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The Impact of Retention Efforts on the Collegiate Experience of Students of Color at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI)

Jeffrie Mallory

THE IMPACT OF RETENTION EFFORTS ON

THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS OF COLOR

AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION (PWI)

A Dissertation

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By

Jeffrie Allen Mallory

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Approved October 10, 2019

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF RETENTION EFFORTS ON

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December 2019

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Gretchen Generett

This dissertation explored perceptions of thirteen stakeholders who participated in the Minority Orientation Program, a pre-entry initiative focused on retaining students of color at a private, four-year university located in the northeast region of the United States. Situated in Vincent Tinto's Theory of Student Integration and Critical Race Theory, the author qualitatively assessed the Minority Orientation Program's impact on participating students of color and the program's influence on their enrollment through the completion of their Freshman year. The study's findings confirmed that the Minority Orientation Program affects the collegiate experience for students of color in several ways. Positive influences in student acclimation were connected to the program environment, support from professional members, outstanding leadership from upperclass student leaders and a deep level of trust among all program

stakeholders. Stakeholders also successfully connected their ability to advance in the completion of their degree to participation in the program. Stakeholders connected specific resources including certain offices, initiatives, peers and professionals in the university community to their ability to graduate. Finally, improvements in stakeholder self-efficacy beliefs, also indicated the Minority Orientation Program has an ability to influence stakeholder behavior and the overall ability to graduate.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Amy, Kate, Brooke and Reed. Thank you for your encouragement, inspiration and unwavering support. This dissertation is also dedicated to my parents and grandparents. Thank you for giving me the gift of life and the opportunity to complete this process. Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to all of the students that my family and I have been privileged to encounter. Each of you have been with me during this journey.

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LIST OF TERMS

Persistence: A person's ability to remain enrolled as a student at an institution of higher education through their graduation.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): An institution of higher education in which White students account for more than half (50%) of the overall student population.

Retention: A student's ability to remain enrolled at the same institution of higher education for a defined time period, as determined by the institution.

Retention Rate: The percentage of students who return to the same institution for their second year (NSC, 2018).

Students of Color: Students from one of the following groups: Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian-American, African-American (Black), Hispanic/Latino(a),, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overall, the retention rate of first-time enrolled, full-time status, students of color at higher education institutions in the United States is below that of White students (Shapiro et al., 2017). Since August 2007, a private, medium-sized, four-year university located in the northeast region of the United States has conducted the Minority Orientation Program in an attempt to increase the retention rate for students of color. The program's target population is first-time enrolled, full-time status, students of color from the following groups: Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian-American, African-American, Hispanic/Latino(a), Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander. For this study, the title of Minority Orientation Program will be used as a pseudonym, in place of the program's true name. In addition, the name of North Spirit University will be used as a pseudonym, in place of the university's true name. The Minority Orientation Program, which supplements the university's Freshman Orientation Program, is held prior to the first day of the academic year. To date, an evaluation to assess the Minority Orientation Program's effectiveness has not been fulfilled.

Additional factors that influence the need to assess the Minority Orientation Program include a confirmed decrease in the national yield of eligible college students of color from 30% to 28% from the Fall 2016 semester through the Fall 2017 semester (Farrugia & Andrejko, 2017). With the existence of large gaps in degree completion rates between such groups as African-American students and White students overall - 38% versus 62%, and the fact that only 19% of African-American students complete the 4-year degree within four years (Shapiro et al.,

2017; Astin, Tsui & Avalos, 1996), the need for enrolled students of color at institutions of higher education to persist beyond their freshman year is a priority.

Furthermore, a relative lack of resources including staff and operating budgets for offices that coordinate minority retention programs highlight the need to assess the Minority Orientation Program's impact overall. The purpose of this study is to qualitatively assess the Minority Orientation Program's impact on participating students of color at North Spirit University and the program's influence on their enrollment through the completion of their Freshman year.

Statement of Problem

From 2015-2017, a questionnaire to assess the Minority Orientation Program's helpfulness to students and their families was administered. The questionnaire also assessed the program's ability to better prepare students prior to the start of their academic careers. For the questionnaire results, over 96% of the students confirmed the program was helpful to them. In addition, 94% of the students indicated they were better prepared to start their academic careers at North Spirit University as a result of participating in the program. A total of 106 responses were included in the previously mentioned data (North Spirit University Dataset, 2018). To date, an assessment for the program's impact on participating students of color at a personal level has not been conducted. In addition, potential connections between student participation in the program and its ability to influence their ability to advance in the completion of their degree has also not been assessed.

A need to raise awareness about issues that students of color may face as they transition into North Spirit University is present. While certain accommodations are provided through the

Minority Orientation Program, there is a lack of clarity about issues that students of color encounter during their initial arrival to the North Spirit University community. In addition, how students of color navigate issues in the university community, through personal and professional means is not truly understood.

North Spirit University should recognize that a student's transition from school to college is a complex and challenging process, especially as it relates to students of color. In general, it is noted that many experiences are common and quite concerning among first-time freshmen, such as confusion over the enrollment process, concerns about finances and the need to balance their lives in and away from college (Weissman, Bulakowski & Jumisko, 1998). Additional factors, such as the inability of students to reach and maintain college-level academic standards, incongruent personal and college goals, and lack of interest also influence their retention (Alford, 2000) and transition into college. For students of color, concerns surrounding their academic preparedness in high school, their commitment to educational goals and the institution, social and academic integration, and the availability of adequate financial means are mentioned as factors in their retention (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003).

Many researchers believe students of color who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) experience alienation and chilly campus climates (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Nelson-Laird et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Students of color may also have strained relationships with White faculty (Guiffrida, 2005; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993), which impede their ability to form cross-cultural mentoring relationships (Guiffrida, 2005). While students of color may

experience racism and discrimination, they may view the curriculum as culturally exclusive, and may also lack adequate support services at the PWI they attend (Person & Christensen, 1996).

Overall, an evaluation of the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University can reveal its effectiveness. This is especially important, due to the reason that North Spirit University is classified as a Predominantly White Institution. While the previously mentioned questionnaire is effective in capturing feedback a qualitative assessment on the Minority Orientation Program's effectiveness through stakeholder interviews will yield important data. The qualitative assessment of the Minority Orientation Program will also inform future decision making for the program. Decision making in the areas of budget, programs, and personnel can be performed in order to maximize the program's impact. Ultimately, the ability to enhance the retention rate for students of color at North Spirit University can be aligned to the findings of the program evaluation.

Minority Orientation Program Goals

There are several goals for the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University. One of the goals is to help first-time enrolled, full-time status, students of color by promoting resources that are available in the North Spirit University community. A second goal is to connect program participants with their peers. Another goal is to develop a mentor relationship between incoming students and upperclass students of color. The last goal is to influence the self-efficacy of each participating student prior to the start of their freshman year.

In agreement with Weisman et al., (1998) the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University believes its students need to understand what it takes to be successful in

college. While a student's understanding may look uniquely different on an individual basis, a prime component for all students to be successful in college is found in their ability to understand the adjustments they will need to make, in order to remain in college. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion at North Spirit University provides critical support for students of color. In comparison to similar offices at other higher education institutions throughout the United States, such an office can provide a point of contact for students and a place to go in time of need, where a plethora of services are collected and provided to vulnerable students (Seidman, 2005). Furthermore, Tinto (2005) agrees, such an office can serve as a critical link to allow students to find comfort in the university setting, which undoubtedly may feel foreign to them during the first weeks of their arrival.

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Program Role For Students

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The Minority Orientation Program seeks to have a major role in the academic, social and personal development areas of each participating student of color. All activities for the Minority Orientation Program are designed to add value to the previously mentioned areas of each student.

Academic Adjustment

The Minority Orientation Program includes various sessions to acclimate the student and raise awareness to the realities of academics at North Spirit University. The *Faculty/Staff Advice Panel* includes tenured faculty members and professional staff members in the university community. In this panel, advice, perspectives, and encouragement are shared with program students. In the *Tips For Success Panel*, which features live testimonials and the sharing of academic stories from upperclass program leaders, program students are given vital information

on such topics as university events, reducing personal stress, goal setting, and food options that are available in the university community. In the *Alumni Feedback Panel*, university alums seek to influence the future success of program students through sharing their perspectives and stories. Finally, *Small Group Sessions* are also held on multiple occasions during the Minority Orientation Program. These sessions, pair students based on their academic majors and exposes them to various academic policies, procedures and nuances of the university community. Led by upperclass student leaders, each Small Group Session provides a unique opportunity for upperclass students to share in-depth advice with participating students in an intimate setting.

