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Experiences Assisting or Hindering the Academic and Social Integration of African American Students at Southwestern Michigan College

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School of Education

EXPERIENCES ASSISTING OR HINDERING THE ACADEMIC
AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
STUDENTS AT SOUTHWESTERN
MICHIGAN COLLEGE

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Naomi L. Ludman

April 1998

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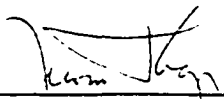
A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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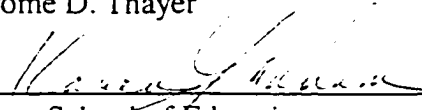
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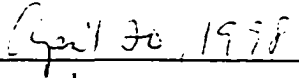
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ABSTRACT

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by

Naomi L. Ludman

Chair: David S. Penner, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

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Title: EXPERIENCES ASSISTING OR HINDERING THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE.

Name of researcher: Naomi L. Ludman

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Problem

Attrition rates of minority students in general and African American students in particular have remained high in postsecondary education, particularly at community colleges. To gain information that is most useful for implementing policies and actions that will increase the retention and achievement of minority students, Tinto has maintained that colleges should not rely solely on systems-wide research, but should study their own students.

Method

This case study used Tinto's longitudinal model of institutional departure to

investigate the experiences of six African American students at a rural community college in southwestern Michigan. Analysis of the data from a series of semi-structured interviews revealed a variety of experiences that assisted or hindered the academic and social integration of students at the institution.

Findings

Students identified the small number of African American students, the lack of minority faculty and staff, and the absence of courses in African American studies as negative experiences, and the quality of teaching and personal attention on the part of faculty and staff as positive experiences in their time at the college.

Five themes run through the experiences of the students in this study:

1. Colleges need enough African American students to support at least some social activities and to provide a sense of belonging.

2) Students sometimes sense a lack of cultural understanding on the part of students, staff, and faculty.

3) Minority students are themselves diverse.

4) Students are aware of sterotypes and their own internal dissonance regarding ethnicity issues.

5) Students prefer classes that provide active learning and personal involvement.

Recommendations include adding more culturally relevant materials to the curricula and recognizing the primacy of the classroom as a source of both academic and social interactions for students at commuter colleges.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Until serious efforts are made to enhance the retention of the most poorly prepared minority students at community colleges, they [community colleges] may not be the best choice for promoting educational opportunity for students of color" (Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1993, p. 3).

This statement from researchers at the National Center for Developmental Education should jolt into action community colleges across the country where minority students, many of whom are underprepared, are enrolling in increasing numbers. By some estimates over 50% of minority students start their postsecondary education at a community college (Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges, 1991, p. 1), and in some areas as many as 80% of minority high-school graduates enroll at community colleges (Richardson, 1990). In 1994, 2-year institutions enrolled 42.5% of African American students (Carter & Wilson, 1996, p. 15).

It is perhaps a great irony that the one institution--the community college--which is the entrance to higher education for so many minority students may also be the least prepared to deal with the needs of these students, particularly those who come academically underprepared (Boylan et al., 1993; Fleming, 1984; Jackson & Swann, 1991). Retention rates for developmental students (those involved in basic skills or learning assistance programs) show that compared to other institutions, community

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colleges have the lowest retention rates for African American and Latino developmental students than for any other type of institution, public or private, including 2-year technical schools (Boylan et al., 1993). Compared to a retention rate of 30% for Whites and 22% for Latinos, the retention rates for African American developmental students at community colleges is a shocking 10%.

Retention was defined as "students having graduated or remained continually enrolled at the end of 3.5 years" for community colleges and 5.5 years for 4-year institutions (Boylan et al., 1993, p. 1). It should be noted that while this rate is disconcertingly low, the definition of retention upon which it is based does not take into account the fact that many students at community colleges do not follow traditional patterns of full-time continual enrollment, but instead "stop out" after one semester or one year, then return to school, sometimes stopping out again before completing their degrees or programs. As Tinto (1993, p. 9) has stated,

> "Until more accurate data are available on the entire range of student movements, we will have to take our estimates of aggregate rates of student departure as precisely that: estimates, which may somewhat misrepresent the scope and patterning of student participation in higher education."

This retention rate is particularly disturbing in light of the fact that between 1988 and 1992 enrollments of African American students at community colleges increased 27.3% compared to 20.6% for 4-year institutions (Carter & Wilson, 1994, p.11). Community college enrollments for minority students as a whole increased 35.5% during this same time period compared to 28.7% for 4-year institutions (Carter & Wilson, 1996, p. 11).

Graduation data reveal further the depth of the problem: In spite of the increase in enrollments, African Americans earned only 8.2% of all associate degrees awarded in 1991, up from 7.8% in 1990, but down from 8.6% in 1981 (Carter & Wilson, 1994, p. 16). It is apparent that graduation rates are not keeping up with enrollment increases.

Community college administrators themselves acknowledge these problems. In a survey conducted by Texas Tech University (R. D. Opp & A. B. Smith, personal communication, June 13, 1995), 41 public, 2-year colleges reported minority enrollments ranging from 8.5% for African Americans to 1.8% for American Indians. Admissions offices cite a number of barriers to their ability to recruit minority students, including

1. the low high-school completion rate of minorities

2. the confusion minority students exhibit about the options and benefits of higher education

3. low expectations communicated by parents, teachers, and peers

4. the rejection by many minority youth of the idea that success requires a college degree

5. the time and labor required to recruit minority students.

A survey reported by *Campus Trends* in 1988 (El-Khawas, 1988) indicated that two-fifths of the administrators who responded considered their institution's ability to retain minority students "as fair or poor." And while this same study found that most colleges and universities are increasing activities to recruit minority students, only a fraction--less than one third--of the administrators ranked their personal commitment to increasing minority participation as high. This is particularly disturbing since institutional commitment and strong administrative leadership appear to be critical factors

for improving minority student retention (Gillett-Karam, Roueche, & Roueche, 1991;
Harris, 1989; Richardson, 1989b; Ross, 1990; Tinto, 1993).

Concerned by these findings, many researchers have attempted to identify those
factors that influence both attrition and retention at institutions of higher education, some
focusing on all students (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1993; Turnbull, 1986), some on minority
students, (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Astin, 1982; Fleming, 1984; Richardson, 1989b,
1990; Richardson & Bender, 1985; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Sedlacek, 1987), and
some, particularly Tinto, attempting to synthesize the results of both groups. A review of
these studies reveals that while in some ways community colleges are uniquely suited to
serving minorities effectively, in other ways they may be ill-suited to the task. It is the
focus of this present study to learn from and add to this research as it pertains to the
retention of African Americans at the community college.

Overview of the Problem

One place to begin is Vincent Tinto's *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and
Cures of Student Attrition* (1987; 1993). In searching for a framework within which to
study retention, Tinto (1987, pp. 87-88) chose to focus on institutional factors that affect
retention, finding these more helpful than "psychological theories of departure," which
have tended to blame the student, or "societal theories of student departure" which have
tended to blame social factors outside the institution. Tinto (1987, p. 89) argued that it is
more productive to develop a theory that focuses on "the role the social setting of the
institution plays in the withdrawal process." Such a theory, he stated, will lead
institutions to examine factors over which they themselves have control.

Tinto (1993) began by looking at Arnold Van Gennep's rites of passage theory, suggesting that to adapt to college life, students will go through three stages: separation, transition, and integration. This theory provides a way to view the initial experiences that face college students as they meet values that often force them to separate from their families and communities and to adopt new ways of thinking and acting. At first glance it might seem that community college students would have an advantage because by living at home they experience less separation. Not so, Tinto argued, for while these students may escape the struggles of separation, they may not experience the benefits of integration into the new system, making persistence in college harder in the long run.

An understanding of separation and transition is particularly important when focusing on reasons minority students depart from higher education. As Tinto (1993) and London (1992) have suggested, first-generation students or students from disadvantaged backgrounds or from distinct social or ethnic communities are likely to find separation more difficult, to find themselves struggling between the old and the new, often living "on the margin of two cultures" (London, p. 6). Many will find transition too stressful and withdraw before having any chance to become incorporated into college life.

To move beyond transition to incorporation, students must be "able [and] willing" (Tinto, 1987, p. 99) to make personal contacts with other students, faculty, and other college personnel. Failure to make these contacts often results in early departure. As Tinto (1993) and others (Boylan et al., 1993) have suggested, commuter colleges tend to have fewer organizations, rituals, and services that assist students in making these contacts. And yet minority students, who most need these structures, are

enrolling in large numbers in the very institutions least equipped to assist them in adapting to the culture of higher education.

To understand how students make this transition, Tinto (1993) has constructed a model (see Figure 1) which describes the interrelationship between the student and institution that will lead to either incorporation into both the academic and social systems of the college or departure for the student. Differences in departure rates for institutions may well result, Tinto maintained, from the relative strength of these academic and social structures.

Departure rates will also be affected by what Tinto (1987, p. 109) has called "individual dispositions" (personal qualities that include the expectations and motivations the student brings to college). These motivations (goals, aspirations, expectations) and commitments (motivation to attain goals) along with "pre-entry attributes (gender, race, socioeconomic background, school experiences, value orientations) will have a direct effect on the way in which students interact with institutional experiences. The goal of this interaction is academic and social integration for the students.

This model, Tinto (1993) has suggested, will allow institutions to assess students, to assess their own structures, and to modify these structures in ways that will support and assist students to persist through separation and transition to integration. The model will also allow an institution to focus its efforts on those students for whom it has the best resources and to develop resources for those students it wishes to attract. In addition, the model allows institutions to identify departures brought about by the external commitments over which the school has little or no control.
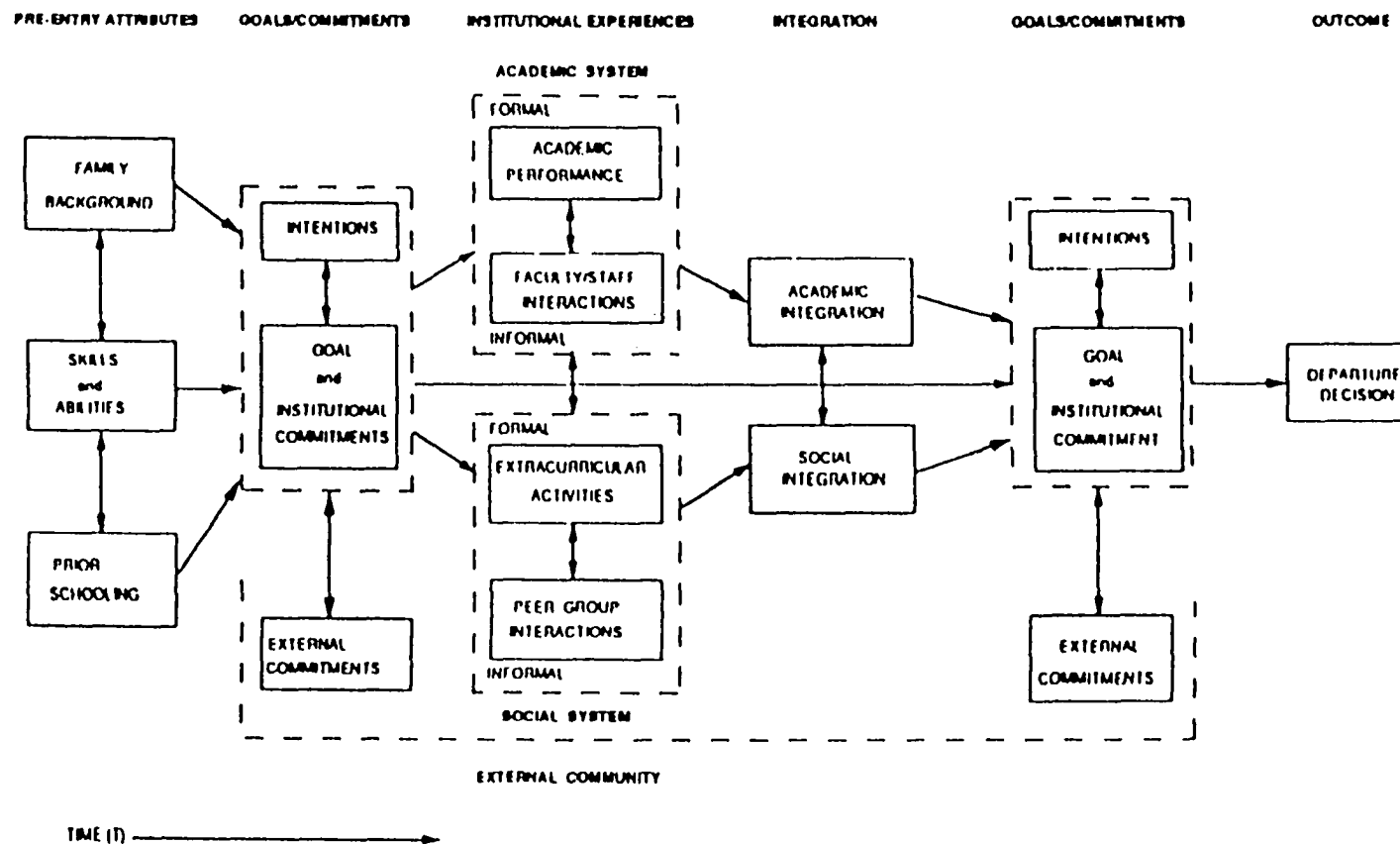
Figure 1. A longitudinal model of institutional departure.

Note: From *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (p. 114), by V. Tinto, 1993. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Copyright 1993 by University of Chicago Press. Reprinted with permission.

Another conceptual framework which has been postulated for explaining retention

in general, and for minority students in particular, has been proposed by William Turnbull

(1986). Like Tinto, Turnbull recognized that students possess personal qualities that

allow them to persist in spite of external factors that may cause other students to leave.

For example, Turnbull maintained that in searching for reasons students leave college, it

is not adequate to accept simple listings of reasons students themselves give for leaving,

such as those identified by Astin (1975) and collected by most institutions. Turnbull

argued that many students with these same problems stay in college. He found it useful

to adapt Hackman and Dysinger's (1970) discussion of "academic competence and

college commitment" (Turnbull, 1986, p. 6). A simple diagram shows how the

interaction between competence and commitment can explain the difference between

students who persist and those who depart. (See Figure 2.) Hackman and Dysinger (p.

321) described this model:

1. Students with solid academic competence but moderately low commitment

tend to withdraw from college--but to transfer to another institution or to re-enroll at the

same school later (transfers/returnees).

2. Students with poor academic qualifications but moderately high commitment

tend to persist in college until they are finally forced to leave because of poor academic

performance (academic dismissals).

3. Students with both low commitment and moderately low academic competence

tend to withdraw from college and not re-enroll in the same school or elsewhere.

Turnbull (1986) suggested that most of the reasons Astin identified for students

leaving school fit into the model. For example, "boredom" correlates with "lack of

commitment"; "dissatisfaction with requirements" fits with "non-involvement"; "poor grades" with "low academic competence" or "low commitment." Problems such as marriage or pregnancy cause conflicts between home and school, with home usually superseding the school commitment. Turnbull (1986) acknowledged that financial difficulties may not be explained by this model, although he pointed to research which connects working on campus with college commitment; in other words, campus jobs can assist with financial needs (which may be greater for minority students; Mulder, 1991) and contribute to a greater commitment to school at the same time. Using this conceptual framework, Turnbull postulated that student involvement is the key to retention.

This belief is supported by Tinto's model where academic and social integration can be seen as similar to commitment. Turnbull's position has also been supported by a National Institute of Education Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education (1984, p. 17) which cited student involvement, "the amount of time, energy, and effort students devote to the learning process," as perhaps the most important condition for promoting excellence in higher education.

As did Tinto with his model, Turnbull went on to show how institutions can impact retention by directing their resources towards students in specific quadrants of the model. For example, good assessment and developmental studies programs can have a positive impact on underprepared students to help move them from the lower left quadrant (low academic competence/low commitment) to the upper right quadrant (moderate to high academic competence/moderate to high commitment). Turnbull (1986, p. 10) saw this matching of student competencies with course work as "the indispensable first step toward the intellectual involvement of the student in the academic environment."

The models of Tinto and Turnbull form a foundation for examining the findings of research that has focused on minority students specifically. In her work *Blacks in College*, Fleming (1984) identified several factors that seem to explain why predominantly Black colleges are more successful in graduating Black students. Fleming found that Black schools provide a better opportunity for students to form relationships with peers, professional staff, and faculty, and that the interpersonal supports found more often at Black institutions are a necessary precondition for intellectual development. Fleming concluded that too often Blacks at White institutions use most of their energy in coping with loneliness and isolation, thus leaving little or no energy for intellectual development.

Thus, it would seem that in order to promote the academic success of their African American students, community colleges must concentrate their resources on the social system block of Tinto's model, or find ways to build social supports within the academic system. As minority students experience separation from their families and value systems, they too often find themselves feeling lonely and abandoned and thus unable to make the transition that would lead to integration into the value system and intellectual life of the campus.

Specifically, Fleming (1984, p. 136) argued that for African American students to make the transition into the academic and social life of the college, students must find more Black faculty and staff members on campus, a large enough number of Black students with a balanced sex ratio, "curricula relevant to the black experience, and responsive counseling services."

Fleming's findings also fit Turnbull's model which urged college action that would

increase both the students' academic competence and college commitment. However,

Turnbull (1986) echoed Fleming (1984) in recognizing that this commitment will likely

not occur for minority students unless the college makes an effort to move the vertical

line on his model to the left. (See Figure 3.) This involves addressing the affective needs

of minority students such as identity development, self-efficacy, and internal versus

external locus of control (Higher Education Extension Service, 1992). These affective

factors may be quite different for White and minority students (Boylan et al., 1993), and

the services that promote such student development are seldom readily available on

community college campuses.

In examining theories of retention and the issue of minority students, it is easy for

community colleges to want a list of things they should do and programs they should

implement. And such lists abound (Applegate & Henniger, 1989; Boylan, Saxon, &

White, 1995; Gillett-Karam, Roueche, & Roueche, 1991; Green, 1989; Richardson,

1990; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Sedlacek, 1987; Tinto, 1993).

Tinto (1993, pp. 251-252), however, has faulted much of the research in this area,

citing several problems: (1) recommendations tend to be so general as to be of little use

to institutions engaged in the "practical" work of creating local policy; (2) much of the

work examines dropout patterns from a systemic viewpoint rather than from the

viewpoint of individual institutions, thus making these studies of limited value for

forming institutional policies; (3) many studies do not take into account the great

diversity that characterizes the patterns of college attendance for many students; and

Student Categories with Respect to Persistence			Low to Moderate	Moderate to High
		High to Moderate	TRANSFERS/ RETURNEES	PERSISTERS
A C A D E M I C	C O M P E T E N C E	Moderate to Low	VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWALS	ACADEMIC DISMISSALS

Figure 2. Student categories with respect to persistence.

Note: From "Involvement: The Key to Retention," by W. Turnbull, 1986, *Journal of Developmental Education, 10*(2), p. 8. Copyright 1986 by the National Center for Developmental Education, Appalachian State University. Reprinted with permission.

College Commitment			Low to Moderate	Moderate to High
A C A D E M I C	C O M P E T E N C E	High to Moderate	TRANSFERS/ RETURNEES/	PERSISTERS
		Moderate to Low	VOL. WITH.	ACADEMIC DISMISSALS
			OR: ADVISED STOP-OUT ADVISED TRANSFER	

Figure 3. College commitment.

Note: From "Involvement: The Key to Retention," by W. Turnbull, 1986, *Journal of Developmental Education, 10*(2) ,p. 8. Copyright 1986 by the National Center for Developmental Education, Appalachian State University. Reprinted with permission.

(4) studies frequently ignore the longitudinal nature of student departure resulting in the need to "time different actions to the particular stage in the student career when those actions might be most effective."

Consequently, Tinto (1993) has maintained that no amount of research will be sufficient or useful if an institution does not first know about the unique needs and characteristics of its own students, their intellectual and affective development, the nature of their social and academic experiences, and their personal interactions on campus. According to Tinto and others (Rendon & Taylor, 1989; Tinto, 1993), data have too often been collected and reported on a systems-wide basis. Instead, he has argued that data such as student retention rates, student GPA's, student majors, transfer rates, employer satisfaction, and student opinions about their college experiences (including differences reflected by gender, age, and ethnicity) should be collected regularly by individual institutions.

This study is one effort to collect this institution-specific data, data which can assist not only one institution in its efforts to serve African American students, but which can illustrate the importance of collecting information as it relates to the experiences of individual students within a specific context.

Description and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify those experiences which have assisted or hindered the integration of African American students into the academic and social life of the college, and have consequently influenced their decisions to leave or stay. I interviewed six students about the nature of their academic and social

experiences at Southwestern Michigan College, a rural community college just north of South Bend, Indiana.

In analyzing the stories of these students, I looked for ways in which college faculty, staff, and procedures caused students to feel distanced or affirmed, isolated or accepted as African Americans. And while it is important to be aware of psychosocial characteristics that research has shown to be associated with academic success for African American students (Fleming, 1984; Sedlacek, 1987), this study focused more on identifying factors within the institution rather than on characteristics of the students. I searched for similarities, differences, and themes that relate the experiences of these students to the literature on retention of African American students in general and community colleges in particular. I was also interested in experiences that might emerge that are unique to a college in a rural setting. In the words of Merriam (1988, p. 67), I wished to "capture and portray the world as it appears to the people in it," recognizing that "what seems true is more important than what is true." As Tinto (1993, p. 36) has stated, "departure hinges upon the individual's perception of his/her experiences within an institution of higher education. . . . What one thinks is real, has real consequences." Thus, in this study I sought to add to our understanding of what causes African American students to stay in or leave our institutions, particularly community colleges.

Definitions

African American: Students who identify themselves in college records as Black and who were born and raised in the United States.

Academic and *social integration*: In the statement "academic and social

integration," the definitions of *academic* and *social* are those used by Tinto (1993, p. 114). Each term has a formal and informal component.

Formal academic experiences: Direct instructional experiences with faculty, staff. or tutors, such as classes, small group sessions, one-on-one instruction, or laboratories.

Informal academic experiences: Interactions with faculty and staff in non-instructional settings, such as conversations in the hallway, faculty offices, the student activity center, or cafeteria.

Formal social experiences: Extracurricular activities, such as participation in clubs. student government, athletics, music or theatre groups.

Informal social experiences: Interactions with peer groups in unstructured activities, such as hallway conversations, card games in the student commons, intramural sports, or even informal study groups.

Integration: "An abstract conceptualization that seeks to combine the notions of involvement and valued memberships" (Vincent Tinto, personal communication, October 20, 1997). Integration occurs as students become involved academically and/or socially in the college community and come to perceive themselves as valued members of that community.

Community college: A 2-year college with open admissions and curricula that lead to certificate or associate degrees which prepare students for transfer to 4-year schools or provide immediate employment credentials.

Retention: A student has been retained when he or she enters a college with an educational goal and leaves having achieved that goal (Turnbull, 1986, p. 6). However, any discussion of retention must acknowledge that student goals vary, change, are often

hard to identify, and do not always match the mission of the institution. Students often leave satisfied even though the institution may call them dropouts. On the other hand, the discussion of retention in this study assumes that it is desirable that more students graduate from the community college and that more transfer to 4-year institutions. Many studies cited in this paper have specific definitions of retention; these definitions have been stated where possible.

Traditional student: A student who attends college immediately, or within 1 year, after graduating from high school. Traditional students are 18 or 19 years old and, although they may work, view attending college as primary.

Non-traditional student: A student who attends college several years after completing high school. Non-traditional students are at least 20 years old, often considerably older, and generally attend school after already having taken on other adult roles, such as parenthood, work, and various community activities. Attending college may not be seen as their primary role.

Terminology

A comment should also be made here regarding terminology for ethnic groups. The term African American is used throughout this paper except in quotations. The terms Hispanic and Latino are consistent with the work cited.

Delimitations

While a number of African American students at SMC live outside the Michiana region and rent housing in the Dowagiac area, the issues of housing and campus life as it relates to these students, particularly athletes who were recruited by the

college, are not addressed in this study. Likewise, the issues of minority access and financial aid are only referred to indirectly.

Summary

Chapter 1 of this dissertation introduces the study, providing an overview as well as a description of the problems and the research associated with retaining African American students in higher education, particularly at community colleges. Sections on definitions, terminology, and delimitations are included. To provide the context for this study, chapter 2 reviews the literature, identifying some of the causes of minority student attrition as well as describing some of the many studies that have shed light on what can be done and still needs to be done to increase the success rates for African Americans, especially those at community colleges.

This particular study grows out of recommendations that colleges must know their own students and from a belief that a case study approach is best suited to providing "authentic insight" that can lead to positive action, action that is "grounded in the situation itself, not imposed from outside it" (Kemmis, 1983, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 164). Thus, chapter 3 describes the study, its design and rationale.

Chapter 4 provides a description of SMC, including data on enrollment, retention, and achievement (grade point average and graduation) of African American students at SMC; chapter 4 also includes the first stage of data analysis: description.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7, further analysis is intertwined with a continuing review of the literature as data are interpreted and analyzed and themes are identified. Chapter 7 also includes recommendations for action and further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

A review of the literature on minority students in higher education shows that the

problem of retention has been studied from a variety of perspectives, none of which by

itself can explain the reasons so many minority students leave college without graduating

or achieving their academic goals. Studies have identified numerous and complex

factors, most of which fall into four categories: societal/system barriers, socioeconomic

barriers, institutional barriers, and characteristics of the students themselves. Although in

reality, students are usually affected by an interplay of all of these barriers, each is

discussed separately here.

Societal/System Barriers

A variety of societal or system barriers (that is, the educational system as it exists

within the context of American society) account for the generally low enrollment and

retention of minority students in postsecondary education. First is the fact that many

minority students drop out of school before reaching high-school graduation, thus

diminishing the pool available for recruitment into higher education. *Minorities in*

Higher Education: Twelfth Annual Status Report (Carter & Wilson, 1994) showed no

gain in the high-school completion rate for African Americans ages 14-24 during the

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1980s and a 2% drop from 1990 to 1992. In responding to a survey of minority student recruitment policies and practices by Texas Tech University in 1995, community college personnel cited the low high-school completion rate of minorities as a barrier to their recruitment (R. D. Opp & A. B. Smith, personal communication, June 13, 1995). Furthermore, those who do graduate often do not understand the expectations and the reward system of higher education (Opp & Smith, personal communication, June 13, 1995; Richardson, Simmons, & de los Santos, 1987). Applegate and Henniger (1989) identified several reasons that minority youth fail to see college enrollment as desirable: (1) minority youth live in communities where even college graduates end up in the unemployment line, (2) a lack of professional role models (role models for minority youth often tend to be athletes), and (3) incidences of racial prejudice and related violence on college campuses often present higher education as a hostile environment for minorities. Ross (1990) cited a variety of reasons minority students may hesitate to enroll in college, including parental fears that students will leave home and not return, that they will lose their cultural values, and that college will present a severe financial burden or will result in the loss of family income the student would have earned had he or she not been in college. In addition, Ross noted that many minority families have seen minority students go to college and fail; these families may believe it is desirable for their children to stay in their own communities, following in the careers and traditions of their families.

Perhaps the most widespread barrier both to actual enrollment in college and to retention once students are enrolled is lack of academic preparedness. This stems from a lack of early literacy and mathematics experiences (Applegate & Henniger, 1989), the

fact that minority students are more likely to come from lower quality public schools

(Tinto, 1987; Weinberg, 1977), and low expectations on the part of teachers and school

systems for minority students (King, 1993). These problems, combined with the fact that

minority students frequently do not take college preparatory courses, result in weak basic

skills in reading, writing, and mathematics (Applegate & Henniger, 1989; Mulder, 1991;

Richardson, 1989a; Tinto, 1987; Wright, 1989) and lower standardized test scores, such

as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (Applegate & Henniger), which affect college admission.

Preparation for college involves more than having adequate basic skills.

Richardson found that minority students lack not only academic skills but "accurate

information about the cognitive, physical and social demands of the college experience"

(Richardson, 1989b, p. 2). In addition, Richardson stated that preparation depends on the

quality of academic standards in high school and association with peers and relatives who

know what it is like to go to college. First-generation college students, many of whom

are minorities, generally lack awareness of the many academic and economic issues

related to college (Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Wright, 1989). Preparation also includes

accurate perceptions about managing time and schedules, accurate expectations about

course content, and a knowledge of financial aid issues as well as the social aspects of

college, which often include racial and ethnic isolation (Richardson, 1989b).

Socioeconomic Barriers

In identifying patterns of attendance-going in college, the significance of the

educational attainment of the parents is very clear. *The Mortenson Research Letter*

(Parental educational attainment and chance for college, 1995) cited a number of statistics

showing the relationship between parental educational attainment and enrollment in college for their children. A person age 18-24 whose parents are not high-school graduates has about one-third chance of going to college compared to someone whose parents have a bachelor's degree (p. 1). Between 1987 and 1993, high-school-graduation rates fell for all groups of young adults except those whose parents have a bachelor's degree or higher (p. 2). For African Americans, college participation for persons whose parents have a bachelor's degree was 94.2% in 1987, and 85.6% in 1993. These numbers fell to 71.8% and 68.3% respectively for African Americans whose parents had some college, but not a bachelor's degree, and to 44% and 56.4% for those whose parents have a high-school diploma (p. 6). Richardson (1989a) also found that minority students with the most adequate preparation come from college-going families. Differences in degree-completion rates are also explainable along socio-economic lines, measures of ability such as test scores, and race (Tinto, 1993) . Tinto stated that roughly half of the gap between African Americans and Whites can be explained by the above factors (p. 32).

Societal and socioeconomic issues also impact patterns of college participation. African American students tend to delay college attendance, entering when they are older and have accumulated family and job responsibilities (Gillett-Karam et al., 1991; Richardson, 1989a; Tinto, 1993). This pattern of college-going not only makes staying in college more difficult, but has actually affected the statistics concerning minority student retention, Tinto has suggested. He argued that retention statistics are generally based on traditional conceptions of college-going while most minorities attend in non-traditional ways. As such, these studies do not reflect the manner and rate at which

individual students progress and may not accurately gauge the retention and completion rates of non-traditional students, many of whom are minority students (Tinto).

Another socioeconomic barrier for African American students is the matter of finances (Coakley & Dickson, 1988; Mulder, 1991; Stikes, 1984; Wright, 1989). Both the ability to pay for college and a lack of understanding of the financial aid available serve as barriers to access and retention for minority students. Nettles (1991) reported that African American college students work more hours than other students and seem to have to pay for more of their college expenses. While only 1 in 10 of the White students who enroll in college come from poverty-level families, as many as one in three Hispanic and African American students lives in poverty (Ross, 1990, p. 18). Even though these students may receive a full financial aid package, they may not have experience in long-term budgeting or may feel compelled by cultural and family expectations to assist with family expenses (Astin, 1975; Boylan, Saxon, White, & Erwin, 1994; Hauptman & Smith, 1994; Ohio Board of Regents, 1989; Richardson et al., 1987; Ross, 1990; Stikes, 1984). Financial difficulties are also associated with the tendency of African Americans to attend college after already having taken on other adult responsibilities. As with other first-generation, non-traditional college students, they may juggle many responsibilities related to work, family, and school, sometimes holding down two or three jobs in order to make ends meet (Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1993).

Institutional Barriers

Minority students also face a variety of institutional barriers once they arrive on campus. Researchers have tended to group many of these under the heading of

"institutional climate," a somewhat nebulous term that includes a variety of factors:

1. Insufficient financial aid and the complex forms, rules, and regulations surrounding financial aid (Astin, 1975; Boylan et al., 1994; Hauptman & Smith, 1994; Richardson et al., 1987) (Some research [*Understanding Campus Climate*, 1991] has found that minority students are more dependent on loans and less likely to receive adequate financial support from their institutions than majority students. Colleges have not provided resources to assist minority students through emergencies that arise with their families or because of their own lack of experience with budgeting [Ross, 1990].)

2. A technology gap between the skills of minority students compared to other students, largely as the result of the number of minority students who come from poor families (Resta, 1994)

3. An unwillingness to provide moral support and monitoring that families might normally provide (Ross, 1990) (Ross, and Stikes [1984], argued that colleges should have trained staff available to assist minority students with personal and family problems.)

4. A failure to involve the families of minority students, many of whom are unfamiliar with college life and reluctant to participate (Ross, 1990) (Ross recommended that colleges work with their students to find appropriate ways of involving their families, many of whom cannot afford to attend orientation activities on campus or who may perceive education as hostile to their cultural heritage [Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988]. Fadale [1990] has shown family support as an important factor related to minority student retention.)

5. Inadequate or marginal academic support programs (Richardson, 1989b; Richardson et al., 1987) that "stigmatize" participants or treat lack of preparedness as a

racial issue (Asa Hilliard, personal communication, cited in Ross, 1990, p. 16)

6. Lack of adequate support in making the adjustment to college (Richardson, 1989b; Richardson et al., 1987) such as bridge programs and academic support services (assessment, remediation, learning laboratories, tutoring, intrusive advising, monitoring) that involve all parts of the college or university, not just special programs

7. A failure to recognize that preparation for college includes, not just the basic skills, but knowing about class expectations, credits and scheduling, note-taking, and expectations for written work (Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Ross, 1990).

Richardson (1989a) argued that while some institutions have addressed a number of access/preparedness issues, such as providing scholarships, loans, and grants, and providing bridge and basic skills programs, they have not addressed issues that promote achievement, such as assessment, pedagogical, and curricular issues. This failure has resulted in what Richardson described as a "mismatch between institutional expectations and student capabilities" (Richardson, 1990, p. 12).

It is at this point that many researchers and educators have noted that institutions, while doing a variety of things to help students change, have done much less to make substantive changes themselves. Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) defined institutional racism as "action taken by a social system or institution which results in negative outcomes for members of a certain group or groups" (p. 45). In the case of minority students, researchers and educators have identified a wide variety of actions that institutions have taken, or, more frequently, failed to take, that have in essence led to institutional racism, including a failure to learn about minority cultures, a failure to recognize the importance of minority staff and faculty, a failure to recruit and attract a significant number of

minority students, a failure to provide academic and social activities relevant to minority students, and a failure to provide administrative leadership in matters impacting minority students (Boylan et al., 1993; Fleming, 1984; Gillett-Karam et al., 1991; Harris, 1989-90; Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987; Richardson, 1989a; Ross, 1990; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976; Stikes, 1984; Tinto, 1993; *Understanding Campus Climate*, 1991).

Predominantly White institutions have generally failed to understand or provide ways of dealing with differences that result from culture or low socioeconomic status, such as dress, learned helplessness, or powerlessness (Richardson, 1989a). Coakley and Dickson (1988) found that minority students often perceived that Whites did not recognize that as minorities things might not be as good for them and were often ignorant about their cultures and needs. Richardson (1989a) and Ross (1990) also identified different styles of personal behaviors and dealing with bureaucracies as cultural barriers. Richardson observed that middle class people are used to dealing with employees in offices, stores, and businesses as equals, whereas low-income people have learned to avoid pointing out errors and are more accepting of what is told them. This behavior does not serve minority students well in financial aid offices and other places where forms and paperwork are required.

Given these differences, minority students face a great deal of uncertainty and fear as they enter predominantly White institutions (Ohio Board of Regents, 1989). They fear not only academic failure, but the "unknown"; that is, they do not know how comfortable and supportive the campus environment will be. The presence of minority staff and faculty has been cited as vital to providing a climate that will indeed be supportive (Gillett-Karam, 1995; Harris, 1989-90; Ohio Board of Regents, 1989; Richardson,

1989a). However, these faculty and staff must not merely be present; they must have a

say in campus affairs (Richardson, 1989b).

