

DISSERTATION

**BROTHER TO BROTHER: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
MALE EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS AT COLORADO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

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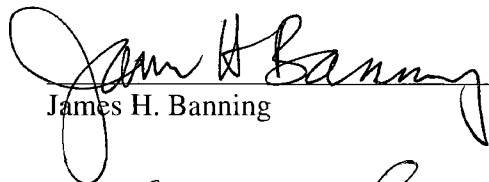
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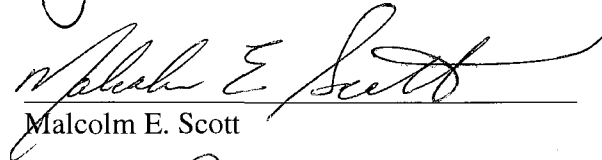
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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY CRAIG ERIC CHESSON ENTITLED BROTHER TO BROTHER: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS AT COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

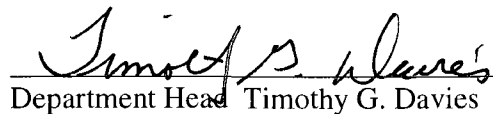
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

BROTHER TO BROTHER: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS AT COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

The purpose of this study was to understand how African American males at Colorado State University achieve academic success. The major questions to be answered by this study were related to how pre-collegiate and collegiate experiences of African American males impacted their academic success at Colorado State University.

The study used a qualitative, narrative inquiry research design. Narrative inquiry allowed the researcher to learn from the participants through storytelling. Critical Race Theory, an emerging theory in the field of education, was used to better understand the stories and the impact of race for African American male students. In-depth interviews were conducted using a purposeful sample of six African American male students, who were in good academic standing and completed at least 60 credits, while attending Colorado State University. The narratives collected from the interviews provided a voice for the participants' perceptions of what it took to become academically successful. The questions from the interview guide focused on the impact of high school teachers and guidance counselors, student involvement, mentors, programs and services, campus environment, other students, and faculty members. Obstacles and challenges to academic success were also explored.

There were six major themes that emerged from the study. These included enrolling in honors and advance placement courses in high school, competition amongst peers, participating in pre-collegiate leadership programs focusing on African American

issues, enhancing skill development, identify and interact with other scholarly African American males and learning how to communicate and build relationships with faculty.

From these themes possible suggestions for high school teachers, college administrators, and faculty members were identified as possible strategies in achieving academic success for African American males not only at Colorado State University but other predominantly white institutions.

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DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to all of my hard working African American brothers who are in the process of obtaining academic success. Remember, we come from a people that have constantly overachieved. The world is yours.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank God for providing me with the strength and perseverance to complete this journey. Your spiritual guidance was paramount through this educational expedition.

To my wife, Lisa, who supported me through this tenuous time. You stepped up to the challenge and kept our family going while I was working on this project. I would not have accomplished this mounting task without your support. To my children, Timothy, Jasmine, and Dominique, thank you for being patient, allowing Daddy to work on his “long book report” and maintain the focus needed to complete this journey. I love you all.

Big thanks to my mother, Judith Chesson, who passed away during my undergraduate studies. I felt your spirit through all of my academic success. I know you are witnessing this accomplishment.

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Sincere thanks to my advisor, Dr. Linda Kuk, who provided constant feedback and encouragement through the entire process. I am grateful for all of the time you invested in me. Your wisdom and guidance was incredibly helpful.

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Words cannot describe how thankful I am for all of the participants in this study. Without you this project would not have any meaning. Your stories brought this study to life. Your insightfulness, courage, and solidarity bring meaning to the title “Brother to Brother.” All of you have achieved academic success and will make a huge difference in our community.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Success is about dreaming big dreams, setting specific goals and realizing them... Once you’re committed, somebody will show up to make it happen.”

-Darnell Sutton

Background/Overview

The enrollment of students of color on college campuses have been an issue for higher education for the past forty years (Cross, 2002). This problem has led college administrators to invest resources on new initiatives to recruit and retain students from these underrepresented populations through mentoring and orientation programs, funding scholarships, and creating tutoring programs. Although progress has been made African Americans, particularly African American males, continue to fall behind other populations in achieving a college degree (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007).

Education in the African American community was once viewed as the key to living the “American dream.” It is now viewed by many African American males as an unnecessary barrier that stands between them and making fast money (Polite & Davis, 1999). According to Polite & Davis (1999) committing the four to five years it takes to obtain a college degree and going into personal debt from student loans takes a back seat to more prevalent issues of economic marginality and unemployment for African American males.

African Americans who manage to go to college often arrive unprepared to handle the demands of higher educational institutions (Cuyjet, 1997). This is because a significant proportion of college-bound African American students arrive on campus suffering from the consequences of prior affiliations, associations, and interactions with

adverse social-situational circumstances that have left burdening emotional scars (Hamilton, 1997). According to Cureton (2003) issues such as economic deprivation, lack of education and employment, racial stereotyping, exploitation and discrimination adversely affects African Americans' social development, self-esteem, and personal confidence and may negatively affect younger generations of African Americans seeking to improve their life chances in areas of wealth, social status, power, and prestige.

The majority of literature published, regarding African American males, is from a deficit perspective. According to the U.S. Census Bureau more than three times as many black people live in prison cells as in college dorms (Ohlemacher, 2007). In 1980 the number of blacks living in college dorms was roughly equal to the number in prison. These statistics are startling to the growth of the African American community. Marc Morial, president and CEO of the Urban League responds to this report by stating, "It points to the signature failure in our education system and how we've been raising our children." The Urban League report provides insight to a social issue that impacts college enrollment of African American students. Bailey & Moore (2004) identified African American males being viewed as an at risk population in education and described with words that have negative connotations such as uneducable, endangered, dysfunctional, dangerous, and lazy as challenges that impact enrollment for these students. Using such words to identify African American males can perpetuate stereotypes among educators which can become self threatening to African American men (Bailey & Moore, 2004). More research on retaining African American males instead of the trend in the twentieth and beginning years of the twenty-first centuries of

labeling this group as an endangered species needs to be conducted (Polite & Davis, 1999).

What is less understood are the college experiences and outcomes for African American men who do successfully negotiate the post secondary educational system. When African American men are given the opportunity to participate in higher education, and when well-conceived and formalized support systems are put into place to promote achievement, African American men have been successful (Richards, 2007). Richards (2007) found that parent involvement, encouragement from mentors, and positive experiences in school, were factors that lead to the success of African American male students.

Research on the experiences of African American students at Predominately White Universities (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) is scattered amongst the literature. The literature also includes a comparison between the student experiences at the two types of institutions using quantitative methods, but little has been done qualitatively focusing on African American men and their academic success. This study provides voice to a small population that is often neglected or misinterpreted. African American males have a story to tell about their academic experience that is uniquely their own. It is likely different from their white counter parts and dissimilar to African American women.

In order to add to the limited published literature, this study researched the factors that led to the academic success of African American males enrolled at Colorado State University. Scott (1994) conducted a similar study at Colorado State University focusing on the perceived factors related to academic success of African American students on a

predominately white campus. Scott (1994) found that cohesiveness and solidarity of African American students, alienation and isolation, negative attitudes towards White students which fostered feelings of resentment, family support, and role models were key factors influencing the academic success of African American students. Scott's (1994) study has provided insight into factors of academic success for African American students.

Statement of the Problem

The problem investigated in this study was the academic accomplishments of African American males at Colorado State University. Specifically, their experiences and what were key factors in their academic success. This study used Colorado State University's definition of students being in good academic standing (2.0 grade point average and above) in determining academic success. The following outlines specifically the problem being researched.

Academic Performance

Historically, African American males have struggled academically in higher education (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007). From 2003-2004, African American undergraduate students nationally, compared to other racial groups, did not perform as well academically. Using the traditional grading scale of A-F, "A" being 90 percent and above and "C and D" being 70 percent and below, African American students received the lowest "A" grade and the highest "C and D" grades (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007). Table 1 compares the academic performance of the various racial groups.

Table 1: National Undergraduate Grade Point Averages

	Mostly A's	A's & B's	Mostly B's	B's & C's	Mostly C's	C's & D's or lower	
Asian	16.9%	13.3%	28.3%	15.9%	18.1%	7.1%	
Black	9.6	9.2	24.2	16.4	25.8	14.9	
Hispanic	12.7	10.9	25.3	16.4	23.5	11.1	
Pacific Islander	14.4	9.9	27.9	15.8	19.3	12.7	
White	19.3	13.7	27.3	15.7	16.2	7.8	

Source: *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007*

Wilson (2000), president and CEO of the Nellie Foundation, an organization which gives money to programs that improve the access, quality and effectiveness of education for students, particularly from low-income or minority backgrounds attributes the lack in performance to African American males coming from high schools that are not supported financially as well as other school districts. Wilson (2000) states due to the lack of funding in urban areas where a good proportion of African American male students come from, the quality of education is not as strong as suburban schools, private schools, or wealthy schools.

Wilson (2000) continues to explain the consistent low expectations from teachers impacts the performance of African Americans in the classroom. “We have seen people categorize Asians as being really smart and getting really good grades and categorize Black kids as not being good students.”

Lack of Enrollment

According to the U.S. Department of Education, African American males have not seen the progress in college enrollment like their racial/ethnic peers. There has been little to no progress in participating rates among African American males over the last quarter of a century. Presently, African American males represent the exact same proportion of all students enrolled in American colleges as they did in 1976. Of approximately 15 million undergraduate students in the United States, less than 5% are African American males. Within the 5 % of African American male students who enter college, only 30% ultimately earn their degree in six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

The low numbers of African American men at PWIs has another impact on the environment that affects others beyond the African American community. Many schools profess a desire for a diverse student body, with the expectation that members of the campus community (students, faculty, and administrators) would thus have opportunities to interact and learn from each other culturally as well as intellectually.

Standardized Tests

Overall performance on college entry exams, particularly for four year selective schools, such as the ACT (American College Testing) and SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), is an important factor in the admissions process. The most current statistics show that African American students are not performing at levels of other groups. The average ACT score for African American students was 17, for White students 22.1, for Asian-American students 22.6, for American Indian students 18.9, and for Hispanic students 18.7. African American students' average score on the SAT was 434 Reading

and 429 Math, White students average scores were 527 Reading and 536 Math, Asian American students scored 510 on Reading and 578 on Math, Hispanic students scored 458 on the Reading and 463 on Math, and American Indian students averaged 487 on Reading and 494 Math (www.collegeboard.com). These statistics provides some insight into one of the issues impacting the low numbers of African American students on campus.

Walpole, McDonough, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi, & Toliver (2005) conducted a qualitative study of approximately 200 African American students on the perceptions of standardized college admissions tests and found the students lacked information about the test and their reliance on their relatively uninformed and unavailable school officials for information. The study also discovered most urban schools, which consisted of high numbers of African American students, lacked college standardized prep classes to develop strategies on how to approach college entry exams such as the ACT and SAT. Findings from the study revealed that African American students believed the exams were an unfair obstacle as well as being culturally biased in the way the questions were designed. Finally, Wapole et al. (2005) indicated structural issues such as socio economic status and poor quality schools, attended by African American students, impact the performance of African American students' results on college entry exams.

Archie Earl, Associate Professor of Mathematics at Norfolk State University, explains the achievement gap between African American and White students in his analysis of SAT & ACT exams. According to Earl (2005), in reality, the gap African American students must close by the time they finish their college or university is much larger than indicated on the SAT. This is because White students are not just standing

still while in college waiting for African American students to catch up. They are moving forward too. This means that, in order for African American students to be prepared to compete in the job market after they complete their undergraduate education, not only do they have to catch up to the point where their White counterparts are now, but they also have to close the gap between that point and where White students are when they finish college.

Public School System

Clayton (2004) stated the cause for the relative decline in Black men in higher education is multi-faceted, but many relate back to high school. The causes are affiliated with the following:

- a) type of academic and career counseling Black males receive in high school
- b) expectations from high school teachers, their family's financial standing, their self identity and attitude toward education
- c) their assessment of jobs and pay available with a high school diploma or less, in comparison to a college degree

Clayton (2004) continued by indicating that the public school system is failing our Black youth. The majority of public school systems are taught by White female school teachers. According to Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, a national renowned author, African American students don't see enough teachers who look like them, citing a sixty-six percent decline in the number of African American teachers since the 1950's. Today, White females make up approximately 83 percent of the country's teaching force (Yates, 2006). The absence of Black teachers, specifically Black male teachers, prevents an

important opportunity for role modeling. Hausman, Schofield, & Woods (2007) in their study found that role models were not only important in high school but are linked to assisting African American students gain a sense of belonging to their college or university.

Unwelcoming Environments

According to Harper & Hurtado (2007) the reality is that many people, including college students, administrators, and faculty, make racist statements; engage in racially oppressive actions; and maintain exclusive memberships in racially segregated social networks. In their study of African American undergraduate students, Swail and others (2003) instructed participants to write in diaries each time they perceived or experienced racism on their campus over a two week period. Thirty six percent documented unfriendly looks and skeptical stares from White students and faculty, 24 percent chronicled derogatory and stereotypical verbal remarks directed towards them, 18 percent kept a log of bad service received in the dining hall and other facilities on campus, and 15 percent noted other assorted incidents. The students attributed all of this negative treatment to racism (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Although most PWIs want a diverse campus, their environments can be unwelcoming for African American men. Holsendolph (2005) explained that for too many African American men, setting foot on a college campus is like emerging from the airport as a stranger in a foreign land. These feelings of being an outsider can be attributed to the overall African American experience in the United States. For many African American men in America the experience is like being forced to wear ill fitted shoes. Some people adjust to it. It is always uncomfortable, but they have to wear them

because they are the only ones they have. Some people can bear it more than others. Some people lock it out of their minds and some people are unable to (Terkel, 1992).

Background of African American Males at Colorado State University

According to the Office of Budgets & Institutional Analysis (O.B.I.A.) at Colorado State University, African American undergraduate students make up only 2.2 percent of the student population (456 students), with males comprising approximately forty percent of African American students. This equates to approximately 180 African American male students. Kunjufu (2002) indicates in his findings that African American students, like all others, want to be like people they see. Kunjufu (2002) reports the presence of other African American students is crucial to the academic success of African American students. Upper class African American students usually informally mentor first year students about campus climate, academic courses, and academic resources on campus such as tutoring. This low enrollment statistic impacts the opportunities for African American students to utilize each other as a resource.

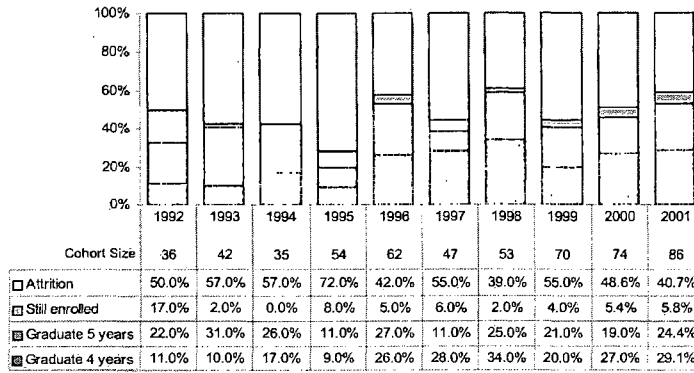
At Colorado State University, graduation and persistence rates for African American men and women are displayed in Figure 1. Figure 2 compares persistence rates for all racial groups. The data from the graphs demonstrates that African Americans, specifically African American men, are not achieving in the classrooms like their peers.

Student attrition is a major issue for colleges and universities (See Table 3). Although attrition is an important issue, focusing on student success the researcher believes will be more of a productive approach in providing research that will assist this population. By not conducting studies focusing on the academic success of African

American male students, colleges and universities like Colorado State University, will continue to struggle with issues of attrition for this population.

Graduation and Persistence of Black Students

New Freshmen



Persistence by Gender

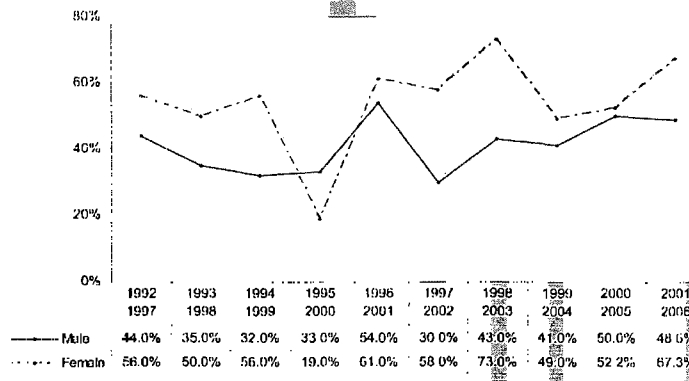
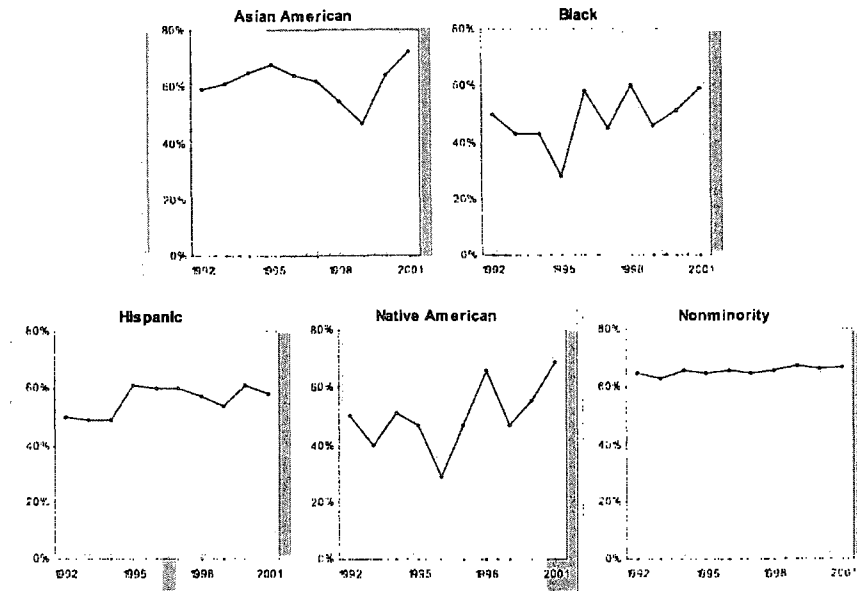


Figure 1: Graduation & Persistence of African American Students at CSU

Persistence by Ethnic Group

The following charts illustrate the percentage of students persisting (either graduated within, or still enrolled after, five years).



	Asian American		Black		Hispanic		Native American		Non-minority	
	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate	Count	Rate
1992 - 1997	87	59.0%	36	50.0%	151	50.0%	20	50.0%	1,931	65.0%
1993 - 1998	107	61.0%	42	43.0%	151	49.0%	37	40.0%	1,857	63.0%
1994 - 1999	94	65.0%	35	43.0%	159	49.0%	31	51.0%	1,976	66.0%
1995 - 2000	95	68.0%	54	28.0%	153	61.0%	36	47.0%	2,256	65.0%
1996 - 2001	95	64.0%	62	58.0%	154	60.0%	38	29.0%	2,384	66.0%
1997 - 2002	87	62.0%	47	45.0%	158	60.0%	30	47.0%	2,331	65.0%
1998 - 2003	98	55.0%	53	60.0%	192	57.0%	35	66.0%	2,678	66.0%
1999 - 2004	100	47.0%	70	46.0%	185	54.0%	34	47.0%	2,748	67.0%
2000 - 2005	116	63.8%	74	51.4%	234	61.1%	36	55.6%	2,854	66.2%
2001 - 2006	112	72.3%	86	59.3%	243	58.0%	35	68.6%	3,244	66.7%

Number of new freshmen entering each year and their five-year persistence rates.

Figure 2: Persistence by Ethnic Group

Finally, qualitative research focusing on African American male students' collegiate experience at Colorado State University could provide insight into what makes them successful. While institutional support has been shown to have significant consequences for educational outcomes, little attention has been paid to the impact institutional support has had on the experiences of African American males in college.

Central Research Question

Research questions were based on the premise that individual life experiences are meaningful and essential for a deep understanding of individuals' perceptions of reality and interactions among people. Qualitative inquiry involves systematic collection, organization, and interpretation of material derived from talk and observation. The study was guided by the central research question: **How do African American males experience academic success at Colorado State University?** Although the focus of this project was on academic success, some questions were geared toward non-academic topics. In order to gain an understanding of academic success it was important to have sub questions related to campus involvement, social life, and cultural identity that contributed to academic performance. The following are some of the questions as well as a table that displays which interview questions (Appendix A) correlate with the research questions:

1. How did African American males high school experiences prepare them for college?
2. How did African American male students get introduced to college while in high school?
3. How did the experiences of African American male students assist in achieving academic success at Colorado State University?

4. How did personal challenges impact the academic success of African American male students at Colorado State University?
5. How did campus involvement assist in the academic success of African American male students at Colorado State University?
6. How did African American males obtain new skills in order to be academically successful at Colorado State University?

Table 2: Answering the Research Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
How did African American males high school experiences prepare them for college?	1, 2,3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13
How did African American male students get introduced to college while in high school?	6,7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15
How did the experiences of African American male students assist in achieving academic success at Colorado State University?	16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 30, 35
How did personal challenges impact the academic success of African American male students at Colorado State University?	18, 19, 24, 26, 32, 34, 35
How did campus involvement assist in the academic success of African American male students at Colorado State University?	20, 25, 29, 31,
How did African American males obtain new skills in order to be academically successful at Colorado State University?	33, 36

The Purpose of the Study

In spite of dismal achievement data (grade point average) on the Black-White achievement gap, African American students succeed despite various odds (Corwin, 2000). The purpose of this study is to analyze and gain a better understanding of the experiences of African American male students at Colorado State University through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework. The intent is to allow these men to voice their experiences and to provide insights on how to enhance their academic success at Colorado State University.

Definition of Terms

African American: African Americans or Black Americans are citizens or residents of the United States who have origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. In the United States the term is generally used for Americans with sub-Saharan African ancestry. Most African Americans are the descendants of captive Africans who were enslaved within the boundaries of the present United States, although some are—or are descended from—voluntary immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, South America, or elsewhere. Retrieved September 26, 2007 from http://http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_American

Academic Success: Determined as any student with a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0 (on a 4.0 scale). Colorado State University defines students with a grade point average of 2.0 and higher in good academic standing (Colorado State University General Catalog).

Retention: Refers to those students who remained at the same institution where they started until they completed their academic program. Students who transfer to other

institutions before completing a degree are usually considered not to have been retained (Carroll, Horn, and Kojaku, 2001).

Attrition: Student attrition is defined as a student who has failed to return to college or university (Tinto, 1975).

Persistence: Students who have a pattern of continued enrollment and meet minimum academic standards of the college or university (Terrenzi, Springer, Yeager et al. 1996).

Experience: This concept entails the accumulation of knowledge or skill that results from observation or direct participation in events or activities (Picket, 2000).

Involvement: The amount of energy and time that college students devote to participating in clubs and organizations, studying, interacting with faculty and peers, spending time on campus, and utilizing campus facilities (Astin, 1984).

Delimitations

The only participants who were eligible for this project were African American male undergraduate students at Colorado State University that have obtained at least 60 academic credits and a minimum grade point average of 2.0 (Colorado State University's guidelines of being in good academic standing) at the time of interviews. All credits were earned at Colorado State University, therefore transfer students were ineligible.

Assumptions & Limitations

The main assumption of this study was that the participants would be truthful in all of the answers during the interview. Since all of the participants involved in the study contributed on a voluntary basis and was conducted in a place the respondents were familiar and felt comfortable, it was likely the participants would feel comfortable and honest during the interview process.

Also, the researcher assumed African American students face barriers that do not exist for other people, and the information of how African American males achieved academic success could inspire other African American males to do the same. This knowledge could provide a foundation for academic success and a better understanding of the obstacles faced by African American males.

A limitation of the study was the purposive sampling used to select six African American males. The results of this study provide a mere description of factors that have contributed to the academic success of African American males in this particular school setting without making any predictions for the future. Merriam (1998) states “results would be limited to describing the phenomenon rather than predicting future behavior (p. 41).”

Also, the social climate for African American male students varies from campus to campus, as well as the availability and the quality of supportive resources. Depending on the college or university, support programs such as tutoring, progressive multicultural centers, and the opportunity to attend cultural awareness programs vary. Therefore, these factors could impact academic success.

Finally, this study’s findings might be limited to the extent that they are based on one set of researchers’ interpretations of one set of data pertaining to the academic success of African American male students.

Conceptual Framework

In conducting a study that examines the academic experiences of African American males at a predominately White institution, a framework must be used that illuminates the struggles of the participants while giving a clear view into the workings of

the society in which they live. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is such a framework that can be used to gain a greater understanding of how racism and discrimination subtly continues to impact the environment that prides itself on equality. This theoretical approach is outlined in detail in chapter 3.

Origins of Research Project

The researcher believes there are stories that need to be told from the perspective of current African American male students on Colorado State's campus. The goal will be to share their experiences in hope that the social, academic, and living environment on Colorado State's campus will change.

This topic touches the researcher deeply, both personally and professionally. As an African American, male, first generation college student, from a lower socioeconomic background, the researcher can recall the many complexities involved in my own transition and adjustment to college. My career in higher education, for the last sixteen years, involved addressing issues of minority student retention. The researcher worked individually with many students, especially in crisis situations, and have initiated and supervised special programs designed to enhance their success.

It was, however, the final project in my Narrative Inquiry course that influenced my commitment to pursue this topic. The researcher had the opportunity to interview one African American student using the concepts of narrative inquiry. The student shared a fascinating story with me about her experience in an Economic class. The following excerpt moved me tremendously. This interview motivated me to gain a better understanding and inquire more about the academic experience of this population and their success.

I took Professor X's Economics class and he has this one section on...I think it was Introduction to Economics or something like that. He had one section on inequality, and I felt like he used the statistics he was presenting in class to, and he manipulated them, ... A lot of the times I disagreed with that portion of the way he was presenting information. I remember going to him and speaking to him a couple of times and him totally being like...you know...not like he hasn't heard this before but not willing to change on how he presented the information and that I kind of struck off by...well that's one. I remember finishing his class and getting a B+ in his class and was satisfied with the grade but when I was writing down answers to some of the questions on exams and things like that I would think again the way the information was presented to me or the way I took it or the way that I was affected by the way the material was presented. It was always a Black and White issue. I saw...Why was there never Latino-American to White or Asian-Americans to White. We were the major minority group or diverse population and we don't make up, by no means, make up the largest minority group. For him to use that as a comparison all the time was just...to me I was offended by it. It really showed us in like a really bad light in most of the ones he used.

As Ladson Billings so eloquently states it is the embracing of "all our selves" when applied to research using this CRT as the lens to view the world. As a graduate of a predominately white institution of higher learning, an African American male that experienced academic success, and a higher education professional, the researcher is familiar with the factors that led to my own accomplishments and failures. Thus, the researcher will employ the use of my own stories to explain the multiple intersections of all my identities and the identities of my participants, as well as to give a richer and more profound voice to the academic experience of African American male students.

The Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is designed to provide research on a problem that is important to colleges and universities, society, and African American male students who will enter college.

