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THE MAJORITY AS THE MINORITY: A SINGLE CASE STUDY EXPLORING CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT AND THE RETENTION OF RACIAL MINORITY STUDENTS ATTENDING A 2-YEAR TECHNICAL HBCU IN SOUTH CAROLINA

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by

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

The existing retention literature focuses on White students and non-White students in predominantly White institutional (PWI) environments. Furthermore, prevailing literature tends to concentrate on varying factors that influence these students to be retained at their respective institutions. Retention factors in differing contexts, such as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), have been studied to a much lesser degree. Moreover, even fewer studies exist on how the campus environment at 2-year HBCUs influences retention or departure. Using a qualitative case study methodology, this study explores how the institutional environment of a rural southern 2-year technical HBCU influences the retention of racial minority students. Additionally, this study examines how the institutional environment contributes to factors that influence retention, such as social integration and sense of belonging.

Keywords: retention, persistence, student departure, academic integration, social integration, sense of belonging, campus culture, campus climate, campus environment, historically Black colleges and universities, student success outcomes, minority, minoritized

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, postsecondary education has experienced a noticeable shift in the demographic composition of the student population (Langston & Scheid, 2014). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021) (NCES), in Fall 2018, the percentage of White students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions dropped to 55% compared to 84% observed in Fall 1976. During the same timeframe, of the U.S. residents enrolled in degree-seeking postsecondary institutions, Hispanic and Black students experienced an increase in enrollment, rising from 4% to 20% and 10% to 13%, respectively (NCES, 2021). Asian/Pacific Islander enrollment increased from 2% to 7% while American Indian/Alaska Native remained steady at .7%. The NCES (2020) projects by 2028, U.S. postsecondary education will experience a 6% decrease in White students, 14% increase in Hispanic students, 8% increase in Black students, 2% increase in Asian/Pacific Islander students, 9% decrease in American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 1% increase in students who are of two or more races.

The student profile in higher education is transforming to reflect a student population comprised of fewer White students and more minoritized students (Andrade, 2006; Dinkes, 2020; Pike & Kuh, 2006). With these changes, there is a growing emphasis on creating environments where students from differing backgrounds can succeed in their respective institutions (Locks et al., 2008; Pike & Kuh, 2006). Although a focus on cultural diversification has become more prevailing (Andrade, 2006), college administrators still strive to understand how to foster successful student outcomes on their campuses (Museus, 2014; Pike & Kuh, 2006). Unfortunately, this pressing task has become more daunting for administrators as institutions are facing an extensive decline in enrollment amid already diminishing financial resources

(Aljohani, 2016; Kelly, 2005). To further the enrollment decline, the national pandemic has had extensive effects on enrollment numbers across the U.S. New barriers have emerged for many higher education students on all campus types that have impeded their ability to continue and complete their studies (United States Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2021). More specifically, during the 2020-2021 academic year, historically Black colleges, and universities (HBCUs) experienced pandemic-related enrollment declines which, in many cases, exceeded those of their predominantly White peer institutions (PWIs) (OCR, 2021). Higher education administrators are being challenged to develop strategic initiatives to recruit and retain all students but especially minoritized students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Aljohani, 2016; Pike & Kuh, 2006).

Additionally, there are countless retention theories throughout the literature, complicating the retention puzzle for college administrators. For instance, theorists Bean (1980), Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), and Spady (1970) investigated student retention from a psychological lens. These scholars attributed much of the retention influencers to the student and their attributes, beliefs, and deficiencies (Aljohani, 2016). Other researchers, MacKinnon-Slaney (1994), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), and Tinto (1987), viewed student retention from a social perspective, indicating institutional and environmental factors as influencers. Retention theories have continued to be organized into additional classifications (e.g., organizational, environmental, interactional, and economic), deepening the complexity of student retention (Aljohani, 2016).

As enrollment managers diligently approach divergent enrollment dilemmas, the need for proactive efforts to increase retention grows due to the influence of enrollment numbers on institutional success (Locks et al., 2008). From a fiduciary perspective, it is beneficial for administrators to work towards campus diversification as empirical data supports the notion that

diverse campuses influence positive student outcomes, such as academic success, persistence, and retention (Kuh & Love, 2016; Locks et al., 2008). From a practical perspective, the financial and institutional efforts placed on retaining versus recruiting a student are considerably less (Cuseo, 2010; Hossler & Bean, 1990; Schuh, 2005; Tinto, 1975). Thus, it is advantageous for institutions to grasp the phenomenon of retention as adequately and efficiently as possible to generate and maintain institutional success (Aljohani, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Improving student retention has become a pressing task for many institutions of higher education. Enrollment numbers and corresponding revenue can substantially influence an institution's fiscal stability and overall sustainability (Hossler & Bean, 1990; Kelly, 2005; Shorette & Arroyo, 2015). Additionally, disparities between the retention of racially diverse student populations and the White student population remain (Kelly, 2005; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Shifting enrollment trends and student demographic changes could have negative effects on institutions and society, such as university financial issues leading to possible closings of postsecondary institutions (Conn, 2020; Kelly, 2005; Langston & Scheid, 2014), fewer educated workers in the workforce (Kelly, 2005; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Museus et al., 2008), and a decline in overall household income (Kelly, 2005; Museus et al., 2008). Therefore, administrators should not take a reactive approach and wait for students to connect with the campus environment without exerting institutional influence. Present-day enrollment strategies require intentional, tactical measures that encourage students to select a specific college or university and continue to commit to the institution throughout their educational journey. Institutions that fail to embrace a proactive approach, even institutions that secure enrollment through name recognition, run the risk of facing drastic enrollment challenges and

potential financial implications including reduction in academic programs, budget deficits, and possible closings (Conn, 2020; Langston & Scheid, 2014; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Shorette & Arroyo, 2015).

Researchers have suggested that academic and social integration (Tinto, 1975), social involvement (Astin, 1984), as well as a sense of belonging (Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus et al., 2018), have a positive influence on student success outcomes, including enhanced retention. However, the literature has not fully explored which institutional factors influence student retention rates (Museus, 2014). Scholars such as Tinto (1975) and Astin (1984) placed the responsibility of retention on the students' shoulders rather than the institution. The burden of retention is positioned with the student (Kiyama et al., 2015; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2014; Museus et al., 2008; Rendón et al., 2016; Tierney, 1992, 1999) and institutional retention efforts are left unmanaged (Museus, 2014). The issue of student retention has maintained its resiliency among administrators. The demand to attract and retain students has continued to increase, the overall number of enrolled students has continued to decline, and the need to obtain an all-encompassing understanding of retention of different student populations in various institutional environments has intensified (Museus et al., 2018; Shorette & Arroyo, 2015). Therefore, institutions should strive to understand and proactively influence retention to maximize and expand resources to offset the steady decline in student enrollment (Arroyo et al., 2016).

The primary question is how can institutions strategically retain students from different backgrounds in various campus settings? To date, qualitative and quantitative research has focused on addressing retention among traditional and non-traditional populations on PWI campuses but has failed to fully explore White students on HBCU campuses (Shorette & Arroyo, 2015). According to Arroyo and Gasman (2014), the majority of HBCU-based literature

examines Black college student success. Research on White students and other non-Black students on HBCU campuses is in less supply (Arroyo et al., 2016; Carter & Fountaine, 2012; Closson & Henry, 2008a, 2008b). Only recently have scholars begun to investigate retention regarding minority student populations (e.g., White students) on HBCU campuses (Arroyo et al., 2016). For instance, many HBCUs are witnessing an increase in White student enrollment (Carter & Fountaine, 2012; Mobley et al., 2021). On these campuses, non-Black students are considered the minority. HBCU campuses should consider how they approach retention efforts for this population, similarly to how PWIs should consider supporting minoritized students in different ways (Hutto & Fenwick, 2002; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002). This case study provides insight into the campus environment and the retention of racial minority students at a technical 2-year HBCU.

Nature of the Problem

Understanding why students persist and why they choose to depart is critical to the overall success of an institution (Xu & Webber, 2018). Without this knowledge, campus administrators make futile attempts to incentivize their students to remain at their institutions. As a result, some students might experience uninformed and inadequate support, which fails to promote either retention or persistence. As the demographics of student populations on college campuses continue to evolve, the quest for successful student outcomes for diverse groups becomes more challenging. Ross et al. (2012) specified in their 2012 NCES report, that there is an observable persistence gap in the educational completion of White males and minoritized racial groups, such as Hispanics, Blacks, and American Indians.

Additionally, there is considerable evidence of rising gender gaps within these racial groups, as females have proven to persist in education at a higher rate than their male peers (Ross

et al., 2012). The implications of these persistence gaps call for institutions to strategize and implement new approaches to retention and persistence. These gaps between various groups of students continue to grow while enrollment numbers decline and competition among institutions increases. Administrators should consider new strategies to help close persistence gaps.

Campus culture has been shown to have an influence on closing these observed gaps in educational attainment. Evans and Chun (2007) studied the implicit behavioral and organizational barriers which hinder women, minority faculty, and administrators in higher education. The scholars affirmed diversity in higher education as a "practical imperative" (Evans & Chun, 2007, p.4). The researchers asserted changes to the demographics of the student populations have attributed to and continue to lead to a majority-minority country. Subsequently, the authors noted administrators on college campuses need to actively respond to the increasing diversification of the U.S. population, stating that "homogeneity is not an alternative" (Evans & Chun, 2007, p.4). The authors suggested institutional leaders should become reflective in their efforts to replicate such demographic multiplicity on their campuses to maintain enrollment effectively.

To effectively respond to both the diversification of the enrollment pool and notable retention gaps, administrators may determine how student success outcomes for each racial group are influenced. Although there are several studies on the aspects of influencing student retention from a general perspective, few scholars have examined the influence student demographics have on their retention (Museus, 2014). Scholars Arroyo and Gasman (2014), Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002), and Gallien (2007) identified retention among minoritized groups as critical to begin to address the needs for more successful higher education institutions. HBCU campuses have been credited with providing an environment that encourages academic

and social success among minoritized students, such as Black students, resulting in increased student success outcomes (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). As a result, researchers Outcalt and Skewes-Cox (2002) encouraged other institutions to examine exactly how HBCUs create such valuable atmospheres for Black students and use it as a benchmark for higher education administrators. Applying these best practices will allow institutional leaders to formulate proactive approaches to student retention on their campuses.

HBCUs have observed an increase in the enrollment of White students (Carter & Fountaine, 2012; Mobley et al., 2021). Given Museus and Jayakumar's (2012) assertion that higher education institutions are obligated to provide all enrolled students the opportunity to succeed, racial minority students on HBCU campuses should also be provided equitable opportunities to achieve successful outcomes in their chosen higher education environments. Like other institutions, HBCUs should also learn to retain their minority students to maintain their institutional success (Hutto & Fenwick, 2002).

Much of the extant retention data collected to further the understanding of such a multifaceted phenomenon stem from outdated retention models that fail to account for additional factors such as campus culture and the institutional environment (Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2014). Furthermore, while a large majority of the present retention literature focuses on Black students, the literature fails to explore White student experiences when they are in the minority. When White students enter HBCUs, they are often the minorities on their campuses, a situation that is comparable to Black students on PWI campuses (Baker et al., 2021; Hall & Closson, 2005). As such, one might postulate factors, cultural and otherwise, influence Black student retention at PWIs and may be similar to those that would help the retention of racial minority students on HBCU campuses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the campus environment and the retention of racial minority students at a rural southern 2-year technical HBCU. Through this bounded case, the study explored how the campus environment contributes to the retention of racial minority students on an HBCU campus. It is important to stress that the purpose of case study research is not generalizability to a population, but rather to get an in-depth understanding of the bounded case. However, practitioners and readers of this study can determine whether findings apply to their own settings. As such, the results of this study could inform HBCUs' efforts to develop additional strategies to maintain and improve retention rates among racial minority students. Just as important, the results of this study could also inform practitioners of similar strategies that can be implemented on PWI campuses to retain students from different backgrounds. This study included the qualitative analysis of interviews with racial minority students who persisted at their current HBCU, campus observations, and document analysis. Such analysis will help to provide an introductory understanding of the retention of racial minority students at an institution historically founded on cultural principles different from the students being retained. Finally, the investigation examined the perception of these students' "sense of belonging" while attending an institution that embraces a mission and vision centered on the success of Black students. How the institutional culture contributed to that sentiment will be of interest in this study.

Tinto's (1975) original retention model reasoned that student characteristics, such as family background and individual attributes, directly influence student commitment to the institution. When students perceive alignment with the institution's views, values, beliefs, and norms of social communities (e.g., campus life, clubs, organizations) and excel in the academic environment, both social and academic integration are achieved. Such integration has been

shown to positively influence student retention (Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1993) later distinguished between formal and informal social integration (e.g., extracurricular activities as formal social integration, and contact with peers as informal integration). He maintained a certain level of both forms of integration were necessary for students to persist (Tinto, 1993).

Derived from Tinto's well-known framework on student retention in higher education, Museus et al. (2018) theorized that a sense of belonging, an aspect of social integration, influences students' decisions to depart the institution or voluntarily remain. A sense of belonging develops over time as "the student ascribes to his or her interactions with the academic and social dimensions of the college or university" (Xu & Webber, 2018, p.4). Utilizing Museus' culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model and Arroyo and Gasman's HBCU approach, this study investigated if social integration and sense of belonging remain consistent on an HBCU campus for racial minority students. Additional factors may likely present when researching retention on a majority-minority campus.

Research Questions

A qualitative case study was used to explore the campus environment and the retention of racial minority students at a rural southern historically Black technical 2-year college. Given existing literature, the following research questions were designed to support the primary purpose of the study:

RQ1: How do students in the racial minority at a rural southern historically Black technical 2-year college describe their reasons for persisting?

RQ2: In what ways does campus environment contribute to the persistence of students in the racial minority at a rural southern historically Black technical 2-year college?

There is minimal research on why racial minority students retain at HBCUs. Given the scarcity of research, this qualitative approach will contribute to our understanding of retention through an in-depth examination of this bounded case and expand existing theory on student retention by exploring the experiences of racial minority students at an HBCU.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand the connotation of each term in this study:

Academic Integration. Students' academic performance, level of intellectual development, and perception of having a positive experience in academic settings (Tinto, 1975).

Campus Climate. Perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and its members (Bauer, 1998, p.2; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

Campus Culture. Collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education which provide a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of events and actions on and off-campus (Kuh & Hall, 1993, p.2; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Any historically Black college or university which was established before 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation (OCR, 1991).

Minoritized. A description used to identify a group recognized to have experienced systemic inequalities, oppression, and marginalization that has placed individuals into "minority" status (Sotto-Santiago, 2019).

Minority. A social construct that identifies a group of people who are different from the larger group in a country or area in some way, such as race or religion (Sotto-Santiago, 2019).

Persistence. A student measure whereby a student returns to any institution for their second year (Hagedorn, 2006; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018).

Persistence Rate. Percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018).

Predominantly White Institution (PWI). The term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which White students account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Lomotey, 2010).

Retention. An institutional measure whereby a student returns to the same institution for their second year (Hagedorn, 2006; Hewitt & Rose-Adams, 2013).

Retention Rate. The percentage of students who return to the same institution for their second year (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018).

Sense of Belonging. The psychological sense that one is an accepted member of one's community (Hausmann et al., 2007).

Social Integration. The involvement in extracurricular activities and the presence of positive relationships with peers (Tinto, 1975).

Student Departure. The exodus of a student from postsecondary education (Tinto, 1987).

Student Engagement. The amount of time and energy students choose to devote to activities both inside and outside the classroom (Kuh, 2001a).

Student Success Outcomes. Student results such as academic achievement, degree completion, retention, and persistence (Museus, 2014).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

An assumption made within this study is that the participating institution site has measured and reported retention data using the same definition of retention. Although federally funded institutions are mandated to collect specific retention data, there is a possibility there may be a discrepancy in the data. Furthermore, the method for displaying and analyzing data is not always consistent among institutions. It is necessary to recognize this assumption when collecting and exploring these data for this study.

Another assumption is that all participants in the study will answer the open-ended, perception-based questions openly and honestly. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions, some participants may choose to provide answers which could be considered "appropriate" for the situation rather than truthful, especially given the gender and race of the researcher. Participants may feel reluctant to have open discussions with me in their specific environment out of fear of judgment or unintended repercussions. Furthermore, the general campus population is deemed to be relatively small. Participants may fear their participation in the study could result in negativity from individuals on campus.

A final assumption in this study is retention factors such as social integration and sense of belonging can be isolated to demonstrate individual influences on retention. It is known that factors influencing retention are vast and do not occur in a vacuum (Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2014; Tinto, 1975). For this study, social integration and sense of belonging were explored as

insulated variables to gain a better understanding of how the campus culture contributes to students' perception of their sense of belonging and how that influences student retention.

One major limitation of the study is the number of eligible participants. I focused on White students in the racial minority. Only five students were eligible to participate in the study and of those five, two agreed to participate. One participant was White, while the other participant identified as multiracial, having one White parent and one Black parent, but responded to the call for White participants. As a qualitative researcher, it is my responsibility to respect the identities of individual participants. I cannot invalidate a participant's identity as a White student. As a result, she was considered eligible to participate. While the data collected was still rich and plentiful, having more participants to reaffirm the emergent themes would have been preferred. Additionally, COVID-19 continued to play a role in the study. COVID-19 could have influenced the number of students returning to campus, as well as altered campus policies and procedures that may have influenced social gatherings and the ability to socially connect with individuals in organic ways.

An additional limitation is the lack of variety in geographic location. There are far fewer 2-year HBCU institutions, especially in the researcher's locale than 4-year institutions. The breadth of literature on this topic for 4-year HBCU institutions is much more readily available, although still limited. Thus, to contribute to the literature, the researcher's site location was more advantageous in terms of proximity. Also, the only other option for a site location lacked participants who met the criteria for the study.

Significance of the Study

Research on institutional factors influencing retention rates of minority students on majority campuses is quite limited. Of the existing literature, the majority examines Black

students attending PWIs (Museus, 2014; Shorette & Arroyo, 2015). Few researchers evaluate other historically marginalized populations and how environmental factors influence their ability to persist (Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2014). Moreover, few researchers have investigated how racial minority students are retained when they are the temporary minority, a phenomenon that can be linked and compared to historically marginalized populations (Shorette & Arroyo, 2015).

Understanding the influence that race has on retaining students from different backgrounds may help researchers and higher education administrators to accomplish several objectives. Researchers can continue to contribute to the comprehensive list of retention elements that can be empirically explored through quantitative analysis. Moreover, scholars can investigate these aspects within assorted demographic groups to conclude if and how those factors pertain to each cultural group. Scholars can also use this research to potentially align these factors with retaining Black students in PWIs, a mission that has been an unyielding struggle for many higher education institutions. Finally, administrators can utilize the retention data collected to enhance their overall enrollment goals and improve the financial stability of their respective institutions

This study explored a bounded case by evaluating students' experiences, observations, and documents to better understand the retention of racial minority students in a campus environment where they are the minority. The most apparent situation where this occurs is on an HBCU campus, a campus historically accepting of non-Black students but established for the sole purpose of educating Black students (Bracey, 2017). Consequently, this study may be beneficial to the study of retention because it provides an opportunity for racial majority students to express their sentiments around being in the minority, an experience that seldom occurs for

their racial group. This study also adds to the current knowledge around campus culture and how it can encourage or deter a student from any background to persist or depart.

This study may also prompt administrators to have more informed conversations around campus culture, race, and ethnicity and how each should be integrated into the institutional fabric to fashion environments that provide support and safe havens for students from all backgrounds. While this information is helpful to retain students at specific institutions and increase overall enrollment, it also provides general insight for administrators. This insight can help ensure that higher education institutions continue to properly educate and retain students in all varieties of institutional environments.

Furthermore, as higher education faces the phenomenon of declining enrollment, this study may aid HBCU administrators in learning how to recruit and retain more non-Black students to their campuses and provide a culture that fosters growth and development. Lastly, this study highlights the aspects of race relations among students in majority-minority settings. The more information that administrators can acquire around such a challenging and influential topic, the more they can appropriately prepare for and mediate potential situations that could damage the campus environment and student success outcomes.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore the bounded case through student experiences, observations, and document analysis to better understand how students were retained when they are the temporary minority in an educational setting. In this case study, racial minority students attending a 2-year HBCU were interviewed to determine why they chose to continue their educational path at their specific institution. Furthermore, artifacts and documents were analyzed to relate these concepts to the institutional culture.

As most previous work on student retention has demonstrated, numerous factors influence a student's decision to retain. Older literature places the duty to retain and persist on the student. However, recent literature has emerged, placing the responsibility to retain students on the institutions. Institutions are being tasked with creating campus environments that support students and facilitate their success beyond graduation. The findings from this case study may help multiple stakeholders achieve a better understanding of how to implement such a plan. Additionally, stakeholders may be able to align the results with their campus environments and potentially facilitate new retention strategies for their students. With an understanding of how to implement new retention strategies, campuses can begin to be more attentive to their minoritized and minority students and adapt their campus culture to generate better student success outcomes.

Four more chapters will follow Chapter I. Chapter II is a holistic review of the literature on retention theory, a sense of belonging, and campus culture. The primary topic discussed is the gap in the literature related to racial minority students attending HBCUs and their perceived sense of belonging due to the campus culture. Chapter III includes the research design and specific details of how the study was conducted. Chapter IV consists of a detailed account of the research findings, and Chapter V provides a thorough explanation of the findings, as well as implications for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The enduring battle between institutions and student retention factors has remained in the foreground of many college educators' minds (Aljohani, 2016; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2014). Due to the evolving demographics of students and the increased need to compete to recruit and retain students, student retention has become even more critical to institutions' success (Aljohani, 2016; Kelly, 2005). While student retention has been and remains to be a widely researched topic within postsecondary education (Aljohani, 2016; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2014; Museus et al., 2018), the influences of the campus environment on student retention are an area which has lacked attention (Museus et al., 2018; Shorette & Arroyo, 2015). However, the current state of enrollment management has led administrators to further investigate these circumstances to provide a more comprehensive assessment of retention influencers.

