendations.

Sub-question #1

What is the relationship between student-faculty interactions and persistence?

During my initial perusal of the data, I did not find many conclusive links between the participants-faculty interactions and persistence. This is especially true for
non-traditional students because they repeatedly inferred that since they are older (many had previous college experiences), they did not need nor desire to have interactions with their teachers outside of the classroom. Non-traditional students operated from the belief that if they needed additional help they would ask another student immediately after class or study harder. Many in the group maintained that as a result of mistakes made during previous college enrollment, they do not require teacher interactions to succeed. However, subsequent examinations of the data revealed that both the non-traditional and traditional students often desired quality interactions with faculty members and other members of the campus society. Many of the participants reported that although some of the teachers made statements about their availability outside of the classroom, the participants did not think the invitations were sincere. The participants did not give examples to validate their perceptions. One participant told of an incident in which she attempted to contact a faculty member during office hours and discovered that the faculty member was not present. Research indicated that faculty members who enjoy and seek student interactions outside of the classroom demonstrate their accessibility for such interactions through in-class attitudes and teaching styles (Wilson, Gaff, Dienst, Wood, & Bavry 1975). Furthermore, quality student-faculty interaction enhance academic and social integration, which in turn impact student retention decisions (Arredono, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977; Tinto, 1993).

Although most of the participants gave reports of positive student-faculty interactions that enhanced their experiences, several told of interactions that did not enhance their experiences. Those interactions left them with feelings of alienation and
without a clear idea of what was acceptable within the classroom and how to complete class assignments to receive high grades. Further interactions with the teachers did not enhance the students’ knowledge the grading policies that led to their receipt of a lower grade. Through these interactions the students’ desires of future interactions with those teachers were reduced. These interactions did very little to enhance the retention decisions of those participants. However, their overall desire to remain in college did not suffer from those negative interactions. A study by Woodside, Wong, and Weist (1999) suggests that positive student-faculty interactions are significantly linked to students’ academically-related self-concept. Furthermore, student self-concept can be linked to academic performance and self-perceptions which are affected by student-faculty in- and out-of-class interactions.

Other data from the interviews and journal entries included information about positive and negative interactions between the participants and faculty members. Accounts of positive interactions informed that those interactions (a) restored confidence in probability of success in the classroom, (b) built a rapport with teachers and teaching methods that enhanced the probability of success, (c) impact subjective grading, and (d) impacted retention decisions by reducing feelings of isolation and alienation. Although many of the students maintained that student-faculty interactions were not necessary for their retention at this PWI, the data suggest that they valued those interactions.

Many researchers have reported findings that concur with the data on the importance of student-teacher interactions both inside and outside the classroom setting.
(Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Parker, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Tinto, 1993). Their research disclosed how both formal and informal student-teacher interactions are crucial to the retention and intellectual development of students. Data from traditional students in this study stated that they would have liked to have had opportunities to form mentoring relationships with their teachers both in and out of the classroom. They also stated that they would have enjoyed just having normal (being called on by the teacher) in-class interaction with their teachers. Research by Fritschner (2000) discussed the importance of active learning to how students enhance their learning. Braxton, Milen and Sullivan (2000) also addressed active learning in the classroom and how it influenced social interactions, which subsequently enhanced retention decisions.

Tinto (1975, 1987) stated that the lack of on-campus interaction can be connected to a shortage in academic integration and is a very significant determinant of attrition. The relationship between academic integration and retention has been documented in other literature dating back over a period of twenty-five years (Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1975). Tinto’s theory linked both social and academic integration as a key to retention of students (Tinto, 1975). Other researchers have reported on the importance of student interaction on student retention during the freshmen year (Lee, 1999; Pascarella, 1985). Although the African American student participants in this study persisted in an environment that does not offer a quantity of in and out of class interaction, it is evident that this environment did offer a few quality interactions, which often enhanced their desire to persist.

The participants linked their limited student-faculty interactions to the lack of same-race faculty members. The students argued that if there were additional same-race
faculty members on campus, they would have had quality interactions through mentoring relationships, friendships, and academic role models. The participants suggest that the university should hire additional same-race faculty members or formulate cross-cultural training for existing faculty to facilitate quality interactions. They further suggested that members of the African American student body should be appointed as members of the hiring committees. Research on social integration that suggests that Black students' social integration is influenced by formal involvement, such as serving on departmental and university committees (Allen, 1985; Martin, 1990). Gloria and colleagues (1999) reported that African American students' commitment to persistence may be in part linked to on faculty/staff member serving as a mentor.