Colleges and universities could benefit from this study because it examines the experiences that shape the success of African American males. Universities might be

able to become aware of effective retention strategies as a result of this study. This research also describes key factors that are essential for academic success. Exploring academic success is essential for African American males. According to Harper (2005) over half of African American students who enroll in college do not complete their degrees.

On a society level, the lack of African American males attaining their degrees decreases their earning and political power. This could result in damaging African American males' self-esteem as well as being a regular contributor to society. The lack of academic success and degree attainment over time potentially affects the community status, family relationships, and leadership roles.

For African American males, the findings of this study could provide empowerment and confidence in obtaining academic success. Becoming aware of the factors that lead to academic success as well as the obstacles, African American male students can control their overall college experience and become insightful student leaders contributing to the overall campus.

Finally, the study's findings may possibly provide insight into what facilitated academic success for African American males. These findings could potentially make a positive contribution to helping high school teachers, college administrators, and faculty members address academic success for African American males.

Researcher's Perspective

Growing up on the East Coast (New York) in a predominately African American community, issues of race, class, gender, power, and equality were a part of my overall experience. Many communities throughout the five boroughs of New York City are

segregated by race, class, as well as religion. I was introduced to these issues at a young age. I recall many conversations with family members as well as friends urging me not to go to Bensonhurst, a predominately white Italian neighborhood, because it was not safe for African Americans. These teachings of segregation were confirmed by experiencing and living through the Yusef Hawkins incident. This tragic case involved a young African American man that was beaten to death because he was in the “wrong part of town.”

I would continue to question issues of race and class within my own experience as it pertained to my education. Why did my school have poorer facilities, damaged books, broken glass in the playground, and limited enrichment programs? My friends who were white attended public schools that were up to par and spotless. The message was clear to me and my friends. This is about two things: race and socio-economic class.

African American women in my community were strong, intuitive, intelligent, and savvy. They had to be. Sexism ran rampant in the workplace as well as in the home. Women in my community wore many hats. At any given time they could transform into several of the following roles: parent, guardian, laborer, disciplinarian, comforter, problem solver, teacher, social worker, therapist, chef, business person, housekeeper, lawyer, and the list goes on and on. Unfortunately, these expectations/roles were not filled by men. Other forms of sexism existed in the social fabric of the community. Several men held positions of power as community leaders but women were not given the opportunity to lead. My church congregation was filled with women but led by men. The message that was perpetrated to me as a young African American male was that I could be successful and hold a position of leadership, as long as it is within my

community. I also believe these messages had an impact on my identity development in forming in my own mind what a man, an African American man, a successful African American male is supposed to be.

All through high school I had good grades and excelled in school. I was involved in several activities and was one of the outstanding leaders in my school. My dream was to attend Cornell University, but my guidance counselor instructed me not to apply to Cornell. He made assumptions about me and my potential. I was devastated and was instructed to select an academically lower level tiered school. My second choice was Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). The guidance counselor told me not to apply there and recommended a community college. That was the last day I went to him for guidance.

I believe issues of race, gender, power, and religion are real and they are a part of our society. This country was built and prospered on racism. Currently, it is not overt but hidden in the wicked, treacherous, devious form called institutional racism that rears its ugly head in the public school system, corporate America, and higher education. This is a barrier many African American male students encounter and continue to face. Some Higher Education administrators and faculty members may be fatigued by constant reminders of how students of color find predominately White colleges and universities racist, alienating, and culturally unresponsive (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). From the positions of privilege, they lack understanding that the students themselves are probably equally tired of the persistent institutional racism that renders their college experiences oppressive (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). African American male students need extra support to achieve academically in order to counter unwelcoming campus climates.

As I reflect on my own academic undergraduate experience attending a PWI, I can recall being frightened to death of being the only African American male student in the majority of my classes. Although my academic profile (grades and standardized test scores) were equivalent to my classmates, I still possessed internal feelings that I did not belong in this academic environment. These feelings of isolation were reinforced when classmates were hesitant to dialogue or be engaged in the class material with me. The thought of asking for assistance from my professor or partnering up with one of my classmates was terrifying. I remember becoming nostalgic over my high school experience when I could walk from class to class and seeing another student that looks like me. There were guidance counselors, teachers, and administrators that had the same shade of brown on their skin. This is what I knew as a welcoming environment.

During my undergraduate experience I struggled academically my first year due to many factors the typical freshman encounters (lack of confidence, transition to large classes, and pace of the class). On top of these obstacles there were also unique factors being an African American male that impacted my academic performance. I still remember the day I read the student newspaper featuring an article explaining the only reason I was attending the institution was to either fill a quota or play sports or the hateful cartoon caricature of a monkey placed on my residence hall door a week after move in day. Given these circumstances, I did eventually excel and perform well academically and graduate with a Bachelors of Science. Through my undergraduate experience there were key factors that led to my academic success such as mentoring, student involvement, and a new understanding of my racial identity. This experience has led me

to conduct this research project on other aspects of academic success for African American males at a different institution almost twenty years later.

Summary

Due to the low percentage of African American male students participating in higher education, specifically at Colorado State University, and the need for advising, mentoring, financial, academic, and personal support of this group as demonstrated by the literature, this dissertation is designed to understand the success of this underrepresented population.

Literature from a deficit perspective on African American male students not being academically talented or gifted is a disservice to the African American community. However, when serious efforts to identify African American men's actual abilities are made, students of the highest academic capability emerge, creating an important need for campus administrators to make serious efforts to retain these gifted students. African American male students who are on our college campus today can provide a wealth of information about how to better serve these students and their brothers who will follow them.

Theoretical concepts have been examined that will set the stage for research in addressing the experiences of African American male student at Colorado State University. An in depth discussion of Critical Race Theory, its history and expanding use in fields such as education were incorporated to ensure a basic understanding of its concepts thus setting the stage for data analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the existing published literature regarding African Americans, particularly African American men, in higher education. The literature will give significance to the purpose statement of this study, which is to examine the experiences of African American men and how they achieve academic success at Colorado State University.

The review of literature begins by briefly outlining the history of higher education in the United States and specific populations that attended these schools. The literature reviewed proceeds to explain the involvement of African Americans in higher education and the types of schools they attended. The review also consists of the obstacles and challenges African Americans encounter while pursuing a degree. Several of the barriers identified in the literature are challenges that existed for African American students since the nineteenth century. The review continues to provide the significance of campus involvement for African American males. Research explains there is a correlation between African American males in leadership positions and experiencing academic success. Finally, the literature reviewed provided models of successful initiatives colleges and universities implemented in assisting African Americans achieve academic success.

Figure 3 provides a conceptual map of how the literature review is linked. The literature reviewed included studies that have investigated the history, life experiences, circumstances, and obstacles that affected African American males' educational attainment.

The diagram below displays a conceptual map of how the review of literature was organized.

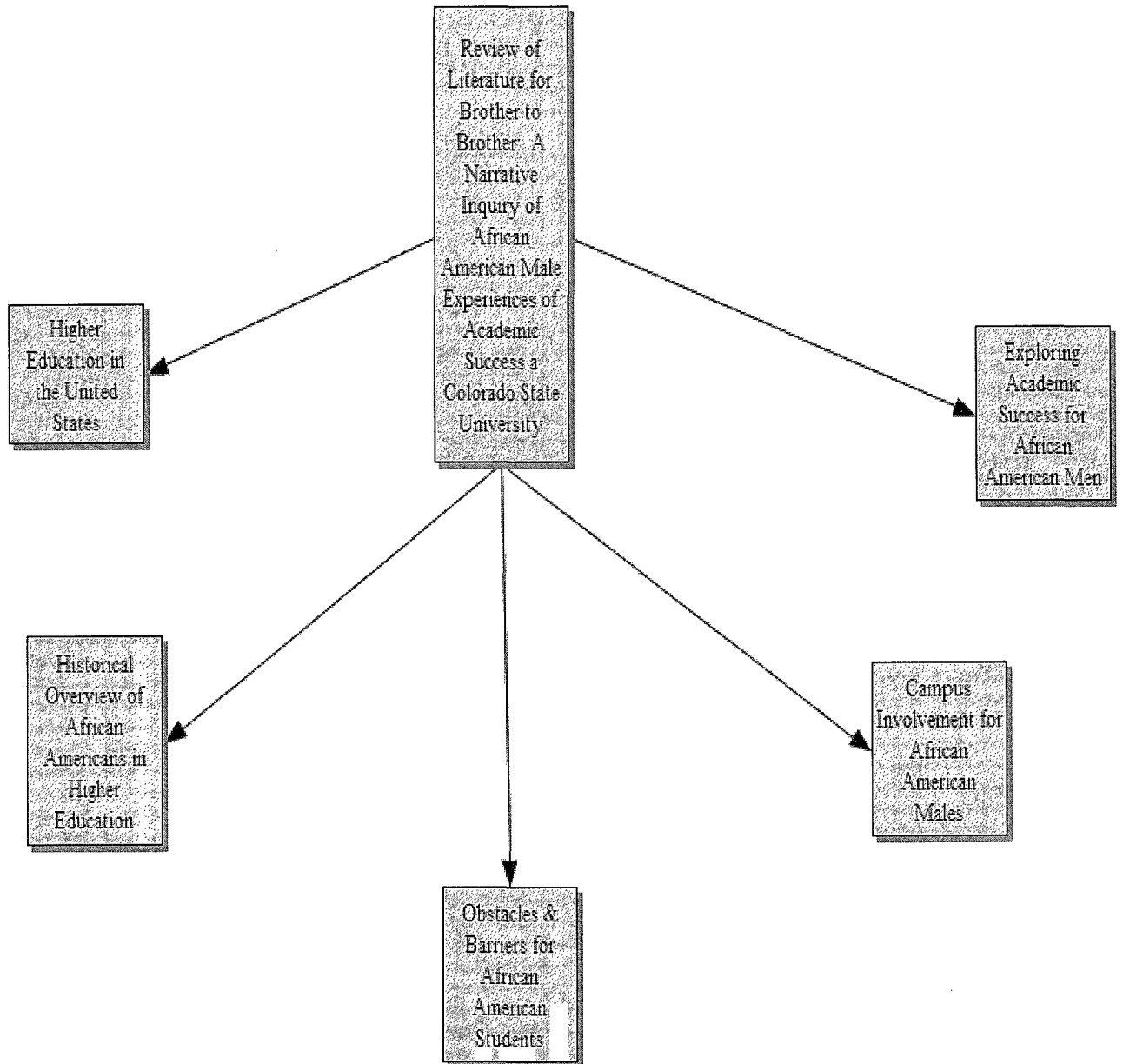


Figure 3: Map of Literature Review

Higher Education in the United States

After the American Revolution three overlapping developments were instrumental in the expansion of higher education in America. First was the rise of the state university. Beginning in 1795 and 1801 the universities of North Carolina and Georgia opened its doors. Second was the creation, under the Morrill Act of 1862, of the land grant colleges, among the earliest being Ezra Cornell's college at Ithaca in upper New York State (1869), where any person can find instruction in any study, particularly in those applied sciences useful to a newly industrializing society as agriculture and engineering (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). American education had an eye for the practical, as well as, the intellectual and moral, but the great leap forward resulted from the third development, the import of the German research university, beginning with John Hopkins in 1876 and soon to be imitated by Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Northwestern, Michigan, and other universities, state and private, all the way across to Stanford and Berkley on the West Coast (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989).

The overwhelming features of American higher education have been its diversity and its restless expansion. In theory, not only could any person find any study, but particularly after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against New Hampshire's attempt to impose state control on Dartmouth College in 1819, any individual group, church, city, state, or private firm could start a college and open its doors to anyone willing to pay the tuition fees. America's wealth, born after the Civil War of free or cheap land, mass production, and endless opportunity poured out part of its riches into hundreds and later thousands of colleges and universities across the continent. Every state and large city had its state-funded university, often with several campuses, and private universities sprang

up to suit every kind of student. The nine colleges at the American Revolution grew to 560 in 1870 and to 1,220 in 1928, and students in higher education as a whole increased from 1,237 in 1800 (about 1 percent of the white males between 18 and 21) to 32, 364 (3.1 percent) in 1860, 256,000 (5 percent) in 1900, and 1,174, 000 (15 percent of both sexes aged eighteen to twenty-one) in 1928 – over five times the average in Europe (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). Of these, women constituted an increasing proportion, from 28 percent in 1870 to no less than 49 percent in 1928, although many more were in teacher colleges and the like than in universities. Today there are over 3, 100 institutions of higher education, with more than seventeen million students (The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007).

African Americans were not left out altogether, though they were far behind the rest. Although there were no black colleges, as distinct from vocational and secondary schools, blacks did participate in higher education. Prior to the American Civil War, only 28 Blacks out of the nation’s nearly four million newly freed slaves had received baccalaureate degrees from American institutions (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

Emancipation from slavery precipitated the founding of black colleges in Atlanta, Nashville, and Washington D.C., between 1865 and 1867. Others followed, and the Morrill-McComas Land Grant Act of 1890 added seventeen more. In 1900 there were only 750 black students, rising to 3, 500 in 1910 and 22,000 in 1930 (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). Despite the long campaign of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People from 1909; in 1938, 97 percent of the black students were in segregated colleges (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). It would take a Supreme Court decision in 1954 and the Civil rights Movement of the 1960’s to open up white

universities, particularly in the South, to African Americans, and even then to less than their share in the population. In the 1980s African Americans made up about 8 percent of American students, compared with their 11 percent share in the population (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989).

Historical Overview of African Americans in Higher Education

Access to higher education for most African Americans was not an option during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The majority of African Americans maintained their role as slaves were illiterate. The following excerpt from a slave narrative indicates the determination of slaves to be educated as well as the resolve of slave owners to prevent them:

When the master suspected that his slaves were learning to read and write, he would call them to the big house and grill them. If we told him we were learning to read, he would beat the daylights out of us. A master found out that his property had learned to read and write would cut your hand or fingers off, but some took the risk.

(Sarah Benjamin, slave on Louisiana, The Federalist Writer's Project, Irons, 2002)

Members of society that attended college during this time period were privileged white males. Attending college for enslaved African Americans seemed an unrealistic goal. This was further supported by legislation that prohibited slaves to learn how to read and write, let alone enroll at a college or university (Irons, 2002). Therefore, African American slaves perceived success as being compliant to the slave masters' rules and being content they had somewhere to eat and sleep.

In 1954, the Brown vs. Board of Education decision was a landmark case for legalizing integration. The Brown ruling was considered a victory in an attempt of

accessing education for many African Americans. Unfortunately, schools throughout the rest of the country were de facto segregated by many political and economic situations.

Presently, there are approximately 120 historically Black Institutions, mainly clustered in the southern portion in the United States, that award bachelor's, graduate and professional degrees (Chronicle Almanac, 2007). In the past forty years, profound changes have occurred in African American student patterns of college attendance. The social and political change of the 1960's substantially increased access to predominately white colleges and universities (Carroll, 1998). As a result, African American college attendance has shifted from historically Black colleges to mainstream colleges and universities. By the end of the 20th century, three-fourths of all African American college students were enrolled in predominately white institutions (Allen, 1988). Unfortunately, research findings suggest that African American students have not fared well on predominately white college campuses. Recent findings show that Black students attrition rates on average are five times higher than those of white students on the same campus (Alford, 2000).

When discussing the education of African Americans with emphasis on African American males, Kunjufu (2001) identified African American males as being in a state of emergency. This emergency stems from the negative statistics, which have categorized African-American males, generalizing them from conception to adulthood. He argues that these statistics and stereotypes, especially from teachers, contribute to African American males' dismal plight.

African American males realize that higher education is essential for a better life, but they have little incentive or self-efficacy. The economic priority is evident. As the

higher education budget is cut by almost seventeen billion dollars, prisons continue to grow. Some young African American men have witnessed too many of their peers cut down, put away, or pushed out of college. If we see young Black men in the context of living within a larger culture that is seen as uncaring, it is easier to understand why their subculture is so alluring, and college so remote (Malveaux, 2006).

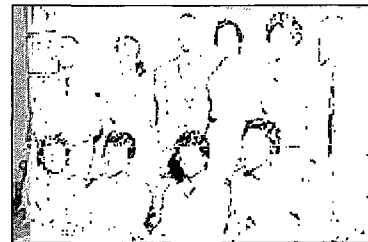
Although progress has been made access and retention still remains an issue on most college campuses for underrepresented populations. Progress could not have been made without major historical events. The following are major events that have impacted the landscape of higher education for African Americans.

Milestones in African American Education

1823 Alexander Lucius Twilight was the first known person of African Ancestry to receive a baccalaureate degree in America.

1837 Institute for Colored Youth founded by Richard Humphreys; later became Cheyney University.

1854 Ashmun Institute, the first school of higher learning for young black men, founded by John Miller Dickey and his wife, Sarah Emlen Cresson; later (1866) renamed Lincoln University (Pa.) after President Abraham Lincoln.



The Little Rock Nine

1856 Wilberforce University, the first black school of higher learning owned and operated by African Americans, founded by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Its president, Daniel A. Payne, became the first African American University president in the country.

1869 Howard University's law school becomes the country's first black law school.

1876 Meharry Medical College, the first black medical school in the U.S., founded by the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

1881 Spelman College, the first college for black women in the U.S., founded by Sophia B. Packard and Harriet E. Giles.

1881 Booker T. Washington founds the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama. The school became one of the leading schools of higher learning for African Americans, and stressed the practical application of knowledge. In 1896, George Washington Carver began teaching there as director of the department of agricultural research, gaining an international reputation for his agricultural advances.

1922

- William Leo Hansberry teaches the first course in African civilization at an American university, at Howard University.
- 1944** Frederick Douglass Patterson establishes the United Negro College Fund to help support black colleges and black students.
- 1954** In the landmark case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kans., the Supreme Court rules unanimously that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.
- 1957** President Dwight D. Eisenhower sends federal troops to ensure integration of the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Ark. The Little Rock Nine were the first black students to attend the school.
- 1960** Black and white students form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), dedicated to working against segregation and discrimination.
- 1962** James Meredith is the first black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi; on the day he enters the university, he is escorted by U.S. marshals.
- 1963** Despite Governor George Wallace physically blocking their way, Vivian Malone and James Hood register for classes at the University of Alabama.
- 1968** San Francisco State University becomes the first four-year college to establish a black studies department.
- 1969** The Ford Foundation gives \$1 million to Morgan State University, Howard University, and Yale University to help prepare faculty members to teach courses in African American studies.
- 2003** In Grutter v. Bollinger, the Supreme Court (5-4) upholds the University of Michigan Law School's affirmative action policy, ruling that race can be one of many factors considered by colleges when selecting their students because it furthers "a compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body."

Source: Information Please® Database, © 2007 Pearson Education, Inc.

Barriers & Obstacles for African American Students

Obtaining a college degree can be a difficult task for any student. For African American students, the obstacles are more profound due to the fact that a majority of African American students are first generation (Driggers, 2007). Driggers (2007) conducted a study and found that first generation students have the extra burden of not being aware of the various resources or comprehending the multiple processes (admissions and financial aid) that a typical college student goes through in order to attend college. In addition to being a first generation student, the following review of literature identified advising and academic preparedness, absence of black role models,

campus climate, isolation, finances, and racial identity, as challenges that impact African American male students.

Advising & Academic Preparedness

The literature regarding High School Counselors indicates there is a lack of guidance and awareness about the college process for all students. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2005) the student to counselor ratio in public school was 490:1 in 2002 and 485:1 in 2003. This ratio falls short of the National Association for College Counseling which recommends a ratio of 100:1 (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005). The Institute for Higher Education Policy and The Education Resources Institute issued a report entitled “Missed Opportunities: A New Look at Disadvantaged College Aspirant.” The report indicated the student counselor ratio impacts African American students more than their white counter parts since the majority of African American students are first generation students and need guidance through the admissions and financial aid process.

Not only did the literature reveal that African American students needed assistance with the college process but research also indicated they were less prepared academically throughout high school (Devarics, 2005). A report published by Achieve Inc. supports the importance of African American students maintaining a strong curriculum to avoid poor academic preparation. Mathew Gandal, Executive Vice President of Achieve, a nonprofit educational research company created by governors and business leaders, reported data showing that 75 percent of African Americans with a rigorous high school curriculum ultimately finish college. The success rate for African Americans without that curriculum is much lower at 46 percent (Dervarics, 2005, pg. 6).

Another obstacle that African American male students encounter is the attitude of their high school teachers. In their study on the ecological context of African American males, Livingston and Nahimana (2006) suggested that it is these teachers' perceptions that ".....can have profound influence and dictate how they see themselves and what they believe they can achieve" (pg. 210). Additionally, Roderick (2003) stated that many high school teachers of African American males are neglectful in reaching out to them and do not hold them to the same standards as other students. As a result, African American males are not accountable for their own learning, and depend on teachers to give them passing grades instead of earning them through taking responsibility for their learning. The study also discovered teachers in the high school setting are less likely to be as pro-active as those in the middle and elementary levels (Roderick, 2003).

Absence of black men role models

The composition of most minority mentoring programs is coeducational, but a growing number of mentoring programs are evolving specifically for African American men in order to address the critical issues surrounding their academic welfare. These programs are needed because African American men are likely to encounter many challenges in adjusting to the traditional educational system (Cuyjet, 2006).

Although the majority of mentoring programs involving African American men have positively influenced the academic and social success of this student subculture, one limitation of such programs is their format and content. Several of these programs are characterized as highly instructional rather than developmentally stimulating for the protégé (Cuyjet, 2006). PWIs also have struggled with mentoring programs due to the lack of African American role models (Cuyjet, 2006).

Despite the struggle PWIs have encountered with mentoring programs, Historical Black Colleges and Universities have had tremendous success mentoring African American males. African American male students are typically more successful at these universities because of the supportive environment provided by faculty and staff (Kuh, 1991). For example, it is highly likely that mentoring experiences between faculty and students may foster collaborative research opportunities, and mentoring relationships with campus administrators, provide encouragement and support for protégés who may wish to pursue similar career paths (Cuyjet, 2006). If minority students, particularly African American men, are to have similar mentoring opportunities and experiences at PWIs as meaningful as those of their counterparts at HBCUs, it is essential that faculty and administrators at PWIs also exhibit strong personal sentiments of interest and care towards African American males. Sutton & Kimbrough (2001) found that mentoring relationships at PWIs are intermittent at best due to negative perceptions of African American male students about their academic ability and how they were accepted into the college. As a result faculty and staff that serve as mentors, only provide one dimensional mentoring that consists of just basic advice on academics and social skills for the disenfranchised (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001).

Hickson (2002) conducted a study of 250 (134 freshman, 30 sophomores, 29 juniors, and 57 seniors) African American students attending a HBCU in Texas focusing on the student's need to have a mentor, the need for a college professor to be a mentor, and the need for a college professor to be of the same race. The findings consisted of the following:

Table 3: African American Students & Mentors

Findings	Percent of Participants	Participants
Felt it was important to have a mentor.	88%	220
Felt that a college professor should be of the same race	12%	30
Consider at least one professor a mentor	55%	138
Students indicated that their mentor is of the same race.	53%	133
Students indicated that having a professor on campus as a mentor increases their chances of completing college.	73%	183
Participants felt that it is more important for their professor to have an interest in them than for the professor to be of the same race.	75%	188
Students said that they would prefer if their professor were of the same race.	40%	100
Respondents said that one of the responsibilities of a professor should be to mentor students.	75%	188

Campus Climate

According to Cross (2002) a nurturing environment for African American students is almost certain to have a positive impact on Black student retention and graduation rates. Unfortunately, for many African American men entering Predominately White Universities (PWIs) are frequently faced with creating strategies on how to survive on campuses that can be extremely unwelcoming. Harper & Hurtado (2007) completed a multi-institutional qualitative study that synthesized fifteen years of research about campus racial climates that reinforces PWI's being unfriendly places for African American students. Harper & Hurtado (2007) discovered nine themes in campus racial

climates. The first theme consisted of the different perceptions of campus by race. Similar to studies conducted by Rankin and Reason's (2003), students of color perceived campus climates more racist and less acceptable than White students. Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) conducted a study that revealed African American students report lower levels of satisfaction with racial climates and perceive differential treatment on the basis of race more frequently than do their Asian American, Latino, Native American and White peers.

The second theme in Harper & Hurtado's (2007) study revealed minority student reports of prejudicial treatment and racist campus environments. Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) discovered similar findings in their study that when African American students experience micro-aggressions (subtle verbal, non verbal, or visual insults), they begin to feel academically and socially alienated in spaces where such oppression occurs, and as a defense mechanism they create their own academic and social counter spaces (ethnic enclaves that offer shelter from the psycho-emotional harms of offensive racial environments).

The third and fourth theme that was established from Harper & Hurtado (2007) study were gaps in social satisfaction by race and reputational legacies of racism. White and Asian American students often expressed feelings of social satisfaction at the institutions and found it difficult to identify aspects of the campus environment they would change. At every university, Black students expressed the highest degrees of dissatisfaction with the social environment. In regards to reputational legacies for racism, African American students reported an expectation of experiencing racism from family members and other members of their community. African American students were

warned about campus racist environments they would encounter because of historical exclusionary admissions practices (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

The remaining themes from the study impacted campus climate: White student overestimation of minority student satisfaction, pervasiveness of Whiteness in Space (campus buildings, lounges, and artifacts which reflects the white dominant culture), Curricula, and Activities, the consciousness-powerlessness paradox among racial/ethnic minority staff, and the unexplored qualitative realities of race in institutional assessment. Harper & Hurtado (2007) recommend institutions' leaders to transform their campus by conducting audits to assess their climate as well as administration leading the way in implementing diversity plans that have substance.

Swail (2003) states that campus integration is key for degree completion for all students, but especially for minority students. The normal challenges associated with maneuvering through the college system are stressful to most students; however, minority students at predominately white campuses encounter additional stresses that come from having a minority status. For minority students, especially African American students, attempts at campus integration are difficult. These additional stresses are due to not having enough professors of the same race, few African American students, racist institutional policies or practices, being discriminated against, being accused of "acting white", and doubts about their ability to succeed (Swail, 2003).

The racial composition of the student body of a college is an issue found in the literature. Barron and Parham (1999) stated in their book entitled African American Student Guide to College that one of the most important factors a student should consider is the racial make-up of a school. In addition, Barron and Parham (1999) wrote "I've

talked to students who feel, for instance, that African American students can only be successful at a historically black college or university. I've talked to students who think that predominately white institutions are generally superior to the black schools." The researcher added that "both claims are inaccurate."

Levine (1994) cited a study on diversity, which included fourteen diverse institutions of higher education. At each of the schools, interviews were conducted with administrators, faculty and students. Levine (1994) wrote, "The minority students interviewed often expressed a feeling of being uncomfortable and feeling illegitimate in traditionally majority institutions" (pg. 35). Levine (1994) further cites the feelings of a young African American when he wrote "one young black woman said that she felt "like an unwelcome guest on campus rather than a member of the community" (pgs. 335-336).

Isolation

For many African American students attending Predominately White Universities (PWIs), feelings of isolation are inevitable (Cureton, 2003). As previously stated, African American male students are still experiencing social alienation at PWIs. These stressful academic experiences and strained social relationships can be devastating, resulting in feelings of powerlessness, meaningless, isolation, segregation, and exclusion. Experiences such as large demanding classes with little room for personal needs, inability of the university to address the needs of African Americans, lack of respect of peers at the university, and minimal interaction with other African American students contribute to feelings of isolation (James, 1992).