An assortment of factors contributes to student retention or departure from an institution, such as their family environment and financial status (Hewitt & Rose-Adams, 2013; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus et al., 2017, 2018; Tierney, 1992). This study, however, aims to explore the bounded case through a variety of data sources to better understand how the campus environment of a 2-year technical HBCU influences students in the racial minority to be retained. The investigation of such a multifaceted phenomenon can help to fill the current gap in retention literature. This study can also inform stakeholders of retention influencers to improve strategic processes within their educational organizations.

Methodology, Content, and Organization of the Literature Review

Much of the current literature on retention was built on the works of theorists such as Spady (1970), Tinto (1975), and Astin (1984). Their theories laid the groundwork for many retention studies (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Hausmann et al., 2007, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2014; Museus et al., 2018; Rendón et al., 2016; Strayhorn, 2008, 2010; Xu & Webber, 2018). Tinto (1975) is the foundational theorist for this study because his models informed numerous retention models utilized as frameworks. Because of that, the literature review is organized so there is a demonstrative, logical build on relevant concepts presented initially rooted in Tinto's model. First, the literature review addresses an older and much critiqued, yet pertinent theoretical framework for retention in Tinto's (1975) student departure theory or interactionalist theory. Tinto's framework establishes a historical understanding of retention. Next, stemming from Tinto's (1975) theory, the review of literature links the notion of integration and the feeling of a student's sense of belonging and its effect on student success outcomes such as retention. Following this, the literature review addresses the evolution of the concept of sense of belonging and how these developments further extend the concept of retention through campus climate, culture, and environment. Lastly, the review culminates with two emergent retention models as a factor of the campus environment and the current exploration of racial minority students on HBCU campuses.

Tinto's Theoretical Framework

Several foundational scholars have investigated student retention to gain a comprehensive understanding of how to retain students from different backgrounds. For this study, Tinto's (1975) student integration model, also referred to as the student departure theory or interactionalist theory, was the primary theory of focus because it is one of the most cited and

tested retention models in the literature (Aljohani, 2016). It provides the beginning of a conceptual framework through which this study evaluates social integration, sense of belonging as a factor of campus environment, and student retention. Tinto (1975) developed a theoretical student departure model which evaluated the academic and social interactions of the individual and the institution. His theory was rooted in Durkheim's theory of suicide and the undergraduate dropout process model developed by Spady (1970). Tinto built upon Durkheim's proposition that suicide was more likely to occur when an individual was inadequately integrated into society, specifically, if they lacked moral or value integration and collective affiliation. Tinto postulated that colleges could be viewed as social societies with their own value systems. Thus, dropping out from college could be viewed similarly to dropping out from the larger society through suicide.

Tinto (1975) paired this perspective of departure with Spady's views on the relationship between students and their institutions' academic and social environments (Spady, 1970). Tinto declared if a student lacked integration into their social system (e.g., their college environment), that would lead to a low commitment to their system and increase the probability of leaving their institution to pursue something else. Integration became the crux of Tinto's philosophy. According to his model, students who integrated into their college environment through different mechanisms were more likely to demonstrate commitment and thus, persist. Though the scholar's framework has played an instrumental role in the development of various additional retention and departure theories, Tinto (1987) recognized the gaps in his theories. He recognized student departure, the exodus of a student from postsecondary education, as a unique event that could be understood by evaluating the experiences and backgrounds of each student who departs.

His work was crucial to understanding why students depart from their institutions and how administrators could potentially influence them to be retained.

With the acknowledgment of a lack of detailed data collection and reporting techniques, Tinto (1987) recognized a common theme pertinent to retention theory. As previously mentioned, student retention and departure are not influenced by one distinct factor. Instead, several variables influence retention, which span the social and academic realm of the student environment, later defined as social and academic integration (Tinto, 1975, 1987). Research has revealed that no such commonalities exist among all students to serve as a "magic recipe" for institutions to improve retention. Furthermore, significantly less research has been conducted to determine how institutional factors influence retention for specific racial groups (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2014). Although there are several factors that influence retention, this study focuses on the campus environment, its influence on social integration and sense of belonging, and if and how those factors influence the retention of racial minority students on a 2-year HBCU campus.

Social Integration and Sense of Belonging

As posited by Tinto (1975) and confirmed by numerous scholars (e.g., Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus et al., 2017, 2018; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Tierney, 1992), *social integration* into the college setting is an instrumental factor in why a student persists. Social integration is defined by a student's involvement in extracurricular activities and their relationships with peers (Tinto, 1975). The results of Guiffrida's (2003) interviews with 88 African American undergraduates at a PWI suggested that students who participated in African American organizations felt more integrated into the campus environment. These students perceived to be surrounded by a culture like their

own, and as a result, felt more adjusted to their environment. The participants' involvement in co-curricular activities, such as Greek organizations, religious groups, student government, and academic honors groups, aided their cultural alignment to the organization and influenced their decision not to depart their institution, a concept evaluated by several other scholars, such as Cerezo et al. (2015), Harper and Quaye (2007), Hurtado and Carter (1997) and Museus (2008b). Similar to conclusions made by other scholars, specifically, Astin (1984) and Kuh (2001b), students' integration was deemed to be a result of their physical and psychological energy devoted to campus activities. Because students were socially adapted to their organizations (Tinto, 1975), they also perceived more positive educational outcomes leading to retention, which aligns with existing research (Carter & Fountaine, 2012; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus et al., 2018).

Other scholars have also investigated the concept of social integration, for example, Hausmann et al. (2007), Museus et al. (2018), Strayhorn (2008), and Xu and Webber (2018). Xu and Webber (2018) evaluated both minority (comprised of Blacks and "other minorities") and White students' survey responses at a diverse, public, 4-year institution to determine if students felt more socially engaged and, in turn, were more likely to remain at their institution. Black students reported higher levels of social engagement than their White peers. The researchers posited the university's proactive attempt to offer a welcoming and supportive diversity culture through the representation of minority students on campus played an influential role in Black students' perceptions. Furthermore, the university's minority affairs program was said to spread awareness of the various minority students and dedicated services on its campus, thus, positively contributing to Black students' perception of higher levels of social engagement.

Likewise, Strayhorn's (2008) study on African American males and their interactions with diverse peers resulted in findings demonstrating students feel a stronger sense of belonging due to their engaging campus environment, a notion to be addressed later in the literature review. Sense of belonging is defined as the psychological feeling a student is an accepted member of their community (Hausmann et al., 2007). The participants' sentiments supported the conclusion that minority students on a culturally engaging campus would likely perceive themselves as more connected to the institution. The perceived connections increased their social integration and led to a sense of belonging, which influenced their likelihood of persisting, a belief expressed by scholars such as Hurtado (2001), Kuh and Love (2016) and Museus and Maramba (2011).

Social integration entails a degree of perceived alignment between the student and their social environment (Tinto, 1975). As a result, social integration mainly occurs through interactions with peers, extracurricular activities, and interactions with faculty and administrators within the college (Tinto, 1975, 2006). When these encounters are viewed as successful by the student, the result is varying degrees of support through communication, friendship, and faculty. These connections are deemed as social rewards built into the generalized decision to persist at the institution, leading to enhanced commitment. In essence, when students perceive their social interactions with their peers and faculty and staff are positive, they are more likely to affiliate themselves with the institution and demonstrate social integration (Tinto, 1975, 2006).

Findings about social integration are noticeably linked to sense of belonging. A *sense of belonging* can be viewed as a positive outcome of social integration (Hausmann et al., 2007, 2009; Locks et al., 2008). As students are more adjusted to their social environments through peer interactions, involvement in extracurricular activities, and the like, they ultimately feel more connected to their environment, resulting in a sense of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2007, 2009;

Locks et al., 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). This feeling of belonging is so powerful and influential that researchers have substantiated the claim as sense of belonging increases, the likelihood of retention increases (Hausmann et al., 2007, 2009; Locks et al., 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009).

Hausmann et al. (2007) and Museus et al. (2018) confirmed this relationship between a student's integration into the campus, sense of belonging, and retention. Hausmann et al. (2007) utilized student survey data to examine numerous factors as predictors of students' sense of belonging and intention to retain, two of which were peer and parental support and social and academic integration. Students' beginning perceptions of their sense of belonging were less associated with academic integration and more associated with social aspects of their involvement, such as peer-group interactions, interactions with faculty, and peer and parental support. The researchers concluded that a sense of belonging was a significant predictor of intention to persist. Thus, as students were more integrated into their college communities, their sense of belonging increased, leading to an increased likelihood of retention (Hausmann et al., 2007, 2009).

Museus et al., (2018) used survey data to evaluate perceived belonging among 870 White students and students of color. The study revealed that access to environments perceived as being more familiar with collectivist cultural orientations might provide conditions to increase belonging among students in college. Essentially, students with established relationships within their institutions with a home-like environment experience a greater sense of belonging. Their relationships and connections to their environment aid in finding their niche and comfort zone, thus increasing their probability to persist, an idea also discussed by Kuh and Love (2016). Kuh and Love (2016) concluded as students became more integrated into their cultural environment,

their sense of belonging increased, which encouraged their retention at their institution, a supposition to be discussed later in the literature review.

Academic Integration

Another widely discussed concept stemming from Tinto's (1975, 1987) theoretical model is academic integration. Academic integration has been posited by Tinto, and confirmed by scholars, such as Goel (2002), Nippert (2000), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), to influence student retention. Tinto suggested students need to be socially and academically integrated into their college systems to be retained. The academic system of the institution is mainly concerned with the education of students, including their level of intellectual development and academic performance. Additionally, a student must perceive a positive academic experience in academic settings to become academically adjusted.

Tinto's (1975) original proposition that *academic integration* was a separate yet influential factor in retention was later augmented by his assertion that the academic integration of students occurs within the larger social system where academic activities often generate and create social communities that aid in integration (Tinto, 1997). Numerous other scholars have supported this notion. For instance, Hausmann et al. (2007) found interactions with faculty, faculty concern for students, and academic intellectual development aided in students' academic integration which led to an increased sense of belonging. Furthermore, Morrow and Ackermann (2012) found that perceived faculty support and classroom comfort improved sense of belonging and positively influenced students' intent to persist.

Deil-Amen (2011) advanced Tinto's (1975) assertions within the context of 2-year institutions. Due to the lack of extensive research on the application of Tinto's model in the 2-year context, Deil-Amen utilized a qualitative methodological approach to collect data regarding

student experiences of both social and academic integration. The scholar found students perceived institutional agents, such as faculty, staff, and peers, as influential in why they integrated. Participants also noted family support as a contributing factor to their integration. However, 92% noted a member of the institutional community as an agent who positively influenced their adjustment and sense of belonging, a sentiment emphasized by Rendón (1994). Rendón (1994) hypothesized that when validating agents, individuals inside or outside of the classroom such as faculty or parents, took an active interest in students' academic success, encouraged them as being capable of doing academic work, and supported them in their academic activities, students became more powerful learners and were more likely to be retained.

Museus's (2014) culturally engaging campus environment (CECE) model and Arroyo and Gasman's (2014) HBCU approach, to be discussed later in the literature review, are also built on the concept of academic integration. Museus's (2014) model posits that cultural relevance (cultural familiarity, relevant knowledge, community service, cross-cultural engagement, and cultural validation) along with cultural responsiveness (collectivist orientations, humanized environments, proactive philosophies, and holistic support) lead to individual outcomes, such as sense of belonging and academic performance, ultimately, enhancing student success outcomes such as retention. Arroyo and Gasman's (2014) model posits that HBCU campuses provide more competitive learning environments with culturally relevant pedagogy which improves students' academic success and the likelihood of persisting.

While many scholars have supported the notion that academic integration does influence student retention, Braxton and Lien's (2016) revision of Tinto's theory has provided some opposition. In reviewing literature regarding academic integration among different institutional types, including 4-year residential and commuter institutions, the scholars found varying

empirical evidence for Tinto's proposition on the effects of academic integration on student retention. Of 20 multi-institutional tests conducted to measure the influence of academic integration on retention, 15 showed a statistically consistent influence on retention, demonstrating strong support for the relationship. However, of the 39 single-institutional tests, only 20 produced statistically reliable results. Braxton and Lien (2016) concluded that multi-institutional studies provided strong empirical support for the effect of academic integration on retention while single-institutional studies provided much less support for the relationship between the variables, demonstrating mixed support for Tinto's supposition of academic integration. The scholars speculated that this occurred because of enhanced variability in the measurement of academic integration in multi-institutional assessments. Additionally, the measures of academic integration across institutions within a multi-institutional study are far more consistent than in single-institutional studies, leading to more statistically significant support for the influence of academic integration in multi-institutional studies.

Ultimately, Tinto's (1975) model of student departure has been substantiated from the aspect of social integration, while some scholars (e.g., Braxton & Lien, 2016) have questioned the extent of influence that academic integration has on retention. Although this is the case, research has also shown that academic integration does have some effect on student retention, even if in the context of social systems. Facets of academic integration, such as faculty support, faculty-student interactions, student performance, and perceived contact with the academic system, have supported the concept of academic integration, leading scholars to continue to investigate how academic integration influences student retention.

Isolation and Incongruence

Tinto's (1987, 1993) later work on student departure led to a revision of his concept of integration. His belief in integration continued to provide a solid foundation for student belonging and retention. However, he further explained the sources of an absence of integration, and therefore, an increased likelihood that students will voluntarily depart before degree completion. Tinto posited that a lack of integration for any student stemmed from two different sources: incongruence and isolation (Tinto, 1987). Tinto defined *incongruence*, also characterized as a lack of institutional fit, as a state where the student perceives themselves to conflict with the institution. As a result, integration is absent because the institution is not favorable in the student's eyes. That is to say that if a student fails to recognize their institution as a good fit for them, the result is a lack of integration and an increased potential for voluntary departure (Museus, 2008a; Tinto, 1987).

Tinto (1987) continued by discussing isolation. He defined *isolation* as lacking adequate interactions through which integration can occur. In this case, the student finds themselves to be separated from the daily life of the institution. Tinto noted that incongruence and isolation relate to one another in that incongruence arises because of interactions and a student's evaluation of the quality of those interactions, while isolation results from the absence of those interactions. He noted incongruence as an inevitable phenomenon in higher education, while isolation, on the other hand, was undoubtedly avoidable (Tinto, 1987).

Tinto's (1987) discussion on incongruence and isolation has set the conceptual foundation for understanding students' adjustment to their campus environment. For instance, if a student fails to establish membership with other individuals in their college community, and the personal bonds that are the foundation for the relationship do not exist, that individual faces

incongruence, and as a result, will experience isolation from their environment. The aftermath is that students will choose to depart. Harper and Quaye (2007) found evidence of incongruence and isolation in their interviews with African American male student leaders at six PWIs. The student leaders mentioned the lack of African American representation on campus and low retention and graduation rates among African American students. Similar to findings from other scholarly studies (e.g., Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008a; Tinto, 1987), this sentiment could have led to increased degrees of incongruence and isolation and created a much higher chance of voluntary departure. However, the students' determination to proactively combat these issues through volunteering in African American and White student groups to provide representation and speak on behalf of others regarding community issues helped to retain them.

Critiques of Tinto's Framework

Tinto (1975) theorized that at the very onset of a student's entry into an institution, the student must adjust both socially (social integration) and academically (academic integration) to be retained. He stated that social integration is essentially the interaction between students with both similar and different backgrounds, values, and commitments within the college community. Academic integration, however, refers to a student's academic performance, intellectual progress, and perception of having a positive experience in academic settings (Tinto, 1975). The researcher declared that both social and academic integration elements had to align for the student to be retained at their institution.

One aspect of Tinto's theory that Museus and Quaye (2009) critiqued, along with other scholars, such as Kuh and Love (2016), Kiyama et al. (2015), Museus (2014), Rendón et al. (2016), and Tierney (1992, 1999), was the implication that students must altogether remove themselves from their cultural backgrounds before being able to fully adjust to the institution's

culture. The previously mentioned scholars asserted that students who were expected to separate from their cultural heritages had an undue burden placed upon them. Instead, it was the institution's responsibility to understand, accept, and enable students' needs for socialization into their institutional environment (Museus, 2014; Museus et al., 2008; Rendón et al., 2016; Tierney, 1992). Tierney (1992, 1999) acknowledged the idea of cultural integrity, which focused on the institution solidifying students' cultural identities and developing more ethnic and diverse social and academic outlets as a medium for assimilation into the institution.

Research has demonstrated the importance of cultural integrity by highlighting how minority college students benefit from being secure in their cultural heritages at their institutions (Kuh & Love, 2016; Maramba & Museus, 2013; Museus & Quaye, 2009). For instance, Museus' (2008b) study evaluated the experiences of 24 Asian American and Black undergraduate students. He found that "ethnic organizations facilitated the cultural adjustment and membership of minority student participants by serving as sources of cultural familiarity, vehicles for cultural expression and advocacy, and venues for cultural validation" (p. 576). Museus and Quaye (2009), along with scholars Maramba and Museus (2013) and Guiffrida (2003), expressed the necessity of cultural agents in influencing and predicting retention among college students. These cultural agents, such as ethnic student organizations, social groups, faculty, and peers, are defined as people and groups to whom students can connect. These factors are essential to the adjustment and retention of minoritized students (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007, 2009; Maramba & Museus, 2013; Museus, 2008b; Museus & Quaye, 2009). These agents provide students with intimate cultural environments within the campus, allow for greater socialization into the larger campus community, and provide a space where students can express and maintain a sense of their own racial or ethnic identity on campus (Maramba & Museus, 2013; Museus,

2008b; Williams et al., 2021), all of which positively influence students' sense of belonging to the campus, and therefore, their retention (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Campus Culture and Sense of Belonging

Campus culture has been shown to influence student success outcomes (e.g., student retention and persistence). As previously mentioned, from a cultural perspective, Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of integration demanded that students adapt to the institution's cultural norms to be satisfied and retained. However, Kiyama et al. (2015), Kuh and Love (2016), Museus (2014), Rendón et al. (2016), and Tierney (1992, 1999), explained that this expectation forced students to remove their cultural or racial identity and placed an undue burden on the student instead of the institution, whom Tierney believed should be accountable for facilitating students' social assimilation into their organization. Other scholars investigated how campus culture influences factors leading to student success outcomes such as retention and persistence.

Museus and Maramba (2011) assessed the connection between campus culture and a sense of belonging among Filipino students at a 4-year PWI. Using a quantitative methodology, the scholars found that as students maintained links to their cultural heritage while in the campus environment, they obtained a more positive sentiment towards adjusting to their institution, as well as an increased sense of belonging to their campus. In contrast, students who perceived pressure to disconnect from their ethnic backgrounds and assimilate into their campus culture, a concept from Tinto's (1975) integration model, had a negative association with the adjustment process and, therefore, felt a reduced sense of belonging.

Kuh and Love (2016) utilized a cultural perspective to examine student retention and departure. The scholars developed eight cultural propositions about premature student departure. These propositions postulated that a student's premature departure was related to their cultural

identity, cultural environment, and the cultural distance they must traverse to identify with their institution's culture. Cultural distance refers to a student's culture of origin and "how effectively it prepared them to expect and deal with the institutions' values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations" (Kuh & Love, 2016, p.204). For some students, this equates to them renouncing or denying their cultures. If presented with this obstacle, a student may choose to depart. One way to manage this distance is to join a group, or subculture, with attitudes, beliefs, and norms that align with one's culture of origin. This alignment with a related subculture can reduce the cultural distance experienced by the student and ultimately lessen the pressure associated with traversing the institution's culture; consequently, leading to more socialization, a greater sense of belonging, and higher rates of retention.

Finally, Kuh and Love (2016) related Tinto's theory of social integration to their proposition that students who are socially immersed in one or more enclaves are more likely to be retained. Enclaves are defined as affinity groups that hold similar values, beliefs, and assumptions as the students' cultures of origin (Kuh & Love, 2016). As with Tinto's original theory, cultural group membership is critical for developing a sense of belonging and believing that these group members possess similar beliefs and values as the students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2016). Aligning with Tinto's (1975) social integration theory, through a lens of cultural background, Kuh and Love (2016) noted that the ability of a student to connect with similar cultural groups on their campus enhances the student's sense of belonging and positively influences their overall retention. The researchers further stated that when a student is a part of an enclave that holds a formal status such as a departmental club, the intent to persist is even stronger (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2016).

Other researchers expanded the influence of campus culture on sense of belonging by investigating how different racial groups experience campus culture (Museus et al., 2018). For instance, Rankin and Reason (2005) explored the varying perceptions of different races of the campus culture across 10 college campuses. Among the 7,347 students surveyed, White students perceived the climate to be less racist and more accepting than their counterparts though White students and students of color experienced similar rates of racial harassment. According to Museus et al. (2018), this would imply that the White students were prone to feel a greater sense of belonging and were more likely to be retained at those institutions.

Johnson et al. (2007) conducted a study in which a national sample of 2,967 students enrolled at PWIs were surveyed to determine the relationship between distinct demographic variables and the sense of belonging among students. White students reported higher levels of sense of belonging in comparison to their counterparts. Furthermore, the scholars reported that students from different racial and ethnic groups were influenced by campus culture regarding their sense of belonging. For instance, the study demonstrated that the support offered by residence halls improved the sense of belonging for students of color more so than for their White peers. The scholars speculated that this improved sense of belonging could be attributed to the closeness and depth of the relationships created, along with the experiences attained in the residence halls during their first year. This also provided evidence that sense of belonging can be targeted and influenced by institutions.

Hurtado (2001) and Morrow and Ackermann (2012) argued that other aspects related to campus culture, such as faculty and peer support, also positively contributed to students' sense of belonging and retention. Museus et al. (2018) applied such studies as evidence that White students and students of color experience their campus environments in differing ways, and

therefore, exhibit different levels of belonging. This sense of belonging reflects their connectivity to their campus culture and influences the intent to persist or depart. Although this study is unique in that it examines the experiences of racial minority students at a 2-year HBCU, the findings from existing literature inform the study by providing a foundational understanding of how students from different backgrounds can be retained.

The Campus Environment

Museus et al. (2018) continued to evaluate the concept of a sense of belonging as it related to the campus environment. Their research showcased that the students connected to their campus community from a psychological perspective were more likely to be retained because they possessed an intrinsic desire to belong to their communities. A failure to make connections was detrimental to students' mental health and behavior and could lead to departure. Such conclusions have led scholars to explore further the nature of the relationship between campus environment and a sense of belonging.

