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Annals of the Next Generation (ANG) is a refereed, scholarly journal that provides a venue to showcase the next generation of scholars of color, by publishing the research of graduate students. *ANG* highlights research from multiple disciplines and areas, and allows these young scholars to present their work to an international audience.

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*Accepted under the editorship of Kinnis Gosha, PhD

Should HBCUs Pursue High-Capacity Fundraising Presidents?

Donald Mitchell, Jr.¹, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, MI

In November of 2012, Dr. John Silvanus Wilson Jr., then executive director for the White House Initiatives on Historically Black Colleges and Universities and now President of Morehouse College, pondered the outcomes of re-introducing Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to the wealthiest Americans in an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Dr. Wilson began the article highlighting the speech Booker T. Washington delivered to a crowd of extremely wealthy Americans on behalf of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) and similar institutions in the early 20th century, a crowd that included Andrew Carnegie and George Foster Peabody. Washington's speech fostered a \$600,000 endowment for Tuskegee from Mr. Carnegie. Adjusting for GDP and inflation, Dr. Wilson noted that \$600,000 donation amounts to \$350-million today. Dr. Wilson then asked readers to imagine Oprah Winfrey, Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and a host of other wealthy individuals gathered in one room to hear a 21st century HBCU president advocate for their institution and other HBCUs.

It was the second question posed by Dr. Wilson that struck a chord with me. He asked, "What are the prospects for recovering the substantial relationship between HBCU[s] and America's highest-capacity philanthropists?" Unfortunately, the current situation is dismal. HBCUs have been in existence since 1837; however, there are a substantial number of wealthy Americans—or any Americans for that matter—that have at best limited knowledge of HBCUs. Consequently, many high-capacity philanthropists do not know the role HBCUs have played in the advancement of higher education in the United States. The wealthiest Americans who do know of HBCUs have been "modest" with their cash donations. Oprah Winfrey's \$5-million gift to Morehouse College in 2004 is the largest cash gift received by an HBCU during the 21st century (not including gifts from organizations/endowments).

The question I pose is, "Should HBCU boards pursue high-capacity philanthropists—who are capable of high-capacity fundraising—as presidential candidates?" Absolutely. For instance, imagine Oprah Winfrey as president of any one

¹Donald Mitchell, Jr., Ph.D., is an assistant professor of higher education at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, MI and editor-in-chief of *Annals of the Next Generation*.

You may contact the author at: mitchedo@gvsu.edu

of the HBCUs across the nation. I suspect Oprah Winfrey would be able to use her business and entrepreneurial expertise to successfully lead an HBCU, fostering financial stability and solid accreditation reviews. Her name alone would increase financial donations; improve campus and alumni engagement; boost enrollment; and draw the attention of other wealthy Americans. In addition, using this practice, name recognition and social networks are additive options to net worth, which expands the pool of potential presidents. This practice could lead to several high-capacity philanthropists advocating for HBCUs in several different rooms rather than one.

I imagine the chief argument against this practice would be, “Oprah does not hold an academic doctoral degree.” I can imagine skeptical board members, faculty, alumni, staff, legislators, and accrediting agencies leading the argument. I would respond, “Do you know Eddie Moore?” Eddie Moore did not have an academic doctoral degree and he successfully revived a struggling Virginia State University, raising their endowment from \$2.5-million to almost \$24-million during his tenure. He also came out of retirement and raised nearly \$5-million for a cash-strapped St. Paul’s College in just six months. I would respond, “Do you know John Broderick?” Old Dominion University faculty voted no confidence in the two finalists—who both held PhDs—for president in 2008 and backed their current president, John Broderick. His highest academic degree is a master’s, but his recent contract extension until 2017 speaks volumes of his success.

While I support a move toward high-impact philanthropic presidents, it is important for the president to appoint competent cabinet members. For example, Dr. Walter Kimbrough (Dillard University), Dr. Dianne Suber (St. Augustine’s College), Dr. Loren Blanchard (Xavier University of Louisiana), Dr. Dorothy Yancy (Shaw University), Dr. M. Christopher Brown II (Alcorn State University), and any budding leaders with fresh perspectives, could serve as provosts, executive vice presidents, or co-presidents, handling the day-to-day operations. I am not advocating for demotions or reassignments for the HBCU presidents on this list; I just admire the fresh perspectives they bring to the 21st century HBCU, and they would be ideal candidates using the proposed model. Just think, Dr. Kimbrough working alongside Oprah Winfrey, or Dr. George T. French (Miles College) working alongside Dr. Shaquille O’Neal. Either option would do wonders for any HBCU.

I consider Dr. Bill Harvey (Hampton University) and Dr. John Silvanus Wilson Jr. prototypes of the fundraising president. Dr. Harvey has left an indelible mark on Hampton University and the HBCU community; I expect Dr. Wilson to do the same at Morehouse College given his government connections as past executive director for the White House Initiatives on Historically Black Colleges and Universities and fundraising experience at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Still, the HBCU community needs 100+ dynamic fundraisers at the helm of these historic institutions. Every few years the HBCU family loses an HBCU because of financial issues (St. Paul’s College most recently). Consequently, many HBCUs need to shift their administrative and operational models for revitalization.

Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Shaquille O’Neal, Dr. Bill Cosby, and Hill Harper: if you read this note, submit your applications for the next HBCU presidential search. At this point, some HBCUs have nothing to lose, but if this model proves successful, America

has so much to gain. HBCUs *will* play a critical role in President Barack Obama's 2020 goal and the economic advancement of the United States in the 21st century. HBCU scholars and administrators just need to document and implement creative practices to expand their presence. I have documented this practice as a consideration. Who is bold enough to answer the call?

No Longer the “Other”: The Unique Experiences of Multiracial Students

Tiffany Jones¹, Southern Education Foundation, Atlanta, GA

As universities address changes in student demographics, they also wrestle with issues of persistence. Understanding why students choose to leave college can be found in a better comprehension of multiracial university populations. The purpose of this study, accordingly, is to examine the relationship between the racial identities of multiracial students and persistence. As such, parental influence and experiences with racism were found to affect how students chose to racially identify, with university responses to diversity and issues of racism also impacting student decisions to remain at their respective institutions.

Keywords: multiracial, monoracial, student development, student engagement

Many colleges and universities rely on student demographic questionnaires to report campus population trends. One important use of this information is to provide administrators with insights into their ability to create equitable outcomes for traditionally marginalized populations. A limitation of these data, however, is that it is often collected using surveys that do not provide adequate space for multiracial students to distinguish themselves. For instance, many require students to select only one race, instructing them to select the option “other” if they cannot. Accordingly, Somers and Gibson (1994) argue that the labeling of traditionally marginalized groups as other reinforces an oppressive narrative, which stifles group engagement and feelings of belonging. Thus, considering multiracial students to be the other is symbolic of higher education’s resistance to recognize and support minority groups. Providing a supportive and engaging environment for multiracial students, then, becomes increasingly important because the number of American citizens who identify as multiracial on the U.S. Census grew 32% between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Campus leaders must also consider the relationship between multiracial students’ identity and the university environment. Scholars have suggested that racial identity is part of understanding oneself on campus and in society as a whole (Chickering &

¹Tiffany Jones, PhD, is a postdoctoral research and policy analyst at the Southern Education Foundation. The present article was accepted during Dr. Jones’ doctoral studies at University of Southern California in Los Angeles, CA.

You may contact the author at: jones1tn@gmail.com

Reiser, 1993; Helms, 1990; Renn, 2000; Stephan, 1992; Williams, 1992). Developing racial identity, then, is contingent on campus environment; general reception and opposition to different racial groups influences how multiracial students progress through the racial identity development process (Helms, 1990).

Although multiracial students can be incorporated into the category of nonwhite minority students, their models for identity development differ significantly from monoracial students insofar that they are not linear (Helms, 1990; Root, 1996). While Root (1996), Renn (2000), and Chaudhari and Pizzolato (2008) have theorized about the situational identity patterns of multiracial students, an in-depth analysis of the relationship between multiracial identity development and the racial state of campus climate has yet to be conducted. A better understanding of these interactions can assist administrators in supporting multiracial student success.

Thus, the purpose of this phenomenological case study is to examine the relationship between racial identity development and campus climate as experienced by multiracial students at a large, public university in the Midwest. In order to better understand how multiracial students experience racial identity development, the author asks these questions to guide the inquiry: How do multiracial college students describe their own identity development? How do they describe their reasons for staying in college?

Multiracial Student Racial Identity Development

The most cited models of Black and White monoracial identity development are linear processes that begin at a stage in which racial issues have not been confronted, only to be followed by certain race-oriented encounters that result in either resistance to or immersion in the select identity group (Cross Jr., 1971; Cross Jr., Parham, & Helms, 1991; Helms, 1990). As demonstrated in Figures 1 and 2, the racial identity development of multiracial college students is unique from other monoracial identity development processes because the former is fluid and cyclical, not linear (Root, 1996).

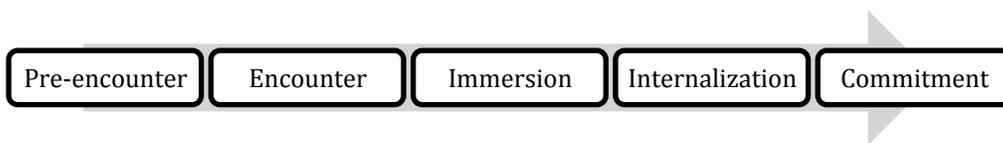


Figure 1. Black Identity Development Process. Stages originated from the work of Cross Jr. (1971, 1991).

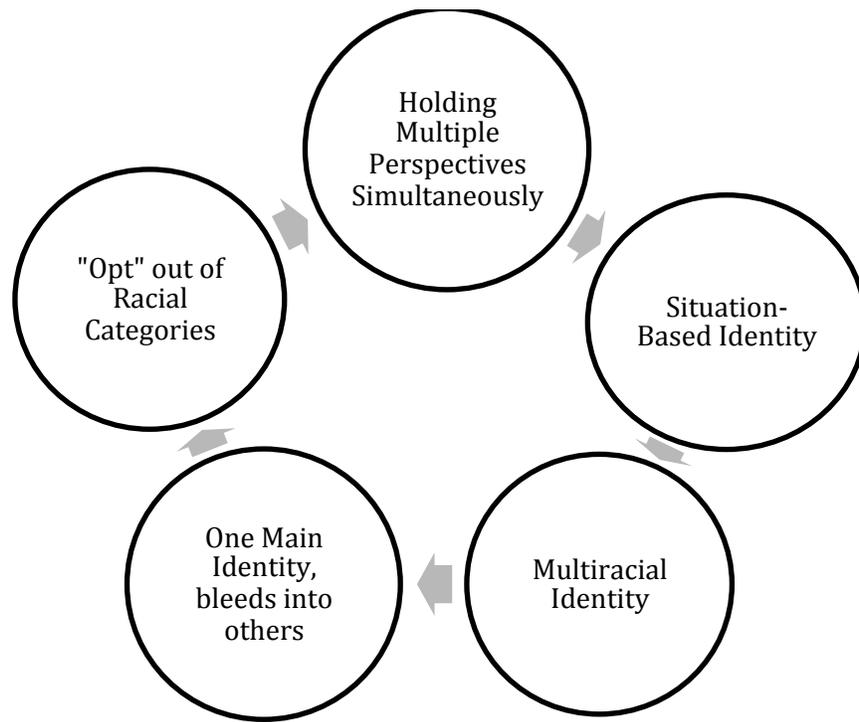


Figure 2. Multiracial Identity Development Process. Stages originated from the work of Root (1996) and Renn (2000).

Monoracial students undergo a stage of development in which they are immersed in their own culture, and thus, they are able to use that as an avenue to achieve and develop a sense of pride (Helms, 1990). Multiracial students, on the other hand, do not experience a singular immersion into a culture. Instead, they are more likely to experience racial identity as a social construct, having integrated the heritage of two or more different racial backgrounds. As such, multiracial students may reject parts of their identity through campus involvement, academic work, and personal identification (Renn, 2000). Root (1996) finds that multiracial identity formation consists of one of four “border crossings,” identities that multiracial students fluidly adopt include: (a) holding multiple perspectives simultaneously, (b) switching racial or ethnic identity based on situation, (c) actively choosing multiracial as an identity, and (d) choosing one main racial identity and making inroads into others. According to Root, any of these four border crossings constitute healthy and productive means of resolving mixed-race identity (p. 385).

Building on Root’s theory, Renn (2000) identifies a fifth border crossing pattern among multiracial college students—opting out of racial categories altogether by deconstructing them. At one university, Renn found that five out of eight participants chose to “opt out of race,” whereas only three out of 16 participants chose this pattern at

the other two universities (p. 385). These findings imply that university environments play a role in multiracial students' identity formation processes. Furthermore, scholars have noted the importance of psychosocial factors—those factors related to the intersection of psychological development and social environment—in racial identity formation, thus supporting the idea that one's university environment might impact multiracial identity formation process (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cross Jr., 1987, 1995; Helms, 1990, 1995; Root, 1996; Wallace, 2001).

Renn's (2003) study uses Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993, as cited in Renn) Ecology Model to determine the roles of microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems in the campus environment and the racial identification process. Microsystems, daily, face-to-face interactions for example, influence students' senses of where they fit in and how easily they can move from one identity-based space to another. Mesosystems, on the other hand, impact the desirability of identifying with various racial groups within the campus environment. Exosystems, presented in the form of having to select one racial category on demographic forms, affects students' awareness of race. Finally, macrosystems influence students' ideas about race and culture, namely, who they are. Consequently, Renn finds that engaging in academic work about racial identity and co-curricular activities that supported these in-class opportunities proved helpful to students during processes of racial identification.

Minority Student Engagement

The multiracial students in this study are minorities insofar that they identify as nonwhite on a campus that is over 90% White. Thus, they face challenges similar to other nonwhite students. One challenge faced by nonwhite, racial, and ethnic minority students is that they complete college at lower rates than their White peer counterparts. For instance, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that, in 2004, 57% of White students enrolled at four-year institutions graduated within six years versus only 37% of Black students. With these gaps in graduation rates reaching nearly 20% between Black and White students, minority student persistence becomes an important issue for colleges and universities. Scholars studying the causes of these racial gaps have identified limited academic and financial support (Gladieux & Swail, 1998; Nora, 1990) as well as the negative campus racial climate for students of color (Cabrera et al., 1999; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora, 1996; Rankin, 2005) as contributing factors to minority students' decisions to leave higher education before graduating.

Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure can be used to explain links between factors like institutional support, campus racial climate, and student retention. According to the theory, four factors that influence persistence are as follows: (1) adjustment, (2) difficulty, (3) incongruence, and (4) isolation. Incongruence refers to the inability of the university to meet student needs, preferences, and interests, which results in feelings of not fitting in with the campus social and intellectual environments. Together, these four factors influence the experience of individuals and their choices to depart from their respective institutions. The more academically and socially involved individuals are, the more likely they are to persist (Tinto, 1998). Students find difficulty adjusting to college because of the differences between their previous environment and the current campus

environment. Thus, students struggle to fit into their new social and intellectual roles (Tinto, 1993). An outcome of this is none other than the fact that many students depart before the start of the second year (Tinto, 1998). Students who depart because of academic difficulties either leave early to avoid failure or are forced to leave by the university. Less than 15% of all university departures, however, are due to academic dismissal; rather they are results of social and intellectual student experiences (Tinto, 1993). Necessary university conditions for successful student retention include: (a) university commitment to address retention, (b) academic and social support, (c) involvement through academic and social integration, and (d) student learning that meets expected student standards. Additionally, retention rates are not equivalent to drop-out rates because the factors that explain why students depart are not the same as those that explain a university's inability to help them remain and graduate (Tinto, 1993). Thus, there are specific aspects of a university's environment that may be related to the development and decisions of multiracial students.

Method

Case study methods can provide “a reference to a complex narrative that takes the reader into the multiple dimensions of a problem or issue and displays it in all of its complexity” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Further, phenomenological data collection allows for the voices of participants to speak to salient issues of identity development with the goal that the “essence” of their experiences will be captured. Both case study and phenomenological research methods can be used together to examine individual phenomena within a particular system. Thus, these methods were used in conjunction to examine the complex dimensions of multiracial student identity development and persistence at Midwestern University (pseudonym).

Participant and Site Information

Data were collected from 16 multiracial college students at Midwestern University, a large, public, four-year, residential research university in a rural city in the Midwest region of the United States. At the time of the study, the site had an undergraduate enrollment of over 27,000 students, of which only 8% identified as nonwhite racial minorities. Additionally, at the time of data collection, the university did not provide a separate coding option for multiracial students. Thus, participants were identified using a snowball technique and consisted of volunteers who were recruited through cultural and scholarship programs, classroom announcements, e-mails, and personal recommendations. Class standing and intentions to return for the following semester of school varied among those individuals involved. Four participants were male, twelve participants were female, and the racial backgrounds of the students all varied.