Furthermore, the lack of African American faculty members has been reported to inhibited the academic integration of African American students (Martin, 1990; Tinto, 1993). Lee (1999) reported that similarities found within same-race mentoring relationships serve as a foundation for development of effective communication and trust. They also reported that there generally is a scarcity of African American faculty on PWIs to pair with African American students. Participants in this study reported that factors that limit academic integration are defined as (a) instructors being fair with Black students, (b) unfair and subjective grading systems that favored White students, and (c) academic services (scholarship information, academic assistance, mentor relationships) not equally provided to African American students. Although the participants reported these limitation, they did not inhibit their desire to persist.

When asked about academic support from teachers, the participants generally stated that they do not ask questions in class because the teachers either ignore them or
make them feel stupid for asking the question. Research indicates that African American students often feel isolated in classrooms and the feeling of isolation is based on their exclusion from the informal discussions among White students and being ignored by professors (Fleming, 1985; Martin 1990). Therefore, participants generally ask for clarification from another African American student, if available, or seek to uncover the answer for themselves. Other researchers reported that approximately 80% of the African American students in their study that the academic support of at least one faculty member contributed to their academic success (Gloria et al., 1999).

Inasmuch as most of these African American students were unable to develop strong bonds with many of the teachers, they stated that there is a need for increased faculty interactions to develop bonds that could impact and enhance the retention decisions of all students, particularly African American students. Bonds with teachers have been proven to impact classroom performance, career decisions, self-sufficiency, academic success, and retention (Allen, 1995; Bean & Kuh, 1984; Parker, 1999; Pascarella, & Terezini, 1991; Woodside, Wong, & Wiest, 1999). Additionally, the participants suggest that in the present academic setting, African American students have developed a self-sufficiency system to help them succeed at this PWI. This system consists of self-awareness, self-reliance, family support groups, and the desire for success. Gloria and colleagues (1999) reported that self-beliefs was a significant predictor in the persistence decisions of African American students. Unfortunately, for other African American students, this self-sufficiency system may not be enough to sustain them through graduation.
The participants in this study also reported that many of their instructors utilized subjective grading systems that are unfair to Black students. Subjective grading practices do not provide a clear format for minority students to understand the expectations within the predominantly white academic setting. Sedlacek (1983) stated minority students need faculty members to provide them with honest and realistic feedback about their performance to be successful academically. The student believed that subjective grading practices do not allow or give value to documents that involve cultural experiences and topics other than the main campus culture of the White middle-class.

The participants also reported that teachers placed little or no value on African American culture, related issues or reports. In order to receive consideration for the quality of academic work, students had to present reports and other academic works that reflect the dominant campus culture. This can be linked to reports that stated that policies and procedures founded on PWIs were developed before African American students were part of the traditionally white campuses (Allen, 1992; Hurtado, Milen, Clayton-Pederson, Allen, 1998). Therefore, the general lack of and devaluing of diverse cultural needs is not surprising.

This study also revealed that African American students generally do not receive recognition for academic excellence in the form of campus recognition or scholarship recommendations. One participant reported that she received a notification of eligibility for an academic scholarship, but the notification was from a support staff person rather than one of her instructors. A number of studies on college withdrawal behaviors have
stated that academic and social isolation are catalysts of college withdrawal (Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991). Martin and Williams-Dixon (1991) stated, “While literature defines academic integration as a function of grades and academic performance, the Black students cannot experience this integrated level until they have positive experiences with professors and peers in the classroom” (p. 7). According to research on college drop-out and attrition, the lack of quality student-faculty interactions proposes that participants of this study are prime examples of potential dropouts, yet they persist.

The participants gave several reasons for their persistence. They believe that while on-campus interactions did enhance the quality of the college experience and aided in their decisions to remain in college, other factors are also important to their initial goal aspirations and helped to sustain them through their enrollment. Some of the factors they gave that were important to their goal aspirations are: (a) their determination to become a role model for others, (b) desire for economic gain, (c) knowledge of family achievement, and (d) determination to succeed. Although there may have been other outlying factors, my understanding of the data led me to believe that these factors, coupled with on-campus interactions, were the most important to the participants and their retention decisions.

Sub-question #2

What is the relationship between student-staff interactions and persistence?

The data revealed that the participants reported a significantly higher level of quantity and quality of student-staff interaction than student-faculty interactions. This

163

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can be directly attributed to participants' on-campus employment. Many of the
participants reported to have had opportunities to interact with staff members as a result
of their on campus jobs in various university academic and administrative offices. Staff
members in those offices often were the main source of academic and social support for
the students. Tracey and Sedlacek (1987) found evidence that supports the importance
of a strong support person (staff or faculty) for the academic success of Black students.
The participants reported that on-campus office jobs presented them with the best
opportunities to build networking systems that enhanced academic learning and fostered
work related social and business skills. They believed that on-campus jobs provided
them with opportunities to interact with university staff personnel that would otherwise
be closed to them. Tinto (1993) also supports the benefits of on-campus jobs to
interactions and institutional commitment. Furthermore, the participant indicated that
through campus jobs they are afforded opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and
worth to members of this university community. On-campus employment is a tool
often used by African American students to develop their niche in the campus
environment.