Several scholars have written about the campus environment and its influence on student outcomes (Harper, 2012; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh, 2001b; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2008a). In such studies, terms such as campus climate and campus culture are often employed interchangeably. However, it is critical to assess and comprehend the distinctions between the terms as each has implications for institutional transformation and the effect on student outcomes such as retention. Whereas campus culture addresses the organization from a universal point of view, climate focuses on specific sections or parts of that environment (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

Understanding Campus Climate

The concept of campus climate has resonated throughout higher education research for decades (Baird, 2016; Cabrera et al., 1999; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1998; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus et al., 2018; Whitt, 1996). Scholars have investigated its meaning and utilized such definitions to study institutional conditions to explore racial identities. Many of these investigations have not only highlighted disparities in student outcomes among diverse racial groups, but they have also been instrumental in the initial phases of discussing institutional change to better serve these groups. As stated by Museus and Jayakumar (2012), "analyses of campus racial climates are focused on measuring students' attitudes, perceptions, observations, or interactions within the racial environment of their institutions at a particular point in time" (p. 5). While such examination has helped to create a footprint for preliminary discussions and the formulation of strategic initiatives around the topic, theorists such as Harper (2012) and Museus and Jayakumar (2012) argued that efforts such as institutional programming directed towards minoritized students have failed to address the deeply embedded systemic institutional barriers that impede successful student outcomes among these groups. Likewise, studies on campus climate provide a more limited outlook rather than addressing the issues through a holistic institutional viewpoint such as campus culture (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

Museus and Jayakumar (2012) criticized campus climate research for failing to address how institutions could and should fully adapt their practices, policies, and systems to be more accommodating to racially diverse demographics. Furthermore, Harper (2012) denoted that although scholars and practitioners investigate the racial climate on university and college campuses, they fail to assess how racism and racist situations directly influence outcomes of

minoritized students. Claims that such research has led to insulated, surface-level programs designed to make racially diverse students feel more welcome on campus have proven relevant in higher education, especially as demographics shift (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

Institutions account for the racial shifts in student populations by formulating targeted programs and other initiatives on campus in a futile attempt to foster adjustment (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Although some institutional initiatives created to enhance the campus climate may facilitate student integration and are a necessary preface to addressing inequalities among racial groups, these efforts do not penetrate the institutional fabric, leaving systemic barriers that these groups continue to overcome, furthering the incongruencies of student outcomes among these racial groups (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). As Harper (2012) noted, "Why is it inconceivable that what a minoritized person occasionally experiences are not a 'chilly climate' but instead a racist environment?" (p. 23).

Moreover, when studying the campus racial climate, race and racism were regarded as topics that could not and should not be discussed (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Faculty, staff, and students observed an unwritten code not to discuss topics surrounding race or racism to avoid making others feel uncomfortable (Harper, 2012; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Societal sentiments around discussions of race and racism have mirrored those demonstrated in the educational environment. Further, Harper (2012) maintained a similar sentiment regarding scholars and their research on campus climates and race. To Harper's point, it is necessary that institutions directly address the covert aspects of the campus environment that are sometimes eluded in scholarly research. In most studies exploring campus climate, race and racism are often evaded as environmental elements that influence a student's inability to achieve specific student outcomes, including retention (Harper, 2012; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012).

To truly begin transforming institutions to serve students from marginalized racial groups, scholarly and institutional research should go beyond student attitudes and perceptions (Harper, 2012; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers should begin to thoroughly explore every aspect of the institutional environment, ranging from pedagogy and academic beliefs (Tinto, 2006) and norms to student activism and community service, and everything in between. The institutional environment should be constructed to foster integration and acceptance and remove inherent obstructions preventing successful student outcomes. Campus climate has undoubtedly been a valuable investigative point. However, research should now extend beyond the breadth of those constrictions to propel racially diverse student populations into the world of successful student outcomes. Such transformations can help to facilitate successful outcomes for students from different backgrounds at varying educational institutions.

Understanding Campus Culture

Museus and Jayakumar (2012) used Schein's (1992) framework to explore the complexities and intricacies of institutional culture. The scholars discussed three levels of institutional culture as applied to higher education institutions: artifacts, values, and assumptions. Artifacts, such as the institutional history, stories, and traditions, were classified as the most salient aspects of an organization's culture (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Schein, 1992). Values were standards that the organization possessed. In Schein's (1992) model, values were espoused (beliefs that are shared among the institutional members) and enacted (beliefs that are displayed in the actions of the institutional members). Finally, the last level of organizational culture was cultural assumptions. These are more implicit aspects of the institution. These assumptions

comprise the foundational system of beliefs and influence members' attitudes, thoughts, opinions, and values (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Whitt, 1996).

Kuh's (2001b) definition of campus culture paralleled that of Schein's framework. He defined campus culture as:

> the collective, mutually shaping patterns of institutional history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and which provide a frame of reference for interpreting the meanings of events and actions on and off campus (p. 25).

He argued that how students perceive the institution with regards to cultural properties, such as norms and traditions, influences how they understand different situations on campus and how they view the institution's functions and what it represents. These factors influence the retention of students.

The multifaceted landscape of campus culture, however, creates difficulties for administrators to bring about institutional change. Kuh (2001b) contended that subcultures on campuses can contribute to the complexity of understanding and adjusting the associated culture. Subcultures are defined as "groups within an organization whose members share patterns of norms and values that differ from those of other groups" (p. 26). Subcultures can be clubs, student religious organizations, sororities and fraternities, and athletic sports teams, to name a few. These groups often share beliefs and values that are held within the institutional culture which can align or collide with the beliefs of the institution. To further add to the convolution, students often belong to more than one subculture, such as the football player who is a member of a Greek fraternity. Moreover, altering the campus culture to be more conducive for certain

minoritized groups could inadvertently result in negative outcomes for others. For example, adding programs geared towards supporting Black students could unintentionally leave non-Black students feeling isolated and ignored. These additional layers of campus culture can further complicate the ability to convert the institutional structure to achieve true change.

Museus and Jayakumar (2012) also highlighted the important yet complex nature of campus culture. Despite its complexity, it is critical to understand the obscurities and power that campus culture has over how the institution functions and, thus, how it influences student outcomes (Hurtado et al., 1998; Kuh, 2001b). Tacit assumptions and beliefs so deeply entrenched within an institution's structure are problematic because those assumptions often constitute the foundation of institutional barriers that prevent successful student outcomes for racial minorities (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). They defined this as:

> The norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that comprise a campus's culture manifest symbolically in various institutional missions, traditions, language, physical structures, artwork, media representations, interactions, and other artifacts. Together, all of these cultural elements and their symbolic manifestations interact to constitute the "invisible tapestry" that has such a powerful influence on institutional members (p.7).

The different aspects of campus culture influence how the institution functions and the influence exerted over student retention. Consequently, recognizing, addressing, and destroying the impermeable ideologies perpetuating disparities among racial groups is complicated work.

Harper and Hurtado (2007) explained that some institutions have historical contexts that cause minoritized students to perceive the campus as being racist even before they experience it for themselves. These students might experience incongruence with their campus before exploring any other aspects of the institution. Arguably, such incongruence could lead to a lack

of integration, a decreased sense of belonging, and ultimately, student departure (Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2008a; Strayhorn, 2008; Tinto, 1975). This is especially important to examine for this study which seeks to understand the experiences of racial minority students at HBCUs. These types of embedded perceptions should be addressed and eradicated to transform campus environments and improve student outcomes. As numerous scholars have suggested (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kuh, 2001b; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012), because campus culture, especially student subcultures, influences retention decisions and student outcomes, it is critical for researchers and administrators alike to relentlessly pursue clarity on the topic.

In Harper's (2012) assessment of campus racial climate literature, Harper and Hurtado's (2007) thematic evaluation of campus racial climates, and Museus and Jayakumar's (2012) differentiation between campus climate and culture, the scholars discussed the necessity for institutional transformation. Harper and Hurtado (2007) used Eckel and Kezar's (2003) definition of transformation to emanate the importance of institutional change to be deep, pervasive, intentional, and occurring over time. Harper and Hurtado (2007) stated:

> Accordingly, deep change reflects a shift in values…and assumptions that underlie daily operations…Pervasiveness indicates that change is felt across the institution in assumptions and daily work of faculty, staff, and administrators…Intentionality in constructing culturally affirming environments and experiences that facilitate the cultivation of racially diverse friendship groups must substitute passivity and negligence (p. 20).

Due to these deeply embedded norms, traditions, values, and the like, institutions should deliberately and proactively alter the fabric with which they have been constructed. To truly embrace institutional transformation and foster a sense of belonging on college campuses,

administrators need to understand the uncomfortably challenging and often sensitive nature of their campus cultures (Hurtado et al., 1998) and begin to construct a culture that integrally and systemically accepts and promotes diversity among students, leading to increased student success outcomes among minoritized groups. While scholarly literature has not fully traversed this domain, some researchers have begun to develop theoretical frameworks that address the complexity of the campus culture to improve student outcomes among various populations.

The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model

Campus cultures that foster integration and a sense of belonging have been shown to enhance student success outcomes such as student retention and persistence. Museus and Maramba (2011) and Museus (2014) have assessed campus culture and how it creates institutional environments that promote student retention. Few studies have provided data assessing the relationship between the campus environment and a sense of belonging perceived by a student. The need to explore the various types of campus environments that maximize the sense of belonging in higher education has led to the development of Museus's (2014) CECE model.

Principles of the CECE Model

The CECE model describes the facets of culturally engaging campus environments that administrators can create and foster to allow diverse student populations to thrive (Museus, 2014). The model is founded on considerable qualitative research conducted by various researchers and consists of nine components that are positively associated with a sense of belonging (Museus et al., 2018). This theoretical framework is rooted in the experiences of diverse populations and incorporates the cultural criticisms of Tinto's theory of student integration (Museus et al., 2017). Additionally, it recognizes that external factors such as

financial aspects and family influences, along with what Museus (2014) identified as precollege inputs (e.g., demographic elements, academic preparation, and temperaments upon matriculating) shape certain college success outcomes, including retention. The scholars identified and categorized nine elements of culturally engaging campus environments into two subgroups: indicators of cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness (Museus, 2014).

Cultural relevance. The first of the two identifiers, cultural relevance, is the level to which the educational environment is pertinent to the student's cultural background and identity. It means that the campus has taken measures to align the campus climate with its diverse students. Within cultural relevance, the CECE model incorporates cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, meaningful cross-cultural engagement, and culturally validating environments. These concepts relate to opportunities presented to the student to interact with their community. For example, cultural familiarity describes opportunities available to students to physically unite with faculty, staff, and peers that can relate to and understand their backgrounds and different experiences.

Culturally relevant knowledge and cultural community service, respectively, incorporate opportunities for students to learn and exchange knowledge about their cultural communities and give back and transform their communities through activism and service. Finally, cross-cultural engagement and validating environments refer to students' degrees of involvement in conversations where they can discuss social and political issues with peers from differing backgrounds, along with the extent to which the campus values the students' cultural understanding, upbringing, and identities (Museus, 2014). Students who are motivated to participate in student activism, encouraged to voice their thoughts and opinions regarding issues

within their community, and give back to those communities with the support of stakeholders are examples of cultural engagement and validating environment.

Cultural responsiveness. The second group of indicators, *cultural responsiveness*, entails the degree to which the campus provides support systems that appropriately and effectively respond to the needs of ethnically diverse student populations. These support systems might be customized to address the varying obstacles that diverse student populations might encounter in an educational setting (Hardy et al., 2019); those are detailed as collectivist cultural orientations, humanized educational environments, proactive philosophies, and holistic support. Within the classification of collectivist orientations, campuses are assessed by how much they value collaboration and share success rather than individualism and competition. This type of campus equates to a cooperative environment where members of the campus focus on the advancement and success of the collective rather than the individual.

The following two elements are humanized educational environments and proactive philosophies. These correspondingly refer to how much the institutional agents (e.g., faculty and staff) care about and are committed to developing meaningful relationships with students and how they go above and beyond to ensure that students have information, opportunities, and support. Lastly, holistic support is the level to which students have access to a minimum of one faculty or staff member whom they can trust to provide information and support, or connect them to meaningful resources, despite the issues they may face.

Individual influences. These nine indicators were based on extensive research over several years and are linked to higher levels of engagement, sense of belonging, and retention, among other success outcomes, identified as individual influences (Guiffrida, 2003; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Rendón, 1994; Rendón et al., 2016;

Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1975,1987). The core of the framework revolves around engaging campus environments fostering individual influences (e.g., sense of belonging, academic performance, student success outcomes) (Museus, 2014). There is still much to be learned about the overall efficacy of these indicators to improve student success outcomes. However, Kiyama et al. (2015) argued that these elements can generate the impetus for beneficial dialogue around how institutions can restructure or transform their campus environments to better support and retain minoritized students when they are engulfed in a campus culture that is unlike their own.

The CECE Model as a New Framework

The construction of the CECE model and its core elements are critical to comprehending student success and retention. Current literature on the topic often involves student behaviors and how those behaviors influence students' decisions to persist, placing the responsibility in the hands of the students (Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus et al., 2017, 2018). On the contrary, the CECE model considers external and environmental factors as potential indicators of student success outcomes for diverse populations and encourages administrators to transform their campus environments to align with its core principles (Museus et al., 2017). While there is still much to be learned about the model and its effectiveness as an empirical retention indicator, Museus (2014) has developed a new lens through which student success can be gauged, and institutional practices can be revamped to foster a more accommodating campus environment for students from diverse backgrounds.

McShay (2017) discussed the CECE model as a framework that educators could utilize to create and implement more holistic and inclusive practices beneficial to diverse student populations, specifically informing the work to be done with multicultural centers and their purpose. The author chose four principles delineated from the CECE model that were deemed as

indicators that directly aligned with the practices and intentions of multicultural centers: cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, and opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagements. Utilizing those principles, McShay (2017) proposed staff- and student-driven activities to promote and foster self-reflection as students were exposed to diverse perspectives, speaking to the model's cross-cultural engagement principle. He also suggested that centers have programs that highlight the experiences of students from varying ethnic backgrounds to foster the acquisition of culturally relevant knowledge.

Using the CECE model, Druery and Brooms (2019) assessed the experiences of five Black male college students participating in the Black Male Leadership Collective (BMLC) program designed to encourage and support cultural assimilation at a predominantly White 4-year institution. The program provided a pathway through which the participants were able to culturally adapt to their environment. Specifically, Druery and Brooms (2019) determined that the program helped to develop the participants' cultural familiarity, connect to a culturally enriching environment, and enhance culturally relevant knowledge, all components of the CECE model. These indicators were perceived through support from the BMLC community, bonding opportunities with BMLC peers, and out-of-classroom opportunities to grow and mature. The program provided a culturally validating environment that was an outlet and safe space for Black males to be surrounded by and embraced by others from shared backgrounds, increasing their likelihood of retaining.

The use of the framework has further been extended to racially minoritized faculty members and their daily encounters. Wright-Mair (2017) used the model to qualitatively explore the experiences of minoritized faculty members in an academic setting and analyze how their PWIs fostered their success through various support services. All participant faculty members

felt that their individual experiences were heavily manipulated by the campus environment in which they worked. While some participants found it challenging to be successful in a campus climate where they did not see themselves physically represented, they were able to traverse their daily functions when they felt an authentic commitment from their institution to connect them with others from shared backgrounds. Lastly, faculty had more rewarding and less taxing experiences when their institution recognized their connection to their communities, another concept outlined in the CECE model. The CECE framework has been shown to improve faculty experiences in a similar manner to student experiences.

Muñoz and Espino (2017) recounted their case study using the CECE framework that analyzed the strategies used by a Georgia university to develop a campus environment that provided educational access for eight students who self-identified as undocumented. The authors found that the institution fulfilled some but not all the principles of the CECE model. Ultimately, the institution incorporated culturally relevant pedagogy through Museus' (2014) principles of culturally relevant knowledge, cultural familiarity, and cultural community service. These aspects were said to have encouraged reflection and educational transformation. Institutional agents offered holistic support and demonstrated authenticity and care for students through their application of proactive philosophies leading to culturally validating educational environments. While these researchers did not directly address retention, the CECE framework was used to show how the campus environment provided a more culturally conducive environment for a minoritized student population, indicating a higher likelihood of successful outcomes such as retention.

As the literature demonstrates, the CECE model is an emerging theoretical framework that can be used to assist educators in attaining a more enhanced understanding of factors that

contribute to the success of diverse groups on college campuses (Kiyama et al., 2015). The CECE model has been reframed in several studies to operationalize a more comprehensive approach for postsecondary institutions to better facilitate student success outcomes. Although the literature lacks substantial data to support the claims, some qualitative and quantitative data have recently been collected to provide a new lens on retaining diverse student populations (Museus, 2014).

Retention Through Another Lens: An HBCU Approach

The CECE model established by Museus (2014) has continued to advance the knowledge concerning retention on different college campuses. It has provided a platform for administrators to create campus environments that attract and retain students from diverse backgrounds. One type of campus that inherently embraces these concepts is the HBCU. These campuses were designed to benefit historically marginalized students (Bracey, 2017; Hurtado et al., 1998). Although Museus (2014) did not utilize this type of campus to generate his model, it could be argued that the principles stemming from his framework intuitively align with the campus atmospheres created by HBCUs. As such, this study must consider the literature surrounding the benefits of HBCUs as they were created to provide a space for Black students (Hurtado et al., 1998) that demonstrate the ideals found in the CECE model.

A Brief Background on The Success of HBCUs

According to the U.S. Department of Education (OCR, 1991), HBCUs were established because there was a lack of structured instructional systems for Black students (Hardy et al., 2019). For centuries, Black individuals were refused any form of learning, and many states implemented legislation that made it unlawful for a Black slave to learn to write (Bracey, 2017; Williams et al., 2019). As slaves were emancipated and desired higher education, they were not

permitted to attend the same institutions as their White counterparts. Instead, they were forced to create their own higher education institutions to escape the unequal treatment by Whites in the already established colleges and universities (Bracey, 2017; Williams et al., 2019).

Unlike PWIs, HBCUs have historically practiced openness when admitting students. These institutions have allowed qualified students to attend their institution regardless of racial or ethnic background (Bracey, 2017; Palmer et al., 2015). This sense of acceptance among the institutions is delineated by one of the most acknowledged benefits provided by HBCUs, which is their ability to create a welcoming environment for students (Bracey, 2017; Hurtado et al., 1998). Bracey (2017) argued that students enrolled at HBCUs are given an escape from the racial conflicts commonly found on PWIs. These campuses are thought to provide an ambiance for acceptance (Hurtado et al., 1998), where Black identity, pride, and ethnic traditions are emphasized (Bracey, 2017; Palmer et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2021). Black students frequently struggle to gain social acceptance at PWIs. The lack of social support networks specifically for Black students on these campuses is apparent. On the other hand, HBCUs provide a gateway for students to cultivate social relationships that enhance their overall self-esteem and self-worth (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014).

Many HBCUs have also embraced academic programs that cater to the individualities and educational needs of Black students and their unique experiences (Hardy et al., 2019; Hurtado et al., 1998; Williams et al., 2019) while integrating Black culture into pedagogy and instilling a sense of pride among students (Bracey, 2017; Williams et al., 2021). Several HBCUs have become the educational centers for the exploration and study of Black history (Bracey, 2017). Some were even the location of varying events of the civil rights movement, also producing civil rights leaders who were graduates (Bracey, 2017). Moreover, the academic goals

of HBCUs have often incorporated and promoted the supposition that Black students were equal to White students and their PWIs, a concept engrained throughout HBCU pedagogy (Bracey, 2017).

Concurrently, HBCUs have a reputation for offering a more supportive setting for Black students than PWIs (Hurtado et al., 1998; OCR, 1991). These campuses tend to provide more academic and faculty support, as well as introductory programs for students who lack college readiness (Bracey, 2017; Hurtado et al., 1998). According to the OCR (1991), "the faculties at many HBCUs place as much, or more, emphasis on teaching and student service-oriented activities as on research. This permits more time for personal and high-quality student-teacher interactions" (para. 27). These instructors also tend to have more direct experience working with and on behalf of historically marginalized students, allowing students to create enhanced connections and relationships with their academic leaders (OCR, 1991). Lastly, HBCUs tend to have an exceptionally healthy and proactive alumni base eager to provide both support and valuable networking to better develop future generations of Black leaders (Why choose an HBCU, 2020; Williams et al., 2019).

The previous discussion highlights only some of the reasons why HBCUs have been more successful at retaining and graduating Black students than PWIs (Why choose an HBCU, 2020). While HBCUs have an empirically proven history of successfully educating diverse groups of students, the research is still limited in exactly how these institutions can do so effectively. A more exhaustive assessment of this phenomenon can certainly aid both HBCUs and non-HBCUs alike in their quest to retain diverse student populations.

The First HBCU-Based Theoretical Framework

As previously examined, HBCUs have provided a safe, supportive haven for Black students to attain the academic knowledge and skills to be successful (Williams et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2021). These institutions have collectively worked to create a space where students can build relationships with faculty, staff, and peers from similar backgrounds while monopolizing opportunities that may not otherwise be offered at PWIs (Bracey, 2017; Palmer et al., 2013). Given the aggregate work and constructive contributions that HBCUs have made to the Black community, researchers Arroyo and Gasman (2014) have progressed towards an educational framework rooted in the fundamentals of HBCUs but applicable to various college campuses. It provides guidelines grounded in empirical research assessing HBCUs' contributions to Black student outcomes. Given the purpose and research questions of this study, this emerging approach can provide the groundwork for investigating racial minority student success outcomes on both HBCU and other campuses.

Arroyo and Gasman (2014) discussed the need to develop an institutional-centric model for addressing retention. As Museus (2014) contended, much of the existing literature addressing student outcomes is student-centric or geared toward retaining White students who are already in more privileged opportunities to be educationally successful (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Baker et al., 2021). This model, like Museus' (2014) CECE model, places the responsibility to adequately serve diverse students on the institution rather than assigning the burden on the student (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Furthermore, the approach provides institutions with insight into how Black students should be educated and supported (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Baker et al., 2021).