Unfortunately, the lack of minority faculty is not only attributable to institutional

racism or lack of effort on the part of college and university administrators. Gillett-

Karam et al. (1991) reported that only 4.2% of all college and university faculty were

African American and this included historically Black colleges. In predominantly White

colleges, only 1.8% of faculty were African American and to complicate matters, there

are only a few African Americans with doctorates in the pipeline (Carter & Wilson, 1994;

Ross, 1990). Cox stated that "the nation produces fewer than one African American

doctorate for each of the more than 1200 community colleges in America" (1993, p. 96).

Even those who are attending graduate school are seldom choosing to stay in academia

(King, 1993; Ross, 1990).

Thus, Ross (1990) and others (Livingston & Stewart, 1987; Stikes, 1984) have

argued that institutions must train their White faculty to be more informed about and

sensitive to the needs of minority students and encourage them to interact more with

minority students (Livingston & Stewart, 1987; Ohio Board of Regents, 1989). Much

evidence suggests that institutions have failed to do this. Minority students have

identified many ways in which faculty exhibit either insensitivity, lack of knowledge, or

outright racism (Coakley & Dickson, 1988; Ross, 1990; Stikes, 1984). Minority students

often feel that they are expected to speak for their group (Coakley & Dickson, 1988;

Ross, 1990); they cite examples of being made to feel incompetent (Ross) and ignored

(Stikes, 1984) and of having to defend their grades or prove that work was their own

(Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Richardson (1989b) cited an institutional expectation that

all students can achieve as a requisite condition for a supportive campus climate.

Minority students traditionally have not been told they can achieve in college (Gurin &

Epps, 1975; Ross, 1990), causing students themselves to have low expectations

(Richardson, 1989b; Ross, 1990), which Ross cited more as a result of socialization than

as a matter of low personal self-esteem.

Researchers have repeatedly cited the role of faculty as crucial to the success of

non-traditional and minority students. This includes an understanding of the

characteristics of African American students and ways in which classrooms can be

structured to create inclusive environments. Structuring classes in ways that allow

students to capitalize on their interpersonal and social skills and providing frequent

feedback have been identified as ways to motivate African American students (Ohio

Board of Regents, 1989; Richardson, 1989b; Stikes, 1984). Faculty must learn about

minority cultures, and must include materials in the courses that they teach that relate to

students of all cultures, and recognize the importance of doing so (Urban Community

Colleges Commission, 1988; National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities,

1991; Ohio Board of Regents, 1989; Ross, 1990; Stikes, 1984). Furthermore, faculty

must understand Black culture, "its importance to Black student development and its

impact on teaching" (Stikes, p. 128). In addition, Stikes noted that faculty and staff must

know how to resolve predictable racial conflicts that will occur when people from

different cultural perspectives interact.

Another facet of institutional racism is the failure to recognize the psychosocial

needs of African American students and other minorities. Boylan et al. (1993) noted that

institutions have not understood that for African American students issues such as self-

efficacy, internal versus external locus of control, and identity development may be quite different. Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) and Eddins (1982) argued that the ability of African American students to meet academic standards is not only related to academic skills but to positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, and familiarity with the academic demands of the institution, findings supported by others (Pascarella, Smart, Ethington, & Nettles, 1987; Ross, 1990). Moreover, not only must students have the requisite academic skills, but they must have the ability to apply them in unfriendly, strange surroundings (Fleming, 1984; Green, 1989; Tinto, 1987).

Minority students are often faced with individual racism as well. African American students cite being made to feel stupid by other students for asking questions in class, having to prove to faculty that work was their own, and being snubbed by White students (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Students cite instances such as having to change partners in a science laboratory because the White student wanted an A in the class (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Wright (1989) and Coakley and Dickson (1988) found students to be generally concerned about fair and equal treatment by faculty and staff. Fleming (1984) found that African American students on White campuses experienced anxiety over both their academic and non-classroom faculty interactions.

Fleming (1984) and others also found that the small numbers of African American students on many White campuses contributed to the sense of isolation and alienation experienced by many minority students (National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1991; Stikes, 1984; Tinto, 1993). As noted earlier, institutions have not been quick to establish aggressive recruiting efforts to attract minority students.

Given the small numbers of minority students on many campuses, it is not surprising that another form of institutional racism is failure to provide adequate academic and social activities relevant to minority students. A nationwide study by Allen (1988) revealed that 45% of African American students reported feeling either "very little" or "not at all" part of their university's general campus life (p. 179). Students reported problems of social adjustment, cultural alienation, and racial discrimination (Allen, 1988). Stikes (1984) found that some students were aided by association with all Black groups, while others needed more freedom to be alone and associate with people without the criterion of race. Fleming (1984) found that the lack of minority faculty and peers leads to isolation and alienation, causing African American students at White schools to divert their energies to coping with this loneliness. She argued that the interpersonal supports provided by faculty and peers are key ingredients to intellectual development and help to explain why African American students frequently experience greater intellectual gains at Black colleges. Mallinckrodt and Sedlacek (1987) and Tinto (1993) suggest that racism and lack of strong social supports make it necessary for students to attend to issues of community first, making it even more important that faculty find ways to build and sustain a sense of community within the classroom.

The study *Campus Life* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990) found that a long list of racial tensions experienced regularly by students led to their desire to form and belong to minority student organizations. Cultural events and minority-related activities need to be a regular part of campus life (Clewell & Ficklen, 1986; Harris, 1989-90). Students also need a culturally diverse curriculum (Ross, 1990) that allows them to "read, study, and celebrate" their own cultures and those of other

social groups (*Understanding Campus Climate*, 1991, p. 7). This includes not only courses dedicated to cultural studies but a comprehensive approach that integrates ethnic studies across the curriculum (*Understanding Campus Climate*, 1991; Richardson, 1989b; Ross, 1990; Stikes, 1984).

Ross particularly has argued that it is a myth that schools must have a separate ethnic studies program to be successful at minority education (1990). In defending this view, Ross stated that not only do many schools not have the resources to offer a solid ethnic studies program, but many minority students find themselves comfortable in an environment that supports their career goals and "takes a more pervasive approach to building cross-cultural awareness into the curriculum" (p. 12). Such an approach should be accompanied by strong faculty leadership with clear standards both for including separate courses within various departments and incorporating appropriate reading lists and other materials into a variety of other courses.

Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) have extended the discussion on a culturally sensitive curriculum to include a pedagogy that is culturally inclusive regardless of the subject matter. They developed a "motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching" which includes four "intersecting goals or conditions":

1. establishing inclusion (forming a learning context that shows respect for all students and teachers

2. developing attitude (creating a "favorable disposition" in learners towards the learning experience)

3. enhancing meaning (expanding or refining the complexity of what is learned in a course in a way that includes values and issues relevant to all the learners)

4. engendering competence (creating an awareness in learners that they are or can be effective in learning information or skills that are of personal value) (pp. 27-28). Wlodkowski and Ginsberg have also identified and developed a wide variety of teaching structures that support this framework.

Finally, institutional racism has been evident in the lack of action in spite of substantial research that shows what actions colleges and universities need to take. In a report on research related to minority students at the National Association of Developmental Education Conference on February 23, 1995, Boylan (personal communication) stated that while a great deal of research exists, little action has occurred. Educators have not turned research into policy.

Richardson (1989a) identified three stages involved in this process of moving from research to action. The first is "reactive" and includes recruitment and access issues. The second is "strategic" and includes outreach, mentoring, and advising activities. The third is "adaptive" and includes changes in student assessment, learning assistance, and curriculum content. It is here with activities that involve institutional change that colleges have "stalled" (Richardson, 1989a). Such changes demand strong administrative leadership that makes minority student achievement a priority (Applegate & Henniger, 1989; Boylan, et al., 1995; Harris, 1989-90; Richardson, 1989a; Ross, 1990; Tinto, 1993).

Administrative leadership is needed to implement policies regarding harassment and grievance procedures, and the establishment of committees that monitor minority involvement in all aspects of the university, including recruitment, hiring, tenure, classroom climate, student dormitories, and other student gathering places (National

Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities,1991; Boylan et al., 1995). Institutions

must set equity goals for minority graduation rates so that minorities are as well

represented among graduates as they are in the undergraduate population (Richardson,

1989a).

Stikes (1984, p. 124) also identified clear support from higher administration as a

"significant variable" in a campus environment supportive of success for African

American students. This support is evidenced by equitable distribution of resources,

diversified programs, flexible policies, and support for Black-oriented programs in a way

that shows they are important to the campus (Clewell & Ficklen, 1986; Stikes, 1984).

And echoing Richardson's call for equitable graduation rates, other researchers (Boylan

et al., 1995; Clewell & Ficklen, 1986) have emphasized the need for setting goals and

evaluating them to ensure that programs are indeed having a positive impact on minority

student retention and achievement.

Student Characteristics

In addition to studying system, socioeconomic, and institutional barriers faced by

minority students, educators have also conducted research designed to identify specific

characteristics of the minority students themselves that might relate to retention and

achievement. Astin's (1982) broad national study identified background factors related

to the undergraduate persistence of African Americans. He found that high-school

grades, good study habits, relatively high self-esteem in terms of academic ability, having

taken college preparatory courses, coming from families who were well educated and

relatively affluent, high test scores, having taken courses in mathematics, languages, and

science, and having attended an integrated high school correlated with persistence.

Nettles (1991) also found that attending a college with a racial composition similar to their high school correlated with persistence along with being married and being a non-transfer student. Richardson and Skinner (1992) conducted a study across 10 predominantly White universities recognized for having high success rates with African American, Hispanic, and Native American students. The researchers identified four profiles for success based on a match between the students' background and instructional and support services offered at the universities. Category 1 students were well-prepared, second-generation college students, but who were unprepared for the lack of social support and the low expectations of faculty. These students coped primarily by finding social support systems off campus and by assertively addressing problems as they arose.

Category 2 students were first-generation college students who grew up with a strong belief in the value of education but whose educational preparation was inadequate. Such students responded well to bridge programs designed to address academic skills and knowledge about what to expect in college. Students who did not receive appropriate support services reported frequent stress resulting from their lack of background knowledge in classes and their lack of understanding about the cognitive demands of college. These problems were compounded by the fact that students in this category were often embarrassed and thus reluctant to seek assistance even when it was available.

Category 3 students were a combination of first- and second-generation college students who questioned the value of education in their lives and lacked direction and purpose in spite of adequate academic preparation. These students came from communities where there were few professional role models and often made social

alliances with students who reinforced these ambivalent attitudes. Turning points for these students came when they began to see opportunities that could open to them with college credentials.

Category 4 students were first-generation college students with little academic preparation who had never intended to attend college. These were often older students who were ambivalent about the value of a college education and for whom academic struggles were common. These students relied heavily on early intervention activities that address study skills, time management, and goal-setting activities, but faced ongoing financial difficulties, stopped out frequently, and often attended part-time, many not completing their programs. Based on such studies, some researchers (Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1993) have argued that student attrition is often a result of the mismatches that occur between students and institutions. Colleges and universities, Tinto (1993) has maintained, should identify those students it has the capacity to serve and encourage some students to seek out other institutions more suited to their needs.

Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) identified seven non-cognitive variables related to persistence for minority students which they used to formulate a non-cognitive questionnaire or NCQ. Tracey and Sedlacek (1985, 1987) demonstrated the validity of the NCQ and added an eighth variable:

1. self-concept (positive feeling about self, strength of character, determination, independence)

2. realistic self-appraisal, especially regarding academics (recognizes deficiencies and works hard to develop self)

3. understands and deals with racism (not submissive or hostile but willing

to address situations involving institutional and/or individual racism)

    4. focuses on long-range goals and is able to defer short-term or immediate needs

    5. availability of strong support person

    6. successful leadership experience in any area related to his/her background (for example, gang, church, sports)

    7. demonstrated community service (involvement in his/her cultural community)

    8. general academic familiarity (relationship of a student's extracurricular interests to formal academic subjects) (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985, p. 406).

Tracey and Sedlacek (1987) found that the NCQ predicted grades, retention, and graduation rates for African American students for up to 6 years after initial enrollment. Items 1, 2, and 8 related to persistence across all periods of enrollment; items 4 and 5 related to persistence within the first year; and items 3 and 7 became more important after the first year. Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) concluded that the NCQ demonstrates that institutions should target students for services at specific times throughout their college years. More importantly, they argued, is the question of whether colleges and universities can change so that these variables will not play such different roles for different races.

Other research has also suggested important differences between the developmental needs of White and African American students. One example is the relationship between a student's sense of internal and external locus of control. Interventions with minority students have frequently emphasized the importance of an increased sense of internal control (Higher Education Extension Service, 1992, p. 70). However, Gurin and Epps (1975) found that recognition of the limits of internal control was an important factor for successful African American college students. These students

had a "dual control orientation" (Higher Education Extension Service, 1992, p. 70) in that they believed in the importance of their own efforts but recognized that certain factors, such as racism, were not within their personal efforts to control. This recognition allowed them to appropriately assess obstacles to their academic and career achievement. Gurin and Epps (1975) maintained that institutions need to assist minority students to understand that some problems can only be addressed through collective or political action, and not by their individual efforts. Such an understanding may assist minority students to move beyond self-blaming and frustration over circumstances that they personally cannot control.

Identity issues are another example of differences between the developmental needs of minority and White students. Helms and Carter (1980) and Hardiman and Jackson (1992) have outlined five stages in the development of racial identity and the differences in those stages for Whites and for ethnic minorities:

1. *Naive*. At this stage children are largely unaware of race and generally incorporate the worldview of their socializing community such as parents, teachers, and community members.

2. *Acceptance*. Gradually children begin to realize that there are differences in races, and they internalize the mores of their own group, recognize how races relate to each other, and differentiate the private and public behaviors that are acceptable for their own group. Persons in this stage have accepted the dominance or inferiority of various racial groups.

3. *Resistance*. Over time, people experience things that contradict the worldview they have accepted and begin to understand racism as it manifests itself in the attitudes

and actions of not only individuals, but of groups, and institutions. Resistance can be either passive or active and may include withdrawal, actively challenging members of the dominant race, distancing oneself from the dominant culture, or trying out the traditions of a minority group.

4. *Redefinition*. At this stage, people move to develop their own sense of self as White or Black, recognizing that up to this point they have accepted society's definition of who they are. Whites may begin to look for ways of defining themselves that do not depend on denigrating other cultures, recognizing that all groups have unique characteristics with no group being superior or inferior to another. Blacks also begin to identify qualities that are unique to their culture and history and to define themselves in ways that do not depend on comparisons to Whites. They move beyond seeing themselves as primarily victims of racism.

5. *Internalization*. African Americans at this stage accept being Black as central to their identity, but recognize that it is not the only significant part of who they are. Whites, on the other hand, recognize that ending racism is in their self-interest and come to view their culture as one among many rather than as normal and others as different.

As Hardiman and Jackson (1992) pointed out, traditional-age students (both White and African American) are more likely to enter college during the acceptance stage and move into the resistance stage during college. Minority students who do not have an adequate number of peers and role models with whom to interact during these crucial stages of identity development may find the task of developing a healthy self-esteem a difficult one (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988). Consequently, as Gay (1985), Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995), and Boylan et al. (1993) have noted, understanding

the developmental nature of racial identity attainment can allow institutions to be prepared for the attitudes and perceptions of their students and to appropriately respond within both classroom and counseling situations.

On the other hand, Wlodkowski and Ginsberg (1995) and Hardiman and Jackson (1992) cautioned against stereotyping students who may in reality be in several stages at one time. Instead, faculty and staff should use knowledge of this process to first recognize their own identity issues and how they may impact their relationships with students, and, second to "[appreciate] these developmental processes" and "to avoid prematurely stifling, artificially hastening, or unfairly condemning the behavior of students as they grapple with topics and themes that confront their differences" (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, p. 51). Gay (1985) has suggested direct instructional activities that would inform minority students about the realities of racism and ethnic and cultural diversity, and that would assist students to recognize and change negative beliefs about self-worth.

Stikes (1984), another researcher interested in developmental issues of African American college students, explored through case studies the personal characteristics that affect retention and achievement. He found that African American students often carried coping strategies and behavior patterns into the college arena that had proved successful in their communities but were inappropriate and self-defeating in this new environment. When faced with situations in which they were academically deficient, students often chose coping strategies that maintained self-esteem, but complicated the problem, such as not taking a test for which they had not studied. This behavior

avoids the immediate embarrassment of failing the test, but does not bring academic success at the end of the course.

Faced with situations in which their expectations about college conflicted with the reality, students relied on old skills such as "beating the system" or trying "to hustle" their way through school (Stikes, p. 52). Needing "concrete, observable" rewards, they had no "self-reinforcing system" which could sustain successful patterns of behavior (p. 52). Such observations support Ogbu's (1987, p. 21) premise that characteristics of "dependence, deference, and manipulatory behavior" (as opposed to initiative, industriousness, and competitiveness associated with Whites and immigrant populations) are learned over generations by members of "caste-like" minorities and often stand in the way of success in college. Stikes (1984, p. 52) characterized the motivation of African American students as "personal" and "experiential," leading to lack of effort in classes that they did not view as relevant or with instructors they did not like.

In addition, students were often overly optimistic about success, tended to gloss over failures, procrastinated, rationalized by blaming teachers or making other excuses, and had no routine for getting things done. Such tendencies were aggravated by a general lack of peer support. Stikes suggested that these behavioral patterns and attitudes stem from growing up in lower socioeconomic communities where students did not learn to appreciate learning for its own sake, a value Stikes associated with the middle class.

Stikes (1984, p. 137) concluded that the degree of satisfaction that African American students find in college is directly related to the extent that they can find "outlets for their abilities, interests, and personality traits." He classified patterns of student development into two categories--involved and uninvolved--supporting other

findings that involvement is directly related to retention (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990; Hackman & Dysinger, 1970; Turnbull, 1986). Stikes found that African American students who had a high level of personal, academic, or athletic involvement were more likely to complete college.

Institutional Differences

In addition to studying barriers that exist for minority students and the characteristics of the students themselves, researchers have also looked at the differences in types of institutions and their success rates in retaining and graduating minority students. Fleming (1985) examined the impact on African American students of attending historically Black institutions. She found that African American students in predominantly White schools often find their energies diverted to coping with loneliness and that the interpersonal supports at Black institutions are a necessary precondition for intellectual development. She argued that while the environment at predominantly White colleges fosters the "integration of intellectual and interpersonal energies" of White students, it does not meet the developmental needs of African American students in the same way that the more homogeneous environment of the Black campus can (p. 136).

Other studies have focused on the differences between 4- and 2-year schools. Astin found a negative relationship between attending a community college and completing a bachelor's degree. Boylan et al. (1993) conducted a national study of developmental students (students who were assessed as needing academic assistance) and found marked differences between retention rates of ethnic groups at various types of institutions. Four-year private institutions had the highest retention rates for African

American developmental students, whose retention levels were higher than for Whites or Latinos (p. 1). Retention rates were lower for African American developmental students at all other types of institutions (4-year public schools, 2-year technical schools, research universities, and community colleges). Most noticeable was the wide margin of difference between the retention rates for White and African American developmental students at community colleges. After 3.5 years, 30.1% of the White students had graduated or were still in school, compared to only 10% for African American students (p. 1). This finding prompted Boylan et al. (1993) to suggest that community colleges must make greater efforts to increase minority student involvement and to attend to the psychosocial needs of minority students.

Deskins (1991) also criticized community colleges saying that the associate degree is a "terminal degree with little value for continuing study in higher education" (p. 28), thus compounding the problem of educational attainment for the large numbers of minority students who attend community colleges. Other researchers (ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges, 1993, p. 2; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1993) have vigorously defended the role of 2-year schools, saying that not everyone who attends college wants a degree or wants to transfer to a 4-year school and that, absent the community colleges, even fewer minority and first-generation college students would enter the higher educational system. Richardson and Skinner interviewed 107 minority graduates of 10 public universities and found that 52% reported attending a community college and 60% of the first-generation students had attended a community college (p. 29).

As noted earlier, patterns of college participation and parental educational attainment also contribute to the large number of minority students who attend community colleges. Persons whose parents have a high-school education or less are more likely to choose a community college (Parental educational attainment and chance for college, 1995). In addition, those who delay entrance to higher education, many of whom are likely to be male, non-White, and of lower socioeconomic origins, are more likely to go to 2-year schools (Tinto, 1993). Moreover, 31.6% of traditional entrants go to 2-year colleges; 70% of delayed entrants go to 2-year colleges.

Among delayed entrants who favored 2-year schools, students are more likely to be female, African American, or Hispanic, and have lower ability than higher ability. The delayed adult entrants are more likely to be enrolled part-time and to be employed full- or part-time. Carroll (1988) estimated that delayed entrants who attend 2-year schools and go part-time are five times less likely than immediate full-time entrants to obtain a 4-year degree. Thus patterns of attendance bear directly on issues of eventual persistence.

Others have cited strengths of community colleges that allow them to address many of the needs of minority students, a large number of whom are also first-generation college students (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990; Person, 1994; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). These educators have noted that community colleges view first-generation students as a "primary clientele" (Richardson & Skinner, p. 41) and consequently place a high priority on the importance of teaching and providing services that acclimate and support these students. In addition, these same educators have cited low tuition, individualized instruction, small class size, outreach

programs, and a belief in the value and dignity of students. *Campus Life* (Carnegie

Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, p. 53) stated that "it's the classroom where

social and intellectual bonding is most likely to occur," noting that community colleges

are particularly good at creating these positive classroom environments. Students report

that teachers at community colleges care about them, their grades, their ideas, and their

personal lives (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).

Richardson and Bender (1985) identified five strengths of community colleges:

1. a commitment to underprepared students

2. a willingness to work with them

3. experience in providing remediation

4. a priority attached to establishing a supportive environment

5. an overt willingness to accommodate academic practices to student

characteristics (p. 15).

Such findings as these make surprising the findings regarding the success of

African American developmental students at community colleges. In examining the

reasons for these findings, Boylan et al. (1993, p. 3) suggested that since many

community college students are commuters, they may not stay on campus long enough to

participate in services such as tutoring, advising, and social and cultural activities, and

that "fewer mechanisms may be in place to assist students overcome the effects of

racism." They urged that colleges must become more "attentive to the developmental and

psycho-social needs of students of color" (p. 3). Richardson (1989b) also observed that

non-traditional students do not "immerse themselves" (p. 23) in the role of college

student, partly because their reference groups are often not college students, and that

rather than staying on campus to participate in activities, students often associate the campus with problems such as parking, transportation, inconvenient scheduling of classes, and paperwork errors.

These conflicting findings and viewpoints regarding community colleges and minority students bring into focus one of the concerns of this particular study. While researchers have generally stated at what type of school their studies were conducted, and many, as noted, have focused on community colleges, studies have not examined how rural and urban community colleges might differ or how minority students in rural community colleges might differ from students in urban areas.

Gillett-Karam (1995) has identified some of the special challenges for rural community colleges as they try to meet the needs of women and minorities. These include attracting and providing adequate salaries for minority faculty and staff; keeping abreast of technology; addressing the greater financial needs of a poorer rural population, which include transportation and day care in areas where distance and inadequate public transportation make college attendance difficult; and developing an economic base to support activities that address these concerns.

Tinto (1993) has argued that additional problems with much of the retention research is that little has been done to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary departure resulting from academic dismissal, that little has been done to distinguish the differences between those students who leave institutions and those who leave the system, and that many studies are descriptive rather than causal, a weakness also cited by Sedlacek (1987). In addition, some researchers (Livingston & Stewart, 1987; Richardson & Skinner, 1992) have noted that studies often fail to recognize the

differences between minority groups or even within minority groups. These deficits, coupled with a lack of focus on types of institutions and how they relate to minority students, have caused some (Tinto, 1993; Livingston & Stewart, 1987) to argue that if real change is to occur, institutions must conduct their own studies; that is, they must examine their own minority retention and graduation rates compared to the retention and graduation rates of White students, they must examine their own institutional climates and policies, and they must talk to their own students.

This study is one attempt to follow these admonitions. Given the lack of focus on rural community colleges and given the disparate findings regarding the strengths and weaknesses of community colleges, studies such as this one can perhaps assist one community college to improve its ability to serve minority students and provide information that can be added to what is known about community colleges in other demographic settings.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

Research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education (Merriam, 1988, p. 3).

The study described here is firmly grounded in this belief. No amount of experimental research about African American students can take the place of research that talks to the students themselves. If educators are to assist students in their efforts to become integrated into the social and academic life of the institution, they must first of all know how students perceive the institution. To learn about these perceptions first-hand, I interviewed six African American students about the nature of their academic and social experiences at Southwestern Michigan College (SMC). My purpose was to identify those experiences which have assisted or hindered the integration of these students into the academic and social life of the college, and have consequently influenced students' decisions to leave or stay.

Rationale for the Study

In focusing on their academic and social experiences, I have linked my study to Tinto's model of institutional departure which asserts that it is more productive to focus

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on factors over which institutions have control than on factors within the students over which college staff often have little control. Tinto's model accepts the fact that students bring background experiences and personal dispositions that will affect the way in which individuals respond to and interact with faculty, staff, and peers in the college setting. The model also allows for the more psychological perspective of Fleming (1984) whose findings indicate that African American students need supportive relationships within the institution if they are to persist and to develop intellectually. Tinto's perspective, however, is a sociological one which emphasizes "the actions of the various actors in the collegiate environment . . . and how those actions shape the nature of the social and academic communities in which students find themselves" (Tinto. 1993. p. 122). Like Tinto. I believe that this orientation leads to a focus on policy and actions that institutions themselves can take, rather than a focus on the deficiencies--real or perceived--in students.

For this reason, I chose to interview a group of students to discover their perceptions of the academic and social settings that the faculty and staff at SMC have created. It is in accurately understanding student perceptions that SMC can begin to understand how its policies and practices may be hindering or assisting the success of its African American students.

Criteria for Student Selection

I used four criteria for selecting the pool of students from which to recruit participants in the study: they had to be students who identified themselves in college records as Black and who were born and raised in the United States; they had to be commuters (that is, they resided in their own homes in the community); they must have

been at SMC for at least four semesters/sessions (the college has two 14-week semesters

and two 7-week sessions); if they were graduates, they had to have graduated within the

last 6 months. (In other words, these were students who had persisted past the crucial first

semester of college.) Within these parameters, I wanted to interview one traditional (18-

20-year-old) male, one non-traditional (20+) male, one traditional female, one non-

traditional female, one nursing student (male or female), and one athlete (male or female).

These are students from distinct groups seen regularly at SMC, and I wanted to hear

in-depth the story of one person in each group. In working with students, SMC staff have

found that each of these groups tends to have specific characteristics that require different

strategies from faculty and counselors. Non-traditional students often come with many

adult responsibilities and insecurities about their ability to be successful. Faculty,

especially, have to be encouraging and flexible in working with these students outside of

class. While men and women share these needs, women more often than men juggle

childcare and household responsibilities with their school work. Non-traditional students

in general tend to be serious students who find school more exciting and meaningful than

when they were younger.

Athletes again have a unique set of needs in that they must juggle the demands of

practice, travel, and competition with the demands of studying. SMC monitors the

academic progress of its athletes for eligibility purposes and actively intervenes to

connect athletes with academic support services.

Nursing students also have additional demands placed on them in that they have

clinicals in addition to their classwork. Their schedules change frequently within

semesters, making it more challenging to juggle work, school, and family responsibilities. In addition, the grading scale in nursing classes is higher than in other classes.

Traditional students, those whose primary role is that of student, generally have fewer outside responsibilities but bring the issues of late adolescence to their college experience. Because these are the main categories, aside from ethnicity and gender, into which staff generally divide students in thinking about the nature of the services the college provides, I was particularly interested in talking with a student from each of these groups. In so doing, I did not expect students to be representative samples; rather I was following what Patton (1990, p. 172) described as "maximum variation sampling," a procedure especially useful when the researcher desires two kinds of findings: "(1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity."

I expected that each student's story would be unique; however, I also anticipated that regardless of age, sex, family responsibilities, curricular or extracurricular interests, these students would share similarities in their experiences as African Americans in a predominantly White school.

Student Selection

I asked both students and staff to help with the process of selecting students for this study. I gave them the list of criteria, with one other comment: I needed students who would be willing to talk. Once a potential pool of students was identified, I screened students using the college's database to ensure that they met the criteria. At that point, I asked either the student or staff member who suggested the student to make the initial

contact. Other than making sure that I had at least two men and two women, students were selected on the basis of who was contacted first and agreed to participate. I asked those who were helping to select students to tell them that I was interested in talking with African American students about their experience at SMC in order to identify ways of serving students more effectively. If the student was willing to talk with me to find out more about the project, I asked the staff member or student making the contact to introduce me to the student or to ask the student to contact me. At this point, I had an opportunity to explain the purpose of the study and the interview procedures.

Based on my experience with other interviews, I knew I needed to be clear about the time commitment and provide examples of questions that would be asked. I also needed to emphasize the confidentiality of the interviews and give the students an opportunity to ask questions of me. If the student expressed interest or willingness to participate, I intended to ask him or her to think about it and arrange to confirm the decision within 2 or 3 days.

Clearly, the risk existed that not enough students would be willing to participate in this study. However, I have conducted two other studies at SMC involving African American students, and in both cases, the first students I asked were willing to participate. Therefore, I was quite confident that I would be able to find six students willing to participate in this specific project.

As it turned out, the difficulty came in finding students who fit the criteria, not in locating students who were willing to participate. Staff members gave me the names of several students, three of whom fit the criteria and were easy to contact and talk to because they were either taking classes in my department or they were in contact with

advisors in my department. In the spring of 1996, I contacted all three of these students. each of whom agreed to participate without any hesitation.

I arranged for interviews with the first three students to begin during May and June 1996. In the meantime, I searched the college database for students who fit the remaining criteria and was able to locate two other students, one a non-traditional male and one a traditional male, both of whom agreed to be interviewed over the summer. However, at this point, I still had not located a nursing student who fit the criteria. I reviewed the college database in the winter and spring of 1996 and after talking with the Dean of the School of Nursing, I determined that while there were African American students who were making application to the nursing program, there was no one already in the program and there were no recent graduates who might have met the criteria.

Thus in the summer of 1996, I decided to identify a student from a category other than nursing, one that would still maintain the "maximum variation" pattern of purposeful selection that characterized the other selections. Therefore I chose a student who had participated in the Minority Student Organization at the college. Students in this organization showed an interest in formally joining with other African American students for both social and extracurricular purposes and for the purpose of speaking out and representing the concerns of minority students on campus. Members of the organization have been in the position of making requests to the institution to sponsor a number of activities and thus have had interactions of a different nature than most other students. Interviewing a student who had participated for at least one semester in the activities of the Minority Student Organization would add a perspective that could be different from the other students being interviewed. A student meeting all of the criteria and who fit this

last category had just graduated from the college and was working on campus. She agreed to participate and was interviewed in the fall of 1996.

Thus at the end of 1996, I had completed all of the interviews except for one student, a traditional male, who had been unable to make any of the appointments we set up for the summer. He did not re-enroll for fall; however, he returned for the 1997 winter semester, at which time we were able to complete the interviews.

Procedures for Interviewing

Each interview began with a brief list of introductory questions about personal background, reasons for coming to SMC, and course of study (see Appendix A). Questions such as those suggested by Patton (1990, p. 207) were used as conversational starting points: experience/behavior questions, opinion/value questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, and sensory questions. However, as Bogdan and Biklen (1992, p. 97) have stated, while structured interviews allow the researcher to collect "comparable data across subjects," more loosely structured conversations provide the "opportunity to find out how the informant structures the topic himself." Since it was my purpose to discover each student's own story, I wanted to be free to follow topics of interest as they arose, to probe more deeply into areas that seemed especially important to individual students. Depth, not breadth, was the goal.

Interviews were conducted in rooms on campus that afforded privacy. With student permission, I made audiotapes of each interview, and listened to each interview before talking with the student again. Taping the interviews left me free to listen carefully and to make process notes, i.e., points to come back to, observations, or insights into the students or their experiences. I started with experience/behavior and

knowledge questions, as those were less probing; however, as the interviews progressed and students became more comfortable, I moved to questions that asked students to evaluate or express feelings about their experiences.

I asked students to commit to three 1-hour interviews. Based on my experience with a series of six 1-hour interviews with another SMC student. I was confident that three hours would be adequate. However, I also asked students to participate in "member checks" as I analyzed the interview transcriptions. In this way, I was able to follow up on points, clarify my interpretations, and enhance the "trustworthiness" of the findings (Lincoln & Guba. 1985; Merriam. 1988).

Validity

The issue of trustworthiness or validity is an important one in a study such as this one where the researcher is also the research instrument. In addition to member checks and the use of maximum variation sampling, validity was addressed in two other ways: peer examination and clarifying researcher bias (Bogdan & Biklen. 1992; Merriam. 1988). Merriam (p. 169) described "peer examination" as a process in which the researcher "asks colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge." I asked colleagues both at SMC and at other community colleges to provide such commentary. At least one of these colleagues was an African American. (See Appendix C for peer comments.)

Also central to the process of validity is clarifying the researcher's bias, that is stating my "assumptions, world view, and theoretical orientation" at the outset (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 47; Merriam. 1988, p. 170). I have already established that in undertaking this study, I did so in the belief that the students' perceptions are primary.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 83-84) discussed the distinction between "perceived" and "constructed" reality. In contrast to the view that a single reality exists which research must try to discover, some scholars have asserted that there may be a reality, but we cannot know what it is, at least not completely; instead we perceive it from different viewpoints. Others have asserted that there is probably no one reality, and even if there is, we "cannot know it and inquiry will not reveal it" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 83). According to this view, reality is constructed in the minds of individuals.

Underlying the present study is the belief that in interactions between people it is unlikely that a single reality exists; it is even less likely that such a reality could be discerned through research. Thus, it was my purpose in this study to discover what each of these six students perceived to be real, based on their experiences at SMC.

The Interviewer

At this point it is probably also useful, in addition to clarifying my biases as a researcher, to say something about myself personally and professionally, since who I am cannot be set aside from the interviewing process; instead, who I am and what I do has led directly to my interest in this research project and undoubtedly had some impact on the interviewing process itself.

Since 1986 I have been part of the Developmental Studies Department at SMC, first as an English instructor, and since 1989 as director of the department, a full-time administrative position. The department is a centralized, comprehensive developmental studies program, which is responsible for the college's basic skills assessment plan, SMC's developmental studies courses, and the wide array of support services available to students in these courses. Fundamental to my job is a personal belief in the value of

open admissions institutions like SMC which make a college education available to all students regardless of their academic background. It is this philosophy which makes a department such as mine a vital part of the institution. It is our task to assess students and place them into those courses indicated as necessary by assessment. Instruction is accompanied by intrusive advising, tutoring, counseling, mentoring, and other support services.

Within this context, students see me in a number of roles: supervisor to faculty and staff; interpreter and enforcer of college policy as it relates to grades, testing, required coursework; instructor; and generally as a spokesperson for the college. In addition, I am frequently seen as one who will assist a student who is having problems with a schedule, a faculty member, or another office on campus, or with a specific class. I have also taken a special interest in minority students on campus, for several years serving as the Minority Student Organization advisor. In this capacity, I was often an advocate for minority students, sharing concerns with various administrators, including going with students to the college president, and on two or three occasions assisting students whose behavior had brought them into disciplinary action with the institution.