Additionally, through on-campus jobs, students were provided opportunities to
form several mentoring relationships with full-time staff personnel who hold a variety
of job titles on campus. Most of the mentoring relationships developed as a result of
on-campus student jobs, while others developed through campus associations. These
mentors provided participants with psychological support systems which allowed them
to reduce feelings of alienation and isolation. This was a welcomed addition in the lives
of many African American students on this predominantly white college campus.

Martin and Williams-Dixon (1991) and Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) reported that psychological support systems foster college persistence for Black college students.

The participants of this study found that through on-campus employment that they had opportunities for interaction with professional staff members and academic professionals. While campus employment does not guarantee academic or social integration, it does provide a vehicle for entry to some of the academic and social settings within the campus network. Unfortunately, the participants also reported that they are not always given an opportunity to obtain on-campus jobs except in the area of food service, which does not promote academic or social integration. Furthermore, food service jobs are generally considered substandard employment with little or no chance for growth, development and quality interactions. The participants suggested that students should take advantage of opportunities to work in academic and administrative offices to develop opportunities for campus networking and to build skills for future employment through interactions.

The findings from this study indicate that students who work part-time on campus have greater opportunities to interact with staff members and others on the campus community and those on-campus interactions promote institutional commitments which positively impact retention decisions (Tinto, 1993). Some researchers have found that students who work part-time have a greater sense of purpose and are more motivated than non-working students (Routh, Chretien, Rakes, 1995; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999). Data from participants in this study support...
those findings. Students who work on campus work flexible hours to accommodate their class schedules and other academic and social obligations. Generally off-campus work hours are scheduled at the convenience of the employer and the work hours often eliminate prime study time.

In summary, one of the recommendations from participants of this study was that any African American student who has an opportunity should work on campus. The data also reports how one participant stated that one of the benefits of her job was that it provided her with access to campus officials who could assist her with any campus-related problem that arose. Participants in this study found that staff interactions enhance retention decisions through reduction of feelings of alienation and isolation. They also stressed that on-campus jobs increase quality on-campus interactions and institutional commitments, therefore, increasing persistence decisions.

**Sub-question #3**

What is the relationship between student-peer interactions and persistence?

The finding of this study indicates that the students did not believe that they would be involved in large quantities of interactions with students by personal and college selection choice. Many stated that they had no need or desire for student-peer interactions, but data later indicated otherwise. Participants also stated that through their enrollment at a PWI, they knew that they were eliminating many potential chances of having quality student-peer interactions. Some participants were able to identify and address areas where there existed a need for peer interactions during their enrollment. Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla (1995) stated the relationships with peers can provide help in
studying, promoting a sense of general well-being, and negotiating the college systems. To address the need for peer interactions, they chose various methods of correcting this deficit in their college experience. Some elected to use this study as a forum to offer solutions and raise awareness of the existence of the need. Others opted to address the need by providing to others the types of interactions they perceived were missing during their earlier years of enrollment.

When the subject of other-race interactions was interjected into the interview, participants, gave a few accounts of those interactions. Although all of the participants did not discuss other-race interaction, a few participants shared their stories. One story indicated how a participant became a cross-race mentor and resource person for residential students to increase their awareness of other cultural practices and possibly form an appreciation of the differences.

Most of the student-peer interactions found in this study were limited to students within the participants' cultural background, roommates, classmates, Greek organizations, or other campus-based organizations. Research by Allen (1995) found that involvement in campus based-organizations provided valuable social contacts and interactions for Black students attending a PWI. Often enrollment at PWIs does not promote other-race student interactions. One participant reported that the campus social climate and environment did not generally promote other-race student interactions. Many campus based activities are labeled as "Black" or "White" functions with a few exceptions such as, *Gumbo Ya Ya* and *Strawberry Jubilee*. This racial separation is evident throughout the campus social setting. As a result, minority students are
frequently without access to other-race students who could assist them in their attempt to negotiate the campus social and academic systems.

One participant reported that after she learned to negotiate some of the social and academic systems, one of her goals was to assist others in learning how to navigate the college system. This participant has decided to provide a support system for younger students by teaching them how to navigate the various on-campus academic and social systems. This student’s decision is on target with current researchers who have stated that minority students need strong on-campus support systems to enhance their retention rates (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Martin & Williams-Dixon, 1991). Other research that supports this participant’s decision to become a peer mentor and provide academic and social support while empowering them with the necessary information about college life (Mueller, 1993).

Research Question
How do on-campus interactions influence African American students’ decisions to persist at a predominantly white institution?