Midwestern University gives students the option to identify their race/ethnicity using the following categories: Nonresident alien, Black non-Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, White non-Hispanic, and race/ethnicity unknown. When asked how they racially identified, participants provided

answers that many would consider to be ethnicities, like “Latina.” In line with the phenomenological tradition, these ethnicities have been listed as races so that the true essence of how participants describe their racial identity is captured. Participants’ racial demographics are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Mother's race	Father's race	Gender	Year	Racial identity
001	Black/White	Black	Male	Sophomore	Black
002	Black/White	Black/White/Native	Female	Junior	Black
003	White	Black	Female	Senior	Biracial
004	White	Black	Female	Junior	Biracial
005	White	Mexican	Female	Senior	Mexican
006	Mexican	White	Female	Senior	Mexican
007	Black	White	Female	Junior	Biracial
008	White	Black	Male	Junior	Biracial
009	White	Mexican	Female	Grad Student	Chicana
010	Black/White/NA/Hispanic	Black	Female	Junior	Black
011	Greek-American	Egyptian/Cypriot	Female	Sophomore	Greek-American
012	Black	White	Male	Sophomore	Biracial
013	Mexican	White	Female	Sophomore	Latina (Mexican)
014	White	Chicano	Male	Senior	Chicano
015	Mexican/Native	Puerto Rican	Female	Junior	Biracial
016	White	Black	Female	Junior	Biracial

Data Collection

The design of this qualitative study revolved around semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups with the 16 participants. Participants were interviewed for two hours each, during which they filled out a demographic sheet providing general background information. Participants were then asked questions regarding their college experience, specifically those issues relevant to retention and identity as informed by the previously discussed literature. The first series of questions pertained specifically to participants’ experiences with race and identity, also addressing intersections of campus engagement and racial identity. The second series of questions focused on participants’ personal experiences with those retention-important factors identified by Tinto (1993) as well as students’ intentions to return to school the following semester.

Following the individual interviews, focus groups were conducted with 13 of the 16 interview participants. The first focus group consisted of six participants and the second consisted of seven participants, each placed randomly based on their availability. Questions were generated based on responses to individual interviews. The main topics discussed included reasons for remaining at Midwestern University, campus engagement, the concept of race, racial identity, implications of racial identity in higher education, and the relationship between race identity and persistence.

Data Analysis

The project's lead researcher completed verbatim transcriptions of the interviews and focus group discussions. Consequently, the data were cross-referenced with the demographic sheet. As such, the findings were triangulated in order to draw conclusions about the relationships between the racial identities of multiracial students and persistence in higher education. Both Tinto's (1993) Retention Theory and the multiracial identity development patterns developed by Root (1996) and Renn (2000) were utilized to analyze the data. These frameworks provided the basis for the coding schema used during said analysis process. Patterns were then identified to categorize salient themes emerging from the data (Creswell, 1998).

Results

Multiracial Identity Development

One goal of this research was to expand the limited knowledge base about the experiences of multiracial students. Another goal was to understand the relationship between multiracial identity development and persistence in higher education. The research findings also offer insights into the roles of parents and racism in the development of racial identity. They also reveal the influence of university responses to race and racial climate on campus with regard to participants' academic engagement and persistence.

Personal identification. All four of Root's (1996) border crossing patterns were supported in the findings. Half of the participants expressed that they were able to hold multiple perspective simultaneously, with one participant stating, "Being biracial...you're a combination of things physically and mentally.... I don't think being biracial should be categorized as one [thing]" (005). Another participant shared that, "I identify myself as both, mixed like Black and White. I'm not more one than the other" (003). Many participants said that they switch their race identity based on circumstance. A prime example is exemplified in this response: "If I'm with one race in a predominately Black area...I know that I can change, and I do change" (007). Many students who switched their identities did so in order to avoid racial problems on campus. One participant said, "I look White, and I don't tell anybody. If I looked Mexican, [other students] are already going to bring on all those social stigmas" (006).

Over half of the participants chose multiracial as their identity. One student stated, "I identify myself as mixed" (008). Another participant who possessed a strong multiracial identity said, "I have a shirt that says 'I heart mixed people,' and I made another shirt that says 'Almost White,' and on the back it says 'Not Quite Black'" (003). All participants, however, maintain a central identity, one from which they occasionally

move into other racial categories, as in the case of one participant who stated, “I identify myself both White and African American, but socially, I’d say White” (007).

There were only a few examples of Renn’s (2000) fifth racial identity pattern in this research, none of which typified strong examples of what he describes as a rejection of all racial categories. The closest example of this viewpoint can be found in this participant’s comment: “White isn’t really anything. White is a fake social construct. It’s precisely the robbing of a community’s way to express themselves in their indigenous way” (014).

Although there were no participants who opted out of racial identities altogether, some chose identities that were politically oriented, such as Chicana and Chicano. One student explained:

Its neither Mexican nor ‘United States-ean.’ The word came about in the late 60s-early 70s as part of the greater civil rights movement. Youth who were children of farm workers and immigrants started exerting their selves culturally in that way. We are Chicanos, not Mexican. We can’t honestly claim to be Mexican because we don’t know really a lot about Mexico. (014)

While not emphasized in previous research, themes such as choosing politically oriented racial identities as well as the influences of parental relationships and racism on racial identity development both warrant further investigation.

Parental and family influences. Participants’ relationships with their parents held a great deal of influence over how they chose to identify themselves. Half selected their racial identities based upon the relationship with the parent to whom they felt closest. One participant stated, “My mother is Mexican, and my father is White. My father was not a part of my life so I identify more with being Mexican” (013). Another participant said “I identify myself [as] Greek.... The reason [is because] I’m closer with my mom” (011). Two students shared that the reason they do not choose one racial identity over the other is because both parents are play central roles in their lives. One participant remarked, “I’m so involved with both sides of parents and everything socially and historically. I participate in activities on both [sides], so I wouldn’t say that I relate more [with either side]” (007).

Over half of the participants chose to identify more with that race that holds racial minority status as a direct result of parental influence. For example, one student shared that although she was raised by her White mother, there was pressure from her White family members to identify as Black, stating, “My White family pressured me to say I’m Black. They personally identify me as being Black because obviously I’m blacker than they are” (003). Just as Root (1996) and Renn (2000) discuss, multiracial students are likely to select racial identities based on situation, which can include family situations as well as environmental racial climate.

Racism and changing identities. One issue not emphasized in earlier research is the role of racism in how participants navigate boundaries of racial identities, with over half claiming that they have changed racial identity as a result of racism. Some students reacted to racism by intentionally or non-intentionally “passing” as White or other races to avoid negative interactions. Here, passing is the act of going along with majority

identification (Wald, 2000). One example of passing can be found in this participant comment: “I look White, so I act like a White kid and nobody places these stereotypes on me. I don’t talk the way that I would at home” (006), with an additional participant stating, “I’m Hispanic, but not very many other people know. So I don’t see many racial barriers” (005).

Additionally, the experience of appearing racially ambiguous, in which others cannot identify one’s race based solely on appearance, made participants more inclined to pass. One student commented, “I pass all the time. Having all White friends and not talking about race is passing, or just not being vocal about it. I think [it] is passing. So yeah, people see me and they think I’m White” (009). Further, the appearance of racial ambiguity meant that participants were more likely to overhear racially charged dialogue that might not be used in the presence of visible racial minorities, many other students operating off of the assumption that the participants were unequivocally White. One participant commented, “White people don’t always realize right away, you know, unless I say something about me being mixed. So I hear so many things that anyone would consider to be, you know, racially insensitive on a regular basis” (008).

Not all participants reacted to racism by trying to pass for White or other races, however. In fact, three participants shared that, even if they could, they would not pass under any circumstances. One student noted, “People would tell me that I should just tell people that I’m White because of my skin color but I couldn’t. That would be like denying my entire family” (008). Nevertheless, such a predominantly White college environment caused many of the participants to pass as White for the sake of avoiding racial obstacles.

Campus Racial Climate, Racial Identity, and Persistence

Many participants discussed how the campus’s racial climate impacted their racial identity and decisions to persist at Midwestern University. Specifically, university initiatives, such as diversity scholarships and cultural programs designed to promote racial diversity, were mentioned by several students. Furthermore, campus racism—in the form of hate groups within the classroom and surrounding community—were common among participant responses to questions about their campus engagement and racial identity development.

University diversity scholarships. All respondents remained at Midwestern University after their first year. When asked why, half stated that scholarships were one of the top reasons that they decided to return, with more than half sharing that their scholarship had been awarded on the basis of their role in promoting diversity and multiculturalism. One participant stated, “The reason [for returning to school] was the scholarship that I have. I’m around other scholars, such as myself, that have the same drive toward enhancing their academic success and expanding their knowledge on diversity and promoting it through their everyday actions” (001). Moreover, several participants prioritized scholarships as their primary reasons for returning to Midwestern University after their first year of school, as in the case of one participant who responded, “If I would not have gotten as much money as I got to come here, I would not still be

here” (013). Hence, university efforts to promote diversity through the awarding of scholarships motivated multiracial students to persist beyond their first year.

Diversity programming. In addition to scholarships, Midwestern University promoted diversity and multiculturalism through campus programming with the aim of educating students about different racial and ethnic groups. It has been previously expressed that the experiences of multiracial students are different from those of monoracial students, the differences highlighted in terms of how diversity programming is viewed. Throughout the data collection process, however, many participants expressed feelings of not belonging to one particular minority group, often feeling uncomfortable when attending group-specific programs. One student stated, “I don’t feel like the campus is trying to segregate people. But it just seems like that’s always the case. Even with their programming and the speakers that they have here” (003). Conversely, some participants’ positive experiences with campus diversity programming contributed to their decision to remain at Midwestern University. One participant stated, “They put on a lot of good programs. [They’re] some of the main reasons I decided to come back and finish up” (008). Additionally, almost half of the participants stated that they liked the campus’s culture, some students having become involved with diversity-promoting programs and organizations.

Despite these positive experiences with diversity initiatives, participants expressed dissatisfaction with how students of color were treated at specific programs. For example, one common theme was displeasure with campus police security measures at parties thrown by minority student groups at the university’s Student Activities Facility (SAF). One student said: “I have never felt so violated when I go to a SAF party. I have to walk through metal detectors [and] get my purse looked through” (004). Another student stated that, “Anytime there’s a Black party at the SAF, why are all the cops at that party and not [at] other events?” (007). Furthermore, participants claimed that perceptions of racism permeated beyond diversity programs into campus culture on the whole.

Campus racism. Tinto (1993) noted in his Theory of Student Departure that integration into institutional culture is key to student success. He does not, however, consider how successful students might respond when institutional culture is unsupportive of nonwhite students. For example, several participants were unhappy with the way Midwestern University responded to issues of race on campus. One participant captured the essence of this feeling when she said, “They’re not doing anything to make you feel comfortable as a minority here. It’s not gonna make you wanna stay in this establishment very long” (002). The campus newspaper was also cited as being a source of negativity with regard to racial issues, as one student expressed, “The college paper...there’s nothing ever good about people of color.... It’s either that they won some sport or they’re beating somebody up” (003). Additionally, participants identified the presence of and university responses to hate groups, classroom racial experiences, and community responses to diversity as being significant to racial identity, institutional experiences, and persistence decisions.

Hate groups on campus. Halfway through data collection for this study, there was a hate group demonstration on campus just outside of the building where one participant interview was conducted. Students of color in attendance also claimed that

they were hit by paintball bullets during the demonstration and were asked to leave by campus police, while the hate group was permitted to remain. The hate group's presence was a persisting campus issue throughout the academic year, and as a result, the participant interviews and focus groups centered somewhat around the issue.

Several participants expressed that they felt unsafe as a result of the hate group presence. One participant said, "It scares me. Where I lived, it's illegal to wear a swastika...I spent like half my life surrounded by Nazis in Germany, and I left to come here and study, and now they're here" (011). The participant went on to share:

I get really scared you know. I'm a young female, and I'm a person of color, you know. I don't go out at night. I don't say to myself, "I'm gonna take my bike and go to the store." I have to think about it and say, "what if, what if?" (011)

As such, many students were dissatisfied with the university's response to the hate group, for they wanted administrators to oppose the group more strongly. One student spoke to student disappointment with the university:

With the hate group situation, our administration did not act. It is not even "take a stand against racism." It's "take a stand against violence." Take a stand against people being mistreated. I'm not asking you to be my friend—"who is White, who likes Black people." I'm not asking you to be my ally. I'm asking you to take a stand against something that hurts my feelings. (013)

It is important for institutions to carefully consider their responses to campus hate groups and student perceptions of said responses because they can impact student's sense of institutional belonging. For instance, one participant shared that "the whole hate group thing threw me through the loop, like I actually told my little brother not to come here." (004). Another participant said, "I did have a little, like, few minutes of fear. I was like 'Mom, they got Nazis up here, I'm thinking about transferring.' That's the only thing that happened up here that made me want to go back home" (012). This volunteering of this information, accordingly, demonstrates that the hate group's presence was a major concern.

Race and the classroom. Beyond dealing with race in the campus community, participants also discussed the role of race within the classroom, specifically with regard to isolation, the experience of taking racism-focused courses, and how faculty responses to racism impacted learning and engagement.

Many participants expressed that they were extremely bothered by their minority status in their classrooms. One participant said, "It was shocking because, sometimes, I was the darkest thing in my class, and I'm not that dark" (004). Another participant stated, "You go into any classroom on campus and there's a bunch of White people...so you sit in the back and you try to get some footing and stuff. I mean it's hard" (006). Consequently, many students agreed that they had to work harder in the classroom because they were minorities. One participant stated, "It is hard to always have to be the martyr. It is exhausting because, sometimes, I feel like maybe I just don't want to participate in discussion. It is like, if I don't say it, it just won't be said" (013). This sentiment was also shared by others who felt pressure to speak for their entire minority

group. One participant noted, “The teachers just stare at the minority students, [and] the rest of the students are going to stare, too. If you are always the only minority in all your classes, that could make someone so uncomfortable, you just want to leave” (016).

The experience of being the sole student of color in the classroom is only intensified in courses that focus on issues of racial diversity and racism. Several participants shared negative stories from these courses. One student said, “It has been difficult to be in Spanish classes with a bunch of White kids who are learning it because it’s a pastime, or they’re going into international business, and they can’t wait to do business with the Mexicans, which means exploit them” (014). Despite such negative experiences, numerous participants shared that they were positively impacted by racism and diversity coursework. One student shared that “It has really helped me understand a lot about where my Black relatives have come from.” (008). Other participants described that, as a consequence of racism and diversity courses, they were less afraid to talk about race. One student stated, “It’s influenced me now to be more involved. Talking about it [is] okay, because before I didn’t really want to hear anything” (015). Even faculty interactions can play a critical role in helping participants embrace positive outcomes as a result of these classes.

As leaders in the classroom, faculty can also play important roles in creating a classroom environment where multiracial students feel welcome. Only one participant, however, stated that a professor demonstrated supportive behavior toward students who had experienced classroom racism, making himself available as a confidential resource in the wake of heated class discussions concerning race. Conversely, other participants shared experiences in which professors were either the sources of racism or harmful to discussions. One example is described as follows:

A professor wanted to do racial slurs in ads put on campus...a guerilla marketing technique. He was just reading [racial slurs] off, you know, pointing at people of color and asked them what they’ve been called.... I just got up and walked out.... When I was a kid I got called the ‘N-word’ and got the shit kicked out of me.... That was one thing that really bothered me, and that just happened last week. (003)

According to the classroom participants, dealing with classroom racism negatively affected their learning and levels of confidence. A few participants experienced significant grade drops as a result, with one student stating, “I went from like a 3.8 [GPA] to a 1.7. I’m just not interested. I’m not going to put time into an institution that I feel does not give a shit about me or my people” (014). Consequently, these reductions in grades and confidence exemplify how campus racial climate relates to academic achievement and persistence for multiracial students.

Racial climate in the surrounding community. Furthermore, participants described how their racial experiences in the Midwestern University community reinforced feelings of discomfort. One participant stated that, “Me and my brother would always talk about how bad [our hometown] was as far as rapid ignorance, but it’s worse here, and that was something that surprised me” (008). Specifically, participants explained that they did not feel welcome or safe and experienced discrimination with local law enforcement. One participant shared that, “I can’t even buy hair products in

town... I just don't feel welcome as a person of color" (003). Another participant shared her experience of stigmatization at a local grocery store, stating, "All these people were just staring at us so hard and my boyfriend was like, 'It's because you look White... They're thinking this White girl, or she's not fully Black, obviously is with this Black man'" (004). Another participant spoke to the city's social milieu on the whole, claiming "It wouldn't surprise me that [the hate group] chose Midwestern University just because [this city] and [its] people don't really accept diversity" (015).