Over the last several years, I have made it a point to talk with African American professionals about factors that seem to prevent a number of our students, particularly African American males, from being successful at SMC; I have read books by African Americans about their experiences such as Shelby Steele's *The Content of Our Character*, and Nathan McCall's *Makes Me Wanna Holler*, in addition to academic literature on minority student retention, in an effort to try and understand some of the perspectives of African American students. And, of course, I have talked informally with students

themselves. But this was the first time I had set out to systematically talk with students about their experiences as African Americans at SMC.

I had, however, conducted a series of six 1-hour interviews with an African American student at SMC. My purpose was to follow Spradley's ethnographic approach for interviewing an informant in order to learn what the culture of college is like. In interviewing Robert, I learned first of all how he had adapted to school as a first-generation college student, what he had learned about college, how he had learned about it, and how he felt about it. Second, I learned about the types of questions that encourage an informant to talk freely, that elicited information about his experiences, and revealed how he had organized his information about college. And I learned about some of the practical matters of taping, transcribing, keeping careful field notes, and the strategies for analyzing data in a methodical, purposeful way that leads not only to accurate description, but analysis and identification of themes that interpret a person's experience.

In addition, I worked with a group of instructors from four other colleges over a period of 3 years on a project to interview developmental writing students for the purpose of identifying the affective factors that impact their writing in positive and/or negative ways. I interviewed two students at SMC, both of whom were African American, analyzed these interviews, and then met with my colleagues to share the results of our collective work. We looked for common threads, for patterns, and discussed what impact this information would have on the way we taught developmental writing. Again, this experience was extremely useful. It reinforced the value of asking the right questions and listening to what students have to say about their experiences. It also taught me about the

importance of thoroughly understanding the nature of one's methodology and for using established strategies for description, interpretation, and analysis of data.

Two factors clearly had the potential to interfere with students being willing to talk openly with me: I am White and I work for the college. However, the fact that I work in a department that is generally known as the place on campus to receive academic support, my personal reputation for being interested in minority students, and the positive personal relationships I have had with a number of African American students over the years seemed to serve as positive forces in this research project.

Generalization

Thus it was the goal of this study to discover not what *is* real, but what is real for each student, to discover what, for each one, has helped or hindered in his or her educational quest at SMC. In coming to understand these specific cases, college staff can become aware of how other students might have similar perceptions and can become more alert to the possible ways in which actions and policies can impact students. As Eisner (1991, p. 207) has said, "Qualitative case studies are full of opportunities for generalization." Once educators become aware of a feature or quality in one educational setting, he asserted, they have gained knowledge that can be useful in evaluating and understanding other settings. Others reading this study may find that they know students who are similar and who have described similar experiences, feelings, or attitudes. These reader "connections" (Eisner, p. 211) have the power to enlighten and influence future interactions between college personnel and African American students in ways that can help more students to be successful. It is this belief in the nature and purpose of case study research that underlies this study.

Analysis of the Data

In analyzing the stories of each student, I followed an approach suggested by Eisner (1991) as useful in understanding and organizing data that have been collected from observing and participating in an educational experience: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics. Description is fundamental to case study research as it is the means by which the reader can enter into the situation which the researcher experienced. As Eisner (p. 89) stated, "To make vicarious participation possible, educational critics must have access to the qualities the situation displays." Providing a detailed description of the context of any study allows readers to make judgments for themselves about the credibility of the researcher's findings and to determine the transferability of these findings to situations of their own (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

Description included information about SMC, its size, location, mission, unique qualities, student body, faculty and staff, as well as information about the students who have served as informants for the study. Most importantly, description must allow the reader to hear the students speak, providing enough of their own words and phrases that their voices may be clearly heard.

Whereas description gives "an account of," interpretation accounts "for" (Eisner 1991, p. 95). It is here that what students have said can be connected to other research, to theories about student retention and factors impacting the experiences of African American students on predominantly White campuses. Specifically, it is here that the explanatory utility of Tinto's model of student departure can be helpful. Interpretation asks the questions "Why?" and "What does this reflect?" I would note here, also, a

pitfall that may be especially difficult to avoid in this particular study--what Eisner (p. 98) called "predictability." Looking for and creating patterns is the goal of interpretation; however, knowing what to look for can keep one from finding the unexpected. Likewise, expecting to find certain things can cause one to see them. It is here that member checks and peer review have assisted me.

Evaluation requires the researcher to pass judgment, to look at what has been seen and heard, and to determine, in this case, how the students' experiences have been shaped--for good or for ill--by the staff, faculty, and policies of SMC. I wanted to determine in what ways the college has contributed positively or negatively to the success or lack of success of these students, and in what ways the college might change that would promote a more positive experience.

Thematics is that part of analysis that looks beyond the immediate situation in a search for "the recurring messages that pervade" and connect it to other situations (Eisner, 1991. p. 104). Students at SMC have experienced feelings, relationships, and events that are similar to those of African American students at other institutions. Themes that have emerged in other research on the retention of African American students emerged in this study also. In identifying themes, I looked for those patterns that connected SMC to other colleges and universities, especially community colleges, those patterns which perhaps distinguish it from its urban counterparts, and those patterns that reinforce or extend the literature on what facilitates the social and academic integration of African American students at the community college.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA

Institutional Overview

Eisner states that the first step of analysis--description--gives "an account of"

(1991, p. 95). In this study, an "account of" needs to begin with a description of SMC,

not as seen by the students, but as described in its own literature and in its own records.

Southwestern Michigan College (SMC) is a publicly supported, locally controlled

community college founded in 1964 to serve the residents of Southwestern Michigan. It

had a 1997 fall semester enrollment of 2,339 students. Southwestern Michigan College

sits in open country 3 miles outside Dowagiac, a small city of nearly 7,000. Situated on

240 acres, the 10-building campus is only 15 miles north of the population centers

surrounding South Bend, Indiana; 50 miles southwest of Kalamazoo, Michigan, and 24

miles southwest of Benton Harbor and St. Joseph, Michigan. In addition, the college has

a one-building campus in Niles.

As a 2-year school, SMC awards associate degrees and 1- and 2-year certificates

in a number of areas, including business, nursing and allied health, technology, and arts

and sciences. The college employs 45 full-time and 110 part-time faculty. In addition,

the college has an active fine and performing arts program, a science and history museum,

and a community-oriented fitness program. The college discontinued its intercollegiate

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athletic program at the end of the 1997-98 academic year, a move which will have

some implications for this study.

Geographic Service Region

While SMC's legal district includes all of Cass, Berrien, and St. Joseph counties

and two townships of Van Buren County, it attracts students from a much larger 1,300-

square-mile service area of 360,000 people that also includes portions of Van Buren

County, and La Porte, St. Joseph, and Elkhart counties in Indiana along the state border

(see Figure 4).

The College's Mission

The mission of Southwestern Michigan College is based "on the belief that higher

educational opportunities should be available to all as a means of achieving their ultimate

goals in life" (*Southwestern Michigan College Catalog*, 1996). The college's mission is

stated in the 1996-98 catalog:

> 1. Meeting the needs and aspirations of the wide range of groups and individuals of all ages who make up the college service area as the only post-secondary institution within the college district.
> 2. Providing one- and two-year occupational programs as well as two-year Baccalaureate-oriented programs in the comprehensive open-door community college serving a rural area.
> 3. Meeting the needs of the area in providing educational, social cultural and economic programs through its facilities, resources, and leadership.
> 4. Maintaining occupational competence in industry, business, science, agriculture, service technology and skilled trades; providing opportunities for individuals to prepare for entrance into various occupations as well as improve skills throughout their working careers. (pp. 17-18)
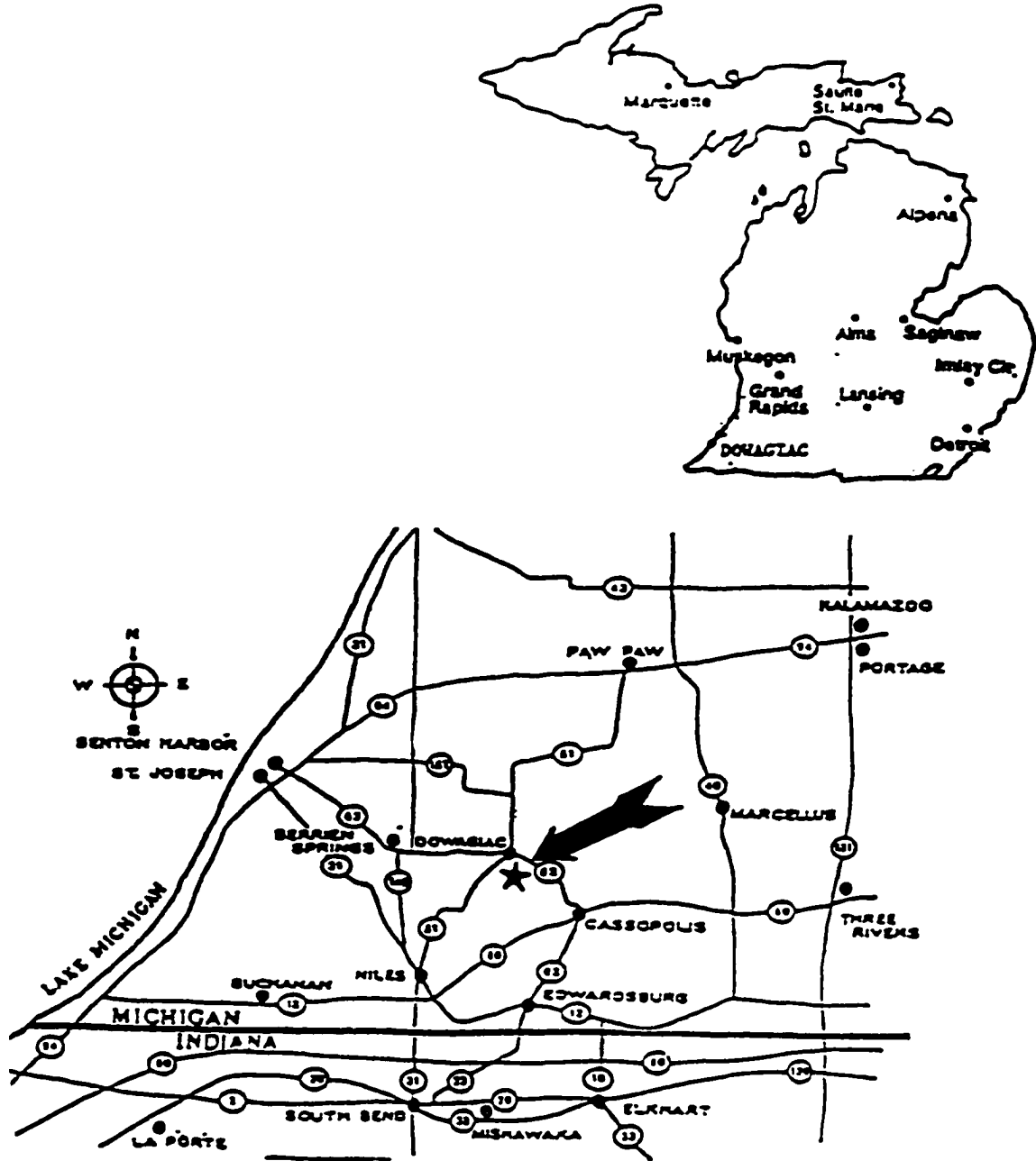
Figure 4. Southwestern Michigan.

Student Body Profile

Southwestern Michigan College students range in age from 12 to 78 years. The average age of the SMC student is 29, reflecting the changing age demographics of the population at large. This age range holds true regardless of whether students are enrolled for regular semester length, special session, or community courses. However, one-third are traditional students who begin college within 1 or 2 years of their high school graduation. Thus a substantial portion of SMC's student body is made up of traditional students, those who attend college immediately, or within 1 year, after graduating from high school, and who, although they may work, view attending college as primary.

Most of the enrolling students at SMC come from non-metropolitan, non-suburban high schools. Almost one-third of SMC's students are in college for the first time while the remainder are returning students. Transfer students make up only a small portion of the student body, about 9%. Approximately 33% are full-time students; 67% are part-time. The same breakdown holds true in comparing the enrollment of men to women: 36% and 64% respectively.

Reflective of its geographic location, SMC is a predominantly White institution with an ethnic minority population of about 11%. The majority of these students are African American (8%), and the remainder Native American (1%), Hispanic (1.6%), or Asian (.6%). While the African American population reflects the larger student body in the ratio of men to women, it differs in the number of non-traditional students. The average age of African American students at SMC is 35. This is not surprising given the national trend of African American students to defer immediate college enrollment and given the low number of African American students who graduate from some of the area

high schools. (Dowagiac averages 12 African American graduates a year; the smaller
community of Cassopolis, 18.) It is not surprising, then, that a large number of SMC's
African American students attend part-time.

Special/Distinctive College Features

SMC's motto is "Excellence with a Personal Touch," a phrase that is reflected in
many of the college's policies and practices. As an open admissions college, SMC has no
admissions requirements in terms of academic record and thus admits students of widely
varying backgrounds and skill levels. To promote student success, therefore, SMC has a
mandatory basic skills assessment policy which includes mandatory placement in
mathematics, reading, writing, and/or study skills if students' assessment test scores
warrant such placement. The college has walk-in testing available every weekday and
Tuesday evenings year round. Academic advising is also available on a walk-in basis,
including evenings and some Saturdays. In keeping with the college motto,
administrators as well as Student Services advisors are expected to see students when
necessary.

Class sizes are small, ranging from 8 to 35 for most classes, although some
lectures for laboratory classes may go as high as 75; the laboratory sections for these
classes would be much smaller. Faculty have required office hours and many adjunct
faculty provide office hours even though they are not paid to do so. For the last 4 or 5
years the college has been engaged in a campus-wide faculty development program to
train faculty in the use of cooperative learning and other active learning strategies. Full-
time faculty are required to participate in campus workshops, and adjuncts are paid if they

choose to attend. Such activities are intended to promote teaching strategies that bring about not only active learning, but a sense of community among students.

In addition to its emphasis on teaching, the college has an early warning system in which all faculty are required to participate. This system involves sending letters and making phone calls to students who are not attending class or who are doing unsatisfactory work. Faculty participation is monitored by the vice president for instruction in order to ensure that all faculty cooperate with this activity.

Such activities are examples of the college's efforts to promote success with a "personal touch." As will be seen in chapter 5, the students in this study all cited the personal interest and caring of faculty and staff as one of the reasons they would recommend SMC to other students.

In spite of this personal touch, however, retention is a challenge at SMC as it is for community colleges across the country. Given the very nature of their student bodies, community colleges admit students of widely varying academic backgrounds and goals and students with varying degrees of commitment to completing a college degree. Even students whose commitment is strong often find themselves torn between the conflicting demands of college, family, and work. Therefore, it is a fact that many students will drop out and many others will stop out, taking several years to complete a certificate or degree. Unfortunately, as has been documented in chapters 1 and 3, it is also a fact that a disproportionate number of African Americans will drop out. In this regard, SMC is no exception.

Enrollment records from 1990 through 1996 show clearly that the number of African American students enrolled at SMC has remained stable, even increasing slightly

(see Figure 5), in spite of a general decrease in overall enrollment since 1993. However. the number of students who graduate has remained disproportionately low compared to the college's overall graduation rate of 30%. As Figure 6 shows, only a small number of African American students stay through graduation: in the 1993-94 academic year. 11: 1994-95, 12; 1995-96, 11; 1996-97, 7. Additionally, enrollment of African Americans has dropped from 210 in the fall of 1996 to 156 in the fall of 1997 because of the cancellation of intercollegiate athletics. (These numbers do not include students enrolled in short, community service, or business development and corporate services courses. When these courses are added in, enrollments of African American students do increase slightly as seen in Figure 7.) Since a fair number of student athletes were from out of state, the number of local African Americans and the number of traditional African Americans have also decreased.

Equally discouraging is the fact that so many students are not successful academically. College wide, 80% or more of the students consistently carry a cumulative GPA of 2.00 (on a 4.00 scale) or higher. In contrast, more than half of the African American students enrolled in any one semester have grade point averages below a 2.00. with the average GPA being 1.67. It is clear, therefore, that while SMC's mission is to provide educational opportunity for all citizens in its service district and the wider surrounding area, not many African Americans are taking advantage of that opportunity, and, of those that do, not many are successful or choose to stay.
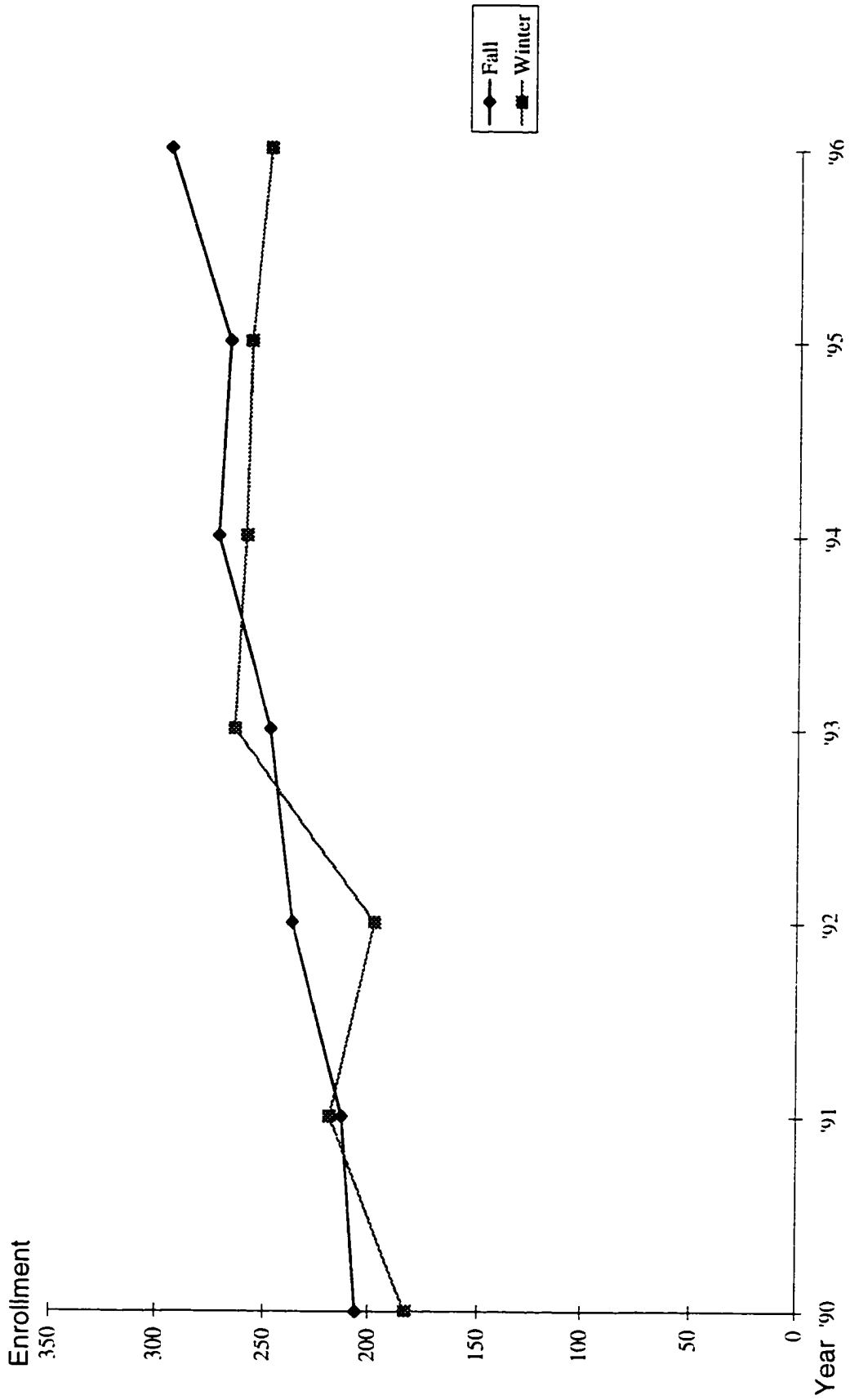
Figure 5. 1990-1996, Fall and winter enrollments for African American Students.
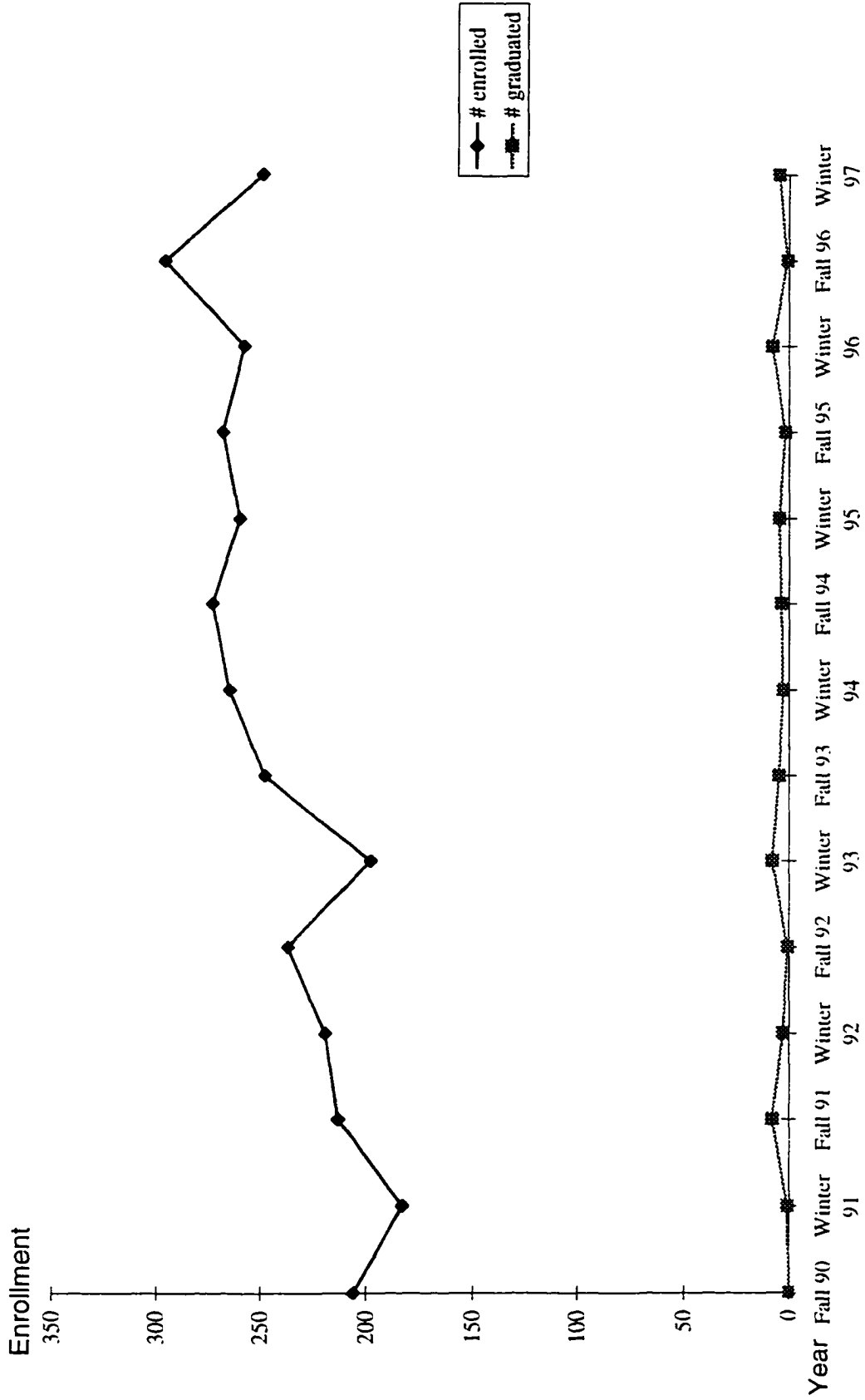
Figure 6. Enrollments versus graduates for African American students.

Enrollment

Year
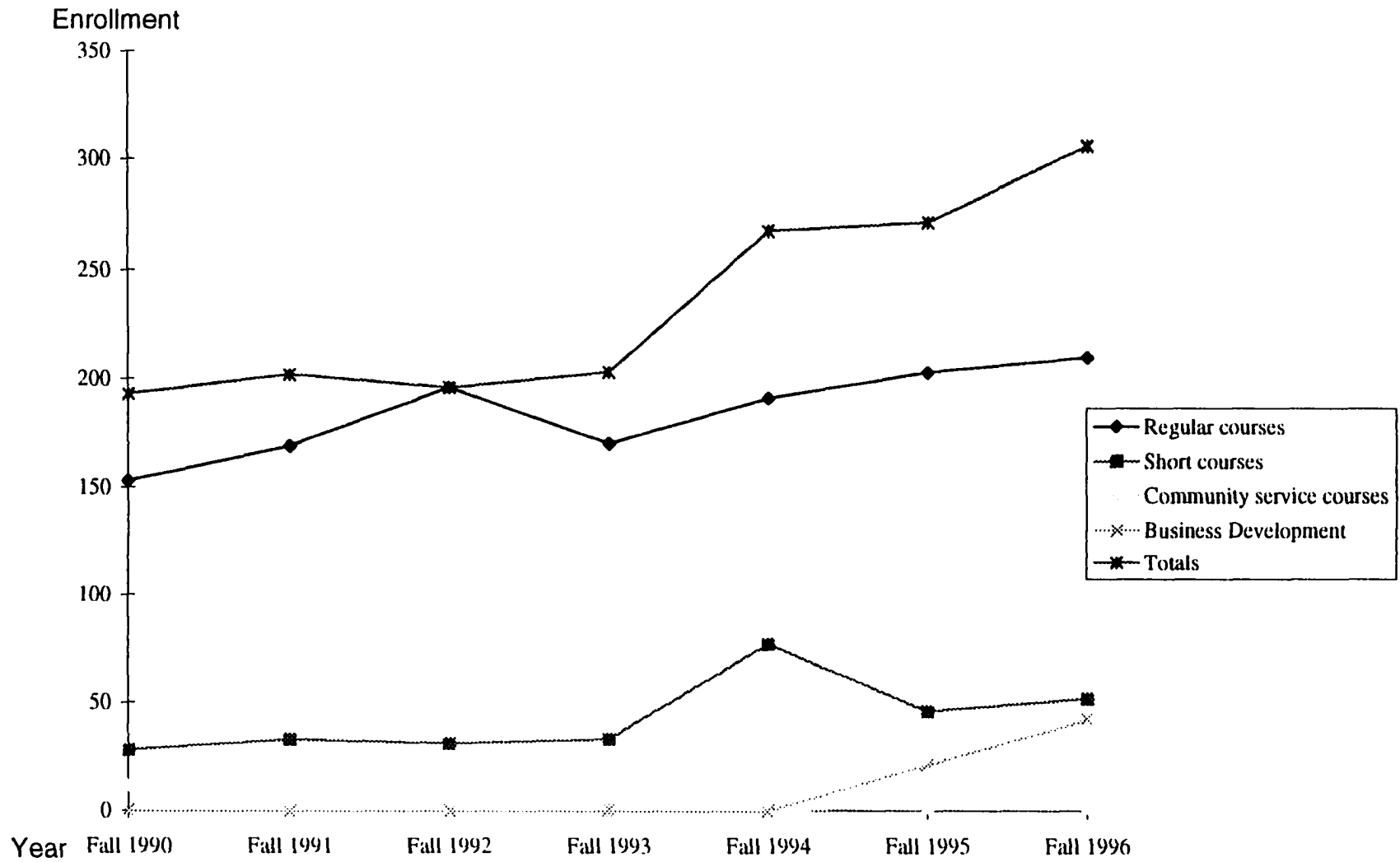
Figure 7. Fall enrollments by type fo course for African American students.

Data Analysis

This overview of SMC provides the background for describing the stories of the students in this study. In deciding on the criteria for student selection, I wanted students who had spent enough time at SMC that they were likely to have had a variety of experiences on campus. They would have had classes from a number of different faculty members, both full- and part-time, in more than one school or division, and they would have gone through the advising and registration process several times. In addition, I wanted students who were different from each other in terms of age at enrollment, maturity, focus, goals, and situation in life. In so doing, I was following what Patton (1990, p. 172) described as "maximum variation sampling," a procedure likely to produce two kinds of findings: "(1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity."

Having selected students with these criteria, I analyzed interview transcripts with the goal of describing each student's individual experience, identifying aspects of those experiences that are distinctive and those that are shared, and interpreting those experiences--asking the questions "Why?" and "What do these experiences reflect?" My first step after transcribing the interviews was to read through each one, making corrections and filling in blanks where the transcriptionist had been unable to decipher the tape. Next I made a list of categories into which it appeared most of the data could be sorted. Then I read each interview again, selecting and sorting information into these categories as I read. In some cases, I added or modified categories; in other cases, I noted that only some students had information that fit a specific category.

Through this process, I reduced the material in each transcript, omitting

information that was not directly relevant to the study and sorting relevant information

into categories. At this point, however, the data were categorized by individual student. I

now wanted to combine the data by category across students. Therefore, I read back

through each student's condensed material and listed each student's responses under the

various categories. This step allowed me to (1) describe the group as a whole, (2) identify

commonalities among the students, and (3) identify features specific to individual

students or to two or three students within the group.

Many categories remained the same as the ones already selected; however, during

this step I also refined categories, combining some and dividing others. I now had a clear

summary of the group, one that gave me an overview of their experiences at SMC, and I

also had data sets that allowed me to examine individual students, to compare and

contrast students, and to identify themes running through the stories of all the students.

In using this process, I followed an inductive method for determining categories, a

process that Abrahamson (1983, p. 286) described as "immersing" oneself in the

documents in order to identify those elements or "dimensions" that emerge from the

words of the speakers. This process also focused on "latent" rather than "manifest"

content (Berg, 1989, p. 107); that is, I was more interested in interpreting the message or

intent behind the words as opposed to counting specific words or elements. This

interpretive process, while more subjective, was consistent with the purpose of this study

which was to first describe and then interpret, evaluate, and identify common themes in

the data. Berg's required "independent corroboration" (p. 107) was built in from the

beginning of the study: Both the students themselves and professional colleagues have

reviewed various portions of the analysis and either concurred with or suggested revisions

with my interpretations. (Readers' comments appear in Appendices B and C.) For the most part, phrases and sentences formed the units of analysis, although, in some cases, whole paragraphs could be treated as a single unit, especially when a student was describing a specific incident. Berg has noted that research frequently requires the use of such a combination of content elements, the fundamental guideline being to use the speakers' own words as much as possible in the coding process.

Four of the six were traditional students who, with the exception of Carl, began college the fall after they had graduated from high school (see Table 1). Two were non-traditional students, James being considerably older than Mary. While not all of them started with clear goals, four of them intended to obtain a bachelor's degree, and one started with the goal of an associate's degree (see Table 2). All of the students had decided on educational and/or career goals at the time of the interviews. In stating their reasons for selecting SMC (see Table 3), three named the modest tuition, five named the location, and one the quality of the academic program. One came because of the athletic program, and three felt it would be a good place to get established academically before transferring to a 4-year school. Although all had visited the campus prior to enrolling, only one cited that visit as a determining factor in selecting the campus.

Student Descriptions

Thomas

Thomas was perhaps the least excited about coming to SMC. The son of a local teacher and coach, Thomas has lived in Dowagiac all his life and did not see SMC as "a step up. It is just the next level," as in moving from 11th grade to 12th grade and now on to the 13th. While he had more freedom than in high school and enjoyed not being in

TABLE 1

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENTS

Demographic Data	Adriana	Carl	James	Mary	Taylor	Thomas
Traditional student	xx	xx			xx	xx
Non-traditional student			xx	xx		
Male		xx	xx			xx
Female	xx			xx		
Has children		xx		xx		
Works on campus	xx	xx	xx		xx	
Works in community		xx		xx	xx	xx
Has PELL grant	xx		xx	xx		
Has scholarship					xx	xx
Has other aid		xx	xx			
Parents pay tuition					xx	

TABLE 2

EDUCATIONAL/CAREER GOALS

Goals	Adrianna	Carl	James	Mary	Taylor	Thomas
Major	business managemen t	business managemen t	accounting	nursing	community journalism	elementary education
Associate's degree	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx
Bachelor's degree	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx
Transfer school	Ferris State University at SMC	uncertain	uncertain		Western Michigan University	Western Michigan University

TABLE 3

REASONS FOR SELECTING SMC

Reasons chose SMC	Adrianna	Carl	James	Mary	Taylor	Thomas
cost		xx		xx	xx	xx
location	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	
academic program				xx		
establish self academically		xx			xx	xx
recommended by relative	xx					
campus visit	xx					
athletic program						xx

the same building as his father. SMC did not really seem like going away to college. However, Thomas is an athlete and in order to get the track scholarship he wanted at Western Michigan University, he had to prove himself academically. His ACT scores were not high enough to allow him to go directly to Western.

Coming to SMC allowed Thomas to run track; he was actively recruited by SMC's coach and received an athletic scholarship for the 2 years he was at SMC. Eighteen at the time he enrolled for his freshman year, he was approaching his 22nd birthday when we met for his first interview in May 1996. He was taking spring classes and was planning to take one more class in the summer before transferring to Western for the fall. In coming to SMC, Thomas had accomplished his purpose of establishing himself as a capable, though not outstanding, student, and as a positive contributor to the track team.

For Thomas, college is something "you just have to do." In describing his experience at SMC, he rated his overall satisfaction with classes as a 3 on a scale of 1 to 5, but attributes this rating to his own attitudes about school, saying he never gets excited about school. "There's not much the school can do; you just have to do the work no matter where you are."

And in rating his overall satisfaction with the college, the only factor keeping it from being a 5 is the college's location--it's in Dowagiac. Track exceeded his expectations. With good coaching and stiff competition, he described his experience as very positive. In addition, the track coach knows a lot of people and can put in a "good word for you."

Thomas decided to major in elementary education because he likes working with young people, and one of the assistant coaches at Western told him there is a big demand for men in elementary education. Other than athletics, Thomas did not participate in activities on campus. He worked 10 to15 hours a week off campus and did not expect the college to provide him with social activities. He cited no experiences where he felt he was treated any differently as an African American, but did observe that faculty sometimes expected less of athletes because instructors are "used to athletes turning work in late and not performing well."

In graduating from SMC, Thomas had proved that he was an athlete who could do what was expected of a college student, both on the track and in the classroom. And that is what he wants to continue doing at Western. "I don't want to work in a factory all my life. I want to show myself that I can get through school and continue on with track."

Carl

In contrast to Thomas, who came to SMC in spite of the fact that it was close to home, Carl chose SMC because it was so close. Carl was not clear about his educational goals, so he thought it would be good to start college at a small school close to home before going on to a university. (He had considered both Eastern and Western Michigan Universities as well as a school in North Carolina.) He had been on campus with his girlfriend who worked at the library. After working for a year after high school, he decided that at age 19 it was time to get started with college. As Carl stated, his whole family--parents, aunts, and uncles--are teachers. There was never any question that he would go to college.

In spite of this expectation and his own desire to learn, college has been an uphill climb for Carl. He attended full-time for the 1992-93 academic year, skipped the fall of 1993, attended winter 1994 full-time, skipped the fall of 1994, and then attended full-time winter 1995, fall 1995, and winter 1996. At this point, with only a few credits needed to graduate, Carl stopped out for a year, returning in the winter of 1997. At the time of our interviews, Carl was 24, the father of two children, working nights full-time, living on his own in Niles, and enrolled for three classes at SMC.

During his first 2 years, besides working off campus, Carl was active in the Minority Student Organization, and in intramural sports, particularly basketball. A business major, Carl liked almost all his classes except science. Stating that he "likes almost everything where I am learning," he particularly liked sociology, art appreciation, and world religion, all classes in which the instructors involved students in discussion and activities and he learned about different cultures.