Social Adjustment

The social adjustment for participating students in the Minority Orientation Program focuses on their social acclimation in the university and surrounding communities. To stimulate their social adjustment, the Minority Orientation Program places an emphasis on resources and services that are available to all students of color. Through sessions, such as *University and Student Life Division Welcome*, individual tours of the campus and surrounding city with their assigned upperclass leader, and previously mentioned *Small Group Sessions*, all program students have the ability to raise their social awareness as new members in the North Spirit University community. In addition, Minority Orientation program students are provided information on a wide variety of university traditions, student organizations and additional programs or activities.

The ability to physically provide individual tours to program students is critical. Through campus tours, important information for entities such as health services, the counseling center

and the tutoring center are provided to participating students. Tours also allow students to physically note the location of their classrooms, which has the potential to both eliminate anxiety and acclimate them to the university community.

The area of social adjustment for students of color is also important. The social adjustment of students can play a role in how they identify as a member of the university community. Through realizing how they fit into the everyday activities of the university community, how they can benefit, and how they can succeed in the completion of their goals, it is believed that a student's chances of persisting through the completion of a degree will increase. Sessions to influence the social interactions between students of color, faculty, staff and administrators are also included in the Minority Orientation Program. These sessions attempt to enhance the fit of participating students in the university community, and also seek to support their future success.

Personal Development

The ability to engage in the personal development of each program student is a critical area of the Minority Orientation Program. The focus of any event for the Minority Orientation Program revolves around student learning and outcomes. The goals of each program event are discussed with participating students prior to their commencing. After each session concludes, the goals of the event are discussed with participating students once again to assess their outcome and to encourage personal development of students.

To build a strong rapport with participating students, Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff members along with upperclass leaders outreach to participating students prior to, during,

and after their arrival to campus. Student goals, worries, and concerns are also addressed during the outreach process. To further stimulate their personal development, conversations about available resources and their ability to aid program students are also frequently held prior to their arrival.

Overall, the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University fulfills the role of acclimating students of color to the university community in the areas of academic, social and personal development. In a targeted effort to support student needs at North Spirit University, the Minority Orientation Program believes the chances of students staying beyond their Freshman year increases if certain conditions for them are fulfilled. Such conditions include the ability for participating students to make connections with critical resources and their ability to integrate academically and socially. The ability for participating students of color to understand their personal development and, more importantly, engage in actions that are conducive to their development, will greatly increase their acclimation and overall experience as well.

Program Role For North Spirit University

One of the primary roles for the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University is to increase the likelihood that first-time enrolled, full-time status, students of color will stay enrolled at the university through the completion of their Freshman year. Through the Minority Orientation Program, North Spirit University provides an opportunity to showcase efforts of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. As stated on its website, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion "promotes a responsibility to help students be successful academically, socially, and professionally in an increasingly multicultural society" (North Spirit University Website, 2018).

The students referenced in the previous statement include first-time enrolled, full time status, students of color who participate in the Minority Orientation Program.

The Minority Orientation Program also provides a role for North Spirit University to highlight enrolled students of color. Through their participation in the Minority Orientation Program, students of color promote the university in numerous ways. The students promote the university through their physical representation in the university and surrounding communities, and are frequently placed on publication sources, including materials and university websites to encourage the hopeful attendance of future students of color.

Participating students of color in the Minority Orientation Program are approached by university staff members to share their overall experiences and provide testimonials. Such involvement for participation may be a burden to students of color. It has been mentioned that students with a different ethnicity than the majority on campus are sometimes seen and assumed to represent all members of their particular culture and race (Seidman, 2005). To be clear, the sharing of enrolled student of color experiences could be deemed invaluable to university professionals. For example, by sharing their experiences enrolled students of color can be utilized to aid various fundraising efforts. Student of color experiences can also be used to depict an image that all students of color are presumably doing well in the university setting overall.

North Spirit University also fulfills a financial role through existence of the Minority Orientation Program. Participating students of color along with other students in the university community, pay tuition to attend the institution. As a result of retaining students who participate

in the program, the university generates additional revenues. Revenues generated from such fees as student tuition, room and board, parking, and technology directly support the university's operating costs. Tuition dollars of students who participate in the Minority Orientation Program also support other areas of university operations. Such areas include: worker salaries, classroom equipment and physical upgrades to the campus. As a university that is largely dependent on tuition dollars, participating students are the lifeblood of the university's continued existence.

Including its financial standing, North Spirit University has to be mindful of the current environment of most higher education institutions. As Tinto (2006) noted, the environment for higher education has changed from one of plenty to one of diminishing resources. In the opinion of Lederman (2017), the increasing financial pressures may be starting to take a toll on institutions. In addition, Lederman notes concerns such as declines in the number of traditional college-age students and strong concerns about student debt and the price of higher education as possible reasons for the closure of institutions in the United States. As an example, the number of private nonprofit institutions, a category North Spirit University is classified in, fell by 33, or 1.7 percent. Additionally, from 2015-16 to 2016-17 the total number of private nonprofit institutions dropped from 1,909 to 1,876 (Lederman, 2017). The trend of closing higher education institutions across the nation, coupled with the direct revenue that Minority Orientation Program students provide the university, points directly to the critical role of their attendance and progression as an enrolled student at North Spirit University.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively assess the Minority Orientation Program's impact on participating students of color at North Spirit University and the program's influence on their enrollment through the completion of their Freshman year.

Research Questions

- How does the Minority Orientation Program affect the collegiate experience of students of color?

- In what ways can student participants of the Minority Orientation Program connect their ability to advance in the completion of their degree at the university to their participation in the program?

Significance of Study

The Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University should be qualitatively assessed for the following reasons. While certain accommodations have been provided through the Minority Orientation Program, there is a lack of clarity about issues that students of color encounter during their initial arrival to the North Spirit University community. In addition, how students of color navigate issues in the university community, through personal and professional means is not truly understood.

From a historical view, since its launch in August 2007, the Minority Orientation Program has not been assessed. Secondly, research supports the first year of college is a critical period for all students, as the likelihood of dropout may be at its greatest (Tinto & Goodsell, 1994). To illustrate the importance of a student's first year of college, the National Student Clearinghouse (2018), confirmed that 79.2 percent of White students who started college in Fall 2015, were retained at their starting institution. In comparison, Asian students were retained at 84.2 percent, Hispanic students (72.5 percent) and Black students had the lowest first-year retention rate of 66.9 percent. Overall, the Minority Orientation Program, which supports the first-year success for students of color must be assessed to determine its effectiveness and ideal optimization for the future.

The Minority Orientation Program assessment also speaks directly to the mission of North Spirit University. The condensed version of the university's mission statement is focused on serving the needs of students. Among the core tenets of the university's mission statement are concern for moral and spiritual values and the university's desire to maintain an atmosphere that is open to diversity. At a deeper level, the university specifically encourages dialogue among people of different faiths and acknowledges the different cultural backgrounds that are present in the community. As a university that was founded by a group of missionaries to educate family members of poor immigrants, several of the university's goals, as previously mentioned align directly with values of the Minority Orientation Program. The Minority Orientation Program intentionally brings together new students of color who may have

differences based on racial, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds. Several of these noted differences are in alignment with the university's founding mission.

The third reason of support for an assessment of the Minority Orientation Program focuses on the program's future. An assessment will inform future decision making for the Minority Orientation Program in the areas of budget, programs, and personnel. Future decision making in the identified areas can aid the Minority Orientation Program's desire to impact the collegiate experience for participating students of color in numerous ways.

Overall, the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University has the potential to be the proven, trusted model for welcoming new students of color to a PWI community, while ensuring they have the needed resources to move forward in the completion of their degrees. While the significance of assessing the Minority Orientation Program's impact may transcend the campus of North Spirit University, its assessment could also add value to other institutions of higher education. For institutions of higher education that may be uncertain in their recruitment and retention efforts for students of color, the Minority Orientation Program's assessment may serve as a catalyst that transforms the lives of their students of color and campus communities overall.

Rebranding Efforts for the Minority Orientation Program

A decision was made during the Fall 2014 semester to rebrand the Minority Orientation Program. Included in the program rebranding was the redesign of all programs, activities, training, and outreach methods to incoming students of color and their families. All promotional

materials related to the Minority Orientation Program including the website were also revised during this time.

Identified Program Issues

Lack of data to measure the program's effectiveness, since its inception in 2007, was a major reason for the rebranding of the Minority Orientation Program. In particular, inconsistencies in the years and type of data secured were confirmed in the areas of student feedback and student experience. In prior years, the effectiveness of the Minority Orientation Program was simply not measured. The only consistent data captured by the program on an annual basis was the total number of students who participated in the program.

Assessing the student experience and collecting reviewable data for the Minority Orientation Program became priorities of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff at North Spirit University. Reviewable data for the future, delivered mainly through surveys on the experience of students in the Minority Orientation Program, was desired. Reviewable data could provide an outline of the program's history and had the potential to inform the program's leadership of future changes.

The second major reason to rebrand the Minority Orientation Program was to ascertain how much time and attention was given to the program by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff. As overseers of the program in terms of financial, program, and student leadership oversight, both the Assistant Vice President for Diversity Initiatives (pseudonym) along with the Administrative Assistant in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion are directly involved in several phases of the program.