Positive on-campus interactions provide African American students with academic and social support needed to develop coping mechanisms to persist on PWIs. These coping mechanisms help African American students to develop a sense of self-worth and self-appraisal. Through these coping mechanisms African American students have learned to persevere in unsupportive environments.

When participants were asked if they would choose to attend the same college again, they all answered affirmatively. Research indicates that minority students are
aware that by attending PWIs, they are entering into institutions that generally do not offer strong support systems. However, data from this research also indicates they are likely to repeat the experience of attending a PWI, if offered the opportunity.

In this study, this opinion is supported by the reasons given by the participants for college choice. Many of the students believed that by attending a PWI, they were preparing for real world experience that does not cater to African American people. As a result, they did not expect an abundance of positive interactions from faculty and staff members. However, the participants in this study found that expectations and acceptance are very different. Although the students frequently found the lack of and the quality of interactions obtrusive and offensive, they are determined to persist.

Participants in this research indicated that they do not experience large quantities of on-campus interactions with staff and faculty members, except through campus employment. Many stated that while the quantity and quality of on-campus interactions often had a positive influence on their retention decisions, they believe other factors were more important. These were often factors that can be classified as self-motivators. Some of their self-motivators were: (a) the desire to succeed, (b) the expectation of parents and other family members, and (c) the desire to serve as a role model and mentor. Many of the non-traditional students stated that they believe that while on-campus interactions were not paramount to their decisions to remain in college, the interactions enhanced the quality of their college experience. The non-traditional students also stated that they believed that while on-campus interactions are not an essential part of their retention decisions, they are important for traditional students.
The participants suggested that quality interactions with faculty, staff, and peer would be beneficial to assist the younger generation of students through the web of social and academic systems found on college campuses, whereby increasing the probability of retention. The non-traditional students believe that previous college enrollment and life experiences will assist them through their enrollment without depending on campus interactions. Although non-traditional students enjoy and value quality on-campus interactions, they do not think that those interactions are paramount to their retention decisions.

**Additional Findings**

In order to complete the picture of student on-campus interactions, I have added the following sections that the participants believed were a part of their college experience. Each section represents a situation that presented an opportunity for on-campus interactions and the potential of increasing the retention decisions of African American students in this study.

The **Orientation process** was viewed by the participants as important to their enrollment and college choice. The participants offered views related to campus interactions that prompted their desire to enroll in school at SLU. Many of the participant stated that they had intended to enroll at other universities prior to a visit to this campus. They also stated they were convinced to attend Southeastern during their orientation week because the orientation staff members were friendly, enthusiastic, helpful, and appeared willing to please the students. One participant stated that he just came because he was presented with an opportunity to visit another college campus. After his trip to the campus, he was sold on Southeastern and its staff.
In a recent article, Parker (1999) stated that the most important step in the retention process begins during the students' first week on campus. Students get a feel for the spirit of the institution during an orientation week. He further stated that during orientation and enrollment, activities the staff should be friendly, communicative and enthusiastic. It is through the orientation staff that students learn about the college, its mission, standards, expectations, and the basic tenets of how the system works.

Campus recognition was an area that was viewed by the participant as important to the persistence of African American students. A participant gave evidence of how the lack of campus recognition affects the quality of student college experiences. The student indicated on-campus interactions that involved acknowledgments of Black students' abilities and accomplishment as having a positive impact on retention decisions. The Black students' struggle for recognition on predominantly white campuses can be documented back to the 1960's (Williamson, 2000). This struggle continues today on this campus. Students are grappling for recognition of excellence in educational endeavors and for cultural acceptance. Many of the participants in this study indicated that it is rare that their high grade point averages are recognized through recommendations for academic scholarships. The data suggests that African American students are rarely recognized for their academic achievement and when they were recognized, it was from some support staff members, not their professors.

Cultural acceptance is another area which has the potential of increasing African American students' persistence. The participants reported that papers or reports about Black culture are rarely well received. Those students who dare to present a paper or speech from the "Black perspective" do so at the risk of receiving a lesser grade. The
participants reported that very few students are willing to risk receiving poor grades in an already subjective grading system.

Another area which has the potential of increasing African American student persistence is availability of on-campus jobs. The participants have identified this type of employment as an important element of on-campus interactions. They believe that the lack of on-campus jobs greatly inhibits African American students' ability to engage in quality on-campus interactions.

