

DISSERTATION

AFRICAN AMERICAN DOCTORAL STUDENTS  
AND THE MENTOR ROLES OF THEIR ADVISORS

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School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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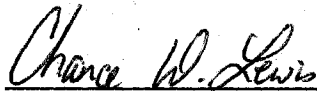
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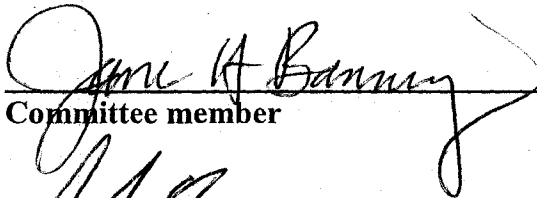
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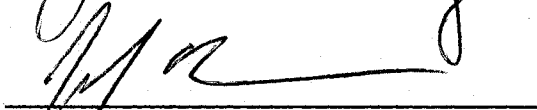
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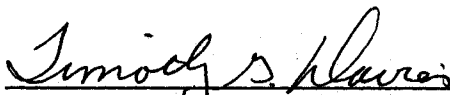
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## **ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

### **AFRICAN AMERICAN DOCTORAL STUDENTS AND THE MENTOR ROLES OF THEIR ADVISORS**

This is a qualitative phenomenological study of African American doctoral students and the mentor roles of their advisors. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship and the importance of connecting the African American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles. The focus of this study is to bring to the forefront the importance as well as the impact of mentors/advisors and their roles in facilitating academic success for African American doctoral students. Many African American doctoral students are typically misunderstood and misdirected in the types of support that they may need to succeed in graduate school (Gallien & Petterson, 2005). Mentors/advisors and the roles that they have are essential to the success of African American doctoral students. The support structures surrounding the mentor/advisor relationship in this research are essential to how it relates to the needs of the African American doctoral student on a predominately White campus. The researcher will interview African American doctoral degree recipients that have successfully completed a doctoral degree program during the 2005-2006 academic school years.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my deceased grandmother, Mrs. Carrie Williams Kador of which was an inspiration to me and my family. My grandmother was the foundation for my success and the person to whom I went to when times were rough. I know that you are watching over me everyday and without your guidance I would not have completed this awesome task or be the person that I am today. Without your support and continuous love this journey would have been more difficult. I would like to say thank you and I will never forget you. I Love You Momma Carrie!

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**“See It Through”**

**By Edgar A. Guest:**

When you're up against a trouble,  
Meet it squarely, face to face;  
Lift your chin and set your shoulders,  
Plant your feet and take a brace;

When it's vain to try to dodge it,  
Do the best that you can do;  
You may fail, but may conquer,  
See it through!

Black may be the clouds about you  
And your future may seem grim,  
But don't let your nerve desert you;  
Keep your self in fighting trim.  
If the worst is bound to happen,  
In spite of all what you can do,  
Running from it will not save you,  
See it through!

Even hope may seem but futile  
When with troubles you're beset,  
But remember you are facing  
Just what other men have met.  
You may fail, but fall still fighting;  
Don't give up, whatever you do.  
Eyes front, head high to the finish,  
See it through!

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Background

The United States has a history that has not been very welcoming to African Americans entering its institutions of higher education. Beginning with the setbacks of entry by means of legal denial that included the doctrine of the separate but equal policy with the intention to direct laws that would ultimately segregate schools; and the affirmative action debates such as the *Bakke* decision and the rulings in the University of Michigan cases (Gallen & Peterson, 2005; Jones, 2001; McGinnis, 2003). Additionally, there is limited access into many Predominately White Institutions for many African Americans based on wealth and academic background; as well as separate institutions, those for African Americans and minorities and the other for majority White students only; although, a few African Americans have found entry into Predominantly White Institutions. Once admitted to a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), many African American doctoral students leave school at a much higher rate without achieving their educational goals (Lang & Ford, 1988; Isaac, 1998). According to Walton (1979) and Minor (2003), one factor which contributes to the higher rates of attrition of African American doctoral students is the inadequacy in mentoring and advising, especially at the doctoral level.

Gallien and Patterson (2005) reported that “the more successful African American doctoral students had a mentor/advisor (or group of mentor/advisors) who encouraged and critiqued their work and followed them through their graduate school experience and beyond, to their professional careers” (p. 9). To better understand the circumstances as it relates to the cultural and academic adjustment that has to be made by many African

American doctoral students at Predominantly White Institutions in order to be successful; the mentor/advisor may be the answer to the adjustment process at the PWI. This study will seek to address many of the issues surrounding the mentor/advisor relationship and how it relates to African American doctoral students completion rates at PWIs. As a result, the issue of whether a mentor/advisor is the key to successful completion of a doctoral program for African Americans in PWIs will be explored.

In the United States, the number of African American doctoral students participating in higher education institutions has increased substantially. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2002), there has been an 18 percent increase in African American doctoral student participation in higher education between 1993 and 1998; these years were chosen to point out the significant increase in higher education participation for African American doctoral students over a relatively short period of time. However, there is still more needed to be done by many PWIs to increase the persistence for many African American doctoral students towards graduation.

The increase in persistence towards graduation completion rates of African American students over many years has shown progress. The NCES reported an increase in African American students completing college between 1975 and 2000; yet African American students still remain less likely than Whites to earn degrees in all fields. African American students during the 1990-1998 academic years had slightly higher completion rates in associate degrees earned in comparison to the bachelor's degrees earned in that same year (NCES, 2000). African American students earned 11 percent of the representation of all associate degrees and slightly lower with 9 percent of all bachelors' degrees. African American students earned 8 percent of the master's degrees,

a percentage similar to that of bachelor's degree recipients. Unfortunately, the numbers were smaller when it came to the completion rates of the doctoral and professional degrees earned, which were 5 and 7 percent, respectively (NCES, 2003).

Although much progress has been made, African Americans are clearly underrepresented at the master's and doctoral levels (Isaac, 1998). There are several factors contributing to the underrepresentation of African American doctoral students in higher education, such as financial issues, cultural issues, and finding insightful encouragement to attain the degree from a trustworthy mentor/advisor. This underrepresentation of African American doctoral students participation in higher education extends beyond that of just attending PWIs. According to Syverson (1999) most historically black colleges and universities do not have the assortment of doctoral programs that many PWIs have to offer to African American doctoral students. As a result, many African American doctoral students are forced to attend many of the PWIs to fulfill their ambitions to obtain a terminal degree in selected fields. The options for many African American doctoral students are to attend PWIs in view of the fact that they may be the first generation graduate students that will study for degrees at predominantly white institutions (Fleming, Gill & Swinton, 1978; Syverson, & Welch, 1997). As a result, graduate schools at PWIs require a significant financial, cultural, academic and philosophical adjustment for African American doctoral students; and by addressing these issues this could possibly remedy the underrepresentation of the African American doctoral student in higher education.

With the presence of adjustment factors to attend graduate school such as adjusting to campus life, and adjusting to cultural differences, African American doctoral

students have a cultural as well as a social obligation to obtain advanced degrees. For instance, many African Americans do not see themselves represented in large numbers in faculty positions and administrative positions at the university level (Anderson et. al., 1993). For this reason, the need for expanded participation and successful completion of the degree programs is related to the potential for African American doctoral students to make progress in terms of economics, along with gaining leadership credibility. Furthermore their participation will have a positive impact on their respective doctoral programs for current and future African American doctoral students success (Fleming, et. al., 1978; Gallen & Peterson, 2005).

African American doctoral students can increase their personal financial opportunities by opening doors to higher paid corporate and public sector jobs with the successful completion of their doctoral programs. In addition, the doctoral degree increases their potential for leadership roles in various occupations. Also, these leaders can then possibly become mentors and act as role models for future African American doctoral students. The cultural obligations for many African American doctoral students are to simply continue the struggle to erase the boundaries that exist (cultural & language); for example, some African American doctoral students display an animated, persuasive, and confrontational communication style, along with non-mainstream communication patterns, plus nonstandard movements and walking styles (Duhaney, 2000). If a white professor or student is unfamiliar with these styles and patterns, it could be a problem associating to these students and this could result in understanding issues for anyone involved (Duhaney, 2000).

African American doctoral students that may come from various regions of the United States can make communication very difficult for some students and professors to understand due to slang language and language pronunciation issues but not in all cases. This along with being able to successfully learn from White professors and students especially at the beginning stages of their programs, assuming that these students did not have a white professor prior to their doctoral program. By continuing the struggle, it gives African American doctoral students that may follow a better opportunity to fulfill their educational ambitions. Although sparsely deployed, it opens doors for opportunities that would otherwise not be there (Isaac, 1998).

Successful completion of doctoral programs for African American doctoral students has been a difficult problem for colleges and universities in the United States (Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991). Studies have found that the degree attainment of African American doctoral students in colleges and universities has increased in the United States (Gallen & Peterson, 2005; Holland, 1993; Isaac, 1998).

*Table 1*  
Proportion of PhD. Degrees conferred upon African American from 1978 to 2003

year	1978	1980	1983	1993	2003
%	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.2	6.6

(Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, 2005)

According to the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (2005), in 1978 to 2003 the proportion of doctoral degrees conferred upon African Americans was 3.9 percent in 1978, 3.9 percent in 1980, 3.9 percent in 1983, 4.2 percent in 1993, and 6.6 percent in 2003 (see Table 1). In the past decade, African Americans in all fields increased the number of doctoral degrees they earned by 88.9 percent, increasing from 1,202 in 1991-92 to more than 2,200 in 2001-02 (U. S Department of Education, 2003).

African American females outpaced African American males in their participation rates in doctoral degree programs by a margin of 119.5 percent compared to 54.3 percent between the years of 1991 thru 2002 (U. S Department of Education, 2003). These years were chosen to point out the significant participation difference between African American males and females enrolled in doctoral degree programs in America. Enrollment for African American graduate students in doctoral degree granting institutions increased 3.2% from 1990 through 2000 (NCES, 2003). Although African American doctoral students have increased their enrollment, there are still enrollment inequalities in universities and colleges in America such as limited access and unequal admission opportunities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

Over the past years, educators have become less concerned with African American doctoral student enrollment patterns as they have in how to retain these students (Lee, 1999). The proportion of African American doctoral students earning degrees in college has increased over several decades; nevertheless with this increase the doctoral degree attainment is still dismal for African American students as indicated in the extant literature (Willie, Grady, & Hope, 1991).

In doctoral degree granting institutions, graduate enrollment has increased over the past 25 years. This increase was due to the percentage distribution in minority status, gender, and enrollment condition of doctoral students in America. In the past 25 years, African American graduate student enrollment in graduate programs increased by 101.2 percent, increasing from 78,000 in 1976 to 158,000 in 2000 (Condition of Education NCES, 2003). Given NCES statistics showing actual increase percentages, more effort needs to be made to continue these trends in order to keep up with the national average of

all African Americans in the United States. The national average as of fall 2004 is 43% enrollment (CGS/GRE survey of graduate Enrollment, 2004). However, with these enrollment trends there is still a need to understand why certain African American doctoral students are successful. African American doctoral students in the United States continue to lag behind when examining economic wealth along with social status compared to their White counterparts. By increasing the completion rates of African Americans in graduate education, the African American graduate student population will have a greater chance to level the playing field with their White counterparts.

### Statement of the Problem

In order to understand the academic success of African American doctoral students on a predominantly White campus, the purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of successful African American doctoral degree recipients and the mentor roles of their advisors on a predominately White campus. In an effort to try to understand what the perceptions are and how the mentor/advisor roles can affect degree attainment for the African American doctoral students on a predominately White campus, there is a need to investigate and understand the role of the mentor/advisor.

Many African American doctoral students are typically misunderstood, or misdirected in the types of support that they may need to survive in graduate school; also there may be an assumption that the same mentoring services needed by white students can be beneficial to all students (Minor, 2003). The mentor/advisor and the roles that they have are essential to the success of the African American doctoral student on a predominately White campus. The support structures surrounding the mentor/advisor

relationship in this research is essential to how it relates to the needs of the African American doctoral student. This research will employ a qualitative methodology that will assist in understanding the types of support that many African American doctoral students need to successfully complete their programs, particularly from their graduate mentor/advisors on a predominately White campus.

### Limitations

This study was limited with the following characteristics:

1. This study does not address issues surrounding part-time African American doctoral students.
2. This study does not address issues of recruitment of African American doctoral students.

### Delimitations

This study was delimited with the following characteristics:

1. This study only included successful African American doctoral degree recipients from PWIs in the United States.

### Significance of the Research

The significance of this research is to address the mentor/advisor roles of African American doctoral students and explain reasons why this population is in jeopardy. Also, this research will explore why these students discontinue their formal education at an earlier stage than their white counterparts on a predominately White campus (Carter &

Wilson, 1991). Mentoring/advising for many African American doctoral students has been a successful tool for encouraging students to complete the doctoral program, and by successfully completing the doctoral degree program it can help increase financial stability by opening doors to higher paid corporate and public sector jobs (Carter & Wilson, 1991). In addition, the doctoral degree increases African American doctoral degree recipients potential for leadership roles in various occupations, and these leaders can then possibly become mentors and act as role models for future African American doctoral students. In addition, a formal mentor/advisor program will assist in motivating and inspiring African American doctoral students to successfully complete the doctoral program, along with being a catalyst to enhance their professional development (Bova & Phillips, 1981; Minor, 2003).

### Research Objective

The research objective is to interpret and report African American doctoral degree recipients perceptions of the impact that mentoring/advising had on their successful completion of the doctoral program on a predominately White campus. The objective will be reached by obtaining verbal descriptions of the perceptions that African American doctoral degree recipients have regarding the impact that the mentor/advisor role had on the retention and completion of the doctoral degree program. This perception will be collected, analyzed, and reported using a qualitative methodology based in the phenomenological approach.

## Theoretical Approach

This theoretical approach challenges modernist assumptions that African American doctoral students experiences at PWIs are not distinct. By this I mean, some theories of mentoring/advising suggest that if African American doctoral students are guided by mentors/advisors then they will be successful through graduation. On the contrary, literature that suggests regardless of positive mentoring/advising experiences at PWIs, African American doctoral students, their mentor/advisors and the broader university must recognize the way in which the mentor/advisor impacts not only their experiences at the university, but also their ways in successfully completing the doctoral program (Omi & Winant, 1994; Stanfield, 1993). By having the data speak in the voice of the participants the issues and experiences of African American doctoral students at PWIs in the context of their mentor/advisor relationship and how it relates to successful completion of a doctoral program will be explored.

## Research Questions

The guiding research questions will seek to address issues concerning African American (AA) doctoral degree recipients, and they are as follows:

1. What are the key characteristics of the mentoring/advising relationship that (AA) doctoral students perceive as influencing their decision to complete the degree?
2. In what ways do issues of race affect the mentoring/advising relationship?

## Researcher's perspective

As a result of this research, my plans are to address the issues that focus on the impact of the mentor roles of advisors on African American doctoral students on predominately White campuses. At hand, there are limited answers to the problems related to African American doctoral student's persistence and successful completion of a graduate program. However, there are many ways to resolve the issues that are present nationwide for African American doctoral students by a means of addressing the mentor/advisor roles of these students. There has to be changes made by mentor/advisors and administrators on all fronts to create a better system when it comes to analyzing the needs of African American doctoral students.

The problem lies in the hands of the mentees as well as many of the mentor/advisors that counsel these students; if they are unaware of the issues that most African American doctoral students face, the relationship can result in a negative outcome. Perhaps the failure in successfully completing a doctoral program can be the result of having a bad relationship with the mentor/advisor. This issue has to be addressed within this research in order to focus on whether or not the mentor/advisor of African American doctoral students are key elements to the successful completion of a doctoral program at a predominately White institution.

## Definition of Terms

1. **African American Graduate/Doctoral Student:** A student of African ancestry who continues studies after the Bachelor's degree.