The last motivation for rebranding the Minority Orientation Program was focused on raising the program's awareness. In addition to raising awareness for all stakeholders, a targeted approach at uplifting the program's vision and impact among select mid- and upper-level administrators of North Spirit University. Identified mid- and upper-level administrators include the Vice President for Student Life, the Vice President for Enrollment Strategies (pseudonym) and the Director of Undergraduate Admissions.

Mid- and upper level administrators at North Spirit University were specifically targeted for their ability to influence the Minority Orientation Program and its students of color. Specifically, administrators have the ability to provide financial and staff resources to recruit students of color for participation while supporting the overall operations. Administrators also have the ability to enhance the program by re-assigning staff in the university community to support the program's various needs.

Identified Program Stakeholders

An important part of the Minority Orientation Program is its stakeholders. This group includes incoming freshmen students, their families, upperclass student leaders, and university staff members. The identified stakeholders of the Minority Orientation Program provide direct support to the Minority Orientation Program. For example, stakeholders can connect with participating students. Stakeholders can also provide encouragement and guidance to ensure that participating students of color achieve their goals. In some cases, the involvement of

stakeholders with participating students could serve as a deciding factor for a student to remain at an institution of higher education.

Stakeholders were identified and categorized based on their direct involvement (i.e. planning events, student outreach, etc.) and experience as a result of participating in the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University. Furthermore, the identified stakeholders are diverse in a variety of ways including their backgrounds, educational experience and socioeconomic status. Overall, each stakeholder has the ability to possess a unique perspective of the Minority Orientation Program in terms of their engagement, observations and their overall experience.

Incoming Freshmen Stakeholder Group

Incoming freshmen students of color are the most important group of stakeholders for the Minority Orientation Program. As previously stated, one of the main areas of the program's focus is on the transition of students of color into the North Spirit University community. The transition of students of color is directly influenced through their participation in program activities. Activities for participating students that raise awareness of available university services, increase their self-efficacy and reduce their anxiety levels are offered.

The impact of the Minority Orientation Program's efforts to transition and retain students is also influenced by how they are received by other individuals and entities in and around the North Spirit University community. The receptiveness of participating students of color in the program can influence their ability to reach out for help in their times of need. Their receptiveness can also inform participating students of color of their fit in the community.

Incoming Freshmen Family Stakeholder Group

The families of freshmen students of color were identified as critical stakeholders for the

Minority Orientation Program. The families of students can directly influence the university's

ability to transition, support, and retain students of color in several ways. Such examples

include: giving advice, identifying student issues that university members may not yet

understand, and notifying university community members to assist a student in time of need.

As a critical stakeholder group, there was a desire to provide families of the Minority

Orientation Program student participants with information about university services that were

available to their loved ones. Through providing information on lodging accommodations,

health services options, campus safety, and available programs for example, there was a belief by

program leaders, that family members could potentially ease their anxiety about their loved ones

transition to higher education.

The importance of a supportive relationship with parents in the maintenance of

psychological well-being for ethnic minority college students has been suggested (Rodriguez,

Mira, Myers, Morris & Cardoza, 2003). Potential attachment issues between students and their

families, as a result of a child's departure to a higher education institution was also noted by

program leaders. In agreement with Berman & Sperling (1991) and Sullivan & Sullivan (1980)

the Minority Orientation Program is mindful, that attachment issues with family may be

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particularly relevant during the first year of college, a time when many freshmen live away from home for the first time. Overall, it is suggested that a participating student's family has the ability to influence them as they transition to higher education and also as they seek retainment through the completion of their freshman year.

Upperclass Student Leaders Stakeholder Group

Upperclass student leaders are identified as the active ingredient in making freshmen students of color feel welcomed, valued, and appreciated in the North Spirit University community. Selected through a rigorous interview process by professional staff members from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, upperclass student leaders lead all operations of the program. Upperclass leaders, are presented as trusted leaders of the Minority Orientation Program in all program materials. In addition, upperclass leaders have the authority to make program decisions in the area of scheduling, budgeting, leadership training and engagement with incoming students and their families. Through building relationships with participating students of color, upperclass student leaders can directly influence them in multiple ways. From their initial outreach, by serving as mentors and through fulfilling activities, upperclass student leaders can impact the experience for participating students of color and ultimately their ability to be retained.

The Minority Orientation Program can also play an important role in the development of upperclass leaders. Through serving as leaders which includes adhering to established rules, and working alongside other full-time, university professionals, upperclass leaders can significantly enhance their personal development. While their leadership abilities may be enhanced, the overall experience of the leaders as students in the North Spirit University community can also be enriched in a positive way throughout their remaining years.

Upperclass student leaders also provide useful feedback for the Minority Orientation Program. While data in the areas of student experience can be collected, insights into program activities from the viewpoint of upperclass leaders can offer unique perspectives on the impact of the Minority Orientation Program. For example, current trends or nuances, which are unique to the Minority Orientation Program, can be discovered by soliciting the insights of upperclass student leaders. More importantly, such insights may not be realized through conventional means of capturing data, such as surveys or the perspectives of participating stakeholders, who do not hold a similar position of leadership as upperclass student leaders.

Office of Diversity and Inclusion Staff Stakeholder Group

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff at North Spirit University includes the Assistant Vice President for Diversity Initiatives and an Administrative Assistant. Collectively,

the office staff fulfills a wide range of responsibilities for the Minority Orientation Program. Responsibilities including student outreach, marshalling financial resources, securing physical meeting spaces, the selecting of upperclass student leaders, and the collecting and dissemination of program data serve as examples.

Serving as the main conduit between participating students, their families, university departments, and university administrators, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff connects many critical relationships. In addition, the need to balance various program aspects, coupled with the ability to manage several areas of the Minority Orientation Program, points to the importance of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff. Overall, the experience of participating students of color is directly influenced by the efforts of the staff.

University Faculty Member Stakeholder Group

The importance of faculty in the development of participating students of color is acknowledged in the Minority Orientation Program. For the student experience, relationships with faculty are seen as a particularly important influence for both academic and social integration (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Most notably through classroom engagement, faculty members directly impact the retention of participating students in several ways. Examples of faculty impact on the retention of students of color can be found in the following activities: direct advisement, coaching, and providing students with vital information in courses they teach.

For new students in general, engagement in the community of the classroom becomes a gateway for subsequent involvement in the social and academic communities of the college generally (Tinto, Goodsell & Russo, 1993). Direct contact between faculty and students of color is also important, because more contact between students and faculty both inside and outside the classroom can lead to greater intellectual development, social development and overall satisfaction for the students (Astin, 1993; Endo and Harpel, 1982).

The Minority Orientation Program strongly supports engagement with faculty members in the North Spirit University community. To encourage this engagement, the Minority Orientation Program provides the program schedule to participating faculty, and also invites them to join participating students and their families for meals and activities, such as advice panels. A unified relationship between university faculty and the Minority Orientation Program can truly influence the retention of participating students of color. For example, faculty members may check-in with participating students to assess their experience as a newer member of the university community and they can alert program leaders to academic issues with participating students.

University Support Staff Member Stakeholder Group

Support staff members from areas of the North Spirit University community, such as housekeeping, food service, and the recreation department, undoubtedly play important roles in the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University. While they may not appear as highly visible members of the Minority Orientation Program's daily operations of the program, their impact can be realized in various ways. Their impact can appear through their fulfillment of program logistics, including food service, securing of venues for program activities, and their ability to offer encouragement and feedback to participating students. Such involvement has the potential to greatly improve student retention.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff has recognizes that university staff members possess great relationships with many Minority Orientation Program stakeholders. In fact, support staff members are frequently approached for assistance by the previously mentioned stakeholders including participating students. The assistance provided continues well beyond the program's completion. The continued assistance from university support staff members can directly influence the ability to retain participating students of color in the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University.

There is a need to specifically invite university support staff members to engage in the Minority Orientation Program. By providing them with program schedules and inviting them to

physically attend program activities, they can directly connect to participating students and their families. Also, through their involvement in the Minority Orientation Program, university support staff members at North Spirit University can increase their awareness of complex issues that many participating students of color will face as they transition into the North Spirit University community.

North Spirit University Administration Stakeholder Group

The administration stakeholder group of North Spirit University serves a unique and important role for the Minority Orientation Program. As leaders of the university, the administration stakeholder group can influence the program specifically through their decision making. For example, they can make decisions that lead to increases in program funding and they can raise awareness of the program's impact throughout the entire university community by having it featured in various publications.

While the North Spirit University administration stakeholder group has the potential to influence the Minority Orientation Program in numerous ways, it ultimately has the authority to discontinue such a program as well. Concerns around the use of funds to support the Minority Orientation Program, the perception of its effectiveness and potential equity concerns as a result of its large focus on students of color, all have the ability to bring the program's existence into question.