Many of the participants agreed that local law enforcement officials practice racial discrimination. One participant shared, "A guy gave me racial crap... the cop comes up to ask what was going on and I said, 'This guy is giving me crap' [and] he went racial on me... 'Well that's what you're gonna get in this town,' that's what the cop said. City police!" (003). Issues with law enforcement in the city extended to a popular local bar and their dress code that the participants argued targeted minorities. One participant shared:

The whole dress code thing at the [local bar], it's been an issue with male friends, like hats, bandannas, and jerseys, and certain T-shirts, and everybody says, "Yup, they're targeting Black students because they're the ones wearing the jerseys and ball caps." (007)

The participants also shared that they felt unsafe in the community as a result of a perceived lack of support from law enforcement with regard to racial diversity. One participant shared that she was victim of harassment by an officer, stating, "He's like, 'You think you're hot, but you're nappy, you're Black.' The bouncers didn't do anything. I took my cup and chucked it at his head. That's when violence happens in this city, because nobody does anything" (003). While the university might not have jurisdiction over the community, participants' experiences are nevertheless relevant to their ability to feel welcome in their new environment, and ultimately, to continue at the institution.

Discussion

While this research supports the General Student Development Theory (Perry, 1970, 1981), that students undergo change while engaging in the university experience, this primary research adds a layer of complexity to Perry's theory. These findings support elements of Root (1996) and Renn's (2000) theories of multiracial identity development as well as Tinto's (1993) Theory of College Student Retention, revealing new issues overlooked in previous research. Students experienced all four of Root's border crossings, but multiracial students' decision to opt out of racial categories altogether—Renn's addition to Root's framework—was not expressed by the participants. New themes that emerged from the data include the importance of parental involvement in racial identity development, changes in racial identity based on experiences with racism, and intersectionality with multiracial identity development, campus racial climate, and persistence. More specifically, financial scholarships

significantly contributed to students' decisions to remain in school, an item not emphasized in Tinto's (1993) theory.

Additionally, the emergent themes have implications for university leaders as they consider strategies for addressing racism and promoting a thread of racial diversity that is inclusive of multiracial student needs. One primary consideration would be providing a space for multiracial students to identify themselves on demographic forms to demonstrate symbolically that they are of equal institutional importance as monoracial students. Secondly, the findings suggest that institutional leaders should pay particular attention to multiracial student experiences with racism in the classroom and campus community, for the frequency and magnitude of racial incidents yielded an increased desire to leave the institution as well as negative academic outcomes.

While universities provide events and programs for specific racial groups, the data reveal multiracial students often felt that such events and programs create a culture of difference rather than integration. Those that cater to one specific racial group can cause multiracial students to feel pressured to identify with only a part of their racial background. One suggestion for addressing this dilemma would be to create programming that caters to more than one racial group at once as a supplement to already existing programs, simply so the needs of the multiracial and monoracial students are both addressed. Lastly, institutions can implement initiatives that specifically target multiracial students, like the creation of multiracial student organizations, programming, and curricula, of which the sole purpose is to educate the campus community about multiracial student experiences.

Conclusion

A major limitation of the study is that the university does not include a multiracial category when documenting information about students, and as a result, the only way to identify participants was through personal recruitment. The recruitment process may have had a major impact on the results about the role of scholarships and involvement in cultural groups because so many of the participants were recruited at scholarship and cultural organization meetings. Another limitation was difference in gender representation; there were three times as many female participants compared to male participants. There may have been variation in the results if there was a more equal representation of both genders.

The data were collected at the end of a turbulent year for Midwestern University, particularly concerning racial tension. The heightened awareness of racial issues—as enabled by the hate group demonstration on campus—may have influenced the importance of institutional culture, making it appear much greater than it may have been during a less controversial period. As such, one benefit of the data collection during this time is that the results give universities insight into how students are affected by negative campus racial climate. Better understanding the student perspective on these issues of race can assist universities in creating more efficient strategies to address campus racism. Even with such limitations, the data have implications for university leaders, so long as they support multiracial students.

Even though some of the students in the study were able to pass and blend in with the dominant White culture, they felt many difficulties relative to the more-visible minority students. In many cases, the desire to pass as White and hide one's heritage was revealed as a tactic to avoid racial problems, not as a natural part of the student's racial identity development. The results of this study, then, give an overview of the experiences and perspectives of multiracial students. Many of this study's findings, though they raised more questions than they did answer them, will hopefully spark interest in further research of this unique group of students. The more that is known about the multiracial student perspective, the better-equipped universities will be to address their needs. More importantly, universities can contribute to the knowledge base about multiracial students by starting to recognize and track multiracial students on their campuses, not as others, but as visible and valuable groups in the campus community.

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The Spot In the Mirror: The Role of Gender in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*

Linda Chavers¹, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA

*Wright undermines his own profundity by denigrating the “Negro” woman in his autobiography *Black Boy*. As Wright moves from child to man his mother literally and figuratively moves from agency to the shadows of his life. In part two his opposition towards racism becomes heavily gendered: the author portrays the deterioration of his relationship with the communist party through the verbal threats of a “huge, fat” Black woman and unknowingly implicates himself in the plight of poor Black women. What's at stake is the author himself—as a critic, but especially as an agitator against racism.*

Keywords: Richard Wright, gender, masculinity, women, Black

The very popular African-American rap star Shawn Carter, also known as Jay-Z, will most likely go down in history as one of the best musicians of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His accolades are numerous as well as the records he's broken in sales. His music and, in particular, his lyrics are what he's most known and respected for – for his portrayals of black life as he sees it. Carter has managed to tap into an everyday grittiness that taints the lives of millions in the urban, Black community.

One song in particular, “99 Problems,” is a well-produced and well-written story of an urban, working-class Black male life (Jay-Z, 2004, track 9). The language of rap is known for its duality and Carter follows suit here. To portray how hard he struggles for success in the world Carter (as Jay-Z) portrays social, fun things such as romance as something he just cannot afford or fit into his conflict-riddled life. Nor does it seem that he would want to if given the chance—the word he uses to capture love and companionship is “bitch” (Jay-Z, 2004, track 9). Carter illuminates racial injustice and police corruption by what they are not—a woman, someone or something apparently too trivial to take seriously.

¹Linda Chavers, PhD, currently teaches literature at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. The present article was accepted for reprinting during Dr. Chavers' doctoral studies at Harvard University.

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You may contact the author at: linda.chavers@temple.edu

Despite some popular notions to the contrary, neither Shawn Carter nor other rap stars invented the use of the feminine as a mirror of personal and social ills or, in this case, as a mirror to the Black man's plight. This has been an American tradition for most of our literary and artistic narratives, those white and Black, and usually male. Richard Wright, the famed Black writer of the 1940s is no exception. In 1940 he received critical acclaim for his novel *Native Son* and, later, for his autobiography *Black Boy* in 1945. Both texts were praised for their truthful renderings of African-American life in Jim Crow America. In his 1993 introduction to *Black Boy*, Ward called it "a book that nicely blended the meaning, the challenge, and the significance of being Southern, Black, and male" (p. xi). Yet, the lyrics of a talented rap star and the literature of a talented writer, while so far apart in style, genre, and intention, turn out to be two sides of the same gendered coin.

A larger recurring statement about manhood lies underneath the surface of most of our popular cultural language today whether women are directly or indirectly mentioned. The final lyric of "99 Problems" changes its word order and Jay-Z (2004) states that *being* a bitch is not an option for him in his "hard-knock" life (track 9). His closing line reveals that it is not "women problems" he cannot afford, it is being weak, a "bitch," that he must not risk (track 9). Both layers of the song share the female, or the feminine, as its foundation. Again, the protagonist uses the feminine as a mirror in which to consider himself: not only can the artist not afford women in his life, he cannot afford to *be* like one either.

Why does this matter regarding Richard Wright and his autobiography *Black Boy*? Nearly sixty years before Shawn Carter wrote out his manhood on the body of the woman in explicitly degrading terms Wright achieved the same when telling the story of his own manhood in subtler, though still disturbing, language. I am not suggesting that misogyny is any type of Black literary tradition, no more or less than it is in the broader American literary canon. In fact, I argue that the subjection of women is such an intrinsic part of the overarching societal structure that contains us that even its agitators cannot escape it in their own seemingly resistant language. Where both artists Carter and Wright attempt to resist their oppression through clever and subversive language they instead still perpetuate oppressive forces through their use of the feminine thus bolstering the very rigidly racist structure they intend to dismantle. In the end, the racist structures these men exist in are not weakened but *strengthened* when its own victims incorporate it into their own language and acts. Despite the convincing critiques *Black Boy* offers regarding the racist hypocrisy of the North and the brutal Jim Crow South, Richard Wright's ultimate attack on American racism fails as true resistance.

An autobiography poses some unique and tricky issues for the reader. Do we hold the author more or less responsible for his story's themes? How much of the narrative is truth and how much is the author making up as myth or fiction? Richard Wright's very act of *writing* down his "life" means there's some self-mythologizing occurring—the author still chooses what to keep, what to omit, what to exaggerate in order to convey his character. That self does not have to be whole or who he would actually say he were in reality but nonetheless there is a self, a "personality" that the author provides us to read.

In his book *On Autobiography*, Lejeune (1989) defines the genre as “the story of [the author’s] personality” and I believe this to be the best way to read *Black Boy* (p. 5). For a personality is never finished, there’s no final chapter. *Black Boy* fits much of Lejeune’s specific criteria including the situation of the author where the author and the narrator are identical; Lejeune also demands “[t]he subject must be *primarily* individual life, the genesis of the personality; but the chronicle and social or political history can also be part of the narrative” (p. 5). We know that the author and the narrator are the same by their shared use of the name “Richard” plus the narrator’s mention of writing “Big Boy Leaves Home” which Wright first published in 1936; the narrator’s personal growth and struggles set within the larger context of Jim Crow racism fit *Black Boy* in Lejeune’s social criteria, as well.

Using the self as a symbol for larger issues runs the risk of unintended self-revelation. We will see that the genesis of the narrator’s consciousness occurs at the locus of the feminine within an unconsciously shared space with racism’s misogyny. I argue that this genesis of Wright’s narrator is not one of rebellion and resistance, but it is the birth of *Wright’s* ambivalence and resentment as well as that of Richard’s—it is the story of a failed resistance at the hands of gender’s silent presence.

The delineation of resistance that earned *Black Boy* praise ultimately collapses into itself through the holes of gender. Wright’s autobiographical narrator, whom I will refer to as “Richard” from this point on, brilliantly reflects the racist oppression he lives in so as to flip and nullify it for his own desperate liberation; but his narrative is unfortunately repeatedly interrupted with the broken, fragile, threatening, demeaned or demeaning Black woman. Though Richard offers himself up as a mirror to Jim Crow in order to judge and condemn it to his larger white audience the women in his life serve as clearer mirrors in which he negatively views himself. Never are the women to have their own agency in the same way Richard gets to fight for and eventually gain. Often nameless, the women in *Black Boy* are tragic in their repressive positions of subjugation.

For example, after describing a particularly traumatic experience in his new job as a busboy at a white hotel Richard, the narrator, pauses to step out of his tale and offer a critique of America as both narrator and as the author, Richard Wright. He notes:

I know that not race alone, not color alone, but the daily values that give meaning to life stood between me and those white girls with whom I worked. Their constant outward-looking...made them dream and fix their eyes upon the trash of life, made it impossible for them to learn a language which could have taught them to speak of what was in their or others’ hearts. The words of their souls were the syllables of popular songs. (Wright, 1945, p. 273)

In his own critique he uses women—in this case, white women—as an example of American emptiness. Richard’s stepping out of his narrative to give this parenthetical critique implies that the *author* Richard Wright is speaking to us, the readers. And, the implied “I” in this pause also points to a “you”—the reader. This conversational detail again fits Lejeune’s (1989) definition for autobiography. For my purposes in this paper, what both “Richard” and Richard Wright choose to talk about directly to the reader points to a deep-seated sexism rather than an embedded, resented anti-racism. Richard

frequently ignores the plight of black women or assumes their oppression as a given reality similar to his own, but not worthy of critical examination.

In the first opening paragraph of *Black Boy*, four-year-old Richard (1945) presents his mother and grandmother as distant and frightening. He recalls:

All morning my mother had been scolding me, telling me to *keep still* [emphasis added], warning me that I *must make no noise* [emphasis added]. And I was angry, fretful, and impatient...I was dreaming of running and playing and shouting, but the vivid image of Granny's old, white, wrinkled, grim face...made me afraid. (p. 3)

Thus, from our very first introduction to *Black Boy*'s Richard he's presented as the creative gem stifled and held back by his female authority figures. Despite Wright's autobiographical intention to reveal and battle racism, his narrative begins first with his immediate abuse at the hands of black women not of whites. Richard's early self-image, at least that presented to the reader, comes from his mother, his grandmother, and his Aunt Addie—who arrives after his mother falls ill and was especially abusive to Richard—all black women, not the whites Wright comes to implicate later. Aunt Addie beats him as a child and terrorizes him so badly in school that he develops a lifelong fear of public speaking; his grandmother repeatedly battles his budding secularism and literary imagination; and his mother fails him most of all—once his go-to for all of his questions, her mysterious illness takes his mother away from him. Also, her illness conveniently coincides with one of his first Jim Crow experiences. Richard relays:

“Why are they taking mama that way?” I asked Uncle Edward.
“There are no hospital facilities for colored, and this is the way we have to do it,” he said. I watched the men take the stretcher down the steps; then I stood on the sidewalk and watched them lift my mother into the ambulance and drive away. I knew that my mother had gone out of my life; I could feel it. (Wright, 1945, p. 99)

In the second half of *Black Boy* Richard's emotions are more problematic. Finally escaping the south he first arrives in Chicago's South Side and finds a room to rent in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ross, where a disturbing passage promptly follows. Mrs. Ross's daughter, Bess, is an attractive young woman of seventeen years who reads on a fifth grade level and immediately “loves” Richard upon meeting him. He experiences many conflicting emotions towards her ranging from disgust to sexual desire:

What could I do with a girl like this? [emphasis added] Was I dumb or was she dumb?... Could I ever talk to her about what I felt, hoped? Could she ever understand my life?...But I knew that such questions did not bother her.... I kissed and petted her. She was warm, eager, *childish, pliable* [emphasis added].... I disengaged my hand from hers. I looked at her and wanted either to laugh or to slap her. (Wright, 1945, pp. 217-219)

Even when Richard directly involves himself with a black woman or is, at least, privy to her own violent experience, as we will see, he never pauses to fully consider her as a fellow victim or companion in the struggle against discrimination; instead, her experiences return us to his fear. In fact, the one time Richard does pause to note the

economic plight of black women he blatantly sidesteps his own implication in their exploitation:

I hungered for relief and, as a salesman of insurance to many young black *girls*, I found it [emphasis added]. There were many comely black housewives who, trying *desperately* to keep up their insurance payments, were willing to make bargains *to escape* paying a ten-cent premium. I had a long, tortured affair with one girl by paying her ten-cent premium each week. She was an illiterate black *child* [emphasis added] with a baby whose father she did not know. (Wright, 1945, p. 289)

Not only is Richard's lover nameless, her description is that of a child whose significance in the world he finds to be meaningless. Then not one page later the author continues Richard's description of life as an insurance agent and pauses to note the particular struggles of black women again:

That was the way the black women were regarded by the black agents...[The agents] would insist upon [sex], using the claim money as a bribe. If the woman refused, they would report to the office that the woman was a malingerer. The average black woman would submit because she needed the money badly. (Wright, 1945, p. 293)

Richard never explicitly implicates his role as a collector as part of these women's exploitation despite his own "relationship" with one of them.

What matters here is that in the 384 pages of the text the only two references Richard Wright makes to his narrator's sexuality involve women who are infantile, useless, and barely plausible as real people. Most importantly, both women gesture to the narrator's own self-consciousness, revealed by his urges to harm the women. Richard voices his frustration at his client-slash-lover's mindless nature:

"Can't you really read?" I asked.

"Naw," she giggled. "You know I can't read."...

"You all right," she said, giggling. "I like you."

"I could kill you," I said ... [emphasis added]

"You crazy, man," she said.

"Maybe I am," I muttered, angry that I was sitting beside a human being to whom I could not talk. (Wright, 1945, p. 290)

It is not just a matter of *ignoring* women, or, rather, excluding women in this critical attack on racism in America; Wright simultaneously and paradoxically glosses over women while perpetuating their subjugation. Worse, the value, or lack thereof, Richard determines for these women seems to warrant a mortal violence.

In his essay *Negating the Negation as a Form of Affirmation in Minority Discourse*, JanMohamed argues (1995) that Wright negates racism's negation in order to

affirm his own human existence. If racism is about stripping one of his humanity and selfhood, Wright must invalidate this attack to both illuminate the racist structure for what it is and, thus, to resist it. His own title *Black Boy* introduces this negation-turned-affirmation by flipping the common degrading “boy” reference to black men into a reclaiming of his own identity and narrative.