2. **Minorities:** An ethnic, racial, religious, or other group having a distinctive presence within a society.
3. **African Americans:** A Black American of African ancestry
4. **Hispanics:** A U.S. citizen or resident of Latin-American or Spanish descent.
5. **Mentor/Advisor:** A wise and trusted counselor or teacher to (another person).
6. **White Counterparts:** A person of the Caucasian race/One that has the same functions and characteristics as another; a corresponding person or thing.
7. **Predominantly White Institutions:** Two and Four year institutions with less than ten percent of its student population being minority or Black.
8. **HBCU:** Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
9. **Administrators:** Those who are officially charged with the functions of administration at the university level. The educational administrator has been described as a generalist in education and a specialist in the process of administration.
10. **Non-Cultural Mentor:** A person without any broad cultural interests outside ones own cultural experiences.
11. **Mentee:** One who is mentored.
12. **Mentor/Mentee Relationship:** A particular type of connection existing between people related to or having dealings with each other.
13. **Academe/Academia:** Academic life. A place in which instruction is given to students.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

In America, the number of African American doctoral students participating in higher education institutions has increased but there is still a long way to go in degree completion for this population. Therefore, the following review of literature will examine areas involving mentoring/advising, characteristics of a mentor/advisor, mentor/advisor roles and functions, along with the positive and negative mentor/advisor outcomes will be reviewed. Supportive literature related to additional aspects of mentoring/advising will also be reviewed. It is important to explore the relationship as well as the aspects of mentor/advisor roles as it relates to the African American doctoral student. The mentor/advisor as identified in the literature consists of numerous components.

In *Reflections of a Protégé*, Parkay (1988) defined mentoring as “an intensive, one-to-one form of teaching in which the wise and experienced mentor inducts the inspiring protégé into a particular, usually professional, way of life” (p. 196). According to Heller and Sindelar (1991), mentoring was simply advice given by a respected and experienced individual to someone in need of assistance. Further, Bova and Phillips (1984) indicated that mentoring is a process by which adults learn through experiences. Cox and Daniel (1983) describe mentoring “as one of the oldest instructional models we know” (p. 53). The following is their historical explanation of the concept of mentoring from Greek mythology:

The name derives from mentor, the confidant of Odysseus, remembered for teacher and guide to Odysseus’ son Telemachus. While Odysseus was away, the mentor was entrusted with the care of the household, including the instruction of

the king's son. The goddess Athena assumed the form of Mentor and accompanied Telemachus in his search for Odysseus after the war. Athena's intervention can be viewed as a mythic representation of a divine spirit that enters the relationship of teacher and student under specially favored conditions. (p. 54)

According to Ellingson, Haeger, and Feldhusen (1986), the word "mentor" originated from Greek mythology and is now defined by a host of terms such as guide, advisor, facilitator, counselor, and influencer to address the titles that one has to have to assume a good mentor/advisor track record.

Thus, the mentor/advisor role in advising the doctoral student or mentee cannot be put in a simple package to be distributed to all mentors/advisors. If mentoring/advising was a simple job all mentors/advisors would be experts, and the mentor/advisor experiences with all African American doctoral students would be the same and manageable. However, the mentor/mentee relationship is very important in the completion and success of African American doctoral students.

The African American doctoral student and the relationship with their mentors/advisors are important to the success through the various stages of the doctoral study. Farmer (2003) states, "It is therefore evident that more attention needs to be given to the development and experiences of African American students' matriculation in doctoral programs" (p. 68). The mentors/advisors of African American doctoral students are the link for students to gain opportunities for presenting research, writing and publishing articles, along with working collaboratively with other scholars. The experiences of African American doctoral students in graduate school are extremely important because many are isolated and have feelings of being the only one in the

department with something to prove (Fields, 1998). This feeling of being isolated can lead the student into considering leaving the academic program and return to previous jobs and lifestyles (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies & Smith, 2004).

The benefit of having a good relationship with the university mentor/advisor is essentially having a role model who always inspires one to do better, as well as providing critical feedback. Mentees' can also build a bond of commonality along with insightful encouragement. Many mentor/advisors do inspire and encourage the mentee to do better based on relationships with prior students, although there are a few mentor/advisors who cannot relate to the mentee based on limited cultural experiences that will result in an unsatisfactory outcome in inspiring or encouraging them to do better. Henrich (2004) this is referred to as a non-cultural mentor/advisor. Henrich documents "the evolution of pro-sociality rooted in the interaction between cultural and genetic transmission of unlike species" (p.31-32). The non-cultural mentor in this context is used to explain the cultural learning capacities of the mentor/advisor. The non-cultural mentor/advisor has plenty to gain along the way also, by being able to benefit from the opportunity to share in the culture of the mentee. African American doctoral students have a greater outlook on graduating as well as retention through a positive mentoring relationship (Jones, 2001).

As a result, many African American doctoral students are in need of being a part of mentoring programs which are geared to effectively retain and guide minority students toward social and academic success (Jones, 2001). Most graduate schools, when it comes to advising African American doctoral students are behind that of the undergraduate advising experiences (Minor, 2003). Minor states, "the dropout rate among African American doctoral students is significantly high at 55 percent of all doctoral students" (p.

239). The total number of degrees awarded to African American doctoral students increased by 88.9 percent, increasing from 1,202 in 1992 to 2,202 in 2002 (U. S. Department of Education, 2005).

There was a decrease in the overall number of doctoral degrees granted to African Americans in all fields, in 1977 from 3.8 percent to 3.1 percent in 1994 (Minor, 2003). The effects of these daunting numbers may be attributed to the doctoral student's mentor/advisor as a potential source of the problem. As early as the 1960s, Heiss (1967) states that, "the quality and character of the relationship between the doctoral student and major advisor is unequivocally the most sensitive and crucial element in the doctoral experience. It not only influences the doctoral student's scholarly development, but also has far-reaching after effects" (p. 48).

To remain at the university and become a successful doctoral student it is vital that African American doctoral students find affirming support from mentors/advisors. The terms mentor/advisor, and for the purposes of this study, are considered one in the same. The mentoring/advising role is the process by which a doctoral student or mentee is positively socialized in the academic environment for the purpose of learning the traditions, practices, and frameworks of a profession, organization, or institute (Brown, Davis & McClendon, 1999). The first line of support for the African American doctoral student is the mentor/advisor and the roles that he/she has in the success of the mentee. Further, mentoring/advising has been a powerful instrument in affirming the African American doctoral student in the dominant culture of the university (Duckworth-Warner, 2003). Lee (1999) noted that mentoring/advising has been a successful tool in retaining

students in higher education. This is especially evident for students who are considered at-risk (e.g., students of color, first generation, and women) (Laden, 1999).

### *Characteristics of mentor/advisor*

Within the literature, many characteristics of a mentor/advisor were identified. Characteristics of a good mentor/advisor included personality traits, work habits, attitude/values, productivity, professional influence, effective communication, availability, and mentoring track record (Johnson & Huwe, 2003). A few characteristics of a good mentor/advisor included creativity, enthusiasm, and a strong belief in the mentee were mentioned as good traits of a mentor/advisor (Halcomb, 1980). According to Hardcastle (1988), “the qualities and characteristics that attracted protégés to their mentors/advisors were wisdom, care, commitment, integrity, high expectations, a sense of humor, and the ability to act as a catalyst” (p. 206). Roche (1979) noted that an important characteristic of a mentor/advisor is a “willingness to share knowledge and understanding” (p. 24).

A question that was posed by Johnson and Huwe (2003) is “what makes a good school mentor/advisor?” (p. 65). To address this question this section will serve as a starting point to finding a high-quality mentor/advisor; along with answering many unanswered questions that pertain to being a good mentor/advisor. One of the most important factors influencing the initial attraction between the mentor/mentee is the notion that the mentor/advisor has strong personality traits (Olian et al., 1993). Johnson and Huwe (2003) describe a few personality traits of the mentor/advisor: (a) being warm; (b) humorous; (c) supportive; (d) encouraging; (e) flexible; (f) dedicated; (g) patient; and (h) empathetic. Doctoral students, African American students in particular, should put

considerable thought into selecting the personality traits of a mentor/advisor that they are most drawn to; this step can help in the survival of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee.

Personality traits of good graduate school mentor/advisors have been surveyed by various researchers. Cronan-Hillix, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, and Davidson (1986) asked graduate psychology students to describe important characteristics of good mentor/advisors. The participants in the survey identified the following as important: (a) a good sense of humor; (b) honesty; (c) dedication; (d) empathy; (e) compassion; (f) genuineness; (g) patience; (h) nonsexism; (i) flexibility; and (j) loyalty as some other important characteristics of a mentor/advisor. Clark, Harden and Johnson (2000) found that good mentor/advisors were described as being supportive, intelligent, knowledgeable, humorous, encouraging, honest, warm, available, caring, and accepting. At best, a good mentor/advisor is kind, competent, and enjoyable to be around.

The second trait for good mentoring/advising is to have positive work habits. It is very important for the mentor/advisor to have perfected the art of balancing academic and personal work habits. Gray and Gray (1985) identified good mentor/advisor work habits as those individuals who prefer working with abstract concepts, "people oriented" and place high value on their work and institutional values. Such mentor/advisors also respected and made a purpose to get along with their fellow co-workers. Gray and Gray (1985) contended that successful mentor/advisors exhibited confidence, security, flexibility, sensitivity, along with trust in their mentees. Zey (1984) reported that a mentor/advisor "oversees the career and development of another person, usually a junior person, through teaching, counseling, providing psychological support, protecting, and at

times promoting or sponsoring. The mentor/advisor may perform any or all of the above functions during the mentor/advisor relationship” (p. 7).

Johnson and Huwe (2003) believe that mentor/advisors help their mentees to grow in multiple areas. First, they promote self-awareness along with setting good boundaries between personal and professional roles. Second, there are explicit conversations between the mentor/mentee about ways to maintain the boundaries that work. Finally, good mentor/advisors address unhealthy work habits that may interfere with personal and academic growth.

The next trait for a mentor/advisor is to have a positive attitude and values. Cronan-Hillix et. al., (1986) states that good mentor/advisors demonstrate clear positive attitudes toward students and their roles as a mentor/advisor. According to Johnson and Huwe (2003), emotional capacity and fundamental personality characteristics are often evident in good mentor/advisors. Faculty mentor/advisors that are described as compassionate, genuine, patient, flexible, and humorous are often preferred by doctoral students. Cronan-Hillix et. al., (1986) noted, “The personality, not the intellect, of mentors is the prime determinant of their desirability” (p. 123). According to Dahle (1998) mentor/advisors are obligated to build an air of trust for the mentoring relationship to be successful.

The following trait has to be one of the most important traits that a mentor/advisor can obtain. The trait of being productive is the key to professional performance in academe. Cronan-Hillix et. al., (1986) states that those graduate school mentor/advisors who are actively involved in research, publishing and continually honing professional skills are demonstrating very valuable professional skills for any student to acquire; these

are traits that are helpful and beneficial to any graduate student if they want to be in academe. Charney (2004) asserts that a mentor/advisor would be efficient and productive if that person would examine the time that is spent on work related issues, compared to the percentage of the time used on activities directly related to the objective. Charney also mentioned that if the time that is spent on school work related issues of being efficiently productive is less than 95 percent, you may have a problem.

In addition to having the traits that are required as a mentor/advisor, Johnson and Huwe (2003) called professional influence and professional power essential to the mentee. This professional influence and power are the causes for the mentee to seek out a mentor/advisor that have professional power. The use of the phrase professional power and influence is used to explain the importance of this trait. Kantor (1977) states, mentees that have influential mentor/advisors will benefit from what is called reflective power. Reflective power is the idea that a mentor/advisor sponsors students work, as well as to indicate to others that the support of an influential person is in place to support what you do.

Charney (2004) mentioned influencing mentees to gain commitment for new ideas is crucial. Mentors/advisors must develop a collaborative attitude with the mentee with the understanding that there is someone that the mentee can depend on while developing independence. Ridley, Baker and Hill (2003) elaborated on professional influence, influencing the facts that mentor/advisors should be involved in more than the sum of several important but insufficient mentoring competencies. In skillfully managing and integrating various virtues, abilities, and focal skills, the mentor/advisor has to be

competent in integrating structure with the hopes that all of these elements will influence the development of a skilled professional mentee.

A trait that is undoubtedly important to any mentor/advisor is the skills of communication. Allen, Poteet and Russell (2000) adds “a recent survey of managers revealed that listening and communication skills are some of the most important characteristics mentor/advisors can possess” (p. 275). A mentor/advisor that has good communication skills will exhibit a strong range of interpersonal skills and is able to focus on other’s ideas, along with the mentee’s views and feelings (Lewis, 1996). Good communication skills between the mentor/advisor and the mentee bring to the relationship a sense of opening a window of which knowledge and understanding are reciprocated. Lewis further mentions that communication skills are obvious in formulating a positive developmental relationship between the mentor/advisor and mentee. Communication between the mentor/mentee is ongoing; mentor/advisors will more than likely gain just as much from the relationship as the mentee does. Furthermore, good communicators express fluent and articulate thoughts; speak to other professionals using technical expressions, question insightful issues that will enable the mentee to gain a better understanding of what matters, visit with the mentee for clarity and understanding in goal setting, listen attentively to concerns, and always promote a forum for two-way communication (1996).

Availability is a key characteristic as well. Lee (1999) noted that mentor/advisors should be obligated to devote time to the mentee and should avoid giving the mentee the feeling of being neglected. Hopp, Mumford and Williams (2003) agreed that the ideal mentoring relationship is one such that the mentor/advisor seeks out, and is available to,

those they mentor. Ensher and Murphy (1997) revealed that mentees who spent more time with their mentor/advisor were more satisfied with the relationship. It is wise for a mentee to consider availability before choosing a mentor/advisor.

The mentor/advisor with a good track record is highly desired. According to Johnson and Huwe (2003), “good graduate school mentor/advisors have consistently mentored/advised students, and their mentees are constantly satisfied with the mentorship” (pg. 71). Johnson and Huwe further document that good mentor/advisors commit to knowing each mentee along with having a firm understanding of the talents and the unique aspirations that each brings to graduate school. Mentor/advisors value and enjoy demonstrating models of teaching, coaching, and being an excellent resource for assistance to the mentee.

#### *Mentoring/advising roles and functions*

Mentor/advisors roles vary in different ways and it depends on the relationship between the mentor/advisor and the mentee. Kram (1985) identify good mentor/advisors as people who assume the roles of: (a) sponsor; (b) coach; (c) teacher; (d) role model; (e) advisor; (f) counselor; and (g) sometimes a friend. Buck (2003) states that the characteristics that are consistent with being a good mentor/advisor is, one who can answer questions in a straight forward manner, and not give an answer that the mentee may always want to hear. A mentor/advisor is also a person that has experiences that can be shared with the mentee to help guide the development throughout the mentee’s personal endeavors. These are roles that come naturally to good experienced mentor/advisors. Additionally, well groomed mentors are skilled at moving flexibly

between roles, depending on the mentee's needs and goals (O'Neil & Wrightsman, 2001).

For a long lasting mentor/advisor relationship to withstand time there has to be a sense of trust and communication (Rentz, 2003). Cook (1982) asserted that a mentor/advisor has a role of a disseminator of information. Cook also notes that a mentor/advisor's role involves more than just pulling people up the ladder. A mentor/advisor can assist in the growth and development of the mentee by helping to develop self-confidence, the sharing of ideals and values, having the mentee available and aware of opportunities, act as a counselor in making decisions, as well as building a personal lasting friendship that is built on respect.

These characteristics along with understanding that the mentor/advisor's role is a two-way street and there must be a shared relationship in the learning process for both the mentor/advisor and mentee. The mentor/advisor can keep current and learn from the mentee by questioning important aspects and not shielding the mentee from making mistakes (Cook, 1982, p.4). Unfortunately, there are a small number of senior faculty mentor/advisors that minorities and women can choose from because most mentor/advisors choose similar mentees to themselves in social class, race, ethnic background, and sex (Hetherington & Barcelo, 1985). But, if a mentee is not chosen by a mentor/advisor or do not have a mentor/advisor, they may suffer due to the importance of obtaining support in negotiating the academic system. By not having this support from a mentor/advisor it can prove to be very difficult to progress through the academic program based on not having the networking source in place (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies & Smith, 2004).