Freshman-year peer mentoring and advising was the last area suggested to assist in providing for the needs of African American students on a PWI to enhance the probability of retention. The participants in this study also alluded to the lack of an informal setting for students to learn about the many facets of college life. Incoming students are often left to stumble through their first year with little or no assistance from other members of the college community. This lack of mentors (peer, staff, and faculty) frequently heightens the student's sense of isolation and alienation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study revealed that, for this small sampling of Black students, various forms of on-campus interaction enhanced their college experiences. A few participants described interactions that left them with moments when they felt like dropping out. Fortunately, those moments passed and the students remained in college. Others reported interactions with staff, faculty, and students that reaffirmed their decisions to remain in college through degree attainment. Although each of them participated in on-campus interactions to varying degrees, they acknowledged that it was an important factor in the retention of African American students at predominantly white institutions.
Many of the students believed that because of their age or determination to succeed, they were able to negate the desire or need for on-campus interactions. The finding indicates that although the students were able to compensate for the lack of on-campus interactions, the participants were resentful of not having had the availability of potential same-race faculty, staff, mentors or other nurturing persons on the campus. In some cases, this lack strengthened the participants' determination to graduate.

While there are numerous approaches available to increase the quality and quantity of on-campus interaction, this campus has recently implemented Tinto's concept of learning communities in classrooms. Tinto's belief is that through development of learning communities, both social and academic integration is enhanced. Tinto also believes that enhanced classroom interactions lead to positive interactions outside of the classroom. Paramount to increased retention rates is the quantity and quality of positive in and out of class interactions which are factors of social and academic integration (Tinto, 1993). Therefore, in an effort to increase retention, the administrators on this campus have implemented Tinto's model of learning centers. It is the administrator's hope that the learning centers will increase the probability of retention of African American and other students. Another consideration for this campus will be the impact of learning centers (which utilizes group learning situations) on students, who like one participant in this study, do not like group assignments. How will other students who have a preference to individualized learning and studying perform in learning centers? Will the learning centers provide quality interactions or will they inhibit learning opportunities for that group of students? Which group of students will benefit most from learning centers? These are just a few
questions that may need to addressed as a result of the implementation of learning centers to enhance student retention.

The participants acknowledged that there is a need for same-race or other support persons to assist African American students through the labyrinth of college life. The participants also acknowledged that information gained during the freshman year is invaluable to students. They recommended that students especially African American students, need a mentor or guide to help them through the first semesters of college. This need can be addressed through the employment of same-race staff and faculty, resident assistants, and peer mentors.

The lack of available same-race support systems on predominantly white campuses presents a challenge to African American students. This group of students is evidence that African American students are capable of meeting the challenge of college enrollment and coming out ahead. The success of the African American students included in this study cannot be translated into evidence that all African American students can succeed on predominantly white campuses without adequate support and interactions. The results of this study indicate that this group of students was determined to become success stories through completion of their academic goals with or without adequate on-campus support systems.

Although some of the participants did not acknowledge a need, during their college enrollment, for all forms of on-campus interactions (student-peer, student-teacher, and student-staff), they gave examples of interactions that impacted their retention decisions. Additionally, they started that on-campus interactions are an important factor for retention of African American students. Furthermore, they
indicated that all African American students should engage in on-campus work-study to enhance their college experiences and subsequently impact retention by providing them with needed finances and interactions. Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1999) supports the benefits of out-of-class learning through on-campus jobs. They stated that on-campus employment, internships, and other formal extracurricular activities encourage academic or cognitive development which enhances the campus integration process. Participants in this study gave additional support to on-campus work to enhance retention through networking that can be beneficial to students while attending school and also in first post-college employment. Each of the elements presented in this study represents a link in the retention chain for African American students.

decisions. Furthermore, the research should examine whether other-race faculty feel competent to mentor African American students to enhance their retention decisions.

As final and closing thoughts, I would like to state that this study was intended as a forum to allow the voices of the participants to be heard through the data presentation. I used narrative and direct participants’ quotes whenever possible to enhance the telling of the story of retention and on-campus interactions from their perspectives. Although retention literature by Tinto (1975/1993) and Terenzini & Pascarella (1984) suggests that on-campus interactions are an important element in the retention of students through degree attainment, the finding from the study did not conclusively support their research. Terenzini and colleagues (1999) indicated that the most powerful influence on student learning is the interpersonal on-campus interactions. From the finding presented in this study, I think that the interactions did have an impact on the participants learning process. It is also my belief that the consequences of the
interactions on their learning process impacted their retention decisions. I would also like to submit that the participants do not consider retention of African American students an issue to be taken lightly. They believe that college degree attainment is the key to their economic success.

Many of the participants in this study, non-traditional students in particular, did not consider on-campus interactions as a vital component of their initial enrollment or later retention decisions. They believed that other factors such as: age, level of maturity, earlier college enrollment experiences, desire to achieve, and personal goals were more important to their retention experiences. Although they did not concede to the importance of on-campus interactions in their retention decisions, they did acknowledge that positive interactions would have enhanced their enrollment experiences and provided them with greater opportunities to excel through academic recognition and mentors. They also acknowledged that on-campus interactions could enhance the enrollment experiences and retention decisions of traditional students.