Strangely enough, for JanMohamed’s (1995) argument to work he himself must ignore the misogyny in Wright’s text. He never directly discusses the women in *Black Boy*, save one passage on Richard’s sick mother and there he cites her illness as yet another reflection of *Richard’s* suffering. Richard’s first job while in the South involved witnessing a gruesome attack on a black female client of his boss and the boss’s son. But, when he discusses this job—one of the moments when Richard faces his negation at the hands of white employers—JanMohamed completely omits the brutal attack. In *Black Boy* Richard (1945) recalls:

One morning...the boss and his son drove up in their car. A frightened black woman sat between them. They got out and half dragged and half kicked the woman into the store. White people passed and looked on without expression. A white policeman watched from the corner, twirling his night stick: but he made no move. I watched out of the corner of my eyes, but *I never slackened the strokes of my chamois upon the brass* [emphasis added]...I heard shrill screams coming from the rear room of the store; later the woman stumbled out, bleeding, crying, holding her stomach, her clothing torn...the policeman met her, grabbed her, accused her of being drunk, called a patrol wagon and carted her away. When I went to the rear of the store, the boss and his son were washing their hands at the sink...the floor was bloody, strewn with wisps of hair and clothing....“Boy, that’s what we do to niggers when they don’t pay their bills.” (p. 179-180)

In his essay all JanMohamed (1995) has to say about this episode is that, “[Wright] soon becomes a victim of casual violence intended to teach him ‘his place,’ and, most dishearteningly for him, he finds his ambitions crushed by the threat of violence” (p. 114-115). JanMohamed uses the woman’s brutalization as a sign of *Richard’s* threatened liberation. And Richard Wright completely overlooks his own subject’s frozen physiological state during this attack. This is what I argue is the leveling and conflating of race with gender, or, perhaps, racism with sexism. Yet Wright cannot or chooses not to see this collapsing despite his own story’s striking examples.

Later, JanMohamed (1995) argues:

For [the author] to understand thoroughly the system and the effects of racial oppression and to bring them to the light of full consciousness, he has to be entirely open to the system, he has to internalize it fully while maintaining a space within his mind that remains uncontaminated by the racist ideology—he has to retain a vantage point from which he can observe, critique, and oppose white ascendancy. (p. 118)

But is it possible to “internalize it fully” whilst retaining a “vantage point”? I would argue that the process of internalizing anything, especially something so large as the system of repressions, requires a residue left with the resister.

In the essay *One is Not Born a Woman*, feminist theorist Wittig (2001) posits that one cannot use the language of the oppressor to speak for the oppressed and thusly there is a stepping *out of* rather than a leaping *into* that could truly attack the oppressive structures in place. Nodding to cultural critic bell hooks (1995) Wright's *Black Boy* absolutely exists in a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Patriarchy is crucial to our understanding Richard's failure to critique or even to escape his racist origins. We have to look at the subjugation of women as another dimension of racism's architecture. So to challenge it requires an abandonment of all its dimensions, or the challenge fails and merely folds in on itself.

Richard's early experiences with women closest to him collectively shape his notions of self. So it is no surprise that the author writes black women as attending the worst moments of his life. Jaques Lacan's (1949/2001) psychoanalytic approach, "The Mirror Stage," helps us to see the author's projection of both fear and anger onto the women around him. Returning to his two "romantic interests" Richard internalizes the women's characters as negative reflections on his own:

I had never dreamed that anyone [e.g. Bess] would accept me so simply, so completely, without question or the least hint of personal aggrandizement. The truth was that I had—even though I had fought against it—grown to accept the value of myself that my old environment had created in me. (Wright, 1945, p. 219)

And again with the illiterate insurance client:

I stared at her and wondered just what a life like hers meant in the scheme of things, and I came to the conclusion that it meant absolutely nothing. *And neither did my life mean anything* [emphasis added]. (Wright, 1945, p. 290).

Richard is critically aware of the oppression that binds him. But he never seems to see the role of women nor their battles with racism that, by the very definition of their bodies, inherently involves sexism. Richard fails to see this parallel as partnered with the same oppressive environment from which he's running. Rather, this is the continuum of white patriarchy that he takes as natural, and perhaps this stems from his negatively identifying with women at an early age. We have seen from the author's own opening lines that he experienced harm at the hands of his female caretakers *before* facing discrimination. Indeed, his mother unintentionally introduces her son to racism when she's carted away. Paradoxically, such a blind spot ultimately holds down Richard and his author, still trapped in their original oppressive spaces. JanMohamed (1995) concludes his essay with the idea that "*Black Boy* is remarkable not so much for its rebellion as for the control that Wright had to exercise and the internal struggle that he had to wage against being engulfed by the racist sovereignty" (p. 118).

This control is actually incomplete and a repressive discipline achieved at the expense of the feminine. This "control" for which Richard Wright is praised is the same discipline Jay-Z (2004) raps about in "99 Problems" (track 9). That is ultimately the deadly beauty of oppression—that even when admiring his liberated reflection the resister's still trapped in oppression's house. Whether through speaking protest, rapping it, or writing it, there is still the shadow in the corner, a smudge in the ink, keeping one's

reflection from completion. And those resisting are left puzzled scratching at the spot on the mirror.

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Factors Contributing to Distance Learning Faculty Changing Their Teaching Practices

Shenita Ray¹, Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA

This paper presents the results of a qualitative study that investigated factors contributing to distance learning faculty changing their teaching strategies, including course design, pedagogy, and assessment of student learning, to enhance student success in higher education. Using Kezar's (2001) typology of organizational change in postsecondary institutions, the findings of this study suggest that distance learning educators are encouraged to modify their teaching strategies in asynchronous online courses as a result of cognitive dissonance, a prominent feature of the socio-cognitive approach to change. Furthermore, this study found that exposure to three sources of information contributed to cognitive dissonance and modifications to teaching practices among the faculty participants. These information sources include: (a) student performance on assessments of learning, and assessment practices in an online environment; (b) formal institutional assessments of teaching effectiveness and course design; and (c) training received related to effective teaching, course design.

Keywords: Assessment, distance learning, online learning, teaching effectiveness

There was a time when the United States was the world leader in postsecondary degree attainment. However, today, many nations lead the U.S. in terms of college degree achievement. For instance, for the workforce population aged 25-34, Canada leads the United States in the percentage of adults with an associate's degree or higher, nearly 55% versus 38%, respectively (Kelly, 2005). Furthermore, in 2006, only 27% of American adults aged 25 and over held a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). This statistic has remained relatively unchanged for a decade. Given the world's competitive economic environment, the impact of the recent Wall Street and real estate meltdown on the U.S. economy, and the continued loss of American manufacturing jobs, American adults without postsecondary credentials face formidable financial and employment challenges. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that over

¹Shenita Ray, PhD, is director of distance education and continuing education at Virginia Union University in Richmond, VA. The present article was accepted during Dr. Ray's doctoral studies at the University of Wisconsin—Madison.

You may contact the author at: slray@vu.edu

the next eight years, the shift in the U.S. economy away from goods-producing to service-producing will continue (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). The manufacturing sector is expected to experience the greatest decline. However, by 2018 over 14 million new service positions will be added to the American economy and over half of the growth (i.e., 8 million jobs) will occur in healthcare, educational, professional, scientific, and technical services (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). Many of these jobs will require a college degree.

Overall, occupations that require postsecondary credentials are expected to experience higher rates of growth than those that do not. For instance, jobs that demand an associate's degree for employment are projected to grow by 19%. Professions requiring a master's degree or a first professional degree are expected to increase by 18%, and careers requiring a bachelor's degree or a doctoral degree are expected to increase by 17% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). However, occupations requiring only on-the-job training are projected to grow by a mere 8%. It is clear that more Americans must achieve higher levels of academic and technical knowledge to remain employable in global knowledge-based markets (Krazis, 2007). Both President Obama's plan to restore the United States' leadership in higher education and the Lumina Foundation's "Big Goal" call for increasing the degree attainment of American adults to 60% over the next 10 years. To achieve this goal, postsecondary institutions can strategically use online education to enhance student access to college. Over 73% of chief academic officers at public colleges and universities reported that online education is critical to the long-term strategy of their institution (Allen & Seaman, 2009). However, research shows that retaining students in distance education programs and courses is a prevalent issue today (Allen & Seaman, 2009; Simpson, 2003). Research also indicates that teaching practices can impact a college's ability to retain students enrolled in distance learning courses and programs.

The use of conventional face-to-face teaching practices in online environments often leads to frustration for both students and faculty when these strategies are unsuccessful (Dasher-Alston, 1998). To teach online effectively, educators must become proficient in using online delivery technology, designing lessons that are student-centered, adapting to teaching in the absence of nonverbal feedback from students, and developing methods of communicating their content without synchronous lecturing (Schoenfeld-Tacher & Persichitte, 2000). To achieve these proficiencies, postsecondary institutions must challenge traditional approaches to teaching and facilitate the development of new pedagogical techniques to advance student success in online learning environments (Kazis, 2007; Moon, Micheli, & McKinnon, 2005).

Despite the need for different teaching tactics in distance education, changing pedagogical practices presents a formidable challenge because American colleges and universities are often slow and resistant to change (Kezar, 2001). However, if online education is to serve as an effective long-term strategy for postsecondary institutions, they must overcome resistance to change in order to advance student retention and success in distance education courses. Research that describes what motivates online faculty to change their teaching practices can help academic leaders encourage instructors to embrace the pedagogical practices that are needed for effective instruction in an online environment. However, virtually no literature exists on this topic. The need therefore

exists to understand what encourages online faculty to change their teaching practices. The purpose of this study is to identify factors that contribute to distance learning faculty changing their teaching strategies—including course design, pedagogy, and assessment of student learning—to enhance student success. In the context of this study, distance education is used interchangeably with online learning and e-learning.

This paper is organized as follows. In the next section, I review relevant literature to provide context for this study. I present a review of the literature related to the situational and demographic characteristics of online learners, the factors that influence dropout from higher education online courses and programs, and Kezar's (2001) typology of organizational change in postsecondary institutions. Next, I detail the methodology that guides this study. Data collection, analysis, and the results of the study are presented thereafter. The last section concludes the paper with a discussion of the study's findings, limitations, and implications.

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that contribute to distance learning faculty changing their teaching practices to enhance student success. To provide a context for this study, I reviewed three strands of literature: (a) the situational and demographic characteristics of online learners; (b) the impact of teaching practices on student success in online courses and programs; and (c) Kezar's (2001) typology of organizational change in higher education.

Situational and Demographic Characteristics of Online Learners

In 2008, 4.6 million students in the United States were taking at least one online course; this number was nearly 17% greater than those enrolled in online courses in 2007 (Allen & Seaman, 2009). In the fall of 2008, online enrollment represented over 25% of the total postsecondary enrollment in American higher education institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2009). The demand for distance education can be partially attributed to the increased access it provides to non-traditional learners who juggle multiple situational responsibilities and find it nearly impossible to attend class in traditional face-to-face environments. Researchers found that 77% of distance education learners live over 50 miles from campus, with the majority living between 101 and 200 miles from campus (Gibson, 1998). Moreover, distance learners are generally older than traditional undergraduate students. Research conducted by Moore and Kearsely (2005) showed that most distance education learners are adults between the ages of 25 and 50. According to a study administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics, undergraduate students who were 24 years of age and over and were enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions were more likely to participate in distance education courses than students under 24 years of age (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Given the flexibility that distance education provides, several studies have illustrated that more women than men enroll in courses delivered at a distance (Gibson, 1998; NCES, 2002). The report by NCES (2002) indicated that older women with families and jobs participated in distance education programs and courses at significantly

higher rates than members of other groups. In a testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, Ashby's (2002) report revealed that women represented about 65% of the undergraduate students who took all their courses through distance education. Despite the significant number of women pursuing education in an online environment, a study funded by the American Association of University Women found that women who took distance education courses faced more barriers than men because this delivery mechanism added a "third shift" to their workday (Kramarae, 2001). Female learners studied and engaged in online classes early in the morning, late at night, in their free time after working the first shift of a full-time job, and after the second shift of taking care of their children (Kramarae, 2001). Although these are trends for women, these trends cut across all distance learners.

Ashby (2002) reported that 85% of graduate students who took online courses also worked full-time compared to 51% of students who did not take distance education courses. Nearly 60% of undergraduate distance education learners worked a full-time job compared to less than 40% of undergraduates who took no distance education courses (Ashby, 2002). The study also showed that undergraduate students who worked full-time considered themselves employees first and students second. Research indicates that this type of student tends to participate in distance education at higher rates than their counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). In fact, distance education students are more likely to be part-time learners (Ashby, 2002). About 63% of the undergraduate students who took all their courses through distance education were part-time students, whereas about 47% of students who did not take distance education courses were part-time learners (Ashby, 2002).

The flexibility and convenience of online courses and programs has not only attracted a significant number of adults, women, and full-time employees, but also increased higher education access to minority learners (Cooper, 2008). In 2006-2007, four of the top five producers of African American doctorates in education were universities that offered primarily online or blended course options (Cooper, 2008). The leader in Black education doctorates is Nova Southeastern University, which produced nearly 20% of the 957 African Americans who earned doctorates in education in 2006-2007 (Cooper, 2008). Furthermore, the top 10 universities conferring master's degrees in education upon Blacks, mostly consist of postsecondary institutions that offer some online courses (Cooper, 2008). These institutions include the University of Phoenix Online, Walden University in Minneapolis, and American InterContinental University Online. Not only are more minorities participating in online education to achieve graduate degrees, but many are also pursuing bachelor's degrees in business, computer, and health fields in online environments (Cooper, 2008). With a 69% growth in online Black graduates in all disciplines since 2005-2006, the University of Phoenix is within two to three dozen degrees of surpassing Florida A&M University and North Carolina A&T, which rank first and second in conferring bachelor's degrees upon African Americans, respectively (Cooper, 2008).

Even with higher tuition and fees than public colleges and universities, for-profit online postsecondary institutions appear to be more effective than traditional public institutions in attracting and graduating minority learners (Kazis, 2007). Of the top 100 institutions conferring degrees upon people of color, the primary producer of minority

Bachelor of Science degrees in engineering-related technologies is ITT Technical Institute of California. The number two institution conferring Bachelor of Science degrees in computer and information services upon African Americans students is Strayer University (Berg, 2005). Both of these institutions offer primarily online courses. In 2007-2008, the average tuition and fees for full-time undergraduate attendance at a four-year public university in California amounted to \$5,950 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b); at ITT Technical Institute-San Diego, California, it was \$15,600 (see also Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS] College Data 2009a). During the same year, the average tuition and fees to attend a four-year public institution in Washington, D.C. was \$3,140 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b); at Strayer University-Washington, D.C., it was \$11,670 (see also IPEDS College Data 2009b). These numbers indicate that despite higher tuition costs to attend a for-profit postsecondary institution that offers online courses, a significant number of minorities are willing to pay more to achieve access to higher education, flexibility, and convenience through distance learning.

Impact of Teaching Practices on Student Success in Online Environments

Research indicates that distance education students tend to be adult learners who are female, full-time employees, and more racially diverse compared to students who primarily take courses in face-to-face environments. Historically, learners with these nontraditional characteristics have been excluded from traditional institutions of higher education; thus, it is apparent that distance education has increased access for learners who previously found postsecondary education inaccessible. However, despite the increased access to higher education that online learning affords adults, women, working professionals, and minorities, evidence suggests that retention rates in distance education courses have declined in the last two decades (Simpson, 2003). Given the preponderance of nontraditional learners taking distance education courses, this is not surprising; nontraditional students and adult learners are known to have lower persistence rates in college compared to traditional learners (Rovai, 2003). The National Center of Educational Statistics estimates that 50% of nontraditional undergraduate students will drop out of college without achieving a degree after three years compared to 12% of traditional students (Rovai & Downey, 2009).

The challenge of retaining nontraditional students in college extends to the online environment. In a survey of 4,100 online learners, researchers found a dropout rate of 71% (Simpson, 2003). Although no national statistic exists that represents the proportion of distance learners who complete distance education programs and courses, many postsecondary administrators agree that course-completion rates are usually 10 to 20 percentage points higher in traditional courses than in online courses (Carr, 2000) and that retaining students is a greater problem in distance education courses than it is in face-to-face courses (Allen & Seaman, 2009). In Allen and Seaman's (2009) report of online education in the United States, only 13% of the chief academic officers surveyed at public institutions stated that retaining students is not a greater problem for online courses than it is for face-to-face courses.