### *Positive and negative mentor/advisor outcomes*

Mentoring/advising cannot occur without encountering the positive as well as the negative aspects of the experience. The formation and development of having a positive mentor/mentee relationship is first to administer clear and concise expectations agreement that will be fundamental in having a positive relationship also called shared expectations. Johnson and Huwe (2003) note “it is essential to clarify expectations and process differences in expectations early-on in your relationship with a mentor” (p. 101). Shared expectations from both the mentor/mentee can provide mutual support resulting in mutual gain. Clawson (1980) asserted that there are many positive aspects of the mentor/mentee relationship from having frequent interactions with the mentee and maintaining a wide perspective. Mentor/mentee relationships flourish when there is personal choice involved. Assigned mentors are not always successful (Clawson, 1980). A mentor/advisor passes on wisdom and experiences to their mentees, mentors/advisors encourage their mentees by supplying them with both technical and social skills. The mentor/advisor formulates learning experiences that challenge and encourage their mentees without causing overwhelming stress and anxiety (p. 150).

Parkay (1988) mentioned characteristics of having a positive and effective mentor/mentee relationship; that described that the mentor/mentee shared similar beliefs and patterns of thinking; the mentee recognized the contributions of the mentor/advisor to the profession; the mentor/advisor was dedicated to a professional way of life; and, the mentor/advisor allowed the mentee to take responsibility for determining the direction and method of learning.

Bova and Phillips (1984) indicated that mentees learned the following from their mentor/advisors: (a) risk-taking behaviors; (b) communication skills; (c) survival in the organization; (d) skills of their professions; (e) respect for other people; (f) setting high standards; and not compromising them; (g) how to be a good listener; (h) how to get along with all kinds of people; (i) leadership qualities; and (j) what it means to be a professional (p. 18).

Researchers (Eby, McManus, Simon, & Russell 2000; Feldman, 1999) mention negative aspects of the mentor/mentee relationship, which can begin with personality differences that can cause conflicts in interest, communication style differences that can affect the mentor/mentee when it comes to discussing sensitive or direct issues, relationship preference differences where the mentor/advisor wants to help and give career advice along the way that may be in conflict with the mentee.

Work style and differences in work habits, as when the mentor or mentee is well organized and detailed and the mentor or mentee is disorganized and does not meet deadlines can cause a conflict in interest. And finally, career interest mismatch that deals with the mentor wanting to focus on research interests and in mentoring/advising mentees into the world of academia, and the mentee intends to be a practitioner and has little aptitude or interest in research. Anderson and Shannon (1988) identified mentoring in terms of four processes:

First, mentoring/advising was identified as an intentional process involving planned activities. Second, mentoring/advising was perceived to be a nurturing process which promoted the growth and development of the mentee. Third, mentoring/advising was considered to be an insightful procedure by which

wisdom was transferred from the mentor/advisor to the mentee and appropriately applied. Finally, mentoring/advising was recognized as a supportive and protective process. Anderson and Shannon further indicated that the central concept of mentoring/advising was role-modeling (p. 39).

The positive as well as the negative mentor/advisor and mentee relationships are fundamental in sharing the expectations in the learning process. There will be positive as well as negative aspects to any relationship, but it is important for any mentor/advisor and mentee to understand that communication is the key to benefit both sides. Furthermore, both positive and negative outcomes of mentoring were described in the literature. The outcomes not only affect the mentee, but the mentor/advisor as well. The benefits along with the negative and positive outcomes of mentoring were identified.

### *Doctoral Students Reflection*

Mentoring/advising has been an advantage to many African American doctoral students based on the roles that mentors/advisors often assume; like many graduate students across America. African American doctoral students require a successful person that they can identify with in order to academically succeed (Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001). The role of the African American doctoral student is extremely important to colleges and universities across the United States, specifically those at Predominately White institutions (PWIs) who are committed to diversity. To explore the perspectives of African American doctoral students along with screening the doctoral experience from a range of perspectives from feelings of isolation, campus life, community adjustments, and mentor/advisor relationships from first hand doctoral students account.

According to Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies and Smith (2004) for many African American doctoral students that attend Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), many students had feelings of isolation or feelings of being invisible. Several comments on feelings of isolation from African American doctoral students such as:

“It (the university) didn’t strike me as an environment that fostered diversity. It’s something that I wish that the faculty would have been aware of. I’d like the faculty to know that there are several layers that we have to deal with. There are the students that are our classmates. Another layer is the faculty that we are taking our courses with. Then there’s the rest of the student body that we have to interact with just walking from our building to the student center. Then there is the larger community. We have to interface with all of those. We have encounters at each of those levels. I wish the faculty were sensitive to them and provide an opportunity for us to talk about that and even to just hear what we’re feeling to validate us” (p. 5).

Some students’ had feelings of being lonely, along with not knowing anybody to relate to. Along with feelings of being isolated, that made many students feel like going back to previous jobs or lifestyles (Lewis, et. al., 2004). An entirely different student had similar feelings of isolation and stated that there was not much support from the university at the beginning of the program of which made many students want to drop out and leave the program. Subsequently, this student had to stay in school due to not having a job to go home to and not having any other options other than staying in school.

Feelings of isolation among many of the African American doctoral students that attend PWIs are common as it relates to negotiating the system, to getting acclimated to

the campus culture. Following feelings of isolation many doctoral students have to make adjustments to campus life. For many African American doctoral students they find it very difficult to make the adjustment to the Predominately White campus life. The difficulty in adjusting for many African American doctoral students is a result of coming from an environment that is more conducive to students of color such as the familiar culture and backgrounds. Lewis and Garrison-Wade (n.d.) add “since many of the students were from environments that were more balanced along racial lines, coming to a predominately White community and attending a predominately White university proved to be difficult initially; to the point where some of the African American Ph.D. students thought about returning to a more comfortable way of life” (p. 7).

According to Lewis and Garrison-Wade (n.d.) for many African American doctoral students that attend Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) the adjustment to campus life was difficult. Several comments on feelings of isolation from African American doctoral students such as:

“The community environment dealt me a blow when I first arrived in town. I walked to the local grocery store after being here for only a week and a policeman stopped me for picking up a flag on the side of the road. He said that it looked like I had taken it out of the yard I had just passed. He made me go to the house of this white man to confirm that I didn’t steal the flag. The white guy couldn’t believe the policeman would make me do that” (p. 8).

Another student had similar difficulty adjusting to campus life and had this to say:

“I found it to be more welcoming and inviting on campus. There were other students going through the same type of adjustment...that made me more

comfortable. However, outside of the campus, there was no one I could relate to. It wasn't like I could just talk to anyone on the street. I felt distant. I didn't feel like I was a part of anything because I didn't know anyone" (p. 8).

There are many challenges that will affect the campus adjustment period for African American doctoral students at PWIs. The difficulty in adjusting to campus life for the majority of African American doctoral students results from cultural differences; of which influenced many doctoral students to drop out or lag behind especially in the beginning stages of their doctoral training.

Many African American doctoral students show concern about the low percentage of African American faculty and administrators on PWIs as it relates to their personal mentor/advisor relationship. There is a great deal of concern from African American doctoral students with feelings of White professors showing favoritism towards White students, along with issues of discrediting research papers and black student issues in PWIs (Rutledge, 1983; Smith, 1980). The mentor/advisor can be the medium to bridge some of the apprehensions that exist along with being a sounding board for advice on how to handle these issues. However, to better understand the personal perspectives along with experiences that several African American doctoral students has had with their mentor/advisor and the contribution to the hindrance or completion of his or her degree. Here is what some doctoral students had to say:

"The rapport with the faculty has been extremely good and I think that has been the biggest aspect of retention for me. Even despite the fact that there weren't any African-American male professors, so far the faculty and staff have been extremely helpful. I understand that even some of the White professors can relate

to the struggle because I have some who can relate...you learn as you venture out that other people have other perspectives and then you meet other people who may be different from you but have the same perspective. You just have to learn to grow to associate and feel comfortable associating” (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies & Smith, 2004).

According to Lewis and Garrison-Wade (n.d.), there are certain faculty members that are more sensitive towards African American students needs, such as the academic, social and acculturation issues. These issues were brought out through informal conversations, dialogue, and discussions in a one-to-one discussion. Lewis and Garrison-Wade goes on to say that certain faculty members of color stated that they will be there to help students in different instances and have availed themselves as being there if anything is needed. Along with one student saying that there isn't anyone that I can approach; however, there are faculty that this student would seek advice from before others.

The previous comments made by African American doctoral students gave accounts of how important the relationships with the faculty members were. These students realized how important it is to have a positive relationship with members of the faculty and how critical this relationship is for their successful matriculation through the doctoral program. Although many African American doctoral students have a positive relationship with their mentor/advisor and faculty as a whole, there are many that do not share this same type of positive experience. King (1994) added:

“The relationship between Clifton and his dissertation advisor, Dr. Jamison, was not friendly, but in hindsight Clifton believes that the professor positively influenced his ability to persist in doctoral study. He felt that Jamison did not

respect him as a fellow professional, and he also disliked the way Jamison pried into his personal affairs. He considered Jamison's manner relaxed and personable with White students...But when he spoke to Clifton, Jamison was always stern and authoritarian (p. 55).

A student by the name of Julia was advised by the only Black faculty member in the department, and Julia's experience as she recalled was not a good one. For two years her advisor Dr. Fisher advised her via telephone, and often Dr. Fisher would forget previously discussed conversations. Along with giving advice to Julia that would be totally irrelevant to the conversation previously discussed. Many African American doctoral students would find it helpful to consult a mentor/advisor that may share similar backgrounds and life experiences, along with a person that may share in their personal interest that can lead to students success. On the other hand, a mentor/advisors ethnicity should not determine the suitability to mentor/advise an African American doctoral student. The successful interaction with faculty members and mentor/advisors is a key variable for many African American doctoral students to be successful in their academic department and in the PWI setting (Lewis & Garrison-Wade, n.d.).

Ross (1998) added that an effective tool for retaining minority students is to implement a mentoring/advising program. By having a minority mentoring program and faculty mentoring program, the predominantly White institution can build student's relationships to the faculty along with instilling a level of belonging. This type of program would help the African American doctoral student feel accepted, supported, and encouraged, especially in PWIs across America.

### *Academic Advising for Doctoral Students Success and Retention*

Academic advising for doctoral students success and retention is vital for many African American doctoral students to succeed; therefore, the role of the mentor/advisor can provide numerous benefits to doctoral students. The mentor/advisor may guide, teach, advise, and connect African American doctoral students to academic networks. The mentoring/advising relationship with African American doctoral students is often complex, and in some cases the outcomes are not always positive. However, the African American doctoral students that has mentors/advisors have access to knowledge and information that may not be as accessible to non-mentored African American doctoral students (Valadez, 1998). Willie, Grady and Hope (1991) reported that African American doctoral students on predominantly White campuses were satisfied for the most part with the administrative services (Financial Services, Health Care Services, and Human Resource Services) that provided a wide variety of services for the students needs. There was a strong correlation observed between the variables that pertained to racial diversity of faculty and the opportunity for interaction with faculty of one's own race. Willie et. al., (1991) also points out that most African American doctoral students are mentored/advised by members of their own race, although effective mentoring did occur across racial and gender categories.

Academic mentoring/advising for many African American doctoral students start with some common concerns that they have once they get to graduate school. Such as how to navigate the system to ensure success along with issues of taking precautions of being isolated, and trying to eliminate stress and frustration. African American doctoral students that find themselves faced with these issues can face the risk of dropping out or

falling behind in their program. Isaac (1998) states “graduate students need support from their peers. Student support helps to decrease feelings of isolation. No matter how good a mentor, professors, major professor, or committee they may have, students need someone on their level to bounce ideas off of, do reality testing on, commiserate with, learn from, and just hang out” (p. 37). Academic mentoring/advising as it relates to African American doctoral students comes in different forms; therefore, a wise African American doctoral student will have more than one support group in order to ensure success.

Key factors for many mentor/advisors to keep in mind and to share with incoming African American doctoral students that are attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) to assist with the academic success and retention of these students they will need: (a) assistance in creating an academic development plan; (b) an orientation to the graduate school; (c) be provided the “inside scoop” on the school; (d) acquaint the student with the field, or profession; (e) assistance to develop a research topic; (f) provide writing assistance; (g) read papers, listen to presentations, and give feedback; (h) offer opportunities for publishing and presenting papers; (i) assistance to develop problem-solving skills; and, (j) listening and teaching educational political savvy (Isaac, 1998). To ensure success and retention for many African American doctoral students most or all of the previously mentioned actions will have to be implemented. Building a strong relationship between the mentor/advisor and the mentee through combining facts and experiential learning is very essential in developing qualities that can lead to a successful completion or outcome.

Holland (1993) points out five types of relationships that African American doctoral students have with their mentor/advisor that will ensure success and retention.

The first relationship is the formal academic advisement; there is very little interaction between the mentor/advisor and the mentee providing basic advice to assist the mentee. The second relationship is academic guidance; in this relationship, any information other than technical aspects of completing the doctoral program will not be discussed. The third relationship is quasi-apprenticeship; the mentor/advisor provides educational research opportunities that are not available to all doctoral students. The fourth relationship is academic mentoring, provides the mentee with individualized guidance and assistance aimed at helping the mentee prepare for academic life in higher education. Finally, the fifth relationship is career mentoring; the mentor/advisor takes a personalized role in preparing the mentee for an academic career in higher education. The relationship of doctoral students with their mentor/advisors ranged from being very limited to very involved. This interaction enhances and promotes the success and retention of the African American doctoral students at PWIs.

Academic advising for African American doctoral students as it relates to success and retention remains a difficult problem to solve. Enrollment, success, and retention rates are dismal for many African American doctoral students in PWIs; but by reviewing various methods that are geared toward increasing the numbers of African American doctoral students, ultimately a resolution to this problem may be possible.

### *Conclusion*

The review of literature gives a detailed history of the experiences of African American doctoral students and the mentor roles of their advisors. Therefore, the review of literature examined areas involving mentoring/advising, characteristics of a

mentor/advisor, mentor/advisor roles and functions, along with the positive and negative mentor/advisor outcomes. Within the literature, many characteristics of a mentor/advisor were identified. Characteristics of a good mentor/advisor included personality traits, work habits, attitude/ values, productivity, professional influence, effective communication, availability, and mentoring track record (Johnson & Huwe, 2003). In skillfully managing and integrating various virtues, abilities, and focal skills, the mentor/advisor has to be competent in integrating structure with the hopes that all of these elements will influence the development of a skilled professional mentee.

A mentor/advisor can assist in the growth and development of the mentee by helping to develop self-confidence, the sharing of ideals and values, having the mentee available and aware of opportunities, act as a counselor in making decisions, as well as building a personal lasting friendship that is built on respect. Furthermore, both positive and negative outcomes of mentoring were described in the literature. The outcomes not only affect the mentee, but the mentor/advisor as well. The benefits along with the negative and positive outcomes of mentoring were identified. Mentoring/advising has been an advantage to many African American doctoral students based on the roles that mentors/advisors often assume; like many graduate students across America, African American doctoral students require a successful person that they can identify with in order to academically succeed (Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001). Academic advising for doctoral students success and retention is vital for many African American doctoral students to succeed; therefore, the role of the mentor/advisor can provide numerous benefits to doctoral students.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived importance of mentoring/advising roles as professed by African American doctoral degree recipients from Predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive university settings. The research design and procedures used to conduct this study included the following: (a) population and sample; (b) research design; (c) instrumentation; (d) participants; (e) data collection procedures; (f) data analysis and (g) trustworthiness.

### Population and Sample

The theoretical population for this study included African American doctoral degree recipients from predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive institutions across the United States. The actual population for this study included African American doctoral degree recipients that have successfully obtained the doctoral degree during the 2005-06 academic school years in all areas of study, from two Predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive universities, one in the Rocky Mountain region, and the other in the Deep South region of the Country.