Many of the traditional students stated that they did not enroll at this PWI institution expecting intensive on-campus interactions. However, interactions during their orientation week led them to expect a greater quantity and quality of interactions than they experienced. As with the non-traditional students, the traditional students did not attribute their retention decisions to on-campus interactions. They stated that factors such as their desire to become a role model, personal goals, economic gains, and parental desires served to strengthen their desire to remain in college through degree completion. Despite the fact that traditional students also acknowledged the impact of on-campus interactions to academic experiences of African American students, they did
not concede that their limited interactions impacted their retention decisions. Several of the students told of interactions with staff personnel who served as mentors and support persons during their enrollment. Although on-campus interactions between students and faculty were considered important to enhance the quality of the students' educational experiences, these participants are determined not to let the lack of quality student-faculty interactions impact their retention decisions. Despite works by Pascarella and Terenzini (1976) and Tinto (1987) that suggest that the lack of formal and informal student-faculty interactions were a significant determinant of attrition, this group of students persist. Without regard for limited on-campus interactions with faculty members, this group of African American students was able to use other motivators to reinforce their retention decisions and allow them to remain in college. Furthermore, this group of students considers positive on-campus interactions as an essential element to enhance the enrollment experiences of all students and those interactions can positively impact their retention decisions. However, they stressed that they were determined to succeed despite the lack on quality and quantity on-campus interactions.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study suggests several issues for further research on the role of interaction on retention of students. First, additional research is needed to assess the impact of student work-study and its influence on the retention of African American students on predominantly white campuses. The students in this study indicated that on-campus jobs were important to both the retention of African American students and the quality of college experiences. Tinto (1993) stated that on-campus jobs can aid in the social
and academic integration process because those jobs provide additional opportunities for students to interact with various members of the campus community. Additional research is needed to explore this claim and discover how student on-campus jobs assist students into integrating into the social and academic systems (Routh, Chretien, Rakes, 1995). Furthermore, the research can evaluate the impact of on-campus jobs verses off-campus jobs on retention decisions.

Second, additional research is needed to evaluate the impact of same-race faculty and staff interactions on the retention of African American students on predominantly white campuses. The students in this study stated that the lack of same-race faculty and staff members negatively impacted their college experience, but not their determination to graduate. Based on these findings and recommendations from Lee (1999), additional research is needed to analyze the impact of the lack of same-race faculty and staff on another similar student population. In an article Lee (1999) stated that future research should be conducted to determine how African American students attending PWIs view the importance of same-race faculty and mentors to retention.

Third, additional research is needed to investigate the impact of on-campus interaction on all students’ retention decisions. This research should center around the quality and the availability of same-race interaction. Furthermore, a comparison of the effect of those interactions by race should be investigated. In a recommendation for future research on faculty-student interaction, Woodside and colleagues (1999) suggested that studies should be conducted to examine both in- and out-of-class interactions to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role of those interactions on college experiences and retention. The study should examine traditional and non-
traditional students individually since their perceptions may differ. Arredondo (1995) also supports the need for additional studies on the impact of faculty-student interactions on degree aspirations.

Fourth, a study should be initiated to investigate the effects of this campus' recent incorporation of Tinto's model and its effects on the retention of African American students and other students (Tinto, 1993). The data from that study would allow the researcher to analyze whether intense in-class interactions will lead to enhanced out-of-class interaction, therefore, promoting both academic and social integration. Tinto's (1975) earlier theory stated that social and academic integration were key factors of retention decision. Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) and others have conducted studies to test Tinto's theory.

Fifth, this study should be replicated using a larger sample and/or participants from a different segment of the United States. This would present an additional view of the evidence presented in this study. It is my recommendation that this research is conducted in relationship to which factors influence the success rate of African American students specific to all sections (gender and age groups) of this student population.

The results of this study indicate that the success of this small sample of the African American student population can be attributed to a number of factors. Although on-campus interactions are only a part of their success stories, they were not the only determinants of their success. One factor suggested by the participants was on-campus jobs which often lead to quality on-campus interactions. The results also indicated that participants predicted that an increase of African American staff and faculty members
would present the participants with additional opportunities for on-campus interactions and mentors. Both of these elements were suggested through the literature and by the participants as factors related to retention of all students. The participants also suggested a need for a program of cross-cultural training to assist the campus community in understanding and valuing the culture of all members of the campus community.
REFERENCES


Astin, A. W., Tsui, L., & Avalos, J. (1996). Degree attainment at American


Iffert, R. E. (1958). *Retention and withdrawal of college students*. Washington,


APPENDIX A - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Dissertation Research
The Relationship Between On-campus Interactions and Retention of African-American Students at a Predominantly White Institution

Your signature on this form gives your consent to participate in this research project which is designed to study the relationship between on-campus interactions and retention of African-American students at a predominately white institutions. This research will serve several purposes: (a) to add to the existing research about retention of African American students at predominantly white institutions, (b) to provide information that may be useful in the improvement of higher education retention policies, and (c) to meet degree requirements for a doctorate in higher education.