Supportive environment. Deemed to be the underpinning of an HBCU's positive influence on Black student outcomes, Arroyo and Gasman (2014) founded the HBCU-based

approach on the concept of providing a supportive environment. As the central notion, the level of support offered to students influences the overall effectiveness of the model. As support increases or decreases, the model's effectiveness directly correlates, meaning that creating a supportive environment is critical to the overall approach.

Based on the results of a comparative study conducted by Fleming (1984), a supportive environment is defined as one where students are provided the opportunity to establish relationships with others outside of the classroom. In these instances, students can participate in campus life and co-curricular activities, and students feel their campus atmosphere is engrossed in academic development, leading to a sense of improvement (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Baker et al., 2021). Arroyo and Gasman (2014) argued that HBCUs provide a generally supportive environment through their diverse applicant pool, affordable tuition costs compared to PWIs, and more flexible admissions policies (Palmer et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2019).

Institutional entry point: relative institutional accessibility and affordability. The second feature of the HBCU approach is the *institutional entry point* through accessibility and affordability. HBCUs are known to welcome students from a variety of backgrounds. Some students are more academically equipped and financially affluent with the ability to prosper regardless of their choice of institution, while others are from more disadvantaged backgrounds with fewer opportunities and less preparation (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Williams et al., 2019). This feature of HBCUs contributes to the efficacy of its environment as a variety of students are equitably educated in one commonplace (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Moreover, HBCUs are deemed to be more affordable than PWIs (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Williams et al., 2019). This attribute is imperative for the success of HBCU students since a large majority are first-generation students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, often qualifying for federal

financial aid (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Lastly, these institutions are said to have more pliable admissions standards than other institutions, allowing access to those who may have lacked the resources to adequately prepare for college entrance exams and the like (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014).

Iterative processes and outcomes: achievement, identity formation, and values cultivation. The third grouping of the HBCU conceptual framework is the interdependent yet holistic relationship between achievement, identity, and values that influence Black student success, known as iterative processes and outcomes (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). With a supportive environment as a controlling influence, the three components work together to increase student success. Research has demonstrated that HBCUs offer competitive learning environments with a more customized learning process, producing graduates who are academically aligned with their PWI counterparts (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Hardy et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019). Additionally, many HBCUs introduce culturally relevant pedagogy along with their traditional methods of teaching, an aspect often lacking at many PWIs (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Williams et al., 2019).

Along with achievement, HBCUs have been known to highlight and encourage the importance of creating student identity through race and ethnicity, intellect, and leadership (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Palmer et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2021). For instance, HBCUs tend to provide instructors and other role models from backgrounds similar to those of their students (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Students are said to connect to individuals who look like them and begin to feel more comfortable with themselves as intellectuals. These students are also afforded more leadership opportunities than observed at PWIs. Administrators on HBCU campuses view students as the next generation of leaders who need to be cultivated and mentored, taking special

attention to support them through trustworthy interactions (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Williams et al., 2019).

The final piece of the conceptual connection is the nurturing of values. HBCUs are known for cultivating and encouraging a set of traditional African American morals, principles, and beliefs to develop society members comprised of character and integrity (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Unlike PWIs, whose primary focus is often on research, HBCUs center on societal evolution by repairing racial and social injustices (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Williams et al., 2019). Numerous campus stakeholders, including high-level administrators, come together around this common goal of bringing about change for the betterment of their community. This sense of community is often lacking on PWI campuses (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014).

These three factors (achievement, identity, and values) define the iterative processes and outcomes elements of this model. They work cohesively to improve student outcomes. In a supportive HBCU environment, the model states that students are encouraged to achieve academic success through customized and culturally relevant pedagogy. Students can explore, or even find, their identities through the intellectual exploration of their racial and ethnic history (Williams et al., 2021) while connecting to caring faculty and staff with whom connections are established (Palmer et al., 2013). Lastly, students are empowered to practice and celebrate who they have been, who they are, and who they will be through the reparation of racial and social injustices (Williams et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2019). These factors positively contribute to their social adjustment and sense of belonging, promoting increased retention.

Holistic success. The aftermath of the interconnectedness of the previously discussed components is noted to be improved student success outcomes (e.g., enhanced academic achievement and increased student retention) (Shorette & Arroyo, 2015). For instance, Shorette

and Arroyo (2015) credit a "disproportionately high percentage of the Black workforce" to HBCUs (p.71). HBCU environments are attributed to educating Blacks who earn terminal degrees in STEM majors such as science or engineering (Shorette & Arroyo, 2015; Williams et al., 2019). This HBCU institutional model is also reasoned to be the justification for the Black middle class (Hardy et al., 2019; Shorette & Arroyo, 2015; Williams et al., 2019). According to this emergent HBCU approach, the environmental factors that lead to these achievements within the Black community are associated with the dynamics of the HBCU milieu and, thus, are the catalyst for holistic success for HBCU students.

White Students as the Minority Racial Group on HBCU Campuses

Studies have recently begun to address the systematic concerns about minority retention. In doing so, the research is almost exclusively centered on students of color (Closson & Henry, 2008a; Shorette & Arroyo, 2015). Though such research is essential to postsecondary education, much can also be learned from evaluating White students when they become in the minority on college campuses (Closson & Henry, 2008a).

Like much of the general retention literature, these minority experiences have been evaluated through a student involvement/engagement lens. Carter and Fountaine (2012) emphasized the importance of students being actively involved on campus rather than simply participating in social activities, a concept supported by Astin's (1984) student involvement theory. Furthermore, to assess students' engagement, one had to also assess how the institution allocated its resources, structured its curriculum, and supported students through other services that might encourage them to participate, a concept repeatedly found to be associated with retention (Carter & Fountaine, 2012; Kuh, 2009; Museus, 2014).

Through this lens, Carter and Fountaine (2012) found in their qualitative case studies on HBCU campuses that White students were engaged through interactions with faculty and staff, involvement in co-curricular activities, prior diversity experiences at the college level, and first-year experience programs. Several of these themes are present in other research, such as Museus' (2014) CECE model and Arroyo's and Gasman's (2014) HBCU educational approach. Closson and Henry's (2008b) study exploring the social adjustment of eight students at their HBCU revealed that participants also felt a strong sense of support from HBCU faculty, which not only aided in their academic assimilation (Tinto, 1975; Umbach, 2006; Xu & Webber, 2018) but also linked them to numerous social groups and activities on campus, heavily influencing their White student success outcomes (Carter & Fountaine, 2012; Closson & Henry, 2008b). Finally, Strayhorn (2010) quantitatively studied 215 White undergraduates attending HBCUs to measure their satisfaction with their institutions based on their interactions with faculty. White students were more satisfied with their institutions when they had networked with faculty members. This finding led to the conclusion that campuses should promote activities that encourage faculty-student interactions to improve student success outcomes among White students.

Mobley et al. (2021) used a qualitative focus group methodology to explore the experiences of White students on HBCU campuses. The scholars addressed several research questions, but the most pertinent to this study was, "How do White HBCU students experience their campus contexts both academically and socially?" (p. 2). Students described a strong feeling towards their campus as they were ultimately required to participate in community services hours within their honors program. Furthermore, some of the participants were also involved in co-curricular activities. The participants explained that being involved in activities outside of the classroom was essential to their student experience. Mobley et al. (2021) stated

that “students engaged in campus and community activities despite any outside commitments they may have had” and that “co-curricular contexts were spaces where they [White students] gained acceptance and affirmation” (p.8-9).

On the contrary, not all experiences of White students on HBCU campuses have been characterized as pleasant and engaging. Several White participants from the Mobley et al. (2021) study described experiences where their racial identity played a negative role in their HBCU experience. For instance, a female participant stated that she felt uncomfortable during her new student orientation not only because she was noticeably one of the only White students in attendance but also because comments were made by campus staff that added to her distress. Additionally, all participants detailed their classroom experience where they, for the first time, engaged in active conversations about White privilege, systematic racism, and the like. In these discussions, one of the students described their need to defend their race, noting that historical sentiments and events that occurred were not necessarily indicative of the entire White race.

Another study examining the experiences of White students on HBCU campuses found comparable results. In the Closson and Henry (2008b) study, a participant indicated that she had encountered acts of racism when her softball team members referred to her as “White Girl” (p.526). Concurrently, another participant expressed his sentiments around negative racial responses. He conveyed his beliefs that Black students chose not to interact with him because they were taught to distrust Whites and to assume all Whites were racists. As a result, Black students chose not to engage with him, according to his perception. While these students mentioned encounters that could have potentially influenced their decision to depart, they still chose to remain at their institutions, and overall, characterized their experiences as being generally positive.

Despite the studies that have been conducted, the literature surrounding White students in HBCU settings is still scarce. Most of the few studies that have been conducted around this topic are those stemming from qualitative analyses. The existing studies suggest that researchers need to continue to inspect this topic in greater detail. Such investigation can support practitioners in their quest to improve retention and maintain enrollment in the majority and minority settings (Palmer et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The literature review serves as a basis for understanding the constructs related to the retention of racial minority students on HBCU campuses. This study was guided by Museus' (2014) CECE model and Arroyo and Gasman's (2014) HBCU educational approach utilizing a qualitative case study methodology. The study supplements extant literature by (a) assessing the retention of racial minority students at HBCUs through the lens of the models and (b) exploring racial minority student experiences at a 2-year technical HBCU. Unfortunately, there has not been a consistent and cohesive list of influential factors that have been said to influence student retention from either a student or institutional perspective (Tinto, 2006). More outdated theorists, such as Tinto (1975), have developed well-researched retention theories but have been criticized for their lack of attention to external, cultural factors that influence these outcomes and implying student assimilation to their campus climate rather than institutional adaptation to the student.

Expanding on Tinto's (1975) student departure theory as the groundwork, several theorists have developed new models that assess factors outside the student's control. These models provide some insight for educators to create strategic initiatives to keep their students. These scholars have also investigated retention through the lens of a diverse student population, a flaw in Tinto's original and updated models (Museus, 2014; Tinto, 2006). However, there is

still a substantial gap in the literature on how administrators can better retain their students within racial or ethnic groups that are the minority on campus. Like Black students attending PWIs, racial minority students on an HBCU campus will be experiencing their academic and social journeys as the minority racial group. With the collection of this data, researchers can begin to evaluate these retention factors and provide practitioners with strategies that can be implemented on any postsecondary campus to retain students from different backgrounds.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach to examine racial minority students at a 2-year technical HBCU. Through interviews, observations, and document and artifact analysis this study explored institutional factors that contribute to the retention of racial minority students on an HBCU campus and how the campus environment contributes to racial minority students being retained. This study aimed to answer two research questions:

RQ1: How do racial minority students at a rural southern historically Black technical 2-year college describe their reasons for persisting?

RQ2: In what ways does campus environment contribute to the persistence of students in the racial minority at a rural southern historically Black technical 2-year college?

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Using a qualitative research methodology, these questions explored how the institutional environment on a 2-year HBCU campus influences the retention of racial minority students. This was necessary for an adequate evaluation of individual student perspectives on the effects of the institutional environment on the retention of racial minority students, specifically related to social integration and sense of belonging. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) and Merriam (1998), qualitative research utilizes a theoretical framework to inform a study of research problems to address a social or human problem. The researcher collects data in the natural setting under study, analyzes the data through both inductive and deductive patterns, and finally, provides a written report which includes the voices of the participants, the reflections of the researchers, the description of the problem, and how the study contributes to extant literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Using this understanding of qualitative research, as the researcher, I positioned myself in the natural setting of the participants to better examine the research questions. While Museus (2014) argued that the extant literature on retention as a function of campus environment is primarily qualitative, the literature addressing these inquiries specific to the racial minority student population on a defined campus type is absent; thus, demanding more extensive qualitative research to lay the groundwork for later quantitative investigations.

Additionally, qualitative research is rooted in the lived experiences of each individual and their subjective views in their naturally occurring setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I investigated the shared experiences of a group of people, in this case, racial minority students in the minority, and described what they have experienced, in what ways they have had these experiences, and what those shared experiences signify (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using a qualitative methodology allowed the participants' narratives to be told through their distinct lenses through data collection techniques such as interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach provided the participants the liberty to independently determine what aspects of life they chose to discuss throughout the study while also allowing me to position myself within the research to interpret, analyze, and convey the collected data from their viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the nature of the research questions and the richness of qualitative data, the narratives provided by the participants allowed for a more comprehensive assessment of retention factors of racial minority students on HBCU campuses.

Case Study: A Constructivist Paradigm Using an Epistemological Assumption

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach grounded in a constructivist epistemology. According to Mills et al. (2010) case study is a methodological approach where the researcher investigates a real-life bounded system (defined by specific parameters) over time

through detailed data collection using several sources of material. Case study research has a lengthy, eminent history across various disciplines including education, sociology, and anthropology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In present-day case study research, there are a plethora of procedural approaches which can be utilized. However, this study was defined as a single instrumental case study where I focused on one concern, the factors which influence the retention of racial minority students on HBCU campuses, and then selected one bounded case (racial minority students at Institution Tech) to demonstrate the issue (Merriam, 1998). Yin (2018) states that the goal of case study research is not generalizability to populations, but rather to "theoretical propositions" (p. 21). Thus, this study seeks to expand the understanding of the CECE Model and HBCU approach in relation to the experience of racial minority students at a 2-year technical HBCU. The use of multiple sources of data was used to advance and triangulate the theoretical propositions found within the case.

Within the landscape of research, a paradigm serves as a map by which research is executed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Paradigms are comprised of four elements that encompass the fundamental beliefs, assumptions, values, and norms that guide the study. Each paradigm has an epistemology. "Epistemology is used to describe how we come to know something; how we know the truth or reality" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p.7). Epistemology is understood as the essentials of knowledge, how it is obtained, and how it is communicated to other individuals (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

This study's epistemological approach was rooted in the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm attempts "to understand the subjective world of the human experience" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 33). This view is taken when the researcher attempts to understand the position of the subject being observed in a comprehensive manner (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

The researcher is more focused on the viewpoints of the subjects rather than those who are observing, as they work to understand and interpret the individuals and the world around them (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This angle ultimately leads to the understanding that each individual's world is socially constructed, and it is what the individual makes it (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Consequently, using this study to gain an understanding of the experiences of racial minority students on HBCU campuses and how the institutional environment influences their integration and sense of belonging necessitated an epistemology that embraced the interpretation of the participants' perspectives and expression of their social existences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Role of the researcher. The researcher's role in qualitative research differs from a quantitative researcher. The researcher is the instrument used to collect the data in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Data is collected, interpreted, analyzed, and conveyed through the researcher. Some intrinsic biases and assumptions should be acknowledged and assessed within a qualitative study. The research audience needs to be aware of the background and context of the instrument collecting the data. The researcher needs to describe pertinent aspects of themselves, including their personal biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences which may qualify them to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003). An effective qualitative investigator seeks to create a representation using ideas and theories from various sources, and asks prating questions, listens, thinks, reflects, and asks more exploratory questions to get to deeper levels of the conversation (Simon, 2011). The researcher also accepts the influence that their values have on their research rather than falsely adopting their ability to remove their bias from the research process (Greenbank, 2003).

As the researcher, I come from a background where I was often one of the only Black students in my classes. I have experienced being one of the only Black female employees in many of the jobs I have held, including the last ten years working in higher education as an admissions counselor, Director of Student Accounts, and then Director of Student Financial Services for a small, private, liberal arts institution in the southeast. In all my higher education responsibilities, retention has played an instrumental role in the institution's success. I have worked with numerous departments on campus to improve student success outcomes for all populations of students. While my education and work experiences place me as a minoritized individual in a predominantly White environment, I feel as though this knowledge and familiarity allows me to connect with those who are the minority in a majority setting.

It is relevant to notate the innate connection and emotional attachment I have with historically marginalized and minoritized students as a member of the population myself. This relationship undoubtedly influenced how my research was conducted and the lens through which the inquiry occurred. It has also heavily influenced the underlying reasons for my desire to conduct this type of research. When analyzing my circumstances, the varying factors that swayed my ability to be retained could coincide with the experiences of many of the participants. Furthermore, my perspective as a researcher who attended a public 4-year PWI should also be recognized as it influenced the lens through which I collected and examined the data. Regardless, I felt comfortable as the researcher because of my familiarity with the sentiments explored and my knowledge about HBCUs. I felt as though I comfortably probed the participants with questions, given our natural connection.

On the contrary, as a self-identified Black female discussing a sensitive topic with White individuals, it was important to recognize and accept the underlying sentiments that potentially

affected the data collection process. As a qualitative researcher, I believe my personal experiences allowed me to build a rapport with the participants, create a comforting environment to convey their sentiments, and permitted me to interpret and reflect on those experiences through my viewpoint. During the data analysis process, I allowed the thematic development to occur independently of my personal experiences, racial status, or previous affiliations with PWIs.

Site Selection

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a critical aspect of the data collection process is choosing the site or individual to study. "For case study research, the researcher needs to select a site or sites to study, such as programs, events, processes, activities, individuals or several individuals" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.153). As formerly mentioned, current literature lacks investigation of retention factors for racial minority students in 2-year historically Black institutions, especially as it relates to campus culture (Shorette & Arroyo, 2015). To contribute to the gap in the literature, I found it imperative to conduct this study at a 2-year HBCU. The site chosen for this study was "Institution Tech" (IT). This institution was selected because White students graduate from IT at a higher rate (67%) than any other racial group. Consequently, it was important to examine the experiences of White students on the campus to understand what contributed to their retention. Convenience, locale, and the lack of racial minority students enrolled at other 2-year HBCUs in the state also contributed to the selection of this institution as the study site.

About Institution Tech

IT is a 2-year public, technical college located in rural South Carolina. Established in 1947, its original purpose was to educate Black citizens in different trades. Since its inception, the college has experienced tremendous growth in its enrollment. It has also diversified its

program offerings and services to citizens from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds across the state. The institution's estimated cost of attendance for 2020 for in-state students living on campus was roughly $13,172 and $18,579 for out-of-state students living on campus. To offset the already affordable cost, IT offers a variety of scholarships in conjunction with both South Carolina state aid and federal aid programs. Additionally, in fall 2021, the institution offered free tuition to the first 500 new, current, and returning students to reduce financial barriers created by COVID-19.

With regards to enrollment, the institution reported its total enrollment to be 491 students in fall 2020. Of those 491 students, 67% identified as female and 33% reported as male. Additionally, 75% were reported as African American, 19% were reported as Caucasian, 1% were reported as Hispanic, 1% were reported as two or more races, and 4% were reported as race unknown. From fall 2015 to fall 2020, the total number of enrolled students has consistently declined, reporting 1043 students in 2015 and 491 in 2020. While the number of White students attending has slightly fluctuated up and down over the years, the net difference between the number of White students attending in 2015 and 2020 is 25 students, with the institution reporting 66 White students in 2015 and 91 White students in 2020. Of the total number of White students enrolled in 2020, the institution reported a total of 14 undergraduate, full-time, degree/certificate-seeking White students. Of the 14, only 5 White students were reported as being first-time students. The remaining 77 White students were reported as being part-time, undergraduate students (74 students non-degree seeking and 3 students continuing education).

Historically, White, full-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students have been a small percentage of the overall number of full-time degree/certificate-seeking students. For example, in 2017 White students made up 4%, 2018 3%, 2019 2% and White

students grew in 2020 to 7% of all full-time degree-seeking undergraduates. While overall enrollment has decreased over time, IT's retention rate for full-time students has increased from 36% in 2017 to 53% in 2020. Although this data is not disaggregated by race, the graduation rate for White students (67%) in comparison to Black students (23%) provides insight into the institution's ability to retain students in the racial minority. Given the historical decrease in institutional enrollment, the changes in the racial composition of the student population, and the overall retention rate, it is important for IT to understand the factors that influence how White students in the racial minority are retained.

The institution advertised a faculty-to-student ratio of 9:1 in 2020, offering various programs and certifications, including an Associate of Science, business administration, early care and education, criminal justice technology, and electro-mechanical engineering Technology. Some of the more popular certificate programs are pre-medical, welding, nurse aide assistant, and culinary arts. IT also offers one-year diplomas, including cosmetology, nursing, and barbering. Finally, the institution has a commitment and service to high school students, providing a dual enrollment program allowing qualified high school juniors and seniors to take college-level courses. In fall 2020, roughly 210 of the 491 enrolled students were classified as non-degree/certificate-seeking students.

In terms of student life, the institution offers an assortment of organizations and clubs through the Office of Student Leadership and Engagement which engage students in the social aspects of campus life. The College also provides athletic opportunities for students, both in the form of competitive teams and intramurals. Moreover, IT boasts its student involvement through its residential campus. In the 2019-2020 academic year, IT reported 179 occupants living on

campus, a decline from the 214 residents reported for the 2016-2017 academic year but nearly identical to the 180 residents reported, in 2018-2019.

One of IT's top five goals in their recently proposed strategic plan is to increase enrollment, persistence, and retention. The institution has witnessed an increase in *program* retention rates over the last five years, noting a 10% increase from fall 2014 to fall 2019. Concurrently, IT has also seen a steady increase retention rates over the course of five years, ending with a 53% retention rate between fall 2019 and fall 2020 for full-time students. Like other postsecondary institutions, IT focuses on providing an environment fostering growth and success to enroll, persist, and retain their students. Overall, although IT only enrolls a small number of racial minority students, its selection as the study site for this case study was due specifically to its enrollment of racial minority students and its proximity.

Gaining Access

Creswell and Poth (2018) affirmed, "qualitative research involves…gaining permission to study the site in a way that will enable the easy collection of data" (p.154). This process entails obtaining approval from the appropriate institutional review boards and individuals at the research site. Moreover, gaining access also means building a rapport with the proper individuals to obtain entrance to the site itself and to collect the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I did not have direct connections with the research site. Therefore, I needed to establish a positive rapport with the institution from the onset.

The first step was to review the website to determine who would be the most logical point of entry to discuss the potential location as a study site. Given that IT professed interest in increasing enrollment and retention efforts, it resonated with me that it might be best to introduce this study to the Vice President of Student Affairs as an initial point of contact. I emailed the

Vice President of Student Affairs to introduce myself as a doctoral student and express interest in conducting research on the campus. The Vice President responded by introducing me to the Vice President for Institutional Advancement and Effectiveness and the Executive Vice President of Administration and Innovation. We exchanged preliminary emails that were followed by more extensive discussion after the proposal defense. Through email discussion of the research purpose, why I chose IT, and the benefits of the study for the institution, I gained support and approval from the previously mentioned individuals. They presented the information to the President for his approval.