While he "loved" his instructors and rated his satisfaction with classes at 4.5 out of 5, he had one negative experience with an advisor who gave him inaccurate advice and an incident where he was unjustly accused of stealing in the gym that tarnished what he otherwise describes as a positive experience at SMC.

Like Thomas, he felt comfortable as an African American on campus, always feeling free to speak out in class. Admitting that he "had a tendency to slack off" occasionally, he noted that the only way he might have been treated differently by instructors was in being given an extra push when he needed it.

Having been at SMC off and on for 5 years, Carl noted the passing of the Minority Student Organization with some sadness, saying it gave African American students "a reason to come together." Partly because there seem to be fewer African American students on campus now, partly because the minority organization is not active, and partly because he is older and has other responsibilities, he does not spend as much time on campus outside of class. However, because of the good teaching, large selection of classes, and modest tuition, he would recommend SMC to other African American students--including his younger brother--as long as they can handle the pressures of "being a real minority" and are not expecting the "college experience" of parties, fraternities, sororities, and lots of people and activities.

Adriana

Adriana, also a traditional student, came to SMC from a background quite different from the backgrounds of Thomas and Carl. Thomas has lived in Dowagiac all his life; Carl grew up in California and then moved to Michigan where his family had

lived previously. He graduated from high school at Brandywine, a school in the Niles area. Adriana, on the other hand, grew up in Chicago, moving the summer following her high-school graduation to Dowagiac where an aunt lived. Unlike Thomas and Carl whose families are teachers, Adriana's father had prevented her mother from attending school. This deprivation served to heighten the importance of education for Adriana's mother, a value she successfully passed on to her daughter. Adriana's aunt suggested that she visit SMC and while not intending to stay in a town as "quiet as Dowagiac." Adriana decided after visiting the campus that people seemed friendly and she would try it for a semester.

When I interviewed her in November of '96, she was an SMC graduate, having attended full-time for 3 years since the fall of 1992. She had completed her associate in arts degree in May and was working part-time in the same office on campus where she had been a work-study employee while still a student. In the winter of '97, she enrolled in the business management program at Ferris State University on SMC's campus and continues to work at the same office.

Although overwhelmed by a new environment where she knew no one and she saw very few African Americans, Adriana purposely chose to attend a predominantly White school. In her words, "This is a White world and you need to learn about it if you are going to be successful in the working world." After getting to know people, she began to feel more comfortable and when her mother moved from Chicago to Dowagiac, they just stayed.

Like Carl, she was active in the Minority Student Organization, seeing in it, as did Carl, a chance "for us to recognize each other." On the other hand, she

most enjoyed the challenge of getting people to do things and liked the community service projects the group organized.

Even though she liked the Minority Student Organization, Adriana stated that she had not expected the college to meet her social needs. "A college is supposed to provide an education," she said. And academics is what she has focused on. When asked about classes she liked, Adriana had a long list of courses that she classified as both interesting and useful: she enjoyed learning about different religions in Introduction to World Religions; speech took away her fear of speaking in public; the accounting instructor used humor to make the class more interesting; her English classes helped with her current job and she likes to write; in geography class the instructor made them feel as if they were scientists; and Introduction to Fiction helped her overcome her dislike of reading and improved her reading comprehension.

However, after two or three semesters at the college, Adriana felt that she was not receiving satisfactory advising. She wanted someone to show her various options and explain clearly the difference between classes, not just tell her what she should take. The administrator in whose office she worked encouraged her to talk with him about concerns she had, so she expressed her frustration to him. This led to a positive advising relationship that has lasted throughout her stay at SMC. She said that he showed her the catalog and how to read it. "From that day I researched every class before I took it. I always talked to more than one student to get more than one perspective." Then "I made up my own mind about what classes to take. Once I started listening to myself and started asking people questions, I was fine."

Like Carl and Thomas, she would not recommend SMC to students wanting social activities or "excitement," but she would recommend it on the basis of its academic program, its friendly campus, and the fact that its size allows students to interact personally with instructors.

Taylor

Taylor, a native of Benton Harbor, a largely African American community, came to SMC because, like Thomas, she did not want to attend the college in her own back yard (Lake Michigan College). Yet she was not entirely sure of her academic and career goals, so it made sense to stay close to home where it was less expensive. Her brother was already attending the University of Illinois, so she was aware of the cost involved. She and her brother are not eligible for PELL grants, a fact that Taylor sees as an unfair aspect of federal financial aid eligibility. The formula for determining eligibility does not take into account other aspects of a family's circumstance besides income. she argues. All the same, she considers herself fortunate because of the good relationship she has with her parents and because of their strong support, both emotionally and financially, of her education. Taylor worked all through her 2 ½ years at SMC, but mostly for spending money and because she likes "doing something else besides school." She did receive an academic scholarship, but felt that compared to athletes, students like her are not awarded what they deserve.

Like Thomas and Adriana, Taylor was a typical traditional student who came to college anticipating that she would go on to a 4-year school. She attributes the class College Success Strategies with helping her to focus on her short-term and long-term

goals, to recognize "what I need to do now to have what I want later." Once she got into the journalism program, she found her niche, learning a lot about the campus through stories she was assigned to write.

That is how she found out about Phi Theta Kappa, so when she was invited to join, she did, liking the idea that this could open up scholarship opportunities for her at a 4-year school. While she did not have time to become really active in the group because of school and work, she did make time for academic activities that she saw as useful, such as career testing, math tutoring, transfer advising, and researching scholarship options. In addition, she took classes that she thought would be useful even though they were not required, such as College Success Strategies and Intermediate Algebra.

While citing the small number of African American students as the only reason she would give for not recommending SMC, Taylor stated that she liked the variety of races and that the college "was not just Black." Like all the other students interviewed, she would recommend the college because of small class size and personal attention from faculty, as well as the free tutoring, faculty office hours, and the general respect with which students are treated. "People answer your questions without making you feel dumb. They explain what you need to know."

Taylor came to SMC in the fall of 1994 at age 18 after working for the summer and almost deciding not to come to school right away. But her parents urged her to attend college and as we talked in May of 1996, she was grateful for their insistence. After 2 years at SMC, she was clearly focused on a major in community journalism at Western Michigan University, and in December 1996 graduated from SMC with honors.

While she felt she was not treated any differently as an African American. she said that as a minority. especially coming from Benton Harbor. she felt she had to prove herself. "I worked harder because my parents are paying. and I wanted to show them I could do this. It's the values they instilled in me."

Mary

Like Taylor. Mary selected SMC because she did not want to attend Lake Michigan College. even though it was closer. because she knew too many students there from her community that she did "not want to associate with." In addition. she had compared the two nursing programs and believed SMC's to be better.

Ironically. however. it was the requirements and standards of the nursing program that she found to be obstacles for someone whose focus was clearly to get the training she needed and move directly to the work place. Although attending a historically Black college such as Spelman or Morehouse is still a dream. supporting herself and her son was the reality.

In May 1996 when I interviewed Mary. she had just started working at Bronson Methodist Hospital in Kalamazoo in the Medical Records Department. having completed SMC's medical transcriptionist program. She had enrolled at SMC at the age of 20 in the fall of 1991. attending part-time fall and then full-time winter 1992 before staying out a year and then returning as a part-time student in the fall of 1993 after her son was born.

Mary came to college so she could get a better job. She had been working as a nursing assistant. often taking double shifts to pay for her apartment and meet her financial obligations. Like many adult students (Cross. 1981) she wanted to take only

those courses she saw as directly related to her goal. "Non-nursing courses like music appreciation" and other general education requirements "are a waste of time." In addition, she found the 85% C cutoff in nursing prerequisites such as Anatomy and Physiology and Math for Meds to be very challenging.

After her son was born in April 1993, she faced the additional challenges of day care and his health problems with asthma. Finally, working two jobs and trying to take a full course load became too much. "I just got burned out," she said and decided she just wanted to work for a while. She had enjoyed her business classes in high school and her introduction to computer class at SMC, so medical transcription seemed the logical program, although she says she may still come back for nursing.

In spite of the classes she found unnecessary, overall she enjoyed school and worked hard to succeed in spite of work and family. She found the behavior of other African American students who seemed to be in school only for socializing very irritating. "Some of us are here for an education and these students reflect badly on all of us." Often tired because of work, she kept an alarm clock in her car and sometimes slept between classes. At one point during her last semester when she was taking five classes, one instructor suggested she drop Disease Process because she was struggling. Mary was insulted. "No way," she said. "This is the last class I need to graduate; you're not getting rid of me that easily."

In spite of this experience, she found most faculty and staff to be supportive and interested in her personally. She confided often in her advisor whom she "trusts completely." She also found students with whom she was comfortable socializing between classes and established a relationship with a new boyfriend who was also a

student at SMC. She would encourage other African American students to come to SMC because "it's a good school and teachers have time to work with students as individuals."

James

At 44, James came to college for the same reasons as Mary--he needed a different job. A factory worker all his life, shoulder and knee problems made physical work difficult and he had decided to retrain himself to "use my brain instead of my body." He had lived in Illinois for many years, but when he decided to quit working, he moved to Cassopolis to live with his mother. He had visited the campus on an earlier trip to Michigan and found out from Student Services about Vocational Rehabilitation and other services. Thus, when he returned to Michigan in the winter of 1993, he completed the necessary paperwork and enrolled in spring classes.

Like Mary, he had a program in mind, accounting, because he did not like reading and writing and had always been better in math. He, too, was surprised that he was required to take non-business classes. But other than physical education, he had discovered that these general education courses were useful in preparing him for the business world.

Unlike many non-traditional students, James made college his primary focus, leaving the working world except for a campus work-study position. He received PELL grants and financial assistance through Michigan Vocational Rehabilitation. Similar to many non-traditional students who find the long time away from school as a major difficulty, James stated that he had not paid enough attention to English and math in school and was now finding studying general subjects hard. Citing reading

comprehension as his biggest obstacle, James found even a part-time course load challenging in spite of taking advantage of tutoring services and faculty assistance outside of class. At the time of our interview in July 1996, he had been in school 3 ½ years (eight semesters/sessions) generally taking two, no more than three courses, a semester. He stayed in school through the 1996-97 academic year, but audited all of his winter semester classes. Citing frustrations with school and concerns about finances, he has decided to concentrate on applying for Supplemental Security Income or finding a job, perhaps returning to school at a later time.

While noting the absence of African American faculty and staff, James said that it does not make any difference to him because "I feel I'm going to learn." He feels faculty and staff have treated him no differently than any other students, but he cited several instances in which comments or gestures were made that reflected a lack of sensitivity to cultural differences. He does not feel that an African American staff member would automatically make a difference because that person might only be hired "to help out when Whites have trouble with a Black person."

While the small number of minorities on campus might be a problem for some, he has felt comfortable on campus because he "is used to being in the minority and as long as people treat me fairly, I'm okay." The only reason he would not recommend SMC to an African American friend would be the lack of social activities, if that were important to the person. Personally, he "entertains himself" and would not participate in social activities even if more were offered. Students coming to SMC would benefit from personalized attention from faculty and would find both staff and students

friendly. He stated that people have been nice to him, helping him out and "being good listeners when he needed that."

Student Activities and Perceptions

Even though none of the students expected SMC to provide much in the way of social activities, each of them became involved in some part of campus life outside of classes: one in intercollegiate athletics, one in intramural sports, two in the Minority Student Organization, one in Phi Theta Kappa (honor society), and four were in the college's federally funded program for first-generation college students, Student Support Services (see Table 4). In addition, four of them worked on campus at some point during their time at the college, further increasing their involvement with the campus.

All were involved in academic advising and all stated that they had regularly participated in faculty conferences outside of class. Four used the library regularly, three the computer laboratories, and three tutoring services. Two specifically cited transfer counseling and one career counseling as additional activities. In addition to these campus activities, all of these students worked part-time while in college, Carl and Mary working full-time at some points (see Table 1). Carl worked on campus his first semester and Taylor her last semester; the rest of the time they worked off campus. Adriana and James worked on campus almost their entire time at SMC; Mary worked off campus exclusively. When asked to characterize their experience at SMC, all stated that they had enjoyed their time and would recommend other African American students to attend (see Table 5). They also cited the modest cost, the quality of the academic program, the

TABLE 4

SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

Service/Activity	Adriana	Carl	James	Mary	Taylor	Thomas
inter-collegiate sports						xx
intramural sports		xx				
minority student group	xx	xx				
Honor Society					xx	
TRIO	xx		xx		xx	
Tutoring		xx	xx			xx
Library		xx	xx	xx	xx	
Computer labs		xx	xx	xx		
career advising					xx	xx
academic advising	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx
transfer advising					xx	xx
faculty conferences	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx

TABLE 5

REASONS AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS SHOULD COME TO SMC

Reasons	Adriana	Carl	James	Mary	Taylor	Thomas
faculty	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx
academic	xx	xx		xx		
program cost		xx		xx	xx	xx
location					xx	xx
campus climate	xx		xx			
size	xx		xx			

friendliness and helpfulness of people on campus, and the size of the college as being factors that would benefit their African American friends.

When asked what reasons there might be for not recommending the college to their African American friends, they said that if social activities were important to a person, they would not recommend SMC because neither the campus nor nearby Dowagiac has much to offer in terms of things to do (see Table 6). One student cited the campus layout as a negative factor because she did not like walking outside in the winter. Two students said that the small number of minority students might be problematic for some people.

All but one of the students cited experiencing at least one incident that they would characterize as discriminatory with either staff, faculty, or students (see Table 7). Most of these incidents occurred with other students (see Tables 8 and 9). Three of the students discussed the tendency of African American and White students to sit separately in the commons and the cafeteria; however, all stated that they felt comfortable mixing with either African American or White students. Two of the students felt strongly that this tendency towards separatism stems from a lack of understanding on the part of Whites who have not been around African Americans very much and are not comfortable with speech patterns and behaviors which are different from theirs. These same students noted that when there is a specific activity such as studying or playing cards, African American and White students mix comfortably. Two students found themselves sometimes embarrassed by the behavior of other African American students who talked loudly in the library or seemed only to be on campus for socializing.

Two of the students gave examples of derogatory comments from White students in their classes. One cited negative comments made to her by other African American female students because she had a White girlfriend. Two cited examples of non-verbal or implied messages regarding their inferior status as African Americans or situations in which assumptions were made about them; for example, assuming that all African Americans like rap music. One male ran into problems with a sexual harassment charge when he asked a White student if she was interested in going out with him. This student also cited two other interactions with women that he found puzzling and assumed to be related to race.

TABLE 6

REASONS AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS SHOULD NOT COME TO SMC

Reasons	Adriana	Carl	James	Mary	Taylor	Thomas
lack of social activities	xx	xx	xx			
small number of minority students		xx			xx	
location				xx		xx
campus layout				xx		

TABLE 7

NUMBER OF DISCRIMINATORY INCIDENTS

Type	Adriana	Carl	James	Mary	Taylor	Thomas
with staff	none	two	two	one possible	none	none
with faculty	none	none	one	one possible	none	none
with students	two	none	three	three	one	none

TABLE 8

PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Student	African American/White	African American/African American (or African)
Adriana	Asked White students to attend Minority Student Organization. African American students saw Organization as open to all. Whites don't understand African American students; Stems from lack of familiarity. African American students sit separately in cafeteria. Some African American students hold onto separatism because of slavery; males especially. Limited pool of African American men on campus poses problem for African American women.	African students feel superior to African American students.
Carl	Minority Student Organization gave African American students a chance to be together. African American students invited White students to attend meetings. White women date African American men, but White men don't date African American women. Even without limited pool of African American men, this would happen. African American and White students sit separately in cafeteria and in class. Whites don't understand African American students; stems from lack of familiarity. White students more school oriented; African Americans, especially males, take advantage of this. African American and White students mix when there is an activity, such as cards or studying.	
James	African Americans and Whites talk freely to each other on campus. African American students can be comfortable in commons. Compared to separatism he has seen at university campuses, students mix freely here.	Noisy groups of African American males in library reinforce negative stereotypes Whites have of African Americans.
Mary	Enjoyed positive interactions with African American and White students between classes. Met African American boyfriend at SMC.	Embarrassed by African American students who seem to be in school only to socialize. Reflects negatively on all of them, including those who are there for an education.
Taylor	Made friends with students who had school as a priority regardless of whether they were African American or White.	Enjoyed the African students.
Thomas	African American and White students talk to each other but sit separately in commons. He sat where he wanted to based on who he wanted to be with, not whether group was African American or White. Experienced no tension between African American and White athletes.	

TABLE 9

RACIAL INCIDENTS WITH OTHER STUDENTS

Student	
Adriana	Two White males made comments about Adriana sitting in front row and making good grades. Said,"Maybe she is sitting up there because she is too good for us." "How did she get that grade? She can't be smarter than us." African American girls in commons made negative comments about Adriana sitting with a White girlfriend. Comments continued for whole semester.
Carl	none
James	White female filed a sexual harassment charge against him. He had asked her if she was interested in going out with him. White female student slapped him in keyboarding class. May or may not have been racial. White female student kicked him in the library; may have been an attempt to flirt with him.
Mary	Couple of times White students asked what she was doing in the class. White woman moved in class and said she would not sit next to a "nigger." Sometimes White students sent non-verbal messages when passing/meeting in the halls. Message was she was "lesser" and should move over for them to pass.
Taylor	Student in music appreciation made uninformed negative comments about rap music. Looked at her as though she should be the expert. Teacher was not informed about rap music. Students sometimes made negative assumptions about her because she is an African American from Benton Harbor.
Thomas	none

All of the students cited the small number of African American students as a situation that would be problematic for some students, although all of them stated that they personally had found people, both African American and White, with whom to socialize between classes. None expected the college to be the focus of their social activities, stating that they preferred to spend their social time off campus.

On the subject of what could be done to improve the campus climate for African Americans, students offered a variety of suggestions (see Tables 10 and 11). Most said that courses in African American history and culture should be offered but had very

different opinions about personally taking these courses. All but one of the students felt that courses such as African American history, literature, music, and culture should be offered, but only three of the students would have taken these courses out of personal interest. Two might have taken them if the courses had met a degree requirement, and one saw such courses as negative (they focus on what is negative and keep African Americans from forgetting the past and moving on). She would have considered taking such a course only if it focused entirely on the accomplishments of African American people and what they could continue to accomplish.

Most stated that while they felt comfortable (see Table 12) with the staff and faculty on campus, it would have been helpful to have an African American to talk to, someone "who looks like you," as Taylor noted. They said that initially their comfort level might have been greater in a class with an African American instructor but that after getting acquainted with faculty, race was no longer an issue. Only one of the students had taken a class at SMC with an African American instructor, an experience she found very positive. It was the only course in which she was not a minority. On the other hand, one of the students found this same African American instructor to be conceited and stated that she had heard he was an "easy A." However, her boyfriend had taken a class from another African American instructor whom he described as good--she made them work and was willing to help students. Two of the students noted that some students perceive the absence of African American faculty and staff as the result of racism on the part of the college. One said she personally did not have enough information to make that judgment, and three noted that they have lived in the area long enough to know that the school systems do not have many African American staff. All of the students rated their

TABLE 10

IMPROVING CAMPUS CLIMATE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Student	Classes to add*	Activities to add	Staff to add	Other
Adriana	Class focusing on accomplishments of African Americans. Has reservations about value of this	Meetings for White students and Black students to meet together	African American advisor	
Carl	African American history, literature, music, culture	More sports, e.g., football; activities such as Beach Day throughout the year; Place where African American students can feel comfortable to congregate	African American faculty and advisor	Need more African American students
James	African American history, Native American culture, class focusing on accomplishments of African Americans	Black History Month activities (stated they should be initiated by students)	African American faculty and advisor	
Mary	African American history, literature, music, history	Black exposition, Black gospel choir	African American faculty and advisor	
Taylor	African American literature, culture, music	African American art exhibits, African American theatre, maybe dances and parties	African American faculty and advisor	Need more African American students
Thomas	African American studies			

*Responses to the question, "Would you have taken these classes if they had been offered?":
Adriana--Probably Not; Carl--Yes; James--Didn't Say; Mary–Only if it substituted for a required
class; Taylor--Yes; Thomas--Might have if they fit a requirement.

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TABLE 11
SUPPORTING COMMENTS FOR IMPROVING CAMPUS CLIMATE

Student	
Adriana	Believes there is a language barrier between African American students and White staff/faculty. Some Blacks don't want to associate with Whites because they still think of Whites as ones who held them in slavery. She believes African American males tend to personalize wrongs against them more. Males more likely to feel they have been treated differently. She wanted to be at a White school because this is a White world and she needs to learn to succeed in White world of work. The African American men at SMC in her age bracket are not mature enough to date. Campus does not provide a place for Black women to find Black males; she personally does not expect SMC to provide her social needs. Minority Student Organization was a place where African American students could talk and release stress, where they could recognize each other. Athletes feel faculty discriminate against them because they are African American; she believes it is because students have not shown interest in class.
Carl	Younger students might not be interested in African American classes; more serious student would. Had one White ladyfriend who was interested in African American classes; doesn't know if others would be. Younger students would go to easiest classes; he wants to be challenged. African American men sit in back of class so they don't have to pay attention. African American students sometimes feel intimidated by White staff; more comfortable talking to African American person about concerns. Sometimes cafeteria is only place on campus he sees another Black person; needs to be more African American people on campus. Number of Black students has decreased since his first two years when COMA (Minority Student Organization) was active. COMA gave African American students a place/reason to come together. That is needed. African American students have ideas that White students are boring. Mix when there is a activity, such as music, sports, cards, to bring them together.
James	Didn't notice lack of African American faculty at first; then thought it would be "nice" if there were some. "If they don't want to come here to teach, there's nothing we can do about that." Would not automatically trust an African American adviser, staff member. Might be only a "token" brought in to take care of Black problems. Would have to see if the African American person had his interest at heart. African American students take responsibility for African American activities/social activities they want. Most students feel they are going to learn regardless of instructor's race. Used to being a minority; doesn't bother him.
Mary	Lack of African American instructor/staff at first added to feeling of being overwhelmed by everything new. Many students assume it is racism on part of college that there are not African American staff/faculty. She believes there must be qualified African American faculty available, but would have to know reason from college personally before she would assume that racism is a factor. Felt comfortable with White instructors after getting to know them; would generally feel comfortable more quickly with African American instructor. Did not like Dr. McCall (African American instructor). Thought he was conceited. She heard he was an "easy A." Comfort level in class and on campus had to do with you own self-confidence as an African American. You can be easily intimidated, or you can believe in your right to be there.

Table 11–*Continued.*

Student	
Taylor	On the need for African American faculty/adviser: It is good to have someone "who looks like you." At registration, she looked around for "someone like me." Accepted as "real world" lack of African American students and staff.
Thomas	Comfort level as African American on campus = 5 out of 5 Took classes based on what he knew about instructor's teaching style. Whether instructor was African American would not have influenced him.

TABLE 12

COMFORT LEVEL AS AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Student	Staff treated me the same as any other student	Faculty treated me the same as any other student	Overall comfort level
Adriana	yes	yes	comfortable; after getting acclimated
Carl	yes	yes; may have encouraged more	comfortable
James	yes	yes	comfortable
Mary	yes	yes	comfortable
Taylor	yes	yes	comfortable
Thomas	yes	yes; expected less of athletes	comfortable

satisfaction with the quality of the teaching and academic programs as high, citing

numerous positive experiences with faculty both in and out of the classroom (see Table

13). While each listed a variety of classes that they found most interesting, three

specifically enjoyed learning about different cultures and religions in Introduction to

World Religions. Students cited classes that involved humor, discussion, activities,

projects, lectures accompanied by notes and handouts, games, and teachers who were

clear about assignments, tests, and course expectations. They all said they felt free

TABLE 13

POSITIVE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

Student	Classroom	Outside Classroom
Adriana	Introduction to Fiction helped her overcome avoidance of reading and improved her reading comprehension. Enjoyed speech, accounting, world religion. English classes helped her with her present job. Geography instructor made her feel like a scientist. Enjoyed instructors who used humor, provided for active involvement/discussion in the classroom. Liked being required to used the textbook for homework.	Liked study groups. Found staff persons who provided good academic advising.
Carl	Sociology instructor used humor, projects, and games; got to know other students. World religion instructor used humor. In art class he learned about different cultures and visited museums. Faculty in many classes encouraged him individually and made allowance for late assignments; pushed him when he fell behind. Felt free to express his opinion in classes.	Praised adviser who assisted him after he was misadvised. Received help in the library with computer searches, using microfiche, and generally finding materials. Received algebra tutoring. Frequently met with faculty outside of class. Faculty showed personal interest in his challenges with school, work, and family.
James	General education classes were helpful in preparing him for job as accountant--psychology, speech, computer information systems and keyboarding. He found teachers very open to questions.	Teachers were easily available outside of class.
Mary	Enjoyed computer, business, and transcription classes.	She liked and trusted her adviser.
Taylor	Psychology and sociology classes encouraged her to look at things from different angles. Class projects helped her to learn about herself. Enjoyed learning about different cultures and people's beliefs in world religion. In music appreciation she learned about a variety of music and was allowed to bring her favorite music genre in. Enjoyed taking College Success Strategies from African American instructor and class that was largely Black. Appreciated having African American instructor with a doctorate; he could identify with her as a middle-class African American. Class helped her to examine her educational and career goals. Felt free to express her opinion in classes.	Met with faculty outside of class when she had questions/concerns. Joined honor society. Received math tutoring. Participated in career testing and advising. Found study tips shared during student orientation useful. Received helpful transfer advising from both journalism instructor and adviser.

Table 13--*Continued.*

Student	Classroom	Outside Classroom
Thomas	Enjoyed Western civilization, world religion, composition, and speech. Sought out classes in which instructors gave writing assignments, gave chance to ask questions, provided study guides, wrote on board, gave frequent quizzes, and generally made it clear what to study for.	Met with faculty outside of class. Attended athletic study table and received math tutoring. Participated in Student Athlete Academic Assistance program attendance/grade monitoring. Received transfer advising and career testing.

to express their opinions in class, although one student said that after being invited to express her opinion about a play, the instructor did not like it because her opinion did not agree with his. Four students stated they made regular use of faculty office hours to discuss concerns or questions about their work, and two students stated that there were a couple of faculty members with whom they visited about personal matters.

One student stated that she found study groups outside of class useful, and three specifically mentioned algebra tutoring as being helpful. Five students cited positive advising experiences, although two described situations in which they received inadequate or inaccurate advising before finding an advisor with whom they were satisfied. Two participated in career testing and were satisfied with both the career and transfer advising they received, and one person noted satisfaction with assistance in the library on how to conduct computer searches, use microfiche, and generally find materials.

Only one student cited being treated any differently by faculty because he is African American. He observed that sometimes African American males do not take school as seriously as they should and faculty know this. It was his perception that

sometimes instructors encouraged him more because they could see that he might be falling behind and wanted him to succeed. He saw this as positive.

However, five of the six students cited second-hand reports of students who felt instructors had either graded them unfairly, who refused to call on African American students in class, or who refused to accept a report written about a famous African American (see Table 14). One student cited a class where it appeared to her that the attendance policy was enforced differently for one of the African American students and a White student, both of whom missed a lot of class. Two students cited a lack of sensitivity or information regarding cultural issues, but did not perceive these incidents as overtly racist.

Four of the students stated that they had not had any experiences with college staff in which they were treated differently because of race. Two of the men, however, described two or more experiences in which they felt race was a factor. One was accused of stealing from the gym, and when confronted by the coach perceived the situation to be racially motivated. This same person stated that one of the coaches routinely found reasons to dismiss the African American males from the basketball court during open gym time.

The second student described three incidents in which he was personally involved in uncomfortable situations with staff. One was the way in which a sexual harassment charge by a White female student was handled by SMC staff. Another involved a student intern who made a comment suggesting that another staff person was using James as an "Uncle Tom." Although James did not agree with the intern's perception, the incident left him uncomfortable. And a third involved what the student perceived to be inappropriate

non-verbal behavior on the part of a staff person, an incident he attributed to lack of awareness on the part of the counselor.

In summarizing their time at the college, students also cited a variety of negative and positive experiences, policies, or programs (see Tables 15 and 16). Negative comments generally related to specific classes that they had not liked, felt unprepared for, or found especially challenging. Two disliked attendance policies and one felt that some instructors allowed students to focus on personal issues unrelated to school, particularly students who were older and had families. The most pervasive comment reflected the friendliness of faculty and staff in all departments and offices, with five of the six students noting that staff listened and provided help whenever they needed it.

TABLE 14

NEGATIVE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES WITH FACULTY RELATED TO RACE

Student	Direct Personal Observation	Second-hand Report
Adriana		Student reported to her that he was not allowed to write about either Martin Luther King or Malcolm X; instructor gave no reason.
Carl		Students reported that sometimes instructors refused to call on African American students.
James		Student reported that coach who taught physical education classes was prejudiced against African American students.
Mary	Mary observed a White student who missed a lot of class receive a passing grade while an African American student who missed class was encouraged to drop. White student said, "I can miss and still get a B."	Student reported to Mary that White student received full credit for same answers for which an African American student received half credit.
Taylor		Some students reported receiving unfair grades because they are African American.
Thomas		

TABLE 15

NEGATIVE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES UNRELATED TO RACE

Student	Related to instructor	Not specifically related to instructor
Adriana	History was boring. Computer instructor used monotone voice. Science instructor made unreasonable homework assignments and gave tests that covered too much material at one time.	
Carl	Algebra instructor refused to meet him "half-way" in his efforts to complete the class. When he repeated the class, there was too much homework. Government was boring.	Marketing was challenging because he did not have the same background as the marketing majors in the class.
James	English instructor sometimes insulted students.	
Mary	Attendance policy in some classes was difficult. English instructor asked for students' opinions, but didn't like it when Mary expressed a negative opinion about literary work. Nursing instructor was "nit-picky" and suggested Mary drop the class even though some students were doing worse than she was. Mary was insulted.	Classes outside of her major were a "waste of time." 85% grading scale in nursing classes was too difficult. Developmental classes were boring.
Taylor	One instructor catered to women in the front row and did not notice whether other students in the class were understanding the material or not.	Disliked attendance policies. Didn't like classes where students shared too much of their personal lives. Older students talked too much about families. Did not have adequate background from high school for science class.
Thomas	Did not like instructors who lectured only, without using board notes or distributing handouts. Instructors who used only objective tests were difficult. Science instructor gave him no breaks in regard to attendance and assigned extra credit only when he was absent.	Disliked attendance policies.

TABLE 16

MISCELLANEOUS POSITIVE FACTORS--CAMPUS CLIMATE

Student	Athletics	Student Services	Other
Adriana			Met a lot of people in various offices across campus through work study. Positive experiences.
Carl			People in cafeteria were always friendly.
James			People have been friendly; listened when he needed someone.
Mary		People in financial aid offices were helpful.	
Taylor	Good intramural sports program; good athletic program in general.		Treated as an adult. Didn't have to be part of any specific group of students. Faculty and staff friendly and helpful. People were accepted for being different.
Thomas	Competitive track program. Coach knows a lot of people at other colleges and can put in a good word for you.		

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

Introduction

Interpretation of data focuses on the questions of "Why?" and "What does this reflect?" Why did students find themselves involved in the Minority Student Organization or spending time in the gymnasium? Why did they find some classes more enjoyable or challenging than others? How do their experiences compare to or differ from the experiences of African American students at other colleges and universities? To answer these and other questions, I returned to the group tables created in round four of the data analysis (see Figure 8), reading through each one again, looking for the ways that the information about one student connected to information about another student and then how that compared to or contrasted with what research has shown about other students and their college experiences. While the group tables were the starting place, the analytical process was a recursive one as I returned repeatedly to the individual student data sets and to the interview transcripts themselves to verify specific student comments.

Choosing SMC

Individually, each student selected SMC based on discussions with friends and family and on estimations of what would meet his or her personal, educational, and/or

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INDIVIDUAL
TABLES

TRANSCRIPTS

Adriana

Carl

James

Mary

Taylor

Thomas

Group Tables

INTREPRETATION

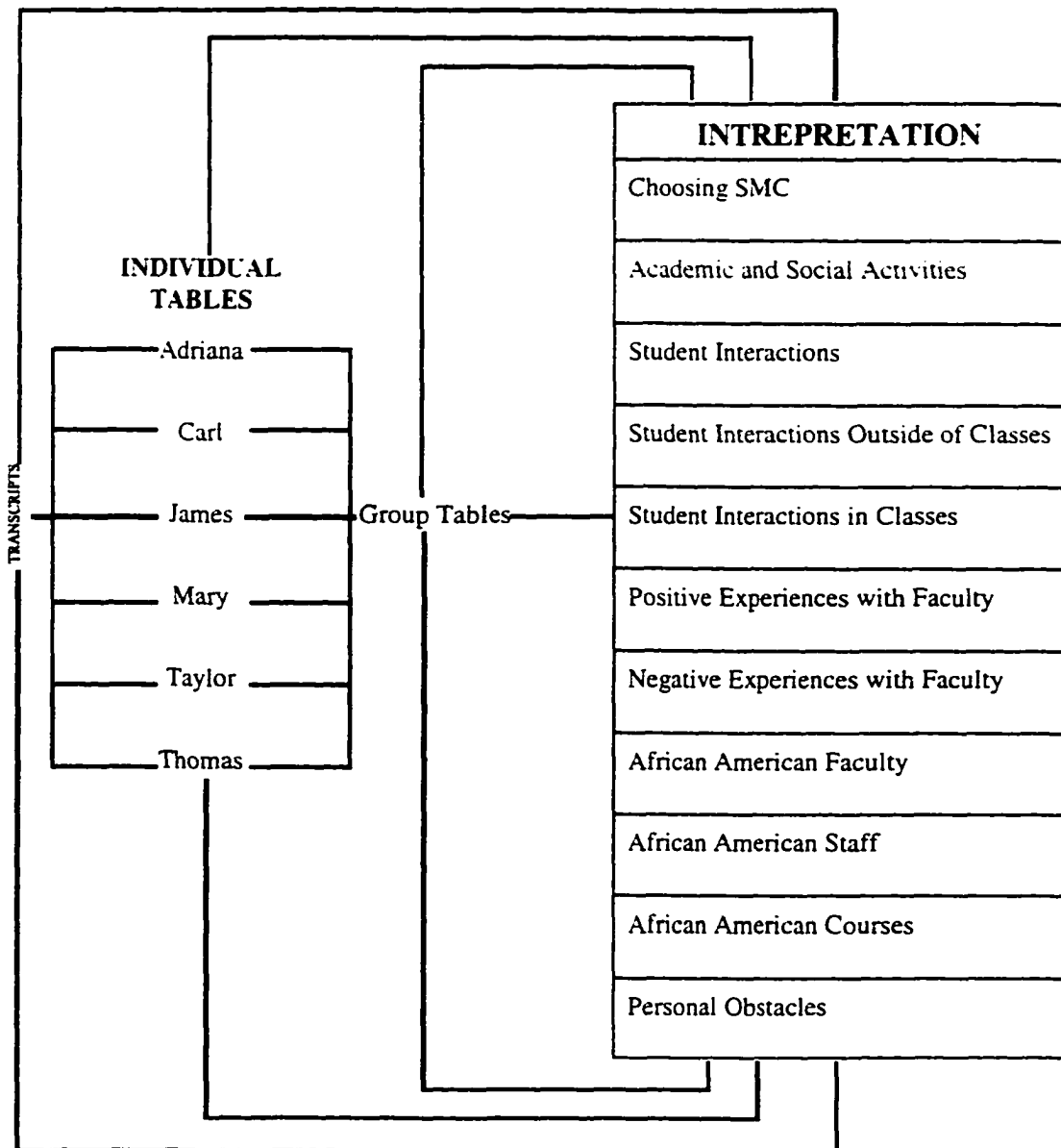| Choosing SMC |
|---|
| Academic and Social Activities |
| Student Interactions |
| Student Interactions Outside of Classes |
| Student Interactions in Classes |
| Positive Experiences with Faculty |
| Negative Experiences with Faculty |
| African American Faculty |
| African American Staff |
| African American Courses |
| Personal Obstacles |

Figure 8. Interpretation: A recursive process.

career goals. These decisions, however, also connect with patterns of attendance, persistence, and achievement that match those of other college students. Richardson and Skinner (1992) identified three "dimensions" of a minority student's background that describe the patterns found in their college attendance. The first is "opportunity orientation," those beliefs students have developed about the role of education in the lives of adults they value. The second is preparation, that is, expectations about college, one's readiness for it, and participation in experiences that "approximate" college-going. The third, mode of college-going, distinguishes between students who are traditional, full-time students and those who enter with adult roles and responsibilities.