This research will consist of a brief, one (1) interview (approximately 45 minutes each) and a one (1) week student journal of on-campus interactions between student-faculty, student-peers, and student-staff members. The personal interviews will be recorded utilizing assumed names to minimize the risk of inadvertent disclosure of the identity of the participants. Audio tapes of interviews will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher and/or transcriber to protect your privacy.

No personal identifying information about participants will be published in any analysis of data resulting from this study. In addition, no personal information about participants will be shared with other persons without express written consent of the participant.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research or concerning your rights, call Catherine Martin at 504-549-2955 or write to Catherine Martin, SLU 12888, Hammond, LA 70402. My faculty advisor is Dr. Rebecca (Becky) Ropers-Huilman, and you may contact her at 225-388-6900.

"I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks and I give my permission for participation in the study."

Participant’s Signature ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________________________________
Current Date

Participant’s Name
Address
City, State Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms.__________:

I am a graduate student working on my doctoral dissertation at Louisiana State University. As a part of the requirements, I have to conduct a research study. The topic of my study is the Relationship Between On-campus Interactions and Retention of African American Students at a Predominantly White Institution. Your name was provided to me through a referral from a member of Southeastern’s staff, faculty or student population.

I am asking for your participation in my study. As an African-American student at Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU), you can provide valuable input that will potentially have a positive impact on the educational experiences of all African American students. Although you have been identified as a potential participant in this study, your further involvement is voluntary. I would greatly appreciate your assistance in making this study a representation of the views of African-American students. Your participation will take only a small amount of your valuable time.

The data collection process will include one forty-five-minute interview, a brief autobiography, and journal keeping for 1-week. All of the research can be conducted on Southeastern’s campus at a time and place recommended by you. After you have completed all parts of this research, you will receive a $10.00 Wal-Mart Gift Card to show my appreciation for sharing your experiences and time with me. This project is not only important to me, but important to all African American students who would like to complete a college degree. The project is worth the effort of taking a few minutes to talk to me and write down your feeling.

I am enclosing an informed consent form requesting your permission to include you in the study. Please complete the document and return it in the enclosed pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope or return in person within the next two days. Don’t forget upon completion of this study all participants who complete all parts of the study will be given a $10.00 Wal-Mart gift card.

Thank you for your assistance in this important research study. If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at 504-549-2955 or visit me at Southeastern Louisiana University, West Stadium, Room 213.

Sincerely yours,

Catherine Martin

194
APPENDIX C - AUTOBIOGRAPHY INSTRUCTIONS

Autobiography Instructions

Thank you for your consent to participate in this valuable research. This research is designed to assist African American students and university officials understand the relationship between on-campus interactions and retention of African American students attending predominantly white colleges and universities.

One of the data collection methods for the research is to gather brief 1 to 3 page autobiographies from the participants. Therefore, I am requesting that you write a brief autobiography including anything you consider important as it relates to you and your decision to attend college and obtainment of a college degree. Your autobiography can be handwritten or typed. It is not important that you worry about proper grammar usage, just be sure to include anything that will be important to your college entry and retention.

A few examples of type of data requested are:

1. Tell about whether other family members (mother, father, sister, brother) have a college degree.

2. Who was important to helping you decide to attend college?

3. Why did you decide to attend college?

4. What is your major and when do you plan to graduate?
APPENDIX D - JOURNAL ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS

The Relationship Between On-campus Interactions and Retention of African American

Journal Entry Instructions

Thank you for continuing to assist me with this research project. I think the final results will assist others to understand the relationship of on-campus interactions and the decisions to remain at a predominantly white university.

The following are a few guides and instructions to help you understand the type and method of Journal entries requested for this study:

5. You are requested to make daily entries of interactions you have with members of the SLU faculty, staff, and student body. Those interactions can include:
   a. In-class discussions with teachers
   b. Out-of-class discussions with teachers
   c. Discussions with staff members
   d. Discussions with students and friends

6. You are requested to record in this journal daily for one week and then return the journal to me. At that time we will schedule the final stage of the research, the interview.

7. Each entry should have full detailed descriptions and dialogue. Remember I am trying to understand the full meaning of your interactions.

8. Each entry should relate to how it influenced your decision to continue or possibly leave SLU in the near future.
9. Each entry should relate to how the interaction made you feel about staying in school.

10. Remember, your continued assistance with this research is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime without penalty. I hope you will understand the value of this research and choose not to withdraw before we have completed the study.