Participants

The objective of participant selection for this study was to obtain an in-depth account of the phenomenon being explored within the bounded case. It was imperative to gather data from participants that would provide insight into the institutional environment and its influence on the retention of racial minority students on the HBCU campus. These individuals consisted of first-time, degree/certificate-seeking, students in the racial minority (with a focus on White students) who had returned to the institution for at least one semester.

Consequently, I utilized purposeful sampling to select participants. Schoch (2016) described purposeful sampling as a method whose "goal is to find individuals or cases that provide insights into the specific situation under study, regardless of the general population" (p. 249). This method of sampling is rooted in the supposition that the researcher desires to understand and gain insight and thus, must select a sample from which the most information can be acquired (Merriam, 1998). In this case, purposeful sampling allowed me to investigate the phenomenon of the retention of racial minority students as a function of the institutional environment and the influence of social integration and sense of belonging. Merriam (1998)

detailed that a researcher must determine the selection criteria, or essential attributes, necessary to conduct the study. The criteria established should "directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases (Merriam, 1998, p.62). In this study, the criteria for the student participants were racial minority students attending the HBCU who had attended for a least one semester and returned to the institution for a second semester.

In terms of sample size, case study samples are typically relatively small (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schoch, 2016). 91 of 491 students identified as White at IT in 2020. However, of those 91 White students, only 14 were considered undergraduate, full-time, degree/certificate-seeking White students. Furthermore, of the 14, only five self-identified White students were considered first-time students. While IT educates White students, many of them are either high school students who are not seeking a degree, are part-time, or are continuing education students. To assist in locating students eligible to participate in the study, the institutional Registrar helped to determine which White students returned to the institution for their second semester. Only five students identified as White and met the eligibility criteria previously mentioned. Of the five eligible White students, two agreed to participate in this study, one of whom was multiracial but self-identified as White having one White parent.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection is a "series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.148). Within case study research, the data collection process entails evaluating multiple sources of data to assess the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process allows the researcher to obtain a comprehensive review of the events described from varying sources. Merriam (1998) argued, "data collection techniques used, as well as the specific information considered to be 'data' in a

study, are determined by the researcher's theoretical orientation, by the problem and purpose of the study, and by the sample selected" (p. 70). The primary means of data collection in this study were semi-structured interviews with each student, observations, and the examination of artifacts and documents.

Interviews

Interviews are the most common method of data collection in qualitative studies (Merriam, 1998). "Interviewing is also the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Consequently, interviews were employed as the primary method of data collection. An email was sent to all eligible participants detailing the breadth of the study and their eligibility to participate in the study (see Appendix A). The benefits of the study were explained to all potential participants, including a $15 digital gift certificate to Amazon as an incentive for each participant. Additionally, the educational benefits of the study were detailed as a technique to entice participation. Using the purposeful sampling strategy previously mentioned, the participants were selected, and interviews commenced.

The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix B) addressing why students chose to attend the HBCU, how the campus environment fostered social integration, how the campus created a sense of belonging among students, and how those factors influenced the students' decisions to return the following year. An outline was generated to help me stay organized and focused when interviewing the participants. Each interview was conducted through Zoom, with a phone audio recording serving as a backup copy. Following the conclusion of the interviews, individual interviews were transcribed to create a written document for thematic coding.

Observations, Artifacts, and Documents

Finally, I utilized observations (field notes and reflexive journaling) and the review of documents and artifacts, including the institutional website, policy documents, an HBCUstrong factsheet, and the student handbook, to gather data on the institutional environment, social integration, belonging, and retention efforts. According to Merriam (1998), an observation "offers a firsthand account of the situation under study and, when combined with interviewing and document analysis, allows for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated" (p.111). Documentation is an overarching term used to refer to a selection of "written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the student (including visual images)" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162). Artifacts are objects in the environment that signify a form of communication that is relevant or important to participants and/or the setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Documents and artifacts for qualitative research may include a wide range of materials, including organizational promotions, letters, historical accounts, and official records (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002). These data resources are often naturally occurring and readily available in the research setting (Merriam, 1998).

To conduct observations, an observation protocol was implemented "as a method for recording notes in the field" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 168). The procedure entailed taking both descriptive and reflexive notes describing what occurred in my individual experiences, instinctive feelings, new knowledge I obtained, personal reflections, insights, confusions, and any other information I deemed pertinent to the study. I had previously visited IT's campus on a few occasions prior to the commencement of the study. Once the study began, I spent several hours on the campus on one specific occasion, given the realities of COVID-19. Observations included inspecting numerous areas on campus which contributed to the campus culture, such as

social spaces, dining halls, and study spaces and taking field notes regarding what was witnessed. Throughout both the interview and observation processes, I participated in reflexive journaling to collect data from a researcher's viewpoint.

To analyze the documents and artifacts, I individually reviewed each object on several occasions in conjunction with the theoretical frameworks as themes emerged. I identified specific areas of the object, for instance, excerpts from a specific policy document, and coded those in conjunction with the pre-identified codes used for transcription coding. Throughout this process, I also noted any observations, feelings, personal reflections, insights, confusion, or any other information that I felt relevant to the research questions.

Ethical Considerations for Data Collection

Qualitative researchers can encounter numerous ethical issues when collecting data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Before data collection, I obtained the appropriate permissions and approvals from the institutional review boards at both Coastal Carolina University and IT. The purpose of this is to provide the applicable review boards with the necessary verification that my study design follows their rules, regulations, policies, and procedures for conducting ethical research. This process protects the researcher, participants, and the participating institution from unethical research practices.

The most common emergent ethical issues in qualitative research relate to respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Respect for persons incorporates participants' privacy and gaining their consent to participate in the study. Concern for welfare relates to the researcher's duty to minimize harm to the participants and "augment reciprocity" (Creswell & Poth, p.151). Lastly, justice addresses the concept of treating each participant equitably and maximizing inclusivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To address these ethical concerns, I gained support from participants through open and honest communication, explaining the purpose of the study, their participation in the study, the nature of the study, and their ability to remove themselves from the study without repercussions at any time. Moreover, each participant's confidentiality was maintained through the assignment of aliases. Although demographic information, such as age, was necessary for data analysis, no information that can be used to identify the participants was noted in the study or shared with anyone other than me, the researcher. The institution was also assigned an alias to maintain its confidentiality, and no identifying information was provided throughout the study. However, in this case, general information about the institution's location was noted to provide a frame of reference for the case study being conducted.

Each participant was required to complete and return a consent form confirming their uncoerced and voluntary agreement to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Only those who completed and returned the consent form were permitted to participate in the study. Lastly, all data collected were stored in a secure location on my password-protected personal computer to protect the privacy of participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis of qualitative data can be challenging for qualitative researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) describe the analysis process as an interconnected group of activities, including "organizing data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and form an interpretation of them" (p. 181). These steps require the researcher to participate in a variety of activities that result in the extensive analysis and representation of the data. The goal of these activities is to make meaning

of collected data and report the information gathered to address the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The initial step in the data analysis process was to organize the collected data into manageable subcategories- student interview transcripts, field notes/observations, reflections, artifacts, and documents. This technique created a manageable case study database (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following the culmination of each interview, individual conversations were transcribed verbatim to create a written document for thematic coding. Coding is "the process of grouping evidence and labeling ideas so that they reflect increasingly broader perspectives" (Creswell & Clark, 2018, p. 214).

Once the transcription process was concluded, a blended coding process commenced, also known as an abductive approach (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). This approach maintained the accuracy of my initial opinions and thoughts that were reflected in the field notes and coding process. The Dedoose qualitative analysis software was used to apply various codes throughout the transcriptions. I used deductive coding throughout the initial read. In this procedure, a researcher creates a pre-defined list of codes from the literature to help guide the coding process as shown in Table 1 (Garvey & Jones, 2021; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Yin, 2018). A deductive approach allows concepts from the literature to lead to what data is relevant for collection (Yin, 2016). This approach can help to establish the importance of a study. Additionally, according to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), "this approach helps focus the coding on those issues that are known to be important in the existing literature, and it is often related to theory testing or theory refinement" (p.13). Following this read, an inductive approach was used. Through each distinctive read, themes consistently emerged throughout the text. As these categories were recognized, a code was applied in the database to identify the theme. The

texts were reread, and additional codes were recognized and related to the previously defined codes. Furthermore, themes related to one another or grouped into even larger groups were arranged and placed into overarching classifications. This process was repeated on numerous occasions until the text was exhausted with the identified codes within the transcriptions.

Table 1

Pre-Defined Codes

Cultural Relevance Indicators	Cultural Responsiveness Indicators
Cultural Familiarity	Collectivist Cultural Orientations
Cultural Relevant Knowledge	Humanized Educational Environments
Cultural Community Service	Proactive Philosophies
Meaningful Cross-Cultural Engagement	Holistic Support
Cultural Validation	

Note: The list of codes stems from the Cultural Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) Model.

Supportive Environment	Institutional Entry Point	Iterative Process and Outcomes
N/A	Accessibility	Achievement
	Affordability	Identity Formation
	Flexibility	Values Cultivation

Note: The list of codes stems from the HBCU Approach.

Finally, to analyze the documents and artifacts, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) first recommend locating the specific artifacts and documents. This process occurred based on suggestions from the Vice President regarding promotional materials, objects, physical spaces, and other applicable pieces. Upon sifting through, each document and artifact were assessed for its authenticity and accuracy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The artifacts were gauged for their

origin, history, and relevance to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following this, I adopted a system of coding and cataloging the items. Each item was given a descriptive category name for coding purposes. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), content analysis is most frequently implemented to assess documents. This systematic strategy allows a researcher to investigate unstructured data considering its meaning and importance to the study. The analysis of the field notes from the observations occurred using a similar strategy.

Throughout the processes of interviewing, observing, and reviewing documents and artifacts, I notated observations, feelings, hunches, thoughts, opinions, and other sentiments. After each interview, I wrote a brief reflection which provided a summation of my initial thoughts and feelings regarding the interviews and any pertinent statements or concepts most noticeable throughout the interviews. While reviewing artifacts and documents, I also wrote a brief reflection regarding each artifact and the document reviewed.

Validity and Reliability

Every scholar conducting research should be concerned with producing results that are both valid (how closely research findings align with reality) and reliable (the extent to which the findings can be duplicated) (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When a researcher achieves validity and reliability, the findings are trustworthy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness is created through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Cope, 2014). Much of the ethics around research can prevent issues of untrustworthiness in studies. However, there are still vital steps researchers can perform to minimize distrust within their research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state, “ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner” (p. 237). One aspect of this is to

vigilantly collect, analyze, and interpret the data, as well as pay careful attention to how the results are presented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These actions can enhance data credibility and ensure that data is presented in a manner that accurately portrays the participants' views (Cope, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017).

To ensure validity in this case study, I utilized triangulation using multiple sources of data. Triangulation is the process by which a researcher compares findings among different sources to determine if the findings are consistent among those sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of multiple sources of data (interviews, field notes and observations, and artifacts and documents) increased the trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation also aids in creating credible data (Nowell et al., 2017).

Another method to ensure validity was member checks, or respondent validation (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016). Member checks are when a researcher presents the transcription and findings from the interviews to the corresponding participants to ensure their opinions and thoughts have been captured and communicated effectively (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each participant was provided a transcription of their interview and given the opportunity to confirm their opinions and thoughts. This verification process also increased the credibility and authenticity of the findings.

In terms of reliability in qualitative research, there are often difficulties when attempting to substantiate a claim that findings can be duplicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Issues occur because qualitative investigations often assess the human experience and subjective opinions of those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because there is such an emphasis in this methodology on understanding the fundamental nature of each individual experience, it can often be impossible to duplicate exact results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Consequently, Merriam and

Tisdell (2016) suggest concentrating on "whether the results are consistent with the data collected…that is, rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense- they are consistent and dependable" (p. 251). These concerns address the transferability of the data (Cope, 2014).

As previously mentioned, triangulation using multiple data sources was one method implemented to increase reliability. Another strategy employed was peer examination. As a doctoral candidate, the dissertation committee had methods built into the dissertation process to check for reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Peer examination also addressed the dependability of the data (Cope, 2014). Furthermore, dependability was achieved through the maintenance of a research journal with detailed reflections, notes, and descriptions of what occurred (Nowell et al., 2017).

Finally, when credibility, transferability, and dependability are attained, confirmability is achieved (Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability certifies that the researcher's perspective of the findings stems directly from the data and not from one's own accord. This requires the researcher to demonstrate how they achieved their conclusions and interpretations. Once more, the research journal provides evidence for and justifications for the decisions that were made.

Ethical Considerations for Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers may also encounter several ethical issues when analyzing data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the analysis phase, researchers might encounter ethical issues concerning participant protection from harm and disclosing the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once again, to avoid precarious situations regarding data, I masked participant names immediately and created composite profiles, as advised by Creswell and Poth (2018), to avoid accidentally including personally identifiable information or displaying data that could be

damaging to the participants or institution. To protect participants and the institution during the reporting segment, composite stories were used so individuals could not be identified (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, I reported all data honestly from multiple perspectives using all types of data collected, even findings contrary to the desired outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Conclusion

Within the previous chapter, literature was explored to provide a foundation for my understanding of the retention of racial minority students at HBCUs and informed the research questions and the methodology for the study. This chapter detailed the steps taken to implement this study. To contribute to the literature, this study used a qualitative case study methodology to explore and convey the lived experiences of racial minority students on a 2-year HBCU campus as it relates to retention. This study not only adds to the literature but also informs practitioners and administrators on innovative strategies which can be used to facilitate improved retention of racial minority students at HBCUs as well as improved student retention on other types of campuses.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach to examine a particular case, that of racial minority students at a 2-year technical HBCU. Through interviews, observations, and document and artifact analysis this study explored institutional factors that contribute to the retention of racial minority students on an HBCU campus and how the campus environment contributes to racial minority students being retained. The following research questions guided this study: (1) How do racial minority students at a rural southern historically Black technical 2-year college describe their reasons for persisting? (2) In what ways does campus environment contribute to the persistence of students in the racial minority at a rural southern historically Black technical 2-year college? As explained in Chapter Three, data were collected using a qualitative case study methodology to address the research questions pertaining to the institutional environment and the retention of racial minority students on an HBCU campus. This chapter provides detailed and rich information about the participants interviewed, observations made, and the documents and artifacts that were analyzed.

Participant Profiles

According to Creswell and Poth (2018) case studies are typically conducted with small sample sizes. The goal for data collection was to interview each eligible participant for a minimum of 45 minutes and a maximum of 75 minutes. For this study, two out of five eligible self-identified White student participants were interviewed to evaluate if the campus environment fostered a sense of belonging and a sense of integration and if so, how it influenced their retention.

The first participant, identified as “Sarah,” was a 19-year-old White, female who lived on campus. She was in her second semester as a Business Administration major. The second participant, identified as “Lisa,” was a 19-year-old multiracial female who lived on campus, was also in her second semester, and majored in Business Administration. It is imperative to note that the second participant identified as multiracial and was self-associated as being both White and Black. She specifically noted having a White father and a Black mother. Consequently, having lived experiences that align with other racial minority students because of her White identity she was eligible to participate in this study.

Thematic Development

The goal of this study was to provide a thorough and rich description of the case, to better understand the lived experiences of White undergraduate students attending a 2-year HBCU and to understand how the campus environment contributes to the retention of racial minority students. This was accomplished employing a case study methodology using interviews, observations, as well as document and artifact analysis through thematic analytical coding. While exploring the research questions that guided the study, a variety of themes emerged within the data. Many themes aligned with those stemming from the two theoretical frameworks used to guide the study. This aligns with the purpose of case study research that aims to expand theoretical propositions (Yin, 2018). However, additional themes emerged as well. All themes are detailed in this section of the chapter. Table 2 provides a summary of the themes that developed throughout the interviews and Table 3 provides a summary of similar themes that emerged throughout the document and artifact analysis.

Table 2

Emergent Themes

Theme	Brief Description	Possible Theoretical Alignment	Defined Theoretical Factor
Accessibility, Affordability, Proximity, and Preparation	Affordability Closeness to home Not ready to attend a 4-year institution	HBCU Approach	Institutional Entry Points (Accessibility and Flexibility)
Feeling Connected: A Family Environment	Everyone has one another's back Tight friend groups	HBCU Approach CECE Model	Supportive Environment Cultural Familiarity Collectivist Cultural Orientations
Social Involvement and Tokenism	Enhancing diversity without creating tokenism	N/A	N/A
Diverse Backgrounds for Social Success	Diverse backgrounds of students attending	HBCU Approach CECE Model	Diversity in applicants Culturally Relevant Knowledge Cultural Validation
Exploration of Cultures	Getting to know one another through campus events	CECE Model HBCU Approach	Culturally Relevant Knowledge Cultural Validation Creation of Leaders through Mentorship and Support Supportive Environment
Faculty Support and Institutional Resources	Helpful faculty Helpful resources such as tutoring and the student center	CECE Model	Humanized Educational Environments Proactive Philosophies
Racial Occurrences	"Jokes" made about actions and related to race	N/A	N/A
Differences between PWI and HBCU	Easier to adapt Easier to be oneself Thriving instead of surviving Different perceptions of academic commitment	HBCU Approach N/A	Identity Formation and Values Cultivation N/A

Table 3

Themes from Documents and Artifacts

Item	Examples	Possible Theoretical Alignment	Defined Theoretical Factor
Website	Photos Taglines Academic Programs Admissions Student Experience News Releases Flyers Tuition and Fees	CECE Model	Cultural Familiarity Meaningful Cross-cultural Engagement Cultural Validation Culturally Relevant Knowledge Humanized Educational Environments Holistic Support
		HBCU Approach	Supportive Environment Accessibility Affordability Identity Formation
Policy Documents	"Assessment of Student Achievement"	CECE Model	Humanized Educational Environments
	"Faculty and Staff Personnel Involvement in Decision-Making Process"	HBCU Approach	Affordability Achievement Pliability Customization Proactive Philosophies Supportive Environment
HBCUstrong Factsheet	N/A	CECE Model	Cultural Community Service Collectivist Cultural Orientations
		HBCU Approach	Values Cultivation
Student Handbook	N/A	CECE Model	Cultural Familiarity Culturally Relevant Knowledge Cultural Community Service Meaningful Cross-Cultural Engagement Cultural Validation Humanized Educational Environments Collectivist Cultural Orientations Holistic Support
		HBCU Approach	Supportive Environment Identity Formation Values Cultivation

Accessibility, Affordability, Proximity, and Preparation

"Um, it was close to home. And because of my academics, it was completely free for me. So that was, that was a major thing," stated Sarah as she detailed her justifications for attending IT. The institution was not only close to home, but she also had excelled academically at her previous high school and had earned a full scholarship from IT, which heavily influenced her decision to attend. To enroll in an institution that was not only close to her but also affordable was influential in her original decision and important in her decision to remain. Sarah continued in this instance to describe additional reasons to maintain her attendance at IT, but affordability continued to play an essential role in her decision to persist.

Similarly, Lisa detailed the institution's affordability as a reason for her to stay, among other reasons "…because like I came to the school on like, a big scholarship and so I don't have to pay anything..." Furthermore, she detailed the campus setting and high school preparation as reasons she chose to attend IT. She mentioned that she did not feel fully prepared to attend a 4-year institution because she had not had adequate experiences in high school to make her feel equipped. However, IT was a great alternative to a 4-year institution being close to home, providing social activities, and being affordable:

> I chose [IT] because the on-campus housing. It's a 2-year technical school. So, like, I wasn't ready to go to like the 4-year school yet. And then they offered soccer for the first year ever. So that really, like drove me to go to IT.

Accessibility and affordability were also prominently displayed on IT's website. While the website actively promotes it pride in being an institution created to serve Black students, it also consistently reinforces the institution as an "open-door" institution serving students throughout the state of South Carolina from varying backgrounds. The incorporation of racial minority students, faculty, and staff photos throughout the website furthers IT's notion and

supports the historical fact that HBCUs have educated students from all racial backgrounds for years and continue to do so present day.

IT's standard admissions policy and the COVID-19 admissions policy also represent the institution's commitment to its pliability to enable educational access for students from varying backgrounds. The standard admissions policy does not require that students have a high school diploma or Test of General Educational Development (GED) to be admitted, although specific programs may have additional requirements. This is imperative to note because it allows students who may not have completed high school or obtained their GED to still achieve an education. Furthermore, the COVID-19 policy extends the pliability a bit further by stating that high school transcripts can be evaluated in lieu of taking placement tests to establish placement into specific courses.

To further support the concept of accessibility, policy documents were reviewed as part of the analysis of the bounded case. The first policy reviewed was "Assessment of Student Achievement." This policy was relevant to the research questions in that it related to academic achievement and integration of students into the academic environment. The language within the policy aligned closely with that of the language from the two theoretical frameworks. For instance, the policy specifically addressed achievement from the HBCU approach. This aspect of the approach incorporated the creation and facilitation of a competitive and customized learning environment to enable academic success.

First, the policy was written to ensure that students receive a high-quality education through more than simply having access to and obtaining educational instruction. Instead, the policy provided direction to confirm that all students attending the institution were equipped with the tools and skills needed to grow personally and intellectually, excel in their professions, and

lead meaningful and purposeful lives. The institutional perspective is that all students, regardless of their background, should be provided the appropriate mechanisms to succeed. Consequently, the policy document explained:

> Students attending [IT] may have different needs based on their personal histories, identities, and life circumstances. It is essential that divisions pay attention to educational quality as it pertains to various subgroups to ensure all students—regardless of their background, identities, or circumstances—receive a high-quality education.

Furthermore, the policy necessitated that when collecting and evaluating assessment data, evaluators should be attentive to disparities in student achievement. It acknowledged and detailed appropriate corrective behaviors were essential to ensure that all students received a superior education. Again, these institutional principles align with the belief that customization and pliability of the learning environment are critical to individual student growth and development, stemming from the HBCU approach.