Selection of the participants in this research were selected from a list of eligible participants that meet the inclusionary criteria was obtained from the registrar's office from two selected universities across the United States. This list included African American doctoral degree recipients that completed their doctoral program as early as the 2005 academic school year. In order to be eligible to participate in this study, the solicited doctoral degree recipients had to be classified as an African American along

with successfully completing the doctoral degree program according to university records.

### Research Design

Qualitative research is a methodology that values the participants' view of reality and seeks to discover these views in an interactive process that allow the participants to create the data for the research through their own voices or words (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Patton (1990) presented a similar perspective on qualitative research when he noted that qualitative research is a way to understand natural occurring phenomena in their natural state with direct quotes and descriptive data. Patton (1990) suggested that qualitative designs are particularly oriented toward exploration and discovery. The purpose of this study is to obtain an understanding of how African American doctoral degree recipients success relates to the relationship that is formed with their mentor/advisor in predominantly White institutions. This purpose fits well into the inductive and exploratory framework provided by the qualitative paradigm.

A qualitative methodology was selected because it uncovers a depth of meaning within the phenomenon that is unavailable in quantitative surveys and experiments (Dave, 1999; Herschell, 1999). Additionally, qualitative research enables the researcher to present detailed discussions of the topic in a literary style. Qualitative researchers interact with their participants in the natural setting often becoming a service to the research themselves. After extensive data collection and detailed analysis, the researcher presents the study from the participant's view rather than a disconnected spectator (Creswell, 1998). In discussing why the qualitative approach was appropriate for this

research, it was important to frame it within the philosophical perspectives of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). There are several modes of inquiry in qualitative research (Creswell, 2003). Phenomenology is one mode that is appropriate for qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Denzen & Lincoln, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The phenomenological study reveals the phenomena by having an open perspective while bracketing personal experiences (Creswell, 1998; Davey, 1999; Koch & Harrington, 1998). Phenomenology, as a research method, is a discipline that attempts to describe how the world is experienced through conscious acts. According to Willig (2001), “phenomenology is concerned with the ways in which human beings gain knowledge of the world around them” (p. 51). The procedures for conducting a phenomenological study as presented by Creswell (1998; p. 54) include: (a) understanding the philosophical perspective for the approach; (b) developing research questions that address the meaning of the lived experiences of the participants related to the phenomenon; (c) collecting data through interviews; (d) analyzing the data to create a description of the experience; and (e) developing a narrative that shares the meaning of the lived experience.

### Instrumentation

The interview schedule was developed based upon key issues derived from the literature review. The interview questions were developed based on prior research, which focused on African American doctoral students and the mentor roles of their advisors on a predominately White campus.

The guiding research questions addressed issues concerning African American (AA) doctoral degree recipients, and they are as follows:

1. What are the key characteristics of the mentoring/advising relationship that (AA) doctoral students perceive as influencing their decision to complete the degree?
2. In what ways do issues of race affect the mentoring/advising relationship?

The following questions were used to guide the in-depth interviews.

1. How important do you see the role of a mentor/advisor in facilitating the academic success of a graduate program?
  - A. What was your experience with your mentor/advisor as it relates to your continued success in your doctoral degree attainment, and why?
  - B. Do you consider your experience with your mentor/advisor a positive influence on your growth and development, if yes how?
2. What was the role of your mentor/advisor in facilitating the success/completion of your graduate program?
  - A. How was your experience with your mentor/advisor as a role model, coach, counselor or a friend.
  - B. Was your relationship with your mentor/advisor positive or negative and why?
3. What were some needs and expectations that you felt that your mentor/advisor fulfilled?
  - A. What were your significant experiences with your mentor/advisor?
  - B. Was your experience with your mentor/advisor what you expected?

## Participants

Ten African American doctoral degree recipients out of 34 potential participants from predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive institutions from across the United States were chosen for this study. Selections were based on the tenets of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) and included the strategy of finding research participants (African American doctoral recipients from predominately White institutions) that met the criterion of successful completion of a doctoral degree program in 2005-2006 could be satisfied. According to Patton (1990) purposeful sampling allows the researcher to engage in “information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 169). Patton (1990) asserts that these “cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169). The procedure used in identifying the sample population was gained by means of solicited referrals from various institutional administrators such as the registrar and the dean of students from across the United States. Based on the referrals, the potential participants were solicited via telephone and electronic mail regarding their interest in participating in this research study. Participant solicitation was primarily based on the mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee in completing the doctoral program from a predominately White Land-Grant Research Extensive institution.

Once institutional administrators were contacted, a list was compiled of potential participants who meet the participation criteria. Doctoral degree recipients that completed their doctoral degree program as early as the 2005 school year was solicited via electronic mail and telephone. Electronic mail and telephone solicitations was used to contact students that have successfully completed a doctoral degree program and that had a

mentor/advisor to participate in this research, the solicitation was focused on doctoral degree recipients that felt that the mentor/advisor played a major role in completion of the doctoral degree program. The researcher was interested in having potential participants determine participation based on their personal experiences in completion of a doctoral program and the roles that their mentor/advisor played in this experience.

Once potential participants were identified, a follow-up contact was made with those prospective participants that had contacted the researcher regarding participation. Participants were contacted via two forms of communication, by electronic mail and via telephone (See Appendix C). Participants who did not respond to electronic mail and telephone contacts were not included in the study. Additionally, participants who indicated their interest in participating in the initial contact but fail to respond to either form of follow-up communication was not included in the final study sample. Once confirmation for interviews was received from participants, the time and dates were verified and the interviews commenced.

#### Data Collection Procedures

The researcher interviewed African American doctoral degree recipients that completed a doctoral degree program during the 2005-2006 academic school years. The actual population for this study included ten African American doctoral degree recipients from predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive universities that have successfully obtained the doctoral degree during the 2005-06 school years.

The participants were contacted by e-mail and telephone in order to ask if they wish to participate in this research study. Those that agreed were mailed and asked to

return a signed consent form (see Appendix A), which described the procedures of how the participants confidentiality will be maintained. In the letter, the researcher discussed the topic in general, the purpose of the research, and the actual interview process involved. The prospective participants were informed that the researcher is African American as well; and when the prospective interviewees agreed to participate in the interview process, they were scheduled for an interview. A copy of the interview questions were distributed to each participant approximately one week prior to the interview. This provided each participant an opportunity to consider his/her response in some depth prior to the actual interview.

Each participant's perceptions of what it took to be successful in obtaining the doctoral degree in a predominantly white institution setting was gathered through the interview process that lasted sixty to one hundred twenty minutes per interview. Interview questions asked to participants were given prior to the actual interview. The individual responses were audio taped and then later transcribed and coded so that common themes could emerge.

### Data Analysis

This section discusses the coding procedures, analysis process, and process of describing and interpreting the data employed in this research. The goal of data analysis in qualitative research is to generate themes and interpretations about the data collected. Most authors (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Glaser, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidel, Freise, & Leonard, 1995; and Tesch, 1990) agree that coding is analysis and forms the basis of description from which interpretation is made. Additionally, several authors in

the field of qualitative analysis have proposed various approaches to analyzing qualitative data (Babbie, 1995; Bogan Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Since there was no one preferred approach for analyzing data, this researcher chose the strategy provided by Marshall and Rossman (1989) which appeared to contain the most common elements of the various approaches that consist of organizing the collected data; generating categories, themes, and patterns; coding the data; understanding emergent themes; searching for alternative explanations; and composing the report (p. 152).

After collecting the data from the interviews and transcription, each interview was read several times to identify emerging themes. During the editing process, the researcher used notes from statements that stood out in the interview. The data from the interviews was organized according to the research questions of the study and reviewed for categories, themes, and patterns (Creswell, 1998). Significant statements were highlighted in each interview and the interview was cataloged and filed. The text of each interview was analyzed and assigned to a code, and new code was created from the varying themes that emerged. Phrases used by the interviewees were assigned code descriptors to reflect how they felt about their mentor/advisor. In coding, the data was separated according to categorical phrases and patterns that emerged. Each category was coded and all data was placed into various categories. The purpose in collecting the data was to understand the unique meaning and significance of the experience of the African American doctoral student on a predominantly white campus. In the emergent findings, the data was linked back to the research questions to interpret the data. Alternative explanations was sought to understand the patterns and categories that were identified.

By describing the possible meaning from the patterns and categories of the collected data, the researcher was able to validate the purpose of this research.

For the purposes of this research, the researcher utilized qualitative phenomenology based on the essence of the mentor/advisor experience. The interview process examined the relationship and the importance connecting the African American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles. The focus of this research was to bring to the forefront the importance as well as the impact of the mentor/advisor and their roles in facilitating academic success for African American doctoral students on predominately White campuses.

#### Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the validity of the study (Krefting, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several methods to establish validity of qualitative research were used. First, a reflexivity journal was used to help guard against over-involvement and bringing into the study undue personal biases. Second, member checking (Guba, 1981) was utilized to ensure what was recorded by the researcher represents the statements made by the informants. Each participant had the opportunity to review his/her interview transcript. This technique decreased the chance of any misrepresentation by the researcher. Third, an audit trail (Guba, 1981) was utilized to enhance reliability. The audit trail included audio tapes and transcripts, journals, and field notes. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is important in a naturalistic inquiry that complete records are kept to track decisions regarding procedural questions, interviews, and the steps of analysis.

## *Conclusion*

This research can provide valuable insights into the mentor/advisor relationship for African American doctoral students on a Predominantly White campus. In examining the extant literature, not many studies have documented this important relationship that has a significant impact on the success of the African American doctoral student. As a result of this research, there can be a clear understanding of the nature and the need for mentor/advisor relationships for the African American doctoral student and their success. In examining the support structures that the mentor/advisor provides for the mentee, it will be easier to develop a meaningful understanding of the importance of building an informed relationship with a mentor/advisor with similar values.

Therefore, by finding out what helpful patterns in mentor/advisor roles there are in place for African American doctoral students that are in pursuit of obtaining higher education; there can be benefits for the current and future African American doctoral students to obtain a higher education degree from predominately White universities. This research will also be a vehicle to bring to the forefront the experiences of a silenced, quiet, and ignored population of students- the African American doctoral student on predominately White campuses.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of African American doctoral students at PWIs in the context of their mentor/advisor relationship and how the relationship relates to successful completion of a doctoral degree program. Two key themes emerged related to the experiences of African American doctoral students at predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive institutions. The first key theme focused on the relationships between the mentor/advisor and the African American doctoral students at PWI's and the roles they play in determining whether or not they persist to graduation. The second theme focused on the role of the mentor/advisor at the PWI as it relates to persistence in the doctoral degree program. These themes focused on the importance of having a mentor/advisor and the impact that they make on the African American doctoral students at a PWI.

This chapter includes a summary of the characteristics of the respondents who participated in individual interviews. The characteristics of the respondents are provided to give the reader a sense of the context in which the respondents developed their values and aspirations and the impact of their life experiences on decisions and choices they made in pursuing the doctoral degree and career aspirations. Context sensitivity in qualitative research offers the researcher a unique perspective on the social and historical context of the phenomenon so that greater understanding of the subject under study is achieved (Patton, 1990).

Next, the key themes are developed including issues involving the perceptions that directly relate to the relationship and the importance connecting the African

American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles, and how this relationship influences successful degree attainment in a doctoral program.

#### Demographic Data

This study was conducted at two predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive institutions across the United States. The actual population for this study included African American doctoral degree recipients from predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive universities that have successfully obtained the doctoral degree during the 2005-06 school years in all fields. The sample included ten doctoral degree recipients from predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive universities in all fields. Due to limitations of the list of thirty-four potential participants, such as outdated phone numbers and addresses, only ten African American doctoral recipients participated in this study.

As shown in Table 2, the six males and four females range in age between 31 and 55 years of age. One participant did not provide her exact age making calculating the exact average age impossible but it is about forty-five. Most were the first in their families to receive the doctorate degree with the exception of one participant who had a close relative previously earn a doctorate degree. The participants in this study earned their degrees in two to seven years with the average program completion length depending on whether he or she was part-time or full-time students. Six of the ten participants are university professors and four of the ten are administrators.

Table 2. Background information on AA Doctoral Degree Recipients

Participant	Age	Years in Doctoral program	Male/Female	Degree Field	Current Career
1	50	6	Female	Education Leadership	School Administrator
2	38	7	Male	Education Leadership	Unemployed
3	31	4	Male	African American Literature	Assistant Professor
4	55	7	Female	Educational Resource Studies	Assistant Dean
5	32	3.5	Male	Mathematics Education	University Instructor
6	45	2	Female	Education Leadership	Assistant Professor
7	36	2.5	Male	Education Leadership	Elementary School Principal
8	44	3	Male	Education Leadership	Vice President of Student Affairs
9	46	3	Female	Education Leadership	University Instructor
10	33	4	Male	Education Leadership	Assistant Professor

First, the majority of the participants (8 of 10) were education leadership doctoral degree recipients and the remaining two participants were African American literature and mathematics education degree recipients. Second, the participants range in age from their early thirties to their mid-fifties as they completed their doctoral degrees.

Finally, there were similarities in the reasons participants gave for attending a PWI. The three main reasons were availability of the program, program reputation, and available resource support. In terms of availability, participant one described how the doctoral program was developed to help faculty in her college obtain a doctoral degree. The program was located at her workplace for participant five; availability meant close proximity “I was in the process of teaching at another university in close proximity, so I chose that university because of its geographical location”. Participant ten identified that he was already in the masters program and his experience with the program led to him receiving financial support:

“I actually received my masters’ degree from the same school I received my doctoral degree and then I was recommended to seek a paid seat, actually by my mentor”.

The reputation of the institution was another reason participants gave for their decision to enter into the doctoral program. According to Participant six “there was a reputation. I heard that it was a good program and I heard some really good things about the program, so that’s why I selected it”. Participant seven noted that his choice was based upon recommendations from others and also the fact that the University supported diversity initiatives.

“I chose that institution because it had a history of African American students that I knew had attended the University as far back as some persons in the late 50s, early 60s. Also, I knew some people who recently had received their degree, their doctoral degree”.

Participant eight voiced a similar reason for selecting the particular program she entered. “The institution had an outstanding reputation for academic achievement and after interviewing with the education faculty, I felt it was a great fit”. The importance of resources and support offered by programs was noted by several participants. For example, Participant four reported that she chose the institution that she attended “because of the joint cohort program, the support was there from day one”. Participant three mentioned the need for funding as influencing his decision. Resources and support sometimes extended beyond the University and also included resources in the community as evidenced by participant nine commented: “I was a single parent with a child and of the schools that I had high interest in, it has the best community to bring a child to live in and the best campus living situation for children.”

The participants in this study had various reasons for attending the PWI that range from availability of the program, program reputation, and available resource support. The participants in this study added intimate reasons for choosing the institution that they chose in grave detail. Although, one similarity that existed with all of the participants, they all had mentor/advisors that were instrumental in their completion of the doctoral degree program from a predominantly white institution.

#### Summary of Demographic Data and Student Profiles

A few key similarities and differences emerge out of the participant’s profiles and the demographic data. First, the majority of the participants (8 of 10) were education leadership doctoral degree recipients and the remaining two participants were African

American literature and mathematics education degree recipients. Second, the participants range in age from their early thirties to their mid-fifties as they completed their doctoral degrees. Finally, there were differences and similarities in the reasons for attending a PWI such as funding to convenience issues; however one similarity that existed with all of the participants, they all had mentor/advisors that were instrumental in their completion of the doctoral degree program from a predominantly white institution.

### Major Themes

In the following pages, the two major themes and sub-themes concerning African American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles are discussed along with how this relationship influences successful degree attainment in a doctoral degree program. Along with determining if the mentor/advisor has a significant role in the success of the African American doctoral student on a predominantly white campus was also discussed. These themes include “Mentor/Advisor Relationships with the Mentee,” and “Important Characteristics of the Mentor/Mentee Relationships.” For each theme, a definition is provided with the major components of the theme.