Multiple factors influence a student's decision to drop an online course. Research indicates that a student's demographic characteristics, motivation, academic abilities, personality traits, social factors, isolation, alienation, and locus of control may impact their retention in a distance education environment (Dille & Mezack, 1991; Levy, 2007; Parker, 1999; Rovai & Downey, 2009). Bean and Metzner's (1985) student attrition model, which is grounded in Tinto's (1975) student integration model, attempts to explain attrition of nontraditional adult learners, whom they define as individuals 25 years of age or older who are commuters and/or part-time learners. Bean and Metzner (1985) suggest that nontraditional student persistence is based on student-institution fit. However, research also indicates that pedagogical practices can influence student success and retention in distance learning courses and programs (Levy, 2007). In a study conducted by Chyung, Winiecki, and Fenner (1998) that focused on adult students taking distance education courses, researchers discovered that students' satisfaction with the learning environment during the first two weeks of class predicted their dropout. Forty-two percent of the students who did not persist until course completion cited dissatisfaction with the learning environment as the primary reason for their voluntary withdrawal from courses (Chyung et al., 1998). In another study that investigated factors that contributed to student attrition in distance education courses, students who dropped out of an online course were asked what the institution could have done to retain them. The top seven responses were as follows: improving teaching quality (29%); more detailed feedback on assignments from instructors (17%); time management issues (13%); exam support (12%); greater empathy from academic staff (11%); greater provision of resources, such as lecture notes and personal computers (11%); and greater clarity about assignments (10%; Simpson, 2003). Most of the student responses fell into the categories of improving teaching, improving course design, and improving learning assessments.

Park and Hee (2009) conducted a study with 147 adult learners who either completed or dropped an online course, and their research findings indicated that learners were less likely to drop out when they were satisfied with their online courses and when the course content was relevant to their lives. Other research has supported these results. For instance, Levy (2007) found that learners' satisfaction with online courses and the relevance of such courses to their jobs were two significant factors that affected their decisions to either drop out or to persist. Students who dropped out reported significantly lower satisfaction with online learning than students who successfully completed an online course (Levy, 2007). Moreover, using survey data collected from 295 students enrolled in online courses at two public universities in Taiwan, Sun et al. (2008) evaluated 13 independent variables and their relationships to student satisfaction in an online course. The researchers found that out of all the variables evaluated, course quality had the strongest association with student satisfaction. Course quality includes the overall course design, teaching materials, and student-teacher and student-student interactivity (Sun et al., 2008). In a similar vein, Shea, Pickett, and Pelz (2003) studied the relationship between pedagogy and course design and students' satisfaction with online courses. The study's results indicated that student satisfaction in distance education correlated to issues related to instructional design, instructors' discourse facilitation, and instructors' direct interaction (Shea, Pickett, & Pelz, 2003). Research

on student dropout and persistence in distance education indicates that the quality of online courses and teaching practices can influence student satisfaction and retention.

Part of the challenge associated with improving student satisfaction and retention in online courses is that for nontraditional adult learners, who represent the majority of online students, traditional postsecondary instructional methods, such as “chalk and talk” lectures, are ineffective teaching practices in online, hybrid, and face-to-face environments (Kazis, 2007). Adult learners are different from traditional college-age students in that they tend to be practical problem solvers who are autonomous, self-directed, and goal oriented (Howell, 2003). Adult learning theories and models have contributed to our understanding of adults as learners (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). According to Knowles (1990), andragogy is based on the following assumptions: adults move from dependency toward self-direction as they mature; adults’ experiences are rich resources for learning; adults are more problem-centered than subject-centered in learning; and adults must understand why they need to learn something (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). In a similar vein, Jarvis’s (1987) model of adult learning explains that teaching practices should integrate adults’ social experiences. Several models and theories of adult learners thus illustrate the importance of adults’ active engagement in defining learning programs and approaches to teaching. This includes instructional methods that highlight adult learners’ personal and professional experiences and teaching practices that are structured in ways that align with work settings that emphasize skill practice, use of technology, and use of case method to extract lessons (Knowles, 1990). Adult learning theories and models illustrate the importance of utilizing teaching practices that reflect adult learners’ unique attributes and learning styles in online courses.

The two strands of literature that I have reviewed indicate that the majority of distance education students are nontraditional adult learners. The literature also suggests that employing traditional face-to-face approaches to teaching and learning in online education environments is inadequate, as it can lead to student dissatisfaction and attrition. Given that studies have demonstrated that learner perceptions of the quality and appropriateness of teaching practices in e-learning environments contribute to student success and retention, teaching practices must improve in order to advance learner persistence. It is thus important to understand what motivates postsecondary institutions to change, as this information can help academic leaders facilitate the adoption of effective teaching methods in distance education courses and programs.

Kezar’s (2001) Typology of Organizational Change in Higher Education

A barrier impacting the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies in online courses is that postsecondary institutions are slow and resistant to initiating change, including changes to pedagogy. Kezar (2001) states that since American colleges and universities have long-standing missions, values, and beliefs, they are less likely to change. Furthermore, if change does occur, it is prone to happen as a result of widespread debate among stakeholders inside and outside of postsecondary institutions and following the principles of the social-cognitive approach to change (Kezar, 2001).

The social-cognitive approach is one of six models in Kezar's (2001) typology of organizational change that attempt to describe what drives change in higher education. The socio-cognitive approach maintains that change in postsecondary organizations is a response to cognitive dissonance (Kezar, 2001). Social-cognitive models emphasize the importance of discussion, single-loop and double-loop learning, understanding, and sense-making in facilitating change in colleges and universities (Kezar, 2001). According to the social-cognitive approach, organizational change takes place not because of external environmental forces, continuous quality improvement, or conflicts between powerful and less powerful groups, but because people within a higher education institution experience cognitive dissonance in which contradictory values, beliefs, or behaviors collide. Change occurs at the point of collision, as people are motivated to eliminate dissonance by altering their actions, attitudes, and ideas (Kezar, 2001).

The remaining models in Kezar's (2001) typology are life cycle, teleological, evolutionary, dialectical, and cultural approaches to change. Each approach offers different explanations for what drives change in colleges and universities. For instance, the life cycle model attributes organizational change to predefined, progressive, and rational stages (Kezar, 2001). In reference to what drives change in higher education, the life-cycle approach asserts that organizations are born and then grow, mature, and cycle through stages of renewal and decline. Change occurs not because people see the necessity of it or even desire it, but because they must adapt to different life cycle stages, as transformations are natural phenomena that cannot be prevented (Kezar, 2001). In a dissimilar vein, the teleological model assumes that change occurs because individuals foresee and observe the necessity of it. People consciously decide to engage in continuous quality improvement, such as TQM or business process reengineering, to advance change in an organization. Research indicates that this approach has been successful in initiating change in higher education institutions (Elton & Cryer, 1994; Farmer, 1990).

Change is anticipated in the teleological model, whereas in the evolutionary approach, the necessity for change is unforeseen and occurs as a reaction to shifts in the external environment. External environmental shifts lead to organizational modifications that reestablish equilibrium between the outside world and an organization (Kezar, 2001). Researchers assert that increased accountability, assessment and accreditation demands, and declining state revenues are evidence that postsecondary institutions are changing as a result of external environmental factors (Gumport & Pusser, 1999; Kezar, 2001). Unlike the evolutionary approach, the dialectical approach ascribes change to conflicts in personal belief systems and values between dominant and non-dominant cultures in an organization (Kezar, 2001). The dominant culture transforms and retransforms an organization and thus dictates what, when, and how change will occur. Principles of the dialectical approach include the importance of coalition building, persuasion, influence, persistence, and mediation to facilitate and enable change in postsecondary institutions (Kezar, 2001; Simsek & Louis, 1994). Finally, cultural models demonstrate that change is a response to alterations in the human environment, as cultures are constantly shifting and adapting (Kezar, 2001). Research indicates that multiple aspects of the cultural environment in postsecondary institutions contribute to or militate against change. These

factors include the history and tradition of the institution, symbolism, and irrational and ambiguous factors such as emotive motivations, politics, and intuition (Kezar, 2001).

Purpose of Study

This study identified factors that contributed to distance learning faculty members changing their teaching practices, including course design, pedagogy, and the assessment of student learning, to enhance student success. To conduct this research, I used the semi-structured interview method of qualitative inquiry to obtain in-depth accounts of the experiences of distance learning faculty and instructional designers. The following questions guided this study: (a) What contributes to faculty changing their teaching practices, including course design, pedagogy, and the assessment of learning? (b) Under which conditions are faculty driven to change approaches to teaching in an online environment? (c) Using Kezar's (2001) typology of organizational change, which models best explain the factors that contribute to faculty changing their teaching practices in an online environment? (d) How do faculty members decide which teaching practices to use in online courses? (e) How do faculty formally and informally assess student learning in an online environment? (f) How do results from formal and informal assessments of student learning impact teaching practices in an online environment? These six sub-questions helped to answer the primary research question of the study: Which factors contribute to distance learning faculty changing their teaching practices to enhance student success?

Methods

Description of Participants

Six faculty members who teach both online and face-to-face courses, and two distance education instructional designers participated in this study. Both of the instructional designers and two of the six faculty members were white males. One faculty member was an East Indian male. The three remaining participants were white female faculty members. All of the participants in the study worked for the same public four-year higher education institution located in a small, rural, Midwestern town. The instructional designers held master's degrees in the education-related fields of curriculum and instruction or training and development. The faculty participants worked in three different departments: Business and Accounting, Criminal Justice, and Counselor Education. At the time of the study, three faculty participants held a master's degree in the field in which they were teaching; the remaining three faculty participants held a doctoral degree in the field in which they were teaching. Most of the participants in the study had been working at the institution for 10 years or longer. The university in question prides itself on being a teaching focused institution and offers undergraduate and graduate online degrees in the disciplines of business and accounting, criminal justice, engineering, and project management.

Procedure

Since the literature suggests that teaching in online environments requires different pedagogical and course design approaches than teaching in traditional face-to-face classes, it was important to select a college or university in which faculty members had significant experience teaching students in both online and face-to-face courses. I thus identified faculty members to participate in this study whose instructional load typically included teaching both distance education and face-to-face courses in the same semester. I asked 10 faculty members to participate in the study based on the above criteria, purposeful sampling, and the scores they received on the Fall 2008 student evaluation of faculty performance and course design. This survey is administered by the institution at the end of each academic term to assess online students' satisfaction with course content, course design, pedagogy, faculty engagement, course materials, and assessments of learning. Twenty percent or more of the students who responded to the Fall 2008 faculty and course survey rated half of the faculty members I identified as potential participants below average on their teaching ability. Ninety percent or more of the students who completed the survey rated the remaining half of the potential faculty participants as average or above average on their teaching ability. Although four professors declined to participate in the study, the balance between those who were rated as average or above average on their teaching ability and those who were rated below average on their teaching ability remained unchanged. I also identified two instructional designers to participate in the study because they had extensive experience working directly with the faculty identified for the study in designing, developing, and implementing online courses.

Prior to the interviews, all of the participants were informed of the purpose of the study. One participant requested and was sent the guiding research questions prior to their interview. All of the interviews were conducted between October 30, 2009 and November 18, 2009. The interviews were intended to gather information from each participant through the use of semi-structured and open-ended questions. This format allowed me to collect a significant amount of data, which enabled me to gain an understanding of factors that contribute to distance education faculty changing their teaching methods to enhance student success in online courses. The guiding interview questions were developed before the literature review was written, and professional colleagues working in distance education and academic peers in a qualitative methods course reviewed them.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

I conducted eight face-to-face, one-on-one interviews using both open-ended and semi-structured guiding questions. All of the interviews except one were audio-recorded with a digital recorder. All of the audio-recorded interviews were manually transcribed using Microsoft Word. The constant comparison method, in which data obtained through interviews is constantly compared to discover emerging themes and inform an encompassing theory (McMillan, 2008), was used to guide my analysis and interpretation of the data. Each interview was coded with a unique numeric identifier, and to ensure the

anonymity of the participants, any reference to their names was removed from the collected data. After each interview was transcribed, I re-read the data multiple times, looking for the word “change” or related synonyms, antonyms, explanations, ideas, and examples. This process assisted with the initial organization of the data and the identification of themes and categories that cut across all of the interviews conducted. I highlighted each direct or indirect reference to the concept of change in the transcripts using the “New Comment” function in Microsoft Word. I also coded each reference with a unique numeric identifier. Moreover, I coded each reference to a factor that contributed to faculty changing their teaching practices according to one or more of the change models identified in Kezar’s (2001) typology of organizational change. I then compiled the categories and the related change models in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Next, I refined the categories to more concisely illuminate and capture patterns that spanned across the data collected from the participants. To identify meaningful and emerging themes, I continually reviewed, compared, and analyzed the transcribed interview data and compiled, reorganized, and refined the categories.

Credibility

Credibility, which is defined as the extent to which data, data analysis, and conclusions are trustworthy, is the primary standard for evaluating qualitative studies (McMillan, 2008). To establish the credibility and plausibility of the themes and patterns that emerged from my data analysis and interpretation, I triangulated the data. Triangulation was achieved by using multiple data sources, including faculty course evaluations, faculty interviews, instructional designer interviews, and an interview with the chair of an academic department. Several participants were sent their transcribed interviews. This member-checking procedure provided the participants with the opportunity to confirm the content of the transcribed interviews and clarify the data provided (McMillan, 2008). The data were reviewed and discussed with faculty members and peers familiar with qualitative research and distance education.

Reliability in qualitative research is defined as the extent to which recorded data accurately represent what truly occurred during an interview. It also applies to the interpretations and conclusions of a study (McMillan, 2008). I enhanced the reliability of this study by using a digital audio-recorder to capture the content of the interviews with the participants, integrating participant quotations in the results to support my interpretations of the data, sharing my analysis and interpretation of the data with the participants, and using member checking.

Results

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contributed to distance learning faculty members changing their teaching practices. The following questions guided this study: (a) What contributes to faculty changing their teaching practices? (b) Under which conditions are faculty driven to change approaches to teaching in an online environment? (c) Using Kezar’s (2001) typology of organizational change, which models best explain the factors that contribute to faculty changing their teaching practices in an

online environment? (d) How do faculty members decide which teaching practices to use in online courses? (e) How do faculty formally and informally assess student learning in an online environment? (f) How do results from formal and informal assessments of student learning impact teaching practices in an online environment?

The data I collected from the participants in this study illustrated that what contributes to and the conditions under which distance learning faculty are encouraged to modify their teaching practices. To do this, I used Kezar's (2001) typology of organizational change, which highlights cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is triggered when conflicting pieces of information collide and challenge an individual's established values, practices, and beliefs (Kezar, 2001). For the faculty members in this study, cognitive dissonance was triggered when they were directly confronted with new sources of information that significantly differed from their established understanding of teaching and learning in an online environment. These new information sources caused faculty participants to question their values and beliefs about how to teach effectively in an online environment. More specifically, cognitive dissonance and change occurred when faculty participants were exposed to information that illuminated substantial discrepancies between the desired impact of their teaching practices on student learning and success and its actual effectiveness in promoting these things. Furthermore, change ensued when faculty participants were exposed to information that illustrated better approaches to teaching in an online environment. This study identified three sources of information that contributed to cognitive dissonance and modifications to teaching practices among faculty participants: (a) student performance on assessments of learning; (b) institutional assessments of teaching effectiveness; and (c) training related to course design and teaching in an online environment. The following discussion explains how these information sources facilitated cognitive dissonance and changes to teaching practices among the distance learning faculty who participated in this study.

Student Performance on Assessments of Learning

In response to the guiding question about how do faculty formally and informally assess student learning in an online environment, the participants in this research identified multiple tools that they use to evaluate student learning in distance education courses.

Table 1

Tools Used in Online Learning

Assessment Tool	Assessment Type
Virtual water cooler area (online open forum discussion board) – student questions/responses	Informal
Discussion board and/or discussion forums – Student responses to instructor’s questions posted online	Formal/Informal
Timed online exams and quizzes – multiple choice, true/false, essay questions	Formal
Written assignments – e.g., research paper, case study analysis papers, responses to exercises in textbooks	Formal
Group exercises and projects submitted using PowerPoint Presentation	Formal
Student questions to instructor via email, phone etc. about assignments and/or course content	Informal

Table 1 above illustrates that the faculty members in this study primarily evaluate student learning through their written communications. The virtual water cooler, discussion board posts, timed online exams and quizzes, written assignments, and group exercises are tools that online instructors used to assess student learning by examining students’ ability to articulate their knowledge and understanding of the course content and objectives through the quality of their writing. This finding supports the instructional design methodology for online courses adopted by this institution. In response to the guiding question about how faculty members decide which teaching practices to use in their online courses, one participant stated:

We ask the faculty when they go through our training that they identify the objectives of the course, the unit and lesson outcomes. We present them with a process based [on] behavioral objectives in [that] the objective itself says that a student will do something and that’s normally described with a verb from Bloom’s Taxonomy and then there’s usually a conditional component to that, for instance, using the textbook or closed book. Whatever, just something that kind of sets the condition. Then the last piece defines how they are going to do it. For example, “the student will demonstrate their understanding or their knowledge of the topic by producing a research paper using library resources” or something along those lines. Then that objective points to a finished product, a finished action. I just gave an example of the finished product being a research paper. It could be a presentation. In some more advanced online models than what we are using, the students might actually get up in front of a camera.