11. I have enclosed two samples of journal entries. These entries are only examples and you may choose a different format to record your entries.

    If you have any questions, please call me at my office 549-2955 or my home at 345-1077. Thank you of your help with this valuable research project.
Sample Journal Entries

Sample Interaction # 1

Sue: Did you understand anything Mr. Stewart said in class today?

Penny: Yes, this is my favorite class.

Sue: I can’t seem to understand the rules for applying all of the different laws. This thing about policemen having the right to choose whether to enforce laws in certain situations is really confusing. How can I decide what is the right answer on a test? Can you help me understand?

Penny: Sure, a few of us are getting together to study at 5:00 on next Wednesday before our next test. Why don’t you meet us in the library?

Sue: Thanks, I could use all of the help I can get.

Sue’s Reaction and Reflections on the interaction.

Last year I really had a rough time here. I could not get anyone to help me to understand all of that history stuff. I know I took good notes and I studied at least two hours a day, but I just couldn’t get a handle on what type of information I should put on the test. Boy, am I happy that Penny said I could join her study group. I know that with just getting a little extra help, I can pass my classes. This really makes me feel as if someone cares enough to help me. If I continue to get just a little assistance like this or just have someone to talk to, I may just stay at this school. Maybe this school does have some good points. Who knows, maybe more Black students will enroll next semester to give me some moral support and we may be able to form a support group. Hey, they may just shock me and hire a Black teacher. Now wouldn’t that be something?
Sample Interaction #2

Sue: Mr. Brown, I am having a lot of trouble understanding how to solve those math equations. I have asked some of my classmates to help me, but I am still not sure of where I am going wrong in my solutions. Can I come to your office after class?

Mr. Brown: Well Sue, I would like to help you, but I have to prepare for my next class. As you know, we have a study hall that is monitored by graduate assistants and we have a computer lab with software to help students like you. Why don’t you try them first? Well, I have to start class now.

Well class, did any of you, other than Sue, have trouble with those equations I assigned on Monday? Good, I thought they were quite self-explanatory. Now, let’s get on with today’s work.

Sue Reaction and Reflections on the Interaction

I can’t believe he embarrassed me like that in front of the whole class. I am going to drop this class. I know I was told that these teachers did not care if I pass or fail, but I never expected a teacher to embarrass me in front of the entire class.

According to my syllabus Mr. Brown is scheduled to have office hours right after our class. I thought that meant that we could talk to him at that time and not that he would be preparing for his next class. I think that I will take these issues of him embarrassing me before the class and his unavailability to his students to the dean. If the dean is unwilling to help me, I don’t think I will return to this school next semester. Boy, SZU is looking better all the time. Maybe Dad was right and I should have gone there.
APPENDIX F - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me a little about why you chose to attend SLU.

2. How are your relations with faculty members at SLU?

3. Have you ever considered leaving SLU?

4. Tell me about those times.

5. Tell me about why you want to stay through graduation?

6. Tell me about a particular teacher who has helped you adjust to college.

7. Give me an example of an interaction with a teacher that has helped you decide to stay in school.

8. Give me an example of an interaction with a teacher that made you want to leave SLU.

9. Tell me about a particular staff member who has helped you adjust to college.

10. Give me an example of an interaction with a staff member that has helped you decide to stay in school.

11. Give me an example of an interaction with a staff member that made you want to leave SLU.

12. Tell me about another student who has helped you adjust to college.

13. Give me an example of an interaction with a student that has helped you decide to stay in school.

14. Give me an example of an interaction with a student that made you want to leave SLU.

15. Tell me about other race friendships you have formed since you enrolled at SLU.

16. How have those friendships helped you to adjust to college?
17. Give me an example of an interaction with other race students that has helped you decide to stay in school.

18. Give me an example of an interaction with other race students that made you want to leave SLU.
VITA

Catherine Martin is a 1991 graduate of Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond. She holds a bachelor of science degree in mathematics education and a master’s degree in educational administration and supervision. Catherine entered in the doctoral educational leadership, research, and counseling program (higher education concentration) at Louisiana State University in 1996. Since November, 2000, she has been employed in the position of director of Educational Opportunity Center and Veterans Upward Bound at Southeastern Louisiana University. In addition to studying retention practices and theory for college students, she has worked for six years with programs that serve first generation, low income college students.

Catherine Martin completed her doctoral studies at Louisiana State University in the Fall 2000 and will receive the degree of Doctor of Philosophy during the Fall 2000 commencement. Her dissertation topic was: The Relationship Between On-campus Interactions and Retention Decisions of African American Students at Predominantly White Institutions.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate:  Catherine Martin

Major Field:  Educational Leadership and Research

Title of Dissertation:  The Relationship Between On-Campus Interactions and Retention of African American Students At Predominantly White Institutions

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

October 18, 2000