#### *Mentor/Advisor Relationships with the Mentee*

For all of the participants in this study, relationships with their mentor/advisor were seen as being paramount to the successful completion of the doctoral degree program at a predominantly white institution. The term “mentor/advisor relationships with the mentee” refers to the close interpersonal relationships between the mentee and the mentor/advisor and how the mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee played an

important role in the mentee's successful performance and completion of the PhD program at the PWI.

The participant responses were clear in portraying a sense that the "mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee" included having a support system and a role model on a predominately white campus, these are very important factors as it relates to successful academic degree completion from a PWI. Participant six portrayed her personal experience with her mentor/advisor as a very positive relationship by saying:

"I didn't have any negative experience with my mentor/advisor. Pretty much, because, I think it was a positive experience because I received research opportunities, financial, as well as direction, material, everything that I needed to be able to do my dissertation and that's because my advisor made that possible for me [to be academically successful].

Participant six also emphasized in great detail on all of the positive research help and many opportunities that made it possible to successfully finish the doctoral program.

My relationship with my advisor was extremely strong, and I could not have completed my doctorate without my mentor advisor, because I was fortunate enough that I had worked on a grant with my advisor. I was selected to be the research director, and that really helped me to have hands on experience with doing research, and it also helped me to develop a love for research and that is why I am in the position that I am in now. And I would not have finished because I finished in the shortest time frame that I think anyone else has finished it, and I couldn't have done that without my advisor. I would also like to add, it's important to have other advisors, I had unofficial mentors, who was not my assigned advisor or mentor, but he helped me tremendously, and was also instrumental in my success"

Similarly, participant two expressed strong positive emotion about the mentor/advisor relationship by saying:

"My advisor's goal was to help make me successful and she was an encourager, She pushed, she motivated, and she had what a lot of people don't have, and that's a sincere interest in me being successful. Without her, I don't believe I would be going to the University of Vermont for this Post-Doc fellowship. I would not have some of the research projects that I am working on. If you're pursuing fellowships or tenure track positions, research is what is going to make

you marketable. I have a topic that I think my committee, particularly my advisor thought was a very timely topic and there needed to be some research done in the area. My study focused on the socialization experiences of full-time tenure and tenure-track African American male faculty. And I felt that it would make me marketable because there's a shortage of African American males in academia and we need to find out why we don't have any Black professors or any Black male professors.

Furthermore participant two expressed in continuous detail about how the mentor/advisor guided and directed ways to help the mentee navigate positively through the doctoral program.

My mentor guided me through the job search process. I mean she would do things behind the scenes that I was totally unaware of. I was invited to an institution for an on-campus interview. The week of the interview, they e-mailed me and told me that my paperwork had not been completed and that HR had not approved me for a campus visit. I e-mailed them, they did not respond. Approximately three weeks later I get an e-mail saying the position has been filled, thank you for your interest. Okay, well, I'm thinking I'm an African American male, I got a topic that deals with African American males, okay, this could be racism here because the school was in the South and the department was fairly white. About a month later, I see the exact same position re-advertised for the Spring of 07. So, by now I'm confident that its racism and I've made a vow that I will never work at the institution. I e-mailed my advisor, because we're still staying in contact, beside me being faced with the process and she responds, yeah, I saw the e-mail announcement; I was hoping you didn't see it. And I started laughing, and I just said well, another institution has lied to me because a second institution did the exact same thing. Well, she e-mailed the search chair person and he explained to her that we were bringing him to campus; we were only funded for two candidates. The third candidate was not funded, and we offered to one of the two that was brought to campus and that individual took the job and then decided he/she did not want the job, so we re-advertised. Now, I don't know if he was telling her a story, but what impressed me was, my advisor was still looking out on my behalf, and I didn't ask her to do that. So, those are the types of things that she did to ensure that this was a positive process from the time she became my advisor, through the job search process and until I committed to take the fellowship at the University of Vermont"

Participant nine, underscored the mentor/advisor relationship by saying:

"At times when the workload felt difficult, my advisor encouraged me to get it done because I needed to get it done. He didn't give me an easy way out. He never gave me answers. He always gave me more questions and more books to read. And even at times when I felt that it was difficult and that he was pushing

me hard, in the end it was in my best interest because in my first job in the work place after my doctorate program was in a research position. And so as a professional researcher, I was able to make deadlines and answer difficult questions, and continue to persevere, simply because of the experience with my advisor during the conducting of my research and writing of my dissertation”

Overall, the participants in this study indicated that the relationship with the mentor/advisor played an important role in their successful degree attainment in a doctoral degree program at the PWI. Specifically, mentor/advisors were viewed as being instrumental to the African American doctoral students success. When the relationship with the mentor/advisor was positive, the African American doctoral student found the environment at the PWI to be supportive and more conducive to influence successful degree attainment in a doctoral degree program. The participants in this study indicated that some African American doctoral students had experiences with mentor/advisors that were not positive or productive. For example, negative experiences in the relationship with the mentor/advisor caused the African American doctoral student to feel unappreciated and unwelcome. Participant four mentioned that by being in a distance program she felt that her relationship with the mentor/advisor was strained because, “you don’t see the advisor all the time, constantly, once a week or what ever it is. And that contact, that frequent contact was not there”. And participant seven stated that his experience with his first advisor wasn’t positive because his study focused on cultural diversity and his advisor was not familiar with it. Thus, participant seven added:

“After working with her, which was real interesting, I found out that she began to do her research through me. And I was not interested in doing her research and that was a little intimidating because some of the advisors, they wanted you to do what they wanted”.

The negative aspects of the mentor/advisor relationship for the participants in this study were viewed as learning outcomes. However the participants in this study indicated

that their mentor/advisor expected them to succeed and the mentor/advisor took a very proactive role to ensure success. Also, the participants held the perception that it is very important to have a mentor/advisor to enhance the academic support to encourage degree attainment. Many of the participants mentioned the fact that they knew many doctoral students that did not have the same type of support system from their mentor/advisor and this had a negative effect on the African American doctoral student academically. In fact, this negative perception led many African American doctoral students to leave and return to prior jobs and familiar surroundings before completing the doctoral degree program.

Finally, the theme “mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee” suggests that the relationship that the African American doctoral student has with the mentor/advisor plays a critical role in the academic success for the African American doctoral student on a predominately white campus. The participant responses were clear in portraying a sense that the “mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee” included having a support system and a role model on a predominately white campus, mentor/advisors were viewed as being instrumental to the African American doctoral students success. The negative aspects of the mentor/advisor relationship for the participants in this study were viewed as learning outcomes. In particular, the participants in this study were successful in attaining the doctoral degree when their mentor/advisor established a meaningful and working relationship with the African American doctoral student and success was emphasized from the very start.

*Sub-Theme I: The Importance to Persistence (facilitation)*

“Persistence” refers to the idea of the participants with the help of the mentor/advisor in navigating the educational system in a scholarly fashion and in turn would be integrated into their successful completion of the doctoral degree program. All ten of the participants admitted that when they entered the university, they believed that they would need the mentor/advisor to assume the role of a guide to facilitate academic success in the doctoral degree program. For example, participant five explained, “my advisor prepared me fully for the challenges of graduate work. He and my committee members understood that I had some academic challenges; however, they worked with me very closely to improve my skills.” And participant nine said:

“I think a mentor/advisors role is key to the success of finishing, completing the program. Sometimes, the student might even change topics. But a mentor/advisor is one who can direct the students by questioning the decisions that the students are making. And that might even mean changing the mentor or advisor, but that person is key in having the students make the right decision.”

Similarly participant seven indicated the same belief that the mentor/advisor should positively direct the mentee by understanding what is needed for the mentee to succeed:

“I had two advisors, one Black and the other White; at first I dealt with my study, my first advisor was John, but because my study was a little different it dealt with a religious aspect, a lot of the faculty felt nervous because it was an area that they weren’t familiar with. At first I was interested in doing my dissertation on working with students and cultural diversity. My first advisor was real big on the constructivist approach and I wasn’t. However, after working with her, which was real interesting, I found out that she began to do her research through me. And I was not interested in doing her research and that was a little intimidating because some of the advisors, they wanted you to do what they wanted to do the twist on it. So I changed and went from her to another advisor, and then he brought me through the prelims and helped with the statistics and all those areas. And after I began to get deeper into my research area, he felt that he did not have experience. So, unlike the first advisor, he volunteered me to find somebody who

could assist me. So, after that I went to two African American advisors, and they were great advisors because they basically encouraged me. They allowed me to do my research that I was interested in and dealt with a lot of the pieces that dealt with the theory part. And my advisor being that she was an African American, she was able to help me with the cultural piece, and also the religious piece of how I could go and find the research. So, I had a mixed experience with the advisors. I went from an advisor who wanted to go one way, to advisors where I was allowed to explore my research. Because I had a unique situation, towards the end I had a good experience with my advisor.”

For the ten participants in this study, they admitted that upon entering the PWI they had aspirations of positively completing the doctoral degree program with the guidance of the mentor/advisor. As participant one explained, “He [mentor/advisor] actually walked me through the process of writing the dissertation, from actually coming up with the concept, talking it through, what I wanted to address with the concept, as well as outlining each chapter before it was written.” Participant three also stated:

“I think the role is significant because the graduate advisor is the first person that the student encounters and many times minority students lean heavily on their advisors for guidance into unfamiliar territory, which is achieving a graduate degree. My advisor helped in terms of not only writing the dissertation, but in terms of going over it and reading the chapters and editing it. More importantly she told me how to write it and what to expect. Because that’s another thing that graduate students don’t often get and they become overwhelmed at the fact that I have to write this 200 page dissertation and I come from writing 25 page papers and all of a sudden thrust into this big project. But I mean, she went into the little detail and broke it down for me for what to do and how I should go about accomplishing my goal because at the time we didn’t have a class where we took on writing your dissertation. You finished your coursework and took your exams and that was it. But those little details, I would have to say were really important when it came to actually writing the dissertation because by the time we got to that I was very comfortable with already doing it because I had did the little steps to complete the program”

Participant four also stated:

“I think that person [mentor/advisor] is the person that guides you, supports you, takes, I call it ownership of you to see that you’re successful in the program. The role they played, that person is the person that will carry you through. They will be the person who will lead you and guide you and direct you. We worked quite

well together; we actually stayed in touch through e-mails or phone calls. So, we stayed step by step during the process and this was the first thing we would do. The second thing my advisor would do is to tell me what I need to do, 'no you need to go back and fix something here, correct this'. But, it's like a step by step map that you have to follow, doing this the right way, and going through this dissertation itself can help in how to actually complete the whole process. So, you couldn't do it without that person. I may be wrong, but not in my opinion"

Many of the participants in this study viewed their mentor/advisor as an initial tour guide through the doctoral degree program. Overall, the responses from the participants indicated that they overwhelmingly felt that their mentor/advisor at the PWI had the experience to guide them through the successful completion of the doctoral degree process. For the participants in this study, there was evidence that the mentor/advisors role as facilitator encouraged and helped them successfully complete the doctoral degree program at the PWI. For these participants they took this interview as a time to reflect on how important the role of the mentor/advisor was for the successful navigation and completion of the doctoral degree program at the predominantly white institution. Thus, it can be said that the idea of successfully completing a doctoral degree program from a PWI for the African American doctoral student has a direct impact on the role that the mentor/advisor takes in facilitating success for the African American doctoral student.

#### *Sub-Theme II: Importance to Doctoral Degree Completion*

Mentor/advisor impact on AA doctoral student completion of the PhD program refers to the participant responses which indicated that they were dependent on the mentor/advisor for motivation, enthusiasm, and commitment to complete the doctoral degree program. The participants in this study acknowledged that the mentor/advisor

adequately impacted the experience in the academic process towards the successful completion of the doctoral degree program.

Participant four explained:

“I don’t think I could have made it without him, because actually when I started the program I was married and through a couple years in the program, I actually went through a divorce and at that time I think that I met him [mentor/advisor] he was just supportive and wanted me to succeed. He was honest in what I had to do, where I needed to make revisions, evaluations, he guided me and taught me that. And especially in the writing part, very valuable, I think a key to a persons success is having a good committee, but more importantly having a good advisor, so crucial”

Participant nine cited an example of the impact that the mentor/advisor played in completing the doctoral degree program by saying:

“Actually I had several mentors/advisors. My original mentor/advisor and I had worked together for about a year and discussed proposed topics and research design. But then that topic and that research design wasn’t the best for me. So, that person advised me to look for another topic. And in searching out another topic, I ended up with a different advisor. So, again that person was key to helping me find what the best fit was for me, topic wise and future wise. My advisor in my final dissertation helped me focus my studies and research in an area that really wasn’t my strength, so my advisor helped me to move out of an area that was my strength to an area that I had not even attempted to develop...so in the end my advisor helped me to grow professionally by guiding me into an area that was not my expertise, but became an area of expertise”

Similarly participant three stated: “If it wasn’t for my advisors, I would not have obtained the PhD. Because of their motivation, enthusiasm, and commitment to assisting me, I was blessed with the completion of the graduate program in three years” Overall, the participants in this study felt that they were guided and supported in a positive direction that impacted the successful completion of the doctoral degree program at the PWI. The participants in this study stated that the mentor/advisor had more than just an impact on the academic success of the African American doctoral student at the PWI. They were also instrumental in assisting the African American doctoral student gain

experience in scholarly endeavors by collaborating on research projects and paper presentations, encouraging students to go to conferences, submit peer-reviewed articles and book chapters and assisting with finding future employment. By doing so, an effective mentor/advisor will assist by improving and guiding the African American doctoral student and by helping the mentee overcome many of the hurdles and obstacles that may arise during the doctoral program. The clear result was that the mentor/advisor is very instrumental as it relates to the PhD completion and the impact on the success of the African American doctoral student at the PWI.

### Summary

The theme “Mentor/Advisor Relationship with the Mentee” referred to the fact that a constructive relationship with the mentor/advisor impacted the academic success of the African American doctoral student at the PWI. In particular, there was a strong indication that the nature of the interpersonal relationship between the mentor/advisor and the mentee played an important role in influencing the successful degree attainment in a doctoral degree program at the PWI. The relationship between the mentor/advisor and the mentee was seen as being paramount to the successful completion of the doctoral degree program. Clearly, the participants in this study indicated that they looked to the mentor/advisor to provide them with the guidance and support to help them in successfully completing the PhD program. In many cases, the relationship with the mentor/advisor were a major disappointment and this caused the mentee to feel unsupported and frustrated; and this would cause the mentee to seek out support

elsewhere. Some mentees even left the PhD program if the mentor/advisor mentee relationship became negative or did not live up to expectations (Minor, 2003).

According to many of the participants in this study, mentor/advisor support for the African American doctoral students at the PWI was available, but it had to be sought out based on research interest and support systems that were in place. Overall, this had a negative impression on the experiences of the mentee. The participants in this study believed that their successful degree attainment was aided by the access and support of the mentor/advisor at the predominantly white institution.

Finally, the participants in this study had the strong feeling that the mentor/advisor had multiple roles to assume for them to be successful in attaining the doctoral degree from the PWI. The relationship that the African American doctoral students had with the mentor/advisor played a critical role in the academic success for the African American doctoral student on a predominately white campus. In particular, the participants in this study were successful in attaining the doctoral degree when their mentor/advisor established a meaningful and working relationship that consisted of multiple roles with the African American doctoral student and success was emphasized from the very start.

#### *Important Characteristics of the Mentor/Mentee Relationships*

For many of the participants in this study a key issue that emerged in regards to successfully navigating through the academic program was the importance and impact of the mentor/advisor. Important Characteristics of the Mentor/Mentee Relationships refers to the various roles that the mentor had to assume in the success of the mentee. The

participants had to be aware of the significance and the awareness of the position of the mentor/advisor and the part they play in the academic success of the African American doctoral student at the PWI. Many of the participants in this study found it was not difficult learning how to navigate the system with their assigned or chosen mentor/advisor due to the lack of diversity among the choices of mentor/advisors at the PWI in their designated departments. While some assigned mentor/advisors had high expectations of the participants others had low expectations of the participants that led to feelings of discomfort and intimidation. This made them feel as though they were unwelcome and unable to perform up to standard as well as their white counterparts. However their mentor/advisor gave motivating and inspirational assurance that there was success at the end of these challenges. Many of the participants in this study alluded to how important and necessary their mentor/advisor was, and this made it easy to formulate a strong relationship bond, furthermore, the participants found comfort in seeking out assistance and guidance when times were rough from their mentor/advisor.