Another participant supported the behavioral approach to learning with the following statement:

I use authentic assessments on my tests. I don’t know whether or not that’s the correct terminology, [but] I give them a one-page case. So, it’s a scenario that I found out of a textbook somewhere along the way. They read the case and then there are test questions that they have to pull from their notes - the concepts. They have to be able to identify those concepts in this case. If they’re not in the case they have [to explain] how they

would use them for the case. Then they have to tell me why it is a good identification or why it's a good usage. So, what I'm after here is could you apply the knowledge; can you identify the knowledge - not can you memorize it; do you understand why this is a good example; and do you understand why this is a good usage because then I know that they can transfer that knowledge to something else. So, what I'm looking for is not memorization but can they think critically or, in an application setting, can they can apply this knowledge.

Many of the participants stated that the assessment tools used in their online courses were based on behavioral objectives and parallel the methods used in their face-to-face classes. However, when I asked the participants the guiding question about how do results from formal and informal assessments of student learning impact their teaching practices, several faculty members expressed concern about their inability to comprehensively gauge student learning in online classes because of the lack of face-to-face and synchronous communications. For instance, one participant stated:

You know, teaching on campus is different because obviously I have the social aspect and I know, you know, that Ryan has not been in class for weeks so when he comes in I say, "You know Ryan, you know where have you been...I have been really worried about you." [Whereas] online I have to email and I don't see [the student's] expressions, I don't know honestly what's going on but, you know, on campus I can see him come in and I can obviously see that he's distraught, that he's not been doing well, he's been sick or whatever. So that feel is different. But assessment is the same. I still basically assess based on points so final grades are based on points. It is based slightly [more] on participation in the online environment because if they don't do it, I don't award them participation points and on-campus I don't give participation points. But on-campus and online, [the assessments are] the same.

Along similar lines, another participant stated that the lack of face-to-face interactions and relationship building between the faculty and learners in online environments may have a negative impact on student learning and the effectiveness of their teaching practices:

I get all the nonverbal stuff [in face-to-face courses] and that's so important. So part of it is, in my field, nonverbal stuff is so important. I mean, it's more important than the verbal, probably. So, yeah, I watch their body language, especially as they're learning counseling skills. So, but the other part Shenita, is the relationship. You know, I know that this is kind of qualitative but truly, if you put two equally minded, equally talented, equally professional professors [and] one has good people skills and interacts [with the students] and is flexible and has accessibility to the students [in face-to-face environments] and the other does not [like in online environments]. Likely, person A is going to be more successful with the students because the students [want] to do more. They want to seek that person out [and] they want to model after that person. So I think it goes beyond the classroom and that's what I think is different in the online [environment].

The professor also raised concerns about the amount of time she has to spend grading assignments in online courses compared to face-to-face classes. She stated:

There are so many [more] assignments in the online class [than in face-to-face classes]. I feel like I'm [always] correcting assignments and this is time-consuming because there are so many more in that way but I definitely find the face-to-face much more time consuming because I'm always building professional relationships with my students.

Additionally, in response to the inquiry about how do results from formal and informal assessments of student learning impact faculty members' teaching practices, the data collected from the participants illustrated that students' performance on exams, assignments, or discussion board posts also contributes to cognitive dissonance and changes to teaching practices in an online environment. For instance, one faculty participant asserted that when students' performance on an assignment or an exam indicated a lack of understanding of the course concepts, they reassessed their approach to teaching in an effort to identify the root cause of the problem. The professor stated:

So, I first go to me as the problem and I kinda do that with my classes here [on campus] too. I mean, I rewrite tests, I change questions, I do an assignment a different way. So, I first look to me, especially if it's not just one person, but if it's a core of people in a course, then I'm like, "Maybe I didn't explain it that well" or "Maybe I didn't give them enough time to really study the material" or "They were too quick, one after another, as far as an assessment piece, they didn't build on each other well."

The professor also stated:

[S]o I noticed that when I read their papers... and I was like, "Oh, it's very obvious...that I haven't done a good job teaching how to formulate...kinda how to really think through situations and kinda what's behind, you know, criminal behavior or what's behind mental health behavior...I haven't done a good job with that."

This excerpt suggests that faculty members view student performance on assessments of learning as an indicator of the effectiveness of their teaching practices. Students' low performance on formal assessments of learning contributes to faculty reflecting on their teaching practices to identify changes that would enhance both student success and the effectiveness of their teaching and assessment strategies.

One faculty member stated that when their online students were no longer responding to an assignment as expected, they modified their assessment techniques. The following is an excerpt from the interview:

I [Interviewer]: When do you make updates...like changes to them...like when...what triggers that decision to make changes to your courses?

R [Respondent]: If I find something which is beginning to fail, and I've never figured out why that happens.

I: Do you have any examples of that?

R: I just know that it happens...that a piece of your course will begin [to fail], and it may be technology. It may be something else that...the project that I had isn't working anymore...it isn't doing what I want it to do...that's when I begin to change. I always monitor whether ...for instance, I used to...I used to give a project, and I would start the project out asking for, "How do you feel this course is going to fit into your life?" and stuff. And the project sort of fell through after two or three years, and so I dropped it.

I: What do you mean by "fell through?"

R: It just didn't do what I was after. The students tended to give sort of, what I consider, answers that are meaningless. The first couple of times that I did it, the students were right on top of it, and I don't know whether it was a change of students.

It is evident from this excerpt that student performance on assessments of learning plays an important role in encouraging faculty to modify their teaching and assessment practices. The data from this study indicates that faculty use information from multiple assessment sources, such as papers, exams, and assignments, to reassess and modify their teaching practices.

Formal Institutional Assessments

Many of the participants in this study stated that the results of the faculty and course evaluation survey helped shape changes to their teaching practices. The survey is intended to measure student satisfaction as it relates to course design, faculty teaching practices, and the assessment of student learning. The results of the survey are distributed to faculty members and program coordinators at the end of each semester. Examples of statements on the survey include the following: the course objectives were clearly defined; the course was challenging and of appropriate rigor for the level of study; the instructor communicated with me effectively; the instructor provided timely responses to questions within two working days; and the individual assignments were relevant to the course. Several faculty participants stated that the results of the survey compelled them to reflect on and reevaluate their instructional strategies to determine if pedagogy, course design, or assessment changes were necessary. One participant stated:

[T]he feedback [from the faculty and course evaluation survey] was almost like a disappointment. So student feedback [on the survey], some new technology, and my agreement with it [that] it was not a good final exam for the students and it wasn't for me either... You know, just the feedback from the students made me change that and from myself, I thought it was kinda lame too. When I look back at it, I'm like, "That was kinda lame."

In a similar vein, another instructor stated that the feedback received from students on the faculty and course evaluation survey resulted in changes to course assignments and assessments of student learning:

I guess, how I overall assess too their feedback...Early on, when I first took the course, there were lots of abstracts and critiques and every week the assignment was, "Write an

abstract and critique it,” and that’s how the previous instructor had run the course. That’s why I asked [the program director] if I could go ahead and change that and she let me change those. So I pulled those out because literally in the feedback students were saying, “This is so boring, this is so monotonous, it’s basically testing to see if we’ve read that material...it’s just not interesting.”

The instructor continued:

[O]ne semester I got an eval [results from the faculty and course evaluation survey] that had said one of the books was dated, which it really is, but they didn’t come out with a new edition of that book, but it had some really good pictures, for example, of different stages of bruising on kids, different burn patterns that people have submerged kids in really hot water. So, it was a good book in terms of visuals, but people [students] had said that it was kinda dated, so I did take a book out and substituted in new material...So I would say that I really do weigh those evals [surveys] very heavily.

These excerpts indicate that faculty members were persuaded to change pedagogical practices, assessments of learning, and course materials based on data collected from students via formal evaluations of online faculty and courses. The data from these formal evaluations serve as another information source that challenge faculty members’ perceptions of the effectiveness of their online teaching practices. To resolve the cognitive dissonance triggered by the results of these surveys, some of which indicated student dissatisfaction with teaching practices, study participants elected to alter their instructional approaches.

Training

Prior to teaching online at the institution in question, most of the faculty interviewed for this study had no formal training in developing and designing online courses. Several participants thus stated that the one-on-one training and support they received from distance education instructional designers when developing or revising an online course helped shape their teaching practices. This training became more formalized after an important initiative was implemented at the institution in 2008. The initiative required that all online courses undergo substantial improvements to enhance student learning and course design by integrating technologies such as audio, video, and flash presentations into the course content, assessments, and lectures. Also included in this initiative was one-on-one training for faculty who were developing or revising an online course.

The instructional designer explained that faculty training focused on effective online teaching, learning, and course design as well as the use of hardware and software that supported the technologies integrated into the course. This training served as a source of information that contributed to cognitive dissonance and changes to teaching practices among the faculty participants. One professor stated that the meetings she had with the instructional designer when revising an online course helped her think differently about how to teach and assess students. She affirmed:

So, when the [distance learning initiative] thing came up...the primary goal is let's infuse more technology and current technology in the course. So in my meeting, my initial meeting [with the instructional designer], I said, "Well, the one thing that students are struggling with that may be technology and might be helpful is that case conceptualization," and so out of that became born, and then we had a whole dialog, and then [the instructional designer] threw out how about doing something with video vignettes... and so, the assessment piece then was me just, when I graded those assignments, I'm like, "It's clear the deficits," and I'm thinking, "Can I really penalize these people if I haven't done a good job...?" Could I really penalize them as far as their grades? Or should I do a better job teaching that and finding a way to capture that through a distance learning environment? Because I can't sit down and have that conversation. You don't see me like kinda of practice one in front of them, you know, it's like...you know, this kid came today, and this is what I did and why I did it. I mean, they [online students] don't get that...that interaction with me on a weekly basis like the students in this program do.

This excerpt shows that the training that the instructional designer provided to the faculty member contributed to the professor rethinking her approach to teaching, learning, and assessing in an online environment. It was through ongoing dialogues with the instructional designer that the faculty member was confronted with information that challenged established methods of assessing and teaching students in an online environment. The passage also illustrates that the professor's sudden awareness of deficiencies in her teaching practices was triggered when the instructional designer provided information about how to facilitate effective teaching and learning in an online environment. This suggests that to advance effective teaching practices among educators teaching online courses, ongoing training and support from instructional designers is important.

Discussion

The results of this study support prior research that indicates that change in postsecondary institutions can be explained through socio-cognitive models (Kezar, 2001). These organizational change models demonstrate the importance of discussion, acquiring new information, learning new approaches, and building on previously acquired knowledge to facilitate cognitive dissonance and change in organizations (Kezar, 2001). The factors that this research identified as contributing to faculty changing their teaching strategies, including course design, pedagogy, and assessment of student learning, are reflective of the notion that change is directly linked to learning and acquiring new information (Kezar, 2001). The findings of this study suggest that distance learning educators are encouraged to modify their teaching strategies in asynchronous online environments as a result of participating in one-on-one training with instructional designers, reviewing the results from formal assessments of teaching practices, and evaluating student performance on assessments of learning. These factors underscore the importance of using training and data to advance faculty learning and establish conditions for cognitive dissonance and change in postsecondary institutions. They also indicate that to create and sustain change in postsecondary institutions, faculty

should be exposed to ongoing training and multiple sources of institutional and student data that illustrate the necessity of changing their teaching practices.

This study found that the majority of the changes that the faculty participants made to their teaching practices were primarily first-order changes. This finding is similar to the results of other studies that describe change in higher education as first-order (Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2001). First-order changes are incremental adjustments and improvements made within the framework of the organization. They occur at an individual level and are characterized by evolutionary and linear change (Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2001). The changes that faculty participants made to their teaching practices were not transformational, multi-dimensional, or multi-level, and they did not cause the institution or the department to change their core missions, cultures, or modes of functioning (Kezar, 2001). On the contrary, faculty changes to teaching practices were incremental and focused on enhancing instructional effectiveness by modifying strategies and altering procedures and practices to resolve discrepancies between desired performance and actual results. This finding aligns with Boyce's (2003) assertion that improving and enhancing effectiveness is an illustration of both first-order change and single-loop learning when organizational inquiry discovers a mismatch between desired performance and results.

The institution in question in this study has yet to achieve second-order change, which is described as transformations that involve changing the organization's underlying mental models, assumptions, and values (Boyce, 2003). However, the initiative that the university implemented in 2008, which mandated that all online courses undergo improvements to enhance student learning and course design by integrating a variety of technologies into courses, has positioned the institution to advance transformations in its underlying culture, mission, and values as they relate to distance education teaching and learning. Research indicates that transformational change is facilitated when multiple stakeholders across a university come together through an organized initiative to change how an institution is structured and oriented (Boyce, 2003). Huff and Huff (2000) created a four-state model to promote transformational change in organizations. The model illustrates that incremental adaptations (i.e., first-order change) occur before the process of deciding to consider second-order change (Huff & Huff, 2000). In accordance with Huff and Huff's (2000) model, the university in question in this study has taken the first step towards transforming the organization's mental models, assumptions, and values concerning distance education teaching and learning. Increased stress on the institution, the inability of postsecondary stakeholders and leaders to continually ignore reoccurring problems, the allocation of resources, or an ineffective decision-making process can enhance the possibility of considering second-order change (Huff and Huff, 2000).

Conclusion

Limitations

The focus of this research was to understand what contributes to distance learning faculty changing their teaching practices in online instructional environments,

thus limited attention was devoted to investigating the similarities and differences between face-to-face and online teaching. Additional limitations of this study include the lack of a representative sample of participants across multiple academic institutions and the small number of participants. Furthermore, since participants were chosen partially based on purposeful sampling, the results may be biased. Researcher bias is also a possible limitation of this study. The lead researcher had prior professional relationships with many of the participants before the research was initiated.

Implications for Institutional Policy and Practices

The results from this study indicate that postsecondary leaders can encourage distance learning educators to modify teaching strategies in online courses by exposing faculty to several information sources: (a) training related to effective teaching practices in an online environment; (b) data collected from formal assessments of teaching effectiveness and course design; and (c) information gathered from student assessments of learning. These findings indicate that to advance student success and retention in online courses, college and university leaders should develop institutional policies and practices that promote increasing faculty members' access to ongoing training courses or programs related to effective online teaching practices. The training should focus on enhancing student learning by helping faculty learn how to successfully teach nontraditional learners in an online environment. Furthermore, the training policies should reflect adult learning theories and models, as research has illustrated that experiential and problem based teaching practices help adult learners connect curricular concepts to relevant knowledge and skills (CAEL, 2005). Moreover, ongoing training for postsecondary educators who teach distance education courses should be the focus of university-wide initiatives to advance student learning and success through more effective teaching methods.

In addition, institutional policies and practices should reinforce collecting, analyzing, disseminating, and discussing the findings associated with informal and formal assessments of student learning, teaching practices, and course design at all levels of an organization. Although most colleges and universities have established processes to collect this data, greater emphasis must be placed on using these information sources as tools for faculty and other institutional leaders to gain a better understanding of how an organization must change to improve student success. Cognitive dissonance and first-order change can be triggered when stakeholders across a university come together to engage in discussions about the results of assessments that evaluate student learning and teaching practices. Institutional leaders should thus implement policies and practices that encourage ongoing discussions about data collected related to student success, teaching, and course design among stakeholders who directly and indirectly influence student success in online courses.

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Graduation Rate Gaps of African American College Students at Small Liberal Arts Colleges: Causes and Remedies

Greg Rankin¹, *Central Washington University*

There is a large discrepancy in the graduation rates of African American students attending small liberal arts colleges. An example of this discrepancy can be found with peer institutions Allegheny and Hamilton Colleges. Allegheny College has a graduation rate gap between African American and White students of 37 percent while Hamilton's gap is only one percent. This study explores the gap in African American graduation rates, identifying factors that contribute to it, as well as to student success, including: location, academic and social support programs, and endowment with the intention of providing a groundwork for administrators that can be used to increase African American graduation rates.

The task of retaining students through their graduation is something college administrators struggle with constantly. They have myriads of research available to help guide them towards paths that will theoretically increase their students' graduation rates. This research, however, is mainly helpful to those that are situated in one of the institutional types that are most commonly researched. These types are, without question, the large public universities and the highly selective private colleges. There is a large gap in the research when it comes to institutions that the Carnegie Foundation defines as private, not for profit colleges that are highly residential, more selective, and have no graduate environment. These institutions are presumably rarely investigated because of a combination of factors: the small size of their student population, the fact that there seems to be more to research within larger campus settings, and the fact that they do not represent the majority of students who attend colleges or universities. In fact, the students attending small liberal arts colleges make up "a miniscule 2 percent of total enrollments" (Breneman, 1994, p. 4) in the undergraduate culture.