Four of these SMC students, Taylor, Thomas, Adriana, and Carl, come from families where education is valued and college attendance promoted, in some cases expected. In identifying minority students who are successful, researchers have clearly shown that students whose parents have attended college themselves or who believe that education plays an important role in reaching both personal and career goals are more likely to attend college and be successful.

Thomas and Carl both come from families whose parents have bachelor's degrees; Carl stated that even though he waited a year to start college, the question was not if he would attend, but when and where. Thomas did not mention his parents' expectations about college, but stated clearly his own thinking: "I really don't want to work in a factory all my life." Thomas also talked about his brother with whom he planned to room when he transferred to Western Michigan University, and Carl mentioned aunts and uncles who, like his mother, were teachers, and would "kill him" if he dropped out of school. Although considered a first-generation college student, Taylor's mother has an

associate's degree and her older brother is a college student. Thus, she, too, has significant adults with college experience. Unlike Thomas, Taylor wanted to work after high school. "I had it all planned," she said. "I would get my sports car and apartment, but my parents said, 'No that's not a good idea.'" When her friends were laid off from the "great job" she had wanted, she was glad she had followed her parents' advice to go to school.

A clear difference between Taylor and Thomas and Carl was the level of family support. While Carl's parents supported education, they did not support him financially. On his own since high school, he worked full-time and struggled financially throughout his time at SMC, with work often getting in the way of school. Both Taylor and Thomas noted with appreciation their parents' financial support of their education.

Mary and Adriana, like many minority students, are both first-generation college students, but like the other students in this study, each equated education with economic success. Mary had struggled with two jobs and still could not make ends meet before deciding to attend college so that she could increase her earning power. "If I wanted to make really decent money, I had to work three doubles a week," she said. In addition, she talked about the dream she and her brother had of attending a historically Black college, such as Spelman or Morehouse. She described visiting Howard University while a senior in high school and watching a television special on historically Black colleges. The importance of education for Mary is also reflected in the fact that she is the only one of the six who specifically selected SMC because of her perception of its academic excellence: She believed that the quality of the nursing program exceeded that of the other schools she considered.

Adriana did not have friends or family who had attended college; however, she had accepted her mother's belief in the value of education. Her mother had not been allowed to go to school, so "she said if we did nothing else ever in our lives, we were going to school." For Adriana, college was a big responsibility: "It's this big thing over my head that I'm the first person ever to graduate from college ever in my family, so that helped, you know, so it's I am going to do this because I will be the first girl." And while she qualified for federal financial aid, she received support from her mother in that she lived at home. Thus in terms of opportunity orientation, Adriana, Carl, Taylor, Mary, and Thomas had accepted personally the value that education is important and could make a difference in their futures.

James, too, believed that education could lead to better job opportunities, but his family did not reinforce that belief, and he was seeking different employment, not because he saw it as better than factory work, but because of a physical disability. Otherwise, he would have been satisfied with the type of employment he had always had. No one in his family had attended college, and he associated a college education with the type of work he was not interested in. "I never wanted a job I had to take home with me," he said.

As such, James came almost completely unprepared for college. He had been out of high school for 27 years, had "never liked reading and writing," had not paid "enough attention to English and math in high school," and had no experiences that prepared him for what the academic routine or expectations of college course work would be like. He thought he would take accounting classes only and was surprised to learn that general education classes were also required. While he found these classes

interesting and more relevant than he had expected, he struggled with reading comprehension and with writing assignments.

Adriana also would be described as ill prepared in terms of both the quality of her high-school education and the experience base that would have given her information about the academic demands or routines of college life. "The school I went to in Chicago was not a very good school," she said, "but it was [close]. . . . I could get there and I had no other choice." The teachers and counselors did encourage students to go to college, but Adriana saw it as "their job" to tell students this, and, with the exception of one counselor who took a personal interest in her, she did not pay much attention to these comments. Moreover, people in the community sent negative messages about college, telling her things like, "My daughters went there and it didn't work out," or "College is hard." Her friends were the most negative of all, asking her, "Why are you going there? When you come back, you are going to talk, look White, act White." What made the difference for her was her family. "I had a better family than anybody I was friends with," she said.

However, she was used to living in a predominantly African American community, and was unprepared for the White campus even though she chose that, and as Richardson (1989b) has pointed out, adequate preparation goes beyond just the academic issues. Students who are used to being in classes with other African Americans and now find themselves the only minority may be unprepared for how to act in this new environment. Research findings indicate that one factor that correlates with success is attending a college with a racial composition similar to that of one's high school (Nettles,

1991). While Adriana may have had family support, she did not come with school or community experiences that prepared her academically or socially for college.

The other students came with varying degrees of preparedness. Thomas had taken a college class during his senior year, had visited his brother at Western, and had the benefit of a father who is a teacher. Thus, even though he himself had low ACT scores and came to a community college to establish himself academically, he had both experiences and information about what to expect in college. Likewise, Carl, whose parents both graduated from Michigan State University, came with the expectation that college is a time to learn about a lot of things. "I have a wide range of interests and like almost everything where I am learning," he stated, attributing this attitude to the influence of all the teachers in his family. Even though he often struggled to keep up with the demands of school and work, he recognized the importance of meeting with his instructors to explain his situation and to seek extra assistance. This type of knowledge is what many first-generation college students lack (Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Taylor, likewise, came with some prior knowledge about what to expect based on her mother's and her brother's experiences, even though she acknowledged some gaps in her academic preparation in terms of mathematics and science. She and her father attended the college's student orientation during the summer, which she said was not all that interesting because she "already knew some of the things." In spite of this, she cited the class College Success Strategies as having been particularly useful and suggested an additional class that would deal more in depth with how to read college catalogs, how to prepare for graduation, and how to prepare for transferring to a 4-year school. Thus, while she had family support and some adequate preparation, there were gaps in her

knowledge base about a number of issues and she did not have peers and family who could adequately assist her in these areas.

Mary, too, had the benefit of her brother's college experience, but otherwise had little in the way of knowledge or experience to prepare her for the demands of college life. This lack of experience became evident as she talked about the rigors of the nursing program and its prerequisites. Even though she selected SMC because she thought its program "was better," she struggled with the nursing department's requirement of 85% for a C and found some of the nursing instructors' expectations "nitpicky." Additionally, she found "non-nursing courses," those that are part of the core curriculum and the distribution requirements for an associate's degree, to be a waste of time. Such attitudes, while typical of many adult students (Cross, 1981), are also reflective of misunderstandings about the nature of college and its academic expectations.

While Adriana, Thomas, and Taylor are clearly traditional students in terms of their "mode of college-going," James and Mary are clearly non-traditional. Mary worked after high school and after enrolling at SMC, stopped out, returned, and attended mostly part-time. In addition, as a single parent, she juggled the responsibilities of family, school, and work. And although James made school his primary focus, his age and part-time status place him in the category of non-traditional.

Carl, however, blurs the lines between traditional and non-traditional. While classified as traditional on the basis of his age at date of enrollment and his initial intention to attend full-time, his pattern of attendance and his adult responsibilities fit a different profile. At the time of his enrollment, he was working, living on his own, and the father of one child. At the time of our interviews, he had been attending off and on

for 5 ½ years, was working full-time, and now had two children with whom he spent time regularly. These responsibilities continue to pull Carl away from his college commitment. He did not complete any of the three classes for which he was registered the 1997 winter semester. Students like Carl are five times less likely than their more traditional counterparts to obtain an associate's degree and transfer to a 4-year school (Carroll, 1988). Thus, in spite of an adequate opportunity orientation and adequate preparation, he clearly has not been able to make school his highest priority.

All of these students, however, share characteristics with students most likely to attend community colleges. Concern over finances, uncertainty regarding specific academic goals or readiness, and/or a recognition of some academic weaknesses influenced these students to attend a community college, specifically SMC. Once enrolled, each of these students became involved in a variety of academic and social activities at the college, some focusing almost solely on what Tinto (1993, pp. 116-17) calls "formal academic" experiences, which include such activities as direct classroom instruction, tutoring, advising, or career and transfer advising, and others taking advantage of a variety of "informal academic" experiences, which include interactions with faculty and/or staff during office hours, in hallways or the cafeteria, or other informal settings.

In addition, some of these students found social experiences, again both formal and informal, in which they participated along with their academic programs. These formal activities, such as clubs, intercollegiate athletics, or fine arts, and informal activities, such as hallway conversations, card games in the commons, or intramural

sports, all served along with their academic involvement to reinforce or alter their initial commitment to completing a degree.

Academic and Social Activities

Identifying the services in which these six students were involved (see Table 4) serves as a place to begin assessing their academic and social involvement. Stikes (1984) found that African American students whose level of personal, academic, or athletic involvement was high were more likely to be retained. Two of the students interviewed were involved in athletics, one on an intercollegiate level and one at the intramural and individual level. Thomas came to SMC specifically because of its track program. He was recruited by the coach and although he would rather have gone to Western, if he had started out there, he would not have been eligible for academic reasons to participate in track his first year. So he chose to come to SMC where he could run for 2 years and then transfer, at which time he hoped his grades would be good enough to allow him to participate in track at Western. His participation in track served both as an ongoing motivation for him to stay at SMC, where he liked the coach and found the competition challenging, and as an incentive to maintain his grades for athletic eligibility.

In talking about track, Thomas gave the program high marks. While the college's weight room and outdoor track were not the best and the coach had limited funds, the coach "used his money for traveling to good meets" and the competition was "better" than he had expected. Thomas said the track team was about evenly split between Whites and African Americans, and he never felt the coach treated him any

differently than he did the White students. Neither did he sense any racial friction between members of the team.

As an athlete, Thomas was required to participate in the Student Athlete Academic Assistance Program which involved ongoing monitoring of his class attendance and performance. It also provided a study table four afternoons a week during which time mathematics tutoring and other academic assistance were available. Although not required to attend on a regular basis, Thomas found out from the coach about the mathematics tutoring and went for help with his algebra on several occasions.

In addition to finding academic support through his participation in athletics, Thomas found social support. He said he had made acquaintances in classes but "friends in athletics." That these friendships were important to Thomas is reflected in his comment that he spent time at the apartments where many of the athletes lived because "the athletes complained about it being boring." He seemed to be interested in their needs, not just his own.

Thomas also found transfer advising through his athletic connections. The coach at Western called him occasionally to see how he was doing and the SMC coach "put in a good word" for him, telling the Western coach that Thomas "was a good worker" on the track team. His information about transfer requirements and the registration process itself came from both his academic advisor at SMC and the athletic office at Western.

Thus, looking at Tinto's model, it can be seen that Thomas's own intentions and goal commitments, combined with his interactions with both peers and professionals in the athletic program, contributed to his social integration at the college, even though he still had ties to the community. Thomas himself acknowledged his own lukewarm

attitude about school, saying, "It's just something you have to do." He was committed,
however, to track and to his personal goal of graduation and transfer--"I want to show
myself that I can get through school and continue on with track."

Carl, while not involved in athletics formally, used the weight room at the sports
center and spent time on the basketball court in informal games and intramural
competitions. He talked about playing basketball three or four nights a week, spending
time with members of the basketball team at their apartment building, and attending
social activities sponsored by both the men's and women's teams.

He also noted that while these activities were important to him his first year, he
had stopped spending as much time in the gymnasium or with the athletes because, after
getting something to eat and going to classes, he usually left campus to spend time with
his sons or to go to work. Carl seemed to look back on the first part of his college
experience fondly, recalling that "the first year he had a group, not just Black, that used
to sit around the Lyons Building and chit chat. I miss that," he said.

Carl also participated in the Minority Student Organization his first year,
attending meetings, handing out flyers, sharing ideas, and attending social events
sponsored by the group. He did not take a leadership role, however, saying he was "just a
regular member." He is bothered by the fact that not enough students participated and
that a leadership void was created when the officers he knew graduated. While some
students came just to be with each other, he attended "for the discussions or to find out
what things they could do," such as parties, talent or fashion shows, or getting together to
go to the movies. Again, however, Carl acknowledged that with his work and family
schedule, he probably would not have found time to participate in the group during his

last two or three semesters. Even so, he noted the importance of these groups, saying, "I think that is one of the reasons that kept me coming to school back then, unity. Even when we didn't have [the Minority Student Organization], it seemed like we all was a big happy group of kids, and we always wanted to talk and chit chat and hang out, even in between classes."

In addition to these social activities, Carl listed algebra tutoring, the computer laboratories, and the library as academic services that he used, noting that staff in the library helped with computer searches, using microfiche, and generally finding resource materials and that he spent a lot of time there his first 2 years. Another service Carl valued was faculty office hours. He cited frequent conferences with instructors to discuss missing or late work, to let them know that it was not lack of interest when he was having trouble getting assignments in.

Perhaps the most telling sign of Carl's academic involvement, however, is the way that he talked about classes. "I have a wide range of interests and like almost any class where I am learning" he said, particularly citing those classes where there were discussions, projects, games, field trips, or learning about different cultures. In describing classes that were difficult, Carl could identify what the problem seemed to be, such as lack of background knowledge, his own difficulty with note taking, or the amount of homework.

Carl's social and academic involvement at the college started out at a fairly high level and then, as time went on, decreased, partly because of changes within the college setting and partly because of changes in his personal life. Tinto's model acknowledges that students like Carl will find external commitments interfering with their goals and

intentions, causing some students to leave college in spite of having had positive academic and social interactions with students, staff, and faculty. Carl appears to be one of these students.

Mary also found the challenge of family commitments conflicting with her goal of completing the nursing program. She cited her son's asthma, finances, juggling work and school, and car troubles as major obstacles in her efforts to complete school. She vividly remembered receiving a call that Bryon was ill and racing home in order to be with him. Another time she missed 2 weeks of school because he was in the hospital. Mary, however, also faced challenges at school. While she found her developmental writing and arithmetic classes "boring" because it was material she felt she knew, she had difficulty in Math for Meds and other nursing pre-requisite classes where 85% is the minimum for a C. In addition, Mary cited several examples of conflicts with instructors who were "stubborn," "set in their ways," or "nitpicky." She cited one instructor's inflexibility in grading, which resulted in what Mary perceived as an unfair grade.

In spite of these difficulties, Mary listed faculty as one of the reasons she would encourage other African American students to come to SMC. "It's a good school and teachers have time to work with students as individuals, " she said. She also said that she would stop by some faculty offices for mainly social reasons because they seemed interested in her as a person.

And while she did not spend much time on campus except as necessary between classes, she found students, both African American and White, with whom she was comfortable visiting and having lunch. In addition, she had a boyfriend whom she had met on campus.

Mary's frustrations with school were mitigated by these positive social

relationships with faculty and students and by her almost fierce determination to graduate,

even if it was in a program other than nursing. She kept coming in spite of what seemed

to her a long drive, unreliable transportation, day-care difficulties, and her son's health.

Some semesters she juggled two jobs and a full class load. And even in situations where

she could have felt intimidated as the only African American, she said, "You have to go

into any situation [with the attitude] this is what I want, this is what I am going to do, and

I am not going to be vulnerable. I am just going to be comfortable. I have a right to be

here, just as you do."

In this regard she resembles minority students at other predominantly White

schools who say that they selected the school because they wanted a good education, not

on the basis of its minority population (Coakley & Dickson, 1988). However, they also

wanted a supportive climate, which included seeing more minority students and faculty

on campus and instructors who could understand their perspective (Coakley & Dickson,

1988). Mary, like these other students, said an African American instructor would have

increased her comfort level in class, especially at the beginning, but again, as with

students in Coakley and Dickson's study, the presence of minority faculty was not a

criterion for staying at the institution. By finding a curricular focus and developing

faculty, staff, and peer associations, Mary used the coping strategies similar to other first-

generation students who have been successful (Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Adriana, too, found ways of adapting to what was initially a completely different

environment from the African American neighborhood in Chicago where she had grown

up. She knew SMC is a White campus, but since she did not come with the intention of

staying long, she felt she could "do it for a semester." She noted that at first it was difficult because students did not seem to want to socialize before class, but after seeing the same people in class two or three times, she started conversations by asking about class assignments. This led to getting acquainted, sharing phone numbers, and forming study groups. She found that she enjoyed meeting new people and began to feel more comfortable, even though she was often the only African American. Her priority in class was sitting down front so she could see the board and interact with the instructor; even when there were other African American students in class, she stayed in the front.

Coakley and Dickson noted that African American students seemed to want help either maintaining their cultural identity or fitting in with the White culture around them (Coakley & Dickson, 1988). Adriana seems to belong to this second group. She said that her research showed that students who attended historically Black schools had more difficulty finding jobs than did African American students who attended White schools. In addition, she stated firmly that this "is a White world and you need to learn about it if you are going be successful in the working world." Thus, she deliberately selected a White school and learned, as other minority students have done, to interact "on Anglo terms" (Coakley & Dickson, 1988). In addition, she became acquainted with the surrounding community through church and traveling around the area. This, too, is often an issue for minority students when they move to a college or university community; students in campus interviews have noted the need to find appropriate social resources, such as places to get their hair done, attend church, and find recreation (*Thank You for Asking!* 1991).

Thus, during her first year, in addition to settling into the Dowagiac area, Adriana made enough positive faculty and student connections that she decided to stay at SMC. During her second year, she increased her campus involvement in several ways. She became active in the Minority Student Organization, she started working on campus, and she established a positive advising relationship. All of these served to increase the level of her involvement in both the social and academic arenas. She enjoyed the minority group, "not so much because it was Black" but because she likes the challenge of getting people to do things and she likes "to know what is going on." She enjoyed the fund-raising activities and projects that involved providing canned goods and toys for school children at Christmas. However, she did not look to the college to provide social activities, saying that she thinks "school should provide an education."

She found her work study experience important because she "got to know a lot of people on campus . . . and met people in different offices" which she found interesting. As noted by Turnbull (1986), campus employment enhances campus involvement, which in turn facilitates retention. For Adriana, campus employment also led her to an advisor who made a significant difference in her academic satisfaction with the college. During her freshman year, she found she was not comfortable with some of her classes and in addition she was confused about the difference between the associate in arts and associate in applied science degrees. The administrator in the office she worked in invited her to talk with him about any concerns she had, an offer she accepted. He explained the two degrees to her, showed her how to read the college catalog, and pointed out various options to her. From that point on, she researched every class before taking it, including talking to students (always more than one so she could get more than one perspective)

and then made up her own mind about what to take. As she said, at first, uncertain of her

new surroundings, she "didn't listen" to herself. Once she paid attention to her own

intuition and started asking people questions, she was much happier.

As Richardson (1989b) has noted, minority students need peer support for

purposes of course selection, teacher selection, and how to manage the bureaucracy of

school. For Adriana, the turning point in her ability to start asking the right questions of

the right people came as a result of a positive staff relationship.

James also found work on campus to be a positive experience that increased his

involvement. This was particularly important in James's case, given his weak academic

preparation and low opportunity orientation for college as noted earlier. Turnbull (1986,

p. 8) argued that students most likely to persist in college are those who have "high to

moderate academic competence" and "high to moderate college commitment." James,

however, fits the profile of a student with "moderate to low academic competence" and

"low to moderate college commitment." In order for such students to persist, they need

the strong academic support of a developmental studies program to build their academic

competence and involvement in activities which enhance their commitment (Turnbull,

1986). As a member of the college's Student Support Services program, James was

placed in basic skills courses and offered intensive academic support and advising,

including tutoring, which he used in several classes. In addition, as part of his financial

aid package he worked on campus in either the computer laboratories or in the library,

working about 15 hours a week every semester. Both of these jobs involve assisting

students, creating the opportunity for social contacts. In addition, they provided him with

training in how to use the library and expanded his computer skills. Non-traditional, first-

generation college students are often embarrassed about their lack of knowledge and are reluctant to seek assistance (Skinner & Richardson, 1988). Through his campus job, James received assistance without having to ask for it. He also found faculty very accessible and made frequent use of office hours to discuss questions about class assignments and material he did not understand. Thus James's employment and his comfort level with faculty increased his involvement socially and academically on the campus.

Taylor, however, worked off campus until her last semester when she found a campus job. Unlike James, Mary, and Carl, Taylor worked so she could have some extra spending money and because she "liked doing something besides school." Even though she did not qualify for financial aid, she did have a small scholarship and her parents were willing to pay for the rest. Like Adriana, she came from a largely African American community, and stated that when she came to register, she "looked around for someone 'like' her," but resigned herself by saying, "it's just the real world and you have to deal with it." More important to her was that people treated her in a friendly manner. "I can get along with anyone, talk to anyone, as long as they are not judging me. You don't have to be my race or nationality or my color to get along with me."

This attitude, combined with the fact that she enjoyed meeting people from other cultures, including the African students, reflects the attitudes expressed by other minority students at colleges where they described their experiences as generally positive. Students reported that they always looked around for others of their race, noting that if they found someone, it made them feel less alone; but they also noted that they were used to being alone (Coakley & Dickson, 1988). Some students commented that meeting

people from other backgrounds was a good experience and realized after being on a campus with a mixed population how important that was (National Institute of Colleges and Universities, 1991). Even though SMC is a largely White campus, Taylor perceived it as having students from a variety of cultures, a fact she appreciated.

Perhaps another factor to note is that Taylor feels that students who live in the community do not look to the campus for recreation. She chose not to stay on campus after classes, preferring to pursue her own social life, which included visiting friends at Western Michigan University and Michigan State University. In this way, Taylor maintained her own circle of friends outside the campus and did not experience the isolation that minority students at residential campuses often report.

She did find ways to become involved on campus, however, mostly through the journalism program. Through her story assignments, she met a variety of people on campus and learned about groups, such as the college honor society, Phi Theta Kappa (PTK). Taylor involved herself in her classwork also, enjoying all of her writing classes; psychology class, where "the instructor assigned projects that helped her learn about herself": Introduction to World Religions, because she is "interested in different religions and cultures, where people live, their beliefs"; and Human Development and Learning, where she was encouraged to look at things from different angles. In addition, she took classes that were not required, such as Intermediate Algebra "to help herself" because she thought she should learn about the graphics calculator. She also joined PTK when invited, citing the opportunity for scholarships and the value it added to her transcript.

In looking at the types and intensity of involvement at the institution, it can be seen that each of these students exhibited a moderate to high level of athletic, academic,

or personal involvement in the social and academic life of the campus either through extracurricular activities, campus employment, active participation in their classes, or some combination of these three. As noted earlier, Stikes (1984) found that any one of these types of involvement contributed to retention. Each student also had specific intentions and goals upon entry, although not all exhibited the same degree of commitment. It may be that as Hackman and Dysinger (1970) contended, those students with the stronger commitments to college--Thomas, Taylor, Adriana, and Mary--persisted in part because of the strength of that commitment. Additionally, each participated in academic and social activities that, as shown in Tinto's model, reinforced, clarified, or modified those goals and commitments. For Carl and James, however, outside influences beyond the control of the institution also impacted those original goals and commitments.

Staff Interactions

In addition to talking about the specific activities in which they participated, students described their interactions with staff, students, and faculty. Generally speaking, the first people with whom these students came in contact were staff persons in Student Services. All of the students reported being treated in a friendly helpful manner when they first came to register and found the advising, financial aid, and business office staff friendly and courteous. None of the students felt as though she or he was treated any differently as an African American. Taylor said that contrary to what her high-school teachers had told her to expect at college, "People were warm and welcoming," not impersonal. After taking her basic skills assessment tests, Mary met with an advisor who

explained the test results and signed her up for classes. She liked this counselor and "stuck with her throughout." Thomas did not mention any particular attachments, but noted that he was satisfied with the advising process and received appropriate transfer assistance from an advisor in Student Services. James did not mention any one advisor or staff person, either, but he noted that "people have been nice to me: helped me out. People have been good listeners when I needed that."

While Adriana had no experiences with staff that she classified as negative, she was not entirely satisfied with the advising process until the administrator in the office where she was employed started advising her. She faulted other advisors for "just telling her what to do" without laying out various options. She also stated that "it's a student's responsibility to read and ask questions," which she did once she was clear about how to read the catalog and about which degree she wanted.

For Adriana and Mary, these two advisors played an important supporting role as they made curriculum and class choices. Tracey and Sedlacek (1985), in developing the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire, noted the importance for African American students of people supportive of the student's academic goals. In Adriana's case, her mother, who was supportive but not knowledgeable, encouraged Adriana to talk with her supervisor. Mary, who did not mention any specific support person outside of school, made it very clear that she "trusted her advisor completely." Given the nature of Mary's personal and academic challenges in completing her program, and given the discomfort Adriana described with some of the early classes she was taking, the roles that these two campus advisors played seem to have been important.

Carl, too, had high praise for a counselor whom he credited with getting him back on track after he had received advising from one person that actually placed him in classes he had already taken or did not need to take. This negative experience was one of the things that stood out in Carl's mind as he described his time at the college along with two other staff experiences involving coaching staff. One of these involved someone Carl identified as an assistant athletic director, who was responsible for supervising open gym time. Carl noted that he and the other African American men who regularly played basketball were often asked by this coach to leave the gym. It was the perception of all of them that he manufactured reasons to dismiss them because they were African American. While this occurred on a regular basis, none of the men took any formal action because, in Carl's words, "It wasn't an academic matter, so they just let it go, but it bothered them." Carl said that if it had become a "one-on-one thing," he would have pursued it. The second situation, which was "one-on-one," he acted on. And even talking about it several years later was obviously distressing to Carl, who jostled uncomfortably in his chair and said that just thinking about the incident "gives me chills."

Carl had been working out in the weight room and after showering was heading towards the parking lot when one of the coaches followed him and asked to search his car, indicating that a pair of shoes had been stolen from his office in the gym. Someone had seen Carl coming out of the office, the coach said. Carl, who was shocked at this accusation, stood back while the coach looked in his trunk. The shoes were not there, but the coach walking back towards the gym, stopped and talked to two other people who as a group stood and looked at him.

Carl had no doubt that they were talking about him and even approached them, asking if this were a "Black/White thing." The coach said, "No, it wasn't," but Carl did not believe him. Carl said he had the same feeling an African American gets in any public situation, such as a store parking lot where two or three Whites will stand and talk and giggle, casting sidelooks at the African American about whom they are obviously talking.

Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) have pointed out that "blacks tend to be more concerned with race than whites . . . Their daily lives are affected because of their race and their lifestyle . . . [and they] have been forced to take quick, sophisticated readings of white motives and intended actions" (p. 15). For Carl, there was no doubt that both of his negative experiences with coaches were related to race. In the case of the shoes, Carl talked with his mother, who was president of the Niles National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She called the athletic director at the college to talk about the situation. It was Carl's understanding that the director talked to the coach involved and the matter was dropped after that. Carl stated that his mother has taught him not to take matters such as this into his own hands, but to talk with her or another adult he respects about how to handle the situation. He has accepted this as a better way because he personally tends to get angry in such situations and realizes that it is in his best interests to delay action until he has calmed down and consulted with someone.

James also related several uncomfortable experiences with staff that he attributed to racism or lack of awareness regarding cultural differences. One involved a reception Student Support Services staff held for participants. During the course of the activity, one of the staff "kicked" him in the "butt." James was upset by this; however, after

waiting a day or two he went and talked to the staff person about it. She was apologetic. and he considered the matter closed. He said that a similar situation happened with a White female co-worker in the library. Again, he talked with the student about feeling insulted by this action. The student told him that she and her boyfriend sometimes "played around" like that, and that her action had been a response to her perception that James was flirting with her. This perception was supported by an African American male friend who James said has experience dating White women. The friend suggested that the girl was letting James know that she was interested in him.

In processing these two experiences, James said he felt that these incidents reflected cultural differences between Whites and African Americans in terms of acceptable non-verbal behaviors. He said that in both cases, another African American male would "definitely" have been offended by these actions. "In my experiences with Black people, you don't hit, you don't kick, and you don't say derogatory things about someone's parents. Blacks don't put up their hands unless they are ready to fight."

In talking with James about these incidents, it was clear that in addition to remembering them, he had also taken steps to let these people know that their actions offended him. Even though he still remembered the events, he said he considered them misunderstandings rather than examples of racism and considered the matters resolved. His response to these events is consistent with the third variable on Tracey and Sedlacek's non-cognitive questionnaire: understands and deals with racism (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). James was neither submissive nor hostile in these situations. but was willing to address them directly with the persons involved.

James did not. however, have positive feelings about another incident in which he felt a college administrator "beat around the bush" and tried to frame the issue in terms of age rather than race. James was accused of sexual harassment by a White female student who is considerably younger than he. James acknowledged that he had approached her about dating him, noting that he had been extra careful because "not all White women are interested in dating Black men."

After the charges were filed, James was contacted by a member of the advising staff in Student Services who explained the charges, and then he also spoke with an administrator in the same office. This person suggested that James should not have approached the woman in question because she was much younger than he. James, in turn, threatened to file a racial discrimination suit unless he was assured that this incident would not be written down and placed in his file. He dropped the charges when given this assurance, but was offended first of all because he heard the charges only second-hand rather than being allowed to meet with the woman and with the college staff to address the issue. Second, he was offended because he did not feel that he was given an opportunity to state his case, and third, he wanted college staff to acknowledge the racial issue, rather than trying to frame it as an age difference. James summarized his feelings clearly. "The way I looked at it, it was just a White man looking out for a White woman, you know. Plain and simple."

James reported one other incident with a staff person, an intern working in Student Services. James had been invited by a counselor to serve as a peer mentor and had decided that he was not comfortable with the job description and some of the tasks involved, so was going to decline it. In talking with the intern, she suggested that the

counselor was using James as an "Uncle Tom" to reach some of the other African American students. While James did not believe that this was the case, the suggestion bothered him and left him somewhat uncomfortable around this counselor.

James also cited an incident in class where he felt insulted by a faculty member who told James that he looked like Robert E. Lee. "I don't look anything like anyone White," James said. The instructor tried to clarify by saying that they both looked distinguished, and James said he had just accepted the remark as a lack of cultural awareness. "He just didn't realize what he was saying."

These incidents are indicative of the "ignorance and insensitivity" about other ethnic groups and "their circumstances, feelings, and needs" that are characteristic of many predominantly White campuses (National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1991). And while James stated that he did not feel uncomfortable on campus because of these incidents, they were clearly still vivid in his memory.

Student Interactions Outside of Class

The sexual harassment charge bothered James, not only because of how college staff responded, but because of the way the other student responded to his interest in her. He had tried to feel his way slowly and said that he had not received any signs from her that she was uncomfortable around him. He was "hurt" when he learned of her harassment charges. He recalled how another White friend had asked him how she could say no to an older White man who was interested in her. In reflecting on the two incidents, James concluded that perhaps the girl he had approached felt similar confusion

about how to say no to him. He acknowledged that sometimes it is hard to separate the Black/White overtones from the male/female issues.

James observed this same discomfort in another situation which involved both age and race issues in a different context. He told of working in the library when some young African American students from a local school were using the computers and talking loudly and otherwise misbehaving. One of the student workers, a young White woman, asked James if he would speak to them. She felt "intimidated" by them, partly because she was White and partly because she was young, James said. He simply walked over and told the boys, "Hey, I'll go talk to your head man." Even though she was reluctant to speak to the boys, she felt comfortable enough to ask James to intervene.

The dissonance reflected in this particular incident seems to somewhat characterize the way in which all of the students described relationships between African American and White students: generally comfortable, but occasionally awkward or separatist, especially when groups or group perceptions were involved.

Adriana and Carl, both of whom participated in the Minority Student Organization, stated that although they had asked White students to attend, none did. They also noted the tendency of African American students to sit together in the cafeteria or the commons. It was their perception that Whites did not attend and often did not join with African Americans in social situations because "Whites don't understand African American students." Both see this lack of understanding as coming from a lack of familiarity; that is, Whites have not been around African Americans that much. Adriana explained, "I guess because we have so many conversations and ways of

saying things until it kind of scares them away maybe or the loudness in our voices which is natural. That is just how it is."

Carl noted that African American and White students were more likely to mix when there is an activity, such as playing cards or studying. When there is no specific activity, the groups tend to sit separately. "Playing cards gives them something in common," Carl said. He explained further that some White students seem quite comfortable with African American students, because they are "more used to being around Blacks and feel like they can fit in." For example, they may listen to the same kind of music. Carl also noted that just as Whites have perceptions about African Americans that may or may not be accurate, African American students often have the idea that "Whites are square and boring," and interested in different things.

Thomas, too, noted the tendency of African American students to sit separately in the commons, but stated, as did Mary, Taylor, and James, that he personally sat where he wanted to, not necessarily where there were other African American students. James noted that he liked the fact that in contrast to his experiences visiting a larger university campus, at SMC African Americans and Whites "talk to each other and hang out together in the halls and commons."

Mary stated that the mix of African American and White students was not a problem for her and that she had found students of both races with whom she was comfortable. Taylor noted that she "made friends with students who had school as a priority," regardless of their race. For Mary, being serious about school was also an important factor in social relationships. She was frustrated by her perception that some African American students seemed only interested in "meeting guys" and "partying all the

time." These students upset her because she "didn't pay her money just to hang out," and such attitudes and behaviors made "the rest of the Black students look bad."

James was also concerned when African American students behaved in a way that "reinforced stereotypes" Whites already have. For example, he was more bothered when a group of African American male students would get rowdy and use inappropriate language than when a group of White students acted the same way. He noted that people already have an image of "Blacks being loud and obnoxious." Thus he would intervene with the African American students, but made it clear that he would also defend them if he thought someone else had criticized them unfairly.

Adriana is the only student who spoke of a specific friendship with a White student. Her experience illustrated a point made by Taylor that she could be treated differently by African American students as well as by Whites. "Blacks have the light skin/dark skin [thing]. Everyone is prejudiced in their own way." Adriana experienced this prejudice first-hand. When she and her White girlfriend would sit in the commons, one group of African American students consistently made comments about her sitting with a White girl instead of with them. Adriana's friend at first was concerned that this attitude would bother Adriana, but Adriana assured her that these girls were not her friends and she did not care what they thought.

This friendship showed Adriana acting out on a personal level something she thought should happen at the group level. Her friend was curious about African American history, leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. These topics they researched together in the library, while more personal matters such as "White girls' fantasies about Black males" they "didn't have to research." Adriana encouraged her

friend to ask any questions she wanted, feeling that it is important for White students to learn about African American students. This is one reason she invited Whites to Minority Student Organization meetings. They would meet "Blacks, see how they think and act," and gain an understanding of "why they do the things that they do." They could get answers to questions they are afraid to ask, such as "why a Black person can call another Black a nigger, but a White person can't."