Finally, affordability remains a top priority throughout IT's policy documents as well. IT advertises itself as an affordable institution and demonstrates its affordability through its low tuition costs and scholarship opportunities. The website notated low application fees and tuition costs, as well as numerous instances for students to obtain IT-specific scholarships and various types of financial aid. In fact, the website advertised free tuition for Fall 2021, which is an undeniably attractive offer for any student. Additionally, the financial aid forms and pertinent links were readily available for students in a centralized location on the website. These characteristics of the website relate to several components of the HBCU approach (e.g., relative institutional accessibility and affordability) and the CECE model (e.g., holistic support). Administrators continually evaluate the financial circumstances of their students and implement new programs and scholarships to allow for equitable access for students from all backgrounds.

Although accessibility, affordability, proximity, and preparation were not as prevalent or discussed to the degree of some of the other themes that emerged directly with the participants, it was noteworthy because the accessibility, affordability, and proximity of the institution are what originally attracted the participants to the campus and continued to affect their decisions to return. Again, being able to attend an institution close to home that was socially and academically attractive without having to pay anything out-of-pocket was essential for these participants and their decision to attend IT. While Lisa was not located as close to the institution, institutional accessibility continued to play an instrumental role in her decision to attend. Additionally, policy documents affirmed that this aspect of the campus environment was important to influence retention among the participants.

Feeling Connected: A Family Environment

One theme that was strongly emphasized throughout both interviews was feeling connected to the institution through the family environment. Both participants explained they knew many if not all the students on campus and felt socially safe with those individuals. They articulated that they felt as though their friends had their back and if they needed anything on campus, they could approach almost anyone and find the support they needed. For example, Sarah said:

> I speak to everyone on campus. Like if I needed anything, I could pretty much go to anybody on campus, and they'd be like ok let me help you. Like I have my friend group and is like, has three other people in it. Like, I don't usually like stray from that friend group, but like if I do, then like, I know, everybody on campus, like I've built enough of a bond with them that I know they have me.

Sarah described her comfort with going to individuals on campus who were not directly in her friend group and still feeling a sense of security in knowing that they had her back (e.g., “have

me"). She continued by saying, "Um, I like campus life the most like, how everybody feels like their family, and like, everybody will stick up for each other and everything."

Lisa expressed comparable sentiments. When detailing her reasons for wanting to return to IT, she discussed her involvement and leadership in specific campus activities as one of the influential factors, but she also emphasized the students and the close-knit relationships that she had developed creating a family environment. "The students like I really liked the family, like the closeness of the students like being able to like to stay on campus, and like, I'm kind of far from home. So, like, I really got tight with a student. So that made me want to stay."

In a separate instance, when asked to describe some of the reasons she stayed at IT, Sarah included not having to pay for tuition, but she emphasized that her bonds on campus and the family environment were so important to her that even if she did have to pay, she still would most likely remain at the institution:

> Um, so one of my major reasons for staying at [IT] besides like not having to pay for it would be like the people like, even because even if we don't go and do the like campus activities, like just the people, like, the bonds that I'm making there with everybody is probably like, the only reason that I'd stay even if, like, I have to pay something.

As an observer of the bounded case, I felt a similar feeling as described by the participants. When I initially arrived on campus, I was greeted by a security guard who kindly assisted me in my inquiry. I initially recognized the geographical area in which the institution was located along with the various areas of natural greenery available for students to enjoy. The institution is located in a rural area in South Carolina, and it embraces much of its countryside locale. I saw many naturally occurring and well-manicured green areas where students could gather to interact and connect. Additionally, the campus layout provided outside space for campus events that could unite students with faculty and staff outside the classroom. The green

spaces reminded me of tranquility and calmness making me feel very at home and comfortable in the spaces.

Although the weather was not the most conducive for outside lounging, I could imagine students gathered on the grass conversing and enjoying time with their friend groups. I could even imagine students taking time away to sit and study on the lawn. Given the smaller number of total students enrolled and the even smaller number of White students on the campus, I did not expect to frequently see students walking around campus or gathering. However, I did see some Black students and the occasional White student walking around along with one or two faculty members. It is also imperative to note that COVID-19 was still a serious threat during this time and could certainly contribute to why I did not see many students, faculty, and staff walking on campus.

As I walked throughout the campus to investigate the buildings, I would occasionally stop a random student to discuss the building with which I was about to explore. The student would politely provide any information I requested and offer additional support if needed. Students, faculty, and staff were also incredibly welcoming to a perfect stranger through eye contact and a greeting when passing. While these gestures may appear small to many, it is these types of interactions that create a campus environment that is welcoming and makes students feel as though they are in a family environment.

The family environment is what made the participants feel connected to the campus. When asked what aspects of the campus environment made Lisa feel most connected with the institution, she replied:

> So, I guess the main thing is really just the people because it doesn't matter like where you are, as like do the people accept you? Do like the people like you? Do the people see you for like, your racial background, or do they just see you as a person? And so, I feel like coming to the school like everybody see me as a person, like they didn't see me as

> like, oh, like you have a White dad or like and you have a Black mother like they just see me as like [Sarah] and like everything I brought just as an individual. So, the people just really made me like feel good about that. Also like the school as well…And then yeah, so like, the people have really made me feel like I like belong there.

She also described her involvement in soccer and how it helped her to formulate bonds with students the facilitated the creation of a family environment:

> Definitely soccer, because soccer was the first thing I got involved with at school because like we came before, like, all the other students came. So, it's like I bonded with them first. Like we do a lot of things together, we do like outside trips together. We like do stuff on campus together, like we do bonfires off campus together. So that really got me involved with like that group of people. And then we also have like outside friends outside of soccer that we're all just like, cool with it. So that was really cool.

Although soccer was relatively new to IT during this time, it was one of the social activities that facilitated a family environment by uniting students together under a common goal.

IT's website was also representative of this theme through its assertion of and dedication to providing a safe and secure environment for all students. This was continually mentioned throughout the website but specifically highlighted when discussing the student experience. The first statement on the website addressed the institution's desire and commitment to providing a protected environment for students to foster their intellectual, psychological, physical, and social development, ultimately, allowing students to feel safe and comfortable enough to formulate bonds with one another on their campus.

The family environment had been critical to both participants feeling connected to their institution and feeling as though they belonged. They have created friend groups through soccer and other student organizations that have supported the development of those bonds. Moreover, even when veering outside of their traditional friend groups, both participants mentioned that they felt comfortable knowing that other students on campus had their back if they were in need.

Social Involvement and Tokenism

Another theme that emerged was the idea of being invited to participate and be involved on campus. Both participants had diverging perspectives when discussing this theme. As a White student, Sarah felt as though she was invited to participate in specific committees and campus activities because she was the "token" White student. She felt as though she was only being asked to be involved to "put on a show" and present the institution as diverse. She detailed her sentiments by stating:

> Umm…at the beginning of the school year, I didn't really notice it as much until the faculty came up to me and like, wanted me to run for food committee and wanted me to be certain things, and wanted me like because I was White and like, I would ask them, and they would come up to me and they'd be like we want our food committee more diverse. And I'd be like are you literally only giving me this opportunity because I'm White. And they'd be like yes. And I'd be like, I don't want it. And so that's what kinda put the mindset in my head in the first place.

These types of circumstances led her to feel as though she was only wanted as a participant to enhance diversity, ultimately, leading to her feeling more isolated and rejecting the opportunity to become involved on campus:

> I wanted to be like, Vice President, SGA, and everything, and I like didn't let myself, because I was the only White student, and I was like you can't take this from them. But I've been like, throughout the entire semester, everybody had told me like, you should have done this. I realized I was like, putting myself back. Because I was White and nobody else really realized it…And, like, I was hindering myself off that.

Sarah initially failed to involve herself in many of the campus organizations and activities because of her race. She not only felt that her race was noticeable, but she also felt that she could not take organizational positions away from the Black students on campus. With a bit of self-reflection, she realized that she was hindering herself from being involved in campus activities. Neither Black students nor the institution was preventing her from being involved. In fact, it was often the opposite situation, even if the reasons were less appealing to her.

Over the course of the year, Sarah's perception of the institutional culture began to shift to incorporate diversity among campus organizations and within the campus culture but did so in a manner that was more inclusive of all diverse students on campus. When prompted about the institution creating the space for her to help improve diversity on campus rather than just being the face of it, she agreed that the institution opened a doorway that was much more appealing for her to participate for who she was as an [IT] student rather than her racial identity:

> At the beginning of the school year when they didn't really know me, they would put me in positions of like authority just because I was White. Like now they put me in positions of authority because of…who I am instead of who I look like.

This narrative given by Sarah was noteworthy given the analysis of the website. While many institutions highlight student and institutional achievements and upcoming events, several non-Black students were pictured in the press releases. One press release celebrated an internship collaboration between a high-tech company and the institution. Another release commended a group of students as the first class of EMTs to graduate from the institution. In both news articles, a minimum of two White students were pictured.

While Sarah stated a feeling of tokenism on IT's campus, Lisa, however, did not express a similar sentiment when being invited to participate in campus events. As a self-identified multiracial student, her involvement with activities was a bit more intrinsic. She naturally got involved in certain activities and deemed invitations to participate as something to enhance diversity on campus. She stated:

> So like even though it is HBCU, like, they don't push, like the stigma… like, we don't just want black students in like the major roles, like any student who's capable, like, if you're smart, if you're dedicated, like, we want anybody in that role, so they've never, like, put anybody down for like who they are, they just want to know who you are as a person and your personality.

The experiences of the two participants are opposing as one perceived to have been included in certain activities specifically because of their race, while the other perceived the institution to

openly invite all students to participate regardless of their race. In both experiences, the participants spoke about the importance of their involvement in organized campus activities and even the evolution of the institution to diversify student participation.

Diverse Backgrounds for Social Success

One of the historical facts about attending HBCUs is that students from different backgrounds are accepted. Whether or not the student's cultural upbringing is pertinent to their success at the institution is a topic that emerged throughout the conversation. Both participants voiced the importance of their upbringing as reasons why they have been able to thrive in an HBCU environment.

When asked about the importance of having other White students on campus as a part of her friendship group as an influential factor in her staying or leaving, Sarah responded by saying:

> I grew up in Japan. And then I came here. And then I went to, like a private Christian school. So, like, everybody in my school was White. So, like, I wasn't close to anybody. And then like, all my friends were still from Japan, or like the public schools here. So, I never had like a close White friend for real. Like all my friends. So, like going here. It doesn't really, it doesn't really bother me, like I'd rather like have the friends now that have me, than have another White person on campus who I don't like.

She agreed that having a diverse peer group aided in her ability to connect with people and establish friendships that she defined as real. To further support her perspective, when asked about the difficulty presented in finding connections with peers like herself, her response was:

> Um, realistically when there was one other White student on campus last semester, I did not get along with her at all. Like, personally, I tried to avoid her. And so, starting out the school year like all of my friends were all soccer players because at the time, like, you know we play soccer every day, and realistically, all my friends are still mainly soccer players but, like I speak to everyone on campus.

Sarah did not feel as though she had to have other White students on campus to feel connected to other students. Instead, she perceived that her background played an important role in her ability to adapt and create friendships with individuals from all racial backgrounds. When asked if she

believed that the diversity among her friend group was what kept her friendships strong, she stated:

> Probably. Because it shows a different point of view. And so, like everyone can come together off that point of view, it holds a deeper perspective and like a deeper respect for everybody. And umm, like, a deeper understanding.

Sarah did not feel that she needed other White students on campus in order to feel as if she belonged on campus. She felt that having a diverse group of friends allowed for different perspectives which helped to create a sense of respect and strengthen the relationships within her friend group.

Additionally, Lisa attributed her upbringing and the connection to her institution in a comparable manner. She described that her diverse background being both White and Black not only allowed her to navigate the institution much more effectively but also allowed her to connect with individuals from different backgrounds more easily:

> So, by being my biracial, I think it's made life easier for me than other students to like, to understand, like, the different students' like backgrounds and like, where they come from, because like, by being black, like I understand some, like my Black students, like our common struggles, or like our common generational curses, or like what our parents go through and what like the kind of path that we're making in school. So, I understand that, and I can connect with that, in a way. And then also like, with, like, my White students, and it's, it's just been able to, like, bond and like, there's certain things that people don't understand about them and their parents, because they never experienced it, but I kinda understand because I'm like, I have a White dad, I have White grandparents, I have White cousins. So, it's like, there's some things like I'm just able to, like, find the balance on both sides. And then I'm able to connect with, like, the different students and I feel like it's easier for me than other students because I understand both by firsthand experience versus just like seeing it.

Her lived experiences as a White and Black female have given her advantages in being able to establish connections with not only Black and White students but also with others from different backgrounds.

Furthermore, Lisa described the importance of having diverse students on campus as a means of creating a successful institutional environment:

> I also think it's important to have like a diverse background. Because it's like when you go into the workforce, you're going to work with someone who doesn't look like you who doesn't talk like you, and who doesn't have hair like you. And you have to respect those people. And you have to know how to talk to those people. And also, there's like cultural differences. So certain cultures, they may not like, like you touching them. But some cultures, they are very, like touchy. And it's like, so when you have those people around you in college, I feel like you learn those things. So, I think it's really, really important that we just, like get a more diverse group so that we all understand when we do go into the workforce, like how to deal with people, and just how to respect people as a whole.

Lisa described the importance of having diversity on campus to her overall success. She felt that having diversity allowed for a better cultural understanding of individuals which could be helpful both while enrolled in college as well as in the real world.

Exploration of Cultures

Lisa also continued to discuss how the institution has and has not played a role in connecting students from varying backgrounds. Interestingly, she felt as though the institution could do a much better job overall to bring students from different backgrounds together in order to facilitate a better understanding of one another. However, she also detailed activities where the institution celebrated the exploration of other student cultures, touching on how the institutional culture has played a role in facilitating the connection of students from different backgrounds:

> I don't think they've [the institution] really done anything to really make like students that aren't Black feel like, okay, like you belong there, like you should be here. There's like individual, like, teachers, or faculty members who like try their best to, but as an institution, like we could do better, because it's like, they just come to our school. And like, I think the school just thinks like, okay, if the students welcome them, like, it's good, but it's like, as an institution, like, we really have to do better.

Lisa detailed her opinions regarding the institution creating more cultural exploration for White students and aiding in their connection to the campus. She continued by saying:

> With like, getting to understand, like, you know, we know you're here, like, we know it's historically Black, but it's really for anybody. And like, I know, our president of our school, he always like says it like, he's like this institution is for anybody, like he wants anybody to come like he wants it to be, like, very diverse. He wants a really diverse school, but it's like we have to take care of like, when they do come, what are we going to do to make them feel welcome? Because they may not feel so welcome.

Although institutional improvements to welcome racial minority students on campus were deemed as a need, Lisa detailed the different cultural events held to help create a cohesive and welcoming campus environment for students from different backgrounds:

> So far like what we have done like when it comes to like, the different cultures at our school, so we have like a food committee, and like our food committee talk to like our non-Black students about like, what they would like to eat because of the things like they eat at home, and like food is like a really big thing for us. So, it's like, we wanted to see like, what they prefer like what we will want to eat at school, because like, we're missing all those things at home. So that's something that they try to implement is like, foods that we eat at home.

Because areas of culture that are most important to individual students vary, the students and institution desired to bring one aspect of students' home lives to campus. Lisa expressed that food was extremely important to the students on campus. Although Lisa mentioned the need to generally improve the food on campus, it was an essential campus cultural event to cross cultural bridges and connect students with parts of their home lives to their lives on campus.

The handbook provided insight into the importance of cultural exploration in both racial background and student involvement as well. It highlighted a diverse range of programs, organizations, activities, and services devised to help foster growth and enhance the student experience. For instance, community service, social, and academic opportunities were all mentioned as avenues to facilitate integration into the campus community. The website described IT's desire to contribute to students' cultural enrichment, aligning with cultural familiarity from the CECE model and identity formation from the HBCU approach. The website also highlighted diverse and multicultural organizations to help promote the understanding of similarities and differences among various cultures, relating to cultural familiarity, meaningful cross-cultural engagement, and cultural validation from the CECE model and providing a supportive environment from the HBCU approach

The handbook also described the Cultural Enrichment Program designed to produce socialized and well-rounded individuals through cultural experiences such as seminars, conferences, historic tours, and community interest events, although these events were not discussed directly by the participants. IT also provides bus transportation to and from the campus for residential students from specific counties to attend area churches and participate in off-campus activities. This relates to creating a supportive and accessible environment for students according to the HBCU approach. According to the CECE model, the institution is also creating cultural familiarity, meaningful cross-cultural engagement, and cultural validation by allowing students to connect with faculty, staff, and their peers throughout these experiences. Students are also able to explore their own and different cultures and obtain new knowledge through identity exploration.

While neither participant specifically mentioned the opportunities detailed in the handbook, Lisa detailed additional campus events observing, celebrating, and validating various student backgrounds and cultural exploration:

> Also, for like, the Hispanic Heritage Month, we did like a program with our students where they like made t-shirts with like things from their certain country or their background. And we had also like an international party because we have different students, just from different backgrounds. I don't think many people are like, from, like international places, but like their parents may be, or they just like, they still practice the culture in their families. So, we had a day for those students where we just like celebrated them. And we had like different foods for the different cultures, which also included American foods. It was like American foods, Caribbean foods, Mexican food and like Chinese foods. So then like, it was like everybody was represented. And that was like something that we did like so far for our students to like, make them feel included.

The website also displayed a colorful flyer publicizing the festivities of Hispanic Heritage Month. Over the course of four days, the institution provided social opportunities for students to experience Hispanic culture, art, music, and food. These types of campus events being publicly displayed on the institutional website could help to encourage the exploration of differing

cultures, facilitate social interaction between students, faculty, and staff outside of the classroom, as well as foster meaningful relationships among members of the communities. Such benefits are said to positively influence student retention as they stem from both theoretical frameworks in this study (e.g., cultural validation, cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, and humanized educational environments from the CECE model, and supportive environment, identity formation, and values cultivation). This event was an example of the diverse interactions and events that occur on campus and how those opportunities influence the retention of racial minority students.

Lisa continued to explain how her involvement in campus activities allowed her to interact and meet students from different areas on campus demonstrating the importance of cultural diversity:

> We've done a sip and paint. One, it wasn't SGA organization, but it was like our early childhood development program, they did a zombies versus human thing, which we got involved with. So, by just being part of those activities, like I get, I get to interact with people from like different majors and stuff like that. And then we had coronation. For example, like where we was crowning our king and queen of our school. And so, I got my hair done by one of the cosmetology students. So, then I started asking her like, hey, what do you like about the program or not? So then that got me involved with like, talking to other programs, even though I'm not a cosmetology major. Like I got to talk to them about like, what they need, what they like, like, who does the best hair who is better at nails and lashes, so like, just like, getting my hair done, or like, just getting involved with the different programs was like really, really good.

IT's student handbook detailed a variety of social and co-curricular opportunities available to students on campus speaking to Lisa's description of the importance of student involvement in her exploration of different cultures. Ranging from the Student Government Association (SGA) to intramurals and student-founded clubs and organizations, the handbook described the varying groups in which students could participate socially and academically. This aligned with various aspects of both the CECE model and the HBCU approach. From the CECE model, creating these instances for social integration relates to all five cultural relevance

indicators (e.g., cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, meaningful cross-cultural engagement, and cultural validation) along with two cultural responsiveness indicators (e.g., humanized educational environments and holistic support).

Simply being involved with different activities on campus allowed students from varying backgrounds to come together and connect on different levels. Sarah also discussed different cultural activities on campus that she felt have helped unite students from varying backgrounds:

> Most of my friends are Hispanic, like, half the soccer team is Hispanic. So, for that they tried to, like, they had like, they called it like a Mexican day, like a Hispanic day and they celebrated the month, and they like, you know, like, trying to like, incorporate all the food.

As Sarah described, her involvement with difference activities on campus, in this case, soccer, helped her to connect with others from different backgrounds.

In examining the website, I attempted to put myself in the position of a racial minority, specifically, a White student attending a historically Black institution, looking to find cultural evidence of reasons to remain or leave the institution. Upon initially evaluating the website, I observed that there were several photos of who I perceived to be White students actively participating in a variety of activities on campus. One photo that was more apparent was of a perceived White and Black student holding shirts representative of the institution. This photo was used under the tagline “Your Future Starts Today” with the notice of the acceptance of applications for upcoming semesters. This photo as a recruitment and marketing tool could be indicative of the institution’s support and promotion of accepting racial minority students into the institution. Furthermore, racial representation of these students on the website could be categorized as cultural familiarity from the CECE model and identity formation from the HBCU approach. According to these elements, students who see faculty, staff, and peers from similar backgrounds are said to connect with these individuals more readily because they understand

their cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences. Relationships such as these encourage retention among these students.

When asked about having events specific to her culture that could potentially help to add to the diversity on campus, Sarah's response was, "So I feel like if we had more White people, they might do something but it's just to me, it doesn't really, I mean we're not going to put on an event for just me." Although she felt that having cultural events specific to White students was not necessary given the fewer number of White students physically attending, she did agree that it was important to have campus activities and celebrate student cultures on campus to help them relate to their culture and associate with their cultural backgrounds. She believed that this could be a helpful way that the institution could bring together students from different backgrounds to create a more cohesive and welcoming campus environment.

Faculty Support and Institutional Resources

Another theme that emerged related to academics, faculty, and resources. Both participants felt as though they had faculty members and resources available to them when needed. Whether they chose to utilize those resources was completely at their discretion and discussed much less, but they specified that they were available. Lisa was quite passionate about the faculty and their support of her overall success. She articulated:

> And also like the faculty, like our academic champions, so they're the people that are over, like, our major, make sure like, we're on track in our courses, like, they really helped me and make sure that I have everything like set, and everything's done. And like, they just helped me with my transition period between like, my semesters, so like, just being able to, like have those people like behind me, it made me want to stay because like, I'm very comfortable, I feel like they want the best for me.

Lisa described how important academic champions were to her ability to be successful on campus. They assisted her not only with academic-related activities, but they also made her feel as though they genuinely cared about her overall success as a student.

Along with Lisa, Sarah mentioned the faculty and staff (specifically, her coach) that have helped create a supportive academic environment for her. She explained:

> Most of my teachers except like two will be very helpful. And then like with those two, I would just go to one of those that were helpful and be like, hey, I know this isn't for your class. Can you do this for me? And then all of those, they would do that for me.