Although the students attending these institutions make up only a sliver of the total undergraduate population, they are incredibly important nonetheless. The students attending these institutions are no less deserving of a great college experience than those

¹Greg Rankin is an academic advisor at Central Washington University. The present article was accepted during Mr. Rankin's graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

You may contact the author at: ranking@cwu.edu

who attend larger, sometimes better-known institutions. Not only are these students deserving, but they also pay significantly more money for their education than those students attending state run institutions; in some cases upwards of 400 dollars a week (Brewer, Eide & Ehrenberg, 1998). On top of the monetary reasons these institutions and their students deserve more attention in the research is “attendance at an elite private college significantly increases the probability of attending graduate school, and more specifically, attending graduate school at a major research institution” (Brewer et al., 1998, p. 2). Because these schools are more likely to produce graduate level students at top tier research institutions, it seems logical that there should be research focusing on selective liberal arts colleges. The lack of research geared specifically towards this special class of institutions, however, results in magnificent amounts of influential research that does not fit their institution type. Without policy research conducted on their specific institutional type there is room for the possibility of a sub-par educational experience for these students. It is for this reason that this study focused on small selective liberal arts colleges.

Not only did this study look at the graduation rates at marginally researched liberal arts colleges, but it also specifically looked into the graduation rates of African American students at these institutions. While some of these institutions managed to shine when it came to African American graduation rates, others continually fell behind. While the sheer number of African Americans attending these schools paled in comparison to the White student population, there is no reason they should suffer in their college careers due to the lack of research geared specifically toward identifying programs that increase their chances at graduation. This study examined the graduation rates of African American students at small liberal arts colleges with a goal of identifying factors that can and will increase the graduation rates of those students. The study examined a particular set of institutions that has a wide range of African American graduation rates, and identified what the schools with the lower graduation rates can do to increase the success rates of their African American students.

As Theresa Smith writes, “it will be an important challenge for colleges and universities to help underrepresented minority students bridge these gaps so that they can succeed (1999, p. 12). It is this challenge that this study will address. Using information gathered from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching gathered during the 2003-04 school year, and the National Center for Educational Statistics, a large discrepancy in the graduation rates of African American students attending different small liberal arts colleges was revealed. For example: Allegheny College’s graduation rate for all students is 73 percent and for White students the graduation rate is 75 percent. Taken alone these numbers are not terribly depressing; however, the problem arises because for African Americans the graduation rate is only 38 percent. These differences represent a 37 percent gap in the graduation rates between African American students and their White counterparts. Allegheny’s peer institution, Hamilton College, has an overall graduation rate of 93 percent, and a White student graduation rate of 89 percent; the graduation rate for African Americans students is 90 percent. Here, the gap between White students and African American students is a positive one percent compared to negative 37 at Allegheny College. This large gap in graduation rates is exactly what this project will address. Whatever Hamilton College is doing to retain and graduate African

American students, it is working, and this study will work to identify these factors so that institutions like Allegheny College can bring the graduation rates of their African American scholars up to or above the graduation rate of the rest of the student population. This problem will be explored through an extensive review of already existing literature regarding student retention and success and the results will be supported by the findings of this study.

Problem Statement

As seen in the introduction, although the Carnegie Institute defines many schools as being equivalent to one another, there exists a large gap between the graduation rates of African American students and White students. This gap, however, does not exist at other equivalent institutions. The problem this paper investigated is why the African American graduation rates at some institutions lag so far behind the African American graduation rates of other equivalent institutions. Moving beyond this problem, this study will seek to reveal policies and programs that lagging schools can use to remedy their problems.

Research Questions

What causes institutions with high African American graduation rates to achieve those levels? What can institutions with low African American graduation rates do to increase their graduation rates? Within these two questions lie more specific questions that seek positive correlations between the African American graduation rate of the institution and factors such as: the overall student population, the African American student population, the White student population, the graduation rates of the institution for African American students and White students, the distance from a major metropolitan area, the existence of peer mentoring programs, and the existence of academic support programs.

Literature Review

Upon examining higher education literature, it quickly becomes apparent that underrepresented students often do not succeed at attaining a college education (Kezar & Eckel, 2007). In fact, although African American enrollment in college has risen 42.7 percent between 1993 and 2003, 30.1 percent of all African American students drop out of college before they attain a degree (Kezar & Eckel, 2007). Contrast this percentage to that of White students who persist and attain a degree 58 percent of the time (Kezar & Eckel, 2007). While over half of all White students succeed in getting their bachelor's degrees, less than half of all African American students can say the same. These figures clearly show a problem with the current state of affairs regarding African American student success. Further supporting the figures of Kezar and Eckel (2007), Vincent Tinto (1993) uses research conducted by Loo and Rolison and Attinasi to assert, "students of color, specially admitted or not, face particularly severe problems in gaining access to the mainstream of social life in largely white institutions" (p. 74). As seen in the problem

statement, graduation rates at the small liberal arts colleges within this study run the gamut from above, to far below the average graduation rates set out by Kezar and Eckel (2007).

Identifying programs and factors contributing to the successful retention and graduation of college students leads to a number of resources. In terms of overall student retention, the most prominent source was produced by Vincent Tinto (1993). From Tinto's work, I intend to draw some basic principles known to affect student attrition and graduation. These basic principles will serve as a jumping-off point for this study as they do not specifically address the population of students this study investigates. Some of the principles affecting student attrition found by Tinto include faculty involvement, a strong sense of community within the campus, and the campus's ability to assimilate the student into the campus culture. Tinto (1993) has identified the first years of students' college experiences as the most crucial in determining their success at the institution. In a succinct paraphrase of Tinto's main points, Guiffrida (2006) comments that, "according to Tinto, the more that students are academically and/or socially integrated into the university, the greater their commitment to completing their degrees" (p. 452).

While giving an address at Staffordshire University in Amsterdam about student retention and graduation, Tinto argues that students need strong support structures around them. He argues that especially in their first year of college, students are in need of specialized support. This support can come in the forms of "summer bridge programs, mentor programs, and student clubs" (Tinto, 2003, p. 1). Along with this structured type of support, Tinto claims that support can be found in the forms of student clubs or through the day-to-day activities of the campus. One way of achieving this day-to-day support is to foster strong relationships between faculty, staff, and students (Tinto, 1993). Tinto writes, "whatever its form, support needs to be readily available and connected to other parts of student collegiate experience, not separated from it" (Tinto, 2003, p. 1). In short, Tinto's theory calls for students to be integrated into the campus community and states that if they are fully integrated, they will persist and graduate at higher levels.

Tinto (1993) calls for several specific forms of intervention that he argues will enhance a student's chances at graduation. Some recommended interventions are pre-entry assessment programs that identify specific student needs; transition assistance programs geared toward helping students cope with changes in social, academic, and residential difficulties; and maintaining early contact in order to build community ties amongst new college students. With early contact and community-building in mind, Tinto (1993) warns against using faculty and staff in this role. He claims that students are able to learn best from other students who have already inserted themselves successfully into the campus community (1993).

Once students have been pre-screened for their strengths and weaknesses, are linked with those who have already become acclimated to the campus, and have begun managing the transition successfully, Tinto (1993) provides other recommendations for ensuring student success. The first of these is maintaining academic involvement, which can be fostered through specialized courses that "build learning and community membership" (Tinto, 1993, p. 169). Tinto (1993) also urges colleges to maintain monitoring and early warning policies. Linked to early warning mechanisms is the importance of counseling and advising (Tinto, 1993) on student success.

While the bulk of Tinto's theory is geared toward majority college students, Tinto does offer brief recommendations regarding the increase of retention rates for students of color (1993). Because "students of color generally are less likely than white students to see themselves as being integrated within the mainstream of life in largely white colleges" (Tinto, 1993, p. 75), Tinto explores some specific interventions he believes will increase the retention of students of color. Tinto (1993) recognizes that "students of color are, on the average, more likely to be academically at-risk and to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds than are white students generally" (p. 185). In light of these two assertions, Tinto (1993) argues that the main strategy campuses can employ to ensure their programs for students of color succeed is to "integrate those programs within the mainstream of the institution's academic, social, and administrative life" (p. 184). With regards to students of color, Tinto calls for an increased focus on advising and counseling that are specifically designed for these students. Tinto (1993) does not expand upon this need too deeply but does encourage campuses to hire staff members who are of the same ethnicity as the targeted students. Tinto (1993) also recommends building personal and social support structures and supportive student communities for students of color. However, Tinto (1993) also warns of "the dangers of excessive segmentation of institutional life that those programs may engender" (p. 186). Because of these "dangers," Tinto downplays their effectiveness in making students a viable member of the campus community (1993).

Tinto (1993) concludes that the most important way for an institution to keep students enrolled and on their path to graduation is for the institution to be fully committed to ensuring its students are assimilated into the college's culture. When speaking of the importance of institutional commitment, Tinto (1993) writes, "institutional commitment is the commitment on the part of each and every member of the institution for the welfare, the social and intellectual growth, of all members of the institution" (p. 212). Tinto (1993) cites a direct relationship between an institution's ability to retain students and its ability to "reach out and make contact with students and integrate them into the social and intellectual fabric of institutional life" (p. 204). If institutions make a concerted effort to engage and assimilate their students into the campus community, students will more likely be retained (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's theory calls on students to be tied directly into the campus community and is supported by Jacobs and Archie (2008). In their paper, they find that a "sense of community was shown to be a positive predictor of student persistence in two diverse settings, indicating that sense of community is an important factor in student persistence research" (p. 284). These findings help to show how support programs geared toward familiarizing students to a campus can be incredibly helpful because they allow students to gain a full picture of what happens on a college campus.

Muraskin and Lee (2004) follow and support the theoretical footsteps of Tinto in a Pell Institute study where they examine student retention and graduation. They found that institutions with high graduation rates shared many characteristics. Beyond characteristics such as freshman orientation programs, personalized academic planning, merit-based financial aid for high achieving students, and virtually unchangeable institutional characteristics, Muraskin and Lee (2004) found that institutions fare better in terms of graduation rates if they maintain a faculty who knows the students personally

and are focused strongly on teaching. Muraskin and Lee (2004) also found that having small class sizes, a developmental education program, and a residential campus contributed to increased student graduation rates. The final factor that Muraskin and Lee (2004) found to favorably affect graduation rates was having an institution and administration that actively and explicitly works to increase student retention (Muraskin & Lee, 2004). Muraskin and Lee (2004) are supporting Tinto's (1993) theory by arguing in favor of leading students toward more campus engagement and integration. Muraskin and Lee (2004) are, in turn, supported by Demaris and Kritsonis (2008), who argue that it is incredibly important for students to be able to integrate and adapt to the campus culture because it helps with student retention.

Between Muraskin and Lee (2004), Demaris and Kritsonis (2008), and Jacobs and Archie (2008), there is strong support for Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention. These researchers determined that everything from student-oriented programs to institutional characteristics could affect student retention and graduation. However, upon further research, understanding the differences in cultures and the importance of a student's ability to have his or her culture supported by the campus climate also proves to be imperative to student success.

Although Tinto's theory of student retention is often revered within the field of higher education, Tierney (1999) offers one problem with it. In his study, Tierney argues that Tinto fails to account for the importance of cultural integrity within the African American community (p. 82). Tierney argues that Tinto's retention model calls for minority students to undergo "cultural suicide" (Tierney, 1999, p. 82). By cultural suicide, Tierney means that students are required to break from their own cultural norms and fully accept the norms of the campus they are attending. Tierney considers Tinto's model a false dichotomy for minority students that calls on students to either leave behind their cultural identities and fully assimilate into the college's culture or, if they fail to do so, fail at college (1999).

The idea that African American students must undergo a certain "cultural suicide" in order to succeed in college is something Tierney disagrees with and instead prefers to support the idea that "when minority college students are able to affirm their own cultural identities, their chances for graduation increase" (p. 84). Instead of calling on African American students to wash away their cultural identities, Tierney argues that institutions ought to find ways to allow these students to affirm their identities. This affirmation, if done in accordance with strong academic and social learning goals, will help offer African American students a better opportunity to succeed at college (Tierney, 1999). After explaining the flaws of Tinto's (1993) theory of retention, Tierney argues his own revised strategy.

Tierney's theory is an "expanded notion of what Tinto has called academic and social integration" (p. 89). His expansion of Tinto's theory calls for a model where African American students do not divorce themselves from their culture; instead, they will be able to embrace their identities. Tierney calls for a break from simple assimilation in favor of a system of "contestation and multiple interpretations" (p. 89). This new system will not only benefit the African American students who are no longer being forced to change or fail, but it will also help the institutions as a whole (Tierney, 1999). By allowing African American students the opportunity to affirm their cultural identities,

“campuses themselves will become more democratic spheres of educational opportunity” (p. 89). Without this change from Tinto’s (1993) model, Tierney believes campuses will continue to struggle with the same retention and graduation rate problems of the past (1999).

Tierney’s assertion is supported by Kezar and Eckel (2007), who found that campuses should mold their cultures to fit those of students of color. If these changes are made, a campus could become a place where students of color are able to affirm who they are (Tierney, 1999) instead of committing cultural suicide, thereby allowing them a greater chance of success (2007). If this is done, Kezar and Eckel believe students of color will be more likely to succeed (2007). Tierney’s (1999) suggestion also offers a way for campuses to move forward from the problems of a homogeneous student body, which is seen in Muraskin and Lee’s (2004) study. Campuses must become places where multiple cultures are fostered instead of simply assimilated in order to avoid “cultural suicide” (Tierney, 1999).

Guiffrida (2006) also expands upon Tinto’s theory on student departure much like Tierney. In short, he argues, “students can become comfortable in the college environment without abandoning supportive relationships at home or rejecting the values and norms of their home communities” (p. 457). Guiffrida, however, takes Tierney’s theory of maintaining one’s culture to the next level by revealing that “Tinto’s interpretation excludes the well-documented benefits of connecting with people outside the university system who share the student’s cultural heritage” (p. 485). He then argues that students should embrace the cultural connections they have at home as well as in the community and on campus. His argument also showcases the importance of student organizations that are geared toward African American students. Whether they are simply in place to celebrate one’s culture or to try to enact specific social change, Guiffrida argues that student organizations can play a positive role in African American student retention and graduation (2006). Guiffrida’s adaptation of Tinto’s theory is aligned closely with that of Tierney’s: They both cite that Tinto’s theory calls for students to become fully integrated into the campus community, and this integration could prove to be more detrimental than beneficial for students of color.

Both Tierney and Guiffrida’s critiques of Tinto’s retention model are supported by Rodgers and Summers, who argue in favor of a highly included African American student community (2008). They write that increasing a student’s ethnic identity can have myriad positive outcomes. This consideration mirrors the theories of both Tierney and Guiffrida because it calls for African American students not to be cut off from their cultural identities as Tinto suggests; instead, those identities should be affirmed. Further support for the necessity of colleges and universities to create an integrated environment for African American students is presented by Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, and Kuh (2008). Kinzie et al. found that first-year students who scored higher levels of engagement with the campus community were more likely to return for their second year (p. 26). Kinzie et al.’s findings suggest that students from underrepresented backgrounds should be the focus of campus administrators. This focus should seek to identify and implement early intervention strategies geared toward alleviating students’ problems before they arise (2008).

More support for social programs geared toward underrepresented students and their success is found in Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) paper. They write, "ethnic subcultures that focus on academic effort and 'success' in college are more likely to facilitate integration of their members into the college social and academic systems (and thereby enhance survival in college)" (p. 82). This integration helps students feel supported throughout their transition into college. All in all, Nagasawa and Wong (1999) write, "for minority students then, ethnic social networks are likely to maximize success in college" (p. 83). Nagasawa and Wong (1999) also briefly consider the importance of critical mass. Critical mass is considered to be "the notion of what is a 'sufficiently large' number of minority students to form a viable community" (p. 82).

Nagasawa and Wong (1999) also consider the issue of critical mass. They believe that critical mass is important to the success of minority students on campus as it is necessary to foster the formation of the social networks they argue are important. They contend that this critical mass must be made up of students "of their own ethnic group" (p. 86). Nagasawa and Wong argue that critical mass functions to "reduce not only the physical and social size of the campus but also isolation on campus" (p. 86), thereby helping with the success of minority students. Their argument in favor of critical mass, however, is not fully supported by the findings of this study. In fact, Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagerdorn (1999) write:

[M]erely increasing the number of minorities on campus without the benefit of a well thought out strategy is inherently dangerous; research on school desegregation shows that discrimination and racial tensions climb as the proportion of minorities to whites decreases (p. 154).