Overall, it is critical that we present the administration stakeholder group with tangible data along with the proposal of future actions for the Minority Orientation Program. As this stakeholder group may be typically far removed from the emotions and lived experiences of university students, the presentation of data can inform them and their decision-making. The opportunity to incorporate the attendance of university administrators during the activities of the Minority Orientation Program is also encouraged.

For the purpose of this study, North Spirit University administrators include members who possess the following qualifications: are at the position of director's level or above, have the capacity, access, and review of institutional data and have the authority to provide an increase in financial resources to the Minority Orientation Program. Specific positions, for example, include vice presidents and directors for divisions such that oversee admissions and student activities, both of which are critical to admitting students and providing programs to retain them.

North Spirit University Admission Staff Stakeholder Group

The final group of identified stakeholders for the Minority Orientation Program are admissions staff members. Through their ability to identify and recruit potential students of color for the Minority Orientation Program, admissions staff members directly influence their transition into the university community.

The Admissions staff members and their handling of relationships with participating students of color and their families is perhaps undervalued. Beyond their initial outreach and even their initial arrival on campus as an enrolled freshman student, admissions staff members are in frequent contact with participating students of color for the Minority Orientation Program. Additionally, admissions staff members can influence the experience of participating students in the following ways: by identifying potential student problems, by encouraging students to utilize available campus resources, and by addressing the concerns of families that have sent a loved one to participate in the Minority Orientation Program. It is essential for the admissions staff stakeholder group to have updated program information along with the opportunity to connect to incoming students of color and their families. As previously mentioned, the admissions stakeholder group is some of the earliest influencers on participating students of color in the Minority Orientation Program. The experience of participating students and their ability to be retained is clearly linked to the admissions stakeholder group.

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW PROGRAM

Establishment of New Program Phases

In the Fall 2014 semester, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff established three phases for the Minority Orientation Program. The first phase was *pre-arrival tasks*. Pre-arrival tasks include outreach to potential students and connecting upperclass mentors with them. The second phase, *on-site programs*, includes the fulfillment of activities that are performed from the

initial arrival of participating students and their families, but prior to the first day of the academic year. The final phase, *extended programs*, includes the continued incorporation of the mentor program, facilitation of program socials and the facilitation of data collection to assess the stakeholder experience. These elements are included in the extended programs phase.

The establishment of new program phases for the Minority Orientation Program was enlightening to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff. As a result, the staff documented how much time and attention was truly required to fulfill the program. In addition, the breadth and scope of all office initiatives were also identified and categorized during the establishment phases. Activities, such as individual student meetings, university committee meetings, alumni visits, community partner site-visits, fundraising, and attending community functions were documented. The highlighted activities, were fulfilled by office staff members in addition to the responsibilities of the Minority Orientation Program.

The establishment of new program phases for the Minority Orientation Program also uncovered additional problems with the program. Issues related to the location of program activities and inconsistencies in upperclass student leadership were identified. For example, certain venues that showcased the physical features of the campus and surrounding communities were not considered for use. Also, inconsistencies in upperclass student leadership including a low number of leaders, confusion about their leadership roles, lack of available training, and inconsistencies in the ability for upperclass leaders to be prompt and present during the designated times for program activities, were confirmed. Each identified problem had the ability

to significantly impact the service and efforts that were provided to students of color who participated in the Minority Orientation Program overall.

Establishment of New Program Model

In an effort to better serve participating students of color in the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University, a new program model was established. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion's new model for the Minority Orientation Program included several phases. First, the model offered multiple opportunities to interact with participating students of color prior to their enrollment at North Spirit University. Through phone and social media outreach in particular, participating students of color could engage with upperclass student leaders and administrators. Secondly, through program activities and individual meetings with upperclass student leaders and administrators among others, deeper relationships could be established. Such relationships could help participating students of color by providing them with individuals to address issues or provide motivation for example. The final phase of the new model for the Minority Orientation Program focused on the post-graduation relationship with past participants of the program. Through providing specific events, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's staff sought to convene North Spirit University alums of color. As a result, the staff could engaged alums of color to both express their gratitude for previous participation and also leverage opportunities to fundraise for office and program needs.

Importance of Relationship Building

During the Fall 2014 semester review of the Minority Orientation Program, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff acknowledged the importance of relationship building with

participating students of color and their families who participate in the Minority Orientation Program. As confirmed, the Minority Orientation Program has the unique and critical ability to serve as the first formal introduction between participating students, their families, and the North Spirit University community. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion's staff wanted to ensure this initial introduction would be a memorable one.

The review of the Minority Orientation Program also revealed a lack of outreach and engagement from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion's staff was unable to identify any methods that were previously used to build the relationship between university community members and the program's participating students of color and their families. In addition, family members of program participants were not invited to participate in any part of the Minority Orientation Program previously. As a result, an opportunity to engage prospective students of color their families was established.

Specifically, through forming strategic relationships with community partners who prepared students to enroll in higher education institutions, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's staff was able to target students of color who met the criteria for enrollment into North Spirit University. Additionally, in an effort to stimulate the relationship with freshmen students of color and their families who committed to enroll in the Minority Orientation Program, upperclass student leaders and office staff reached out to prospective students via phone calls, social media prompts, and regular mailings at predetermined times before their arrival. The ultimate goal of establishing a relationship with students of color and their families prior to their enrollment was achieved.

Additional Program Changes

The following is a list of additional changes that were incorporated into the new model of the Minority Orientation Program. First, upon confirming their enrollment with the Admissions Department at North Spirit University, all accepted, participating students of color and their families are given information about the Minority Orientation Program. Next, pending confirmation of their future enrollment, an introductory packet, which includes a list of programs and services offered by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion along with Minority Orientation Program information is distributed to all students of color and their families.

Minority Orientation Program activities were significantly altered as well. A role-playing session focused on utilizing public transportation was incorporated in the new program model. This session sought to acclimate participating students of color to their new surroundings of the university community and region. The additions of a staff/faculty advice panel and an alumni panel, which included the opportunity for alums to share their lived experiences as members of the North Spirit University, were also incorporated into the new program model.

The incorporation of alumni was a critical addition for the Minority Orientation Program. To encourage their involvement, alumni were invited to assist with the student move-in and as previously mentioned, were asked to participate in the alumni panel. Alumni were also invited to join participating students and their families for the program's welcome dinner. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion's staff assumed the combination of alums sharing their lived experiences at North Spirit University, would resonate with many of the participating students of color.

Additionally, alumni could also add value through their participation by directly addressing any unique questions or concerns that family members in attendance presented.

Impact of Minority Orientation Program Changes

As a result of rebranding efforts for the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University, an increase in participating students was realized from the Fall 2014 through Fall 2017 semesters. The Fall 2017 semester welcomed over 130 new students of color and their families to North Spirit University for the Minority Orientation Program. The Fall 2017 semester student total is a sharp contrast to the 35 total students of color who were averaged in the Minority Orientation Program, from 2011-2014.

The participation yield from eligible students of color for the Minority Orientation Program, substantially increased between the Fall 2014 and Fall 2017 semesters as well. As a program that is based on voluntary enrollment from participating students of color and their families, an overall increase from 25% in Fall 2014 semester to 43% for Fall 2017 was significant.

Possible Factors

The spike in voluntary participation for eligible students of color could be attributed to a few different factors. First, it is conceivable that incoming students of color and their families have increased awareness about the Minority Orientation Program, including its events and potential benefits. Secondly, it is plausible that as a result of a substantial increase in the size of both the overall incoming class sizes and the increased number of diverse students in them at

North Spirit University, the number of eligible students for the Minority Orientation Program has increased.

For example, the total class sizes of 1,569 students for the Class of 2021 and 1,556 for the Class of 2020 are the two largest incoming class sizes in North Spirit University's history (North Spirit University Student Newspaper, 2017). Furthermore, the percentage of diversity in the Classes of 2021 (16%), 2020 (18%) and 2019 (17.1%) improved the ability to recruit and engage students of color for the Minority Orientation Program (North Spirit University Student Newspaper, 2017). As a reminder, students of color included in the previously mentioned figures include those in the following groups: African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic/Latino(a), American Indian, Pacific Islander and Native Alaskan (North Spirit University Website, 2015).

The increased percentage of incoming diverse students for North Spirit University is substantial. An illustration of the university's improved efforts in their ability to recruit diverse students is found in fact, that in 2005, only 97 total minority students were enrolled at North Spirit University. In contrast, the Class of 2019, contained 251 minority students in its class alone (North Spirit University Factbook, 2015). James Smith (pseudonym) who served as the Associate Provost for Admissions Strategies (pseudonym) at the time also recognized North Spirit University's improved ability to enroll students of color. Smith stated, "the increase of minority students over the past decade is the result of North Spirit University President, Sam Jones's (pseudonym) effort to ensure that academically talented students of all social and ethnic backgrounds have access to education (North Spirit University Student Newspaper, 2015)." To

date, North Spirit University, with over 9,000 students enrolled has enrollment of just under twelve percent overall for its students of color (North Spirit University Factbook, 2017).