While Sarah was not as vehement about her perspectives on faculty support, she did feel as though she had faculty members with whom she could connect that would assist in her academic success.

Both observations and document analysis supported the participants' explanations of faculty support being important to their connection to the campus. When observing the campus, I explored various academic buildings where individual faculty members were interacting with students in an academic nature. From teaching in the classroom to supporting outside of the classroom, students were receiving assistance from instructors in almost every academic building where classrooms were located. It did appear as though faculty were engaging with students in the academic environment as mentioned in both theoretical frameworks.

The "Faculty and Staff Personnel Involvement in Decision-Making Process" document also detailed the Student Services Committee. The committee's responsibility is to make recommendations for improvements and review matters involving student life. This aspect of the campus culture is incredibly influential in student retention as it is the crucial factor in facilitating social integration. Within this committee is the Financial Aid subcommittee that works together to continuously review scholarship policies and practices and recommend changes to be implemented. These two committees embodied values and beliefs that can be identified in both theoretical frameworks. The institution creates a humanized educational environment so that students can interact and connect with one another and administrators.

Furthermore, meaningful cross-cultural engagement can potentially occur through these interactions and institutional programs.

Institutional resources. Further conversations of support led to the discussion of campus resources. Sarah mentioned the availability of numerous academic resources as well as her perception that those resources are not utilized to their full potential. Sarah explained:

> I feel like most people don't use them, but the resources are there. Like, we have, you know, like tutor.com or whatever, that you can, like, ask people about…Um, but I feel like all the resources are there. I don't usually use them. But I don't need to use them. I feel like people who need to use them don't use them or don't know enough about them to use them.

As an academically inclined student who was perceived to be well-prepared scholastically prior to entering IT, Sarah described that she did not have much of a need for the resources available. However, she knew they existed and felt that not enough students really used them.

Lisa also detailed many of the resources available to students, though her specific usage of those resources was not directly articulated:

> So, I definitely feel like we have the resources, like we have a website that's called tutor.com that the school provides us for free. And it's like, we can get on there any time of the day. And like we can submit an assignment, and someone can look over it or you can request like an online tutor. So that's a resource that like really, really helps. And we also use like this education or site like Cengage and like it comes with a textbook, practice questions, actual assignments, so that's like a really nice tool.

While Lisa did not detail the extent to which she used different academic resources, she did explain that there were several available for use by students in need.

One of the most noteworthy and pertinent features of the institutional website easy access to a myriad of useful academic and social resources. Several documents, such as policies and procedures were located in a convenient place where they were easily retrievable by students, faculty, staff, and the public.

Another policy document scrutinized was "Faculty and Staff Personnel Involvement in the Decision-Making Process." This policy was written as a safeguard for faculty and staff input regarding the events on the campus. Although a variety of administrative and faculty committees were created based on this policy, two were most appropriate for the purpose of this study. The first was the academic affairs committee. A large majority of institutions have committees specifically designated to monitor, guide, and improve the academic affairs of the institution. However, this policy distinctly noted the responsibility of not only improving academic programs but using new methods and technology in teaching, aligning with the proactive philosophies component of the HBCU approach. This was also apparent in the Learning Resources Committee which served as a liaison between faculty, students, and the Learning Resource Center itself. Not only does this subcommittee focus on providing resources and improving the academic aspects of the campus through the LRC, but it also presents opportunities to students to interact and build relationships with faculty and their peers outside the classroom. As students develop these connections outside of the classroom (e.g., humanized educational environments and supportive environments), they are more likely to be retained, and this committee delivers a verbal commitment to facilitating these connections.

This commitment was also noticeable when observing the LRC and other academic buildings on campus. When visiting the LRC, I noticed a variety of academic and technological resources along with academic spaces, such as study rooms and communal spaces, to engage in academic interactions. The study rooms were provided for students, faculty, and the community to use. Additionally, it appeared that every academic building that I entered on campus had either a named computer lab or a space where computers were available for students to use without question. This is a crucial resource for students on campus because in the event they do not or

cannot afford a personal computer, they are able to use the computers on campus without hesitation.

Along with these resources, Lisa also detailed that there were some other resources on campus that she found appealing because they made her institutional experience somewhat more comparable to that of a 4-year institution:

> I also love that we have like a pantry. So, like during the week, if like, we want some snacks and stuff, and we can't make it to the grocery store. Like we have that on campus. So that's nice. And like we have a weight room and a student center. So, like those are really good things. So, it's like you don't have to go get your own gym membership. It's like all on campus…. Like the Student Center and the pantry and like the weight room makes it feel like, like, that's like almost like a 4-year experience. Like, even though we're not on a 4-year level, it's like, those are things that you would be offered at a 4-year. So, it really gives like that on campus, like living my experience when you have those things on campus.

Again, participants detailed both academic and non-academic resources, supported by observations and document and artifact analysis, along with faculty support as vital to their individual experiences. Even though their experiences are not entrenched in differing resources and the faculty support can be perceived to be different for each participant, they both acknowledge and appreciate these areas as important for their individual experiences and pertaining to their retention on their campus.

Racial Occurrences

> At first, I didn't like it. Like I really did not like it. I would get so upset. And I would get so salty, because I'm just like, why are you saying that? Like, I'm just a person. Like, I'm like, this is just me being me. Like it has nothing to do with my skin color. It's just like who I am as a person.

This brief excerpt was taken from Lisa who detailed the occasional and inconsistent yet meaningful instances of what she perceived to be racial occurrences. Even as a student who identified as partially Black, she still endured various instances of race-related events. When asked about racial instances that she may have encountered, she voiced the following:

> Like I know people like they love to make their jokes. Like my friends love to make their jokes. And like if I do a certain thing, they're like, oh [Lisa], that's some White people mess. And I'm like, well, at this point, like am I half White y'all. Yeah, like, I can't deny it. Like I don't I don't deny it. And then I think once I like, that's another thing once I was just like, I'm comfortable with like who I am. Nobody can hurt me. Because it's like, I'm comfortable. Like I know. So, it's like, even with their jokes, like as soon as I was just like, I know I am. They just don't say it anymore. Because like, I own up to what I am.

Lisa continued to describe how and why the race-related comments influenced her, especially given her childhood as a multiracial individual and how she overcame those negative feelings:

> And then also, I think growing up, I would also get those comments. So then coming to college, like it just like hurt more, because I'm like, I already had to deal with this when I was younger. And now we're grown. And I still have to deal with this. And I was just like, why is that? So then when I finally like kind of reflected, I was just like, you just have to own up to it. Like there is no, there's no running from it. Like you just have to own up to what you want. Like people have nothing to say. So yeah, like, I think it was just also like the fact that like, when I was younger, I got the same comments. And like the same things, but people were really being mean about it when I was younger.

Lisa's experience with race-related comments throughout her childhood and then in college contributed to her inability to simply disregard the comments. Instead, the comments upset her, and she had to address them. She continued to describe her experience:

> But then as I got older, like my friends, they were like, yo, we're like, we're just joking with you, like really not trying to hurt your feelings. But like subconsciously, I was like, it's hurting my feelings, though. Like, and then I had that conversation with them. I was just like, hey, like, it's really bothering me. And I said that too. They're like, okay, like, if it's really bothering you, like, I'll stop because like, they just, you gotta have that respect for people. Like if they really don't like it. Like, just stop. So, yeah, I think at first it did hurt. But then once I like I had those conversations, and I just like owned up to it. Like I feel better about it.

Although Lisa encountered racial occurrences in her experience on campus, she confronted the individuals involved and expressed her discontent. As a result, she was able to alleviate her discomfort and maintain a connection with her friend groups.

Sarah also encountered an instance where her race became apparent in her everyday experience. However, her encounter was described with less influence and consequence on her daily life:

> The only thing I can think of is like somebody, but I never knew what they said, like somebody said something and one of the people in my friend group like, turned it around like immediately and like shut it down. Like you'll never do this again, never, like he never told me what they said and then like that was towards the beginning of the year. So, everybody saw it, but like past that nobody's done anything. Like said anything like that to me, whatsoever.

This occurrence did not appear to negatively influence Sarah's experience on campus because her friends not only protected her from the incident, they shielded her from the details. However, she did describe a situation similar to Lisa's where her friends' made jokes about her race. "Like, they'll make their jokes and be like, if I go dancing in the rain, that's a White person thing to do. Or if I walk outside bare foot, they'll be like, only White people do that." Although this was said, she did not consider that to be a racial occurrence and instead expressed this when describing her initial resistance to getting involved on campus because of her race.

Overall, although both students encountered some form of racial incidences, neither seemed to have been heavily influenced by the events. In fact, Sarah brushed off the instances as somewhat "normal" friendship behavior and Lisa explained her feelings about the comments made to stop her friends from continuing. Both participants still valued their friendship groups enough to remain on campus. Neither observations nor document analysis provided evidence of racial occurrences within the bounded case.

Differences Between PWIs and HBCUs

One interesting theme that intrinsically developed was the discussion between what the participants perceived their experiences might be at a PWI versus their current experiences at an HBCU. Lisa detailed a powerful narrative of both how she viewed her current HBCU and how she felt her success would differ at a PWI:

> Like, there will be a difference. But I feel like probably, like, probably the closeness, I feel like, that would be the difference. Because like, I feel like I just went in, like, personally, I just wouldn't have been able to, like, quickly, like, open up or like quickly,

> like be myself, like being around like, mostly predominantly White students. Because I feel like I would like be on the edge. And I will just be like, okay, and like I would really, really, really have to get to know them, I feel like it would just take longer, to really like fit in or to like get a feel for like who they were, versus like being at like a HBCU.

In this except, Lisa thought that she would be able to adapt more easily on an HBCU campus because she would experience less anxiety than she would on a PWI. She continued to explain her perceived differences between PWIs and HBCUs:

> And the other things I feel like are like the activities like that we have going on, I feel like the activities would just like be different, or it would just be a different vibe going at a PWI versus the HBCU. Like I was telling one of my other friends, I was like, I feel like I would be able to survive at a PWI. But I don't think I would thrive if I went to a PWI. So, it's like I would be able to connect, and I would be able to like do my work and stuff. But I don't feel like I would truly like be myself or truly be thriving, if I like didn't go to my HBCU first and like really find out who I was first before going because like, I have a have a habit of just like kind of morphing. Like wherever I go, I just fit in. Like I'm myself, but I'm like there's like these different versions of myself. So, I feel like I wouldn't be able to be truly [Lisa] when I go there. Versus like going to my HBCU first, like whenever I make that transition, if it's HBCU or a PWI. Like I feel like I'll be able to like truly be myself. Like no matter what.

For Lisa, her ability to go above and beyond simply existing and doing well at a PWI is rooted in being at an HBCU. Her HBCU gives her the ability to truly thrive socially and academically and prepares her to give back to her community. She perceived that her HBCU has given her opportunities to adapt more readily to her educational environment, be more involved at her institution, and be who she is more freely. While she felt that she would be "just fine" attending a PWI, she felt that her HBCU allowed her to do more than just be acceptable. Her HBCU has given her the social and academic tools and resources to be a better version of herself.

This perspective was also supported by the introduction of the student handbook and the HBCUstrong factsheet that was analyzed. First, the student handbook began with a message from the president praising IT for having an enduring spirit that promotes the fostering of innovative learning and the creation of a solid co-curricular experience for all. The message continued by expressing that IT possesses the grit when times get hard and has the strength to

push forward to create a better IT. This message emanated pride and praise. The president's appreciation and respect for the institution and its members were apparent in the note. This could easily align with the HBCU approach through the creation of a supportive environment, identity formation, and values cultivation, as well as collectivist cultural orientations from the CECE model.

The HBCUstrong factsheet displayed a plethora of numeric data emphasizing the importance and benefits of attending an HBCU and demonstrating pride in HBCUs. The factsheet specifically accentuated the economic and community value of an HBCU. For example, one fact presented was IT generates $32 million in total economic impact for local and regional communities. These facts may promote the retention of racial minority students by allowing students to positively transform their home communities through cultural community service and collectivist cultural orientations, as well as values cultivation from the HBCU approach.

Additionally, the document reported the workforce benefits after attending and graduating from IT. IT students are also expected to earn $266,000 in additional income due to their college credentials and 2014 graduates expected to earn roughly 19% more than they could earn without their college credentials from IT. Finally, the factsheet used hashtags such as *#HBCUStrong* and taglines "HBCUs Make America Strong." These words emanated strength, unity, and progress, which could make students perceive to be more connected with the institution, as explained through cultural community service and collectivist cultural orientations according to the CECE model and through achievement and identity formation according to the HBCU approach.

Overall, the factsheet showcased a sense of pride in the institution and the achievements attained as an HBCU. It not only provided numeric data supporting its successes, but it also

underlined the ways in which it was helping to nourish the local and regional communities and create a stronger, more talented workforce. While the participants did not directly address this area as essential to their retention on IT's campus, both theoretical models detail the importance of giving back to the community as an influential factor in student retention. As an evaluator, I could easily recognize how these accomplishments were indicative of the school's commitment to various HBCU philosophies and could influence any student to be retained. Once more, facets from both theoretical models examined in this study could be used to understand the retention of racial minority students at IT.

On the other hand, Sarah detailed her perceptions in a bit of a different manner. She stated:

> Um, I feel like, it would have been a lot of difference because, like, just like, in the White communities' academics is a lot more important. And so, like, most of my friends, like, like I wouldn't say they're dumb, but they don't try at all. And like at a predominately White, like, I like they would all be like me, they would all try to, like, be high up there. They would all, I feel like the word that I can't think of the commitment whatever like the commitment to the school, or like the event, the participation and events would be more…Um, it would just be like a different like atmosphere.

Many of Sarah's perceptions stemmed from her academic observations and the increased participation in social events that she has noticed at PWIs in comparison to her HBCU. It was clear that her perceptions were those from her individual experiences and not all-encompassing assumptions applicable to all students or all HBCUs. As previously mentioned, she felt as though her HBCU could be improved if individual students on campus simply chose to be more participative in the campus and social activities that were offered to students. Despite the expected differences in her viewpoint of PWIs and HBCUs, she still felt strongly about returning to IT and was committed to the social and academic environments.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 provided an in-depth description of the case, by outlining the observations made, documents and artifacts explored, and themes that were analyzed across the narratives of two students currently attending IT. The chapter described eight distinct themes that emerged from the analysis of the bounded case. It also detailed the individual experiences of the participants and analyzed the trends among the themes to provide an in-depth exploration of how each theme manifested among the participants. Throughout the chapter, connections were made to the theoretical frameworks used to guide the study as well as allowing for newly developed concepts that emerged within the data.

Generally, the interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts analyzed within the bounded case supported the suppositions of both the CECE model and the HBCU Approach. The interviews delivered a rich description of Sarah and Lisa's experiences on IT's campus, while the documentation and artifacts provided a solid foundation demonstrating the implementation of the theoretical frameworks on IT's campus. However, participant interviews did not directly align with all themes presented throughout the analysis. While several themes relate (e.g., affordability and accessibility, peer-to-peer interactions and social involvement, and access to faculty and other resources), there are still areas of the theoretical frameworks that are not necessarily present in the findings, such as racial occurrences and differences between PWIs and HBCUs, as demonstrated throughout the interviews with the participants.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach to explore campus environment and the retention of racial minority students attending a rural southern 2-year technical HBCU. This chapter is divided into multiple sections that detail how the findings relate to current literature and how the study may influence future research. The first section provides a summary of the study. The second section discusses the findings and their support or opposition to prior research. The third section discusses recommendations for future research and implications for postsecondary institutions, and the final section provides a conclusion to the study.

HBCU campuses were created to provide Black students with a systematic method of educational instruction after being denied access to White educational systems (DOE, 1991; Hardy et al., 2019). These institutions are known to create a protected and secure environment for Black students to not only be themselves but to learn about and embrace their cultural backgrounds (Bracey, 2017). Although the historical purpose of these institutions centered on Black students and facilitating success, HBCUs have been known to practice openness when accepting students (Palmer et al., 2015), creating a welcoming environment for students from all backgrounds (Bracey, 2017; Hurtado et al., 1998).

As demographic shifts have and continue to alter the recruitment pool of postsecondary students and enrollment numbers across the higher education landscape decline, practitioners should explore a myriad of retention strategies to retain minoritized students on their campuses. Various theorists suggest that altering the campus environment can aid in retaining students from various backgrounds (Harper, 2012; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh, 2001b; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2008a). For the purpose of this study, Museus' (2014) CECE model and Arroyo and

Gasman (2014) HBCU approach were used to provide a foundation for how racial minority students could describe their reasons for persisting at a southern 2-year technical HBCU.

Aspects of academic and social integration throughout both frameworks describe how campus environments might influence student retention. Museus (2014) concluded that factors such as cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness affect if a student is retained. Arroyo and Gasman (2014) determined that creating a supportive environment based on institutional entry points (e.g., accessibility and affordability) and iterative processes and outcomes (e.g., achievement, identity formation, and values cultivation) influence if a student is retained. Both frameworks overlap in their foundational principles regarding how students from various backgrounds can be retained. However, because of the lack of research on the retention of racial minority students at 2-year HBCUs, it was necessary to explore these frameworks in an HBCU setting through racial minority student narratives of their experiences and campus environmental factors influencing their retention.

The following research questions guided this study: (1) How do racial minority students at a rural southern historically Black technical 2-year college describe their reasons for persisting? (2) In what ways does campus environment contribute to the persistence of racial minority students at a rural southern historically Black technical 2-year college?

This case study analysis utilized data from two participant interviews, observations, and document and artifact analysis. Two out of five eligible participants were interviewed to gain insight into their experiences as racial minority students at Institutional Tech and the reasons they were retained. Both participants were 19-year-old, residential females majoring in Business Administration returning for their second semester at IT. One identified as White while the other identified as multiracial (White and Black). It is important to note that while this study explores

the experiences of these two racial minority students on their HBCU campus, like most qualitative research, the findings are not generalizable to all racial minority students enrolled at HBCUs. Instead, these findings are representative of the individual experiences of these specific participants. In qualitative research, data is deemed valid, reliable, and trustworthy through the processes and procedures used to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Cope, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017), not through the sample size (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, while the number of participants interviewed was small, the data provided a rich narrative of their individual experiences providing insight into the retention of racial minority students. Upon interviewing each participant, eight themes emerged: accessibility, proximity, and preparation; feeling connected: a family environment; inclusion without isolation; diverse backgrounds for social success; exploration of cultures; faculty support and institutional resources; racial occurrences; and differences between PWIs and HBCUs. Each theme was analyzed and, if applicable, associated with the theoretical frameworks utilized to guide the study. Observations and document analysis provided additional context to the IT campus environment and factors that may influence the retention of racial minority students.

Interpretation of Findings

The theoretical frameworks used to guide this study postulate several ways that institutions can improve their campus environments to be more engaging and improve student success outcomes, such as retention. The frameworks have been explored by investigating PWIs and HBCUs and the influence their environments have on minoritized students and success outcomes. However, the literature fails to adequately assess the influence campus environments have on the retention of racial minority students when they are in the minority. The findings from this study suggest there are features from both frameworks that facilitate the retention of

racial minority students when they are the minority on an HBCU campus. The findings show that not all features from the models much be integrated into the campus environment to facilitate retention among these students. Instead, fundamental characteristics of the campus environment, such as social involvement and faculty support, are needed in order for racial minority students to feel belonging when they are in the minority and thus, promote retention. The findings also show that even when students perceive the campus environment to be lacking in certain areas, as long as the institution is deemed to be accessible and affordable, students feel connected to the campus environment through peer-to-peer bonds that create a family environment, students have access to faculty and resources, and there is diversity throughout the campus, the retention of racial minority students will be a likely result.

IT holds an electronic database of policies and procedures to provide a blueprint to promote the success of all students on its campus. These documents displayed a commitment to and celebration of being an HBCU. Incorporated into these documents were strategies and methods to help faculty and staff create a campus environment that is both socially and academically advantageous for all students. Many of the documents and artifacts analyzed encompassed features of Museus (2014) CECE model and Arroyo and Gasman (2014) HBCU approach. Policies and procedures are an imperative set of standards symbolic of institutional beliefs, values, and traditions, as well as a viewpoint on how the institution should and intends to function. These aspects are integrated into the campus culture as described by numerous researchers (e.g., Kuh, 2001b; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Schein, 1992), and IT currently has a robust set of principles supporting the concept of an engaging campus environment, solidifying suppositions that engaging campuses can help to retain racial minority students on HBCU

campuses. This allows the institution to function in a more focused manner, using the policies and procedures rooted in the theoretical frameworks to facilitate and improve success outcomes.

Interactions with Peers and Family Environment

Other aspects of IT's campus environment that were relevant to the suppositions from the literature were peer-to-peer interactions. Peer-to-peer interactions and the creation of social bonds are critical for students attending HBCUs. Research has shown this concept is not only applicable to HBCUs but to a variety of campus types (Hurtado, 2001; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Museus, 2014). Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that even if racial minority students were to encounter other obstacles such as having to pay for their tuition or not having full support from various faculty members, the peer bonds and relationships are strong enough to influence them to persist. While the Museus (2014) CECE model and Arroyo and Gasman (2014) HBCU do not specifically detail factors that influence the retention of racial minority students on specific campuses, the findings from this study continue to support their speculations that social integration through peer-to-peer interactions is instrumental, even in the retention of racial minority students when they are in the minority.

Additionally, the establishment of a "family" environment where students feel safe enough to go to one another, even if they are not in close-knit friendship groups, is important. Creating a safe campus environment where students could celebrate who they were rather than rid themselves of their prior cultural connections was discussed as an imperative by Kiyama et al. (2015), Kuh and Love (2016), Museus (2014), Rendón et al. (2016), and Tierney (1992, 1999). On IT's campus, the participants felt as though they were safe and could depend upon both their friend groups and those outside of it. The question is whether the institution has been a factor in creating these groups or if the type of students and their backgrounds are what help to

create these bonds and therefore, help to establish the perception of comfort and safety. From one perspective, it could be argued that by creating social and cultural spaces, having social activities, and increasing social involvement, students are encouraged to interact with one another and generate deeply connected bonds, stemming from Museus (2014) CECE model.