Social alienation plays a significant role in adjustment to college as evidenced in the research of Augustine Pounds (1987). Pounds found that victims of social alienation

were less effective socially, had fewer friends, felt lonelier, and participated less in extra-curricular activities. Social alienation experienced by African Americans at PWIs is expressed and perceived by the quality of relationships between the African American and the White population of students, teachers, counselors, advisors, and staff. A lack of diversity in staff, social activities and academic organizations in PWIs concerns all minority groups and produces special anxieties that can affect a students' ability to learn and succeed (James, 1992).

Laveist (2000) supports this feeling of some African American students attending predominately White institutions stating "that it is true that at most non HBCUs' African American students segregate themselves socially from non-African American students and have little interaction with them other than the classroom." (pg.6).

Morley (2004) conducted a study examining the influence of racial/ethnic dynamics on the process of social and academic integration. Students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds were interviewed throughout their first year and again at the beginning of their sophomore year about their pre-college and in college experiences. Results yielded a qualitative description of the process of integration and indicated the importance of peer culture and institutional environment. Racial/ethnic accountability, the pervasiveness of White culture, and the pursuit of a color blind society led to differences in integration by race/ethnicity. These differences in addition to pre-college learning opportunities challenged the social and academic integration of minority students, particularly African American students (Morley, 2004).

Finances

Financial barriers are the most prevalent for African American students.

Although most groups of students are faced with the burden of trying to finance their college education, the obstacle is dramatic for a significant number of African American students. The U.S. Census Bureau (2007) reported the median household income for African Americans was \$17,343 while the median household of Whites was \$32,097. In addition, the poverty rate for African Americans was 24.5% and the rate for non-Hispanic Whites is 8.2 percent of all people in this subgroup (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Therefore, meeting the cost of a college education is more challenging for African American families.

“Largely due to limited financial aid funds, low income, high achieving students face tremendous barriers to success in college, representatives from Black and Hispanic colleges told Congress in 2002” (Devarics, 2002, pg. 6). Dr. Shirley A.R. Lewis, President of Paine College stated to Congress “Let me be very clear – adequate student financial assistance is fundamentally the most important element to assuring access to low income students. She further stated “But financial aid with strong student support services is “a winning plan for student success” (Devarics, 2002, pg. 6). The fact that loans have become the primary source of student aide creates a barrier or source of concern for many African American students because they are reluctant to borrow money for school (American Council on Education). Another concern arises from the overdependence on loans for college access being borne by those who are required to borrow in order to take remedial courses necessary to do college level work (American Council on Education). High risk students who have been unconsciously underserved by

our public schools are expected to bear the cost associated with closing educational gaps so that they may have a chance to succeed in college.

Financial aid packages are often the primary consideration in making the decision to continue or leave college. Burdensome loan debt creates stress that affects student success and satisfaction with the college experience. Anxiety as a result of financial stress becomes even more pronounced when added to the students' general feeling of alienation and dissatisfaction (Jones, 2001). Kaltenbaugh, St. John, & Starkey (1999) conducted a study and revealed the differences among racial groups with regard to student aid indicating that African Americans were less likely to persist if financial aid levels were not adequate.

An American Council on Education (ACE) study of the public's knowledge and attitudes about financing higher education showed that people do not understand the differences in cost between public and private institutions or two year and four year colleges (Hartle, 1998). Seventy one percent of the people surveyed believe that college is not affordable for most families, and 83 percent of the African American residents believe so (Hartle, 1998).

Guiffrida (2005) conducted a study regarding the impact of African American students', attending a predominately white institution, families on their academic success and finances were one of the themes that emerged. The study consisted of 99 students from a private research institution in the Northeastern part of the United States. Guiffrida (2005) found that high achieving students, grade point between 2.8 to 3.18, identified receiving small checks regardless of the amount attributed to their ability to excel in school. The participants acknowledged the small amounts of money provided time to

participate in student organizations or to work on outside research with faculty. One high achiever specifically described how this support allowed him to concentrate on academics.

Guiffrida (2005) found from his participants that receiving money from home also gave students the feeling that their education was important and valued by their families. Rather than feeling guilty for taking away from scarce family resources, high achievers consistently discussed these sacrifices as motivating them to do well. All high achievers, regardless of income, expressed at some point during the study that they felt the financial support they received from their families was an asset to their academic achievement.

Racial Identity

Much of the literature on minority student identity development has focused on a model that assumes as if the only thing minority students have to do to be successful is adopt a cultural European American model. Alternative frameworks have been proposed to describe and measure identity development of students of color during college. Three issues are prominent in identity development of African American males, their racial identity, role model identification, and peer acceptance issues (Corbin, Saladink & Pruitt, 1999).

Racial identity theory examined how a person of color perceived himself as sharing a common racial heritage with his socio-racial group (Helms, 1990). Racial identity development is the process whereby members of an oppressed group overcome society's negative evaluation of their group and develop an identity with roots in the culture and experiences of their ascribed group (Kohatsu, et al., 2000). Black children and adolescents become aware of racial inequalities in society and of a Eurocentric

dominance in politics, economic control, and standards of beauty. Black males tend to develop a sense of pessimism based on stereotypes, violence, police harassment, and the possibility of incarceration (Corbin, 1999).

The extent to which individuals come to terms with their racial identity may be related to academic achievement. Stevens (2007) study determined adolescents with complex identity development that encompassed both a strong racial identity and the ability to interact pragmatically with the larger culture demonstrated greater academic success than those who either do not incorporate race or ethnicity in their self concept or did so without a sense of membership in the larger society.

Ogbu (2004) conducted a study with African American college students and how they identified themselves racially, specifically taking on an identity of “acting White.” The results from the study indicated few African American students rejected obtaining good grades because it was defined as being “White.” On the contrary, the participants want to make good grades and many report that they are well received by their close friends when they get good grades, such as when they get an A (Ogbu, 2004). What the participants in the study rejected that hurt their academic performance were “White” attitudes and behaviors conducive to making good grades (Ogbu, 2004). For example, “White” behaviors included speaking standard English, enrolling in Honors and AP classes, being smart during lessons and having too many White friends. These behaviors were perceived as “acting White” so it was not uncommon for students to oppose these behaviors to maintain a stronger Black identity. The study also revealed that Black students experience peer pressures from other Black students to discourage them from adopting such White attitudes and behaviors (Ogbu, 2004).

Bergin & Cooks (2002) conducted a study to explore the concept of “acting white” and how it impacted racial identity and academic performance for African American students. The research project included 37 high achieving participants who felt strong resentment toward their African American peers’ accusations of acting white. The participants associated acting white with speaking proper English, working up to your potential in school, getting good grades, and always doing your work. One participant specifically explained, “I feel everybody in the academy is in the category of not totally being themselves, hiding their ethnic identity. Those who aren’t able to adjust leave. Those who are willing to adjust – maybe somewhat – can stay.” The findings also included participants feeling angry that accusers knew nothing about their own African heritage but would accuse more knowledgeable people of acting white. A participant indicated the following, “It made me feel bad because I had probably known more black history and had done more to delve into my history than most of them and they had the nerve to see me as something that was trying to negate my heritage. So I mean it made me feel pretty bad but I just learned to try to ignore it.”(Bergin & Cooks, 2002).

African American Men in Higher Education

The opposition to Negro education in the South was at first bitter.....for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong: for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent. Nevertheless, men strive to know (Dubois, 1903).

In general, African American men have been overrepresented in literature from a deficit perspective. Moreover, this deficit perspective focuses on the individual’s or group’s weaknesses and societal barriers. For this reason scholars who have used a

deficit perspective lens have guided the majority of literature and other studies to examine the negative aspects of African American men rather than the successes African-American men encounter. Categories such as homelessness, violence, homicide, suicide, incarceration, and dropping out of school at an alarming rate tend to flood the literature. Representation of African American men in literature and studies that provide analogies of success, perseverance, and a tenacious behavior are scarce.

Hall & Rowan (2000) reported, “African American males encounter various forms of oppression in higher education that correlate with their dropout and graduation rates” (p. 3). Institutions of higher education are in fact perceived as hostile environments and culturally irrelevant to such students (Hall & Rowan, 2000). African American males have historically failed in higher education, encountering various obstacles to success. These obstacles include: lack of institutional and administrative support, problems adjusting or finding a niche at the institution, and external societal pressure (Hall & Rowan, 2000).

The manifestations of these obstacles are deeply rooted in the American psyche and are reflected in the practices and policies – however subtle – of higher education. In the aftermath, African American males are disproportionately imprisoned, have higher unemployment and poverty rates, and for some, have disproportionately higher rates of suicide (Hall & Rowan, 2000).

Gender Differences

Cuyjet (1997) explains that there are fundamental differences in the way African American men and women socialize, make moral decisions, and process information. These differences appear even more drastic as African American men adopt alternative

behaviors to compensate for the normal behaviors denied them because of racism, socioeconomic disadvantages, or a combination of both. Cuyjet (1997) also found that African American men do not perform as well as African American women academically. Cuyjet (1997) attributes this to deficient skills in note taking, socializing with others in the classroom, and a commitment to study hours. African American men may need different types of support services to help them adapt to the college environment.

As previously stated by Cuyjet (1997) there are key differences between the sexes that impact their college experience. African American women attend college in proportionally larger numbers than African American men. According to The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (2007) among the more than seventeen million students enrolled in American colleges and universities in 2005, African American men had the lowest male to female proportion when compared to other ethnic groups. Only 35 percent of African American students are male: corresponding percentages for the male segment of other groups are 46 percent for Asians, 41 percent for Hispanics, 39 percent for Native Americans, and 44 percent for whites (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007).

Most colleges and universities define academic success as completing a degree. In 1980, 24,511 Black men earned bachelor's degrees, compared to 36,162 Black women—a difference of 11,651 (American Council in Higher Education, 2002). By 2004-2005, that gap more than quadrupled when only 45,810 Black men earned four-year degrees compared to 90,312 for Black women (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007). In other words, nearly 66 percent of Black college graduates in 2004 were women.

The fact that more African American females are attending and graduating from colleges and universities may, over time, affect the community status, family relationships and the leadership roles of African American men and women. The increased earning and political power of women may be viewed as a positive outcome. However, the shift in earning and political power of women may potentially have devastating effects on African American male esteem and role perception as well as on family and community stability.

Prior to being enrolled at college, college administrators have learned through opportunity programs for the disadvantaged that some students, especially young African American men, need help adjusting to several factors in college life, specifically the admissions process, dealing with peers, interacting with teachers and authority figures and organizational skills (Cuyjet, 1997).

Academic Success

Although these obstacles exist, there are African American males that obtain academic success. Harper (2005) conducted a study of 35 high achieving African American male students from the University of Michigan, University of Illinois, Michigan State University, Purdue University, Indiana University, and Ohio State University who were considered student leaders. Administrators at the six universities identified the students. These students were involved in multiple organizations, received scholarships, awards, honors, and were liked and appreciated by their friends. Harper noted that the high achievers initially chose to join particular organizations because older African American students took them under their wings.

The results from the study showed the students were heavily involved in campus activities, clubs, and organizations and sought leadership positions. The analysis discovered active participation and engagement in multiple capacities for learning had a positive effect on the experiences of African American males.

Lewis & Middleton (2003) in their study of African Americans in Community Colleges discovered there is an increase of African Americans enrolling as a gateway to higher education. Through a deductive process using constant comparative procedures their research found emerging themes that impact African American students' academic success. Similar to four year institutions, environmental factors impacted African American students' academic success. Environmental factors that emerged from the data were counselors (advisers) to help students identify their goals, stronger mentoring programs, outside encouragement from family members, and incorporating academic skills workshops.

The second rising theme is the reported absence of African American faculty. Kunjufu (2002) reported that African American students, like all others, wanted to be like people they see. Increasing African American faculty at community colleges enhances educational aspirations of minority students. With this increase, Caucasian students are more likely to overcome prejudices about the intellectual abilities of people of color.

In order to reverse the trend of African American males not enrolling in college, Harvey of the American Council in Education, indicated the importance of supporting community organizations such as the NAACP, churches, and the Urban League. The message that education and academic achievement is important needs to be reinforced at additional places outside the home (Hefner, 2004).

Campus Involvement for African American Males

Astin (1984) defined student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience.” For African American male students, involvement is central to their success as he is highly likely to reap a return on the investments he makes in his experience (Astin, 1984). Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) also asserted that active involvement in and out of class activities, and the nature and quality of students’ social interactions with peers, faculty and staff have a positive influence on persistence, educational aspirations, completion of a bachelor’s degree and subsequent enrollment in graduate school. Additionally Harrold (2002) found that involvement positively impacted cognitive and intellectual skill development, adjustment to college, moral and ethical development, psychosocial development and positive images of self, interpersonal skills and competence, and undergraduate student retention rates.

In spite of the positive impact involvement has on a student’s academic success, many African American men are not engaged in out of classroom opportunities, especially at predominately white institutions. Harper & Wolley (2002) found that African American men are not involved in student organizations because they do not see other men like themselves occupying key positions on campus. Many African American men default to other activities where their brothers are better represented. Harper & Wolley (2002) also discovered for African American men, participation in these clubs limited their time to assert proficiency in activities that create better, more masculine reputations, such as participating in sports, playing video games, obtaining material possessions, pursuing romantic relationships with women and interacting informally with

other African American male peers. African American males also come to campus with the notion from primary and secondary school as well as their home communities of what is masculinity. African American males discovered that those who played sports well or fit in with “the guys” were often the most sought after for romantic relationships (Harper & Wolley, 2002). The last two issues found in Harper & Wolley’s (2002) research project was a misconception among African American undergraduate men. The majority of African American males in the study believed they must already have specific leadership skills in order to participate in most student organizations. Since many African American male students did not participate in non sports activities during high school, they may falsely conclude that it is too late to acquire the necessary skills for participation in college activities (Harper & Wolley, 2002).

Finally, the reality is that not every student is going to be engaged or interested in student activities. Some African American male students want to concentrate on their academic studies instead of committing time to out of class activities. Attending meetings, planning programs, running for offices and interacting with campus administrators are sometimes seen as a distraction and something else to do (Harper & Wolley, 2002).

Sutton & Terrell (1997) conducted research to ascertain African American men perceptions of opportunities for leadership. The findings from their research indicated that African American men who are leaders within their fraternities are also involved in campus wide organizations. Also, African American men who are leaders within their fraternities also perceive themselves as leaders among the African American student population. Finally, the researchers found that African American men recognized the

need for leadership training programs for fraternity officers. Although many African American men were eager to assume positions of leadership, a number of participants indicated they were not prepared to provide leadership for their organization. Due to the unfamiliarity with specific leadership techniques (i.e. parliamentary procedures, group facilitation, and developing an agenda) African American men's involvements in campus wide organizations were limited to non leader memberships.

Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLO) has played a significant role in the lives of African American men. BGLO's have historically served and continue to serve as valuable social support outlets for African American men, especially at PWI's. Harper & Wolley (2002) calls attention to the increasing African American male participation in campus activities and acknowledged how these groups typically require aspiring members to demonstrate academic excellence, active involvement, outreach to the community, and leadership potential.

Hayek, Carini, O'Day, and Kuh (2002) conducted the National Survey of Student Engagement and found that fraternity members were just as engaged as their unaffiliated peers, or sometimes even more engaged, in academic preparation and studying, active learning, interactions with faculty both inside and outside the classroom, community service, and diversity related activities. Hayek et al. (2002) concluded that fraternity members were more satisfied with their undergraduate experience.

Sutton & Kimbrough (2001) examined the trends in African American student involvement within traditional campus organizations at PWI campuses. The researchers' findings were vastly different than the majority of the published literature. Sutton & Kimbrough (2001) concluded that African American students, regardless of institutional

environment, spent more time than White students at PWIs utilizing campus facilities and participating in clubs and organizations.

Harper & Quaye (2007) performed a study focusing on student organizations as venues for Black identity and development for African American males. This phenomenological study consisted of participants from at least six different PWIs that were high achieving students involved with multiple student organizations. Key administrators on campus were identified to select participants with a 3.0 grade point average or higher.

Harper & Quaye (2007) found that although participants held membership in mainstream campus organizations, the participants' leadership and engagement were overwhelmingly situated in predominately Black and minority student organizations. Regardless of the organization he chose or the position he held, each student leader articulated a commitment to uplifting the African American community (both on campus and broadly defined) and devoted himself to dispelling stereotypes, breaking down barriers, and opening new doors for other African American students on his campus (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Harper & Quaye (2007) also found that cross-cultural communication was the most frequently cited skill mentioned throughout the interviews. The participants reported that they had successfully learned how to work with people who were different in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, and religion. The participants clearly understood that in order to be successful they needed to forge relationships with people from different backgrounds (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Cuyjet's (2006) research revealed that in order to make leadership and involvement opportunities more attractive to African American undergraduate men, it is essential that college administrators understand what these students gain and the ways in which their college experiences can be enhanced. It is also important to develop viable ways to help African American men comprehend these gains and appreciate their positive consequences.

Exploring Academic Success for African American Males

According to Harris (2003) in order for African males to achieve academic success in higher education they need to make a mental shift and reframe the issue if we are going to improve. Harris (2003) states:

We must move from a victim model to one that says not only can we be successful, but we **WILL** be successful. We must begin by reframing our perception of our status. Rather than seeing ourselves as victims, we must see ourselves as creators of our destiny. Rather than seeing ourselves endangered species, we must draw strength and courage from our 500 years of struggling against, and often overcoming the hurdles of racism and other forms of bigotry (Harris, pg. 3).

In a study conducted by Harris (2003) called "Successful African American Males on Predominately White Campuses" he concluded that African American males who were successful could clearly articulate a personal concept of success. Secondly, those young African American males who defined themselves as successful were adept at networking. Not only did they network with other students of color but they reached out to various student groups, student government, and academic student organizations. These students knew the importance of getting connected. The last attribute this population possessed was the ability to maintain balance. These students lives consisted of going to class, studying, getting involved on campus, and maintaining a part time job.

Related literature emphasizes the importance of colleges and universities to utilize non-cognitive variables in determining academic success for African American male students. Non-cognitive variables were seen as an alternative because many researchers have argued that traditional measures such as ACT and SAT scores, in particular were not valid predictors for minority students (Arbona & Novy, 1990). Sedlacek (1992) conducted a study comparing SAT scores and variables on the Non-cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) to predict performance of 105 incoming first year athletes, found the non-cognitive variables were better predictors than the SAT scores. The use of non-cognitive variables are highly successful in the prediction of students' academic success and more effective in predicting college grade point average than high school grade point average, high school rank, or SAT scores.

Successful Initiatives

Although there appears to be a void in the literature as to specific retention and persistence strategies for post secondary institutions, particularly as it relates to African American males, the following universities have implemented and created successful initiatives in addressing this crisis. The University of Kansas increased their retention and persistence rates of African American students by 6 points above that of the freshman on the campus, which is 81 percent, utilizing a program called Hawk Link. By employing a combination of orientation, mentoring, and tutoring programs, as well as information sessions covering topics such as career counseling and financial aid (Fields, 2002, p. 28). The program enlists the participation of faculty and staff to give the program a more comprehensive scope. The University of Kansas' Hawk Link program won the Noel-Levitz Retention Excellence Award (Fields, 2002).

Cross (2002) published an article called “Colleges with the highest black student graduation rates” that stressed Brown University’s accomplishment of obtaining a graduation rate for African American students of 92 percent. Brown University attributed part of their success to making their campus a happy place for African Americans students. A Brown University administrator also attributed its success with African American students to recruiting students who can compete academically and utilize the resources available to them at the university (Pasternick, 1999). Brown University offers a series of programs that include internship and fellowship opportunities, as well as programs such as EXSEL (for students in engineering and science) and the leadership alliance which offered mentoring of students pursuing the humanities, social sciences, life sciences and physical sciences. The academic component coupled with research, fellowships, and mentorship opportunities is the formula for success for any student (Pasternick, 1999).

The Mentoring Center, a non-profit organization committed to helping high-risk youth, including disadvantaged and formerly incarcerated black males in the Oakland/San Francisco Bay Area strive to transform their lives. Composed of seven programs, The Mentoring Center promoted an intensive, curriculum-based group mentoring process that shared information and knowledge builds rapport and relationships. The transformative mentoring system focused on changing the mentality that gives rise to destructive behavior among black men (Scott, 2006).

The program has enjoyed remarkable success. Over the past three years, the Mentoring Center has doubled the number of young people who received its services. Records show 20 percent of the formerly incarcerated youth who participated in its

programs returned to the juvenile justice system, compared to a recidivism rate of 75 percent in California and 66 percent nationally. Several participants are attending college, six are currently enrolled in four-year universities, and another 15 are in community colleges (Scott, 2006).

The Black Man on Campus (BMOC) Project was initiated during fall 2000. It provided a foundation for academic and social success of African American males at Bowling Green State University through mentoring relationships, a classroom environment that embraced their African American cultural legacy, and activities designed to promote a positive self image (Cuyjet, 2006). The project directors were four African American men in the Division of Student Affairs who believed in the merits of the Project and devoted time to its success. The first fall semester pilot program was supported by a one-time internal university grant of 4,000 dollars, which covered the cost of textbooks, guest speakers, and food for activities. The BMOC Project has three components: 1) a culturally relevant classroom experience fostered through a freshman 101 style course 2) a one-on-one mentoring relationship with an African American male faculty or staff member, and 3) participation in a weekend rap session related to success in college for African American men (Cuyjet, 2006).

Multiple methods were proposed to assess the impact of the BMOC project, which met with varying levels of success. The primary assessment instrument was the UNIV 100 qualitative and quantitative course evaluation. UNIV 100 is an optional two credit course that introduces college life and covers topics such as academic skills, career and life planning, and diversity awareness. Sections are themed and are geared toward special populations, one being African American males. The following qualitative

comment was helpful in determining the value of the theme-section for students (Cuyjet, 2006):

UNIV 100 made me a smarter minority student here on the campus of BGSU. This class has taught me how to use my resources to my advantage. It has also made me more informed and educated about how to deal with the different adversities facing African American males on college campuses and society.

Evaluation of the UNIV 100 program consisted of measuring student persistence and grades. The university's first-to-second year retention rate of the fall 2000 cohort was 78 percent. The overall retention rate for African American males for the same period was 80.6 percent. Additionally, African American males who participated in the pilot project had higher grade point averages in their first semester compared with the average GPA for all African American males enrolled. The participants were above the all male average of 2.42 and slightly under the White male average of 2.47 (Cuyjet, 2006).

The Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) organization was founded on November 10, 1990 by Dr. Tyrone Bledsoe to address the academic challenges to African American males at Georgia Southwestern University. SAAB relies on the belief that the challenges facing African American males can be resolved by providing student development intervention and support to its participants.

The SAAB organization has attracted national attention as an innovative prototype for personal and academic enrichment, and has been successfully replicated at public and private schools, at four-year institutions and community colleges, and at both PWIs and HBCU's (Cuyjet, 2006). SAAB encourages its members to participate and get involved with other aspects of campus life, such as campus activities boards, student governmental boards, resident assistants, and other key student leadership opportunities.

Assessment initiatives of SAAB included surveys of participants and focus groups in an effort to detect positive and possible negative implications associated with the institution's climate for the academic and personal development of its members.

Finally, Strayhorn (2008) conducted a study on the relationship between African American male academic achievement (as measured by college grades), satisfaction with college, and their supportive relationships with major socializing agents on campus including peers, faculty, and staff. Strayhorn (2008) found that having a strong support person was positively related with satisfaction in college for African American men despite differences in age, marital status, year in college, and grades. These findings are consistent with student development theorists (Astin & Tinto) that emphasized the importance of establishing support networks and/or a connection to the college or university via faculty member, peer, or administrator.

Although the previous institutions and programs should be applauded for their efforts of implementing programs to assist African American males, there needs to be steps taken before they reach campus. According to Maxwell (2004) the seeds for success, especially academic success are most effectively planted at home. The presence of books in the home and parents who read and discuss ideas and current affairs almost always influence children to read and care about things of the mind. Too many African American homes are headed by parents, single or otherwise, who lack interest in the long term efficacy of education, who do not insist that their children learn.

Summary

This chapter presented the relevant literature in regard to Higher Education in the United States, the experiences of African Americans and the educational process they

encountered. The trends in Higher Education were examined as well as several obstacles encountered by African American male students. Strategies such as campus involvement, mentoring programs, family support, and making a “will do” mental shift of determination for academic success, were explored in detail.

Finally, several academic successful programs were identified as well as factors that have led to African American males’ success. Although colleges and universities have implemented successful programs targeting African American males, the process begins prior to enrollment. Parents play a key role in enforcing the importance of education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand how African American male students who completed at least 60 credits experienced academic success (obtain at least a 2.0 grade point average) at Colorado State University. In order to accomplish these results, a qualitative approach was utilized as part of the research design. This chapter begins by providing reasons for the significance of qualitative research for groups that historically do not have a voice. It is followed by sections explaining the approach of the study, the setting, the selection of participants, procedures used, data collection, analysis of data, and methods of trustworthiness.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Qualitative research involves collecting data from participants in their natural setting. It operates on the assumption that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting that it occurs. “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2001, p. 6). According to Merriam (2001), some of the characteristics of qualitative research include the use of methods that are interactive, are interpretive, use inductive analysis, holistically explore social phenomena, and involve developing a rapport with participants. The strengths of qualitative research lie in the researcher’s opportunity to be exploratory and flexible (Merriam, 2001). For instance, qualitative research allows the researcher to ask questions of different people in different ways and to modify the questions and data collection

methods to explore topics that are not initially deemed important. The data being collected is very descriptive and authentic and assists with the search for understanding. A qualitative approach for this study allowed the researcher to understand the participants' perspectives on academic success experiences and how events, actions, and meanings, were shaped by the circumstances in which they occurred.

Ragin (1994) states that researchers use qualitative methods when they believe the best way to construct a proper representation is through in-depth study of phenomena. Often researchers address phenomena that they believe have been seriously misrepresented, sometimes by social researchers using other approaches, or perhaps not represented at all (Ragin, 1994). As qualitative research can be used to capture the voice of the research participants as they perceive their reality and make sense of the lives in which they are engaged, it was the method used for this study.

A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to collect rich data through interviews and analyze the stories of the participants. From a qualitative perspective, it is much more appropriate to understand the experiences of students through words as opposed to quantitative measures (Kuh & Andreas, 1991). Qualitative research is designed to answer questions about lived or social experiences and gives meaning to these experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

In regards to studies involving college students, qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, afford participants the freedom to choose aspects of campus life on which to reflect so that it is possible to collect foreseeable, as well as unanticipated information about their experiences (Caple, 1991; Manning, 1992). Whitt & Kuh (1991) suggest that qualitative studies are appropriate and particularly useful to student affairs

professionals and others who are interested in understanding the quality of the undergraduate student experience.

The researcher believes that in issues of marginalization the stories told in the voices of those who lived it, are more powerful, valid and meaningful than numbers or statistics. The researcher also believes quantitative research tells us the “what” of the research question and is an important part of research inquiry, yet, qualitative research tells us the “why” of a study and this study is concerned with the “why”. Specifically, why do African American male students at Colorado State University experience academic success?