Program's Future Effectiveness

Assessing the Minority Orientation Program's impact on participating students of color and their retention through the completion of their freshman year should be a priority in the North Spirit University community. If the university continues to increase its enrollment for students of color in future years, it will need to invest additional resources into the Minority Orientation Program. From providing food to purchasing passes for public transportation, certain aspects of the Minority Orientation Program far exceed their monetary value. In addition, the ability to increase the program's awareness to potential students of color and their families is also critical, especially if the program is confirmed as effective. To be effective, the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University has to prove it delivers a positive impact on developing and retaining participating students of color.

Presently, the effectiveness of the Minority Orientation Program is measured through assessments of participating freshmen students, their families and the upperclass leaders. In particular, questionnaires, informal focus groups and informal interviews are used to assess the program's effectiveness. The areas assessed for the Minority Orientation Program include identifying impactful parts of the program, identifying potential areas of improvement, and identifying personal value(s) that are gained from participating in the program.

Program students and upperclass leaders are directly invited to participate in online surveys within two weeks of the Minority Orientation Program's conclusion. In addition,

parents and families of participating students of color are also given the opportunity to complete on-site, paper surveys at the program's concluding event.

Participating students of color and upperclass leaders are the target of informal focus groups. Focus groups of 4-6 students are intermittently fulfilled in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion within two months of the Minority Orientation Program's conclusion. Informal interviews, completed within two months of the Minority Orientation Program's conclusion, are also conducted with upperclass student leaders and family members of Minority Orientation Program participants. Individual interviews with upperclass student leadership for the Minority Orientation Program are held in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, while interviews with families of participating students of color are fulfilled via phone and teleconference calls.

The effectiveness of the Minority Orientation Program is also measured in student outreach, that occurs after the program's conclusion. Participating students of color are contacted by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's staff at preset times during their first academic year to assess their well-being and address any concerns that may impact their ability to persist. The final area to measure the current effectiveness of the Minority Orientation Program is performed by presenting a post-program overview. The overview was fulfilled to recommend changes, raise awareness and ultimately increase program resources. The entities presented to include the Vice President for Student Activities (pseudonym), Student Life Retention Group (pseudonym) and the University Student Retention Committee (pseudonym). Presented by the Assistant Vice President for Diversity Initiatives, the Minority Orientation Program overview provides numeric data such as total enrollments, highlights the special

achievements of upperclass student leaders, and provides an overall opinion on the program's

ability to retain the most recent group of participating students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand factors that impact students of color in higher education, literature on student retention in higher education was reviewed. An emphasis was placed on literature that explained retention models and programs for students of color at higher education institutions. This chapter begins with a historical perspective of retaining students of color at higher education institutions. Next, theoretical models of student retention and specific types of retention initiatives at higher education institutions are highlighted. To conclude this chapter, adjustments for students of color in their academic, social and personal integration areas along with the conceptual frameworks that support this study are explained.

Historical Perspective

Overall, the attrition of students of color in higher education has raised concerns (Lang, 2001). These concerns were initially raised over the high rates of attrition for minority students in the early 1980's. The higher rates of the 1980's were preceded by a decade of record rates for minority enrollment in higher education institutions during the 1970's. After an initial emphasis on student retention in the mid-1980's, the focus of much research shifted to minority students in higher education. The retention of black students in particular was specifically addressed (Lang, 2001). The focus was partially prompted by the publishing of Jacqueline Fleming's book titled *Blacks in College* (1985). Fleming examined the retention and attrition of black students at selected historically black and traditionally White institutions (Lang, 2001).

At a deeper level, certain seminal works have addressed the overall retention efforts for all groups of students in higher education. For example, Vincent Tinto's (1975) theoretical model on Dropout Behavior explained the interaction between the individual and the institution that led differing individuals to drop out from institutions of higher education. At the time of its release, the Tinto study provided a unique approach that explained dropout from institutions of higher education at an institutional level. In comparison, many of the prior approaches focused on the overall dropout in the system of higher education (Tinto, 1975).

Theoretical Models of Student Retention

Bean's Model of Student Attrition

The first framework discussed is J.P. Bean's model of student attrition (1980). Bean's model asserts that student interactions with the academic and social systems of an institution of higher education will influence the ability for him/her to be retained at the institution. Based on employee turnover in work organizations, Bean's model suggests that future student interactions and behaviors at an institution of higher education are rooted in several factors. These factors may include a student's previous high school experience, family support, financial standing and goals (Bean, 1980). Once enrolled in college, factors including grade point average, belonging to campus organizations, the value of the education and quality of the institution attended are all considered to determine if a student is satisfied with an institution of higher education. Overall, Bean's model suggests the level of satisfaction experienced by a student is expected to increase the student's level of institutional commitment (Bean, 1980). The interplay between the two

mentioned levels, ultimately plays a major role in a student's decision to stay in school or dropout (Bean, 1980).

Spady's Model of College Dropout Process

In his explanatory model of the college dropout process, Spady (1970) acknowledges the importance of social and academic integration areas on student persistence. In Spady's model, student background characteristics, entering aspirations, and pre-college experiences are areas that can influence both persistence/withdrawal decisions and the quality of the student experience with an institution's social and academic systems (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). In addition, Spady's model supports that each student enters college with a definite pattern of dispositions, interests, expectations, goals, and values shaped by such values as family background and high school experiences. Finally, Spady's model also suggests that a student's full integration into the common life of the college depends on successfully meeting the demands of both its social and academic systems (Spady, 1970).

Astin's Model of Student Involvement

Astin's model of student involvement (1984) stressed the importance of early, strong integration for students. In Astin's model, "student involvement" refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience (Seidman, 2005). For his model, Astin believes a highly involved student who devotes considerable energy to studying, participates in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students is more committed to the institution overall (Astin, 1984). Finally, Astin's model suggests anything that is done to enhance both a student's commitment to a goal and to

the institution they attend overall, should further enhance their social integration, academic

integration and ultimately promote their retention at a higher education institution (Seidman,

2005).

<div align="center">**Retention Initiatives Overview**</div>

Numerous initiatives have been created to retain students of color at higher education

institutions throughout the United States. These retention initiatives for students of color vary in

size, costs and desired goals. As confirmed in the literature review the depth and quality of

retention initiatives may also vary. Beyond the noted differences among retention initiatives,

many commonalities were also discovered through the literature review. One common area for

retention initiatives is found in programs. The different features of a few retention programs that

exist at higher education institutions in the United States are discussed in the following sections.

First, is the use of bridge programs. Bridge programs, which commonly take place in the

summer before a student's freshman year, typically incorporate different activities. Such

activities include the taking of academic courses by students, while encouraging them to learn

social and academic skills important in their transition to college (Sablan, 2014). In addition,

sessions on how to navigate the college environment, office locations and access to other college

resources may also be included in bridge programs (Sablan, 2014).

The use of mentoring programs in higher education is also highlighted. An example of a

mentor program may be to pair students with faculty or peers so they can connect, build a

relationship and ultimately have additional supports (Lang, 2001). Another area for student

retention initiatives discussed by Lang is learning communities. According to Tinto (2003),

learning communities may include co-registration or block scheduling that enables students to take courses together, rather than apart. Lang also argues that specialized counseling, advising, and academic skills programs could also be incorporated to meet the particular needs of students (Lang, 2001). Finally, Lang discusses the use of special services. Spanning a wide range of initiatives, special services including tutoring and peer counseling, may be fulfilled in an attempt to meet the special needs of students.

Minority Orientation Programs

Tinto (1982) believes successful student retention is linked to a successful first-year experience for college students. Overall, the first-year experience would include a successful integration a new student into the community of an institution. Similar to the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University, several higher education institutions hold an incoming student orientation prior to the beginning of classes. The format for incoming student orientations may vary. For example, the format may include a one-day summer registration event, or take place for two or three days before the beginning of classes for the Fall term week of welcome (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986; Tucker & Hemphill, 2018).

The basic goals of orientation programs are to familiarize students with administrative and academic regulations, make students aware of student organizations and activities, bring student services to their attention, and design academic programs and select courses for the Fall semester (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfle, 1986). Successful new student orientation programs also set the stage for academic success, foster students feeling valued and included, and connect students with their new campus community (Tucker & Hemphill, 2018).

Orientation programs may include several activities. An overview of the post-secondary

institution and the academic experience are typically included in orientation programs (Tucker &

Hemphill, 2018). Modeling campus values and traditions, meeting other students, faculty, staff

and also assuring students of their rights and responsibilities may also be incorporated into

orientation programs (National Association for Orientation, Transition, Retention in Higher

Education, 2014). Issues related to campus life, housing and dining, along with available support

services may also be featured in the new student orientation (National Orientation Directors

Association, 2014).