On the other hand, it could be argued that students from diverse backgrounds already have a certain social skillset that allows them to formulate bonds more easily with other minoritized students. For instance, although Sarah is not a minoritized student, her previous interactions with minoritized students and those from different racial and ethnic backgrounds played an influential role in her ability to formulate meaningful friendships on campus. Does this also extend to minoritized students on PWIs? Does that mean that students from diverse backgrounds have an advantage when formulating friendships with diverse students? Moreover, do those advantages translate when attempting to formulate friendships with students attending PWIs? These are all questions that are not directly answered by the findings in this study. However, both the CECE model and HBCU approach speculate that as students are presented with opportunities to interact with individuals from different backgrounds, they may experience cultural familiarity, meaningful cross-cultural engagement, cultural validation, and even humanized educational opportunities (CECE model) as well as a supportive environment, identity formation, and values cultivation (HBCU approach). All these experiences may contribute to the retention of racial minority students at an HBCU.

Diversity and Tokenism

In either case, encouraging diversity on any type of campus is essential to the success of that campus. However, creating diversity simply to claim an identity as a diverse campus is counterproductive. As Sarah mentioned, she felt she was encouraged to be involved on campus

only because of her race. She perceived that her involvement on campus was not because she should be involved as an academically and socially successful student. Instead, she felt that her involvement was desired simply to indicate campus diversity leading to a sense of tokenism on campus. Consequently, she experienced isolation and frustration. Lisa, however, did not have a similar experience. She naturally became involved in activities and when her involvement was encouraged, she did not attribute that to her race or to the creation of racial diversity. This could potentially be attributed to her being multiracial and viewing herself as half Black. In this instance, she may not have regarded her participation in activities a part of the initiative to create diversity on campus.

Being perceived as a symbol of diversity on a campus attempting to create diversity is a feeling that is often experienced by minoritized students on PWI campuses similarly to how Sarah felt as a White student on an HBCU campus. Embracing and facilitating diversity on all campus environments is critical. For instance, photos on IT's website alone could help to overcome the stereotypes that racial minority students do not (and should not) attend HBCUs and cannot be successful on an HBCU campus. Nevertheless, the attempt to overcome these stereotypes should not be done at the expense of creating tokenism within the campus environment. A deeper understanding of these findings should be further explored, as discussed in the recommendations for future research section.

Theoretical Factors as Influencers

This study has also shown that the HBCU approach and the CECE model overlap when reviewing influential factors and how those lead to success outcomes such as retention. However, not all factors directly align. The HBCU approach seems to have more generalized factors while the CECE model has more detailed factors covering a wider range of campus

environments. When using these frameworks with reference to campus environments, the question becomes to what extent factors from either model need to exist in order for the campus environment to positively facilitate minoritized or minority student retention? For example, both participants found that peer-to-peer interactions (cultural familiarity from the CECE model and supportive environment from the HBCU approach) influenced their decisions to retain, even though they did not discuss other factors, such as the need to have opportunities to give back to and transform their home communities. While both factors are aspects of the CECE model and the HBCU approach, both were not deemed to influence the retention of two racial minority student participants at IT. Instead, peer-to-peer interactions were perceived to be influential. This finding is essential to the understanding of the theoretical frameworks as administrators attempt to create environments that incorporate facets of the models. If one or more characteristics are deemed to be more important in the retention of racial minority students on HBCU campuses, administrators will need a comprehensive understanding of which characteristics are more or less influential to assist in improving the campus culture.

A lingering question is how do individual characteristics from these theories relate to one another in order to influence the retention of racial minority students? How many of these characteristics must an institution possess in order to best promote and facilitate success outcomes, or do participants connect more with defined areas of the campus environment, perhaps the social environment, and thus, other areas that might be lacking are less influential in student retention? The findings from this study suggest that students who find their social niche and have secure connections to faculty members who can help them academically are more likely to perceive they belong on their campus even if there are aspects of their campus they may dislike. This is supportive of a large body of research that stresses the importance of social and

academic integration (Guiffrida, 2003; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus et al., 2017, 2018; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1975). Yet again, the findings do not demonstrate that the campus environment must possess all facets of the models (or even a specified number) in order to promote success. In fact, the findings suggest that perhaps some characteristics of the model might be more influential than others, such as the social aspects and access to institutional resources when needed.

Maintaining Accessibility and Affordability

Furthermore, when discussing the HBCU approach, accessibility remained an essential aspect of the campus culture for the participants, along with proximity and affordability. Similarly, college readiness was a vital assessment made by Lisa to determine if IT was the right choice for her and if she should return the following semester. With that being said, other aspects of the HBCU approach such as validation of traditional African American values and the ability to connect with others similar to themselves did not seem to play as much of an active role in the participants' ability to connect with the campus. Even when discussing Sarah's cultural background, she did not feel that there was a major need to have her cultural background validated in order for her to feel connected and belong to the campus, which is contrary to the literature when investigating minoritized students. This could be because White student identity is not linked to maintaining connections with their cultural background, which is contrary to research regarding minoritized students and retention (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Kuh & Love, 2016; Museus, 2014). Kuh and Love (2016) and Museus and Maramba (2011) both suggested minoritized students needed to maintain links to their cultural heritage on their campus through cultural connections. Conversely, both participants in this study voiced their ability to adapt and connect with others from different backgrounds more easily because of their prior experience

with and knowledge of diverse backgrounds. Neither participant deemed that they required on-campus connections with their cultural backgrounds in order to be retained.

Racial Encounters and Microaggressions

It is also imperative to recognize that racial instances that have been apparent in some studies investigating White students as the minorities on campus (Closson & Henry, 2008b) have proven to be relevant in this study as well. Participants described situations where their actions were associated with a racial stereotype in some manner or another. However, these instances did not seem to be abundant or so negatively penetrating to the students' morale to hinder their success or motivate them to leave their institution. Can the same be said for minoritized students on PWI campuses? Racial microaggressions, defined as subtle, racialized offenses, experienced by minoritized students are prevalent throughout retention research on minoritized student (Morales, 2021). Some research has shown that some minoritized students simply disregard racial encounters and microaggression and continue to remain enrolled. Morales (2021) described instances when Black students used a self-affirming strategy known as *beasting* to combat racial microaggressions on PWIs. In these instances, Black students used counternarratives, stories of individuals whose experiences are often not told, to affirm the importance of Black culture in opposition to racial microaggressions and help navigate their journeys on PWIs. However, many minoritized students who perceive a racist campus climate (in some cases, even before stepping foot on campus) or experience racial events on PWI campuses often depart from their institution (Harper, 2012; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). PWI administrators should continue to explore racial occurrences and microaggressions and facilitate a campus culture to eradicate these experiences.

Campuses with minoritized students as the majority are not removed from this task simply because these instances are perceived to be fewer and less severe in nature. Instead, administrators should still work to create safe spaces for students to explore these occurrences through open discussion. Students should also be provided the opportunity to learn from where racial stereotypes stem and be provided appropriate tools to combat those sentiments. These findings would relate most to the holistic support from the CECE model and a supportive environment from the HBCU approach.

The ability to create an intentional and meaningful campus culture where students, faculty, and staff can come together to openly discuss these events and learn from one another could certainly assist in facilitating a campus environment of openness and acceptance as discussed in numerous studies regarding racial climate and institutional environment (Harper, 2012; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Although IT did provide opportunities to celebrate various cultures, the participants detailed a lack of opportunities to truly learn about and discuss the racial climate on and off campus. This finding could relate to a lack of meaningful cross-cultural engagement as detailed in the CECE model. The model details that environments need programs and practices where students can engage in educationally meaningful cross-cultural interactions where they can focus on solving real-world social and political problems. Lisa even mentioned that she would like the opportunity to become more educated on political issues but that IT did not necessarily provide the educational space for that on campus. While mediating such conversations and integrating understanding into the campus culture could be difficult, it is crucial when creating diverse campus environments to facilitate student success.

In many ways, the findings from the data have supported assumptions that institutions that create engaging campus environments promote success and facilitate personal growth among students. As a 2-year technical HBCU, IT has strategized to reduce obstructions preventing students from attaining equitable access to education and integrated cultural facets to promote success outcomes. It could be argued that IT has intrinsically embraced many of those characteristics given its historical context as an HBCU, but what does this mean for other institutional types, and how can non-HBCUs utilize these theoretical frameworks to promote and enhance success outcomes such as retention?

Recommendations for Future Research

Numerous findings from this study have supported the theoretical frameworks used to guide the study. However, there is still much research to be conducted to obtain a better understanding of the campus environment and minority student retention. For instance, specifically at IT, additional research could be conducted to determine why students who departed did not return to the institution and if the campus environment influenced their decisions. This would provide IT with information regarding the retention of racial minority students and the campus environment.

Generally, researchers should conduct more qualitative studies with 2-year HBCUs to assess the experiences of both minoritized and minority students from different racial backgrounds and how the campus environment influences their retention. These studies should be conducted in both rural and urban geographical areas and analyzed to see if geography is also a factor in how these students are retained at HBCUs. In some cases, this may present as difficult given the small numbers of non-Black students that may attend 2-year HBCUs and the smaller

number of 2-year HBCUs, but it is imperative that this research continues to be executed and the findings analyzed to explore the lived experiences of these students.

Along with conducting additional qualitative studies to see how consistent these models are in other 2-year HBCU environments, researchers may want to conduct quantitative analyses to see if individual factors from both models can be predictors of specific success outcomes for minoritized or minority students. To expand further, surveys that incorporate these theoretical frameworks, such as the CECE Survey, can also be conducted on PWIs and other types of campuses to determine to what degree their campuses are culturally engaging and if their environments influence the retention of their minority students. Surveys like the CECE Survey assess an institution's campus environment to facilitate student success outcomes.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to utilize a 2-year theoretical perspective in conjunction with the HBCU approach and/or CECE model to explore how the campus environment influences minority student retention. Generally, 2-year institutions have a mission and purpose that differs from 4-year institutions, including educating students in technical and more career-focused fields and preparing students to attend 4-year institutions (Brand et al., 2013). These frameworks could be utilized to explore if they apply to technical schools, to assess their campus environments as engaging or not, and whether those models would influence minority student retention.

Researchers should also explore how racial minority students from diverse backgrounds in comparison to racial minority students from non-diverse backgrounds assimilate into engaging campus environments. Much of the theoretical frameworks integrate cross-cultural connections, cultural validation, and opportunities for cultural celebration as instrumental factors in providing support for minority students to promote belonging and retention. Researchers may want to

determine if racial minority students truly need these factors to promote retention or if previous exposure to diverse backgrounds is sufficient in navigating HBCU campuses.

Investigators may also question whether a campus whose enrollment primarily consists of diverse students, such as an HBCU, could automatically be categorized as an engaging campus based on the CECE model. These types of campuses may already have numerous facets of the models that accommodate diverse students. Therefore, it would be pertinent to determine how these models can be used to promote success outcomes like retention on these campuses. Furthermore, do diverse campuses equate to engaging campuses and if so, do they intrinsically promote increased success outcomes because they are considered engaging? Finally, researchers may want to investigate the influence of other demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender, and age, as well as pre-college characteristics, such as academic preparation, grade point average, and high school co-curricular involvement, to see how these students perform on engaging campuses and how those pre-existing factors influence their success outcomes.

Recommendations for Postsecondary Institutions

Researchers should conduct additional research to further investigate how engaging campus environments could impact minority retention on all campus types. However, from this study, several recommendations come to mind for administrators on both HBCU and PWI campuses. First, creating a campus environment where minority students feel holistically supported should be a goal. This entails creating spaces and opportunities for diverse groups of students to interact with one another outside of the academic environment. It also necessitates providing faculty and staff who can assist students with their needs, regardless of their connection to the students' racial background. Even if all faculty members are not perceived as

being helpful or academic champions, students seem to need at least one institutional member with whom they can connect or interact that can provide them with the needed resources and support (Museus, 2014, Arroyo & Gasman, 2014). Students need a variety of support in their educational environments, and it is vital that the institution assesses those needs and provide ongoing access to resources to acknowledge and accommodate their needs.

Secondly, students need spaces to safely be themselves and explore who they were before attending their institution, who they have evolved to be at their institution, and who they could potentially be after leaving their institution. They need to be able to be who they are without fear of retribution or judgment. While this might present as difficult for administrators, having student-led centers and organizations that provide these opportunities for students to not only be themselves but express themselves is vital. Administrators will also need to be supportive of these spaces and help to ensure that they remain protected for their students.

Additionally, diversity in any campus environment has been shown to be beneficial for all students but especially for minority students. However, creating diversity for the sake of being able to claim oneself as a diverse campus can be counterintuitive by creating a feeling of isolation among minority students and indirectly creating tokenism within the campus culture. Administrators should embrace and encourage diversity in all aspects of campus environments. However, they should do so genuinely by using diversity assessment tools and listening to their students to determine how to improve diversity on campus.

Concurrently, the stigma that HBCUs exist only to educate and promote success among Black students still seems to hold strong in the higher education landscape. On the contrary, history and theoretical frameworks show that most students can succeed in these environments. Administrators should celebrate their HBCU institutions and their importance to student success

while still promoting their openness and ability to foster success among all students. All students are welcome and therefore, all students attending an HBCU should feel a sense of HBCU pride without it being rooted in a "Black only" institutional mentality. HBCUs can celebrate their history and pride while incorporating and celebrating other student cultures. HBCUs provide countless opportunities for all students to succeed academically and socially and therefore, should be higher education options for students from all backgrounds.

Lastly, while this study focused primarily on HBCUs, the theoretical frameworks were designed to be used with any institutional type. Therefore, it is encouraged that administrators on all types of campuses work towards creating engaging environments that incorporate facets of both the CECE model and the HBCU approach. As previously stated, further research is needed to determine to what extent factors from each model influence outcomes in minoritized students. Nevertheless, these frameworks have demonstrated success for minoritized students, and therefore, could currently be used as a guide to help campus administrators create environments that would facilitate and promote success outcomes for all students.

Conclusion

This case study explored campus environment and the retention of racial minority students on a 2-year technical HBCU campus. The findings provide insight into the experiences of racial minority students attending HBCUs and how campus culture influences their retention. The findings from the interviews, observations, and document and artifact analysis may provide insight into how HBCUs can continue to create campus environments that facilitate and promote success outcomes such as retention. In their own words, participants discussed what influenced their reasons for returning to their institution and how the campus environment influenced those decisions. Analysis of the findings suggested that racial minority students persist for numerous

reasons, specifically their bonds with diverse peers, the family campus environment, and the support and assistance of faculty. The reasons associated with the retention of racial minority students can assist administrators at HBCUs in cultivating a campus environment that is conducive to promote success outcomes such as academic achievement, degree completion, retention, and persistence.

APPENDIX A: Recruitment Email

Dear [Student Name]:

My name is Meaghan Avery. I am a graduate student at Coastal Carolina University. I am conducting research on the experiences of White students at a 2-year HBCU, and I am inviting you to participate.

Participation in this research includes a 45-to-60-minute interview with me regarding your current experiences as a student here at Institution Tech. Your participation is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for choosing not to participate in this study. Furthermore, you have the right to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or adversely affecting your relationship with your institution. While there are no monetary benefits for participating, the results of this study will aid in improving student experiences both at Institution Tech and other institutions. As a result of your participation, you will receive a $15 digital Amazon gift card.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at ***maisgett@coastal.edu***.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Meaghan Avery

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

The Majority as the Minority: A Case Study Assessing Retention as a Factor of Campus Environment for White Students Attending a 2-Year Technical HBCU in South Carolina
Avery Dissertation
Spring 2022
Interviewer: Meaghan Avery

Hi! My name is Meaghan. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Worked in Higher Education for 10 years
Currently Bursar at Quantic School of Business and Technology
First in my family to obtain a Master's degree or beyond
Attended a 4-year, PWI (say this out) (UVA) where I was a part of the minority racial group
My niece attended an HBCU (VSU) in VA which inspired my interest

Review Consent Document & Encourage Questions

Introduction:
I'm conducting a research study that aims to understand White students understand their experiences on HBCU campuses. I want to learn how different aspects of the campus environment influence your decision to re-enroll in your institution. Students who are involved both academically and socially on their campuses are said to be more likely return the following semester. However, it is unclear how a student's campus environment plays a role in those decisions. I hope to understand more about why White students return to their institution when they are in the racial minority so that institutions can create environments that are more supportive and encourage these students to return.

I'd like your permission to record our conversation. It's just because I can't take notes fast enough and I want to have an accurate record of what you have to say. Our conversation is confidential (I won't use your name in my writing) and if we were to quote you, it would be anonymously. Please let me know if you would like me to use a certain pseudonym to refer to you in my study, otherwise I will choose one. I don't think I'll ask you anything that is particularly sensitive, but if you ever feel uncomfortable, you have the right to say, "I'd prefer not to answer that question," or you can tell me that "this is definitely off the record—don't quote me," or you can point to the tape recorder, and I'll turn it off.

Participant Background:
What is your name?
How old are you?
What is your gender?
What is your race?
How long have you attended IT?
What's your academic major?

Interview Topics:

Easy intros

Why did you choose to attend IT?

What factors influenced you to return the next semester?

What aspects of the campus do you like the most? Dislike?

What aspects of the campus make you feel supported or not? Academically, socially, etc.?

How would you describe the campus environment at this institution? How does it impact your decision to remain or leave?

What words best describe what it is like to be a student here in this institution? In particular, what words best describe what it's like to be a White student here?

Describe any institutional programs or policies that you know of that are geared directly towards keeping students from your cultural background connected to the campus. For instance, do you know of social programs geared towards non-Black students, etc.?

Social Involvement

Describe the social environment here on campus?

-How involved are you at your HBCU? What factors influenced or hindered your campus involvement?

What aspects of the campus help to make you feel as though you belong at (or are a part of) campus community or not?

Connections with Peers

Discuss how easy (or not) it is to find people with similar backgrounds to you? How does that make you feel? How does that influence your decision to remain on this campus?

To what degree do you feel as though the institution provides adequate opportunities for you to connect with faculty and staff outside of the classroom

Discuss what contributes (or detracts) from your ability to feel connected to the institution?

Discuss the importance to you of having opportunities to interact with individuals from backgrounds different from yours on campus.

Impact Community

How does the institution aid (or not) your ability to positively impact your cultural community and society? If not, please discuss.

Discuss how comfortable you feel discussing issues such as race and politics on campus.

Academic Involvement

Describe the academic environment here on campus? Faculty? Staff? Resources for students, etc.

To what degree, and in what ways, is the faculty here supportive and helpful—or less than supportive and less than helpful —to individual students? To what degree does race influence faculty supportiveness and helpfulness?

To what degree are you comfortable approaching instructors here? Which instructors are the most comfortable or least comfortable to approach? In particular, those of a different race? Same race?

Closing- I will email a $15 amazon gift card to you after the conclusion of the interview. Can you confirm your email address?

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Do you have any questions or comments about the interview today?

I may need to follow-up with you in the future to confirm my findings or to do an additional interview. Are you ok with this?

If so, how would you like to be contacted?

If not, thank you for participating, I truly appreciate you taking the time to speak with me.

Thank you so much for speaking with me today. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns, or if I can be of any help to you. I've spent many years in college and working at colleges so have many pools of resources I can draw from.

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FOR HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Introduction

My name is Meaghan Avery, and I am a doctoral student at Coastal Carolina University. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study entitled, "The Majority as the Minority: A Case Study Assessing Retention as a Factor of Campus Environment for White Students Attending a 2-year Technical HBCU in South Carolina." You are free to talk with someone you trust about your participation in this research and may take time to reflect on whether you wish to participate or not. If you have any questions, I will answer them now or at any time during the study.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the current experiences of White students that attend 2-year historically Black colleges and universities and how the institutional environment does or does not contribute to their decision to remain at their institution.

Procedures

During this research study, you will be involved an interview where you will be asked various questions regarding your current perception of your experiences on campus, your social involvement, and the campus environment.

Duration

For this research study, your participation will be required for roughly 45-60 minutes. However, if you feel that additional time is needed to fully express yourself, I am available to extend this particular session, or we can schedule a follow-up session as needed.

Rights

You do not have to agree to participate in this research study. If you do choose to participate, you may choose not to at any time once the study begins. There is no penalty for not participating or withdrawing from the study at any time. If you are a CCU student, your decision to participate or not will have no affect your grade.

Risks

During this research study, we will be discussing aspects that could potentially relate to race and racial situations. As a result, it is possible that you may experience certain emotional discomfort. However, no other risks are anticipated.

Benefits

By agreeing to participate in this research study, each participant will receive a $15 gift card to Amazon. Additionally, this research, may help to gain a better understanding of others within your community or society as a whole as a result of finding an answer to the research questions.

Confidentiality

Unless you provide consent to the contrary, the confidentiality of your participation in this research study, your responses or any individual results will be maintained by the PI and all members of the research team.

Note that confidentiality will only be violated when required by law or the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association. This usually includes, but may not be limited to, situations when your responses indicate that you, or another clearly identified individual, is at risk of imminent harm or situations in which faculty are mandated reporters, such as instances of child abuse or issues covered under Title IX regulations. For more information about Title IX, please see the University's webpage at: https://www.coastal.edu/titleix/.

Sharing the Results

As the Principal Investigator on this research study, I plan to share the results of this study through class presentations, conference presentations, and potential publication.

Contacts

If you have any questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me by phone [434-465-5257] or email [maisgett@coastal.edu].

My faculty advisor on this study is Dr. Sheena Kauppila and she can also be contacted by phone [843-349-4098] or email [skauppila@coastal.edu].

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) under the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Services is responsible for the oversight of all human subject research conducted at Coastal Carolina University. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant before, during or after the research study, you may contact this office by calling (843) 349-2978 or emailing OSPRS@coastal.edu.

This research study has been approved by the IRB on April 25, 2020. This approval will expire on April 25, 2024, unless the IRB renews the approval prior to this date.

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Consent

I have read this form and have been able to ask questions of the PI and/or discuss my participation with someone I trust. I understand that I can ask additional questions at any time during this research study and am free to withdraw from participation at any time.

☐ **I agree to take part in this research study.**

☐ **I agree to allow my name or other identifying information to be included in reports, publications and/or presentations resulting from this research study.**

☐ **I DO NOT agree to allow my name or other identifying information to be included in reports, publications and/or presentations resulting from this research study.**

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

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