Finally, for some of the participants in this study that did not have positive guidance and assistance from their mentor/advisors, they either had to seek out a helpful mentor/advisor, learn how to navigate the system on their own, struggle or leave the university. Some participants stated that they had to learn how to work within the confines of the academic system with limited guidance until they found the right mentor/advisor. It was clear that the participants wanted to succeed no matter what it took to successfully attain the doctoral degree. But, whether it meant to get a mentor/advisor outside of the department or at another institution, completing the PhD degree program was paramount. The participants had to learn how to navigate the academic system to the

completion of the academic program and the mentor/advisor was an important part of that success.

*Sub-Theme I: Accessible*

The needs and expectations of the participants in this study was for the mentor/advisor to be available and supportive, it refers to a consensus among the participants. In order for them to be successful in the PhD program at a PWI an important issue beyond financial and academic support was for the mentor/advisor to be accessible and supportive. The participants in this study indicated that there are many demands placed on them as doctoral students at the beginning stages of the program and there is a need for guidance from the mentor/advisor. The mentee is expected to academically perform in a successful manner and in some cases the guidance is not there. In most cases the demands deal with performance and writing issues.

Almost all of the participants insisted that they expected guidance throughout their doctoral degree programs from the mentor/advisor in order to perform well and academically succeed. As participant one said it:

“My needs and expectations were to be heard and to be guided...when I first met him [mentor/advisor] the first day of class, he asked us what was our fear, and my fear was writing. My anxiety was writing, and he made sure that I overcame that anxiety.”

In regards to needs and expectations, participant three also stated:

“I don’t know other things in terms of things that advisors supposed to do. I mean she did. There was no off the wall things that I expected her to do. In regards to that, certainly, she was the type or at least she has the reputation of being a very difficult person to work with because she had very stringent rules about what she wanted. But what people didn’t understand about her is that she was doing it for a reason. At first, I felt overwhelmed because the first chapter of the dissertation we probably edited about five times and I was getting frustrated about it and

that's when she sat down with me and told me why we were working so hard. She was like, yeah, I know you could probably write the dissertation in a year, but when you're finished, I don't want you to have to spend another two or three years trying to turn it into a book, because it's going to be already a lot closer. So, once I understood that, then we got on the same page. But as far as what I wanted to do with the dissertation and my topic, she was very open to that. Her thing was finding the best way to say it, putting it in the best form. She didn't worry about changing ideas or anything like that. She would just give me suggestions; well maybe you should look at this angle and try this angle. And we would try my way and try this and if it didn't work we would go back and agree on it, but she always allowed me to be able to compromise with what I wanted. She never forces her ideas on me. She would tell me, I think this is best. So, certainly under those terms and her availability were excellent and that's very important to. And I don't know why that was the case with me because she was African American, but I think the availability was a big thing because sometimes when students can't reach their advisors, they feel like nobody's helping me, nobody's looking out for me. I've had several friends who have dropped out of the program because they were the only people in the program and they felt very lonely. They didn't have the type of advisor that I did. But they also didn't understand that in choosing an advisor that you need to choose someone who is hands on, like my advisor that you're the type of person that can make deadlines, or you're the type of person that's self-sufficient. And you can take a lot of lead-way, you don't need a lot of guidance, then that's the type of person that you could choose. So, often times graduate students make the wrong choice when they're choosing their advisor when they don't know what to expect. So, certainly she was available and helpful and very aware of the ideas that I had for my dissertation"

In a similar fashion, many participants in this study reported having similar perceptions. For example, participant four reported:

"You know this is your first experience, they've been advisors before. They've been through the process of getting their doctorate degree so they know what it takes to do that. So, the fact that they know that they're there to guide, support, direct, lead, push, pull, all of those things are there for that person."

Similarly participant six stated:

"I expected the advisor to be there if I needed to meet with them, that they would listen to you, that they would provide resources; they provide direction for you, they provided information and resources that was needed to help me to be successful, that they provided direction so I wouldn't make mistakes, and if I was having problems, and if I was having a problem in a class, that my advisor could somehow intervene, to somehow be able to talk with this professor or could somehow be a part of the meeting if I needed to do that? I mean that never

happened, but that would have been an expectation if a situation like these were to happen. And pretty much, I think an advisor, I expected my advisor to provide whatever kind of guidance or coaching to help me to successfully complete my dissertation and my advisor did provide all those things to me”

The responses of the participants indicated that although they were provided with the tools to be successful they were still in need of guidance, as a result the needs and expectations were very high for the participants in their doctoral degree programs. As a result, some of the participants were very passionate about the needs and expectations that impacted them during the times that they realized that they were experiencing academic or non-academic concerns. They realized that the mentor/advisor was the key to resolving many of the problems that may arise from time to time. Overall, the participants expressed feelings of being isolated and not belonging in the majority white student setting. In turn the participants did their best to perform to the best of their ability and they still needed the assurance of the mentor/advisor. In other words, the participants needed validation of their academic achievement to strengthen their motivation in the doctoral degree program at the PWI.

#### *Sub-Theme II: Supportive*

The role of the mentor/advisor at the PWI is very unique due to the guidance, support and advocacy needed for success as it relates to the African American doctoral student. The role of the mentor/advisor at the PWI refers to the notion that what are the needs and expectations of the African American doctoral students at the PWI. This will determine what type of role the mentor/advisor will have to assume for the African American doctoral student to successfully finish the doctoral degree program.

Additionally, for the participants in this study, the role of the mentor/advisor was instrumental to the success of the PhD program. The idea that another person such as the mentor/advisor has to play such a major role in the African American doctoral student's academic career for them to succeed professionally played a vital role in how much they really depended on what type of guidance that they sought out from the mentor/advisor.

In regards to the role of the mentor/advisor participant six states:

“The most significant thing that helped me was my advisor, and in my first semester, I went to my advisor and I told her that I needed to have financial support in order to stay in the program and that's how I got to work with the grant with my advisor, by her being a principal investigator of a grant she told me that she would see whether she could hire me as her graduate assistant and she did and so the first semester I was just the assistant, but after one semester of working with her, she put me in charge of doing the research on the grant. And that gave me confidence that she trusted me to be able to provide the research and be in charge of the research on the grant. So, it was very, very significant to work on a large fellow grant and through that I learned so much about research that I would not have learned just by being in the class”

Similarly participant ten stated:

“One significant thing that happened in my program process was when I got really discouraged because I had my mind set on how long this process would take and I wanted to have initially completed this by three years, or within three years. And I had began to hit some unanticipated stumbling blocks, and obstacles as I moved into the data collection process. And as I moved into the research component, I found that my mentor was a good litmus and regulator, in terms of my own emotional state, my panic, you know, how are we going to get this done in the time frame, and to say that, you know really if it takes you a little longer, that's okay, that some things in this process are unexpected and its okay to come to realize whatever that timeline is and some things can be a little flexible, and to kind of put me at ease, because the anxiety was high. But I remember that one in particular because it was almost because he had enough faith and belief in my ability to complete the work and to get this done, that at times I thought I may have had in myself. And, so if I felt like, to sum it all up, there were occasions when my mentor/advisor believed in my abilities more than I even did and was able to facilitate the successful completion because of that knowing that I was capable because I again I had no family members, either of my parents even graduated from college. So, it was a bit difficult to have someone who could actually reflect on their own experiences to help guide me through mine and he was able to do that and again put my mind at ease about some of my most anxious moments in the process”

There were two components of this theme.

First, the participants in this study indicated that the role of the mentor/advisor as it relates to the needs and expectations of the African American doctoral student is to be available and supportive. This attitude from the participants was an important issue beyond the academic and financial supportive role that had a direct impact on their success in the PhD program.

Second, the emotional facilitation of academic success by the mentor/advisor was as well important to the participants of this study. In fact, for many of the participants there was anxiety in the beginning of the PhD program, as they did not see the academic path that would lead them to success. However the mentor/advisor made success easy by facilitating a successful model for the African American doctoral students to focus on.

The role of the mentor/advisor at the PWI is very valuable for the successful completion of the doctoral degree program for the African American doctoral students at a predominantly white institution. This sense of the role of the mentor/advisor describe the importance of having someone in place to take on responsibility for the success of the mentee in what ever capacity that is needed to succeed.

### *Sub-Theme III: Positive Direction*

Prior to attending the PWI the African American doctoral students had high expectations about the relationship with the mentor/advisor; this high hope can easily be disappointed when those expectations are not fulfilled. But with the inclusion of positive direction and continued support from the mentor/advisor success can be easily achieved. The participants in this study strongly indicated that their healthy relationship with their

mentor/advisor played a major role in being successful in attaining the doctoral degree. For example, participant three indicated that a main reason for his persistence to obtain the PhD degree was because he felt that his mentor/advisor really was concerned about his success. He said:

“She told me the little things that I needed to do to be successful, helped me to be more competitive in some ways, and helped me seek out opportunities that I didn’t know about in order to be a successful graduate student...and helped me out with personal problems that I may have encountered in the program in dealing with professors and teachers. I guess I would say my experience would be one that grounded me in knowing what to expect as a graduate student because some students don’t realize that when you get into a graduate program, you’re pretty much on your own anyways. And if you’re at a predominately white institution, then it makes it even more difficult when you don’t feel comfortable communicating with people. And often times, some people don’t ask questions because we’re afraid that they might be stupid or whatever. But, my advisor was very good about being very open and very frank about what to expect and allow me to feel comfortable enough to ask any type of questions, even simple questions that I didn’t know the answers to. So, because of that aspect and the ways she made me feel, and then I didn’t really find my program especially difficult. Not even getting along with the faculty or other students, because of that confidence that she provided”

Similarly, participant seven expressed this same sense of being a part of a positive and supportive relationship with the mentor/advisor. He reported:

“I still keep in contact with one of my advisors. Every now and then I call the other one. My advisor took some of the dissertation work and we have done a diversity piece in the news, for a chapter of a book. And I always could call, and the advisor saw a lot of things that could help me outside of the dissertation piece, and that was always very encouraging, always providing input on what to do in certain situations, outside of the university to prepare me to go beyond the university... really, really helpful. I think I left with an understanding that my advisor really had my back. There was not a time when I questioned or wondered. When I saw some who didn’t know how the advisor stood. But I felt like my advisor really prepared me for the outside scope, to be a productive person”

Participant eight added:

“I definitely think my experience with my mentor/advisor was a positive influence on my experience as a doctoral student. The support mechanisms and

also the mentoring aspect from the point of view of discussion, and sometimes arguments and disagreements proved fruitful in my matriculation through the program”

In regards to having a positive relationship experience, participant six also stated:

“Yes, I mean, very, very positive, as I’ve said earlier. It really helped me to be successful. I felt that I could talk to my advisor about any experience that I was having. I’m a very organized person, so I didn’t look for my advisor to provide and tell me what course to take or anything like that, because I did that for myself, but I did look for my advisor to be a sounding board, or provide me with additional that I might need or when I get to the dissertation stage, to start providing me feedback on the area that I was working on, to give me direction and things like that. So, yes, very, very important role”

This attitude of the participants of their positive perceptions of the relationship with the mentor/advisor underscores their belief that they felt they had support and guidance that encouraged persistence to graduate. But even though several participants expressed excitement about their supportive relationships with their mentor/advisor, several others expressed the idea that poor relationships with some mentor/advisors, especially feelings of lack of support and caring, that led the mentee to have to choose a mentor/advisor that was a better fit, based on research interest or personal feelings.

Overall, it is clear that the participants in this study looked to their mentor/advisors to provide them with the support and guidance to help them successfully complete the doctoral degree program at the PWI. If this type of relationship had not materialized, the participants in this study felt that they would have been disappointed and frustrated with the process. However, the participants in this study were quick to point out that this was not the case and the relationship with their mentor/advisor was positive and is paramount to the African American doctoral students success at the PWI.

*Sub-Theme IV: Flexibility (Many Hats)*

Participants in this study felt that their mentor/advisor wore many hats to truly support the various needs that arise from time to time for them to succeed in completing the doctoral degree program at the PWI. For the most part the mentors/advisors were described as being well versed and knowledgeable on the many facets of what it takes to be academically successful. In fact, some mentor/advisors were described as being an orchestrator of academic success. This sense was real for many of the participants in this study.

The relationship that the mentor/advisor have with the mentee can take on so many roles in the academic success of the mentee that it is almost impossible to categorize them, but it is ultimately the needs of the mentee to how they view the mentor/advisor. This sense of how the mentee view the mentor/advisor and the many roles that is required for the mentor/mentee relationship to be successful was discussed, in support of this, participant eight stated that:

“I would say it was practically all of those [role model, coach, counselor or friend]. Because there were times when we would have serious conversations that were not related to my topic of study and then there were times when we had to figure out course scheduling and what path I should actually take in terms of my concentration with the degree...I can recall a point when I was sort of frustrated and I didn't want to continue pursuing a degree. I already had a job, it wasn't a tenure track position, but I already had a teaching job at a regional university. So, through discussions with him he encouraged me and said this is not the time to actually abandon this effort. So, through this encouragement, or him pushing me further and further, I decided to maintain my status in the program”

Additionally, participant nine said:

“My mentor/advisor fit the role of a coach; he facilitated the process for me by using inquiry methods, where if I came to him with a situation, he simply asked me a series of questions; and then guided me, using the inquiry process to answer those questions, he facilitated my growth...my advisor in my final dissertation helped me focus my studies and research in an area that really wasn't my

strength. I came into the program as a teacher/educator, and I focused a lot of my energy the first year on teacher/education. My original dissertation topic had to do with curriculum and instruction. Once I changed that topic, it was still a curriculum piece, but it was more on researching the outcomes of the curriculum piece. My advisor who I finished the program with helped me to focus more on becoming more of an educational researcher, as opposed to focusing on teacher education. So, my advisor helped me to move out of an area that was my strength, to an area that I had not even attempted to develop. I had worked on research and course work, but I had not focused my efforts on becoming an educational researcher in quantitative and qualitative methods. So, in the end my advisor helped me to grow professionally by guiding me into an area that was not my expertise, but became an area of expertise”

For participant ten, there was this same sense of feeling supported and welcomed.

He said:

“I really think that my advisor is and has been a mentor advisor, a role model, coach, counselor and a friend for me. He’s been a role model because he was the cause of my academics, he has five or six books written, four of which are text books that are well beyond their third and fourth edition, some are as high as eleventh edition, and so in that way he’s been a role model because of my aspirations of becoming a full professor, hopefully one day, or at least tenure professor, he’s just recently received a national award through social work because of his role model component. He just got the life time achievement award from the National Association of Social Work and the Counsel of Social Work education. And so, he’s been a role model in that way in terms of being an example that I can model after, and a good example. He has been an advisor and counselor because there have been times when I just wanted to say, the heck with it all, I’m moving home with this masters degree that’s good enough for me; He counseled me through that and talked me through that, but also counseled me relative again to around my academic work. He has been an emotional support as well, in terms of the friendship side. Being so far away from family and friends, and not having any family in the state where I did my masters and doctoral degree, you know it’s kind of difficult, particularly going to a predominately white institution it’s been even more difficult trying to maintain friendships with folk my same age, and sort of thing too. But he has been golden, he and his wife both, actually. To go to his house and not feel like a hangout but he cook and do fun things that are not just academic things and this has been exciting as well, and so I honor all of that and so we have become good friends over the years. So we’ve been knowing each other for about seven years now and it’s been a wonderful relationship”

One participant in the study indicated a positive relationship with the mentor advisor in reference to being a role model, coach, counselor and a friend. She stated, “I

think they fit all those categories at one point or another, they play the good guy, the bad guy, and they do it all that's what I think." Overall, the participants in this study indicated that the mentor/advisor was instrumental and successful to the mentee if they were more than just an academic advisor and more of a mentor/advisor, role model, coach, counselor and more or less a friend. This relationship with the mentor/advisor had a major effect on the mentee by creating an atmosphere of feeling supported academically and socially in the university setting. For the most part, the participants in this study indicated a desire to be able to discuss issues not only surrounding academics but social and personal issues as well. Although, they did want to feel comfortable knowing that they could come to the mentor/advisor to discuss academic and non-academic issues without being shunned away or looked down upon due to the nature of the discussion. The participants in this study indicated that the mentor/advisors that did not show any interest in interacting with the mentee other than just academics were perceived as uncaring and unsupportive. Whether real or imagined, the participants in this study had the strong feeling that the mentor/advisor had multiple roles to assume for them to be successful in attaining the doctoral degree from the PWI.