To assess the impact of an orientation program's ability to retain students, several studies

on orientation programs were incorporated into the literature review. A pre-college orientation

program's influence on both student persistence and withdrawal were studied by Pascarella,

Terenzini and Wolfle (1986). Using Vincent Tinto's causal model, responses from 763 freshmen

students were reviewed in the longitudinal study. The goals of the Pascarella, Terenzini &

Wolfle study were to increase student knowledge of the institution and to raise the awareness of

existing traditions. In an attempt to facilitate the participating student's integration into the

institution's social and academic systems, the pre-college orientation was selected as the

intervention for the study (Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986).

The primary hypothesis of the study by Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle assumed that

students attending the two-day orientation would develop higher levels of initial social

integration during college and subsequent commitment to the institution than students not

attending orientation. Study results confirmed the pre-college orientation had only a small direct

influence on student persistence, but as hypothesized, had substantial and significant positive effects on both the student's social integration during college and subsequent commitment to the institution attended. As a result of the study, Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle believe a student's initial ability to cope with a new set of social challenges in an unfamiliar environment was greatly enhanced through their participation in a pre-college orientation.

An example of a successful retention program in higher education for students of color is found at the University of Virginia (UVA) (Townsend, 1994). For this program, UVA graduated 71.5 percent of its African-American students from the Class of 1985 within six years - which at the time was among the highest rates in the nation for any state university. UVA's program, which engages students to participate before the arrival of their first year, managed to integrate key points of a successful retention effort into its atmosphere (Townsend, 1994). According to Townsend these included: financial aid, strong mentoring, faculty involvement, a proven institutional commitment, and a critical mass of students who participate. The financial commitment for UVA's program was substantial. In comparison to UVA's program, many minority retention programs are often left on the fringe of university budgets and institutional prestige, occupying low-rent space and employing junior people, without real commitment from the administration (Townsend, 1994).

Specific, additional areas of UVA's retention program that may be considered as influential components were also explained. First, new students at UVA learn right away why the school has one of the best reputations for graduating African-American students (Townsend, 1994). In advance of each freshman student's arrival to campus, at least three letters go out to

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welcome them and a picnic is organized for both incoming students and their parents after they arrive. During the first few weeks of the semester, students are also introduced and engaged into two orientation programs that coincide with UVA's retention program. One program serves to orient students, while the other seeks to honor their achievements after the first semester (Townsend, 1994).

Parental involvement is also present in UVA's retention program. An example of parental involvement is found through the program's parental advisory association, which oversees fundraising for student emergency loans (Townsend, 1994). To highlight the intimacy of UVA's program, M. Rick Turner, the former Dean of African-American Affairs at the University of Virginia, states "the program reinforces the feeling of critical mass, almost a tight-knight village at UVA" (Townsend, 1994).

Bridge Programs

Implemented at both 2-year and 4-year postsecondary institutions, bridge programs are routinely conducted to help students bridge the transition from secondary school to college. Bridge programs can serve as an academic "boot camp," providing reviews of basic math, writing or reading skills. Another focus of some bridge programs is study skills, planning, and other practice matters that entering students may underestimate or ignore (Douglas & Attewell, 2014). To date, such programs have been shown to improve retention, program completion of students and increase the level of performance for its participants (Wachen, Pretlow & Dixon, 2018; Cuseo, 1997).

An example of a bridge program is found in the University of North Carolina Academic Summer Bridge and Retention Program (UNC SB). Launched in 2008, UNC SB was implemented at a total of five campuses in the University of North Carolina system. The overall goal of UNC SB was to provide a rigorous summer experience for in-state, first-generation, underserved students requiring additional academic and social preparation in order to transition from high school to the university setting (Wachen, Pretlow & Dixon, 2018). To enhance their transition, participating students of UNC SB also had the following items paid for: tuition, books, room and board fees. Program students of UNC SB were also provided additional support services. Such services included tutoring, mentoring access to support labs, and counseling (Wachen, Pretlow & Dixon, 2018).

The University of Toledo (UT) conducts a summer bridge program. Launched in 2015, the aim of UT's program is to help freshmen minority students matriculate (Anderson, 2018). As a part of the program, students live on campus and take summer courses for six weeks. Students are required to take a social science course, english course and also participate in a math camp, which prepares them for collegiate level math. For the program's impact, preliminary results revealed that 77 percent of students who attended the program since its inception remained in school (Anderson, 2018).

Freshmen Year Programs

Freshman year programs designed specifically to help students in their transition to the postsecondary environment were noted in the literature review. Freshman year programs are incorporated at many institutions of higher education. Modeled after typical college courses, the

primary focus for FYS programs can include an attempt to enhance peer and mentor relationships along with academic skill building (Sidle & McReynolds, 2009). Freshman year programs are commonly labeled as a Freshman Year Seminar (FYS) or First Year Experience (FYE).

An example of a FYE is found at the University of South Carolina (USC). At USC, freshmen are encouraged to take a model seminar, University 101 (Townsend, 1994). USC's program also offers credit courses that focus on aligning new students to the expectations of the university and its setting. Sessions including: how to study, library skills, and normal adjustment techniques are provided to FYE students at USC. The results of USC's program are impressive: Black students had a higher sophomore retention rate than White students, with a mark of 87.2 percent at its peak, in every year from 1974 to 1992.

The potential effects of a Freshman Year Seminar (FYS) on student persistence were reviewed in a study by Jenkins-Guarnieri, Horne, Wallis, Rings and Vaughn (2015). The purpose of this study was to assess the potential roles of an FYS on the persistence and academic success of first-year, undergraduate students. Conducted at a medium-sized, public, four-year university in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States the study included 342 students (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015).

The Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., study revealed students who completed the FYS were significantly likely to remain enrolled into the following semester than were non-FYS participants. In addition, successful completion of the FYS program by students also revealed a

significant increase in their odds of being in good academic standing (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015).

Mentoring Programs

Utilized at higher education institutions, mentoring programs may significantly influence student retention. Mentoring programs can include different features. Features may include the establishment of a mentor program as either a formal or informal entity, and the incorporation or non-incorporation of faculty/staff (Lee, 1999). The role of participating stakeholders in mentoring programs may also vary. Defined as a trusted counselor or guide, tutor, or even a coach (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1988) mentors can play a pivotal role, in their support of students who are new to an institution of higher education. In many cases, the primary purpose of a peer mentoring program may be to create a sense of support for new students who may have a difficult time adjusting to the college environment (Brown, 2008).

An example of a successful peer-mentoring program is highlighted by Laden's study (1999) of first-generation Latino students. Conducted at a community college in the western region of the United States, Laden's study revealed that specific benefits were received by participants of a peer-mentoring program. Specific benefits including reduced confusion and help with culture shock as they transitioned into the institution were confirmed in the study. In another study by Sanchez, Bauer & Paronto (2006), students assigned to a peer mentoring group reported a higher level of satisfaction with their university experience in comparison to peers in a control group.

The influence of mentors on students of color was a focus of the literature review. Cervantes (1988) and Bandura (1982, 1989), support the importance of having mentors and mentees who share similar characteristics. They state, "having mentors who have successfully traversed the academic and racially and ethnically similar peers who are persisting in their education may create a sense of vicarious self-efficacy, or a belief in one's abilities to complete certain tasks to obtain a specific outcome (Cervantes 1988; Bandura 1982, 1989)."

Learning Communities

Learning communities are the final area that is included in the literature review. According to Zhao and Kuh (2004), learning communities can contribute to the core missions of institutions. Most learning communities incorporate active and collaborative learning activities that promote involvement in academic and social activities, that extend beyond the classroom. Through their participation in learning communities, Zhao and Kuh also support student learning is deeper, more personally relevant, and becomes a part of who they truly are as students.

The structure of learning communities including its scope and student targets can vary. Lenning and Ebbers (1999) provide four generic forms of learning communities:

1. Curricular learning communities are made up of students co-enrolled in two or more courses (often from different disciplines) that are linked by a common theme (Zhao & Kuh, 2004);

2. Classroom learning communities treat the classroom as the locus of community-building by featuring cooperative learning techniques and group process learning activities (Zhao & Kuh, 2004);

3. Residential learning communities organize on-campus living arrangements so that students taking two or more common courses live in close physical proximity, which increases the opportunities for out-of-class interactions and supplementary learning opportunities (Zhao & Kuh, 2004); and

4.   Student-type learning communities are designed for targeted groups, such as academically underprepared students, historically underrepresented students, honors students, students with disabilities, or students with similar academic interests, such as women in math, science, and engineering (Zhao & Kuh, 2004).