This friendship with a White student seems to have reinforced for Adriana her belief that many White students are curious about African American culture and that it would be useful for the college to promote more interaction, such as holding meetings called by one White and one African American student, "a social event" designed to make students "socially aware" of their surroundings. Such an event should be attended by both faculty and students and should include "interpreters" who can help faculty and students cross the language barrier that she believes exists between Whites and African Americans. When asked for examples of this communication gap, Adriana cited an assumption on the part of college faculty and staff that students understand academic language in talking about course and degree requirements, when in reality she spent quite a bit of her time in the cafeteria "translating" for students, explaining things in words that African Americans are familiar with. She also talked about African American slang, which is part of their everyday speech, a feature she saw as contributing to separatism because of lack of understanding. Adriana's observations are supported by Stikes (1984) who said that even though highly verbal, African American students often speak differently. This means that it may take time for them to become familiar with academic language which often includes specialized vocabulary and terminology.

Like Carl, however, Adriana supported Thomas's observation that students involved in athletics tended to associate comfortably regardless of race. Carl said he noted no tension along racial lines, that students (mostly athletes) in the dormitory seemed to socialize across races, and Adriana and Carl both noted particularly that members of the women's basketball team seemed to talk with each other and spend time together, whereas in other contexts, Adriana said, "most White girls won't talk to Black girls."

The concern expressed by both Carl and Adriana for better understanding between Whites and Blacks is particularly interesting because it is not a concern noted in any of the interviews, focus group reports, surveys, or studies from other campuses that were reviewed for this study (Coakley & Dickson, 1988; Davis, 1995; National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1991; Skinner & Richardson, 1988; Stikes, 1984; *Thank You for Asking!* 1991; Wright, 1989). This is not to suggest that students elsewhere do not share the feelings of Carl and Adriana; however, when asked about their experiences and for suggestions to improve campus climate, students in these other studies focused on negative experiences or on activities that would relate to their cultural and social interests as African Americans. They did not mention activities designed to bring students of different races together.

Carl did not offer the direct suggestions that Adriana did, but his comments indicate a concern that opportunities exist for changing African American and White students' perceptions of each other. While he feels that these attitudes are largely formed at home and influenced by a student's background, e.g., rural or urban, he noted that activities such as sports, cards, studies, and classroom discussions

could serve to bring students together, "classes where you get into groups. . . . Those kinds of classes I think help out the interaction."

Carl, as did the other five students, also stated that he felt free to speak out in class discussions, such as English or sociology, even when there were differences of opinion between African Americans and Whites in class. It was his perception that other students felt free also. He noted that African American males did tend to sit separately in class, something he saw not so much as a matter of race relations as a reflection of the attitude that young African American males have towards school. They sat in the back so they could "get away without paying attention." In general, he feels that African American students "do just enough to get by and have fun," waiting until the last minute to get serious. Sometimes they start getting more serious their second year or even second semester. He also noted that males especially take advantage of the more serious attitude of the White students by finding Whites to study with.

Adriana had a more dismissive attitude towards African American males. In commenting about her comfort level in classes, she stated that she never felt she was treated any differently as an African American. However, when asked about the perceptions of other African American students, she said, "Males, of course. They are always looking for an excuse not to be in school." And unlike Mary, who had met her boyfriend at SMC, Adriana said she has found no African American men at SMC in her age bracket that "are mature enough" for her to consider dating." She noted that the small pool of eligible African American males was a problem for some of her younger friends, although they generally expected to look elsewhere for social relationships.

Carl also noted the ratio of men to women and how this posed a problem for African American women who did not generally date White men as freely as African American males dated White women. He observed that even if there were an equal number of African American men and women, the men would still date White women, leaving African American women with a smaller pool of men from which to choose. Fleming (1984) and Stikes (1984) have noted this as a pervasive problem for African American women in higher education.

This area of social activities is generally a problematic one for community colleges as Tinto (1993), Richardson (1989b), and Boylan et al. (1993) have noted. Students in this study clearly stated that (1) they did not expect SMC to provide social activities and (2) their level of participation would not be high even if there were activities of more interest to them as African Americans. Adriana stated that she did not really look to the school to provide social activities. "School should provide an education." Taylor said that she did not feel that students who lived in the community looked to the campus for recreation. She personally wanted to get home as soon as classes were over. She had her job off campus and preferred to go out of town on weekends to visit friends. Mary would like to have seen a Gospel chorus or other cultural activities related to African Americans, but given the distance she lived from campus, her schedule, and the amount of time her son required, she is not sure she would have participated in such events. Thomas noted that he did not participate in intramural sports activities because he did not have time for track, school, and work, although he thinks such programs are important because they "keep people interested if they are not participating in intercollegiate athletics." He noted that his brother had enjoyed

intramurals at Western Michigan University. Thomas did feel that there should be more activities for students who are on campus between classes, such as a recreation room with video games, a television, comfortable furniture, "a place to relax." Carl felt that there should be more activities on campus, such as the annual Beach Day sponsored by Student Services, and a higher visibility for the intramural sports program, although like Mary, Taylor, and Thomas, he noted that he himself was spending less and less time on campus.

James was perhaps the most adamant in saying that he would not participate in campus social activities, although he did attend informal gatherings held during the day for Student Support Services students. He said social activities were not even a consideration; "I'm here to get an education." He personally has an aversion to formal events, and unless it was something where he could "walk out" if he wanted, he would not attend, even something like an African American art exhibit. James also noted that while his age played a part in his lack of interest in social events, the younger students he talked with did not follow through with action when they talked about organizing activities in honor of Black History month. "Students just come to campus for classes and leave," he said.

Carl, Adriana, and others who participate in intramural athletics and other activities show that James's observation is not entirely accurate. Carl's participation in the Minority Student Organization during his first year was a positive experience that served to keep him on campus at a time when he did have more time to be there. He liked not only the chance to meet with people but to discuss possible activities and concerns such as African American classes and Black History month. In addition, he enjoyed the social activities--going to movies, having parties, and sponsoring events such

as a fashion show. In this respect, he is like the many students on other campuses who express a need to socialize with other African American students. Given the nature of SMC's student body, the Minority Student Organization was the only group where Carl was likely to have found a sizable number of African American students other than in athletic events. Combined, these two activities provided a level of involvement that was not just academic, but social.

Likewise, even though Adriana did not expect the college to provide for her social needs, she noted that during her first year there was not much to do on campus. This void came at a time when she was new to the area and was finding her way around as well as becoming acclimated to a predominantly White environment. One can speculate that her involvement in the Minority Student Organization came at a time when she needed to become more connected to the campus. She noted that this participation made her time on campus more "interesting," that she liked the group socialization, the opportunity to be involved in projects, and the challenge of getting people to do things. The importance of these social activities for Carl and Adriana is consistent with the findings of research that suggest that social and interpersonal supports may be more important for African American students than for White students (Fleming, 1984; Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987; Tinto, 1993).

Student Interactions in Class

As with student interactions out of class, students reported generally positive peer interactions within classes. Carl and Adriana, while noting a tendency for African American students to sit together in class, also commented on feeling free to speak

openly. While this reflects on instructors' openness to student opinion, it also reflects a comfort level with the other students. Neither Carl nor Thomas reported any incidents with other students in class that they interpreted as being racially related. James had one encounter in a class where a White female "slapped" him. He was puzzled by this incident, saying that she had offered to help with a keyboarding assignment and when he said that he understood it, she slapped him. He asked her why, but she did not explain herself. He did not perceive the action as racially motivated.

Taylor, Adriana, and Mary all reported at least one incident that was clearly racial. Taylor recalled a student in music appreciation who "slammed rap music due to the lyrical content." In addition, other students looked at her as though she should be the expert in interpreting various rap songs. This type of experience is one cited frequently by minority students who find themselves confronted by stereotypes regularly or called on to know the minority perspective (Coakley & Dickson, 1988; National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1991). Taylor said she just attributes such attitudes to "ignorance," as long as they are not directed towards her personally.

Adriana and Mary both shared incidents that were directed at them personally. In one of her classes, Adriana remembers two White males making comments about her sitting in the front row. She heard them say, "Maybe she is sitting up there because she is too good for us." They also asked, "How did she get that grade? She can't be smarter than us." Like Taylor, Adriana attributed the comments to "ignorance" and said they did not bother her. Mary recalled "a couple of times" when White students asked her what she was doing in class, and one time a White woman "rolled her eyes" at Mary and moved to a different seat, saying, "She would not sit next to a "nigger." In this situation,

Mary addressed the issue directly and forcefully after class, informing the student that she could expect physical violence if "she ever called me that again."

While such experiences appear to be infrequent at SMC based on the reports of these six students, none of the women seemed surprised by these incidents, and were in fact prepared to deal with them, either directly as in the case of Mary, or indirectly by refusing to take the comments personally. However, it should be noted that each of the women had experience in dealing with such experiences and had strategies for dealing with them. This ability to deal with racism is one of the characteristics associated with successful minority students (Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985).

In fact, all of the students except Thomas demonstrated strategies for dealing with racism. Carl, James, and Mary all cited examples of confronting directly the person who offended them; in addition, James and Carl noted that they usually withdrew from the situation and thought about it before taking action, sometimes talking with someone else first. Third, they were able to reject comments that did not target them personally, but were more "generic," revealing a stereotypical attitude or belief.

A fourth strategy might be inferred from reviewing some of Mary's comments and can be described as a positive self-talk combined with an expectant attitude. By expecting to encounter racism, Mary was prepared with the internal messages she needed to combat the situation. For example, in commenting about the lack of African American staff and being somewhat overwhelmed during her first few days and weeks on campus, she said that even though she thought there should a "Black instructor somewhere," she had never looked into why there were none. Her attitude was, "I pay my money to go to school. I am going to do it, whether anyone likes me or not." She was sensitive to non-

verbal language (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976) as evidenced by the hallway encounters

mentioned earlier, but again her expectation that she would have such experiences had

almost conditioned her. She said she experienced such actions or attitudes all the time

off campus, so she "can blow [them] off." And in describing her comfort level in

classes, her comments again reveal this expectant attitude: "You have to go into any

situation [knowing] this is what I want . . . and I am not going to be vulnerable . . . I have

a right to be here." This pro-active self-talk seemed to be a well-developed mechanism

for coping with racism, perhaps reflecting the "dual control" orientation that researchers

have associated with successful minority students (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Higher

Education Extension Service, 1992). Such students, like Mary, feel confident of their

own ability to deal with situations and yet, they can also acknowledge that there are some

things they will be unable to change.

<u>Positive Experiences With Faculty</u>

Without exception, all six of the students cited their experiences with faculty, both

in and out of the classroom, as positive. When asked for reasons that they would

recommend SMC to their African American friends, they cited the quality of the teaching

and the personal attention they received from faculty. In some regards this is not

surprising, since faculty at SMC, both full- and part-time, generally receive positive

evaluations from students, and students in general frequently cite the faculty as one of the

things they like about SMC. However, given the research cited so far in this study, it is

clear that minority students frequently find the classroom as lonely and racist a place as

anywhere else on campus.

In addition to documenting the unfriendly classroom climate experienced by many minority students, educators have made a variety of recommendations about how faculty can structure their classrooms in such a way that students from diverse cultural backgrounds and with diverse learning styles can feel safe, respected, and motivated to achieve (Anderson & Adams, 1992; Claxton & Murrell, 1987; Stikes, 1984; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). However, these educators seem to concur that since African American students often have strong interpersonal and social skills and experiential learning styles, faculty whose teaching incorporates a wide variety of strategies will find themselves addressing the needs of all of their students, including their minority students (Anderson & Adams, 1992; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

Given the apparent importance of teaching style for African American students, and given the purpose of this study to investigate experiences that promoted academic integration, I was particularly interested in the specific reasons students would give for having liked a particular class or instructor. Would it be the subject area? The reputation of the instructor as easy or hard or interesting? The instructor's teaching style? Personality?

As it turned out, students cited all of these reasons for selecting specific classes and for liking their classes. Carl, Taylor, Adriana, and Thomas all named Introduction to World Religions as interesting because of the subject matter--they liked learning about different cultures and ways of thinking. Carl liked art appreciation for the same reason, and Taylor stated that psychology and sociology classes encouraged her to look at things from different angles. Taylor noted that in music appreciation she learned about a variety of music and was allowed to bring in her own favorite music (jazz).

In addition, they liked classes that provided an opportunity to learn about themselves or that had some practical application. Adriana enjoyed a literature class because it improved her reading comprehension and her writing classes because they helped her with her job. James noted that classes such as psychology, speech, and keyboarding would help him in a job as an accountant, but he did not comment on teaching styles. Taylor liked the projects in psychology that helped her to learn about herself, and College Success Strategies helped her examine her educational and career goals, which she found extremely useful. Mary was very clear that she wanted to take classes that related only to her major; she was not as clear about what teaching strategies were most helpful to her.

Thomas sought out classes where the teaching style suited his learning style. He found multiple-choice tests difficult, but liked essay questions where he could "write out exactly what I know." In addition, he was comfortable with out-of-class writing assignments. A visual learner, Thomas wanted to be sure that he had study guides to go along with notes on the boards, because it was hard for him to just hear the lecture. He also wanted frequent quizzes so that information was broken into manageable chunks and he knew where he stood in the class.

Carl and Adriana appreciated instructors who used humor and, along with Taylor, especially enjoyed classes that included discussion, games, and projects; for example, Adriana remembers the geography instructor making her "feel like a scientist." And contrary to student reports in much of the research literature, students stated clearly that they felt free to participate in these discussions and to express their opinions. James noted especially that he found teachers very open to questions. Taylor concurred,

although she said that she had learned in high school that teachers sometimes made students feel stupid for asking questions, so she saved all of her questions and asked them before or after class or during faculty office hours. It would seem, however, that each of these students through active class participation and through both "formal and informal" (Tinto, 1993) experiences with faculty developed positive connections with the college.

Negative Experiences With Faculty

In addition, these students' preferences support what has been said about the general preferences of African American students towards faculty who make content relevant to the students personally, who involve them actively in the learning process, and who create a climate that is conducive to open dialogue and questions. When citing classes that they did not like, it was again a combination of teaching style and subject matter that made the difference.

Taylor, for example, noted that she dislikes science classes. "Even though I study hard, my comprehension level was lower due to lack of interest," she said, noting that she found it somewhat easier in classes where teachers were enthusiastic about the subject. Her criticism of instructors was consistent with other comments that she made about her experiences and goals. She did not appreciate instructors who allowed students to interject too much of their personal lives into a class discussion, especially when it related to family problems. First of all, she did not care to hear people's personal problems, and second, she was irritated by women who talked a lot about their children and husbands. "I don't have a husband and children, and I don't want to hear about their problems," she said.

Likewise, when asked if she talked with faculty about interests not related to school, she said, "I don't make a point to do that. I see them as an instructor, teacher. . . . It shouldn't go beyond that." She also stated that she did not socialize out of class with many of the journalism majors either, because a number of them were older students with families and other interests. She had made friends with students whose main goal was school. Thus, one of her criteria for evaluating an instructor was his or her ability to focus discussion on the subject at hand. This was consistent with how she selected her friends and with her academic orientation.

Adriana also evaluated instructors based on their knowledge of the subject matter and their ability to involve the students; she didn't want "just lecture." She was generally forgiving of instructors who "might just be having a bad day," although she noted that some subjects were "boring" even when the instructor tried "to liven" things up. On the other hand, because she liked computers, she tolerated a teacher with a "boring monotone." Unlike many of the African American students Stikes studied (1984), Adriana did not consider it important if she liked the instructor or the instructor liked her, saying, "it is my job to learn regardless." She did, however, fault her first Environmental Issues instructor, but on the basis of her teaching. Adriana felt that the homework assignments were unreasonable, requiring students to go off campus to complete some of them, and since she did not have her own transportation, she felt such an expectation was out of line. She also felt that the instructor gave too few tests, so that each one covered too much material. When Adriana repeated the class with another instructor, she found the course expectations to be much more reasonable.

Like Adriana and Taylor, Carl appreciated faculty who used humor and class discussions; he found classes difficult that were primarily lecture. He noted that it was hard for him to listen to a lecture and take good notes at the same time. Carl was also willing to accept at least some of the responsibility in classes that had been challenging either because they were mostly lecture (government) or because he lacked background knowledge, as with marketing. He noted that he had just started a new job the semester he took government and missed a lot of classes. He struggled with classes that had lots of daily homework, such as math and science classes for the same reason.

Unlike Taylor, however, Carl, who stated that he "loved" his teachers, made a point of talking with faculty outside of class about both school and personal matters. He found in faculty people who were interested in him as a student and as a person; he talked to them about his work and family, introducing them to his sons when they were on campus with him. In this regard, Carl is like many of the first-generation, non-traditional students Richardson and Skinner (1992) describe who are constantly torn between two worlds (Zwerling & London, 1992). As Tinto (1987, 1993) has noted, while it seems on the surface that the transition from the community to college for commuter students should be easier, in reality it is much more difficult. In spite of his positive involvement with the campus both with students and faculty both in and out of the classroom, he was constantly torn between academic and personal demands, between the world of school and the world of work. Again, Carl blurs the lines, not only between the categories of traditional and non-traditional, but between first-generation and second-generation college student.

None of the students reported being treated any differently by faculty because they were African American. Mary is the only one who cited observing a situation personally in which she felt that an instructor treated a White student and an African American student differently. This situation involved the instructor's attendance policy and how it was enforced. Mary heard the White student say, "I can miss class and still get a B." However, Mary noted that the instructor encouraged the African American student who had missed a lot of class sessions to drop. It was Mary's perception that since both students had violated the class attendance policy, there was no apparent difference other than race between the two students.

All of the students except Taylor, however, cited second-hand reports of students who felt that they had been treated differently because they were African Americans. Adriana said that one student wanted to write about an African American for an assignment, first Martin Luther King, Jr., and then Malcolm X. The instructor rejected both topics, apparently without an explanation, leaving the student to conclude that writing about an African American was unacceptable. Adriana also said that sometimes African American students perceived that if both a White student and an African American student raised a hand in class, the White student would be called on.

Carl, James, and Mary all reported hearing students talk about receiving unfair grades because they were African Americans. In one instance, a student told Mary that a White student received full credit for answers for which he or she had received only half credit. Carl noted that any time an African American student attributed a low grade to an instructor's "not liking me," the end of the sentence was also understood to be "because I am Black." In talking about these reports, however, Carl and the other students were not

always sympathetic. For example, Adriana noted that the athletes feel that faculty discriminate against them because they are African American when in reality it is because they are athletes and may not be attending class regularly. She feels that athletes have a tendency to attribute any negative feedback to their status as African Americans or as athletes. She did give some credence to the student who wanted to write the paper about an African American, citing him as a "serious student."

Thomas also noted that he felt that faculty may have had lower expectations of athletes, not just those who were African Americans, because athletes had learned in high school that not much was expected of them and came to college with the same behaviors, often turning in assignments late and not performing well. This in turn has caused faculty to have lower expectations of athletes in general. Thomas himself had a particularly unpleasant experience with Environmental Issues, noting that while some of the African American students attributed their low grades in that class to race, he was not sure that he could say that was the problem since these students "weren't going to classes or doing the proper things to help themselves out." He did, however, have strong negative feelings about the class, which stood out in contrast to his more neutral feelings towards other classes where he also struggled (e.g., algebra and reading). He talked about the science class several times noting how there was a "weird closeness" between his absences and the instructor's choice of days to assign extra credit.

Carl seemed to give some credence to the students who said they received lower grades in the physical education classes taught by the coach with whom they had conflicts in the gymnasium. He, like Thomas, had difficulty with Environmental Issues, although he saw the problem as his rather than the instructor's, saying he missed class, came late to

class, and did not study as much as he should have for tests. He said the instructor told him he had to change and get his work in and that she was firm and consistent about accepting late papers, treating all the students, both African American and White students alike. In fact, Carl said the only way in which he felt that faculty treated African Americans differently was that instructors may have pushed him and some of the others more than they did White students. He saw this as a very positive thing, noting that he had a tendency "to slack off" and needed the extra push. He feels that faculty have seen a lot of African American students not do well and may take an added interest in some of these students because they want the students to succeed.

Carl cited only one case where he thought that an instructor did not work with him or give him the benefit of the doubt in a situation where he felt she could have. He admitted not doing everything he could have done in his Intermediate Algebra class, but unlike the Environmental Issues class where he perceived fairness, he felt that the algebra instructor made no effort to work with him. He did not, however, attribute this to racial prejudice on her part.

African American Faculty

Another matter relating to faculty is that in addition to having a predominantly White student body, SMC has an almost exclusively White faculty. From time to time, there have been one or two African American instructors on the adjunct faculty, but there are no full-time faculty--or staff--who are African American. Students in this study had varying opinions about this matter, ranging from Mary who said, "Why aren't they here? I'm sure there's someone out there that's qualified to teach some of the courses, to work in

Student Services or anywhere here on campus," to James who said, "It would be just kind of nice to see some around, but if they don't want to come here and teach, there's nothing we can do about that."

In addition to Mary and James, Carl and Taylor also expressed the desire to see African American faculty, although again they had varying opinions about how this would impact them personally. Mary stated that she would probably have felt initially more comfortable in a class taught by an African American instructor--students who had taken classes from one of the African American instructors who taught classes for three or four semesters had told her that they felt more comfortable in his classes. However, she said overall it would not have made much difference as she had felt comfortable with her White instructors after getting to know them. She personally had not liked the instructor the students were referring to, finding him "conceited." She had also heard that he was an "easy A," and this, along with "silly" comments from students about maybe getting higher grades if they could have African American instructors, made her angry. Her boyfriend, however, had taken Theater Appreciation from an African American instructor and found her to be a good teacher, who made class interesting, and was willing to work with students.

James, unlike students who thought they might get better grades from an African American instructor, had just the opposite opinion, stating that based on his limited experience African American instructors might be harder on them. He based this comment on a high-school experience where an African American teacher had expected more of him than the White teachers had, not because he showed differential treatment, but because he did not. In other words, his White teachers had generally expected less of

him, and this instructor had the same expectations for all of his students. James thought it was possible that this same thing could happen at the college, although he felt personally that all of his instructors at SMC expected the same from him as from any other student. James had talked with two of the African American instructors, noting that one was not very friendly, but he had not taken classes from either of them.

Thomas, while agreeing that it would be good to have African American faculty on staff, did not expect to find any. His father is the only African American teacher at the high school in Dowagiac, so he "didn't expect anything different." Having African American instructors to choose from would not have made a difference to him because he would still have made his selection on "how easy" the instructor is. Carl felt that there should be African American faculty, simply because some "students are more comfortable talking to an African American person about concerns; sometimes they are intimidated by White staff." Taylor made a similar observation in talking about African American faculty, saying, "It's good to have someone around who looks like you to go to for advice."

Taylor, Mary, and James all noted that they had heard other students comment about the lack of African American faculty, although James said that most felt as he did, that "they're going to learn anyway." Mary, while reserving judgment herself because she did "not have enough information to know for sure," noted that "a lot" of students assumed that racism is the reason there are not more African American faculty.

Taylor is the only one of the six students who took a class from an African American instructor, the one Mary had heard was an "easy A" and thought was conceited. Taylor found him to be a "good professor" who tied the book in with their other class

assignments and who related his personal experiences to theirs. She found it "exciting" to see someone of her race with a doctor's degree and said he was "able to relate to us in every kind of way." He understood "how I felt about education" and "what it's like coming from a middle class family, not getting grants, dealing with friends who are not going to school, dealing with different prejudice issues, with race."

Taylor's comments are noteworthy when read in light of research findings that attribute the lack of participation and achievement for minorities in higher education to such factors as lack of role models, lack of peer support and reference groups who value education (Applegate & Henniger, 1989; Ross, 1990; Tinto, 1993). Even though Taylor could not "think of any changes" that SMC should make specifically for African American students, citing her time at the college as "pleasant, a learning one," it is clear that in this class, which was made up largely of African American students and taught by an African American instructor, she experienced a learning environment that was comfortable in a different way from any of her other classes.

The importance of this is seen in other comments that she made. Unlike all of her other classes, in this situation she was in the majority. In classes where she is a minority, she feels she has to work harder. "I had to prove myself because people would stare" at her because she is an African American from Benton Harbor, a place people know about through the papers, which print mostly the bad things. She said she had to work harder in high school, too, but even harder at SMC because her parents are paying and she wanted to show that "she could do this--it is the values they have instilled in me."

In these feelings, Taylor is like many other minority students who feel they constantly have to work harder to prove themselves (National Institute of Independent

Colleges and Universities, 1991; *Thank You for Asking!* 1991) and who find that White

faculty do not understand or appreciate what it is like for them as minorities (Coakley &

Dickson, 1988). Perhaps incidentally, because goal-setting is part of the course

curriculum, Taylor cited this class as helping her to sort out her educational and career

goals and that as a result she was more able to delay some of the things that she wanted in

order to focus on her longer range goals. The inability to delay immediate gratification in

order to achieve a long-term goal has been identified as another difficulty for many

African American students (Clewell & Ficklen, 1986). Certainly in this class, Taylor

received encouragement and tangible proof that working towards long-term goals was

worth the effort.

African American Staff

In addition to the lack of African American faculty, students also noted the

absence of any staff who are African American. Some of them stated that they noticed

this lack when they first came to visit or register; others said they really had not paid too

much attention at first. Thomas accepted this as the norm, saying there were no African

American staff at the high school, so he did not expect any at SMC. Carl noted the same

thing, saying he was prepared for this based on what his high school was like and what

his mother had told him about the area. Taylor made note of the all-White staff when she

first came, but after looking around for "someone like me," she just accepted it "as the

real world and you have to deal with it." She went on to say that even if there had been

an African American staff member, it would not have made any difference to her as long

as people treated her in a "friendly manner." Mary, however, said that she noticed the

absence of African American staff during the admissions process and the first few weeks of school. This absence contributed to everything seeming a bit "overwhelming" at first, especially as the campus also seemed large.

When asked about the importance of African American staff in student services or the addition of a minority affairs office, students were not sure of the benefits. James said emphatically that he would be skeptical until he found out whether such a person was going to be his/her own person or just "someone who would try to smooth things over for the Whites." Based on his experience in factories, he had found that African Americans were often brought in just "to help them when they [the Whites] were having trouble with a Black person." He said in the case of his own sexual harassment charge on campus, he would have known immediately which role the staff person was going to play. What James would look for is someone who was going to "treat everyone alike," not someone who would "just try to smooth things over."

Although Mary was adamant that there ought to be African American faculty, she said she had not given any thought about whether an office of minority affairs might be useful and was not aware of what role such an office would play. She had not noticed the absence of one, she said. Carl stated that African American students would be more likely to share their problems with an African American staff member. And while both Carl and Adriana, as well as the others, had found staff or faculty at SMC they could talk to, their observations about the need for minority staff are supported by researchers (Coakley & Dickson, 1988; Stikes, 1984) who have noted that minority students are often taught to be independent and not to talk to Whites about their problems.

African American Courses

Whereas students were generally in agreement about the need for African American staff and faculty, on the subject of a culturally relevant curricula students had a variety of opinions. Carl, James, Mary, and Taylor all initiated the subject of adding African American studies classes. Thomas did not include this on his list of recommendations to the college, but when asked directly, agreed that such courses would be good.

Adriana, however, had strong opinions about the negative impact she feels such classes have. Concerned about the separation she already sees between White and African American students on campus, she feels that classes focusing on African American history only serve to remind people of slavery and negative experiences of the past. She believes that some "Blacks still want to be separatist because they are sensitive to the fact that they were owned by Whites at one time." Males especially tend to feel this way as they take things "more personally" than females. While she acknowledged that these classes might help some students focus on skills they need, such as improving their reading comprehension, she was more concerned about the negative effect they could have in diverting students from the important issue of education by attracting "their attention too much. Then they would be running around here picketing. . . . Blacks just go to the extreme with something that is not necessary . . . instead of getting on with their life." She was also concerned that students might succeed in only those classes that they feel relate to them. She personally was not interested in that "pro-Black stuff," and the only African American course she could support would have to focus exclusively on the "accomplishments of African Americans and successful modern-day Blacks." At the

same time, it should be remembered that Adriana spent time in the library looking up information about African American leaders with her White girlfriend. For Adriana, there is some dissonance on this subject and a fine line between a negative focus on the past and a healthy appreciation of one's cultural identity.

Mary, Carl, and Taylor, however, felt strongly that such courses as African American literature, art, history, and culture are needed. But when asked whether they would have taken such courses themselves, the answers were somewhat surprising, and yet consistent with what each had said about their general academic interests. For example, Thomas had made it clear that "school was just something you have to do," and his goal was very specific: getting his associate's degree with a good enough grade point average to allow him to transfer to Western and become a member of the track team. Would he have taken these African American courses? Only if they had met a degree requirement. Even then, his criteria for selecting between two classes that both met a requirement would have been the same as it had been throughout--who was teaching the class and what instructional strategies the instructor used. He always wanted the class that would be "easier" for him.

Mary made it clear that she was frustrated by having to take classes that she did not perceive to be relevant to her curriculum. She wanted only "required" classes and would have taken one of these African American classes only if it had substituted for a requirement. Taylor and Carl, on the other hand, both talked about taking classes that they were interested in, not just classes that were required. Consistent with that position, they would have taken these classes if they had been available.

Carl also speculated about whether other African American students would take these courses, although he thought the "older, more serious" (by older he was referring to students like him who were in their 20s) students would, and he had had a "White lady friend" that would have been interested. Carl also said that he was not sure why such classes were not offered. Students in the Minority Student Organization had asked college staff about this, but he was never clear about a reason that these courses could not be offered. He also said that he had not thought much about it after his involvement with the minority student group.

However, a culturally relevant curriculum does not refer exclusively to special classes. It also means that class reading lists include materials from a variety of cultural backgrounds, that the accomplishments or contributions of culturally diverse groups are recognized, and that events and issues are presented from a variety of viewpoints. Students did not seem to have any strong feelings in this regard. In talking about government and history classes, Thomas could not recall any particular mention of African Americans and their specific roles or contributions. Neither had he ever paid any attention to this. He had not even thought to be aware of it. He did recall one or two stories in one of his literature classes being about African Americans, but again this had not been particularly noticeable to him at the time.

Adriana also recalled reading at least one or two stories in literature class that were about African Americans, but again she had not paid specific attention to this. She took the class because she had always avoided reading (even though she approved of instructors who required that she read the textbook outside of class) and had decided to address this issue head on. She credited the class with greatly improving

her reading comprehension skills and with helping her to discover that reading could be enjoyable. Whether the reading selections included African American authors was not something she had even thought about or that in retrospect she saw as relevant. Mary did not see the literature selections in class as an issue either. She said, "Some were fine, stories she could relate to; others were just garbage." But, she said, this was not a Black/White issue.

It would appear then, that in terms of individual classes, students were satisfied, but like other minority students across college campuses of all types, these students and their friends would like to have among the courses from which they choose some that deal directly with African American history and culture.

Personal Obstacles

Each of the students in this study shared at some point in the interviews what some of his or her biggest obstacles had been to meeting their goals at SMC. In each case, the student responses reflected their personal life situation and their status as a traditional or non-traditional student. In sharing what they thought would have been helpful, they in essence were reflecting on the coping skills that each had used to overcome these obstacles. Adriana, who came from an African American neighborhood in Chicago, found it a challenge to acclimate herself to a smaller community and one that had relatively few African Americans. Within those new surroundings and in a new academic situation, learning to advocate for herself was also a big challenge, assisted by finding an advisor with whom she felt comfortable. Taylor and Thomas both listed specific classes--science for both of them, and math and art appreciation for Thomas--as

challenges. Taylor also listed her frustration at being ineligible for financial aid, but, in addition, she felt the financial aid office could have been more helpful in providing her with scholarship information and alternative sources of aid. As she reflected on her experiences and prepared to transfer, she stated that it would have been helpful to her if a counselor had met with her after her first semester to map out her entire academic plan; in addition, a seminar on transfer issues would be a good idea, she believes. Thomas, on the other hand, would have appreciated a recreation room and improved athletic facilities.

Carl and Mary, while also listing specific classes as obstacles, found personal and work issues to be their biggest challenges. Carl listed science classes and Mary the nursing pre-requisites, as well as the general education courses that she saw as unrelated to nursing. Carl was also frustrated at having received poor advising which resulted in his taking unnecessary classes. Otherwise, he listed his own immaturity and the challenge of juggling work and family responsibilities. This same juggling act was a challenge for Mary, one that was complicated by child-care problems, the distance from the college to her home, and her son's health problems. She mentioned that she carried a small alarm clock and often slept in her car between classes. For her, campus day-care facilities and a better student lounge would have made a big difference. She also cited the inconvenient scheduling of some of the classes she needed for the medical transcriptionist program. James, as an older student, predictably found the length of time since he had been in school a major obstacle compounded by the fact that he did not have a strong academic background to begin with.

In summarizing their overall experiences, however, each inevitably came back to people. It was people at the college who made their experience positive--the ladies in the

cafeteria, people in financial aid, faculty, coaches, and people across campus in a variety

of offices. Taylor, perhaps, stated it most succinctly: She was treated as an adult; she did

not have to be a part of any specific group. People were accepted for being different.

In making these comments, students sounded quite a bit like an editorial in *Black*

Issues in Higher Education (Person, 1994, p. 104):

> The community college offers a quality of teaching and learning more directly
> suited to the variety of students admitted. For example, the older student will find
> regular faculty in the classroom and not some teaching assistant. In addition,
> students will have more instructional support available, such as tutorial services
> and other developmental and remedial programs.
>   In general, the community college has a more hospitable environment, the
> faculty-student interactions are, or can be, more individualized, and the class sizes
> are smaller. Another strong vital attribute of the community college is its belief
> in the value and dignity of its students.

CHAPTER SIX

EVALUATION OF THE DATA

Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure

In their efforts to determine why students leave or stay, researchers have studied

the background characteristics of students, the psychological and affective characteristics

of students, social systems which impact attendance patterns, and the organizational

structures of institutions that may impact student experiences (Tinto, 1993). While all of

these approaches may have useful elements, Tinto has argued that they all have

shortcomings in terms of their usefulness for explaining to individual institutions why

students choose to leave, and, more importantly, what changes institutions might make

that would cause more students to stay.

In this particular study, I have adopted Tinto's premise (1993) that it is more

useful to focus on an individual institution and the interactions that occur between the

student, the staff, and activities within the institution, rather than to focus on factors

outside the institution or perceived deficiencies within the student over which

institutions have limited control. Additionally, Tinto has argued that the organizational

structure of a college or university has only an indirect effect on students. Thus

his model of institutional departure (see Figure 1, p. 7) is sociological in nature and

focuses on the "multiple interactions which occur among members of the institution"

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(Tinto, 1993, p. 113). As such,

> it looks to the social and intellectual context of the institution, its formal and informal interactional environment, as playing a central role in the longitudinal process of individual departure. Though it accepts as a given the fact that individuals have much to do with their own leaving, it argues that the impact of individual attributes cannot be understood without reference to the social and intellectual context within which individuals find themselves. . . . It is structured to allow institutional planners to identify those elements of the institutional environment, academic and social, which may interfere with degree completion . . . [and] is intended to enable institutional officials to ask and answer the question, How can the institution be altered to enhance retention on campus? (p. 113)

It is this last question that the third stage of data analysis--evaluation--attempts to answer. Having reviewed those "elements of the institutional environment, academic and social" that these six students encountered at SMC, suggesting why they chose certain activities and relationships, comparing individual experiences not only to those of other students in the group but also to findings of other researchers, and having examined how each student responded to various experiences, I wanted to evaluate the impact of these experiences. This required passing judgment, looking at what students had said, and determining how these students' interactions were shaped--for good or for ill--by the staff, faculty, and policies of SMC. In other words, I wanted to know in what ways the college had contributed positively or negatively to the academic and social integration of these students, and in what ways the college might change that would promote the retention of a larger number of African American students in the future.