#### *Sub-Theme V: Race*

All of the participants in this study stated that race was not an issue in their relationship with their mentor/advisor. The participants agreed that the importance of their mentor/advisor lies in the fact that if they came to the mentor/advisor with an issue that they were there, and was there to help them through the process. The participants felt that it did not matter about race as long as the mentor/advisor fulfilled the needs and

expectations they had. Many of the participants in this study described how fortunate they were to have such an encouraging and forthright mentor/advisor that followed throughout their doctoral program. The overall value to the PhD student at a PWI for successful completion of a doctoral degree program was guidance, plus assistance with the challenging variables that may exist along the way was important not race.

The participants reported on the importance of having a mentor/advisor at a PWI no matter what race. For example, participant five said, “there was no question or situation he did not provide sound advice for, his ability to help me navigate through the academic rigors of the program lead to my success.” Participant seven expressed his idea by saying:

“I could call him anytime. I was always nervous because I always felt like I didn’t do anything. Let me take that back. I always felt like I was not going in the right direction. And he would simply be there a lot of times just to listen and just to say, this is fine. The advisor never really told me, this is not good, take it out. They would say this is good, let’s build upon it, and this is how you can build upon it. And this is where you need to go and look. That was a plus for me, because I knew other people who had advisors and every time they were ready to bring it to them, it was like this is not right, start over, let’s do this again. And I felt like they were left hanging, or a lot of their advisors really were like just signing on and then some would go to see the defense, and the advisor would leave them hanging. So, I felt like when I got ready to go to my defense, the advisor had gone through it with me, and they would always drill questions throughout the process of working on the degree. So, it was always like I was getting ready for my defense, prior to the defense. My advisor left, so she began to pursue something else and she came back when I did my dissertation defense. But it so happened I was able to have a job, which I took a leave from. But I think if the university could do more to help the graduates, looking to the employment area, because so many that I know who left, they had to actually go and look for a job. So I felt like if there was a job, I don’t know if I could say job fair, but maybe more contact beyond the local university arena to find jobs for graduate students”

Similarly participant eight explained:

“I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to work very, very closely with my advisor with my masters as well as my doctoral degree. That relationship, that

working relationship proved key to my success in actually matriculating and successfully completing the doctoral degree. I'll give you a prime example. In actually designing my research study, I intended to use an instrument that would not have given me enough data or the proper type of assessment data to complete the study and my advisor stepped right in and said, wait, you might want to re-think this and had some discussions on how to approach the problem and what type of research instrument or assessment tool we could actually use to complete the project”

The participants in this study expressed feelings of how important it was to work with the mentor/advisor and how this relationship resulted in successful completion of the doctoral degree. Thus, for many of the participants it was an issue of staying focused and on task in the eyesight of the mentor/advisor. Participant two highlighted the sense of importance of having a mentor/advisor within the doctoral degree program. He described his feelings of being reassured by saying:

“First of all, it was a positive experience because she pushed me to go places, scholarly ways that I would not have gone without that push. I think what made the relationship even more positive was that in a lot of ways, we are at the same place in life. And let me explain that. First of all, I may be two or three years older than her, so our age was very synonymous. She has children who are the same age as my children, so we both have boys that are five and two. She understands the struggles of being in academia and having family commitments, parenting commitments and we were in tune to that. She had a very good sense of when the process was frustrating me and telling me you're on the right path, but I need to dig deeper. Take a step back, walk away from it for the weekend, reflect on it, come back and hit it again Monday morning. So not only did she mentor and push me through the process, but she advised me on how to deal with the process. She's an individual that I'm very comfortable with. Even with your advisor when you're doing your research project, people tell you or faculty members will tell you that we're equals. I want to hear your feedback, but you know you always have that hesitancy as a student, you're thinking, this person still has the pen and the pen is yielding the sword. I never had that type of relationship with this type of individual. We were always on level ground with each other. If we were working on a research project together, she asked for my feedback and she truly wanted to know what I thought about it. And the thing about it, she's a white female, and we're polar opposites in every way. But professionally, it is one of the best experiences that I have ever had. And after thirteen years as an administrator in student affairs and as a doctoral student, I have never had a male mentor, let alone an African American male mentor. My

mentors that come to mind, one was an African American female and the one that helped me through this process was a white female”

Overall, the participants in this study indicated how important it was to have a mentor/advisor in the process of attaining the doctoral degree no matter about race. Most of the participants in this study mentioned that they felt that they would not have completed the doctoral degree program without the guidance and support of the mentor/advisor. For the participants in this study there were significant events throughout the doctoral degree process which forced a reaffirming attitude of the importance of the mentor/advisor in the successful completion of the doctoral degree program.

### Summary

The theme “Important Characteristics of the Mentor/Mentee Relationships” refers to the idea that African American doctoral students at a PWI are faced with many challenges that they will have to overcome to complete the doctoral degree program. However, with the guidance and assistance of the mentor/advisor these challenges can be limited and sometimes avoided. The first challenge for many of the African American doctoral students at PWIs was finding themselves in an environment and an academic system that was unfamiliar to them, ultimately the mentor/advisor was viewed as being important to the mentee success and this proved to be very valuable to the African American doctoral student. A second challenge was a need for guidance, motivation, enthusiasm, and commitment to complete the doctoral degree program and the mentor/advisor impact on African American doctoral degree completion of the PhD program played a vital role in the African American doctoral student completion rate of the doctoral degree program at the PWI. This meant that the African American doctoral

student at the PWI had to have a sense of the importance and the impact of the mentor/advisor on the academic, social and overall successful completion of the doctoral degree program at the PWI.

The mentor/advisor will have to assume many responsibilities for the African American doctoral student to successfully finish the doctoral degree program. The roles of the mentor/advisor have a direct impact on how well and successful the African American doctoral student at the PWI becomes. If the participants had a positive experience with the mentor/advisor as in the types of significant roles that were needed for success at the PWI led the participants to successfully complete the doctoral degree program. If the mentor/advisor gave limited guidance or was not accessible to the participants, then they had a tendency not to do well in the face of academic and institutional challenges. These ideas were substantiated in two ways. First, the participants in this study indicated that the role of the mentor/advisor as it relates to the needs and expectations of the African American doctoral student is to be available and supportive. This attitude from the participants was an important issue beyond the academic and financial supportive role that had a direct impact on their success in the PhD program.

Second, the facilitation of academic success by the mentor/advisor was important to the participants of this study. In fact, for many of the participants there was anxiety in the beginning of the PhD program, as they did not see the academic path that would lead them to success. However, the mentor/advisor made success in the PhD program more realistic by facilitating a successful model for the African American doctoral students to focus on. Clearly, the role of the mentor/advisor was important to all of the participants in

this study. The needs and expectations along with the roles of the mentor/advisor were very important to the successful completion of the doctoral degree program at the PWI.

### Summary of Themes

The above themes evolved out of the experiences of ten African American doctoral degree recipients who participated in this study. Two major themes were noted: “Mentor/Advisor Relationships with the Mentee,” and “Important Characteristics of the Mentor/Mentee Relationships.” The theme focusing on “Mentor/Advisor Relationships with the Mentee,” contained two sub-themes: a) The Importance to Persistence (facilitation), and b) Importance to Doctoral Degree Completion.

The theme focusing on “Important Characteristics of the Mentor/Mentee Relationships,” contained five sub-themes: a) Accessible, b) Supportive, c) Positive Direction, d) Flexibility (Many Hats), and e) Race. Taken as a composite these themes are represented from the researcher’s interpretation of the phenomenon of being an African American doctoral degree recipient and the impact of the mentor roles of their advisors at a predominantly White institution.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter reported on the participants, the research questions, and the results of the thematic analysis. The findings indicated that the mentor/advisor of the African American doctoral student on a predominantly white campus is necessary and plays a pertinent part in the successful completion of the doctoral degree program. Overall there was a feeling among the participants in this study that the mentor/advisor was a key

element in their successful completion of the PhD program and their continued success after completing the degree program. Several of the participants in this study share common stories beginning with the hardships of selecting the right mentor/advisor, plus someone who will be available and understanding in the face of many challenges, along with being a mentor/advisor that is upfront and forward about the degree process, and continued guidance to completion of the degree program; finally the participants express concerns of having a mentor/advisor that will assist with publication issues, conference opportunities, funding, and job placement opportunities.

The participants' in this study had a major statement of advice for African American doctoral students attending a PWI; that it's better to have a mentor/advisor and be able to have access to them, then to need one and actually not have one. If an AA doctoral student is going through the doctoral degree process and do not have access to a quality mentor/advisor, it would be beneficial if they were to find one. If that AA doctoral student cannot find a mentor/advisor in the department area or on campus, particularly on a predominantly white campus, and that AA doctoral student does not feel that he/she is supported, find a mentor/advisor that may be outside of the department, or find one outside of the campus. If there is not a mentor/advisor that the AA doctoral student can find on that campus through looking and searching out mentor/advisors or the AA doctoral student can partner with, find someone via online by searching university faculty listings. Given that everything now is really technology based and the world has become smaller because of technological advances with computers. Therefore, find a mentor/advisor wherever the AA doctoral student can, because he/she will need that

person to help ease some of the stress and anxiety that is associated with the whole process of obtaining the PhD at the predominantly white institution.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter five presents an overall summary of the study, a discussion of the findings in relationship to current literature, and conclusions. In addition, based on the findings, a set of recommendations will be given for further research along with a set of recommendations for predominantly white institutions regarding means for assisting in the role of the mentor/advisor as it relates to the African American doctoral students at PWIs.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship and the importance connecting the African American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles, and how this relationship influences successful degree attainment in a doctoral degree program. The study asked three major interview questions. First, the study sought to determine what the mentor/advisor relationships were with the African American doctoral student that successfully completed the doctoral degree program from a predominantly white institution. Second, the study sought to determine what the perceived roles of the mentor/advisor were for the African American doctoral students to successfully complete a doctoral degree program at a PWI. Finally, the study sought to determine the importance and the impact that the mentor/advisor had on the persistence and successful completion of the doctoral degree program as it relates to the African American doctoral students at a predominantly white institution.

Ten African American doctoral degree recipients were selected to participate in the study. Selection was based on purposeful and criterion sampling. All participants were African American doctoral degree recipients from predominantly White Land-Grant Research Extensive universities.

The study used a phenomenological research design. The data for the study were generated by interviewing the participants regarding the mentor roles of their advisors on a predominantly white campus. The interview focused on questions related to the roles of the mentor/advisor, needs and expectations of the mentor/advisor, and the mentor/advisor mentee relationship. The findings of the study were organized around the two research questions as well as an analysis of emerging themes. These participants all had mentor/advisors throughout their time at the PWI and on to graduation.

### Findings

The findings from this study supports the literature review in that the mentor/advisor can assist in the growth and development of the mentee by helping to develop self-confidence, the sharing of ideals and values, having the mentee available and aware of opportunities, act as a counselor in making decisions, as well as building a personal lasting friendship that is built on respect (Duckworth-Warner, 2003). Furthermore, both positive and negative outcomes of mentoring were described in the literature. The outcomes not only affect the mentee, but the mentor/advisor as well. The benefits along with the negative and positive outcomes of mentoring were identified. Mentoring/advising has been an advantage to many African American doctoral students based on the roles that mentors/advisors often assume; like many graduate students across

America, African American doctoral students require a successful person that they can identify with in order to academically succeed (Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001).

Johnson and Huwe (2003) believe that mentor/advisors help their mentees to grow in multiple areas. First, they promote self-awareness along with setting good boundaries between personal and professional roles. Second, there are explicit conversations between the mentor/mentee about ways to maintain the boundaries that work. Finally, good mentor/advisors address unhealthy work habits that may interfere with personal and academic growth.

Academic advising for doctoral students success and retention is vital for many African American doctoral students to succeed; therefore, the role of the mentor/advisor can provide numerous benefits to doctoral students. The first line of support for the African American doctoral student is the mentor/advisor and the roles that he/she has in the success of the mentee. Further, mentoring/advising has been a powerful instrument in affirming the African American doctoral student in the dominant culture of the university (Duckworth-Warner, 2003).

This study examined the experiences of African American doctoral students at PWIs in the context of their mentor/advisor relationship and how it relates to successful completion of a doctoral degree program and from the coded data of the interviews two major themes emerged. The first theme was that the mentor/advisor relationship with the African American doctoral students had a direct impact on the matriculation and successful completion of the doctoral degree program at the PWI. The second major theme that emerged was that the mentor/advisors role at the PWI is pertinent and unique as it relates to the needs and expectations of the African American doctoral student at the

PWI. The mentor/advisor was important and had a major impact on the persistence towards completion of the doctoral degree for the African American doctoral student at the predominantly white institution.

This research provided valuable insights into the mentor/advisor relationship for African American doctoral students on a Predominantly White campus. With this research, there can be a clear understanding of the nature and the need for mentor/advisor relationships for the African American doctoral student and their success. In examining the support structures that the mentor/advisor provides for the mentee, it will be easier to develop a meaningful understanding of the importance of building an informed relationship with a mentor/advisor; this will assist the mentee in the pursuit of obtaining higher education. There can be benefits for the current and future African American doctoral students to obtain higher education degrees from predominately White institution based on the findings of this study.

#### Summary of the Research Questions

The following section details the responses to the two research questions based on the themes derived from the interviews.

Research Question I: What are the key characteristics of the mentoring/advising relationship that (AA) doctoral students perceive as influencing their decision to complete the degree?

The ten participants in this study provided an in-depth and detailed look at their mentor/advisor and the experiences related to their successful completion of the doctoral degree program from a predominantly white institution. Overall they expressed the importance of the relationship that is required between the mentor/advisor and the mentee to be successful in completing the PhD program at the PWI. The participants in this study discussed many of the characteristics that are needed to formulate a positive working relationship between the mentor/advisor and the mentee, such as research interest, availability, sensitivity of personal issues, cultural sensitivity, and an advocate for issues focused on funding, publications, and job related issues.

In Themes One and Two it was explained that there was a strong indication by the participants in this study that the nature of having a good interpersonal relationship with the mentor/advisor played an important role in their completion of the doctoral degree program. Nine of the ten participants in this study recognized their mentor/advisor as a role model, coach, counselor and a friend, this relationship had a direct impact on the participants academic completion of the doctoral degree program. One of the ten viewed her mentor/advisor as a coach only because she felt they were all combined to describe her mentor/advisor, and she went on to explain that she said coach only because, her mentor/advisor shows her how to do something in order to go on the right path. Similarly, as explained in sub-theme one, several of the participants indicated that they had a positive and supportive relationship with their mentor/advisor, and because of this relationship the participants were more than likely to seek out help from the mentor/advisor when it was really needed.

Overall, participants in this study communicated the importance of the strong working relationship between the mentor/advisor and the mentee and how this relationship along with guidance and support led to the successful completion of the doctoral degree program at the predominantly white institution. The participants in this study also indicated that there are many forms of pressure placed on them to succeed at the PWI. In most cases, it's not the academic pressures that affect the African American doctoral student at the PWI, it's the pressures surrounding the cultural environmental issues, funding issues, and just coping with an unfamiliar cultural setting. The participants in this study said that their mentor/advisors goal was to ensure that they were successful in completing the doctoral degree. However, it was clear, that in retrospect, the participants in this study saw the relationship with their mentor/advisor as a catalyst that influenced the successful completion of the doctoral degree at the predominantly white institution.