Vincent Tinto (2003) suggests almost all learning communities have three common features. The first commonality is *shared knowledge*. By requiring students to take courses together and organizing those courses around a theme, learning communities seek to construct a shared, coherent curricular experience. *Shared knowing* is the second commonality. Learning communities enroll the same students in several classes so they get to know each other quickly and fairly intimately in a way that is part and parcel of their academic experience. The final commonality of learning communities, *shared responsibility*, asks students to become responsible to each other in the process of trying to know (Tinto, 2003).

To assess the impact of learning communities, the relationships between participating in learning communities and student engagement were examined in a study by Zhao and Kuh (2004). The study included a total 80,479 randomly selected first-year and senior students from 365 four-year institutions. Results of the study indicated that student participation in a learning community is positively linked to their engagement in educational activities and their overall satisfaction with the college experience. The Zhao and Kuh study also suggest the lasting impact on students who participate in learning communities will differ based on their enrollment year. In particular, while the learning community experience may remain fairly strong for senior year students, Zhao and Kuh also suggest the effects are somewhat stronger for first-year students. (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). An additional study on learning communities by Shapiro and Levine

(1999), confirmed that student participants of learning communities were more engaged overall, had higher persistence rates, and achieved greater gains in their intellectual and social development, in comparison to peers who did not participate in learning communities.

Retention Initiatives Summary

A considerable amount of time is spent by authors, including Vincent Tinto, on features that are common in effective retention programs at institutions of higher education. Tinto (1990) offers three principles that underlie effective retention programs. First, Tinto believes institutions that are effective in student retention continually ask themselves how their actions serve to further the welfare of students. Secondly, Tinto implies effective retention is a commitment on the part of all members of the institution, faculty, staff, and administration, not just those few appointed staff whose job it is to focus on retention. Third, an effective retention program emphasizes the communal nature of an institution, including the importance of the educational, social, and academic areas in the learning process for students. A final feature of effective retention programs mentioned by Tinto is focused on constructing classroom settings and academic programs that actively engage and support students in the learning process (Tinto, 2003). Overall, Tinto believes student-centered institutions are in their everyday life tangibly different from those institutions which place student welfare second to other goals (Tinto, 1990).

Student Adjustment Areas

Academic Adjustments

The literature review revealed the criticalness of the relationship between a student's academic adjustment and his or her retention at institutions of higher education. Specific factors,

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such as motivation to learn, taking action to meet academic demands, having a clear sense of purpose, and general satisfaction with the academic environment are identified as important components in the academic adjustment of students (Baker & Siryk, 1984). In comparison to non-minority peers, the academic adjustments for students of color may include additional difficulties. To offset their challenges, Thompson and Fretz (1991) theorize that many successful minority students in higher education have learned to integrate into the "culture of competitive learning that characterizes the majority of academic environments."

Tinto (2005) theorizes there is mutual dependency between a student's academic adjustment and conditions for their success. Tinto states, students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that are committed to their success, hold high expectations for their success, and provide the needed supports. Tinto also mentions the need to assess students and provide them with frequent feedback about their performance. The need to involve students with their peers and other faculty in the learning process, is also emphasized by Tinto.

Overall, for students to achieve success, Tinto believes certain conditions must exist. First, Tinto states there is a need for institutional commitment. Institutions that are committed to the goal of increasing student success, especially among low-income and under-represented students, seem to find a way to achieve that end (Tinto, 2005). Included in the institutional commitment is a specific commitment and willingness from the leadership of an institution to invest resources to enhance student success (Tinto, 2005). The need to establish high expectations for enrolled students is the next condition offered by Tinto. Establishing high expectations for students is critical, as Tinto believes no student rises to low expectations. The

third condition mentioned by Tinto is focused on three types of student support: academic, social and student involvement.

Examples of academic support for students are found in the availability of developmental education courses, tutoring, study groups, and academic support programs (Tinto, 2005). One example, Project 100, an early alert/early intervention program is found at the University of Southern Maine. In Project 100, at-risk students who have unacceptable performances and/or attendance, are identified and assisted early in the semester by their advisors in an attempt for them to have a greater chance of success (Johnson, 2001).

The second type of student support addressed by Tinto for student success is social. Tinto acknowledges the availability of counseling, mentoring, and ethnic centers in particular, to enhance social support for students in higher education (Tinto, 2005). Student involvement as a condition of success is the final type of student support addressed by Tinto. Tinto suggests, the more students are academically and socially involved, they are likely to persist and graduate.

The ability for new students to adjust to the classroom setting of higher education and its impact on their overall academic adjustment is also confirmed in the literature review. Nowhere is involvement more important than in the classrooms of the campus, especially during the first year of college (Tinto, 2005). Tinto provides a few reasons that support the importance of the classroom setting. First, the classroom may be the only place students meet each other and the faculty. Second, the notion of learning as a common experience shared by all students in college, is another reason Tinto provides in support of the classroom setting (Tinto, 2005).

Social & Personal Adjustments

The social and personal adjustments of students at institutions of higher education was addressed in the literature review. Gerdes & Mallinckrodt (1994) stressed the need for students to socially integrate into their new higher education environments. Examples of social integration for students are their forming of support networks and managing their new social freedoms.

A study by Pappas & Loring (1985) focused on student personal adjustment and problems associated with it. According to Pappas & Loring, student issues such as psychological distress, anxiety issues, low self-esteem, or depression were provided as potential areas that could impact a student's personal adjustment to higher education.

An additional area of personal adjustment is found through the potential impact of a student's relationship between them and their family members, as a result of their transition into higher education. In particular, attachment issues may be relevant during the first year of college, a time when many freshmen live away from home for the first time (Berman & Sperling, 1991; Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980).

In a study on the home-leaving process, Sullivan and Sullivan (1980) compared 286 freshmen college students who left home to attend college with students who chose to live at home during their freshman year. The study assessed potential changes in the students' relationships with their parents as a result of entering college. In comparison to students who commuted, the study revealed that freshmen students who moved away from home exhibited

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increases across all family functioning indicators. These indicators included communication, affection, independence, and satisfaction (Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980).

Interactions between students and faculty, and its impact on student development were also studied in the literature review. In a study by Kuh and Hu (2001), which included 5,409 students from 126 colleges and universities throughout the United States, the character and impact of student-faculty interaction on student learning and personal development was assessed. The following areas were examined in the study: the nature of student-faculty interaction from the first year of college through senior year, the contribution of student-faculty interaction to student satisfaction during college, and the potential impact to student learning and satisfaction through different forms of contact between students and faculty (Kuh & Hu, 2001).

Results of the Kuh and Hu study were categorized by general findings and according to student ethnic groups. For general findings, the study confirmed that contact between students and faculty members increases during the four years of college. Next, Kuh and Hu revealed that effects of student-faculty interaction on students are conditional. Overall, the most frequent type of contact with faculty that students reported in the study was general contact. In contrast, the least frequent type of contact by students, was found in those that worked with faculty members on research projects (Kuh & Hu, 2001).

For findings based on student ethnic groups, Kuh and Hu confirmed that Asian American students reported less interaction with faculty, compared to White students. In addition, African American students had more interaction with faculty overall. Latino students had more contact with faculty members as it related to writing improvement in particular (Kuh & Hu, 2001).

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Social adjustments, based on institutional type were also incorporated in the literature review. The social adjustment and retention of students enrolled at two-year institutions as opposed to four-year institutions was a focus of a study by Pascarella, Smart & Ethington (1986). For the study, 825 students from 85 two-year institutions were followed for a nine-year period (Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, 1986).

To explain the long-term persistence/withdrawal behavior of students, Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, incorporated a model in their study, that was based on the work of Tinto (1975). Study results revealed two variables, academic and social integration, as most consistent and impactful on degree persistence and degree completion of students. The Pascarella, Smart & Ethington study also revealed students who initially enrolled in two-year institutions were significantly more likely either to obtain or persist in the pursuit of the bachelor's degree if they became successfully integrated into the academic and social systems of the last institution they attended (Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, 1986).

Adjustments By Student Race Groups

The literature review revealed commonalities in the inability for students of color, including such groups as American Indians, African American and Hispanic students to successfully integrate into the academic and social life of colleges (Seidman, 2005). According to Seidman, these commonalities include a lack of academic preparation, a lack of a critical mass of students with similar ethnic characteristics, and financial challenges.

To enhance my perspective as a researcher, studies that focused on student of color adjustment and racial categories were reviewed. Black students were the focus of an exploratory

study by D'Augelli & Hershberger (1993). D'Augelli & Hershberger compared the experiences of 146 African American students versus White students at a large, Predominantly White Institution. In an attempt to determine its impact on their overall academic success, differences in students' background characteristics and campus experiences were studied by D'Augelli & Hershberger.

Results of the D'Augelli & Hershberger study confirmed African American students' experiences on campus differed in comparison to White students in several areas. These differences were based on the personal backgrounds of students in particular. Overall, African American students viewed their Predominantly White University more negatively in comparison to their White peers. In addition, almost all the African American students in the study reported exposure to racist remarks. Most African American students also assumed they would be mistreated on campus as well (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993).