Academic and Social Activities

Two of the students, Thomas and Carl, were involved in athletics, Thomas in a formal way as a member of the college intercollegiate track team, and Carl in an informal

way through basketball games in the gymnasium and his own interest in weight lifting. As described in the previous section, Thomas had nothing but positive comments in describing his interactions with other athletes and with the track coach, noting that, in fact, the track program had exceeded his expectations. Carl, on the other hand, while enjoying the social interaction with other students, found his experience with the coaching staff less positive.

In evaluating the impact of the athletic program for Thomas, two observations emerge. First, while committed to the goal of completing his associate's degree, Thomas was actively engaged in his academic program only as much as he needed to be in order to "prove that he could do college work." He was not involved because he liked school or had found a curricular focus that challenged him intellectually. It was through the athletic program that Thomas received academic support. The college required participation in the Student Athlete Academic Assistance Program (SAAAP) which monitored attendance and grades in all classes on a formal basis three times a semester and informally almost weekly. While Thomas said he generally knew where he stood in his classes, this monitoring undoubtedly allowed him to check his own perception about how he was doing with what his instructors reported, and knowing that the coach required regular class attendance for track participation certainly served as an incentive for athletes for whom this participation was important.

In addition to this regular academic monitoring, the SAAAP supervisor was available to talk with athletes and intervene on their behalf with instructors. She also offered informal advising if students expressed concerns about their classes or other academic issues. The SAAAP supervisor also coordinated a study table for athletes, a

service which Thomas used at the suggestion of his coach when he was having difficulty with algebra. Thus, it would seem that the college's policy regarding the SAAAP program and athletic eligibility, and the cooperation of the coach with that program, contributed to Thomas's academic involvement and achievement.

A second observation is that since Thomas did not particularly want to come to SMC, and came only because it was a stepping stone to being able to transfer and run track at Western Michigan University, he might have chosen not to stay had he not been happy with track. Without the satisfaction of a challenging track program and one that placed a priority on classroom as well as track performance, Thomas might have found it difficult to sustain his academic engagement, or he might have opted to move on to Western before finishing his degree at SMC.

In addition to strengthening his academic involvement, track also provided social connections for Thomas. It was through track that Thomas made friends with whom he spent time after class, both on the track and in the apartments where athletes who came from out of town lived. While Thomas probably still had Dowagiac friends with whom he had gone to high school, he made new friends at the college, which strengthened his connections to the campus. Especially on commuter campuses where students often attend class and leave, particularly if they work off campus as Thomas did, social involvement on the campus is sometimes minimal. Thomas associated with these friends at practice, in their apartments, and then at track meets on weekends, each setting reinforcing his social integration with the campus.

He noted that the track team was made up of about an even number of White and African American students. Thus, even though Thomas came from a

predominantly White high school, through his athletic participation he had a peer group that gave him the opportunity to associate with a number of African Americans. He had one situation in which he did not have to look around "for someone like him." And in addition to this positive peer interaction, Thomas respected the track coach, saying that even though the athletic program was understaffed and the coach could not always give them the individual attention they needed, he was a good coach, who treated the White and African American members equally and "would put in a good word for you" if you were looking to transfer.

Carl's less formal participation in intramural sports also led to social contacts with other students, but, unlike Thomas, Carl had two negative staff experiences, one lasting over a period of time, and even though his involvement provided him with a positive social outlet, it did not serve as any direct connection to academic involvement. Carl did not indicate that either of his bad experiences with coaches led him to stop going to the sports center, but it was clear that the stealing charge had left a deep impression that still disturbed him, even though he seemed to feel that the matter had been adequately addressed by the college.

However, given the importance of social support systems for African American students (Boylan et al., 1993; Fleming, 1984; *Thank You for Asking!* 1991), and given Carl's own admission that he was not as serious about school his first year as he was later, these social connections seemed to stand out in Carl's mind as he talked about how things had changed for him over the years and he had become less involved in the campus. Carl talked of playing basketball three or four evenings a week as well as working out in the weight room. He also talked about

socializing with the men's and women's basketball teams, so that even indirectly he was benefitting from the intercollegiate athletic program.

In addition, in discussing what he saw as activities that the college should add to make the campus more comfortable for African Americans, Carl recommended adding more sports, especially during the winter semester, and increasing the visibility of the intramural program through better campus advertising and more direct mailings to students and signs in the student apartments. Clearly, he saw athletic involvement as important to African American students in terms of providing opportunities for social involvement and a reason to be on campus. However, it is also clear that the athletic department needs to be very sensitive to any discriminatory attitudes or behaviors on the part of staff persons hired to supervise these activities. This is true, not only because such prejudice is wrong, but because young African American males whose academic involvement may not be strong, need these positive social attachments in order to feel connected to the college (Fleming, 1984; Stikes, 1984). This involvement might be especially important during the freshman year as Stikes has also suggested that African American students "tend to lag behind" in their first 2 years of college, moving ahead at a faster rate than other students in their last 2 years in terms of achievement (p. 69).

In addition, just as the coaching staff in track was able to make positive academic connections for Thomas, the potential exists for intramural staff to have a positive impact on students in regard to academics. If they are well informed about academic support services on campus, if they are able to provide informal advising services, these staff persons can contribute to the academic as well as social integration of students like Carl who spend a lot of time in the sports center. Just as Adriana found an advisor (an

administrator whose job was not advising) through campus employment, staff persons in any position can emerge as the ones who may be able to connect and serve a student. In Carl's situation, however, his athletic involvement was positive in providing social connections, but negative in terms of staff interactions.

Carl did, however, have other positive social involvement that was a little more closely allied to academics and which provided another opportunity for positive social interactions. His participation in the Minority Student Organization served to connect him to the campus in several ways. First he met more students, students who may not have participated in sports. Second, this was a group made up entirely of African Americans, and third, the group planned social activities as well as discussed concerns of African American students, such as why there were no African American studies classes or how they could celebrate Black History Month. Carl stated that he enjoyed these discussions and that attending the group made him "think about the school and changes that could be made."

While it is true that such thinking could lead to discussions with college officials that could be positive or negative depending on the college's response, it is also true that a student who sees a place where he or she might be able to bring about change is more likely to seek out contact with staff or faculty and is more likely to join purposefully with a group of students, thus increasing his or her involvement with the institution.

Adriana, who was also active in the group, did not mention any efforts to use the group to address African American concerns with college staff, but she did say that students were concerned about such issues as financial aid, transportation assistance, parties--"things for themselves." Given the social isolation that minority students on

many White campuses report (Fleming, 1984; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Wright, 1989), their perceptions that White students do not understand the problems they have (Coakley & Dickson, 1988), and given that African American students will sometimes not talk to Whites about their problems (Coakley & Dickson, 1988; Stikes, 1984), it can be seen that involvement in the Minority Student Organization gave both Carl and Adriana the chance to discuss these issues with their peers at the very least.

Carl did, however, also participate in a number of academic services, such as algebra tutoring, the computer laboratories, and the library. He cited the library staff as being helpful with computer searches, using microfiche, and finding resource materials, and said that he spent a lot of time in the library his first 2 years. At least one study of use of campus facilities (Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987) showed a significant correlation between time spent in the campus library and retention for African American students. Even though those findings, which were done at a university, will not generalize to a rural community college, it suggests that time spent in a place conducive to study can make a difference. Tinto (presentation to Southwestern Michigan College faculty, February 27, 1997) has noted that "time on task" is one of the most significant factors in student retention and achievement. Thus it may not be the library per se, but the time on task which the library or tutoring or being in the computer laboratory encourages. As Carl was pulled away from college by work and family, he spent less time on campus, and admittedly less time on his studies, finding classes with a lot of homework difficult to keep up with.

Unfortunately, the demise of the minority organization coincided with the increase of outside demands on Carl's time. He stopped out, and when he came back, the social

support of the minority group was not there. As Carl continued to struggle with keeping up in class, he might not have taken the time to participate in the group; however, it is not far-fetched to speculate that the absence of the group upset a balance that might otherwise have been there--a pull to campus and a pull off campus. In fact, Carl himself noted that it was partly the group of friends he had made and regularly spent time with that kept him coming back during his first year on campus. With fewer minority students on campus as time went on, and no organized social group, there was not an equal pull *to* the campus.

Adriana also found her participation in the Minority Student Organization a positive experience. Like Carl, she saw the organization as providing a reason and an opportunity for African American students to come together; it provided her with a social outlet and gave her the personal satisfaction of trying to involve others in activities that could benefit them as well as people in the community, such as the group's Christmas project. Fortunately, during the time she was active in the group, she also started working on campus. Thus when the Minority Student Organization became inactive, she still had a social connection to the college, one that allowed her to meet a variety of people across campus, find out about different parts of the campus, and feel connected to the campus through her work.

James, too, met a number of people, both students and staff, through his campus employment in the library and computer laboratories. And as Turnbull (1986) has noted, campus employment often leads to positive campus involvement. In providing campus employment to students, the college gives students a reason to stay on campus after or even between classes. Campus employment introduces students to college personnel other than faculty. There is often more opportunity for socializing in a work situation

than in a classroom, opening up possibilities for staff mentoring relationships, which often develop on both an informal and formal basis. Clearly such a mentoring relationship developed for Adriana in her job, which transformed the quality of her academic experience on campus. James, who rarely took more than two or three classes at a time, would probably have spent little time on campus, given his lack of interest in other social activities, if he had not also worked on campus.

Although Taylor was not involved in campus employment, her involvement in the journalism program led to similar opportunities to find out about the campus. Through various story assignments, she met college staff and learned about campus activities and such programs as Phi Theta Kappa (PTK). She was later invited to join PTK, which she did, being already familiar with the group and the benefits of membership.

With the exception of Mary, each of the students in this group was involved in some activity outside of class--either athletics, a club, campus employment, or class assignments. In each case, this involvement gave the students a reason to spend more time on campus, gave them more knowledge about the campus, and provided them with an opportunity to meet personal, social, and academic needs. Clearly this involvement contributed to the social and/or academic integration of these students.

However, for college personnel, the important point may be that involvement in these activities is not predictable. The college cannot know which activities will appeal to which students. Not all of the minority students at the college participated in the Minority Student Organization; not all students come to campus with a clear curricular or extracurricular focus that involves them in some activity such as athletics, music, or journalism (Taylor did not settle on journalism until her sophomore year); not all students

will seek campus employment; and none of these students expected that the campus would meet their social needs. Thus, while these activities can clearly serve to facilitate student involvement on campus, the college cannot count on such activities to reach all students, or to provide the level of involvement necessary to sustain student persistence, or to engage students in the primary function of the institution: education. And, as each of these six students clearly stated: They came to SMC to obtain an education.

Faculty

Thus, even when he had negative experiences with coaching staff, and even when the Minority Student Organization was no longer meeting, Carl continued to enjoy the intellectual challenge of school and to continue seeking out contact with faculty both in and out of the classroom. His enthusiasm continued for a wide range of courses and for classes that involved him in discussion and activities in spite of outside conflicts. He found faculty interested in his personal problems and willing to make at least some accommodations with deadlines and assignment requirements. He also appreciated the way in which faculty reached out to him. They took the initiative to speak to him when he was falling behind or not doing as well on tests as his participation in class would indicate that he should be. Carl noted that this reaching out is important for African American students who, because of past experiences, often think that people do not care about them. They need personal attention to counteract this perception. He said that African American students often ignore comments made to a group, thinking that these comments are not directed at them. These students need faculty to speak to them about attendance and school work, to let them know that faculty believe the

students can do the work. "Pin them down; give them a specific time for an appointment to review work," Carl recommended.

In making these suggestions, Carl was acknowledging the importance of this attention and encouragement for him personally. Given the pattern of stopping out and returning that has developed for Carl, this positive faculty interaction, this personal connection that he feels to a number of them, has certainly served as a positive force to keep Carl returning to the campus. Indeed, if Carl comes back to finish, it may well be in large part because he believes that faculty will welcome him without judgment in spite of his past failures.

Carl's belief in the importance of positive faculty contacts is well-supported by research. Pascarella (1980) found that both the frequency and quality of informal faculty interaction were especially important for students with low commitments to the goal of college graduation, who were first-generation college students, or who were "low on other measures of social and academic integration" (p. 558), qualities associated with many African American students in community colleges. Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983) later reported that the quality of the interaction between faculty and students was even more important than the frequency in impacting the student's academic growth and persistence, a finding particularly relevant because their study was conducted at a commuter school, such as SMC. Additionally, student-faculty interactions seem to be important to student development, that is, their investment in learning (Astin, 1993; Endo & Harpel, 1982). Furthermore, as Tinto (1993) has argued, as non-residential institutions, community colleges must recognize that it is their classrooms that

are located at the very heart of the academic community of the college. They serve as smaller academic meeting places that intersect the diverse faculty and student communities of the college. If involvement is to occur, if student effort is to be enhanced, in most colleges it must begin in the classroom. (p. 132)

Thus, whereas student participation in a variety of other campus activities is unpredictable, the fact that students will participate in classroom experiences is completely predictable. In fact, like Mary, for some students participation in classes and advising may be the only activities in which they are involved, other than the time they spend between classes in the hallways. In this context, then, the classroom experiences of Adriana, Carl, James, Mary, Taylor, and Thomas take on more significance, for, as Tinto (1993) has also argued, it is the students' perceived level of satisfaction with faculty and classroom interactions that colleges must investigate. Without exception, each of the six students in this study noted a high level of satisfaction with faculty, both in terms of the quality of their teaching and the nature of their personal interactions with faculty in and out of the classroom. It is this academic engagement, Tinto has argued, that becomes, especially for new students, "the gateway for subsequent involvement in the larger academic and social communities of the college" (p. 132).

However, for African American students, even when satisfaction with faculty is high, if that faculty is all White, a piece is missing. Each of the students in this study agreed that the college needs more African American faculty. Even though these six students did not necessarily fault the institution for the absence of minority faculty, Mary noted that some students did, assuming that it is the result of racism. In evaluating the impact of an almost all-White faculty, though, it is important to note several comments that these six students made. First, Taylor who found faculty "very caring and

approachable," described vividly the positive impact of taking a class from an African

American instructor, and said that "students do comment that they wish there were more

African American instructors, especially male students. They ask, 'Where are they? Why

aren't they here?'"

Adriana and Mary both said that when they first came to campus, the lack of

African American faculty was particularly noticeable; they both persisted in spite of this.

However, other students whose commitment to college is not as strong or who are less

able or willing to cope with being such a small minority might well choose not to stay.

Adriana and Mary persisted when, as Adriana said, an instructor was "having a bad day"

or, as Mary said, "being stubborn" or "set in their ways." Likewise, the other students

accepted the fact that some faculty and classes were boring or in a subject area they did

not like. Given their personal dispositions and commitments, and given their perception

of faculty as caring and accepting of them as individuals, these six students accepted the

absence of African American faculty as "the way things are" and did not attribute

negative classroom experiences to racism.

Other students with other dispositions and commitments might not respond in the

same way as these students chose to. As they themselves noted, and as research has

supported (Stikes, 1984), many African American students will not share their problems

or inner feelings with Whites. Given the obstacles students like Carl, Mary, and James

face in coming to college, and given the fact that each looked around campus for people

"like them," it is clear that students need support persons with whom they can

comfortably identify. Thus, the absence of African American faculty and staff creates a

void in both the instructional and counseling arenas. Even a few African American staff

can make a difference, for as Stikes has suggested, African American advisors can "provide a link of trust" between White faculty, administration, and black students" (p. 109). When James was accused of sexual harassment charges, he had no African American staff person to whom to turn. As he himself stated, he would not automatically have trusted such a person, suggesting the dangers of what students would perceive as a "token" minority staff. However, it is also clear that the absence of such faculty and staff leaves students who have not established strong, positive relationships with a White staff or faculty member in a particularly vulnerable and lonely position. Therefore, while the students in this study accepted the absence of African American faculty and staff as long as they personally were treated fairly, the presence of African American faculty and staff could have enhanced the quality of their experiences. In addition, it can be seen that their friends who felt that they had been treated unfairly most likely had no faculty or staff person on campus with whom to share these feelings.

Another point of importance is that while these six students each demonstrated specific strategies for dealing with racism, not all students have found such positive ways of addressing these issues. Students who have not developed such skills or who are in the resistance stage of racial identity development may simply withdraw or find themselves in confrontational situations when such experiences occur. As students wrestle with the developmental issues involved in these various stages, the presence of African American faculty and staff who can identify with their struggles and who have ideally progressed to redefinition and/or internalization could make a difference in the decision of African American students to persist at the institution. In the case of Adriana, Carl, James, Mary, Taylor, and Thomas, the presence of such faculty and staff could have assisted them when

they did encounter racism; and it could have added that extra excitement, that extra sense of belonging, that Taylor felt in her College Success Strategies class.

Curriculum

Besides the addition of African American faculty and staff, students cited the absence of any courses to which they could directly relate as African Americans. While they were satisfied generally with the variety of classes and with the content of the courses they took, they wanted at least some classes that focused on African American culture and history. In this regard, they are like African American students on many college and university campuses who find that the one minority studies class they can include in their schedule is one of the few places on a predominantly White campus where they feel they belong (Ross, 1990). These SMC students noted that most of the African American students probably had little idea of African American history and accomplishments and that such classes would fill a needed gap. James noted that such courses should not be limited to African American studies, but should include Native American and Hispanic studies as well.

While these students did not leave because such courses were not offered, the absence of such courses emphasizes to minority students that SMC is a White campus. Not only are there only occasionally African American instructors available, and not only are there no African American staff, but there are no courses in the curriculum that speak directly to their cultural identity. And while these students did not notice the absence of culturally relevant materials within any of the classes they took, neither could they identify any courses they had taken which included such materials to the extent that when

asked about it they could recall these units. That is not to say that no instructors at SMC used literature by African American authors, or focused a discussion on differences in cultural perceptions or values, or talked about the accomplishments of African Americans in society. However, it does suggest that such inclusions may not be systematic or intentional and may not occur very frequently.

It is also interesting to note that several of the students cited Introduction to World Religions as a course they enjoyed because they learned about different people and cultures. While this course is popular with White students as well, it is one of the few courses, along with Non-Western Civilization, that is already in the curriculum at SMC that teaches material that is not Eurocentric. Given their comments about the lack of culturally relevant courses, it is not surprising that students found this one course especially attractive.

Thus, in evaluating the impact that the lack of such courses had on these students, it would be difficult to say that their experience at SMC was diminished; however, it could be said that in one more way they were expected to accommodate themselves to a White perspective. These students were willing to do that; they came for an education and accepted that at a White school such an education did not include courses about their culture. However, it is easy to see that for some students the absence of such courses may be one more alienating factor that would lead to withdrawal from the institution.

African American Students

There may be one more factor that would prevent African American students from enrolling in the first place--the small number of African American students. While only

Carl and Taylor stated the need for more African American students in suggesting changes that would assist African American students, from the very beginning each of these students noted that there were not many people who look like them. They spoke of sometimes being the only non-White student in a class, or one of only two or three in other cases. Carl, particularly, commented about the decline in the number of African American students over the period of time that he has been in school, noting that when he first came, African Americans might have made up about a third of the students in some classes. This decline he believes impacted the Minority Student Organization and the nightly basketball games at the sports center. With fewer African American students attending, these activities have faded away. For Carl, the most notable difference has been in the number of local African American traditional-age students. During his first 2 years, he knew a number of the students because they were from area high schools. Acknowledging that he knows fewer of the younger students now, he has still noticed the smaller numbers.

Even though students might not have explicitly listed the need for more African American students, the types of activities indicated that would appeal to African American students would clearly take a larger number of African American students to sustain. For example, Mary said that even though she was busy, she would have considered joining a Gospel choir. Taylor, who did not expect the college to provide social activities, was nevertheless interested in African American art, literature, and theatre, noting that other students also expressed a desire for more activities/classes "they can relate to." Taylor also noted that even though the intramural sports program conflicted with her work and class schedule, she noticed a lot of interest and thought the program looked good.

Several observations emerge from these comments about extracurricular activities and the numbers of African American students. First, students do look around for other students like them. Second, an interest in such activities as a Gospel choir or African American art exhibit seem to be an extension of the desire for courses related to African American art, literature, and culture. Third, these six students are no different than other students--even though they may be interested in a particular activity they may or may not choose to participate in it at any given point in time. This means that just as with any college activity there has to be a "critical mass" of interested students in order to support these activities. If such a "mass" does not exist, even though there may be some interest, these activities will not be sustainable. And fourth, the absence of both the activities and the students will in turn result in fewer students.

Fleming (1984) has argued that not only is a sufficient number of African American students important, but a balanced ratio between men and women is important in order to support appropriate social relationships. Certainly Carl's and Adriana's comments would support this point. In addition, Tinto (1993) has argued that the number of minority students is important in order for students to find other minority students with whom they have things in common. "Sharing a common racial origin," Tinto has noted, "is no guarantee of the sharing of common interests and dispositions" (p. 74). The generally smaller numbers of minority students on college campuses means that these students start with fewer options in finding communities on campus to which to belong.

In speaking about the need for more African American students and culturally relevant classes and activities, these students are saying what they did not find. For Adriana, Mary, Taylor, and Thomas, however, what they did find was enough.

Given their individual dispositions and the strength of their goals and commitments, these four students found enough academic and social experiences, both formal and informal, to sustain their persistence through to graduation. Through the activities that were available, they found either an extracurricular or curricular focus that involved them both socially and academically in the life of the institution.

James, however, who has found his classes generally enjoyable and who has found faculty helpful and personable, has also found that his weak academic skills have prevented his moving through school quickly enough. In addition, he has not made any strong personal attachments and his curricular focus was more a selection of lesser "evils" than a decision based on a positive exploration of alternatives. And unlike the other students interviewed, James talked about more negative than positive experiences at SMC. Citing his need for employment (other than his work study position), James has chosen to leave school, at least for the time being, his original commitment to school having eroded over time both by his own academic weaknesses and insufficient integration into the social and academic structures of the college.

Carl, whose academic skills are adequate and who has enjoyed his classes and for whom finishing college is an expectation, has been pulled away by other commitments that have become more important. In spite of positive social and academic experiences, albeit mixed with some negative staff encounters, Carl is like many non-traditional students whose pattern of attendance is sporadic and long-term.

The question for SMC is whether other African American students, whose characteristics and goals are both similar to and different from these six students, will also find experiences that draw them into the academic and social life of the institution.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THEMES, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Five themes emerge from the experiences of Adriana, Carl, James, Mary, Taylor, and Thomas, themes that connect their stories and their experiences at SMC to the stories and experiences of students at other colleges and universities and to the findings of researchers who have analyzed and reported these experiences. In identifying these themes, I have made connections between these six students and what I have read about other students. It is the goal of case studies such as this one that other people reading this study will make further connections with students that they know at still other institutions. In coming to understand these six students, SMC staff and staff at other colleges can become aware of how their students might have similar perceptions and can become more alert to the possible ways in which their actions and college policies can impact students. Furthermore, just as this study was intended to investigate one institution on the premise that institutional policies and procedures should be based on what a college or university knows about its own students, other schools should also seek to investigate first-hand the experiences and perceptions of their own students.

Each theme discussed here implies a specific conclusion which in turn leads to one or more recommended actions. Because this is a case study at one institution with the specific purpose of assessing the perceptions of students at this institution, some of these recommendations are necessarily directed towards the staff and faculty of Southwestern

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Michigan College. However, to the extent that personnel from other community colleges recognize similarities in their own students and their own institutions, these findings and recommended actions may apply outside the context of SMC.

Theme 1: The Need for More African American Students

A clear and crucial theme that runs through the stories of these SMC students and students from other institutions (Fleming, 1984; Tinto, 1993) is the importance of finding other minorities, particularly African Americans, on campus. Each student from his/her first day on campus looked around for someone who looked like him or her. These students knew they would be a minority, but they did not expect to be alone. And while they were certainly not alone in all classes or in all locations on campus, there were times when each was the only African American in a class. There were times when there were only two or three other African American students in the commons or cafeteria. Most never even saw an African American instructor, and only one student had actually taken a class from an African American instructor.

Those students whose goals and commitments are strong enough and those students who know what to expect and who are accustomed to being in a mostly White environment may possibly be able to do as these students did: focus on whether they are being treated in a fair and friendly manner. However, this propensity to find someone who looks like them will go with students from the admissions office to the classroom, to the hallways, to the cafeteria, to the library, to the gymnasium, and to campus offices. For some, the lack of other minority students will have an immediate isolating impact; for

others, the feeling of isolation may grow as they look for other African American students who have interests similar to theirs and cannot find them.

In addition, if students feel awkward in the classroom, if they encounter discrimination or have any personal or academic problems, to whom will they turn if they are uncomfortable talking with White faculty or staff? And how can activities such as a minority student organization be sustained without an adequate number of African American students? And even if the classroom is the place most likely to support and promote both the social and intellectual development of students on a commuter campus (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990; Tinto, 1993), if there are only one or two or three African American students in a class, the sense of social isolation may still be acute.

Conclusion #1: The number of African Americans at SMC is small enough that students may have difficulty finding other African American students, especially those with similar interests and values, with whom to associate.

First recommended action: Administrators, staff, and faculty who are responsible for recruitment should make a concerted effort to recruit African American students to the institution.

Conclusion #2: The students in this study who were most successful and satisfied with SMC were those whose opportunity orientation and academic goals and commitments matched those of other traditional college students, White or African American, and who were willing to adapt to the social and academic expectations of a White institution.

Second recommended action: In its efforts to recruit African American students, SMC should either (1) recognize that it is students like Adriana, Taylor, and Thomas who may have the most chance of success and focus its recruitment on these students, or (2) implement changes within the institution that will provide more directly for the social and curricular needs of a wider range of African American students who may not be as willing or as able to accommodate themselves to the expectations and climate of a White institution.

Theme 2: A Lack of Cultural Understanding

Another theme pervasive across United States college and university campuses (National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1991) and evident in the accounts of these SMC students is that Whites, including staff, faculty, and students, are often ignorant about the culture and lifestyles of African Americans, and insensitive about their circumstances, feelings, and needs. Carl and Adriana described clearly their perceptions of the lack of understanding between White and African American students about such matters as language, interests, and behavior. James perceived a lack of understanding regarding gestures and comments that White staff and faculty did not realize would offend him; he was completely dissatisfied with the way in which the sexual harassment charge was handled.

In addition, the absence of any classes on African American history or culture or any efforts visible to students to include culturally relevant materials or courses in the curricula reflects an apparent lack of awareness or concern about the importance of such matters for African American students. Furthermore, the lack of any African American

faculty or staff assigned to serve in an advising or counseling capacity or to serve as an advisor for a minority student organization again demonstrates an apparent lack of understanding about the importance of such persons not only in terms of establishing a supportive climate but also for facilitating an environment conducive to the developmental needs of African American men and women.

Conclusion #1: African American students at SMC who are comfortable being a distinct minority, who relate easily with Whites, who have little time for socializing on campus, who establish enough positive faculty and staff relationships, or who find a clear curricular focus may be able to compensate for the small number of African American students, the lack of a visible social support system, the lack of a culturally relevant curriculum, and the absence of African American faculty and staff with whom they might more comfortably share concerns and problems.

First recommended action: College administrators responsible for recruitment and retention should take steps to learn about the developmental needs of African American students, the stages of racial identity development, and the ways in which students might perceive the institution as being either racist or insensitive to the needs of African American students. This information should be shared with all faculty and staff.

Second recommended action: Administrators and faculty responsible for instruction should investigate ways in which material representing a variety of cultural perspectives can be systematically and intentionally included in the curriculum. Faculty should receive training in ways to facilitate discussions that focus on cultural issues which may be controversial.

Theme 3: Minority Students Are Themselves Diverse

Clearly the students in this study are not unanimous in their socioeconomic backgrounds, opportunity orientation, academic backgrounds and goals, opinions about relations among Whites and African Americans, comfort level with a White campus, or attitudes about African American courses or activities. Tinto (1993) and Skinner and Richardson (1988) have also noted that educators and researchers have sometimes failed to pay attention to the diversity and complexity within minority populations, although because community colleges already serve a diverse population, they may be more prepared than some schools to deal with differences in students.

Taylor noted her lack of interest in the concerns and issues of some of the older students in her classes and in the journalism program. These differences are not Black/White issues; they are issues that faculty must constantly juggle in trying to serve the needs of both traditional and non-traditional students. Likewise, Taylor's frustration with federal financial aid guidelines is a frustration shared by many middle-income students, not just those who are African American. Carl and James are like many community college students who return to school after years away or who find family or work responsibilities making it hard for them to be successful in school. Mary is not unique in her desire to take only those courses that she sees as directly related to her job goal. Similarly, expectations of faculty were in other ways reflective of traditional/non-traditional status--Taylor, Thomas, and Adriana kept conversations primarily related to academic concerns, whereas Carl and Mary shared family and other personal issues with faculty.

However, these issues, along with past experiences with racism, past experiences in a predominantly White environment, and attitudes towards cultural issues, add a layer of complexity to what is already a diverse student population. As Tinto (1993) has noted, differences between minority students and other disadvantaged students are in some ways a matter of degree; at the same time, these differences are also "qualitative" in that they involve how "individuals are valued and treated" (Tinto, 1993, p. 75). Adriana, who came from a predominantly African American neighborhood in Chicago that did not support education, did not expect a White school to meet her social needs or to provide classes in African American culture. Taylor, however, said she attended cultural events at Lake Michigan College in her largely African American community and would have attended such events at SMC. On the other hand, she did not seem to need the college to provide activities that were primarily social.

Carl, however, seemed to need social activities such as intramural sports, the Minority Student Organization, and enough students his age to form informal groups for conversation and cards. This is consistent with Turnbull's (1986) and Fleming's (1984) research that suggested that minority students often must experience emotional and affective involvement first, which in turn reinforces cognitive involvement. Thomas found these social connections through intercollegiate athletics.

Conclusion #1: Even though small, SMC's African American population is diverse in terms of students' social and academic needs and goals, in attitudes towards Whites, and in their expectations of the college, its students, staff, faculty, and curricula.

Recommended action: If SMC wishes to attract and retain more African American students, recruiting staff should develop a strategy that targets specific groups

of students within the African American communities surrounding the college. African American students from those communities who have attended the college should be invited to participate in such recruiting efforts. Such targeted recruiting efforts would have as their goal not only increasing the number of African American students at the college, but of maintaining and supporting the diverse nature of that population on campus, thus providing a climate in which African American students would be more likely to find other African Americans with interests and values similar to theirs.

Theme 4: Awareness of Stereotypes and Internal Dissonance

African American students at SMC and elsewhere (National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1991) are keenly aware of the stereotypes Whites have of them and their peers and sometimes find within themselves a sense of dissonance or tension about how to personally respond to these stereotypical attitudes. James and Mary both noted their discomfort or even anger with African American students who behaved in what they perceived to be inappropriate ways in either the library or hallways. They were particularly concerned that these behaviors reinforce stereotypes of African Americans as loud and boisterous or not concerned about school, and felt that such behaviors were a bad reflection on those who are serious students. At the same time, James noted that he would come to the defense of the young men in the library if he felt they were criticized unfairly. He sometimes spoke to them before they became loud enough that they might attract someone else's attention.

Taylor was aware of the perceptions of her as an African American from Benton Harbor and felt she had to work extra hard to prove herself academically. She came to

SMC partly because she did not want to go to a college in Benton Harbor, and yet one reason she was attracted to a major in community journalism is to be able to make a difference as an African American reporter--she resents what she sees as a distorted picture of her community by the local press. She wants to be free to be herself without race being an issue, and yet she wants to prove herself as an African American.

Carl, too, seemed aware of a sense of dissonance. He acknowledged that in his tendency to leave things until the last minute or not to do all that was assigned, he was like most African American students in his experience--primarily males--who needed an extra push and personal attention from instructors to keep them going. At the same time, he comes from a family who values higher education and whom he credits with cultivating his interest in a wide variety of subjects. He is keenly aware of their expectations of him and of his own ability to do well in college.

Carl also expressed frustration and disappointment over the lack of student leadership for the minority organization, and yet he recognized that he had not taken a leadership role himself. Adriana said that while she liked the opportunity to socialize and the challenge of getting people to do things, she also felt that African Americans have a tendency to be "bossy" and did not care for those who acted that way within the group.

Both Carl and Adriana understood and experienced the desire to socialize with other African American students. However, Adriana had no tolerance for the African American students who made prejudicial remarks about her friendship with a White student. She and Carl both made a point of inviting Whites to meet with the minority student group. In fact, all of the students interviewed wanted to be able to associate freely with both African American and White students.

Their attitudes about taking African American studies courses or classes from an African American instructor also reflect a sense of dissonance or tension. Students recognized conflicting priorities in wanting to learn more about their own experiences and accomplishments as African Americans, wanting to be in a comfortable environment, wanting to see African Americans in leadership roles, and yet also wanting to take those courses that would best meet their academic needs and that were taught by faculty who came recommended by other students. They wanted options regarding classes and activities that were culturally relevant, but they would not necessarily have made participation in such classes or activities a priority.

Clearly, while there were mixed feelings about why the college does not have African Americans on the full-time faculty and staff, these students had several criteria that were important to them in selecting faculty and staff and would not have let go of those criteria in order to take classes or seek services from an African American. These students were not naive in believing that because someone was African American, he/she would give them higher grades, relate to their learning style, or provide better advising; however, some, at least, recognized the symbolic importance of such staff for most African American students and the actual importance for others.

Conclusion #1: Students cannot escape the issues of race and the stereotypical attitudes of Whites and, in some cases, African Americans. In addition, students are faced with their own internal tensions and conflicting feelings on issues such as how important African American faculty and staff and culturally relevant classes are to them personally.

<u>First recommended action:</u> College faculty and staff should be especially careful to accept students as individuals and not as representatives of their race or culture. At the same time, college personnel should be aware that African American students will have a variety of concerns and feelings, some of them mixed, about racial representation and equity on campus. Some students would benefit from an appropriate forum, such as a minority student organization or focus group, for discussing their concerns with both each other and with representatives of the college. Such discussions could play a useful role for students who are dealing with the normal stages of racial identity development.

<u>Second recommended action:</u> Since some students will not participate in activities outside of class, faculty should receive training in how to lead discussions on sensitive and controversial issues in classes where such discussions might be appropriate. Students, both African American and White, would benefit from increased opportunities to participate in structured conversations with students from different backgrounds and experiences.

<u>Third recommended action:</u> In spite of the difficulty all colleges and universities, especially rural colleges (Gillett-Karam, 1995), face in hiring minority staff, SMC's Board of Trustees and administration should actively explore ways in which they can attract African American faculty and staff. In addition, if and when such persons are hired, the college must work to incorporate these minority staff persons into the life of the campus in such a way that they are not treated or perceived as tokens by students and other staff. It is also important that college officials find an appropriate way to let African American students and their communities know of the steps being taken to hire African American staff. The perception of inaction or lack of effort in this regard leaves African American

students with the impression that the college either does not care about this issue or is deliberately avoiding hiring such individuals because of racism.

Theme 5: Students Prefer Active Learning and Personal Involvement

Students enjoyed most those classes in which they were actively involved through either discussion, group or individual projects, and activities which encouraged personal application of the material. This is consistent with research (Ohio Board of Regents, 1989; Stikes, 1984) that suggests that African American students tend to be more motivated and comfortable in classes that allow them to use their interpersonal skills and in more informal settings that reduce the "perceived differences in status between teacher and students" (Stikes, 1984, p. 149).