Research Question II: In what ways do issues of race affect the mentoring/advising relationship?

All ten participants in this study had white mentor/advisor, and two had African American co-advisors. All of the participants in this study stated that race was not an issue in their relationship with their mentor/advisor. The participants agreed that the importance of their mentor/advisor lies in the fact that if they came to the mentor/advisor with an issue that they were there, and was there to help them through the process. The participants felt that it did not matter about race as long as the mentor/advisor fulfilled the

needs and expectations they had. One participant said it would help in some instances, but he was really concerned with if he was going to be able to work with that person whether white or black. The participants stressed the fact that it is important to have a mentor/advisor that will help them be successful, race and gender did not matter.

All of the participants reported that it was important to find a good mentor/advisor, but it is really a trial and error process. Because so much of academia is a trial and error process particularly for graduate students and junior faculty as it relates to mentoring and advising. The participants in this study also agreed that they had to go through more than one mentor/advisor until they found the one that fit all of their needs. For these participants the overall consensus was that race did not matter in their academic success. The reality for these participants was finding a mentor/advisor no matter what nationality, gender or race, as long as the mentor/advisor was easy to work with, and made them feel comfortable to come to in any situation.

### Recommendations

As a result of the findings of this study, the following recommendations for further research are proposed:

1. A replication of this study (an in-depth phenomenological interview process) focusing on African American first year doctoral students at a predominantly white institution as this study focused on doctoral degree recipients. The findings of a study of this nature would afford an opportunity to see what the differences are in the mentor/advisor roles for first year doctoral students and students that has attained the doctoral degree.

2. The roles of the mentor/advisor of African American doctoral students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities for comparative purposes since this study focused only on doctoral degree recipients at predominantly white institutions. Such a study might identify the role that environment plays in the relationship of the mentor/advisor on both types of campuses and the types of support needed for success.
3. An implementation of a similar study for comparative purposes focusing on mentor/advisor experiences with African American doctoral students in predominantly white institutions. While this study has found that the relationship a mentee has with the mentor/advisor is important, however this study will focus on the mentor/advisor experiences that could help to identify ways in which these relationships could be enhanced.
4. A replication of this study focusing on white doctoral students at predominantly white institutions since this study was focused only on African American doctoral students. This would yield valuable information as to the many differences between African American doctoral students and the majority doctoral students and determine if race is an important variable in mentor/advisor mentee relationships.
5. A replication of this study focusing on doctoral students that do not have a mentor/advisor at predominantly white institutions. While this study has found that the mentor/advisor mentee relationship has a positive ending result, however this study will focus on doctoral students that do not have a mentor advisor and compare the retention, matriculation and completion rates.

6. A replication of this study focusing on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) areas to see if there are any differences in the findings.

#### Mentoring Recommendations for Administrators at Predominately White Institutions

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are directed to predominantly white institutions. Efforts in the directions suggested by these recommendations may be helpful in the recruitment and retention of African American doctoral students in white institutions.

1. Mentoring/advising programs are needed so that African American doctoral students can successfully be paired with a wise and trusted mentor/advisor, one that has successful experience working with mentees. This would afford the mentee a greater opportunity to persist to graduate.
2. Strong orientation programs are needed to assist African American doctoral students in getting acclimated to the environment within the university. This orientation should focus on how to choose a good mentor/advisor, who to go to if there are no mentor/advisors available, institutional rules and regulations, funding opportunities, along with assistance with cultural resources such as Black student services.
3. African American doctoral students must be guided and supported academically and socially that will assist them in persisting to graduate.
4. African American doctoral students at PWIs are in great need of appropriate initiatives that will help them succeed in higher education. It is imperative that administrators and mentor/advisors not only learn what factors affect persistence

but look into certain forms of racism that may be harbored on PWI campuses (Jacobs, Cintron, & Canton, 2002). Awareness to improve persistence, retention, and graduation rates of African American doctoral students has to be a priority for administrators and mentor/advisor for these students to be successful. The following recommendations for administrators and mentor/advisors should be applied to acquire success for African American doctoral students. Administrators and mentor/advisors must make every attempt to: a) include family members in the academic and retention efforts; b) closely monitor the academic progress of African American doctoral students, so they can avoid making unwise academic decisions; c) have special social events that will allow students to meet different faculty in their departments; d) formulate collaborative relationships with African American alumni, this interaction could help with student development and future employment contacts; e) enhance mentor/advisor understanding of the challenges that African American doctoral students experience at PWIs; f) administrators and mentor/advisors should have the names of offices and contact information around campus that specialize in working with African American doctoral students as a resource (Jones, 2001).

5. Attempts should be made to include culturally relevant activities, get connected with successful African Americans out in the community, and collaborate with family members that would allow African American doctoral students to make connections with their environment and the world around them (Lewis, Garrison-Wade, Scott, Douglas, & Middleton, 2004). According to Cherwitz and Boyd (2003) administrators and mentor/advisors should “increase awareness of the

value of graduate education and diverse experiences...to fulfill their professional visions and ethical commitments...along with recruiting a critical mass of outstanding African American graduate students requires a change in mindset” (p. 2). Along with understanding the academic process as it relates to African American doctoral students, hence affirmative action, equality, and student success; therefore it is important for administrators, mentor/advisors and policy makers to explore the issues of success for African American doctoral students.

### Conclusions

The findings in this study suggest several key conclusions regarding the relationship connecting the African American doctoral students and the mentor roles of their advisors. First, African American doctoral students who attend a predominantly white institution of higher education have a series of unique experiences and feelings which have a direct impact on them being successful. This supports previous research by Duckworth-Warner (2003) which focuses on the interactive process that occurs between the mentor/advisor and the mentee. Clearly, the participants in this study included many positive aspects of their relationships with their mentor/advisor that influenced the persistence to attain the doctoral degree at the PWI. The participants in this study were all successful in completing the doctoral degree program with the help and assistance of their mentor advisor. Duckworth-Warner stated that the mentee has to know thyself and what you need in a mentor/advisor before you choose an advisor/mentor.

The participants in this study believed that their successful degree attainment was aided by the access and support of the mentor/advisor at the predominantly white

institution. In fact, for many of the participants there was anxiety in the beginning of the PhD program, as they did not see the academic path that would lead them to success. However the mentor/advisor made success easy by facilitating a successful model for the African American doctoral students to focus on. This meant that the African American doctoral student at the PWI had to have a sense of the importance and the impact of the mentor/advisor on the academic, social, and overall successful completion of the doctoral degree program at the PWI.

Finally, guidance and support was key issues for the participants in this study. Many of the responses of the participants in this study had something to do with the need and support of the mentor/advisor. Clearly, the participants in this study recognized that they were in need of help and guidance as they attended the predominantly white institution. Not only were they in need of assistance and guidance, they had to find the right mentor/advisor in order to be successful. The right mentor/advisor was a key factor for the participants in this study to be successful in completing the doctoral degree program. Just as Zachary (2000) describes the role of the mentor/advisor as being a person that goes through phases with the mentee and celebrates the success of the mentee all the while letting the relationship evolve into one of a colleague and friend.

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## **APPENDICES**

May 25, 2006



School of Education  
1588 campus Delivery  
Ft. Collins, Co 80523

**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project**

**PROJECT TITLE:** African American Doctoral Students and the Mentor Roles of their Advisors.

**PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR:** Jean Lehmann, Ph.D.

**CO-INVESTIGATOR:** James T. Kador

**CONTACT NAME AND INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS:**  
James T. Kador – 970-351-1159 or [jkador@cahs.colostate.edu](mailto:jkador@cahs.colostate.edu)

**PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:** This study is to examine the relationship and the importance connecting the African American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles, and how this relationship influences successful degree attainment in a doctoral program. As a result, I have designed my doctoral dissertation, for Colorado State University, to determine if the mentor/advisor has a significant role in the success of the African American doctoral student on a predominately White campus.

**PROCEDURES/METHODS TO BE USED:** If you agree to participate in these interviews you will be asked a series of questions related to your experiences with your advisors in the mentor roles, and how this relationship influenced your persistence and continued success. The first interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes directly related to the mentor/advisor relationship with the mentee in completing the doctoral program. Notes will be taken and the interview will be audio taped. The second interview will be 30-45 minutes and will be used as a follow-up to include after thoughts. All gathered materials will be held by case numbers and no names will be associated with the material. **Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, universities, and states.**

**RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES:** There are no known risks. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, but the researcher have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

**BENEFITS:** There are no known benefits associated directly for you as a participant in the study, but the information gained from you should be helpful both to individual African American doctoral students on a predominately White campus.

Page 1 of 2    Subject Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Colorado State University Consent Form/Research Project; James T. Kador

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Individual, institutional, and state identity associated with your interview will not be used in any reports generated by the study. Quotes from the interviews will be used to support general themes, but these quotes from the data will not be identified as to persons, institutions or states. Interview materials and tape recordings will be stored in a safe area and destroyed upon the completion of the study.

**Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, universities, and states.**

**LIABILITY:** The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

Questions about subject's rights may be directed to **Janell Meldrem, HRC Administrator, Regulatory Compliance Office, 970-491-1655.**  
**janell.meldrem@colostate.edu.**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The participants can be excluded from this study for not keeping the scheduled interview.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature      Date

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator or Co-investigator Signature      Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Page 2 of 2      Subject Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

May 25, 2006



School of Education  
1588 campus Delivery  
Ft. Collins, Co 80523

Registrar  
Louisiana State University  
156 Thomas Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA. 70803

Dear Registrar:

My name is James T. Kador and I am a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University. My dissertation topic is "African American Doctoral Students and the Mentor Roles of Their Advisors." As a current doctoral student, it is my belief that this research will be beneficial to African American doctoral students attending predominately White institutions. This study is to examine the relationship and the importance connecting the African American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles, and how this relationship influences the persistence and continued success of these students. As a result, I have designed my doctoral dissertation, for Colorado State University, to determine if the mentor/advisor has a significant role in the success of the African American doctoral student on a predominately White campus.

At this time, I respectfully request your permission to include Louisiana State University as one of the schools that will participate in my study. The sample population consists of African American doctoral degree recipients that have completed their doctoral study as early as the 2005 academic school year. Colorado State University is familiar with the scope of the project, the satisfaction of the individuals involved will be adequately protected as human research subjects, and the subjects participation is completely voluntary. I will take every step possible to ensure participants' complete confidentiality. Please note that **participation by the African American doctoral degree recipients is completely voluntary**. I am requesting that Louisiana State University provide names, telephone numbers, addresses, e-mail address, and any other form of contact information that would be beneficial in contacting the doctoral degree recipient for this study.

I know that you receive many requests to conduct research on the Louisiana State University Campus. However, I strongly believe that the Louisiana State University campus could benefit greatly through participation in this research study. After completion of this study, I would gladly share the results with you and members of your institution.

Please let me know if you require any additional information, regarding my request. If there are any questions, please call me at 970-351-1159 or email me at [jkador@cahs.colostate.edu](mailto:jkador@cahs.colostate.edu). Please send your response on appropriate letterhead by June 15, 2006; thank you in advance.

Professionally,

James T. Kador  
Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Jean Lehmann (PI)  
PH-970-491-6317

May 25, 2006



*Knowledge to Go Places*

School of Education  
1588 campus Delivery  
Ft. Collins, Co 80523

### Letter to Participants

May 25, 2006

Address~

Dear Student:

My name is James T. Kador and I am a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University. Under the supervision of Professor Chance W. Lewis, I am in the process of my dissertation which is titled "African American Doctoral Students and the Mentor Roles of Their Advisors." This is a qualitative study using in-depth interviews to explore the questions relating to the relationship and the importance connecting the African American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles in predominately White institutions. I feel the information gained from these interviews will be helpful not only to future African American doctoral students, but also to predominately White institutions in their recruiting and retention of African American doctoral students.

Your name has been recommended as a potential participant in my study. I have attached a copy of my interview questions for your review. I will contact you by mail in the next few weeks to see if you would be willing to participate in an interview that will last approximately one to one and a half hours. If you are willing to participate, I will visit your campus to conduct the personal interview.

If you have any questions prior to my visit, please feel free to contact me at 970-351-1159 or email me at [jkador@cahs.colostate.edu](mailto:jkador@cahs.colostate.edu).

Sincerely,

James T. Kador  
Doctoral Candidate  
School of Education  
Colorado State University

Dr. Jean Lehmann (PI)  
PH-970-491-6317

May 25, 2006



School of Education  
1588 campus Delivery  
Ft. Collins, Co 80523

Registrar  
Colorado State University  
8021 Campus Delivery  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-8021

Dear Registrar:

My name is James T. Kador and I am a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University. My dissertation topic is "African American Doctoral Students and the Mentor Roles of Their Advisors." As a current doctoral student, it is my belief that this research will be beneficial to African American doctoral students attending predominately White institutions. This study is to examine the relationship and the importance connecting the African American doctoral students and their advisors in the mentor roles, and how this relationship influences the persistence and continued success of these students. As a result, I have designed my doctoral dissertation, for Colorado State University, to determine if the mentor/advisor has a significant role in the success of the African American doctoral student on a predominately White campus.

At this time, I respectfully request your permission to include Colorado State University as one of the schools that will participate in my study. The sample population consists of African American doctoral degree recipients that have completed their doctoral study as early as the 2005 academic school year. Colorado State University is familiar with the scope of the project, the satisfaction of the individuals involved will be adequately protected as human research subjects, and the subjects participation is completely voluntary. I will take every step possible to ensure participants' complete confidentiality. Please note that **participation by the African American doctoral degree recipients is completely voluntary**. I am requesting that Colorado State University provide names, telephone numbers, addresses, e-mail address, and any other form of contact information that would be beneficial in contacting the doctoral degree recipient for this study.

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Please let me know if you require any additional information, regarding my request. If there are any questions, please call me at 970-351-1159 or email me at [jkador@cahs.colostate.edu](mailto:jkador@cahs.colostate.edu). Please send your response on appropriate letterhead by June 15, 2006; thank you in advance.

Professionally,

James T. Kador  
Doctoral Candidate

Dr. Jean Lehmann (PI)  
PH-970-491-6317

June 2, 2006



School of Education  
1588 campus Delivery  
Ft. Collins, Co 80523

**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project**

**PROJECT TITLE: African American Doctoral Students and the Mentor Roles of their Advisors.**

**PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR: Jean Lehmann, Ph.D.**

**CO-INVESTIGATOR: James T. Kador**

**CONTACT NAME AND INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS:**

**James T. Kador – 970-351-1159 or [jkador@cahs.colostate.edu](mailto:jkador@cahs.colostate.edu)**

**If you agree to participate please sign and return the form before or on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2006. Please include a contact phone number and I will contact you with some possible dates and times for the interviews if you agree to participate. Thank you for your consideration, and feel free to contact me if you have any questions.**

**Instrumentation**

The interview schedule will be developed based upon key issues derived from the literature review. The interview questions will be developed based on prior research, which focused on African American doctoral students and the mentor roles of their advisors on a predominately White campus.

The guiding research questions will seek to address issues concerning African American (AA) doctoral degree recipients, and they are as follows:

1. What are the key characteristics of the mentoring/advising relationship that (AA) doctoral students perceive as influencing their decision to complete the degree?
2. In what ways do issues of race affect the mentoring/advising relationship?

The following questions will be used to guide the in-depth interviews.

1. How important do you see the role of a mentor/advisor in facilitating the Academic success of a graduate program?
  - A. What was your experience with your mentor/advisor as it relates to your continued success in your doctoral degree attainment, and why?
  - B. Do you consider your experience with your mentor/advisor a positive influence on your growth and development, if yes how?
2. What was the role of your mentor/advisor in facilitating the success/completion of your graduate program?
  - A. How was your experience with your mentor/advisor as a role model, coach, counselor or a friend.
  - B. Was your relationship with your mentor/advisor positive or negative and why?
3. What were some needs and expectations that you felt that your mentor/advisor fulfilled?
  - A. What were your significant experiences with your mentor/advisor?
  - B. Was your experience what you expected from your mentor/advisor?