Narrative Study Approach

Recently, stories have emerged as a popular form of qualitative research, particularly in social science and education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narration brings researchers and educators together collaboratively to construct school experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). According to Ollerenshaw (2002), narrative inquiry emphasizes the importance of learning from participants in a setting. The learning occurs through the telling of stories by individuals, such as teachers and students. The data usually comes from observations in the classroom, interviews, as well as informal conversations with students.

Narrative inquiry takes into consideration that people live complex lives. It reflects that people are constantly changing and reports on more than the participants' stories. Storytelling is a reflective act. The process of telling other stories is educative because it goes beyond writing for the self because the story has an audience, as well as an imagined response, and an actual response. The meaning of the story then becomes

reshaped, as well as the meaning of the world to which the story refers. Daiute & Fine (2003) state that the narrative process is a search for meaning, so the telling and the told, the hearing and the written, are inextricably linked as is the individual narrator in the social milieu of discourse. Narrative inquiry fits with my epistemological approach because it scrutinizes how power, culture, and society impacts a person's life. Although many positivists may reject storytelling as a form of collecting data, Connelly and Claudinin (1990) clearly counter this argument by utilizing compelling stories of marginalized groups in research and by theorizing why we can learn about the socio-cultural context of a person's life through story and narrative analysis. This methodology assists with making the invisible – visible.

According to Bell (2002) narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of individual story structures. That is, we select those moments of experience to which we will attend, and we pattern those chosen elements in ways that reflect the stories available to us.

Narrative inquiry allowed the researcher to analyze experiences holistically in all their complexities and richness. They are therefore powerful constructions, which can function as instruments of social control (Mumby, 1993). Bloom (2002) explains how carefully interpreted narratives can illuminate how an individual life, different dominant ideologies and power relations in society are maintained, reproduced, or subverted. Narrative allows marginalized groups to participate in interpreting their experience.

The value of narrative is that it allows the researcher to understand experience. People's lives matter, but much research looks at outcomes and disregards the impact of

the experience itself. Narrative inquiry illuminates the temporal notion of experience, recognizing that one's understanding of people and events changes (Bell, 2002).

Storytelling is in the words of Clandinin and Connelly (1994), “a process of moving simultaneously in four directions: inward (inside self), outward (toward community), backward (in time), and forward (also in time). What one does in telling something to another is to engage in sharing a story, an event or situation that moves in each of these directions. There is also another important aspect of sharing stories from the past in the light of present knowledge. It is not enough to retell the same story in the same way across time if that story is to be used to connect with new meaning and inform us in the present (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Rather, a story remembered must be revisited using our own life experience across the intervening years” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

Critical Race Theory

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) assert that CRT challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups. CRT can be used to understand how traditional ways of researching serve to limit the educational opportunities of people of color. Numerous scholars have utilized CRT to analyze the educational experiences of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2000, Solorzano, 1997, Tate, 1997). CRT scholars employ alternative methodologies such as storytelling, parables, chronicles, counter-stories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories, unconventional and creative ways to draw on the lived experiences of students of color

(Solorzano, 2002). Using their experimental knowledge, Critical Race Theorists explain their historical and shared experiences and transform social injustices.

As a theoretical framework CRT pays special attention to the historical implications for African Americans in this country and takes into account how these experiences have structured the current society that they are a part of. CRT is needed to truly understand how the campus community is structured and how African Americans are positioned in it. As African Americans are often positioned on the fringe of society and subjected to discriminatory practices, CRT offered an interesting paradigm to be used to begin the process of making meaning in the context of the current cultural system impacting the lives of African American men.

Incorporating CRT as a lens to analyze the data, while applying a qualitative research method, allows the participants as well as the researcher to be an active part of the research process. This is important in gaining participant trust and provides an accurate understanding of their experiences. For African Americans, representation is of paramount importance as it allows them to take an active part in the research conducted about their lives and assists in the interpretation of such research. Utilizing CRT in regards to African American male experiences at Colorado State, this study took a look at campus climate, academic and social support, and policies in place that impact African American male students.

The criteria used as a guide in implementing the lens of inquiry of Critical Race Theory (CRT) was researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to others. Researching the self is important in bringing awareness to one's own perceptions, unanticipated issues, and

epistemological positions. Milner (2007) recommended researchers ask themselves the following questions prior to analyzing data:

1. What is my racial and cultural heritage? How do I know?
2. What do I believe about race and culture in society and education, and how do I attend to my own convictions and beliefs about race and culture in my research? Why? How do I know?
3. What are and have been the contextual nuances and realities that shape my racial and cultural ways of knowing, both past and present? How do I know?

Secondly, researching the self in relation to others is important in developing a lens for CRT. The researcher reflected about himself in relation to the participants and their multiple roles and identities. Milner recommended researchers consider the following questions:

1. What are the cultural and racial heritage and the historical landscape of the participants? How do I know?
2. In what way do my research participants' racial and cultural backgrounds influence how they experience the world? How do I know?
3. What do my participants believe about race and culture in society and education, and how do they and I attend to the tensions inherent in my research and their beliefs about race and culture in the research process? How do I know?

Third, engaged research reflection and representation is when both researcher and participants think through what is happening in a particular community. From a CRT perspective researchers' and research participants' voices, perspectives, narratives, and counter narratives are represented in the interpretation and findings of a study (Milner, 2007). One voice or narrative is not privileged over another. In cases of disagreement as to the interpretation of what is occurring in a research study, researchers' and participants' narratives are both presented as point and counter point or narrative and counter narrative (Milner, 2007).

Finally, a fourth criteria of CRT in analyzing data is shifting the process of inquiry from a personal level to consider policy, institutional, systemic, and collective issues. From a CRT perspective, issues of race and racism need to be situated in the broader context, not just on an individualized or personal level (Milner, 2007). The following questions were used as a guide to shift the researcher's thinking from the self to the system:

1. What is the contextual nature of race, racism, and culture in this study? What do race, racism, and culture mean in the community under study and in the broader community? How do I know?
2. What is known socially, institutionally, and historically about the community and people under study? What does the research literature reveal about the community and people under study? What do people from the indigenous racial and cultural group write about the community and people under study?
3. What systemic and organizational barriers and structures shape the community and people's experiences, locally and more broadly? How do I know?

Utilizing the previously mentioned criteria allowed the researcher to analyze what impact race had on the academic success of African American male students. The core principles of CRT are to create change for groups that have been previously marginalized. CRT offered a framework to the study that places race in the front of analyzing data or discussing educational change.

Research Setting & Participants

The research setting for this study was Colorado State University (CSU) which is a land grant institution and a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University-Extensive. CSU was founded as the Colorado Agricultural College in 1870, six years before the Colorado Territory gained statehood. CSU is in Fort Collins, a city located in northern Colorado at the western edge of the Great Plains and at the base of the Rocky Mountains, with approximately 142,000 residents. CSU has an enrollment of approximately 26,000

students from undergraduate and graduate programs enrolled in one of their eight colleges. Enrollment consists of students from every state; with 80% of the students from Colorado (OBIA, 2008). Ethnic minorities make up 13.2% of CSU's overall population, with 2.2% being African American and less than 1 percent identifying as African American and male (OBIA, 2008). The remaining students of color are 6.9% Latino, 3.1% Asian American, and 1.5% Native American (Appendix D).

CSU awarded 5,646 degrees for the 2007-2008 academic years. There were 4,280 bachelor's degrees awarded in 62 programs. CSU touts outstanding academic programs featuring small classes and a senior year creativity project. CSU is ranked 124th of 258 national universities in the U.S. News and World Report's rankings of "America's Best Colleges and Universities (OBIA, 2008)."

The criteria used for participants for this study will be African American males, enrolled in a minimum of 60 credits, who have maintained at least a 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. In addition, the project was reviewed and approved by Colorado State's Institution Review Board prior to any participant being contacted. Students were assured before they agreed to participate in the study of how their confidentiality and privacy will be protected.

Procedures

The purpose of this study was to identify and determine the experiences of 6 African American male Colorado State University students that obtained academic success. In order to obtain participants for the study purposeful sampling was used. "Purposeful sampling was based on the assumption that the investigator wants to

discover, and gain more insight, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned.” (Merriam, 1998, p.61)

Participants were selected from a list of students created by the Office of Black Student Services (BSS) that met the study’s criteria (African American, male, 2.0 grade point average, and completed at least 60 credit hours). BSS provides programs that assist African American students make the transition to Colorado State University. The Director of BSS randomly selected 12 students from the list. Although 6 students were interviewed for the study, an additional six were identified in case of attrition. The selected students received introductory letters (See Appendix C) about the research project. The introductory letter indicated to all individuals identified for the research project, to return the biographical information sheet (Appendix E) in a self addressed envelope to the researcher. A follow up phone call to discuss the project in detail and the scheduling of the first interview occurred after receipt of the biographical information sheet. The researcher’s initial contact with the participants included an explanation of the purpose of the study as well as an opportunity to address any questions. The researcher also indicated to participants that through their participation they would be making a valuable contribution as well as engaging in a self-enhancing activity. Participants were informed that their involvement is strictly on a voluntary basis and can decline participation at any time. Prior to data collection, all participants signed all required consent forms required from Colorado State University’s Institutional Review Board. The researcher indicated to all participants in the initial meeting that their anonymity would be protected, nothing would be forwarded to their professors or academic advisors, and that their contribution to this research would not impact their standing with the

university. The researcher protected the participants' identity by informing them that all of the interviews would be recorded, transcribed, and stored away in a locked file. The researcher was the only person who would have access to the secured desk. Three years after the conclusion of the research project all audio tapes, transcripts and notes will be destroyed. All participants were referred to by a pseudonym identified by the participants. Although all interviews were transcribed verbatim, the researcher disguised any essential identifying information, such as where a participant lived, worked, or held membership in a particular organization to maintain confidentiality.

For reporting purposes, organization of the participants' stories was created by pseudonym. The names were ordered chronologically of when the interview took place. The data was organized by research questions for each participant. Reporting included emerging themes, the impact language played in forming individual narratives, and the incorporation of the principles of Critical Race Theory in analyzing the participants' interviews in addressing the central research question.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions addressed understanding how African American males at Colorado State University achieved academic success, and they are as follows:

1. How did African American males high school experiences prepare them for college?
2. How did African American male students get introduced to college while in high school?
3. How did the experiences of African American male students assist in achieving academic success at Colorado State University?
4. How did personal challenges impact the academic success of African American male students at Colorado State University?

5. How did campus involvement assist in the academic success of African American male students at Colorado State University?
6. How did African American males obtain new skills in order to be academically successful at Colorado State University?

Data Collection

The main source of data collection was through in depth-interviewing. The purpose of in-depth interviews is to learn to view the world the way the person being interviewed sees it (Ely et al., 1991). According to Creswell (2003), "These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intend to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 188). Leedy and Ormrod (2001) determined that interviews could be flexible and, if conducted correctly, yield interesting information.

There was a total of two interviews for each participant. Scheduled interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes for each participant. The initial interview focused on pre-collegiate background information relating to family dynamics, home community, high school experiences, and academic preparedness. The second interview concentrated on the participants' specific academic experience at Colorado State University. The main objectives of these interviews were to stimulate open discussions with the participants, permitting them to freely explore their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations. During the interviews participants were informed that their narratives might take them away from the original question. This digression would be acceptable because this information could possibly be a significant finding in the overall research. Participants were interviewed in intervals of at least one week in order for the researcher to have time to review each interview and reconnect with the participant for follow up questions.

All of the interviews were held in the Morgan library. The researcher's goal was to build rapport with the participants and make a connection during the first interview. During this initial interview the researcher discussed the purpose and the procedures used in the study. Afterwards the researcher collected data on the participant's high school experiences. The second interview focused on the participants collegiate experiences and how it impacted their academic success. The researcher did not conduct any of the interviews in his business office. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. The researcher wanted to preserve the essence of the spoken word so grammar or any language structure was not corrected. All of the questions used during the interview process were open-ended such as: "Tell me about your freshman experience. What were your first impressions of Colorado State?" (See Appendix A)

The biographical information sheet (Appendix E), completed prior to the interview, solicited background information from the participants. The completion of the biographical information sheets were done to provide the researcher the ability to describe the makeup of the participants in the study. The design of the form was intentionally created to be clear and logical. The participants completed the biographical information sheet without confusion. In essence, this assisted with the validity of the study. Assuming the participants were truthful, the information from the biographical information sheet helped the study accurately reflect or assess the concept studied.

After each interview, observations of the participants were audio recorded. The researcher noted if there were any body language cues, significant pauses or non verbal communication during the interview. Additionally, the researcher documented in a field journal how the interviews impacted him personally. The observations and field journal

were another component of data collection and interpretation that assisted in identifying and organizing themes.

Data Analysis

This section discusses the procedures implemented in the analysis of the data collected. Analysis of data is an ongoing and recursive process that is concurrent with data collection. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), data analysis may be defined in its simplest terms as a process of “making sense” of the data. The following procedures for data analysis will be utilized in order to “make sense” of the data:

1. *Transcription* - Data was transcribed within a week of the recorded interview. The data from the interviews were organized according to the research questions of the study and reviewed for categories, themes, and patterns (Creswell, 1998). Transcripts from narratives were read and reread, as well as notes taken while listening to the recorded interviews, field journal remarks on how the researcher was impacted, and comments from observations. The researcher proceeded to “learn to think in idiosyncratic language and meaning-system of the participant” (Josselson, 2004, p.9), to understand their frame of reference and assumptive world.

2. *Thematic and Structural analysis* – Data analysis followed the strategies described by Riessman (2008). Thematic and structural analysis was utilized to interpret the data collected from the participant interviews. Analysis interprets and compares biographies as they are constituted in the research interview (Riessman, 2008). According to Riessman (2008), thematic analysis allows the investigator to work with a single interview at a time, isolating and ordering relevant episodes into a chronological biographical account. After the process has been completed for all interviews, the

researcher zoomed in, identifying the underlying assumptions in each account and naming (coding) them. Particular cases were then selected to illustrate general patterns, range and variation, and the underlying assumptions of different cases were compared (Riessman, 2008). In thematic narrative analysis, emphasis is on “the told”, more specifically, the events and cognitions to which language refers (the content of speech). In narrative thematic analysis, language is viewed as a resource, rather than a topic of inquiry (Riessman, 2008). Narrative thematic analysis focuses on “what” is said rather than “how” or “to whom” and for “what purpose.” This process was utilized to code for themes *within* each recorded interview and then *across* all of the interviews (Josselson, & Lieblich, 2003). The coding consisted of labels that gave adequate descriptions of the themes that emerged from the data. After reviewing the transcripts continuously the researcher made comments in the margins. Each code captured the essence of the information shared. For example, if a participant indicated their mother, father, brother, or other family members were significant influences in their academic success, “family support” was the primary group/category created.

Using holistic content analysis, the researcher identified stories from the participants and bolded the text. The researcher used a highlighter to separate the various stories within an interview. If a participant recalled a story he mentioned earlier the researcher would use the same highlighter as the previous story. After completing this process with all of the transcripts, the researcher scrutinized the transcripts carefully in search of the meaning for each story and created interpretive comments. This process allowed the researcher to draw connections and understand the participants experience on a deeper level.

According to Riessman (2008), structural analysis and thematic analysis can be combined. Structural analysis refers to brief embedded moments in a conversation that takes poetic form. Structure can refer to genre or an overarching “storyline” (Riessman, 2008). Like thematic analysis, structural analysis is concerned with content, but attention to narrative form adds insights beyond what can be learned from referential meanings alone. Narrative structures matter in human communication (Riessman, 2008). The process of structural analysis involves slowing down the narrative account, stepping back from it, and scrutinizing how a narrator uses form and language to achieve particular effects. Labov (1982) uses clauses in developing a model to analyze structure of narrative accounts. Labov identified sequences and structural parts of the narrative that recur across stories about experiences. Labov’s clauses include abstracts (summary/point of the story), orientation (time and place), complicating action (the event sequence), evaluation (the narrator takes a step back from the action and comments on meaning and communicate emotions), resolution (outcome of the plot), and coda (ending of the story and bringing action back to the present). By combining thematic and structural analysis, the researcher was able to describe broad patterns (thematic similarities across the sample) but also variation in meaning for individuals.

3. *Holistic/Content Analysis* – Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) offer a model that will assist with the analysis and organization of narratives. The holistic approach takes into account the life story of a person as a whole, and sections of the text are interpreted in the context of other parts of the narrative. Content focuses on what happened, why it happened, who participated in the event, all from the standpoint of the storyteller (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, 1998).

In analyzing the data to understand the way African American males achieve academic success, the holistic content was the best fit. This approach allowed the researcher to determine if sections of the narrative, opening or closing, bring meaning in light of content that emerges from the rest of the narrative or in the context of the story in its entirety. This mode of analysis basically takes into consideration the entire story and focuses on its content.

Although it is important to focus on themes and structures articulated by the participant, the researcher scrutinized nonverbal communication and meanings that were less conscious (interpersonal space, body movement, posture, volume, and pitch (Fontana & Frey, 2000)).

In light of the various recommendations mentioned in the review of literature section, the researcher focused themes related to the academic success of African American males. Throughout the process the researcher was engaged with the literature, and where new themes emerged, the researcher sought after relevant research.

Finally, the researcher presented the results by using vignettes from the interviews to support concepts and themes found within and across narratives. Geertz (1973) refers to presenting narrative results as a “continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring both into view simultaneously” (p. 239). Reporting will be organized by participant and in chronological order starting with the first scheduled interview.

Methods of Trustworthiness (Validity)

In qualitative research, believability can be expected when the data are derived directly from the data source, and the researcher is familiar with the subjects’

environment and language. Every effort was made to adhere to these standards. In addition to complying with the above standards the researcher followed the measures offered by Riessman (1993) and Creswell (2003) to evaluate methodological rigor and accuracy. The following will be used to increase the validity of the study:

1. *Member checks* – Member checks occur to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific description or themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate (Creswell, 2003). In this study, transcribed interviews were provided to the participants for their review so they could determine if their responses were correct. Riessman (1993) refers to this process as correspondence.
 - a. *Follow up interviews* – Follow up interviews were scheduled for participants in the study for clarification purposes. These meetings were used to review participants’ responses and clarify any ambiguous findings.
2. *Peer debriefing or use of a “third party”*- This method provides an external check of the research process (Ely et al. 1991, Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Merriam, 1988). Using a third party during the research process reduces researcher bias and increases validity. A third party was identified and familiar with issues impacting African American males in Higher Education. The third party review the researcher’s interpretations and findings from the study to confirm the themes are consistent with those of others. Lincoln & Guba (1985) defines the third party role as a “devils advocate,” an individual who keeps the researcher honest, asks questions about meanings and interpretations, and provides the researcher with a listening ear.

3. *Researcher bias*- According to Creswell (2003), researchers must be aware of any personal bias and must clarify those biases at the onset of a study. The possible bias the researcher brings to this study are years of working in higher education and interacting with African American males as a mentor. In addition, as an African American male that attended a PWI, the researcher has his own experiences of academic success. As a result, the researcher feels personally connected to the success and failure of African American male students. The three previously mentioned strategies, member checking, follow up interviews, and third party review were utilized to reduce the influence of researcher bias and enhance the researchers confidence that the findings will reflect the perspectives of the participants rather than my own experiences.
4. *Rich thick description*- Denzin & Lincoln (2000) report the use of “thick” descriptions interrupts the process of generalization. It thereby puts a check on the researcher’s impulse to interpret according to their own presuppositions. All of the descriptions from collected data were recorded in their language, incorporating their interpretations and intentions. This process allowed readers to determine how transferable the research is to their situation. Riessman (1993) also discusses the use of coherence. Coherence shows that an interpretation is more than ad hoc and must be “thick” as possible.
5. *Persuasiveness* – Riessman (1993) indicates that persuasiveness is “greatest when theoretical claims are supported with evidence from informants’ accounts and when alternative interpretations of the data are considered. The criterion forces us to document interpretive statements for the benefit of skeptical outsiders”

(Riessman, 1993, p. 65). In order to implement this criterion for validity, various interpretations of the participants' stories when analyzing the data will be documented.

6. *Pragmatic use* – Finally, Riessman (1993) recommends pragmatic use as criteria for validity. In contrast to other validation criteria, this one is future oriented. Pragmatic use involves providing information that will make it possible for others to determine the trustworthiness of our work (Riessman, 1993). The researcher accomplished this by describing how the findings were produced, explaining the procedures used for this study, and making primary data available for other researchers (i.e. transcripts of recorded interviews).

According to Merriam (2001), reliability in qualitative research addresses one central question: are the results consistent with the collected data? In order to enhance reliability for this study, the researcher created an audit trail. An audit trail is the chain of evidence that was created and available for review. An audit trail allows outside researchers to authenticate the findings of the study by following the trail of the researcher (Merriam, 2001). The audit trail for this study included biographical information sheets, interview guides, audio taped interviews transcripts, and the coding process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, chapter 3 illustrated the procedures used in this study, the rationale for qualitative research, the utilization of narrative inquiry, the research setting, as well as issues of trustworthiness incorporated in the study. The researcher identified the actions taken to ensure that proper procedures for data collection, the process used to address

confidentiality and ethical protection of the participants, and the method for analysis.

The results from analysis are reported in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA COLLECTION & RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand how African American male students experience academic success at Colorado State University. Six Colorado State University African American male students were interviewed regarding their experiences and how they obtained academic success. These students were selected from African American students who achieved at least a 2.0 grade point average after 60 hours of course work. This dissertation was a qualitative study using narrative inquiry as its method of acquiring and analyzing data.

This chapter includes a summary of the narratives of the respondents who participated in individual interviews. The narratives in this study are provided to give the reader a glimpse of the context in which the participants experienced challenges and achievements in their efforts to attain academic success. 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).

Emerging themes were developed from the participants' pre-collegiate and collegiate experiences that directly relate to their academic success. This chapter is organized by demographics of the participants, emerging themes, narrative analysis, and a summary of the overall findings.

Demographics of Participants

In order to become more familiar with the participants, the researcher has provided a brief biographical summary regarding the participants. In order to protect the

identity and location of all the participants, pseudonyms were used. The following information derived from the biographical information sheet (Appendix E).

Participant A

Participant A was a senior majoring in Sociology. He was from Denver, Colorado and graduated from a Denver Public School with a 3.8 grade point average. The community he grew up in was ethnically diverse and consisted of families that were socioeconomically poor and middle class. He enjoyed listening to music, reading, playing sports, and was fascinated with entrepreneurship. Although he was not involved in extra-curricular activities in high school he was actively involved at Colorado State. His grade point average at Colorado State University was 2.8.

Participant B

Participant B was a senior majoring in Business Administration. He attended a high school in the Denver Public School district and graduated with a 3.2 grade point average. He attended a high school outside his living community. Participant B enjoyed reading, traveling, working out, and playing basketball. He participated in athletics throughout high school and believes he could have performed better in high school. Participant B admits that he was not the best student in high school and attributed it to not having a clear vision for life. He grew up in a military household that believed in education and commanded respect. This respect transferred into the classroom although he didn't pay much attention in class. He had a 3.0 grade point average and was involved in various student organizations.

Participant C

Participant C is a junior majoring in Health Exercise Science & Sociology. He was from Hattiesburg, Mississippi and attended a public predominately African American high school. During his senior year of high school he was impacted by hurricane Katrina and missed half of the fall semester due to the school district closing his high school. Although he missed several weeks of school he was able to apply and identify Colorado State University as the school he wanted to attend. Participant C was very active in high school participating in extra-curricular activities. He was also President of his class. His involvement continued at Colorado State University and was considered to be one of the prominent student leaders on campus. He enjoyed chess, reading, bowling and spending time with his friends. Participant C had a 2.9 grade point average at Colorado State University.

Participant D

Participant D was a senior majoring in Criminal Justice & Sociology. He was from Denver, Colorado and attended catholic schools from elementary through high school. He participated in football and enjoyed skateboarding. The community he grew up in consisted of elderly residents. Participant D experienced a lot of racial tension through high school and encountered personal struggles with his own racial identity. He enjoyed weight training, boxing, music, and spending time with his friends. His grade point average at Colorado State was 2.6.

Participant E

Participant E was a junior majoring in Political Science. He was from Aurora, Colorado and attended private schools from elementary through high school. He was

raised in two different communities in the Denver area and has been exposed to various cultures and lifestyles. He was involved in high school playing athletics, attending summer engineering camps, and an array of student organizations. He maintained a 3.5 grade point average throughout high school while being active in the community by sponsoring cultural events. Participant E enjoyed reading, writing, drawing, sports, camping, fishing, and video games. He was actively involved on campus and enjoyed assisting first year students successfully make the transition from high school. Participant E had a 3.0 grade point average.

Participant F

Participant F was a senior majoring in Psychology with Media Studies as a minor. He was from Aurora, Colorado and attended high school in the Denver Public school district. He lived in Littleton, Colorado for a part of his upbringing and was the only African American family in the neighborhood. His family moved to Aurora and lived in a community that was predominately African American. He maintained a 3.5 grade point average through high school and enjoyed writing for the school newspaper. He enjoyed reading, music, and sports. He had a 3.1 grade point average at Colorado State.

Table 4: Background Information of Participants

Participants	Type of High School	High School Grade Point Average	Year in School at CSU	Major	1 st Generation	Parents: Divorced/Together	CSU Grade Point Average
A	Public	3.8	Senior	Sociology	No	Together	2.8
B	Public	3.2	Senior	Business Administration	Yes	Divorced	3.0
C	Public	3.5	Junior	Health & Exercise Science & Sociology	Yes	Together	2.9
D	Catholic	-	Senior	Criminal Justice & Sociology	Yes	Divorced	2.6
E	Private	3.5	Junior	Political Science	Yes	Divorced	3.0
F	Public	3.5	Senior	Psychology and Media Relations	Yes	Divorced	3.1

As Table 4 indicates, the students' backgrounds were varied and included different majors, types of high schools, and the majority (four out of six) households consisted of divorced parents. Five of the six participants were first generation students. Only one student was from out of state (Participant C –Mississippi) and five resided in the Denver area. All participants were involved in various extra-curricular activities and maintained above a 3.0 grade point average throughout high school.

Emerging Themes

In the following pages the researcher identified several themes focusing on how African American males achieved academic success at Colorado State University. Factors such as pre-collegiate preparation, personal motivation, obstacles and challenges, mentors, student involvement, and the need to obtain new skills were part of the inquiry for this study.

Pre-Collegiate Experiences

Research Question #1: How did African American males high school experiences prepare them for college?

Theme I: Enrolling in Advance Placement (AP) and/or Honors Classes

For the majority of the participants enrolling in advanced placement courses or honor classes was extremely important in their preparation for college. The participants felt challenged in these courses. Participants explained how the academic rigor was not present in standard classes. Participants also felt that high school teachers personally cared about their overall success in these classes and were more motivated to assist with course material. Participant A indicated the following:

Because of the thing I was in, the technology academy, there was an expectation to excel. Really the focus of the program was to prepare kids for college was the whole purpose of starting that program...it was to cycle kids out of my high school into college. I got lucky and was chosen to be in the program and that was a blessing. If I was to be in the regular classes, I probably would not be here right now. Honestly. The teachers there were better than the other ones. I had some regular teachers of course, but most of the ones in that program (technology) were serious about helping us out and taking that extra step to see what we needed so they were the ones that wrote letters of recommendation to get me into college. They were the ones that were telling us that we needed to be thinking of college and think about these things. They told us about it but really you had to step outside your box and do it and make it happen. They just kept on mentioning it. I guess that's like positive reinforcement somewhere. Just saying it over and over that, "you guys need to go" is enough. So those teachers in that program were good.