When Nagasawa and Wong's (1999) argument is examined without considering other research, it becomes clear that it fails to take into account the importance of the theories put forth by Tierney and Guiffrida. Simply arguing in favor of a large number of African American students on campus does nothing to allow them to affirm their own cultural identities, especially if, as Tinto's theory suggests, those students are called upon to undergo "cultural suicide" (Tierney, 1999). Cabrera et al.'s (1999) study actually found that "disengagement with family, friends, and past communities is not a precondition for the successful adjustment to college; the reverse appears to be more truthful" (p. 152).

Once the case has been made that a) minority students do not need to divorce themselves from their culture and completely adopt the culture of the institution they are attending (Guiffrida, 2006; Tierney, 1999), b) critical mass may not play the end-all role in minority student success (Cabrera et al., 1999), and c) there is a need for specific support programs designed to aid in student retention and success (Nagasawa and Wong, 1999), the need emerges to identify those specific support programs that can aid in increasing student retention. Support programs geared toward helping African American students succeed in college offer a way for students to remain connected (Cabrera et al., 1999).

Tinto (1993), Muraskin et al. (2004), and Kinzie et al (2008) are not the only scholars to support the idea that freshman orientation programs help African American students become more engaged in the campus community. A study conducted by Wilkie

and Kuckuck (1989) also shows “that high-risk college freshmen (N=74) that successfully completed a freshman orientation course were less likely to drop out and achieved higher grade point averages over a three-year period than students not in an orientation course” (p. 1). Although Wilkie and Kuckuck do not focus specifically on African American students, they do focus on high-risk students. The comparison between African American students and high-risk students is not difficult to make since African Americans are often categorized as a high-risk population in the college community (Gill, 1992). Smith (1999) also lends her voice to that of Gill’s in terms of categorizing African American students as an at-risk (or high-risk) population. She explains that underrepresented students (including African American students) tend to do less well in the college setting than their white counterparts (Smith, 1999). Smith’s findings support the categorization of African American students as a high-risk population, dispelling any concerns over the validity of Wilkie and Kuckuck’s (1989) arguments in this study.

Peer mentoring programs have also been shown to have a positive effect on the success of students at the college level. Studies completed by Terrion and Leonard (2007) and Brawer (1996) help to define peer-mentoring programs and show the ways they can contribute to student success. Terrion and Leonard define peer mentoring as a program “in which qualified students provide guidance and support to vulnerable students to enable them to navigate through their education” (p. 149). Brawer’s (1996) study also helps to support peer mentoring programs and the assertion that they can influence student retention. Brawer reports that Saint Clair County Community College’s peer mentoring program proved effective in increasing the retention rates of the targeted population (1996). Brawer’s results offer strong support for my inclusion of peer mentoring support programs in this study.

Academic support programs also play a major role in student success as supported by Harter (2000). Harter examines the Project Assuring Student Success program and its beneficial effect on the student population at Mercy College of Northwest Ohio. Harter (2000) describes how the program developed a center to focus on “skills development programs” (p. 3), a faculty training seminar, and a center offering remedial classes in reading, math, and writing skills (2000). Harter (2000) reports that as a result of the program’s implementation, the institution’s retention rate rose from 82 to 89 percent.

Method

The methodology used in this study began with selecting a group of institutions using the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s definitions. An extensive literature review was conducted in order to evaluate different retention strategies and their effectiveness on African American students. The literature review also identified what academic and co-curricular programs the study should focus on when looking at African American graduation rates. After identifying these programs and placing them into categories based on quality, a statistical analysis was conducted in order to find the direct correlations between identified factors.

Sample

The institutions investigated within this project were identified using classifications from The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching¹. By selecting the desired variables, the Carnegie Foundation produced a list of institutions fitting the requested prerequisites. The variables were chosen based upon the categorization of one of the focus institutions. Every variable that the Carnegie Foundation attributed to the single chosen institution was selected for the query. This particular institution was chosen as it represents a small liberal arts college known to the author. The resulting list included 42 institutions that matched every trait of the single institution, of which became this study's focus. Once the list of focus schools was identified, each school was evaluated to determine the gap between the African American and white graduation rates. The study's focus schools were then narrowed down to the institutions with the largest gaps falling between 31 and 10 percent and the institutions with the smallest gaps ranging from a positive twelve percent gap to negative six percent. There are a total of 21 schools identified with either high or low gaps with the breakdown being twelve high gap and nine low gap institutions. The chosen criteria met by all focus schools are: four-year or above and private not-for-profit, arts and science focus with no graduate coexistence, exclusively undergraduate four-year, full-time four-year with a more selective admissions policy, low transfer in-rate, small four-year (1,000 – 2,999 students), highly residential, and baccalaureate College – Arts and Sciences.

Units of Institutional Measurement

The focus institutions were compared using the following factors that were identified based upon the literature as factors that could contribute to retention and graduation rates, as well as on the overall necessity of gaining the information: overall student population, African American student population, white student population, overall graduation rate, African American graduation rate, White student graduation rate, distance from a major metropolitan area, and the types and quality of support programs offered.

The data pertaining to graduation rates, student demographics, and population numbers was obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), a division of the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics². The samples used were gathered by the government using data from the 2006 academic year.

Data referencing the distance institutions are located from major metropolitan areas was obtained using Google Maps³. For the purpose of this study, major metropolitan area can be defined as the nearest city with a population over 95,000 residents as defined by the United States Census Bureau, and based off the 2000 US census. The nearest metropolitan areas were located, and driving directions were then

¹ Available at <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/>

² Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>

³ Available at <http://maps.google.com/maps?client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&hl=en&channel=s&tab=wl&q=>

obtained using Google Maps. After calculating the approximate distance from the institution, the nearest metropolitan area was added to the data.

The data pertaining to student support programs and services was obtained from each institution's website. Institutions were evaluated based on their having or not having the following resources: a staffed multicultural center, a pre-freshman orientation for incoming African American students, a peer mentoring system lasting at least through the freshman year, more than one student organization focusing on African American culture, and academic programs or concentrations centered on African American studies. Institutions were then coded using these indicators. In order for the data to represent the opportunities of all African American students attending the institutions, federal and state funded programs were *not* included in the data. These state and federal programs include but are not limited to TRiO⁴ and POSSE⁵. While both programs aim to help underrepresented students and it would seem this purpose would make them ideal for this study, they do not necessarily help every underrepresented student on campus. Because both programs have only a limited number of slots available, they cannot serve the entire population, and therefore were not included in the study. Instead, the only programs counted in this study were programs available to every underrepresented student on campus.

Institutions with at least four of the five factors were assigned as a level one institution. Institutions with none of these factors, or institutions that may have only had one or two were assigned as a level three institution. Level two institutions were designated as such because they did not have enough programs to be considered a level one, but they did have significantly more than a level three institution.

Limitations

The main limitation this study faces is the lack of large numbers of students for the sample sizes. Since this study is examining African American students at small liberal arts colleges, the numbers of students are limited. Not only are there few students within this institutional type, but as they are all predominantly White institutions, the numbers of African American students are low. However, this being said, there still existed statistically relevant correlations, even with the limited numbers of students.

Another possible limitation of this study was the availability of program data. The data regarding the type and number of student-oriented programs was gathered using the institutions' websites. It is possible that some of the institutions had programs that were not on their websites. However, as seen in Kezar and Eckel (2007), in order for an institution to best move toward becoming a place where all students can fit their cultural selves the entire institution must be behind the change. This raises the question, how much institutional buy-in can there be if, in our digital age, key underrepresented support programs and services are not represented on the institution's website? Given the

⁴ The Federal TRiO Programs are educational opportunity outreach programs designed to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>

⁵ The Posse Foundation identifies, recruits and trains student leaders from public high schools to form multicultural teams called "Posses." Available at <http://www.possefoundation.org/main/learn/index.cfm>

research on the matter, an institution's website was taken as a reasonable representation of an institution's actual resources; if a program was not accessible via the website it was concluded not to exist. While this may not necessarily be the case, this study assumed it was for the purpose of data collection.

Statistical Interpretation of the Data

The statistical analysis was performed using basic statistical methods. In this study, the dependent variable is always African American graduation rate, while the independent variables include the distance the campus is from a major metropolitan area, overall graduation rate, total number of students including overall, African American and White. Other independent variables considered were the type and quality of programs offered, as well as the White student graduation rate. In order to test the various hypotheses, the independent variables change. Using SPSS statistical software, the variables were manipulated in order to find possible correlations. Specifically, Spearman bivariate correlations were sought. The Spearman method was chosen over Pearson because it is not a random sampling of schools involved in the study but instead was decided based upon institution type.

Table 1

Focus Institutions

School	Distance From Major Metropolitan Area	Overall Number of Students	Overall Graduation Rate	African American Graduation Rate	White Graduation Rate	Number of students: African American	Number of students: White
Wellesley College	17 Miles Boston, MA	2331	94%	96%	91%	133 5.7%	1044 44.8
Lafayette College	19 Miles Allentown, PA	2346	92%	95%	91%	113 4.8%	1945 82.9
Swarthmore College	20 Miles Philadelphia, PA	1479	96%	94%	92%	102 6.9%	700 47.3
Amherst College	26 Miles - Springfield, MA	1612	96%	93%	96%	151 9.4%	724 44.9%
Claremont McKenna College	35 Miles – Los Angeles, CA	1140	84%	90%	89%	50 4.4%	641 56.3%
Grinnell College	54 Miles – Des Moines, IA	1577	92%	90%	89%	66 4.2%	1056 67%
Hamilton College	48 Miles – Syracuse, NY	1809	93%	90%	89%	69 3.8%	1322 73.1%
Pomona College	33 Miles Los Angeles, CA	1533	100%	90%	96%	100 6.5%	812 53%
Wheaton College	40 Miles Boston, MA	1569	86%	87%	75%	52 3.3%	1236 78.8%
Allegheny College	93 Miles – Pittsburgh, PA	2053	73%	38%	75%	31 1.5%	1909 93%
College of Wooster	60 Miles – Cleveland, OH	1846	88%	52%	79%	68 3.7%	1384 75%
Denison University	36 Miles – Columbus, OH	2328	90%	52%	81%	121 5.2%	1943 83.5%
Beloit College	75 Miles – Milwaukee, WI	1385	85%	61%	74%	36 2.6%	1163 83.6
Carleton College	44 Miles – Minneapolis, MN	1936	97%	63%	89%	108 5.6%	1413 73%
DePauw University	49 Miles – Indianapolis, IN	2397	92%	64%	80%	132 5.5%	2061 86%
Davidson College	23 Miles – Charlotte, NC	1683	95%	71%	88%	99 5.9%	1312 78%
Colby College	186 Miles – Boston, MA	1871	94%	76%	91%	33 1.8%	1553 83%
Union College	20 Miles – Albany, NY	2252	91%	77%	85%	58 2.6%	1851 82.2%
Haverford College	12 Miles – Philadelphia, PA	1168	98%	80%	89%	74 6.4%	809 69.3%

Results

The focus institutions used in this study, along with their distance from a major city, overall graduation rates, African American graduation rates, White graduation rates, overall number of students, number of White students, and the number of African American students as obtained through The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Google Maps, and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System are represented in Table 1. Using the results found in this table this study used the Spearman statistical technique in order to find correlations between the different factors found in Table 1.⁶

There is a moderately strong negative correlation ($\rho = -.588$, $p < .01$) between African American graduation rates and the distance the institution is located from major cities. It also shows the lack of a significant correlation between the number of African American students and their graduation rates at any alpha level below .05.

There is a strong positive correlation ($\rho = .726$, $p < .01$) between the graduation rates of White students and the graduation rates of African American students. It also shows that there is a weak negative correlation ($\rho = -.488$, $p < .05$) between the graduation rates of African American students and the number of White students.

There is a moderate negative correlation ($\rho = -.528$, $p < .05$) between the graduation rate of African American students and the types of programs the schools have available as measured by the amount of outreach the programs provide. The correlations found based off the information regarding the focus institutions' program types, which were ranked on a scale from one to three, where one represents an institution with a high level of quality outreach programs and three represents an institution lacking in outreach programs.

There exists a weak negative correlation ($\rho = -.451$, $p < .05$) between the graduation rate of African American students and academic programs in African/Africana Studies. It also shows a moderate negative correlation ($\rho = -.516$, $p < .05$) between the graduation rate of African American students and the institutions having a peer mentoring program geared specifically towards African American scholars. The other factors within the program group that were analyzed and showed no significant correlations were: whether or not there was an: orientation program, more than one student organization, or a staffed multi-cultural center. The staffed or non-staffed distinction was made as it is difficult to imagine a non-staffed multi-cultural center filling the same need as a center with a staff.

There is also a moderate positive correlation ($\rho = .687$, $p < .01$) between the size of an institutions endowment and the graduation rate of African American students. It shows another moderate correlation ($\rho = -.526$, $p < .05$) between the types of programs a school offers specifically for African American students and the size of the institutions endowment.

⁶ Any time a correlation is referred to it was found using SPSS statistical software with the Spearman statistical technique.

Discussion

Although it may seem that some of the factors influencing African American graduation rates are unchangeable, like the size of an institution's endowment or its location, this study has found factors that the literature suggests are stronger than the concrete situation of an institution. These factors are the key to overcoming the hurdle some institutions face when it comes to their African American graduation rates. Take for example, the correlation between program types and African American graduation rates. Even without nearby major metropolitan areas, schools are able to overcome the lack of cultural activities allowing African American students to "affirm their own cultural identities" so that "their chances for graduation increase" (Tierney, 1999, p. 84). This can be accomplished by introducing and supporting strong social and academic programs geared towards the African American community (Cabrerria et al., 1999; Guiffrida, 2006; Tierney, 1999). Most specifically, peer mentoring and academic programs were found to have the strongest correlation with African American graduation rates when examined one at a time. They are also perfect examples of a social and an academic way for African American students to maintain close ties with their culture, as this is an invaluable factor in determining the success rates of these students (Guiffrida, 2006; Tierney, 1999).

Although this study found a significant correlation between African American graduation rates and the distance an institution is located from a major city, there are institutions, like Grinnell College ranking seventh from the bottom in terms of its distance from a major city, who manage to make up for their distance from a major city with their superior on-campus resources.

Recommendations

The results of this study can and should be used by administrators in order to increase the graduation rates of African Americans at their institutions. The first recommendation is to implement a peer mentoring and orientation program for incoming African American students. This will allow students the ability to form bonds with student mentors as well as gain a better understanding of the campus before the rigors of the academic year begin. Secondly, institutions should strive to incorporate academic programs geared toward African American students into their curriculum. These programs will help students affirm their cultural identities (Tierney, 1999) in an academic way. Examples of these academic fields of study include Black Studies and Africana Studies programs. The creation of a multicultural center is a third important recommendation. This center should serve as the center of cultural, academic, and social change on campus and will allow students a recognized outlet for their activities. The final recommendation of this study rests less on the creation of programs and more on the importance of having a caring and thoughtful staff on campus. Campuses should make sure they have a dedicated staff that is devoted to working towards making the campus a place where African American students do not feel the need to commit "cultural suicide" (Tierney, 1999). The following is a concise list of the above recommendations that will serve institutions in providing a campus community that serves to increase the graduation rates of African American students: implement a peer mentoring and orientation program

for incoming African American students, create academic programs geared toward African American students (e.g., Black studies, Africana studies, etc.), create a multicultural center as a location able to act as the center of cultural and activist events on campus, and hire a dedicated staff whose personal goals align with the goal of increasing the graduation rates of African American students.

Future Research

This study could become more comprehensive in a number of ways. One of the most important advances this study could undergo would be a more in-depth investigation into the academic and social programs the schools offer to their African American population. This could include, but is not limited to, the creation and distribution of a survey to students and program staff at the institutions in order to get a firsthand account of the quality of the programs. It would also be beneficial to conduct exit surveys at the focus institutions on both graduating and departing students in order to gauge their complete experience with the campus environment. Another factor that could be helpful in this study would be to explore a possible correlation between African American graduation rates and the number of minority faculty on campus. Further exploration into the area of endowments would also be an interesting and possibly important addition to this study.

Conclusion

The gaps in graduation rates between African American and White students shown in this research represent a significant problem administrators face when trying to make their campuses viable educational communities for all of their students. As the literature reveals, there are many policies and programs that campuses can enact to enhance the chances of their students graduating. More specifically, the data collected shows clear gaps in the graduation rates of White and African American students at some institutions and no gaps at others. By examining correlations between African American graduation rates and different institutional factors this study identified many areas where institutions are able to change their policies and services offered in an attempt to increase the graduation rates of their African American students. By developing orientation programs with peer mentors, adding academic programs such as Black studies, and by incorporating a staffed multicultural center into the campus community, small private liberal arts colleges with low African American graduation rates can shrink those gaps and move toward a more equitable educational system. Without these changes, the gaps will remain, and countless African American students will not only be missing out on the same educational experience as White students, but more importantly will be missing out on a quality college education. This inequity is something the educational community and, more specifically, college administrators must not allow.

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