Although the students in this study did not dismiss as irrelevant or uninteresting those classes which might have focused on more traditional lecture, or large-group formats, when asked to list and describe classes they most enjoyed, they talked about classes that either focused on diversity, such as Introduction to World Religions or Music or Art Appreciation, or classes that involved discussion or activities, or personal relevance such as sociology or psychology.

Mary clearly wanted classes which were connected to her career. And although she was the only one of this group to emphasize this, Stikes (1984) found that such a preference is quite common among African American students.

First recommended action: Stikes recommended that advisors working with African American students put students in classes that are likely to include personal involvement and active learning, at least for the first and/or second

semester, suggesting that students are more likely to experience academic success and to feel comfortable in such courses.

Second recommended action: Additionally, Richardson (1989b) has argued that "discrete activities" set up outside "the academic core" are more related to increasing participation than they are in promoting achievement. Thus he has maintained that greater emphasis should be placed on teaching/learning strategies within the classroom than activities outside the classroom. Since it is clear that the classroom and faculty interactions were primary for the students in this study, the college should heed Richardson's recommendation.

Conclusion

In her book, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe*, Margaret Wheatley (1994) has suggested that organizations are dynamic systems in which leaders should focus on understanding relationships as they affect the whole system and on organizational vision as a "field--a force of unseen connections that influences employee's behavior--rather than as an evocative message about some desired future state" (p. 13). She further suggested that "there are no recipes or formulae, no checklists or advice that describe 'reality.' There is only what we create through our engagement with others and with events" (p. 13).

Wheatley's observations seem particularly relevant as I think about how the stories of these six students could make a difference as educators at community colleges reflect on what their institutions might do differently. Clearly, each of these students experienced a different "reality," and clearly no one set of actions or policy changes

will automatically lead to improved success rates for African American students on community college campuses.

However, as Tinto has suggested, in studying their own students, colleges can identify priorities for action. In the case of SMC, it is clear that while social experiences may be important for some students, it is the academic experiences--those in the classroom and in faculty offices--that were most important in assisting the integration of these students into the life of the college. These students confirmed that, as Tinto's model acknowledges, ties and responsibilities outside the control of the college may pull students away, but in the case of community colleges, and SMC in particular, schools can most effectively counter this through continuing to provide effective instruction and by promoting positive interpersonal experiences in the classroom, both between students and between students and faculty. Thus it may be in the classroom and with faculty that SMC can most effectively promote both the academic and social integration of African American students.

Recommendations for Further Study

The design of this study was intentionally limited in focus to an in-depth analysis of a few students as opposed to a broader study of many students. In addition, it focused on students who had chosen to stay at SMC for several semesters. In order to gain further information about the perceptions and experiences of African American students at the institution, their academic and social needs, and their expectations, college personnel would need to gather additional information from several other sources, using perhaps a variety of research methods:

1. Students who enrolled for only one or two semesters should also be studied, either through interviews, focus groups, or surveys.

2. Graduates from the last several years should be studied, either through interviews, focus groups, or surveys.

In addition to studying students who have enrolled at the institution, college staff could learn from investigating the perceptions and needs of African Americans who have not enrolled at the institution. This information could be useful in both the recruitment and retention activities of the college. Those people in the community who have not enrolled are not only potential students, but they are also the families and friends of people who have enrolled. As such, their perceptions of the institution may encourage or discourage them from enrolling and may impact the support they provide to their friends or family members who have enrolled.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Is the information on this printout from college records correct? Name, address, birth date, major, college activities, date first attended SMC.

2. You started attending SMC in 19__. Have you been attending part-time, full-time, every semester?

3. What prompted you to come to college?

4. What led to your decision to select SMC?

5. Getting started in college involves quite a few steps? Could you tell me what steps you followed when you decided to enroll at SMC? I would be interested in knowing what offices you went to, what people you saw, how long it took you.

6. What was this process like for you? How did you feel about? Are there things that might have made it easier for you?

7. SMC has an orientation for new students. In what ways was that helpful or not helpful to you?

8. All of the admissions staff at SMC are White. Would it have made a difference to you if any of the staff persons had been African American? In what way(s) might it have been different?

9. By this time you have taken a number of classes at SMC. I would like to know about some of your classes? Those you have enjoyed the most, the least, ones that have been the most challenging, the easiest?

10. You mentioned _____. What was it you enjoyed most about this class? Was it the content, the instructor, the way the class was taught?

11. You also mentioned that you didn't enjoy _____? What was it about this class that you didn't like? Was it the content, the instructor, the way the class was taught?

12. Overall how would you characterize your experience at SMC? Enjoyable, not enjoyable, fun, challenging, difficult, satisfying, frustrating? Or any other way you would choose to describe it.

13. What factors or experiences have made it that way? Students? Instructors? The classes themselves? Other activities?

14. What other activities have you been involved in besides attending classes?

15. What is your overall perception of the faculty at SMC?

16. Have you ever taken a class at SMC that was taught by an African American instructor? If so, was that experience any different for you than in classes taught by White instructors? If so, in what ways?

17. How would you describe your experiences with other students at SMC?

18. Have you had experiences with students, faculty, or staff, in which you feel you have been treated differently than a White student would have been treated? If so, could you describe that experience?

19. What experiences have been positive for you, have helped you to feel comfortable and affirmed?

20. What experiences have been negative, have caused you to feel isolated or not accepted?

21. What was it that made experience X positive and experience X negative?

22. Is there anything else about your experiences at SMC, particularly as an African American student, that you would like me to know about?

Note: With the exception of the first two or three questions, this list is not intended as an interview protocol. Rather these questions are examples of the types of questions that were asked.

APPENDIX B

LETTER AND INSTRUCTIONS SENT TO STUDENTS REQUESTING THEIR

COMMENTS

P. O. Box 328
Dowagiac, MI 49047

August 26, 1997

420 E. Railroad
Parkside #5
Dowagiac, MI 49047

Dear   ,

I am writing because after studying all of the interviews I conducted with you and other students at SMC, I am ready for you to read over some of my discussion. It appears to be quite a lot reading, but you actually only need to read parts of it. I have included a page with notes and instructions so that you will know how to proceed. I have also included a self-addressed stamped envelope. When you have finished reading and made any notes you wish to, please return everything to me in the enclosed envelope.

I really appreciate your help with this,   , and hope you will be able to get this all back to me by the end of September. If you can sit down and do it right away, that would be great. Please call me if you have any questions--616/782-1329.

Thanks.

Sincerely,

Naomi Ludman

Instructions for Reviewing Interview Discussion

The section included here is an excerpt from "Interpretation." In this section, I took things that you told me about your activities and experiences at SMC and asked questions like, "Why were these experiences important? How did one person's experience compare or differ from another's? How do these experiences relate to what researchers say about students on other campuses?

You will recall that I gave each of you a pseudonym, or false name. Yours is Adriana. Everything about you, using that name, has been highlighted in the attached pages. You can read everything, or just the portions that are about you. **Please follow these guidelines:**

1. Are the statements made about you or attributed to you accurate?

2. Are the conclusions or explanations accurate? Does what I say about you "sound right?" Would you change any of my comments or the statements attributed to you in any way?

3. Make any comments, changes, deletions, additions, right on this paper.

4. Do not hesitate to react--negatively or positively--to anything I have written. My goal is to accurately interpret the experiences you talked about. So if something doesn't seem right, please let me know.

5. Return all pages to me in the enclosed envelope.

Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!

Response from Adriana:

Mrs. Ludman,
        Thank you for the opportunity of reading this. It was great.

Instructions for Reviewing Interview Discussion

The section included here is an excerpt from "Interpretation." In this section, I took things that you told me about your activities and experiences at SMC and asked questions like, "Why were these experiences important? How did one person's experience compare or differ from another's? How do these experiences relate to what researchers say about students on other campuses?

You will recall that I gave each of you a pseudonym, or false name. Yours is James. Everything about you, using that name, has been highlighted in the attached pages. You can read everything, or just the portions that are about you. **Please follow these guidelines:**

1. Are the statements made about you or attributed to you accurate?

2. Are the conclusions or explanations accurate? Does what I say about you "sound right?" Would you change any of my comments or the statements attributed to you in any way?

3. Make any comments, changes, deletions, additions, right on this paper.

4. Do not hesitate to react--negatively or positively--to anything I have written. My goal is to accurately interpret the experiences you talked about. So if something doesn't seem right, please let me know.

5. Return all pages to me in the enclosed envelope.

Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!

<u>Response from James</u>:

James returned the document to me in person and said it was fine; he had no changes to make.

Instructions for Reviewing Interview Discussion

The section included here is an excerpt from "Interpretation." In this section, I took things that you told me about your activities and experiences at SMC and asked questions like, "Why were these experiences important? How did one person's experience compare or differ from another's? How do these experiences relate to what researchers say about students on other campuses?

You will recall that I gave each of you a pseudonym, or false name. Yours is Mary. Everything about you, using that name, has been highlighted in the attached pages. You can read everything, or just the portions that are about you. **Please follow these guidelines:**

1. Are the statements made about you or attributed to you accurate?

2. Are the conclusions or explanations accurate? Does what I say about you "sound right?" Would you change any of my comments or the statements attributed to you in any way?

3. Make any comments, changes, deletions, additions, right on this paper.

4. Do not hesitate to react--negatively or positively--to anything I have written. My goal is to accurately interpret the experiences you talked about. So if something doesn't seem right, please let me know.

5. Return all pages to me in the enclosed envelope.

Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!

<u>Response from Mary</u>:

Dear Ms. Ludman:
      The manuscript is great. I don't know if this makes a difference. But I have heard from former students that SMC is losing the majority of its African-American students. I believe its due to the elimination of sports. Education is still the utmost importance, but so is a leisure activity. Especially to the younger African-American students just starting out. I believe this research could be very beneficial in helping the students. Taking away what they enjoy will soon make SMC an all white college. Also not having any black instructors will do that as well. From what I have heard, the younger students really take that to heart.
      Thank you for giving me a chance to read this.
                                 Sincerely

Instructions for Reviewing Interview Discussion

The section included here is an excerpt from "Interpretation." In this section, I took things that you told me about your activities and experiences at SMC and asked questions like, "Why were these experiences important? How did one person's experience compare or differ from another's? How do these experiences relate to what researchers say about students on other campuses?

You will recall that I gave each of you a pseudonym, or false name. Yours is Taylor. Everything about you, using that name, has been highlighted in the attached pages. You can read everything, or just the portions that are about you. **Please follow these guidelines:**

1. Are the statements made about you or attributed to you accurate?

2. Are the conclusions or explanations accurate? Does what I say about you "sound right?" Would you change any of my comments or the statements attributed to you in any way?

3. Make any comments, changes, deletions, additions, right on this paper.

4. Do not hesitate to react--negatively or positively--to anything I have written. My goal is to accurately interpret the experiences you talked about. So if something doesn't seem right, please let me know.

5. Return all pages to me in the enclosed envelope.

Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!

Response from Taylor:

"I made corrections on pg. 30, 35, and 42. When your research is complete I would like to have a copy of your thesis, if possible."

that her involvement in the Minority Student Organization came at a time when she

needed to become more connected to the campus. She noted that this participation made

her time on campus more "interesting," that she liked the group socialization, the

opportunity to be involved in projects, and the challenge of getting people to do things.

The importance of these social activities for Carl and Adriana is consistent with the

findings of research that suggest that social and interpersonal supports may be more

important for African American students than for White students [Tinto, 1993 #63;

Mallinckrodt, 1987 #35; Fleming, 1984 #25].

Student Interactions in Classes

As with student interactions out of class, students reported generally positive peer

interactions within classes. Carl and Adriana, while noting a tendency for African

American students to sit together in class, also commented on feeling free to speak

openly. While this reflects on instructors' openness to student opinion, it also reflects a

comfort level with the other students. Neither Carl nor Thomas reported any incidents

with other students in class that they interpreted as being racially related. James had one

encounter in a class where a white female "slapped" him. He was puzzled by this

incident, saying that she had offered to help with a keyboarding assignment and when he

said that he understood it, she slapped him. He asked her why, but she did not explain

herself. He did not perceive the action as racially motivated.

Taylor, Adriana, and Mary all reported at least one incident that was clearly *due to the lyrical content*

racial. Taylor recalled a student in music appreciation who "slammed music they had

~~never heard before like rap~~." In addition, this students looked at her as though she should *only*

be the expert. This type of experience is one cited frequently by minority students who *in interpreting various rap song,*

find themselves confronted by stereotypes regularly or called on to know the minority

perspective (National Institute of Independent Colleges and Universities # 74)

[Universities., 1991 #74; Coakley, 1988 #20]. Taylor said she just attributes such

attitudes to "ignorance," as long as they are not directed towards her personally.

relevant to the students personally, who involve them actively in the learning process, and who create a climate that is conducive to open dialogue and questions. When citing classes that they did not like, it was again a combination of teaching style and subject matter that made the difference.

Taylor, for example, noted that she ~~always had trouble with~~ *dislikes* science classes. "Even though I study hard, ~~nothing sticks~~," she said, noting that she found it somewhat *my comprehension level was lowered due to lack of interest.* easier in classes where teachers were enthusiastic about the subject. Her criticism of instructors was consistent with other comments that she made about her experiences and goals. She did not appreciate instructors who allowed students to interject too much of their personal lives into a class discussion, especially when it related to family problems. First of all, she did not care to hear people's personal problems, and secondly, she was irritated by women who talked a lot about their children and husbands. "I don't have a husband and children, and I don't want to hear about their problems," she said.

Likewise, when asked if she talked with faculty about interests not related to school, she said, "I don't make a point to do that. I see them as an instructor, teacher. . . . It shouldn't go beyond that." She also stated that she did not socialize out of class with many of the journalism majors either, because a number of them were older students with families and other interests. She had made friends with students whose main goal was school. Thus, one of her criteria for evaluating an instructor was his or her ability to focus discussion on the subject at hand. This was consistent with how she selected her friends and with her academic orientation.

Adriana also evaluated instructors based on their knowledge of the subject matter and their ability to involve the students; she didn't want "just lecture." She was generally forgiving of instructors who "might just be having a bad day," although she noted that some subjects were "boring" even when the instructor tried "to liven" things up. On the other hand, because she liked computers, she tolerated a teacher with a "boring monotone." Unlike many of the African American students Stikes studied [, 1984 #117],

her because she is an African American from Benton Harbor, a place people know about
through the papers which print mostly the bad things.   She said she had to work harder in
high school, too, but even harder at SMC because her parents are paying and she wanted
to show that "she could do this—it is the values they have instilled in me."

In these feelings, Taylor is like many other minority students who feel they
constantly have to work harder to prove themselves (National Institute of Independent
Colleges and [Universities., 1991 #74; , 1991 #61] (before 61 add Thank you for asking)
and who find that White faculty do not understand or appreciate what it is like for them
as minorities [Coakley, 1988 #20]. Perhaps incidentally, because goal-setting is part of
the course curriculum, Taylor cited this class as helping her to sort out her educational
and career goals and that as a result she was more able to delay some of the things that
she wanted in order to focus on her longer range goals. The inability to delay immediate
gratification in order to achieve a long-term goal has been identified as another difficulty
for many African American students [Clewell, 1986 #19]. Certainly in this class, Taylor
received encouragement and tangible proof that working towards long-term goals was
worth the effort.

<div align="center">African American Staff</div>

In addition to the lack of African American faculty, students also noted the
absence of any staff who are African American. Some of them stated that they noticed
this lack when they came first came to visit or register; others said they really had not
paid too much attention at first. Thomas accepted this as the norm saying there were no
African American staff at the high school, so he did not expect any at SMC. Carl noted
the same thing saying he was prepared for this based on what his high school was like
and what his mother had told him about the area. Taylor made note of the all-white staff
when she first came, but after looking around for "someone like me," she just accepted it
"as the real world and you have to deal with it." She went on to say that even if there had
been an African American staff member, it would not have made any difference to her as

Instructions for Reviewing Interview Discussion

The section included here is an excerpt from "Interpretation." In this section, I took things that you told me about your activities and experiences at SMC and asked questions like, "Why were these experiences important? How did one person's experience compare or differ from another's? How do these experiences relate to what researchers say about students on other campuses?

You will recall that I gave each of you a pseudonym, or false name. Yours is Thomas. Everything about you, using that name, has been highlighted in the attached pages. You can read everything, or just the portions that are about you. **Please follow these guidelines:**

1. **Are the statements made about you or attributed to you accurate?**
   Thomas wrote "Yes." here.

2. **Are the conclusions or explanations accurate? Does what I say about you "sound right?" Would you change any of my comments or the statements attributed to you in any way?**
   Thomas wrote "You sound just like me."

3. **Make any comments, changes, deletions, additions, right on this paper.**

4. **Do not hesitate to react--negatively or positively--to anything I have written. My goal is to accurately interpret the experiences you talked about. So if something doesn't seem right, please let me know.**

5. **Return all pages to me in the enclosed envelope.**

Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!

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You will recall that I gave each of you a pseudonym, or false name. Yours is Carl. Everything about you, using that name, has been highlighted in the attached pages. You can read everything, or just the portions that are about you. **Please follow these guidelines:**

1. Are the statements made about you or attributed to you accurate?

2. Are the conclusions or explanations accurate? Does what I say about you "sound right?" Would you change any of my comments or the statements attributed to you in any way?

3. Make any comments, changes, deletions, additions, right on this paper.

4. Do not hesitate to react--negatively or positively--to anything I have written. My goal is to accurately interpret the experiences you talked about. So if something doesn't seem right, please let me know.

5. Return all pages to me in the enclosed envelope.

Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!Thanks!

<u>Response from Carl</u>:

I was unable to reach Carl.

APPENDIX C

COMMENTS FROM PEER REVIEWERS

Comments from Sirkka Gudan, Ph.D.
Schoolcraft College
Livonia, Michigan

I sincerely apologize for the delay in getting my comments to you regarding your dissertation. Your accomplishment is to be commended. You certainly did a lot of work on it. I didn't respond earlier because I wanted to read the entire document–I learned from it. It did take several days to finish it all. I especially enjoyed reading the charts where you categorized students' comments. That section was very thought out and organized.

I needed to keep reminding myself that you were focusing on factors affecting students over which the institution has control, i.e. Tinto's approach also. However, in several areas, personal and work issues seemed to present the biggest challenges. These were outside of institutional control. In this regard, I think you were correct in increasing the visibility of African American staff/faculty because some of the "non-controllable issues' may be worked out better through a discussion with another African American. This is not to suggest that non-African American staff can't help work out issues, but perhaps progress toward dealing with the issues might occur more readily.

I feel that you themes and conclusions were appropriately generated from the data. The discussion of the lack of cultural understanding implied that this phenomenon occurs with other cultures also, not just with African Americans. We need to be so careful to not sterotype a particular culture. This fact was stated so well when you indicated that "minority students are themselves diverse." Again, the caution is made against stereotyping on both sides: African American and White. I've often observed African American students sitting at one end of the cafeteria and White students at another. Some African American students are intermingled throughout the seating area. I applaud you recommended action of providing faculty specific training in leading discussions on sensitive issues. I also highly endorse your recommendation that encourages students working in groups in the classroom which places African American and White students together pursuing a common purpose.

In general, your dissertation is very well organized and based on theories in the literature and you new data. Your observations clearly emanate from students' comments which lead to logical conclusions and recommendations.

However, I have concerns about two issues:

1. Perhaps college is not for everyone. Is there a point at which the student, any student, gets to that indicates she/he has reached a threshold? Are there occasions when the college can offer no appropriate course for the student? What type of advising or counseling is provided for Thomas who doesn't like school and yet wants to become a teacher?

2. The second issue is regarding the absence of academic performance information on the 6 students at SWC. The study focuses on retention of African American students at community college. In order to better understand students' comments, I would have preferred a summary of each academic transcript indicating current GPA, number of courses taken, credits earned, and semesters attended. It would have enhanced my understanding of each student.

Again, I thoroughly enjoyed reading you comprehensive study. I think you did a super job and I really appreciate your sharing it with me. Please let me know when the Big Day arrives! I'm mailing it back to you today, but I wanted to email my comments so that you could get them earlier.

Comments from Thomas Huber
Southwestern Michigan College

we always wanted to talk and chit chat and hang out, even in between classes."

In addition to these social activities, Carl listed algebra tutoring, the computer laboratories, and the library as academic services that he used, noting that staff in the library helped with computer searches, using microfiche, and generally finding resource materials and that he spent a lot of time there his first two years. Another service Carl valued was faculty office hours. He cited frequent conferences with instructors to discuss missing or late work, to let them know that it was not lack of interest when he was having trouble getting assignments in.

Perhaps the most telling sign of Carl's academic involvement, however, is the way that he talked about classes. "I have a wide range of interests and like almost any class where I am learning" he said, particularly citing those classes where there was discussion, projects, games, field trips, learning about different cultures. In describing classes that were difficult, Carl could identify what the problem seemed to be, such as lack of background knowledge, his own difficulty with notetaking, or the amount of homework.

Carl's social and academic involvement at the college started out at a fairly high level and then as time went on decreased, partly because of changes within the college setting and partly because of changes in his personal life. Tinto's model acknowledges that students like Carl will find external commitments interfering with their goals and intentions, causing some students to leave college in spite of having had positive academic and social interactions with students, staff, and faculty. Carl appears to be one of these students.   *(good use of Tinto here)*

Mary also found the challenge of family commitments conflicting with her goal of completing the nursing program. She cited her son's asthma, finances, juggling work and

to do things and she likes "to know what is going on." She enjoyed the fund-raising activities and projects that involved providing canned goods and toys for school children at Christmas. However, she did not look to the college to provide social activities, saying that she thinks "school should provide an education."

She found her work study experience important because she "got to know a lot of people on campus . . . and met people in different offices" which she found interesting. As noted by Turnbull (1986) campus employment enhances campus involvement which in turn facilitates retention. For Adriana, campus employment also led her to an advisor who made a significant difference in her academic satisfaction with the college. During her freshman year, she found she was not comfortable with some of her classes and in addition she was confused about the difference between the associate in arts and associate in applied science degrees. The administrator in the office she worked in invited her to talk with him about any concerns she had, an offer she accepted. He explained the two degrees to her, showed her how to read the college catalog, and pointed out various options to her. From that point on, she researched every class before taking it, including talking to students (always more than one so she could get more than one perspective) and then made up her own mind about what to take. As she said, at first, uncertain of her new surroundings, she "didn't listen" to herself. Once she paid attention to her own intuition and started asking people questions, she was much happier.

As Richardson (1989) has noted, minority students need peer support for purposes of course selection, teacher selection, and how to manage the bureaucracy of school. For Adriana, the turning point in her ability to start asking the right questions of the right people came as a result of a positive staff relationship.

Just a thought: Did you ever consider looking at assessment scores to indicate basic skills prep. as a possible variable for student success?

James also found work on campus to be a positive experience that increased his

involvement. This was particularly important in James's case, given his weak academic

preparation and low opportunity orientation for college as noted earlier. Turnbull (1986,

p. 8) argued that students most likely to persist in college are those who have "high to

moderate academic competence" and "high to moderate college commitment." James,

however, fits the profile of a student with "moderate to low academic competence" and

"low to moderate college commitment." In order for such students to persist, they need

the strong academic support of a developmental studies program to build their academic

competence and involvement in activities which enhance their commitment (Turnbull,

1986). As a member of the college's Student Support Services program, James was

placed in basic skills courses and offered intensive academic support and advising,

including tutoring which he used in several classes. In addition, as part of his financial aid

package he worked on campus in either the computer laboratories or in the library,

working about fifteen hours a week every semester. Both of these jobs involve assisting

students, creating the opportunity for social contacts. In addition, they provided him with

training in how to use the library and expanded his computer skills. Non-traditional, first-

generation college students are often embarrassed about their lack of knowledge and

reluctant to seek assistance (Skinner & Richardson, 1988). Through his campus job,

James received assistance without having to ask for it. He also found faculty very

accessible and made frequent use of office hours to discuss questions about class

assignments and material he did not understand. Thus James's employment and his

comfort level with faculty increased his involvement socially and academically on the

campus.

Adriana had a more dismissive attitude towards African American males. In commenting about her comfort level in classes, she stated that she never felt she was treated any differently as an African American. However, when asked about the perceptions of other African American students, she said, "Males, of course. They are always looking for an excuse not to be in school." And unlike, Mary who had met her boyfriend at SMC, Adriana said she has found no African American men at SMC in her age bracket that "are mature enough" for her to consider dating." She noted that the small pool of eligible African American males was a problem for some of her younger friends, although they generally expected to look elsewhere for social relationships.

Carl also noted the ratio of men to women and how this posed a problem for African American women who did not generally date White men as freely as African American males dated White women. He observed that even if there were an equal number of African American men and women, the men would still date White women, leaving African American women with a smaller pool of men from which to choose. Fleming (1984) and Stikes (1984) have noted this as a pervasive problem for African American women in higher education.

This area of social activities is generally a problematic one for community colleges as Tinto (1983), Richardson (1989), and Boylan et al. (1993) have noted. Students in this study clearly stated that 1) they did not expect SMC to provide social activities and 2) their level of participation would not be high even if there were activities of more interest to them as African Americans. Adriana stated that she didn't really look to the school to provide social activities. "School should provide an education." Taylor said that she did not feel that students who lived in the community looked to the campus for recreation.

first. Thirdly, they were able to reject comments that did not target them personally, but were more "generic," revealing a stereotypical attitude or belief.

A fourth strategy might be inferred from reviewing some of Mary's comments and can be described as a positive self-talk combined with an expectant attitude. By expecting to encounter racism, Mary was prepared with the internal messages she needed to combat the situation. For example, in commenting about the lack of African American staff and being somewhat overwhelmed during her first few days and weeks on campus, she said that even though she thought there should a "Black instructor somewhere," she had never looked into why there were none. Her attitude was, "I pay my money to go to school. I am going to do it, whether anyone likes me or not." She was sensitive to non-verbal language (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976) as evidenced by the hallway encounters mentioned earlier, but again her expectation that she would have such experiences had almost conditioned her. She said she experienced such actions or attitudes all the time off-campus, so she "can blow [them] off." And in describing her comfort level in classes, her comments again reveal this expectant attitude: "You have to go into any situation [knowing] this is what I want.... and I am not going to be vulnerable. . . . I have a right to be here." This pro-active self-talk seemed to be a well-developed mechanism for coping with racism, perhaps reflecting the "dual control" orientation that researchers have associated with successful minority students (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Higher Education Extension Service, 1992). Such students, like Mary, feel confident of their own ability to deal with situations and yet, they can also acknowledge that there are some things they will be unable to change.

impact of an almost all-White faculty, though, it is important to note several comments

that these six students made. First, Taylor who found faculty "very caring and

approachable," described vividly the positive impact of taking a class from an African

American instructor, and said that "students do comment that they wish there were more

African American instructors, especially male students. They ask, 'Where are they? Why

aren't they here?'"

Adriana and Mary both said that when they first came to campus, the lack of

African American faculty was particularly noticeable; they both persisted in spite of this.

However, other students whose commitment to college is not as strong or who are less

able or willing to cope with being such a small minority might well choose not to stay.

Adriana and Mary persisted when as Adriana said, an instructor was "having a bad day"

or as Mary said, "being stubborn" or "set in their ways." Likewise, the other students

accepted the fact that some faculty and classes were boring or in a subject area they did

not like. Given their personal dispositions and commitments, and given their perception of

faculty as caring and accepting of them as individuals, these six students accepted the

absence of African American faculty as "the way things are" and did not attribute negative

classroom experiences to racism.

Other students with other dispositions and commitments might not respond in the

same way as these students chose to. As they themselves noted, and as research has

supported (Stikes, 1984), many African American students will not share their problems or

inner feelings with Whites. Given the obstacles students like Carl, Mary, and James face

in coming to college, and given the fact that each looked around campus for people "like

them," it is clear that students need support persons with whom they can comfortably

directly to their cultural identity. And while these students did not notice the absence of culturally relevant materials within any of the classes they took, neither could they identify any courses they had taken which included such materials to the extent that when asked about it they could recall these units. That is not to say that no instructors at SMC used literature by African American authors, or focused a discussion on differences in cultural perceptions or values, or talked about the accomplishments of African Americans in society. However, it does suggest that such inclusions may not be systematic or intentional and may not occur very frequently.

It is also interesting to note that several of the students cited Introduction to World Religions as a course they enjoyed because they learned about different people and cultures. While this course is popular with White students as well, it is one of the few courses, along with Non-Western Civilization, that is already in the curriculum at SMC that teaches material that is not Eurocentric. Given their comments about the lack of culturally relevant courses, it is not surprising that students found this one course especially attractive.   *Good observation!*

Thus in evaluating the impact that the lack of such courses had on these students, it would be difficult to say that their experience at SMC was diminished; however, it could be said that in one more way they were expected to accommodate themselves to a White perspective. These students were willing to do that; they came for an education and accepted that at a White school such an education did not include courses about their culture. However, it is easy to see that for some students, the absence of such courses may be one more alienating factor that would lead to withdrawal from the institution.

Comments from Jolene Brimage Prosper
Founder & Director of
Professional Training Concepts Educational Services
Berrien Springs, Michigan

I will begin this response commentary with a congratulations to you on the preparation of a comprehensive narrative of student experiences and personal reactions. Your presentations and very vivid accounts of students experiences were well fleshed out and flowed in collaboration with what "research" and "educational authorities" have said.

The following are my reactions and suggestions:

The American Culture has been shaped by a "system"' that elevates what is known as European Domination and "white Privilege." This ageless, faceless and all-powerful "system" is pervasive and is woven into the fabric of everything that is done and will be done. The educational system has not escaped its domination. In fact, education is one of its most influential allies. So it is not surprising that the six students in your presentation were affected by it. Some were aware of it, others did not appear to know what they have been programmed from the cradle, to think and feel about survival and success in the academic arena. I hope somewhere in your dissertation or even in you defense you prepare the reader/hearer with a brief, but comprehensive knowledge of the "American mind culture" that has affected from generation to generation, everyone indoctrinated into it.

- One of the authorities you quoted found that blacks over whites seemed more concerned about race. This statement seems accurate as many whites over blacks have benefitted from "white privilege" (white privilege is not speaking of European people today, but of a system that was set up by the Anglo forefathers and how that system can be used by whites, or other heritage groups that know how to manage the agreement of "white privilege."

- You mentioned on pg. 118 that "Adriana said that her research showed that students who attended historically Black school had more difficulty finding jobs than African American students who attended White schools." Did Adriana conduct research? If so, What was her method of measurement? Based on my 14 years of experience in Black Historical Institutions (BHI), I along with many (at least 150 persons) have felt quite the opposite. The system has thoroughly prepared American citizenship to deal and interact on Anglo terms. Preparation to interact in Anglo terms dominates the media; (movies, news, reading material), how teachers of all heritages educate and behave, how our neighborhoods are structured, etc.

- On pg. 120 a lot of what Richardson referred to is more present in B.H.I. because of the history of Blacks in America than many non-B.H.I.

- I concur with your stance that family history, one's personal predisposition, intrinsic, external, and environmental support is necessary on educational retention. You did a very thorough job in this area.

- The term "Anglo students" balances out African American more that the term "white." While the terms black/white are very acceptable and commonly used in the American culture, the balance of African American/Anglo are equal in definition and accuracy and could avoid offense.

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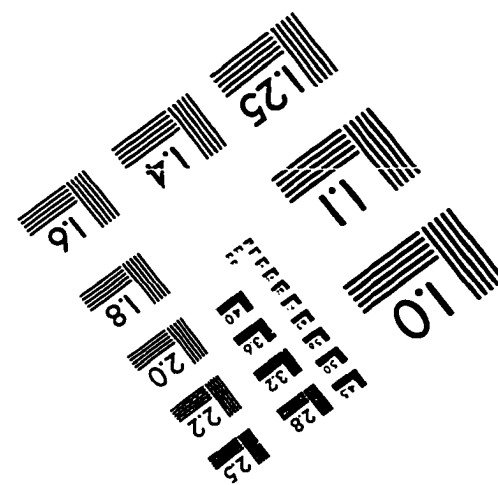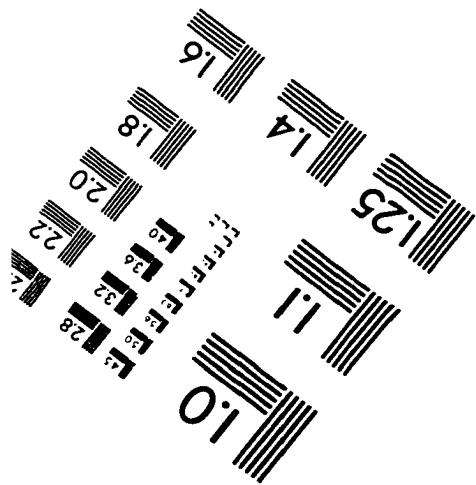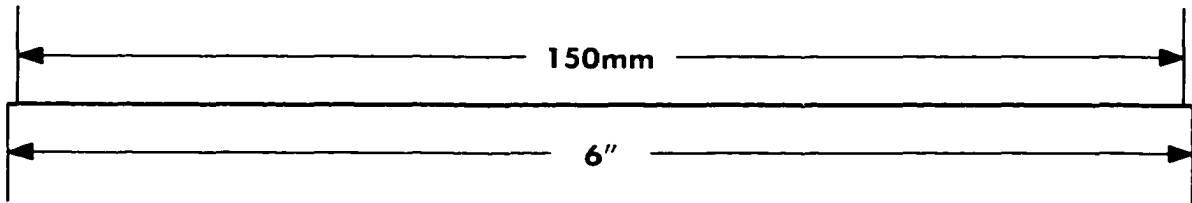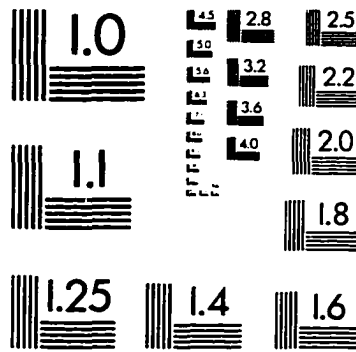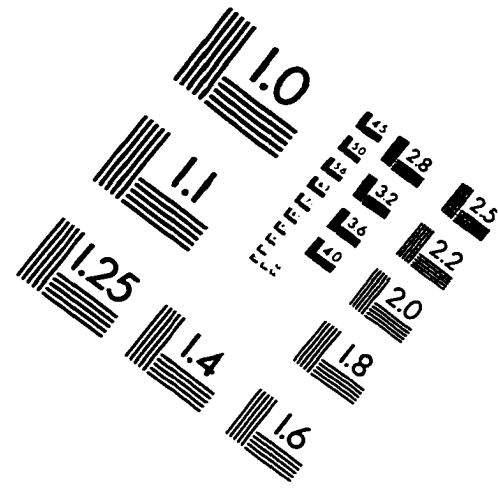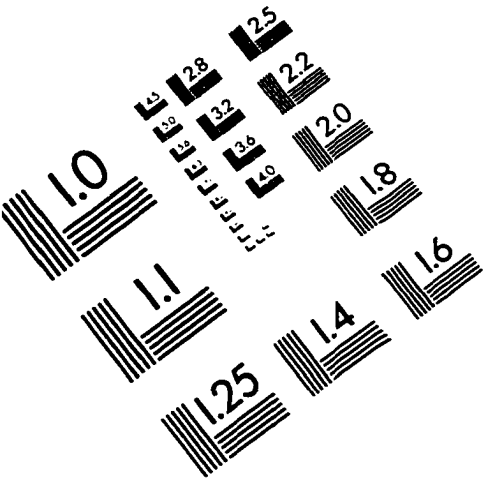
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