Participant C shared a similar belief that teachers who taught higher level courses expected more from you by indicating the following:

I remember my AP Chemistry teacher always pushed me even though it's my senior year and I'm sitting in the back saying, I'm really not wanting to be here today. The teacher would say you gotta do what you gotta do. This will help you succeed at something else down the road. I think the teachers overall are pretty supportive. When they see you can do well they are more willing to help you to get to where you want to be.

Participant C continued to mention the following during the interview:

I think for me, since this is about me, was the classes that I took that challenged me to be more successful. I think a lot of students hear about you taking this AP course they are kind of like “I don’t want to do that. That’s not for me.” Then you have students taking accelerated classes and then you got people taking regular classes. You look at the dynamic of those classes nine times out of ten the people going in AP classes are probably going to college. The people in the accelerated they are probably going to college but it’s probably not going to be a good institution. They are going juco (junior college) first. Then you have these people in the regular classes, every once in a while you got one of them who is going to get it. They don’t have those people who will challenge them to do better. I know a lot people in those classes that I went to high school with. They finish high school and go learn some trade in welding, fixing air conditioners, or being a mechanic or doing something. I’m not saying they won’t be successful they are probably going to make money doing it but really challenging themselves to get out there. I went to school with some smart people like all the way around but man you have to use it. For me it was the courses that I took from AP World History to...it was the challenge for me. I’m going to go challenge myself and go do this. The cool thing about our school is that anybody can take an AP class. A lot of institutions especially surrounding you have to have a certain g.p.a. or certain things to get into A.P. class. At my school it wasn’t like that. It was A.P. you open to do it...you do it...that’s it. The opportunities were there; you just had to actually sign up for them and do them. That was the cool thing about my school...there were no guidelines in order to get into AP. There were some people that didn’t cut it and they had to get out but at least they took that challenge to get in and see if this is right for me and...oh, let me change my schedule. The school was pretty flexible towards that but for me it was the courses I took through high school that really got me ready for college.

Participant F shared the following:

I think it was kind of mutual that I would do well. I was in a lot of honors and AP classes so most of the students in those classes we kind of have that drive to do well and we are ready. We are taking that first step of taking those classes so I think we have higher goals or we just want that challenge so I think we are expected by our teachers to do more so they may give us more reading assignments or have a quicker turn around date between exams or essays and stuff like that. So, I think they were challenging but I sought out that challenge too.

Summary

The participants in the study indicated although the Advanced Placement and Honors classes resulted in extra assignments they all enjoyed the challenge the classes

demanded. The students in the study indicated they felt respected by the teacher and that the teacher had their best interest at hand. This was apparent by the positive reinforcement participants received as well as the instruction they received towards applying to colleges and being academically prepared in a university classroom.

Participants also indicated the teachers from the advanced placement and honor classes were better prepared and had more experience. The participants continued to inform the researcher that the skill level of teachers were evident in advance placement and honor classes in that the instructors delivered the material in various ways via lecture, handouts, or incorporating outside resources (guest presenters).

Theme II: Positive Interactions with High School Teachers and/or Guidance Counselors

Participants indicated becoming more invested in their education once they connected with a staff member (teacher or guidance counselor). Participants mentioned guidance counselors assisting with the overall college process and teachers writing letters of support was significant in their success.

Participant D shared the following:

They really saw the potential in me and that happened to be my Physics teacher, Dean of students, and the, Athletic Director. Since they saw the potential in me they helped out a lot. I think it was my Physics teacher that helped me and my Spanish teacher too because I really wasn't into Spanish and he was shocked that I was really into it. There was a lot of support from teachers. Since it was a small high school, there was only 400 students, teachers knew everybody personally. Just knowing me and my personality there was not any problem getting any teacher recommendations for college and I could go up to any teacher I wanted and get good references and recommendations from them.

Participant C stated the following:

I think my junior year they did a pretty good job of helping me get prepared for college. If it was trying to get students to go to a college fair or making sure students had what they needed to get to the next level. I think overall they did a

pretty good job of really trying to prepare people for that. One of the scholarships I even got to come to CSU was from my counselor. It was a two thousand scholarship for something. I got that my freshman year. She helped me do that. She saw that I did well and was like, "Hmmm, you're a good candidate." She was like fill out this sheet of paper. Okay cool...there's a scholarship. Overall they did a great job helping with the process.

Participant E included the following statements in his interview in regards to his relationship with his teachers and guidance counselor.

In high school we definitely had our guidance counselors that were really helpful...to me they were really helpful. The school actually hired someone whose specific job was to help students find scholarships, help students prepare for standardized tests to help you get into college, and help you set up appointments for colleges. The woman that ran that was extremely helpful. She got me scholarships so I can be at this institution today and just helping me narrow down my choices and helping me with career choices and stuff like that. My teachers inside the classroom, knowing them professionally as teachers and knowing them personally I just think all of them just really set up that network just for me to be successful.

Summary

Many of the participants in this study viewed the positive relationship with their teachers and guidance counselor as a factor in succeeding on their journey to college. Five out of the six participants were first generation students so the entire college and financial aid process was very confusing and frustrating for them. The participants established good rapport with the teachers and guidance counselors which led to the staff explaining in detail lengthy forms such as the FAFSA (Federal Financial Aid Form for Student Aid), registering for standardized tests, and conducting successful scholarship searches. Teachers contributed by preparing letters of recommendation as well as providing constructive feedback on their college essays. Participants attribute these high school staff members to being admitted at Colorado State University.

Theme III: Competition Amongst Peers

For the majority of participants in the study competition amongst their peers assisted the males in handling pressure and becoming an overall better student. The responses from the participants indicated they welcomed the challenge whether it was competing on class exams, excelling in an extra-curricular activity, or receiving public recognition. Participant C provided the following as an example of his competitive spirit:

Well I think for me I'm a big competitor. When you see other people around you doing good you want to do good too. That was probably one of those other reasons you wanted to do good. I hate to lose. I do. I do. I do. I don't know why this stuck out in my brain but I remember I had a Sociology class my senior year in high school and there were only ten people in this whole class and me and this young lady, Amber Toper, me and her competed in everything that we did. "I would say I bet I could beat you on this exam." You don't know how much that motivates you until you actually challenge someone like ... "I am going to challenge you on this test and I bet I am going to do better on this exam." She only beat me on one exam. For me that was it. That was it. Otherwise I got her on every exam that we took.

Participant F continued to elaborate on the significance of competition by saying:

I think academically I did pretty well in high school. I was in a lot of AP classes and Honor classes so just being out there competing I think was something that kind of created drive and competition to stay with my peers and just be able to excel...

Participant F continued to explain:

"I think just wanting to compete with everybody and have that drive to be in those Honor classes..."

Participant A shared the following example of how competition impacted his academic experience in high school.

It was just like my girlfriend at the time, she was really into school...so were her friends. They were like you need to get yourself together and do good and do all of these things. I was like, man "I'm not trying to listen to you guys" (laughter). Just being around them...they always did their work and stuff. I'd be around them at times and I'd be like, "I minds well do my homework." They were always serious about school and they all had high grade point averages and just

being around them if you watch my transition through high school I started out with a 2.0 and finished with like a 3.8.

Summary

The theme competing amongst their peers indicated the males wanted to be valued in the classroom setting. The participants did not want to be disrespected or not feel like they could not handle the advanced placement classes. One participant indicated that his competitive nature did get him in trouble academically because he wanted to stay on top with his peers and primarily focused on performing well on exams and missed the content of the class.

Participants stated that through all of this competition they benefited by seeing other African American male students and individuals they were in a relationship with excel in the classroom. Competing and interacting with other African males increased their confidence as well as their drive to strive for excellence. Participants indicated although they were competing against other African American males they were quick to offer support and “light a fire under each other” when the time was appropriate.

For the six participants in the study, they admitted and stressed the importance of surrounding themselves with good people who have positive thoughts. As participant C explained, “People who you surround yourself with make who you are.”

Research Question #2: How did African American male high school students get introduced to college?

Theme IV: Participating in a Pre-Collegiate Leadership Program Focusing on African American Issues

Participants reported being involved in a leadership program that discussed and evaluated important issues that affect the African American community at the local, state, national, and/or global level were significant. By participating in such a leadership

program that introduced its participants to a major university library, faculty, staff, currently enrolled students, and the opportunity to live in one of the residence halls made the possibility of attending college a reality.

Colorado State offers a leadership program containing the previous elements called the Black Issues Forum. All of the participants in the study were involved in the Black Issues Forum and indicated it was the main reason they enrolled in college, specifically Colorado State University. Participant A shared the following:

I think that really hit me, like I mentioned, at the Black Issues Forum. When I got to come here and live on campus and live in the dorms and be around some actual college kids. My mentors for that program, they actually took some extra time out, after the night was over and we did all of these activities for the day, they came and sat down in the room and talked to us. I thought that was cool that they actually took the time to do that and told us the real story about what college life was like. They were open to all questions and they just got me excited. I was like, "Man I can't wait (laughter). I can't wait to get to school and live like they are living right now." Just hearing that from them and being around people with the program really made me really want to go to college more than anything else. Before that I did not think college was for me. You always had your mom telling you go to college...go to college but it's like it's not realistic until you see it and experience it and then be around some of your peers because an adult talking down to you is like.....oh yeah it's just talk (laughter). They sold me on it...they really did. If it wasn't for that program I probably might have went somewhere...maybe. I don't know.

Participant B expressed similar feelings about becoming aware of college by sharing the following:

It came around the BIF(Black Issues Forum) program. We came up here...most of the students came up on a bus down in Denver and picked them up. I still was a little skeptical about this whole thing. Why am I spending my summer on a college doing research? I told my parents to drive me up and we'll see. Again, I am a shy person so I was kind standoffish the first day and try and figure this whole thing out. I don't really understand how this whole thing operates. I start to interact with a lot of students as we gathered to our groups and started doing our research and social activities and things...I learned about their stories and meeting a lot of the faculty and staff. I had a lot of fun peer mentors who were helpful. It just clicked for me....it just clicked for me. I felt comfortable. I can do this. I can do this. I am kind of an independent person so this is my first

opportunity to kind of be on my own. I said, "I can do this. I think I can do ok here. I wasn't intimidated anymore. I knew kind of what the expectations were. I said I could hang. I did not call my Mom the whole time. She was a little worried about me but I was really having a good time on my own and socializing with everyone and doing the work and learning and bonding.

Summary

Overall, the participants felt participating in a leadership program was instrumental into introducing them to college life. The program's philosophy is embedded in the notion that in order to impact the African American community participants must invest in their future and pursue higher education. All of the participants took this notion to heart and it inspired them to continue their studies at Colorado State University. The participants indicated they felt they had an advantage over other students because they already connected with faculty, staff, and enrolled students.

Participants were very motivated to enroll at Colorado State University not only because of the support and familiarity of the campus but because of the scholarship they received for participating in the program. Four of the six participants felt so strong about the impact and success of the program that they wanted to give back to the Black Issues Forum. These participants applied and were accepted as peer mentors for new incoming students the following year.

Collegiate Experiences in Achieving Academic Success

Research Question #3: How did the experiences of African American male students assist in achieving academic success at Colorado State University?

Theme V: Identify & Interact with Other Scholarly African American Males

The majority of the participants realized after their first semester that college was very exciting and challenging. One of the biggest challenges was being able to deter the

many distractions that exist for the average college student. These distractions come in the form of partying, drinking, playing video games, surfing the internet, and socializing with other students. In order to counter these distractions participants built an inner network of close friends that played the role of accountability partners. These friends would provide honest feedback regarding their personal, social, and academic life. The feedback that was provided was built on the foundation of their friendship which was to become academically successful. Excelling academically was paramount and the participants believed it was imperative to keep a tight circle of friends who would provide a reality check if they noticed one of them were slipping.

Participant A attributed his academic success to his good friends:

Yeah, I had a couple of other students, some friends, that were really good in certain subjects that would do those for me...they would take out the time to help me in Math. They did not have to do that. These were guys I barely knew coming into school. They would say, "Yeah I'll help you out" and would take the time out to work with you or whatever. They would always push you to do good things. I always found that group of people who would say that I needed to get my grades up and focus and all of this stuff which was good. It was helpful and motivates you. I had a lot of fun but if I did not have that group of guys, I would not have been as successful as I am right now. I would probably be lower than where I am right now which isn't great.

Participant B provided the rationale why it was important to surround yourself with good friends:

I have been blessed to have very good people around me in my core group of friends. We always supported one another and been able to light a fire under each other when we see we are getting off track and haven't been at school and we will say hey what are you doing man? What do you mean you get an "F" on that test? I noticed you have been spending a lot of time with these women over here...how's your school doing? Just someone you can talk to when you are struggling and give you different pointers and tips. That's really helped out a lot....people who are into being successful. Surround yourself with people who are interested in being successful has helped a lot.

Participant B continued by expressing the following:

Whatever issue I had I felt comfortable with people I can trust and people who truly cared about my success. I knew with having that in my corner there was nothing stopping me but me. From there it's just setting you for success by not making things more difficult than they need to be...surrounding yourself with positive people who want to be successful as well and making time to have a little bit of fun.

Participant E stated the following in regards to his circle of friends:

People who I felt were my best friends like being around men of positive rank, good grade point average standards, and positive in general. Yes, we had the best time together because we are not squares and study all the time. That's one thing I don't want to come off as I'm a square. We go to parties together and hang out but we meet on Sundays at 4p.m. and get things done. The night before we would go out and party and have stories to tell and Sunday it was all about business writing grant proposals and fund raising to go to conferences.

Summary

As the narratives have indicated, the participants expressed the need to have a good support group of friends. All of the participants were strategic in selecting their friends. The common denominator in the friendship was academic success. The participants assisted one another in these close knit circles by providing tutoring, mentoring, study partners, and writing grants to attend educational conferences. These groups not only served as positive encouragement for the participants but also provided a venue for the participants to see other confident African American men excel socially and academically.

Theme VI: Recognition of Academic Success

Throughout the interviews the participants identified that being recognized publicly for their academic accomplishments was extremely motivating. The Black Student Services Awards Ceremony was the major event where participants received awards for the highest grade point average in their class, maintaining a 3.0 or higher

grade point average over a period of time, and exhibiting leadership skills through their involvement in student organizations.

Participant A shared his uplifting experience with the Black Student Services Awards Ceremony by stating the following:

Last year, my junior year, was my best academic year all around. I just really focused and wanted to get my grades up for some reason...I don't know why (laughter). Just kidding. I remember I was working so hard because all of my friends at the previous year, we have an awards program, through Black Student Services where you get 3.0 awards and you get a medal and stuff. I was sitting out in the audience and didn't get anything (laughter). I didn't get any awards period (laughter). I was like man this sucks. So next year I am going to come back with a thunder. I ended up getting focused in student orgs (organizations) and helping out on campus and being really involved and stuff and bringing my academics up because I ended my freshman year with a 2.5 or something like that. It's hard to bring it up once you start out bad. It's hard to bring it up. So over the years I've been bringing it up and eventually I got that 3.0 grade point average. I was like...I better be getting something (laughter). My mom won't come to the awards ceremony unless I'm getting something. I talked to them and they were like yeah you're getting the 3.0 and we checked the grades. I was like good...I'll be there. I got my 3.0 award and it was a happy moment for me. Then I sat back down and they were calling all of these special awards. The one I got was big. It was the Vivian L. Kerr –Student of the Year Award. I was like...OH! (laughter) Oh, thanks! I didn't know what to say. So I go up and was all cheesin' (smiling) like an idiot (laughter). I didn't know how to make a speech or anything. I just took my award. My mom and dad were there as well as my sister. They were all proud of me...so it was cool. That was a good moment academically.

Participant C continued to mention the impact of the awards ceremony by saying the following:

I think one of the big things for me during my freshman year at the B.S.S. (Black Student Services) awards ceremony and they have all of these people coming on stage getting this 3.0 and you're sitting there like, "I don't have a 3.0 right now chillin' with a 2.3." You don't realize but seeing other people that look like you be successful that's it. Academic wise there are a lot of Black people on this campus doing pretty dang well for themselves. Most of them can compete with anybody else on this campus. They are at or above the regular/average g.p.a than you have some that are below. I was there at one point and I 'm not saying you can't turn it around. I think the biggest thing was realizing I wasn't getting a 3.0 medal at the BSS awards and seeing other people do well. That did it for me. I think the BSS awards were the biggest thing for me for my second year to realize

I had to get my butt in gear and get going. That would be the event for me....seeing those medals being handed out and I didn't get a gold one...I was mad (laughter).

Summary

The participants indicated being recognized publicly motivated them to succeed academically. In particular, the opportunity for African American males to see each other receive awards encouraged them to get serious about academics.

Recognizing the participants' leadership skills at the Black Student Services Awards Ceremony reinforced other African American male students in the audience regarding the importance of being involved outside the classroom and giving back to the campus community. As a result of participating in the Awards Ceremony, participants felt this event supplied a motivating charge in wanting to perform their best in the classroom.

Theme VII: Participating in Living Learning Communities

For many of the participants in the study being connected with a living learning community assisted with their academic success. Participants reported that living and taking courses together in clusters was extremely beneficial. Participants also reported that a living learning community, specifically Key Academic Community, provided opportunities to connect with faculty and develop leadership skills. Participant A shares how a living learning community influenced him:

Support systems...uhm...the first year it was KEY (Key Academic Community is a program where students take their classes through clusters). I had a mentor for Key and anytime I needed help with something they put me in touch with a tutor or something. That was a great resource and from there it was kind of reaching out and just looking for all resources from there.

Participant B expressed the following:

So I did Key Academic Community when I was a freshman which is really really critical I think in making me feel comfortable on campus and instill some confidence that I can succeed here and establish good relationships with people.....all different types of people. A lot of the people I met my freshman year in KEY are still the same people I hang out with now. So I think that was really important in laying a solid foundation for the beginning of my college career.

Participant C provided the following information regarding the Key Academic Community:

KEY and that cluster I was in taught me so much and Brian Hayes as my mentor. That experience alone has taught me a lot about myself and where I need to be at in life and focusing on what really matters to you and find out what you are passionate about and change is a good thing you can't stay the same forever. For me that experience alone in KEY probably made me who I am; in KEY they tell you to go meet your Professor, I did that but I did not care what he had to tell me or what she had to tell me. I was worried about what I was going to do next. What are we going to be doing this weekend? I always tell people there are some things you listen to; you hear them but you don't listen to them. You take them in like go meet your professors; sit in the first three rows. You hear them but you don't listen to them. Later on it's like oh, they told me that a long time ago and this actually works now and realizing those things like that. That's what KEY taught me. It gives me a great foundation that helps me now. It didn't help me the first two semesters when I was in KEY. Not at all but these last two it did. It's one of those things you learn about like taking your time, time management, and doing the small things makes a big difference. You don't have to overly do everything and don't have to over compensate. I think that experience in KEY with Dr. Vigil taught me so much just about myself, about college, and being you as a person. That whole experience was something every student needs to go through; I know they can't but man it was phenomenal. For me that would be my one experience through my last few years here that would just open up doors man.

Participant D explains how Key Academic Community impacted him:

Key Academic Community was the main organization. We were grouped with people that have the same major called clusters. Cluster 1 would be a science major and cluster 2 will be psychology which I was in. Basically you live with the people that you are in the same classes with so you have people that can help you out and do homework and study with while living in the same dorm together which is cool. Key Academic Community was the group that helped with academics and stuff.

Similarly, participant E met his core friends by sharing the following:

Being in KEY it's so diverse and in my judgment they have that community to build networks for four years and beyond. You start in the clusters and then you meet people in Key as well. Since KEY I have about four close friends that I have met thus far that were in KEY and then I have friends who are in other groups as well.

Finally, participant F provided the foundation Key Academic Community established with its participants:

Definitely, in KEY we have general guidelines of attending class and really putting in the work. A lot of them come in feeling intimidated by college but I always tell them if you put in that work the grade will show up for you.

Summary

A Living Learning Community not only provided academic support for the participants but it was a coordinated program that set the tone for academic success for the participants. These communities introduced the participants to college classrooms and outlined the academic differences between high school and college. Participants quickly learned they were not going to be able to sit in class and study the night before in order to perform their best on exams. The Learning Living Community also provided a productive community of student scholars that were serious about their studies. By enrolling in clusters participants were able to rely on one another for assistance. This assistance came easy since they lived on the same floor as their classmates.

For most of the participants the Key Academic Community was the reason they returned the following year. Several of the participants shared the same sentiment of not knowing how other students not a part of the Key Academic Community survived at Colorado State. Most of the participants shared their overall college experience and leadership skills with incoming Key Academic Community members by returning to the program as peer mentors.

Academic Success Challenges

Research Question: How did personal challenges impact the academic success of African American male students at Colorado State University?

For the participants in this study experiencing racism, not asking for help, and losing financial support were themes that emerged as obstacles and challenges in obtaining academic success.

Theme VIII: Experiences of Racism

Participants in this study expressed experiencing various forms of racism during their enrollment and how this impacted their academic success. These encounters usually were in the form of stereotypes or general assumptions about their academic ability, how they were admitted into the institution, or just interacting with other students socially. The participants attributed most of the behaviors as ignorance but indicated these behaviors became old after a while and were bothersome. Participant A shared the following:

I think the classroom was different because being a Black student on campus... all of the white students aren't necessarily going to reach out to you and try to embrace you so you have to take extra steps to be in group projects and ask to be put with certain people. You don't know anybody in the class so going to the classrooms you are like...alright...who is going to sit by me (laughter). Maybe somebody will sit by me and talk to me or sometime they will sit a couple of seats down this way or this way (demonstrating) and I would be like the only one. I'm like man...I don't smell bad or nothing (laughter). I'm fresh. I'm clean. I don't know. I thought I was nice. I think it is a known fact that they are intimidated. They don't know how to interact with you the same way you don't know how to interact with them.

Participant B shared his frustration with other students making assumptions about him as a person and discussed the following incident:

I went to a pretty diverse high school and I could get along with pretty much anybody but it was a little bit intimidating coming to a college campus being first generation and not really knowing what this whole thing is about or what to

expect. It was a little bit intimidating...uhm...I got some funny looks a lot of times from people trying to size you up. Man, we were talking about this last night with some of the students. I got asked a lot, "Are you an athlete? Do you know how to get some weed?" I said No for either of those questions. I dealt with a lot of that my first year. I just couldn't believe people would be so ignorant to ask me those questions but as I kind of went through the year you probably haven't been exposed to many Black people and it is an opportunity to enlighten you and provide a different perspective of what Black people can do. It was a little rough my freshman year and uhm...a lot of people when I was walking towards somebody they wouldn't look me in the eye. I couldn't understand why that was. It never failed for some reason when people would come towards me they would look every other place but towards me. They would look in the air, the ground, in the pond...I couldn't understand am I intimidating or do you just not like me or do they not know how to deal with the situation? That was kind of a big deal for me I remember particularly my freshman year.

Participant E provided an example of how issues of stereotypes and racism make it difficult to succeed. He explains how students made assumptions about his ability as an African American male. He shares the following:

Being an African American male to get to college and the difficulty of having the whole mind set of I don't belong here because if you feel this way that's how you will crash quickly because you think people owe you things. You come to college because you are worthy but if you question why you are here you will have those who are behind closed doors or on the plaza saying oh you are here because of affirmative action. You don't belong here because of your merit. You're here because of your skin color. That will tear someone down quickly so that's one thing that is difficult about college in general as a Black male like having the perception of not belonging here because of your merit. That's one thing I really didn't struggle with but I knew and was cognizant of it. One thing people will question you because you are Black and a Black man at that for being here not as an athlete but on academic scholarship. I have to not so much prove them wrong because I could care less what they think about but I could prove to myself that I know I could compete with the best of the best and know that I could graduate in four years like them and don't have to go to parties so I could fit in.

The following excerpt from participant A describes the frustration of frequently being in the role of educator and being exposed to ignorance from other students.

Participant A shared the following narrative:

I think I had a group project and I had to talk about issues on Affirmative Action and this guy who was in my group was stupid (laughter). He said a lot of ignorant

stuff about Affirmative Action. “It takes away a lot of opportunities for people. It only favors Black people.” I had to deal with that. I tried to work with him saying my opinion without putting his down. That was a challenge. I never had to deal with anything like that before. I had some group members that talked to him too and they were like, “Yeah he just needs to learn so this is a good project for him.” So I was like, “I guess you’re right.” It’s that challenge where some of those people have stereotypes and some just don’t understand. That’s interesting being on campus trying to deal with those projects and things like that.

Participants indicated this type of ignorance in the classroom can become exhausting and prevented them from becoming engaged in the classroom. Participant A continued to reflect on the event and expressed this was a unique challenge for him because he felt majority students did not have to play the dual role of student and educator. Unfortunately, this type of negative experience in the classroom was repeated throughout the interviews. Participant D elaborated on a horrific interaction with his professor. Participant D shares his encounter of racism by explaining the following:

When I was part of United Men of Color we used to dress up on Thursdays and wear tuxedos or whatever going to class looking professional and at that time is when the football players got in trouble for the huge check fraud and stuff like that. At that time I was lifting weights and people thought I was in football. One History teacher had the nerve to say, in my tux looking all good, I always sat in the front of the class in the front room ready to learn. She had the nerve to say, “Did you just come back from court?” I was like.....”What?” “Did you come back from court? I was like, “No.” I just felt like dressing up today. I am not a football player. There are some teachers that might be racist or whatever here. I was just like.....”Wow!” I was like shit.

This story displays Participant’s D first-hand experience of racism in the classroom. He was floored to hear from one of his instructors that he was involved in the criminal justice system. Participant D prided himself that he does not have any experience with breaking the law or being arrested. Professors and other students making assumptions about the participants in this study based on their race attributed to participants feeling the environment was not safe inside or outside the classroom.

Participants in the study indicated these incidents were not frequent but when they occurred it stung and is a reminder of how quick people make assumptions about your academic ability, involvement in campus activities, and your affiliation with the university.

Through this adversity, many of the participants indicated they flourished and became stronger. For many of the participants, they established a stronger cultural identity and created a “me against the world” mentality and wanted to prove to their classmates and professors that they belonged on campus and they could compete with the best of the students. Participant B revealed the following:

I see myself as a Black male and I learned a lot about myself and my people as I have been here in college. Through college I have been learning about this.....in high school most of the stuff they teach you about Black people is just that we were like second class citizens for the most part. For all of history we have been here we were slaves and once we were free we still didn't have any rights in the civil rights movement and now we are all in jail and can't do anything right. Coming here being exposed to different people and reading and learning I've learned so much more about the contributions of African people and African American people to the world it makes me proud to be a Black male. I'm in awe of the determination and resiliency of my people and all of the contributions they were able to make to the world. Though I have some challenges before me people have gone through greater challenges and have done great things. As one of the new leaders in my time I have a responsibility to kind of carry that legacy forward. I'm proud to be a Black man and I wear that title with great responsibility. Before I came to school I didn't really think much about it when I did hear about it we were just second class citizens.

For most of the participants, being the only African American student in a large lecture hall was very intimidating and lonely. Participants across the interviews expressed concern of having an extra burden of carrying the torch for their race. They felt undue pressure to perform well in order to prevent others from believing the participants did not deserve to be there. Participant C shared the following narrative:

Man, it's rough going to class and you are the only brother up in there. I guarantee you if you walk into a class of 380 people ten of them might be a person of color, 4 of them might be Black and by the end of the year there might be 2 of ya'll in the whole class. I don't think a lot of people realize how intimidating that is. Especially for me I'm in Sociology major and they talk about some controversial stuff. So you have that second thought in your mind saying do I want to be the angry Black man sitting in the back that always has something to say. Well, I am today. For me I came to realize if people can't come up to me and ask me why I feel this way than I don't need to explain to nobody in here. If you don't respect me enough as a human being to come to me asking, "Why do you raise your hand? For me I am going to challenge everything given to me from a Professor on down. You might have a second thought about me or you might be thinking something in your brain but if you don't have the audacity or the respect to come up to and say, "Can I ask you a question?" than you shouldn't be thinking what you are thinking. If I can come up to you and say, "Why do you feel that certain way?" People have this fear that you come and ask them a question they you going to lash out at you with something random. For me I try and set up that culture if you have that problem you can come ask me. I'm pretty nice about it. I always tell my people back at home that I got more Black coming out here with all of these White people... it's a true story man (laughter). Back at home you always saw people who look like you doing great things. The mayor where I lived was Black, the Superintendent was a Black female, and everyone was Black. Restaurants were owned by people from all different backgrounds. Somebody from India or Mexican Latino... whatever. You saw people of color especially a Black owned business strapped doing well making money living that good life that everybody wants to live and you come here and it's like.....maybe somebody around here is doing something and you don't see as often and it kind of ruins your confidence. For me coming in here and realizing those stereotypes and racism they may not think so but it does. For me and realizing that and going through this whole experience in being at CSU knowing that you are the only Black person in the class of 380 people and knowing that there are a lot of people out there that look like you and these stereotypes usually...I always tell people usually after people ask me my name they ask me what sport do I play? I don't hate them for it or dislike them but some people that's how they stereotype that every person of color around here is playing a sport. For me I'm not playing a sport I just come on my academics. I can compete just well as or better than you can. For me culturally it's been rough in patches. It's been rough but you learn how to play the game. It's something I learned in high school. You learn how to play the game but once you learn how to play the game you are in it to win it. My mother told me a long time ago...at that point I heard it but didn't listen to it. I didn't realize this until my second semester of my freshman year...she told one of my siblings, "Look you need White people in this world to do what you want to do." I didn't listen to it at all. I got here and that's what I realized. Dang, she was so right. A lot of people don't realize how many obstacles there are thrown at you but as long as you have the right people around you they will be taken down or you can just avoid them. It's been rough. It's been a great experience I

won't change it for nothing in the world. I've enjoyed it so much. It has taught me so much about myself and how raising my children to be. It's been rough and it's been different and something I haven't got used to yet but it's been something I wouldn't change for anything in the world...anything.

This narrative from participant C explained how race had a major impact on his academic experience at Colorado State University. Participant C, like other members from this study, came from communities where they interacted and had contact with students, teachers, administrators, and professionals who looked like him and were part of the same culture. These communities constructed his overall concept of the African American experience. Being able to see other African Americans, specifically African American males, enhanced his confidence in all aspects of his life. For many of the participants, race was at the core of their experience. Being the only African American male in a large lecture hall was explained by several participants as being a fly in a cup of milk. Participants in the study specified being detected when they were not present for class, easily noticed when they were not engaged in classroom discussions, and mistakenly identified as another African American male as negative encounters.

Participant E reflected on his experience interacting with other African American students in the classroom, specifically student athletes. Participant E, similar to other participants in the study, welcomed the opportunity to interact with other African American males in an academic setting. Although the two students resided in the classroom together, their experiences were completely different. Participant E reflected on his experience with African American male student athletes and mentioned the following in his narrative:

I had a lot of classroom experiences. Let's see...the one fundamental thing that happens every year in class of course is being the only Black male and Black person in class. I took African American History since 1865 my freshman in

college (spring semester). It wasn't that I was the only one, there were athletes in there as well (Black athletes). It was cool to walk in there and be with them but at the same time it is still separate. It's like a unwritten, I don't even know how to explain it, it's me and then it's them or it's us and then it's them. It's the athletes and the non-athletes. They already come to campus with that whole I'm an athlete; I have this type of entitlement, I get this and this and this, the teachers love me, I don't have to work as hard as you, I get all the girls, I'm in the paper all the time type of swagger to them which is cool but I don't have to give you respect because you are an athlete. I look at you as a Black man trying to get his degree but if you're here not trying to take advantage of your school but take advantage of your status it doesn't make sense. If you're going to be here for seven years and still be known as an athlete that's still here. Taking classes with them was interesting to see where their head was at and to see did they really deserve to be here. I would take class with them; especially that class the African American class that focuses on our history, to sit there and have them have discussions with me but don't know what they are talking about. The teacher would ask us to get into groups and talk about slavery, the Civil Rights movement, or Emmitt Till, and they are like quiet. Chirp. Chirp. I'm like, "Wow." It's like...did you at least do the reading? It's kind of crazy. It was interesting to take a class with people that really didn't know what they are talking about. I kind of questioned whether or not you are worthy to be in class. Okay, you are an athlete and you got here based on your athletic abilities but academically? That motivated me more to try and reach out to help them out but they never try to share.

Participant E's context of race was from a stance of empowering one's own people and helping one another. In his experience with other African American males it was beneficial to him to surround himself with other African American males. In these circles, the participants would aid each other the best way they could whether it was socially, academically, or professionally. Participants E, like other participants in this study, were met with a different reaction when making attempts to network or establish a relationship with African American student athletes. Participant E quickly realized he made assumptions about the athletes' academic ability. This was the same reaction he experienced from majority students when interacting with them in the classroom.

Participant E admitted to fostering stereotypical feelings towards African American student athletes. Specifically, student athletes being entitled and having a lot of support

without asking for assistance as well as admitted to school purely based on their talent and not academics. Other participants realized this was a fascinating dynamic and there were institutional dynamics that impact the academic success of African American student males.

Finally, Participant E continued to reflect about his own racial identity and how it influenced his academic success. His cultural identity contributed to his overall academic success by knowing who he was as a person and not letting other communities or environments define who he was. Participant E reflected on how important it was to remember there were not a lot of African American students on campus and this overall experience was new. For many of the participants, identifying as an African American male assisted in their academic success. For African American male students who did not know their background, these same individuals could be misinformed about their cultural heritage. Participant E explains the following:

Growing up I was never raised to see color but at the same time you are because we are socialized at a young age. I was well versed in different cultures, my dad, because we went everywhere. My dad owns a cultural center down in Denver. I've done a lot there from workshops to poetry nights to open night mic plays. It's also who am I as a man. It's also who am I as an African American man. I know who I am based on my experience but my culture helps define me but then I also define my own path of life. I don't really view things in a racial way I do it as this is me and this is my life experience and this is what I learned through life. But this is also being a Black man this is what I experienced as well so my experience could be different than yours but it is probably the same type of scenarios that have gone on. Just being Black in college it has its own force with it because it is new. There are not a lot of us here so that could make or break us. It could make you a stronger person or it could make you very aggravated and very..."The world owes me" "I want my 40 acres and a mule." It's cool if it happens. I want mine but it's not going to happen. Just knowing who I am from jump because my dad taught us "if you don't know who you are than honestly someone can come and tell you ...you should do this and that's what you do. My favorite book is *The Invisible Man*. I read that book my senior year in high school prior to coming up here. I was like "Wow." Live your life and not know what color you are and be blind and have people like interact with you based on

your race but you don't see it and you come to the realization that...Ohhhhhh now I have to go underground to understand who I am as a man...as a Black man and stuff like that. That's what I do I understand that people of all races really don't know who they are so they get among other people and try to define them. It is difficult to have an individual identity and a group identity. That group identity has a huge dynamic to make or break you. You can either go with the group and have a positive or negative experience or be that individual that still with the group and your still successful but individually you can hold your own.

Summary

These narrations indicated that issues of race at Colorado State University are personal challenges for the participants to achieve academic success. The majority of the participants derived from schools and communities that consist of people that look like them. Several of the participants discussed in the interviews of feeling alone in the classroom due to students unsure of how to interact with them or eating in the residence hall dining facility and nobody talking to them. The participants mentioned these types of experiences made them feel unwelcome on campus. Participants indicated that not only did other students have these perceptions but teachers did as well. In order to overcome this challenge participants have had group discussions at different club meetings as well as during orientation programs.

Theme IX: Not Asking for Help

The theme "not asking for help" pertains to the participants' strong desire to complete their academic program on their own. For many of the participants asking for assistance appeared as a sign of weakness. These individuals pride themselves in figuring out obstacles and being independent. Asking for help for the participants appeared to be a sign that you did not belong. Some of the participants also feared perpetuating all of the stereotypes of not possessing the required intellect at the college level by asking for help. Participant B disclosed the following:

Growing up I was a very shy person. I always have been introverted on top of being shy. I think sometimes earlier in my career it inhibited a little bit of my success. Even though I did very well, I probably could have done even better, because I was shy and a little unsure of myself and a very prideful person. It was kind of hard for me to ask for help when I need it. I was being told to stand strong and try to stand on your own two feet. Be a “can do” person. You can’t do everything on your own. Sometimes you need some help...sometimes getting help will get the answer a lot quicker, even though you can’t do it on your own, it may take you ten hours to get it on your own but if you talk to somebody and they could have helped you to get it in one hour. I think that inhibited a little bit of my success as well just not being able to speak up and ask for help when you need it. I thought you had to know everything and if you didn’t you were kind of a dummy. Really the smart people are the ones that know what they do not know.

Participant E stated the following regarding African American men not asking for help and the negative competition amongst African American males:

Even though you are a Black man and there are other Black men on campus there experience is not like mine. It’s that whole competition type of aspect which there is this unwritten tension amongst Black men to hang out with each other or don’t know each other because there is that click factor like you’re comfortable with your surroundings so if you’re around two or three dudes for two years and then there are freshman coming in it’s like I’m not going to talk to them because I’m better than them. It’s like that I walk alone mentality that whole ego that Black men suffer from and we are stubborn and never ask for help. That’s one thing I struggle with sometimes knowing that I need help but than trying to look like I am weak and vulnerable and ask for help makes me look less than a man. I learned that everyone needs help and that I can’t do it by myself. That’s one thing I think that Black people, especially Black men, especially struggle with thinking that they don’t belong, feeling that they are alone, and being stubborn and egotistical.

Summary

Personal challenges are part of the academic experience for all college students. For the participants in the study the pressure of wanting to succeed academically, not having family members understand the pressures of taking final exams, and trying to balance their finances made their college experience difficult. “Asking for help” for some of the participants meant not being able to compete. Unfortunately, some of the

participants fell into this trap and struggled with their academics. They soon learned that in order to succeed it is okay to ask for assistance.

Theme X: Losing Financial Support

The participants in the study prior to enrolling at Colorado State University had concerns about how to finance their education. Many of them applied for scholarships and were rewarded awards due to their academic performance and extra curricular activities in high school. In order to make college a possibility, the participants needed to maintain their scholarships through their college career. For those participants that lost their scholarship, it placed an undue pressure on them which resulted in lack of focus on their academics.

Participant A expressed the impact of losing one of his scholarships. He reported the following:

In one semester I didn't do so well and I lost one of my scholarships for the semester. Ah, man! I never knew how serious it was because I was used to having that money all along and then this scholarship is gone and now I have this huge financial issue...it's like you need to come up with this amount of money to pay for the rent. At the same time we are trying to take a special fun trip and all of this other stuff. I was like ah gosh (laughter). So I had to come up with all kinds of schemes to get some money to pay for the rest of the semester. It was just a real burden on me. It just wore on me. It kind of took away from my academics again. I had to try and figure out how to get this money and ended up having to take a loan...another small loan in order to just pay for some of the other expenses and a couple of bills and stuff. I was like Ah...alright. So then I finished out this last semester strong so I would get the scholarship back (laughter). I called them up on the phone and was like hey guys...I kind of need that money for one semester...I got my grades back up. They put me on probation because I did not do good, every semester you have to have at least a 2.5 and I had a 2.3 because I failed a class, and it put me in a bad spot. I did not tell my Mom I lost my scholarship either so she really did not know what was going on so I didn't have any help from my parents either so I was trying to work this whole thing out myself. I was like...urgh. But I got through it and now I have the scholarship back and it is going to take a huge burden off of me. So now I am like...whew. Financially that is so crucial. If you can get your school paid for and have enough money to live on...than your fine. School will be easy. But

when you have all of these other things...bills piling up and you don't have a job...whew...it will tear you apart.

Later in the interview participant A continued on how losing his scholarship impacted him by saying:

I think it (losing the scholarship) pushed me to do better. Because I felt bad that I did so bad academically. I don't know what happened. I guess because it was senior year and I was coasting a little bit and not really focused. It was like...man that was a waste of my time. I could have been focusing better in school and it pushed me to do a lot better because I did not want to have to deal with that money thing again. So, that was huge.

Additionally, participant E stated:

I'm a first generation scholar so I get that every year as well as the BIF scholarship and then the Charter fund scholarship but with that whole thing it was 2,000 dollars a year. The only thing I have to do with that one is keep in contact with them. I had to send them an e-mail and let them know how I am doing academically and my G.P.A. and class schedule. I lost it at the end of my junior year, they took it away. I was going to be out of school tuition money because I don't have this scholarship. It was crazy because they said I didn't keep in contact with them. I was like are you serious? I send you an e-mail every semester and I can track you. They were like no you don't no you don't. So I was like are you really serious? That was one financial hardship that I had because that was my book money. I had to work harder over the summer."

Summary

The responses of the participants indicate how much they relied on their scholarships. For many of them losing their scholarship presented a personal challenge due to the amount of unwanted stress. All of the participants did not have extra resources to cover them so they either had to pick up an extra job which took away from study time or secured a loan. The participants in this study lost their scholarship due to not meeting additional requirements from the sponsoring organization. These requirements included attending specific events, keeping in contact via electronic communication, or submitting renewal forms during the academic year. The participants did not make excuses but

attributed not remembering or following through with the requirement to being focused on their academics.

Research Question #5: How did campus involvement assist in the academic success of African American male students at Colorado State University?

Theme XI: Student Involvement

The participants in the study explained how academics and student activities go together and it is all part of the experience of being a Colorado State student. The participants also infer that their involvement with various organizations has transferred in the classroom and assisted with their academic success. Participant A shares the following about being involved in student activities:

We started up an organization and we took a trip freshman year out to Kansas with a group of guys. It was an Am I My Brother's Keeper Conference. That was an awakening experience for us and we needed something like this on our campus to try and unify all of the guys and have some type of brotherhood or something and do some positive things on campus because we wanted to be represented well and seen well by the eyes of the community. We formed that group in the spring. So just being involved with that whole process, all of the time management, leadership skills, and forming a group and all of those kind of things really academically pushes you to be a better public speaker. You have more organization with your time and things like that. I was also involved heavily with BSA (Black Student Alliance) in the past. I was public relations, doing flyers, for them and doing marketing for programs and stuff like that. It really helps you get out of your shell. I'd be able to meet other people and it all transitions into the classroom too when you have to manage projects for groups and have a time table for getting things done. You have to balance. Once you have more things to balance in life I think you do a better job at focusing with using your time well to do things.

Participant B mentions how he and other participants formed an organization to meet their needs:

Uhm...than a few guys realized there was no outlets for men of color to express themselves and talk about issues that pertain to them. We decided to start our own organization. We started out by just going to BSS and just talk, talk about guy things, things that we were going through and that was our time to just vent about some of these crazy experiences we were dealing with some of these

students. From that we would talk and talk and we said we should do something about all of these things. We should do that by starting an organization. We decided that officially my sophomore year, really just kind of building that organization was something important to me and I was really driven and motivated to do. Again, I needed a new challenge and something to occupy my time so I gravitated towards doing that. I was Vice President my sophomore year and President my junior year which was officially the second year of the organization.

Participant B continued to share the positive impact of being involved on campus:

I am around my people, comfortable, but there is more to me than just being Black. I started looking for other experiences outside of the Black community to help enhance my leadership development and just to meet some new people and learn some new things. I applied to be a Presidential Ambassador and I did that my junior year and last year. For the last couple of years I really have been involved in the new organization and just being a Presidential Ambassador. Presidential Ambassador was really a good experience for me because I got to interact with high level people for the first time in my life. I never really...I had some misconceptions about people who got to really high positions in life like they were superior or I don't know...they knew something incredible that I didn't know. So, being able to interact with these people and learning about different stories and just watch them. A lot of times I wouldn't say anything, I would just watch how they would carry themselves. It really opened my eyes to the fact that they are no different than me. They just made some good choices and are good leaders and gave me the confidence to know that nobody is any better than me or anybody is any worse than me. I don't know how to put that...I am not any better or nobody's any better than me. That was really a good experience. It just let me know that it is possible to get to wherever you want to get to and not have to be the smartest person in the world or come from the wealthiest background. It's a matter of being able to relate and interact with other people and be able to take care of people and deliver results. That was a really, really, really good experience for me.

Similarly, participant C explained how academics and student involvement are interchangeable.

Involvement and academics go hand and hand and they do. For me I took that to heart. You work so hard in class you really need an outlet to do something else. Programming is something I love to do because it helps me focus.

Participant E explained:

The previous spring semester before I got here which was spring '05 they started a new student organization. Basically it's a student organization that consists of

building leaders and doing culturally inclusive programs through our experiences at CSU as African American men. What we do is bring positive programs to CSU to show people about African Americans in a positive light and try to dispel the stereotype of us being athletes and rappers. It's also to build a core network within ourselves to have a relationship outside of class because we are not all athletes and that's a whole different thing.

Participant E continued to elaborate on how his involvement with campus organizations assisted him academically.

I pledged my fraternity my sophomore year spring semester and that was a rough experience starting out but got through it and crossed March 17, 2007. That was cool because our chapter is state wide so it is hard because we had to commute to different campuses and different houses just to get it started. That was a huge step in the right direction for me and just going through that and learning my personality more and who I am as a person as a man. I started joining more organizations...I also was in another organization my freshman year, I forgot about that. It has been here since 1976...and had fun networking with people who were in Key and upperclassmen. I was the historian of the organization my sophomore year. I was the historian of my chapter my sophomore year. Junior year I became the president of the National Pan-Hellenic Council up here at CSU which is the governing body of all the historically Black Greek Letter Organizations. We had six of the nine back then now we have five of the nine...so that was a pretty good experience. I was the Vice President of UMC and historian of my chapter again. All of this helps me with my academics based on the whole discipline and time management. One thing I strive to do is not to put things because it looks good on my resume but because I found a group or organization that I love. Those are the things I am truly passionate about so succeeding well to be on those exec boards' means I have to do well academically. So to be on the exec board you had to have a 2.5. That kind of motivated me to strive academically not just to be on those exec boards but just for my college career in general. Those student organizations don't make me graduate but being in a class makes me graduate because without the class credit you can't graduate because you have to retake the class. Through my experience of helping people out and being in programs on campus, I've programmed over 30, 40, maybe 50 programs within almost four years. Getting involved is not so much just getting personal satisfaction of like putting it on my resume but it is because I am trying to leave a positive mark up here at CSU because I'm the first one in my family to go to college. Here's my mark that I'm going to set to make my own history. When my kids go to college they could have my dad did this and that so I can set myself up so my children can look up to me and start their own college and career path off.

Finally, participant F shared how extra-curricular activities contributed to his academic success.

I think I have been involved in campus activities and how they ground me academically is they give me that balance. I know when I first got here that freshman year I was always in the library and really in the books. I do think that is important but at the same time I didn't have that balance that doing something proactive in the organization and being able to network with other people and stuff like that. For my involvement, I have been involved in many student organizations. I've done a lot of things and most of them deal with diversity and social justice. It's something I believe in and have a passion for.

Summary

Many of the participants in this study viewed their involvement in extra-curricular activities as a way to give back to the university. The participants became aware of the importance not only to excel in the classroom but outside as well. These experiences enhanced their overall experience as well as built their confidence to compete in the classroom.

Three of the participants were instrumental in starting a new organization on Colorado State Universities' campus. This group's main focus was to provide a safe place where African American men could share their issues and support one another. Participants also expressed they were able to create balance between their academic and social life by being involved in student organizations.

Essential Skills for Success

Research Question #6: How did African American male students at Colorado State University obtain new skills in order to be academically successful?

Theme XII: Enhancing Skill Development

Participants in the study reported the need to enhance their personal skill set as being paramount to their academic success. Enhancing the participants skill set refers to forming study groups, learning time management, instilling discipline, creating balance, and strengthening reading and studying.

The participants' responses were clear in portraying a sense that the enhanced skill development included getting out of their comfort zone and relying on other African American males, commonly upperclassmen, to fill this void.

Sub Theme I: Forming Study Groups

For many of the participants in this study forming study groups was the key to their academic success. By forming study groups participants were able to connect with other students and became aware of different learning strategies such as note taking, organization of course material, and become aware of different interpretations of course content. These groups were advantageous for the participants because they were able to learn test taking tips and other resources on campus they were not familiar with (i.e. tutoring labs and a network of students that previously enrolled in the class). Participant E expressed his appreciation for being a part of study groups:

In Fort Collins especially it's not a lot of people who are here to help you academically but they are here to like party with you. That's funny because every time you go out to a party it's always the same people but when it comes down to studying in the library the same people are not there. So it's like who do I know that will strive academically as well as have fun at the same time. There are like three or four good people that I like study with all of the time. Study groups...that are one thing that I used all of the time to pick the brains of other people.

Participant B also emphasized the importance of study groups.

For the most part I had to work a lot with students outside of my circle in the business school for a lot of projects we have. For the most part when it comes to studying for tests and things I usually do that on my own. But a lot of habits that I picked up, I learned from watching other students. Like little simple things that you just may not even know that sometimes a professor may have old tests on file that you can go look at and help you and try and figure out what the questions might be or what types of questions the professor has as opposed to when a lot of us get here we have no clue or we're struggling we don't know where the professor is getting this from and it's right here (laughter). Some of my white counter parts they knew this all along...in their fraternity house they have all of these old tests. They are like...it was pretty simple I had all the old tests. I'm like..."Ah man, dang. I wish I would have known something like that." It's just all of the little things like that and from watching my peers have helped me reach my success.

Similarly participant F added:

Most of my Science classes I really struggled, and just not being afraid to use the tutoring services, not being afraid to do study groups, to get extra help because there are so many resources on campus that you really shouldn't be struggling in class if you seek out those resources. I think being able to ask for help is a big thing too that I think led to my academic success.

Summary

For most of the participants in the study forming study groups was the key that opened the door for other resources. The participants stressed the importance of not only connecting with other African American males but networking with White students. Although a few of the participants encountered negative experiences with study groups, such as other students making assumptions about their academic ability, the participants welcomed the challenge and their competitive nature took over and battled forms of racism and stereotypes. Participant A & B share the following experiences:

I think I had a group project and I had to talk about issues on Affirmative Action and this guy who was in my group was stupid (laughter). He said a lot of ignorant stuff about Affirmative Action. "It takes away a lot of opportunities for people. It only favors Black people." I had to deal with that. I tried to work with him saying my opinion without putting his down. That was a challenge. I never had to deal with anything like that before. I had some group members that talked to him too and they were like, "Yeah he just needs to learn so this is a good project

for him.” So I was like, “I guess you’re right.” It’s that challenge where some of those people have stereotypes and some just don’t understand. (Participant A)

Uhm...in the business school we have a lot of group projects so you are forced to work with people outside your circle. So that was an interesting experience for me dealing with the...working with other people to accomplish a task but on top of that people who sometimes have misconceptions about you. Not only do I have to deal with your misconceptions but then I have to work with you just...bottom line to get the task done. It adds an interesting dynamic to the way I have to approach some group situations but it’s fun...it’s good practice for what happens in the real world. (Participant B)

Sub Theme II: Reading and Studying

For most of the participants in this study, reading and studying were key skills they had to reevaluate and improve. The majority of the participants were perplexed at the amount of reading, as well as various techniques other students used in order to retain the material from their classes. Some of the participants made the error of using the same methods that created academic success for them in high school and quickly realized they needed a new approach. The participants admitted to always having a passion for reading but were adamant that reading for their academic classes was very different.

Participants also revealed the necessity to become familiar and learn their personal learning style. Whether the student processed information through lectures, class discussions, power point slides, or handouts, being aware of their learning style were paramount. During high school none of the participants were familiar with their learning style but became more acquainted with it when they enrolled on campus.

Participant F shared which skills he needed to be successful:

I talked earlier about not liking tests so I had to gain the skill of how to take a test or how to adapt to the test in order to pass the class. Whether that would be asking the teacher what they were looking for before the exam, really paying attention to the lectures and the notes, and just putting in the extra work to know what is required of me so making sure I know the requirements of the class I am in is one of the skills I had to learn. I’ve been pretty good with time management

and then also finding the way I learn too because I had to go through being in classes where the teacher is talking and people can answer questions while the teacher spoken, I'm not processing what the teacher said. So figuring out how I best can learn the information. Am I going to learn it during that lecture or does it take me going home and looking at it on my own and drawing a picture with this. Just figuring how I learn different and being okay with learning that way.

Participant A reveals the following:

OK...I think it makes it challenging one thing when you are not used to reading and keeping at your own pace and not trying to follow the class. They give you a syllabus with a reading schedule and you're like...whatever I'll get to that whenever. If you do not have anybody pushing you...it's all on you to do the course. That was a challenge...just trying to get into the habit of reading the book and staying up with what is going on in the class because sometimes I come to class and they (instructors) would be like...alright...what are we talking about and discussing in chapter 5 or whatever. I don't know. (laughter) I don't know. Another challenge of course is the testing. I am not good at standardized testing and most of these tests are like multiple choice and bubble sheets. I am better at like writing essays and things like that. OF course, still with that it was different you know I still had a struggle with which one of these four options sounds the best...and this one sounds just as good a this one...and the teacher sometimes make it extra difficult and they put the same line all the way through and it is like a different word on each page. I was like, "Man, I don't like this." (laughter) Dealing with those tests were challenging and with Math. Math was an issue for me...doing those...what do you call them..."Math mods" (Individual self paced math exams). The early ones...I was in there before they went electronic, because I had to take a couple of classes, but doing those were hard. I did the tests. I like did the tests every day. I did like three or four tests, the same test, every day...every day. Eventually I wasn't learning it; I just knew the answer to the test because they give you the answers afterwards. After you take the same test over and over you see the answers over and over you see the same answers and that I how I ended up passing Math. I tried to get help with the tutors there and they were cool but they knew Math and they did the Math thing, I just didn't understand it. It felt good when they said it but then when I got back to the test. OK, what did they do? But then they went electronic and that helped out a lot. You had the online training and stuff like that, I liked that...so that was good the last one. Math was a hard issue. Calculus...I had that...I struggled. Stats...that was a struggle...failed that and had to take that over. You know....things like that.

Participant A continues to share the importance of learning how to read and study for college:

Other academic skills...probably reading and studying. I didn't have to do that much in high school...that was a hard task you have to learn the hard way and sometimes you have to fall first (laughter) and fail a test...and then you start to get it and advice from other people that have studied or you go to one of those quick study group things where you have a guy present to you about how you should study and all this stuff. Yeah...that's it.

Participant C discusses the importance of knowing your learning style and learning how to study:

Going to class and learning how to study and my learning style is totally different from the person sitting right next to me. I always tell people me and my roommate took this class Current World Problems class. The only thing she did was she showed up there the whole time and did not put up no notes or overheads and just read off a sheet of paper. Blah blah blah blah blah. I'm sitting up there chillin' because I could hear her and write. My roommate on the other hand was over there struggling and for me we learn two different ways. If I see something visual on the overhead it's money in the bank. I have nothing to worry about because I could see it. For me learning how to study and learning this experience is about me and no one is going to make me do nothing I don't want to do...that helped me to be successful. Seeing other people around me being successful was a motivation tool. For me the skills of learning how to study and knowing what to do like going to talk to the professor, sitting in the first two rows, and doing this and doing that those make a difference. Seeing people around you that skill being observant like, "What is that person doing?" Asking a question, "How do you study for this class?" or "What did you think about that test?" Doing those simple things like asking a person how they study might give you a hint of what you might need to do.

Participant E recalls specific skills needed in making the transition to college:

It's like playing soccer and then switching to basketball. The first step is to learn the rules and regulations of the sport and then you have to train and condition differently and then you have to practice the sport and then the games. It's just like high school; high school is structured and you have your parents, teachers, advisors, your coaches, or whatever those are on your back. You have to wake up and catch a bus and go to classes that are seven hours of the day and then you have sports, go home and eat dinner, do homework, and do everything all over again. But in college it is a whole new ball game. Time management.....and you are known as an adult now and you has all of these choices to make. You can either go to class, not go to class, wake up or not wake up, study or not study, party or not party, pay your bills or not pay your bills. You have a lot of choices and the huge trenches and that is one thing I had to face not that I am alone but I have more choices in whether I could do whatever I want. My mom didn't have to wake me up for my 8am class. If I missed class teachers wouldn't be on my

back. The teachers didn't really care. If I miss class I fail and if I go to class and take notes than I will succeed. Its small things like that step by step you learn to play the game and after a while you play well or you go home.

Summary

The theme "reading and studying" refers to the necessary skills participants in this study disclosed were important to obtain academic success. The participants indicated they underestimated the significance of reading and preparing for class as well as studying for exams.

In many cases, becoming familiar with their learning style was paramount in achieving academic success. Through the overall transition to Colorado State University participants expressed the need to become aware and maximize on their learning style. In cases where the classroom was not conducive of a participants' learning style they indicated the need to advocate for themselves and connect with the instructor about their style or rely on their study group for assistance.

Sub-Theme III: Learning Time Management Skills, Discipline, and Overall Balance

Participants asserted that their involvement in extra-curricular activities were crucial in learning how to manage their time, incorporate discipline, and maintain balance. Participant A reveals the following:

We formed a new group in the spring. So just being involved with that whole process, all of the time management, leadership skills, and forming a group and all of those kind of things really academically pushes you to be a better public speaker. You have more organization with your time and things like that. I was also involved heavily with BSA (Black Student Alliance) in the past. I was public relations, doing flyers, for them and doing marketing for programs and stuff like that. It really helps you get out of your shell. I'd be able to meet other people and it all transitions into the classroom too when you have to manage projects for groups and have a time table for getting things done. You have to balance. Once you have more things to balance in life I think you do a better job at focusing with using your time well to do things. Because freshman...early in when you first come in you're just hanging out (laughter). You don't have nothing to do for the

most part and you're like...I'll get to the homework whenever. You're just hangin' out with your friends going to parties and stuff and it hits you like...ah man...I got this homework to do. But once you have things to balance than you start putting that homework in there and then you will start to see your G.P.A. increase and come up.

Participant B continued by sharing the following:

Activities definitely enhanced my...uhm...academic success but more so my personal development. I had never really been involved in organizations or things at the high school level besides basketball. I knew early on that I was not going to the NBA so when I came here, I stopped playing basketball after high school, I knew I needed something to do with my time. Before that most of my time was working out for basketball. Since I wasn't doing basketball I needed something to do with my time, I needed a new challenge that's part of the reason why I gravitated towards student organizations and try and figure this whole thing out called leadership.

Participant E discusses his school involvement by saying the following:

I was the Vice President of UMC and historian of my chapter again. All of this helps me with my academics based on the whole discipline and time management. One thing I strive to do is not to put things because it looks good on my resume but because I found a group or organization that I love (BSA, UMC, and Alpha. Those are the things I am truly passionate about so succeeding well to be on those exec boards' means I have to do well academically. So to be on the exec board you had to have a 2.5. That kind of motivated me to strive academically not just to be on those exec boards but just for my college career in general. Those student organizations don't make me graduate but being in a class makes me graduate because without the class credit you can't graduate because you have to retake the class. Through my experience of helping people out and being in programs on campus, I've programmed over 30, 40, maybe 50 programs within almost four years. Getting involved is not so much just getting personal satisfaction of like putting it on my resume but it is because I am trying to leave a positive mark up here at CSU because I'm the first one in my family to go to college. Here's my mark that I m going to set to make my own history. When my kids go to college they could have my dad did this and that so I can set myself up so my children can look up to me and start their own college and career path off.

Finally, participant F added the following:

I think I have been involved in campus activities and how they ground me academically is they give me that balance. I think I have been involved in campus activities and I think it gives I know when I first got here that freshman year I was always in the library and really in the books. I do think that is important but at the

same time I didn't have that balance that doing something proactive in the organization and being able to network with other people and stuff like that.

Participant F also shared the following on how time management assisted him academically:

Part of it was time management keeping up with the deadlines and making sure you are turning everything in and being aware of when you have an exam and stuff like that. Also it's putting in the effort to make sure you get things done definitely you can't cram in college it is not useful.

Summary

On the whole, the African American male students in this study reaped many benefits from their involvement in clubs and organizations outside of the classroom. The participants developed personally as well as academically. They also were able to learn professional skills from holding officer positions like facilitating business meetings, public speaking, and preparing budgets. Some of the participants mentioned it was really good to be involved in multicultural organizations or clubs that were sponsored by the Office of Black Student Services. These organizations assisted with countering an environment on Colorado State University's campus that might be interpreted as unwelcoming and unfriendly. The multicultural clubs and organizations assist with cultural identity development as well as a forum to create social change on campus. Although the participants were active in multicultural organizations they were adamant that it was important to branch out to other organizations such as the Associated Students of Colorado State University or the Presidents Leadership Program in order to enhance networking and have a voice, the African American male voice, at the table of the majority population.

Theme XIII – Communicating and Forming Relationships with Faculty

For all of the participants in this study, learning how to communicate and form relationships with professors played an essential role in achieving academic success. Communicating with professors meant connecting with them during office hours, staying after class for a few minutes, or corresponding with them informally electronically via e-mail or social networking sites.

It was apparent through the participants' responses the relationship between the participant and the faculty member provided a catalyst for them to be more engaged in the classroom. Participants were inclined to work harder in these classes because of the personal relationship that was created. Participant D portrayed his experience in forming a relationship with his professor by saying:

Because of my experience with Eric Ishiwata and I started to get into...the higher you get up there the smaller the classes are...I started to talk more and more with my teachers one on one. I started asking more and more questions and stuff like that. Like, "Help me understand how...Can I do a couple of practice problems?" I started getting more and more in touch. Everyday I would e-mail teachers three times the semester just about stuff. Like, "I didn't understand this can I talk contact you during your office hours. Can we talk about this? We would used to stay for about an hour or two in their office talking about this and that. That usually helps out a lot in the smaller classes and I happened to develop a friendship in the Sociology.

Participant D continued to express the following:

It was the social factor that definitely helped me out a lot in so many ways. I can't talk about them because there are so many and things I probably didn't realize that it really helped me out through it all like talking to teachers and stuff like that was amazing and actually getting friendships from teachers was outstanding. Yeah, you have to study and all that stuff but because of the relationship that I developed with my teacher it makes the subject fun and makes you want to study and you also want to show them that that you are passionate about what they are teaching and that you really want to learn. That is what I was trying to do. You know what you are an awesome teacher and you make this subject so much more interesting than it is that I enjoy studying, reading, and being prepared for these tests. I am going to like show you that I am committed

and that you are doing a good job helping me out and you are doing a good job teaching. Basically all the staff contributed to my academic success and helped me study more and got me interested in the books. Not just coming home from class and just reading. I can't do that. Not me I need more insight...I need more. If I'm involved in this key concept I will never develop by myself. Some teachers will make it cool. I was like wow...I don't want to forget that class. That makes me want to do notes by myself. When it comes to test time I got this.

Similarly, participant B expressed how building a relationship with the professor assisted him by saying:

It was not in my best interest, I thought, to really spend my time, so much my time, reading a textbook when a lot of the stuff I am really going to need to be successful is not going to learn it there. I am going to just learn some facts and regurgitate these facts for this test so I really just stopped reading the textbooks and really focused on going to class, trying be engaged in class, going to talk with my Professors after class and trying to build those relationships with them and then really talk about the material one on one with the Professor. That kind of gave me a better concept or understanding of the concepts in the class and how they apply to the real world as opposed to just remembering for facts sake.

The following narrative from participant C summarizes the advantage of communicating with his professor. He reflected on his own experience and shared the following:

During my sophomore year I went and met all of my professors two weeks before classes started. You go in there and ask three simple questions, "What should I expect from your class, What do I need to read, and How do I get an A? That's three questions...that's all you need to ask and that's all you need to know about the class. At that point they may tell you some things. I found out in my Biology class I went to talk to my professor and she said I'm not going to tell class but I'm going to give four tests but I am only going to count three of them. I was probably the only person in the class that knew that the whole semester and I'm sitting there chillin'. She didn't tell anybody until the end of it when everybody did their last test. For me I was chillin' because I had three in and I was good to go and didn't have to worry about it the rest of the semester and I could concentrate on other things that I need to concentrate on. For me it was doing those small things, going to meet the professor, sitting in the first row, going to class.

Summary

Overall, the participants in the study revealed that the ability to communicate and create a relationship with their professor led to their academic success. Professors were seen as instrumental resources for the participants to connect with. Participants learned quickly they did not have to enjoy the subject matter at hand but rather be engaged and show they cared about the class and their own overall academic success. Once professors witnessed this type of behavior participants own fears were eliminated and their motivation increased.

Participants also expressed the benefits of forming relationships with mentors from academic colleges. For all of the participants in the study, they did not identify or have a mentor during their high school years. All of the participants had a mentor at Colorado State University. These mentors contributed to their academic success by instilling confidence in their abilities, connecting participants with resources such as tutoring, and making the participants' battle feelings of loneliness and homesickness. Mentors also provided feedback on personal decision making, studying, and note taking skills. Participants ultimately identified mentors as individuals that pushed them academically, provided vision to obtain academic goals, assisted with maintaining balance, offered advice on career choices, and stressed the importance of fostering relationships through their college experience.

How do African American males achieve academic success at Colorado State University?

Table 5: Cross-case Analysis Display

	Enroll in AP/Honor classes in High School	Competition Amongst Peers	Pre-Collegiate Leadership Programs Focusing on African American Issues	Identify & Interact with Other Scholarly African American Males	Enhancing Skill Development	Communicate and form relationships with Professors
Participant A	"If I was to be in the regular classes, I probably would not be here right now."	"They were always serious about school and they all had high grade point averages and just being around them if you watch my transition through high school I started out with a 2.0 and finished with like a 3.8.	"I thought that was cool that they actually took the time to do that and told us the real story about what college life was like. They were open to all questions and they just got me excited."	"I always found that group of people who would say that I needed to get my grades up."	"I think it makes it challenging when you are not used to reading and keeping at your own pace and not trying to follow the class."	"The teachers are willing to meet with you during their office hours and just go over stuff and get you on pace."
Participant B	"Those were a little more challenging and the expectations were higher."	"Surrounding yourself with people who are interested in being successful has helped a lot."	"I learned about their stories and meeting a lot of the faculty and staff. I had a lot of fun peer mentors who were helpful. It just clicked for me."	"Surrounding yourself with people who are interested in being successful has helped a lot."	"Sometimes getting help will get the answer a lot quicker, even though you can do it on your own."	"going to talk with my Professors after class and trying to build those relationships"
Participant C	"I remember my AP Chemistry teacher always pushed me."	"I think just wanting to compete with everybody and have that drive to be in those Honor classes..."	"The program really made me really want to go to college more than anything else."	"Any situation or problem I had they were there right behind me."	"For me learning how to study and learning this experience is about me."	"During my sophomore year I went and met all of my professors two weeks before classes started."

	Enroll in AP/Honor classes in High School	Competition Amongst Peers	Pre-Collegiate Leadership Programs Focusing on African American Issues	Identify & Interact with Other Scholarly African American Males	Enhancing Skill Development	Communicate and form relationships with Professors
Participant D	"Since they saw the potential in me they helped out a lot."	"Some are more confident than others which is awesome about succeeding. Those are the types of people I need to be around."	"They (leadership program) sold me on it (college)... they really did."	"Some are more confident than others which is awesome about succeeding. Those are the types of people need to be around."	"You have to read the material because professors will randomly call people."	"I started to talk more and more with my teachers one on one."
Participant E	"There was no split between honor classes and regular classes. All of the classes a honor classes."	"Overall it was a time for us to compete with different schools."	"I had a lot of fun peer mentors who were helpful."	"People who I felt were my best friends like being around men of positive rank, good grade point average standards, and positive in general."	"Every week you should take your notes from class and read it and rewrite it and know the information."	"I would talk to the teacher and ask them what I should study for so all the questions I didn't get right were the things I didn't study for."
Participant F	"I think they (AP classes) were challenging but I sought out that challenge too."	"I was in a lot of AP classes and Honor classes so just being out there competing I think was something that kind of created drive and competition to stay with my peers and just be able to excel..."	"I can do this. I think I can do ok here. I wasn't intimidated anymore (after attending the leadership program)."	"I just think having that support is a big thing and it keeps me being a Colorado State student."	"I had to gain the skills in order to adapt."	"Just building that relationship from her (teacher) when I first got here and seeing how I have grown from now I really enjoyed that."

The procedure used to develop themes from the data consisted of the researcher reviewing and rereading the transcripts repeatedly. As a result, the researcher clustered themes into major themes. This intense review of the transcripts was performed for each participant (within-case analysis). All of the participants themes were compared and contrasted (cross analysis). This allowed the experiences of the participants emerge into meaningful themes.

Summary of Themes

This chapter presented thirteen themes that emerged from the data. These themes derived from both pre-collegiate and collegiate experiences of the participants. Although chapter four identified thirteen themes, there were six major themes answering the overarching research question – How do African American males at Colorado State University achieve academic success? These six themes derived from a second level of analysis. After reading the transcripts repeatedly, these major themes were interwoven throughout the participants' pre-collegiate and collegiate experiences. Participants would move back and forth in their narratives referring to these major themes. After comparing the themes, the six major themes displayed a pattern of academic success for the participants. Riessman (2008) explains how analysis interprets and compares biographies as they are compared in the research interviews. After the process, the researcher zooms in identifying underlying assumptions. In order to illustrate general patterns, range, and variation assumptions of various cases are compared (Riessman, 2008). The six themes that surfaced from this study were: a) enrolling in college prep classes during high school, b) competition amongst peers, c) participating in leadership programs focusing on African American issues, d) enhancing skill development, e) identifying and interact with

other scholarly African American males, and f) forming relationships with faculty members. These themes serve as the basis for the discussion in chapter five. These themes transpired from in depth interviews and were recorded in the form of narratives. These themes also provide the readers with an understanding of how African American males achieve academic success?

Obstacles and challenges towards achieving academic success were identified by participants in this study. Although the participants identified the campus environment as unwelcoming through experiences of racism, participants were able to conquer these feelings of loneliness by receiving support and encouragement from mentors, family members (specifically grandparents), and most important other African American male students. Most of the participants were strong individuals who had survived severe hardships on their way to being the first in their family to graduate from college. Their competitive nature and inner strength gained through their cultural identity were significant elements to their success.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter five presents an overall summary of the study, a discussion of the findings in relation to current literature, implications for action, and a conclusion. This chapter will also provide a set of recommendations based on the findings for further research specifically focusing on how African American males can achieve academic success.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how African American male students who completed at least 60 credits experience academic success (obtain at least a 2.0 grade point average) at Colorado State University. This study utilized six research questions based on the participants' pre-collegiate experiences, awareness in wanting to pursue a college degree, achieving academic success at Colorado State University, personal challenges while obtaining their degree, campus involvement, and obtaining specific skills while working towards academic success.

The findings of the study were organized around the six research questions as well as analysis of emerging themes. Holistic analysis was used in order to emphasize and draw on context. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) state that using this type of analysis assists with understanding the why all from the standpoint of the storyteller.

The participants who were interviewed in the study were in good academic standing. The range of the participants' cumulative grade point average at Colorado State University was 2.6 - 3.1. These participants derived from various types of high schools

(public, private, and catholic) and enrolled in different majors. All participants were first generation students except one.

Discussion of Findings

The six major findings from the study derived from pre-collegiate and collegiate experiences of the participants in achieving academic success. Obstacles and challenges were also reported. The major pre-collegiate findings were: a) enrolling in advance placement and honor classes, b) competition amongst peers, and c) participating in a pre-collegiate leadership program focusing on African American issues. Major collegiate themes for academic success consisted of: a) enhancing skill development, b) interacting with other scholarly African American men, and c) creating relationships with faculty members. Participants identified: a) experiencing racism, b) not asking for help, and c) losing financial support as obstacles.

Pre-Collegiate Experiences towards Academic Success

Major Theme I: Enrolling in Honor & Advance Placement Exams

According to the ACT policy report (2005), rigorous college preparatory course sequences—particularly in English, mathematics, and science—are critical to preparing students for postsecondary education and work (Schmeiser & Hayock, 2005).

Participants in this study indicated enrolling in a rigorous class schedule which included advance placement or honor courses was significant. In these types of courses the participant's experiences included positive interactions with their teachers while being challenged academically on course content. Participants claimed the teachers in these types of courses focused on college preparation. The participants expressed how the

teachers from the advance placement & honor classes reached out by spending one on one time after class and demonstrated they cared about their overall success.

Some of the participants in the study did not have good relationships with their high school guidance counselor. This presented various challenges such as not being advised on enrolling in these colleges preparatory classes. Polite (1999) studied 115 Black males who enrolled at Metropolitan High School and found that teachers and counselors often fail to direct African American male youth to college prep opportunities such as advanced math courses. As a result, he found that not more than 1 out of 15 was actually prepared for college level work.

The significance of enrolling in honor and advance placement courses assists students perform well on college entrance exams (ACT/SAT) and sets the expectations from high school teachers, like college professors, that African American males students want the best from their educational experience (ACT policy report, 2005). Carter (2006) also found through her study that taking advance placement and honor classes are key factors to persistence at the college level.

According to Hamilton (2007) improving students reading comprehension skills should become a top priority for high school teachers and administrators. If students can not comprehend what they are being asked to do, it's impossible for them to do well on tests. Dervarics (2005) also explains through his study the success rate for African Americans without a rigorous curriculum is lower than 46 percent. According to the ACT report (2005), high school students who take a college preparatory curriculum and increasing the rigor of the high school curriculum will significantly improve postsecondary readiness and success (Schmeiser & Hayock, 2005). Brown (2006) also

explains having positive experiences in school are a significant component for promoting resilience in students who desire to reach a high level of academic achievement.

Major Theme II: Competition Amongst Peers

Competition emerged as a theme when the participants discussed their experiences relating to academics and involvement in activities during high school. Whether the involvement was in the classroom or extra-curricular activities, the participants in the study explained the need to be on top and not wanting to lose or be viewed as secondary. Participants indicated this involvement transferred to success by getting along with different types of people and competing with their peers. This finding supports the research by Head (1999) in that male peer group interactions typically result in some sort of contest to see who can outpace, outrun, and overpower others. This competitiveness sometimes turns academic, thus increasing African American males' interest in doing well (Head, 1999). For most of the participants in the study they correlate the competition as a training ground for the next level. Thus, it can be said that competing in and out of classroom activities created a work ethic that instilled in the participants to never give up. Flowers (2002) found in-class and out of class involvement for African American males positively impacted their development. Astin (1984) & Kuh (1996) also assert that African American students' educational outcomes are impacted by the type, quantity, and quality of their student involvement in college. This finding of competition supports the recent study conducted by Harper & Nichols (2008) which showed many African American men were in constant competition with each other for purposes of "standing out" from their same race peers. Participants from Harper & Nichols (2008) study agreed that affiliation with a group was associated with increased popularity on campus. In addition, the participants in Harper & Nichols (2008) study

viewed Black men who were actively involved or held leadership positions in prominent campus organizations as socially privileged. “Leaders and guys who are involved, they get more attention, which everyone is pretty much desiring.”

This study’s findings of competition were consistent with the research conducted by Harper & Nichols (2008) in that the participants became very involved in high school and campus activities in order to have an academic advantage by standing out from their peers. This involvement transferred into other leadership opportunities for the participants.

Major Theme III: Participating in a Pre-Collegiate Leadership Program focusing on African American Issues

It was a consistent belief among the participants that partaking in the pre-collegiate leadership program sponsored by Colorado State University played a significant role not only in selecting Colorado State University as a school of choice but making college a reality. Bobb (2006) indicates there is a need to create initiatives in order to improve the success and initiatives of African American males. The leadership program extended the participants’ educational journey by conducting research on issues impacting the African American community over the summer. This finding supports Lewis (2008) which found that for African American males to improve their educational attainment; they can not stop their academic pursuits at the end of the academic year. Lewis (2008) continued to explain how it is critically important that the African American male be constantly involved in constructive activities, especially in the summer. The leadership program the participants’ were involved in took place in the summer. Participants repeatedly expressed how invaluable it was to interact with currently enrolled students and discuss the issues impacting the African American

community. During these interactions participants were able to learn about student life and the resources available to them in order to be successful. The majority of the participants were unaware about college although their high school teachers and guidance counselors held conversations with them about applying and what a degree can do for them professionally. Not until physically being on campus and engaged in the program did participants make the connection they wanted to attend college and be part of this environment full time. All of the participants in the study affirmed the importance of participating in a pre-collegiate leadership program focusing on African American issues as well as learning about college life. These types of programs provide support such as encouragement, resources, assistance, and high expectations (Whitt, 2005). According to Whitt (2005) effective colleges and universities recognize that new students need affirmation, encouragement, and support as well as information...to create a foundation for academic success.

In an ethnographic study conducted by Nathan (2005), an anthropologist at a large university, enrolled as a freshman, moved into the dorm, ate in the dining halls, and took a full course load, and collected data on today's college student culture. She found that students who participated in pre-collegiate leadership programs formed a network of friends that established a core university community. Nathan's (2005) study ultimately found that these student networks led to overall student success in college. The participants in this study indicated the peer mentors they met during the leadership program (BIF) served as a contact for the participants to connect with prior to enrolling. The participants in this study also bonded with other participants from the leadership

program (BIF) during the academic year in high school thus forming a core community of incoming students prior to move in day.

Collegiate Experiences towards Academic Success

Major Theme IV: Identify & Interact With Other Scholarly African American Males

Peer groups constitute an important source of support for students attempting to negotiate the rigors of the undergraduate experience (Cuyjet, 2006). According to Cuyjet (2006), the peer group for African American males takes on a greater level of significance in their matriculation experience. Due to differences from their white counterparts around social behavior (aggressiveness, assertiveness, and candor); African American males peer group serves to “meet the need for belonging, feedback and new learning experiences (Cuyjet, 2006). Cuyjet (2006) found African American students connected to peers who would provide them with critical feedback related not only to their academic progress, but also to their nonacademic progress, assists in their academic success. The findings from this study supports Cuyjet’s (2006) research in that the participants expressed the need to identify and interact with other African American males in order to create accountability partners as well as form solidarity with one another. Interacting with other African American males was instrumental for academic success. In a study conducted by Peltier, Laden, and Maltranga (1999) report that having other African American male roommates positively affected the grade point averages of African American men.

Similar to the findings from Scott (1994), a qualitative study on the perceived factors of academic success for African American students at Colorado State University, this study revealed that the majority of the participants believed surrounding themselves

with positive African American males was a factor for success. Reinforcing Cuyjet's (2006) findings participants in this study surrounded themselves with other African American males with the same academic ability. These students developed a support group on campus where they could confide in each other about their issues. Most of the participants also indicated these "brothers" provided encouragement and incentive by challenging one another through friendly competition in who received the highest grade point average in a given semester. Participants believed they were able to focus on the overall goal of performing well in class because their "brothers" were incredibly supportive. As indicated by Tyrone Bledsoe, Executive Director of the Student African American Brotherhood, "a lot of young African American males have been disappointed so regularly they don't trust and believe in anything. These young men want to be loved. They want to be cared for and cared about" (Schmidt, 2008). The participants in the study indicated they relied on each other for emotional support.

Consistent with literature from Palmer & Gasman (2008), the participants' supportive relationships with other African American males facilitated perseverance and persistence toward the goal of graduation; peers provide a rich source of social capital. Many of the participants reported if they did not have these relationships, their academic success would be hindered. Kincaid (2003) emphasizes that confidence, motivation and strong supportive human support systems as positive influences on academic success. Strayhorn (2008) also discovered having a strong support person(s) positively related with satisfaction for African American males.

Major Theme V: Enhancing Skill Development

The findings from this study also confirmed the participants' needed to enhance their existing skills in order to achieve academic success. This was accomplished by forming study groups, learning time management, instilling discipline, creating balance, and improving reading and studying. David Conley (2005), a professor and Director of the research center at the University of Oregon explains that there is more to college than meets the eye. He continues to explain that students of color need knowledge in many different areas. "It is not enough to capitalize words correctly. You have to understand arguments and interpret contradictory findings." Another important area is self knowledge. Conley (2005) reports having a realistic appraisal of a student's strength and weaknesses, knowing how to study and manage time, as well as making the right decision towards academics are essential skills. Conley (2005) also emphasizes knowing how to interact with students from different backgrounds is an important skill. These skills were all mentioned by the participants as a means of being successful.

Lewis (2008) offers a multi-faceted approach to African American males being successful in the new millennium. Lewis (2008) stresses the importance of a greater emphasis on education in the home environment. Consistent with the findings from this study (enhancing skill development & participating in pre-collegiate leadership programs), these solutions involve African American males reading more at home and have the ability to summarize and write on the material just read. This is based on the concept that readers become leaders. Lewis (2008) continues to recommend having African American males involved in after school or enrichment programs such as tutoring

programs, sports activities to enhance physical activity, or Boys and Girls Clubs. These programs are all geared to improve their educational attainment.

Kunjufu (2007) suggests African American families possess items such as library cards, adult books, computer software, internet access, telescope, musical instruments, and a chemistry set in their homes to aid in the academic development of African American males. These items will assist in the students' educational pursuits by wanting to expand their knowledge base.

Major Theme VI: Creating Relationships With Faculty Members

Participants indicated that through establishing a relationship with faculty members they were able to demonstrate that they were serious students. By inquiring about important topics for upcoming exams, participants found themselves being more engaged in class and exhibiting their best effort. Participants shared they were successful in difficult subjects because of the relationship they had with the faculty member. This is consistent with the literature which stated the key to academic success for all students was forming some type of relationship with their faculty. Palmer & Gasson (2008) found in their study that by creating these positive relationships, faculty members tend to display empathy for their students and display concern, not only for their academic success, but also for their personal welfare. Faculty members tend to enhance the students potential when a relationship was created (Palmer & Gasson, 2008). As a result of creating relationships with faculty members, participants stated faculty members tend to discuss with their colleagues in their departments the accomplishments of their students. This can potentially provide opportunities for African American males to be considered for scholarships or internships.

Challenges to Academic Success

Not Asking for Help

All six of the participants believed that not asking for help presented a serious challenge to excelling in the classroom. Participants attributed not asking for assistance to being prideful as well as wanting to prove their merit. Participants stated they did not want to appear as weak or inferior to their classmates or professors and asking for help would do just that. Consistent with current literature Shaun Harper, Assistant Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, claims, “black men often perceive colleges as having low expectations for them, and feel “tremendous pressure to prove their intellectual competence and their right at the institution” (Chronicle of Higher Education, pg. A25, 2008). Additionally, Cuyjet (2006) found that black men are less likely than other segments of the population to collaborate with other students or to admit they need help.

For most of the participants in the study they attributed their lack of asking for help to coming from backgrounds where they were used to struggling on their own until they found an answer. Participants admitted to being hesitant to asking for help but turned to their “brothers” for assistance in their small study groups.

Experiencing Racism

Experiencing racism was a major obstacle to achieving academic success for the participants. These findings support research conducted by Nathan (2005), in her ethnographic study on student culture, all of the African American male student participants experienced various forms of racism in academic and social settings. Participants in this study shared experiences of not being selected as a partner in class projects, students and faculty perpetuating stereotypes by assuming they were a student

athlete, and being called racially derogatory names at social functions such as off campus parties. This finding supports research by Rankin and Reason (2005) who asserted that racial/ethnic minorities perceived campus climates more racist and less accepting than did White students. Additionally, Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) found that Black students reported lower levels of satisfaction with racial climates and perceive differential treatment on the basis of race more frequently than their Asian American, Latino, Native American, and White peers. Finally, Swim (2003) researched racial climates on campus and its implications. She discovered Black undergraduates experienced racism or perceived something on their campus to be racist via looks and skeptical stares from White students and faculty, derogatory and stereotypical remarks directed toward them, and a lot of bad service received in dining halls and other facilities.

By encountering racism, the participants indicated it was a significant factor on whether they were going to continue their studies at Colorado State University. Swail, Red, & Pern (2003) found that African American male students experiencing racism has an impact on their personal confidence, motivation, and potentially detract these students from academic success throughout their collegiate experience which potentially could result in African American males departing prematurely.

Loss of Financial Support

Five of the six participants in this study were first generation students and from low income economic backgrounds. Therefore any adjustments from the participants' financial aid award would cause major problems. This finding is consistent with research conducted by Merisotis & McCarthy (2005) which reported the economic condition of African American students coming from lower income groups were highly correlated

with the ability to pay and stay in college. This finding emphasized the strong role that financial aid can play in recruiting, retaining, and graduating African American students (Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). According to Ishitani (2004), several factors including rank in their high school class, educational level of their parents, types of financial aid awarded, participation in work study programs, and income levels, can affect the likelihood of college graduation.

This study found that when participants lost a scholarship, it caused major anxiety and stress for the student. These findings support research by Watkins, Green, & Goodson (2007) focusing on the stressful life events of African American male students found that finances were a major concern. The research also revealed this stress led to other health problems that impacted African American males' academic performance.

Being a first generation college student, most of the participants were unfamiliar with the requirements for financial assistance. Participants shared they were unaware of the forms and paperwork that were required to be submitted in order to receive the scholarship for the upcoming year. This caused some of the participant to lose funding which resulted in them getting a job or an extra student loan. Participants disclosed that working extra hours and the stress of trying to make up the financial loss impacted their academics.

Perceptions from Participants

In addition to the themes previously mentioned the researcher identified significant perceptions from the participants. Five of the six participants in the study started their career at Colorado State University in the fall 2004 semester when the campus experienced a series of events that would impact their overall impression of the

university. On two consecutive evenings as the campus opened the 2004-2005 academic years, members of the student body engaged in inciting riots. Two weeks later the campus lost a student to an alcohol overdose. These events played as an introduction to college life for the participants. The participants admitted it had an impact on their perception of college social life and the overall student body. It made the participants question how serious students took their academics and wondered if this type of behavior was going to transfer into other parts of their college experience.

While interviewing the participants in this study the body language throughout the interviews were very upbeat. Participants would constantly smile when sharing narratives of their success. When discussing their experiences on how much they have grown personally, most of the participants were content and engaged in their story. Specifically, when discussing how much family members have contributed to their success participants were happy and forthcoming. In regards to family members, participants identified grandparents as a motivating factor to perform well in the classroom. The participants attributed their success to the strong relationship with their grandparents. They indicated that their grandparents consistently stressed the importance of an education.

The only time the demeanor of the participants changed was when they discussed their personal challenges of being a student. Students became very quiet when they shared their experiences of losing scholarships, acts of racism, or a negative encounter with a professor. This was the only time during interviews participants did not have eye contact with the researcher. Instead, the participants would look on the floor or around the room. The researcher's perception of these observations is that the participants were

tired of facing these challenges and have accepted these obstacles as part of the overall college experience.

Implications for Action

The purpose of this research was to explore how African American males achieve academic success at Colorado State University. As a result of the findings from this study the researcher was able to develop the following suggestions for high schools, college administrators, faculty, and future research. Many of the suggestions identified from the findings are specifically targeted for Colorado State University but might have relevance to other predominately white institutions.

Suggestions for High Schools to Consider

1. Create high expectations for African American males to perform in their academic studies. Continuously challenge them on the course content and provide opportunities for them to learn the material with various learning styles.
2. Encourage African American males to enroll in international baccalaureate programs, honor classes, or advance placement courses.
3. Partner with local colleges and universities and support their pre-collegiate programs (i.e. Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, or leadership programs like the Black Issues Forum).
4. Foster an environment where African American males can compete in and out of the classroom. Competition enhances African Americans overall confidence for academic success.

Suggestions for College Administrators to Consider

Based on the findings from this study the following suggestions are for college administrators to consider.

1. Invest in Pre-collegiate leadership programs focusing on African American issues in order to maximize participation from African American males.
2. Assess the current climate of Campus Life by conducting focus groups; implementing surveys, walking in the residence halls, eating in dining facilities, attending school sponsored events, and observing literature and posters in academic buildings that might contain racially insensitive language.
3. Create a pool of scholarships for which African American male students would be able to fairly compete and gain access.
4. Encourage faculty to move beyond classroom instruction and research and establish meaningful relationships, which focus on their academic success, with African American male students.
5. Examine other colleges and universities that have successful programs targeting African American males and incorporate their best practices.

Suggestions for Faculty Members to Consider

Relationships with faculty members are essential to the success for any student but especially for African American males. They are critical to any student's success and they can make or break the college experience for African American males. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations include:

1. Establish meaningful relationships with African American male students focusing on their academic success.

2. Conduct focus groups of African American males and develop strategies focusing on academic success.
3. Set high expectations for African American male students on class assignments, classroom participation, and overall performance.

Recommendations for Further Research

As a result of this study, several recommendations are made regarding future research focusing on African American male students and their academic success. This study used a qualitative design, specifically narrative inquiry, as a method of inquiry. A replication of this study is recommended focusing on African American females at Colorado State University and how they achieved academic success. Because this project focused and accessed one gender (males), additional research should include females. As indicated in the literature review there are differences in the way African American females experience academic success. Additionally, given the disparity in the number of African American males attending college compared to females, the findings will be beneficial. The findings of such a study could be used to better understand the differences in the perception of African American students across gender.

Understanding the academic success of African American male students attending HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges & Universities) would be beneficial. A duplication of this study conducted at a HBCU could provide information about the presumed different experiences. This presumption is based on the HBCU's mission and support programs that are in place for African American males.

According to the Black Journal of Higher Education (2002), institutions such as Brown and Princeton consistently maintain high retention rates for African American

students. Brown University “although often troubled by racial incidents, is famous for making efforts to make its campus happy for African Americans” (p. 91). The university graduation rate for African Americans is 87% (TBJHE, 2002). Future research using qualitative methods conducted at a highly selective Ivy League institution should be conducted in order to understand the experiences of African American males at these types of institutions. Inquiring whether African American males at highly selective institutions are academically successful because of their high school experiences, universities high admissions standards, or needing a specific skill set to achieve success should be explored. Such a study might produce varying results on the academic success of African American male students at public institutions.

Research is also needed exploring the perceptions of faculty members on how African American male students experience academic success. Inquiring from faculty regarding how they interact with African American male students at Colorado State University would be insightful. Research questions focusing on whether faculty notice if African American male students lack confidence during the semester, hesitant to participate, or if faculty members had assumptions about the academic ability of African American males also should be investigated. This would yield information as to the differences in perceptions between African American male students and the faculty member on what is needed in order to be successful.

Conclusion

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2008), African American men and boys, on the whole, have struggled in their educational pursuits throughout American history. They graduate from high school and attend and complete college at

disproportionally low rates (Schmidt, 2008). In higher education attendance they are outnumbered by African American women by a ratio of nearly two to one (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). Additionally, Harper (2008) found that fewer than a third of African American men who enter four year colleges as freshmen graduate within six years, the lowest six year graduation rate among all racial and ethnic groups.

After a careful review of the current literature, the researcher was motivated to design a study that discovered factors that led to the success of African American men. This approach was also supported by educators such as Pedro A. Noguero, a professor of sociology and executive director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, at New York University. He was perplexed about the issue by stating, “The question I keep posing is: Why we don’t do more that works?” Hamilton (2007) encouraged scholars to engage in more research that contribute to African American male success. The practice of focusing on the deficits guides the majority of the literature and studies to examine the negative aspects of African American experiences, rather than the successes.

Through the researcher’s personal and professional work with this small population on the campus at Colorado State University, African American males were a group that was succeeding despite discouraging statistics, various obstacles and personal challenges previously mentioned. The researcher was impressed with the resiliency and determination of this group thus the formulation of this study.

Through the voices of the participants the researcher had the opportunity to gain valuable information. The participants’ narratives demonstrated how the participants were able to persevere and succeed academically. After analyzing the coded data and

revisiting the passionate stories of the participants, the researcher firmly believes the findings from this study might assist other African American males succeed.

The findings of this study provide insights regarding how African American males achieve academic success. First, the African American males in this study believed their pre-collegiate experiences had an impact on their current academic success at Colorado State University. The majority of the participants indicated enrolling in challenging courses such as honors and advanced placement were essential in being prepared for the academic rigor at the next level. This was particularly necessary in order to keep up with other gifted students. This finding supports the need for African American males to receive a quality education during high school in order to enhance their self esteem and aspirations for post secondary education. By participants displaying hard work, dedication, and making high school a priority, it was easier for them to excel in the classroom and created an overall positive experience.

Second, the participants believed healthy competition amongst each other was necessary in order to develop a drive to succeed in and out of the classroom. In particular there was a strong indication that healthy competition played an important role in the academic performance and social interactions for African American males.

Third, the participants confirmed the impact the pre-collegiate leadership program focusing on the issues impacting the African American community, is what made college a reality for them. These initiatives include increasing the number of African American males enrolling at institutions of higher education. Programs like Colorado State University's Black Issues Forum provide opportunities for currently enrolled African

American male students to discuss their experiences with young Black male high school students. Several of the participants felt the program was the reason they are in college.

Fourth, the participants reported the significance of enhancing their personal skill development in obtaining academic success. Even though the university had some mechanisms in place which should have provided support for African American males, the participants did not feel welcome or had difficulty connecting with these resources. Instead, the participants formed their own study groups and relied on each other to obtain new skills (note taking, studying, time management) in order to enhance their academic performance. Most of the participants were student leaders and were forced to balance their academic, social, and personal time. Participants indicated they became true managers of their time and committed to a schedule consisting of study hours and course preparation. Participants also obtained public speaking skills as well as the ability to stay focused by being involved on campus. Similarly, being involved on campus assisted with participants being connected to the university. The participants' involvement also addressed feelings of loneliness that comes from being part of a campus environment that could be interpreted as unwelcoming.

Fifth, participants also conveyed the importance of interacting and surrounding themselves with other high achieving African American males. This strategy provided a close bond between the group as well as establishing accountability partners. This "my brother's keeper" mentality paid high dividends specifically when the participants encountered challenges on campus. The participants felt a connectedness to one another that signified a concern for and motivation towards academic success. The bond the

participants formed was also grounded on the basis that African American male students were experiencing similar obstacles.

Sixth, there was a predominate belief of the participants in the study that learning how to communicate and build relationships with faculty was essential to academic success. Participants reported being hesitant when interacting with professors hindered their success in the classroom in the beginning of their college careers. Once the participants established relationships with faculty members, their path to academic success was easier.

The six participants in this study unanimously identified that being an African American male student on Colorado State University's campus comes with challenges. The first challenge the participants experienced was subtle and overt racism. This created feelings of discomfort and being judged differently whether it was about their academic abilities, social interactions, or how they became a student. In return, participants expressed these feelings had an impact on their overall academic success. A second challenge for the African American males was not asking for help from their professors. Participants reported the need to prove they belonged on campus and asking for help showed a sign of weakness. Participants in the study explained they had a level of pride that can be interpreted as stubbornness which prevented them from asking for assistance. A final challenge for African American males in this study was learning how to maintain their financial support. Most of the participants indicated losing financial support placed an extra burden that impacted their academics. Despite losing financial support, the participants were able to persevere and persist.

This study has identified key factors in becoming academically successful for African American males. Educators whether teaching at the elementary, junior high, high school, or college levels have an enormous responsibility in teaching their students and making sure they succeed. In order to change the trend and improve academic success for African American males, these educators have to show just one basic concept...that they care.

Although these six males provided an understanding of factors that led to their academic success, it is imperative for African American males to be proactive towards their education. Unfortunately, African American males have been labeled as an at risk population in education and society. Despite these difficulties it is in the hands of the individuals to be successful. The researcher believes these labels can be used as motivating factors in achieving academic success. By reframing the issue of underachievement, African American males can utilize their talents and succeed academically at any college or university.

**Today I Woke Up A Black Man
Inspired By President Barack Obama
Written By David E. Talbert**

Today I woke up to the reality that everything is possible
Leaving nothing to chance, luck or speculation
I have this new realization
I'm a safe bet
The cards are stacked in my favor
Not a victim of some wicked plot, scheme, or attack plan
Today I woke up A Black Man

No longer enslaved by the images that once defined me
I woke up with a light so bright it blinds me
Today I woke up A Black Man

My clothes no longer fit me
My chest pokes out a bit further
My arms reach a bit higher
Even my hat fits snug
My brain has increased its capacity
Enlarged by my own audacity
I can be more than a thug, a pimp, or the crack man
Today I woke up A Black Man

The generational curse has been broken
My journey needs only this token
This fee
That I choose to believe in me
That I set free the thoughts of pain, stress and strain
That I accept the responsibility that greatness is my probability
Today I woke up A Black Man

Not shackled by how the world sees me
What matters most is how I see me
A seed snatched from the equator
The most beautiful reflection of my creator
Fear and failure are simply a distraction
Today my future found traction
Today I woke up A Black Man

I have twenty twenty vision
Courage, hope, and honor is my daily mission
I'm no longer a gamble
Leaving nothing to chance, luck, or speculation
I have this new realization
I'm a safe bet
The cards are stacked in my favor
If you dare suggest these words aren't fact man
Today I woke up A Black Man

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Pre – Collegiate Experience

1. Tell me about your background and what your interests were in high school?
2. Could you share a story about the neighborhood you grew up in?
3. Tell me a story about your high school experience.
4. Please share a story about your social life in high school.
5. Did extra-curricular activities contribute to your academic success? How?
6. Did you receive motivational support towards academics while in high school? If so, how?
7. How did your teachers assist you academically in high school? If not, why?
8. Tell me a story how your teachers challenged you academically.
9. Was there an expectation to excel academically from high school teachers? Please share a story.
10. Tell a story on whether or not your guidance counselor assisted you with the college process?
11. Did you have a mentor while in high school? If so, share a memorable moment on how they helped you succeed academically? What was so special about them?
12. How did your overall high school experience prepare you for college?
13. Share an occasion when you were aware that you wanted to attend college?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your high school experience?

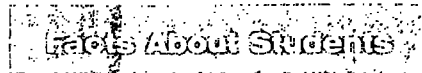
College Experience

15. How did you come to being a Colorado State student?
16. Tell me a story about your freshman experience. What were your first impressions of Colorado State?

17. How did you adapt to campus life at Colorado State?
18. Provide a story that describes your social life.
19. Tell me a story about your impression of other students that are not in your circle of friends.
20. To what extent have you been involved in campus activities? If so, how did it assist you academically?
21. What were some of your classroom experiences like? Tell me a memorable moment about your professors.
22. Tell me a story about your academic success?
23. How did you become academically successful?
24. Could you share a story about your concerns that makes it difficult to succeed academically?
25. Who are your support systems and do you feel these support systems help to address your academic needs?
26. Tell me a story about your cultural identity? How does it contribute to your academic success?
27. Can you tell me about a recent occasion when your cultural identity had an impact on your academic success?
28. While at Colorado State, what do you perceive as the factors regarding whether or not you will remain at Colorado State? Could you share with me a story that reflects this?
29. Did campus resources contribute to your academic success? Can you reflect on a specific occasion?
30. Did interacting with other students assist in achieving academic success? If so, share the occasion.
31. Did you have a mentor while in college? If so, share a memorable moment on how they helped you succeed academically?
32. Can you recall personal challenges that impacted your academic success? If so, what were they and how did you overcome them?

33. Did you obtain new skills in order to be academically successful at Colorado State University? What were they? How did you achieve them?
34. How did finances impact your ability to succeed in school?
35. What academic success stories do you share with other students?
36. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your college experience?

APPENDIX B Facts About Students

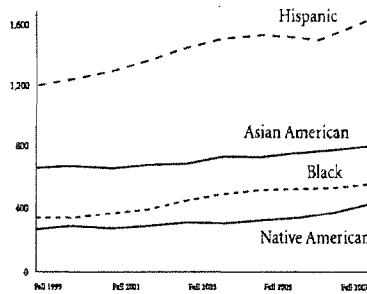


Students by Ethnicity

	Under-graduate	Graduate	PVM	Total
Asian American	651	86	30	767
Black	456	43	4	503
Hispanic	1,351	148	33	1,532
Native American	326	48	2	376
White	16,715	2,528	375	19,618
International	343	540	4	887
Other	923	286	91	1,300
Total	20,765	3,679	539	24,983
<i>Minority</i>		13.2%		
<i>Non-Minority</i>		86.8%		

Note: International students are excluded from minority and non-minority percentages. Ethnicity is self-reported.

History of Ethnic Student Enrollment



APPENDIX C
Recruitment Letter

Date

Dear _____:

The purpose of this letter is to extend an invitation to you to participate in a research project I am conducting for my dissertation in Educational Leadership in the School of Education. I am personally concerned about the academic success of African American males at Colorado State University. Although there is plenty of research that label African American males as an endangered species, I am interested in researching factors that make them successful. I believe this study will contribute to the literature and benefit young men like you who are currently enrolled as well as perspective students that have dreams of attending at Colorado State. I believe voices like yours are important in gaining a true understanding of this critical topic.

Please complete the enclosed biographical information sheet and return it in the postage paid envelope. I will follow up with you with a phone call to inquire about your interest in this project and schedule our first interview. Thanks for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Craig E. Chesson
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D Ethnicity Chart

University of Alaska

Ethnicity

	Resident		Nonresident		Total	
	No.	% of Category	No.	% of Category	No.	% of Category
Undergraduate						
Native American	260	1.5	66	1.8	326	1.6
Black	375	2.2	81	2.2	456	2.2
Asian American	533	3.1	118	3.1	651	3.1
Hispanic	1,174	6.9	177	4.7	1,351	6.5
White	13,945	81.9	2,770	73.9	16,715	80.5
International	29	0.2	314	8.4	343	1.7
Other	702	4.1	221	5.9	923	4.4
Total	17,018	100.0	3,747	100.0	20,765	100.0
Graduate						
Native American	35	1.4	13	1.2	48	1.3
Black	35	1.4	8	0.7	43	1.2
Asian American	71	2.7	15	1.4	86	2.3
Hispanic	118	4.6	30	2.7	148	4.0
White	2,068	79.9	460	42.1	2,528	68.7
International	37	1.4	503	46.1	540	14.7
Other	223	8.6	63	5.8	286	7.8
Total	2,587	100.0	1,092	100.0	3,679	100.0
Prof Vet Med						
Native American	2	0.7	0	0.0	2	0.4
Black	4	1.4	0	0.0	4	0.7
Asian American	21	7.1	9	3.7	30	5.6
Hispanic	16	5.4	17	7.0	33	6.1
White	212	71.6	163	67.1	375	69.6
International	0	0.0	4	1.6	4	0.7
Other	41	13.9	50	20.6	91	16.9
Total	296	100.0	243	100.0	539	100.0
University						
Native American	297	1.5	79	1.6	376	1.5
Black	414	2.1	89	1.8	503	2.0
Asian American	625	3.1	142	2.8	767	3.1
Hispanic	1,308	6.6	224	4.4	1,532	6.1
White	16,225	81.5	3,393	66.8	19,618	78.5
International	66	0.3	821	16.2	887	3.6
Other	966	4.9	334	6.6	1,300	5.2
University Total	19,901	100.0	5,082	100.0	24,983	100.0

Census Date Enrollment for Fall 2007

7

ebk009ap

APPENDIX E
Biographical Information Sheet

Name: _____

Local Address: _____

Permanent Address: _____

Cell Phone Number: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Major: _____

Current Grade Point Average: _____

List Clubs/Organizations: _____

Employment: _____

Hobbies & Special Interest:

Name of High School:

High School Grade Point Average:

Please complete the above information and return to Craig Chesson. This information will be kept confidential and will not be shared. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please leave it blank. This page can be folded and either dropped in campus mail, or drop by the office.

**APPENDIX F
IRB Certification**

**CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION**

This certificate verifies that

Craig E. Chesson

completed Colorado State University's human research protection training on September 25, 2007. Attending this workshop will maintain your active status for human subjects protection training at Colorado State University through September 2010.

Your next training should be completed before October 1, 2010.

The training included the history of human subjects protection, the Belmont Report, the 45 CFR 46 and the Common Rule regulations, institutional procedures, and common situations encountered in research, in addition to a question/answer period. Attendance of the entire session was required to obtain this certificate of completion. The course was developed at Colorado State University.

**Colorado
State
University**

Knowledge to Go Places

Dorell Barker

Administrator, Regulatory Compliance, in conjunction with the
Human Research Committee

Issued: September 25, 2007

APPENDIX G
Letter of Approval



Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office
Office of Vice President for Research
Fort Collins, CO 80523-3011
(970) 491-4353
FAX: (970) 491-3133

Notice of Approval for Human
Research

Principal Investigators: Linda Kuk, Education, 1568
Co-PI: Craig Chesson, Conflict Resolution & Student
Conduct Services, 8015
Title: Brother to Brother: A Narrative Inquiry of African American
Male Experiences of Academic Success at CSU
Protocol #: 08-143H **Funding Source:** n/a
Number of Participants/Records: 4 participants
Board Action: Approval Date: June 6, 2008 Expires: June 5, 2009
IRB Administrator: Janell Bartley *Janell Bartley*

Consent Process:
The above-referenced project was approved by the Institutional Review Board with the condition that the attached consent form is signed by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of this. NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the IRB.

- Investigator Responsibilities:**
- It is the PI's responsibility to obtain this consent form from all subjects.
 - It is the responsibility of the PI to immediately inform the IRB of any serious complications, unexpected risks, or injuries resulting from this research.
 - It is also the PI's responsibility to notify the IRB of any changes in experimental design, participant population, consent procedures or documents. This can be done with a memo describing the changes and submitting any altered documents.
 - Students serving as Co-Principal Investigators must obtain PI approval for any changes prior to submitting the proposed changes to the IRB for review and approval.
 - The PI is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project.
 - A status report of this project will be required within a 12-month period from the date of review. Renewal is the PI's responsibility, but as a courtesy, a reminder will be sent approximately two months before the protocol expires. The PI will be asked to report on the numbers of subjects who have participated this year and project-to-date, problems encountered, and provide a verifying copy of the consent form or cover letter used. The necessary continuation form (H-101) is available from the RICRO web page <http://ricro.research.colostate.edu>.
 - Upon completion of the project, an H-101 should be submitted as a close-out report.
 - If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.
 - Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's CHRP Federal Wide Assurance 00000647.
Please direct any questions about the IRB's action on this project to me for routing to the IRB.
Attachment Date of Correspondence: 6/12/08

Black Student Services
204 Lory Student Center
8016 Campus Delivery
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-8016
(970) 491-5781
FAX: (970) 491-0492

Mr. Craig E. Chesson
Doctoral Candidate
School of Education
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523
April 28, 2008

Dear Mr. Chesson:

I am pleased to grant your request to assist you with the recruitment of students for your research project. It is my understanding that you are looking for my office to identify African American males who have completed at least 60 credit hours and in good academic standing at Colorado State University.

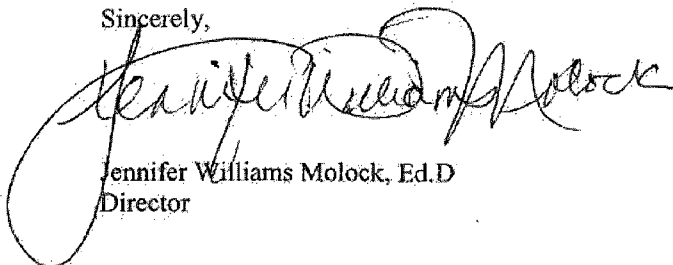
As you are aware, the Office of Black Student Services' mission is to assist African American students make a successful transition to Colorado State University. The staff and I are very familiar with the many factors that attribute to the success and present challenges of African American males in Higher Education. I am thrilled your study focuses on African American male students at Colorado State University!

Efforts in identifying how this population succeeds will benefit the University tremendously. The more we educate ourselves about the success factors of African American males, the further we empower them and advance the African American community.

The Office of Black Student Services would like to assist with your research projects as long as the participants are protected human research subjects and the process is voluntary. I would be happy to accommodate your request once you receive approval from the Institution Review Board.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (970)491-5781. I wish you much success on completing your academic journey.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Williams Molock, Ed.D
Director