Next, Black commuter students were the topic of an exploratory study by Alford (2000). Alford's study attempted to understand, factors that affect the retention of Black commuter students. In particular, Alford studied methods that were used by students to balance factors, including home life, and relationships. Alford's study included interviews from fifteen students at two 4-year urban commuter colleges in the North Atlantic region of the United States. Overall, Alford's study confirmed there were no clear differences in student behavior or attitude regarding their social environments.

An additional study by Stoecker, Pascarella, and Wolfe (1988) identified factors that impact the persistence for African-American students. For African-American men in particular,

Stoecker, Pascarella, and Wolfe's study revealed that socioeconomic status and secondary school academic achievement had a direct effect on their persistence. For African-American females, factors such as selectivity, prestige of the institution, and college academic achievement had a direct effect on their persistence. In addition, Stoecker, Pascarella and Wolfe's study confirmed both race and gender influence student persistence for students of color.

A different perspective, with a focus on the Latino(a) student adjustment, was the focus of Hurtado, Carter and Spuler's (1996) study. The Hurtado et. al. study, which incorporated data from a national survey of 203 Latino attempted to understand, factors that affect the Latino student population and their adjustment to college. Individual attributes, college climate characteristics, student transitional experiences, and student behaviors were assessed in the Hurtado et al. study.

The Hurtado et al., study revealed significant climate-related stressors for Latino students. The existence discrimination and experiences of discrimination were also confirmed by Latino(a) students. When discrimination was experienced by Latino(a) students, the study revealed that a depressing effect between students and their feelings of attachment to the institution was created (Hurtado et al., 1996).

The perception of racial/ethnic tension and its impact on Latino(a) students was also addressed in the results of the Hurtado et al., study. A direct correlation for lower levels of personal-emotional adjustment, attachment to the institution, and adjustment in the Latino students, academic, and social areas were attributed to the perception of racial/ethnic tension. For the personal-emotional adjustment of Latino(a) students, Hurtado et al., confirmed a better

personal-emotional adjustment among students who had less difficulty separating from the family while also maintaining family relationships and support (Hurtado et al., 1996).

Important areas in the higher education setting that can potentially ease the adjustment for new students in higher education, were also forwarded by Hurtado et al. Upperclass student involvement with incoming students, the need for students to adjust to their new amounts of school work, the ability for students to manage resources, and the importance of structural diversity at a student's attending institution were suggestions given to potentially ease the adjustment for incoming students (Hurtado et al., 1996).

An additional perspective, with a focus on Mexican-American students was highlighted in Atinnasi's (1989) study. The ability for Mexican-American students to persist or not persist in the university setting was the focus of Atinnasi's study. Conducted at a large, public university in the Southwest region of the United States, Attinasi's study reviewed the perceptions of eighteen students from an entering freshman class. The experiences of participating students prior to, and during their freshman year was examined by Atinnasi.

The impact of "background" variables on the persistence of Mexican-American students was confirmed in Attinasi's study. Identified variables included high school curriculum, parents' education and parents' occupations for example. The impact of anticipatory socialization on college-going Mexican-American freshmen was also confirmed in Attinasi's findings. Defined by Attinasi, anticipatory socialization refers to a premature taking on or identification with the behavior and attitudes of an aspired group. Attinasi stressed the importance of anticipatory socialization on the overall student experience in several ways.

Attinasi suggests anticipatory socialization has the ability to influence a student's decision to go to college and ultimately stay enrolled. Finally, Attinasi believes a student's willingness to "stick it out" at a higher education institution may appear through socialization. To conclude the study, Attinasi identified groups such as family, teachers, and college peers and their ability to help students adjust socially (Attinasi, 1989).

Lastly, the perspectives of a small group of students, Native-Americans, who enrolled at institutions of higher education throughout the United States were reviewed in a study by Reyhner and Dodd (1995). Reyhner and Dodd specifically focused on the college retention and dropout of Native-American students. According to Reyhner and Dodd, the inability for Native American students to persist in college was rooted in several factors. These factors include: the large size of schools, the impersonal nature of education, passive teaching methods used in schools, and perceptions that teachers are not concerned about the success or failure of Native-American students (Reyhner & Dodd, 1995). Reyhner and Dodd's study also highlighted curriculum concerns for Native American students. In particular, Native-American students in higher education may view the curriculum as irrelevant, as they believe and conclude it is designed for mainstream Americans (Reyhner & Dodd, 1995).

Adjustments By Other Student Groups

First-generation minority students were among additional student groups examined in the literature review. The influence of personal motivation and social supports on minority first-generation college students were reviewed in a longitudinal study by Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco (2005). One hundred first-generation students enrolled at an urban commuter

university on the west coast of the United States were included in the study (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005). The Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco study revealed a connection between personal/career motivation to attend college and college outcomes among first-generation, minority college students.

Social adjustments of first-generation students were also addressed in the literature review. The literature review identified problematic areas for first-generation students as it relates to their social adjustment. First-generation students may be less equipped for college due to poor academic preparation from high school (Zalaquett, 1999), they are also likely to have unrealistic expectations about college (Brooks-Terry, 1988), and they may lack knowledge of the university system (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991).

In another area, perspectives between minority and non-minority groups of students along with potential differences in their adjustments were examined. Nora and Cabrera (1996) measured the potential impact, that perceived prejudice and discrimination played for the persistence of minority and non-minority students. Conducted at a major public, Predominantly White Institution located in the Midwest region of the United States, the Nora and Cabrera study included survey results from 831 students.

The Nora & Cabrera study identified assertions that could potentially influence the persistence of minority and non-minority student groups. There were four major categories of asertions: (a) the influential nature of academic preparedness within the persistence process; (b) the extent to which separation from family and community facilitates a successful transition to college; (c) the role of perceptions of prejudice on the adjustment to college environments and on

college-related outcomes; and (d) the extent to which existing models of college persistence are unique to non-minority students (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

For the first assertion, the Nora and Cabrera study revealed no support to the claim that academic preparedness exerts a stronger effect among minorities than it does among Whites (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). The second assertion indicates that student attachments to significant others are key for their successful transition to college. For the second assertion, Nora & Cabrera revealed that parental encouragement and support had positive effects on the integration of students into college in multiple ways. Positive effects were found in the academic and intellectual development of students, in their academic performance and in their commitments of completing a college degree, and to the institution they attended (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

The third assertion of the Nora & Cabrera study, with a focus on the perceptions of prejudice-discrimination of students, discussed two components. The first component asserts perceptions of prejudice and discrimination are present only among minority students. The second component suggests that exposure to a climate of prejudice and discrimination has an effect of lessening the adjustment for minority students in the academic and social realms of the institution (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Nora and Cabrera's study also confirmed both minority and non-minority students perceived a negative campus climate, viewed discriminatory attitudes held by faculty and staff, and reported racially oriented in-class experiences (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

Another important finding from Nora and Cabrera suggested that minority students have potentially become more accustomed to discriminatory acts on campuses. As a result, minority students have become more hardened to pressures that would otherwise push students away from

persisting in college as a result. For example, a discriminatory act experienced by a White college student may be a new experience to him or her. The impact from experiencing such an act may have a stronger effect on the persistence decision of a White college student as a result (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

Overall, the Nora and Cabrera study also confirmed twice as much variation for minority college students in the areas of goal commitment, academic experiences and social integration as compared to White college students. Finally, Nora and Cabrera suggested that experiences of racism and alienation were unique to the students they examined. Experiences of racism and alienation, also heightened their feelings of not belonging at the institution and compounded negative effects associated with other stressors (Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

Another perspective on the adjustments of minority and non-minority student groups was found in a study by Eimers and Pike (1997). Utilizing a model based on student persistence, sought to identify differences in student adjustments. A total of 799 freshmen at a residential, public research university in the Midwest region of the United States were included in the Eimers and Pike study.

Eimers and Pike revealed four findings in their study. First, academic integration played a key role as a contributing factor to the academic success of minority students. Second, the perceived quality for minority students had a significant effect on their intent to persist, in comparison to non-minority students. Third, although minority students generally perceived more discrimination than non-minority students, there were no differences in effects between the two student groups. Confirmation of encouragement from family and friends as an important

influence on minority and non-minority students' intention to persist in college was the fourth finding of the Eimers and Pike study (Eimers & Pike, 1997).

To expand on findings from the Eimers & Pike (1997) study, a study by Feenstra, Banyard, Rines & Hopkins (2001) addressed the impact of family and friends on student retention. Through surveying 139 first-semester student at a medium-sized university in the Northeast region of the United States, the impact of family structure and family conflict, among other variables were assessed. The Feenstra et. al, study revealed that family structure seemed to have no significant effect on the students' adjustment to college (Feenstra et al., 2001).

Conceptual Framework

A qualitative assessment will be conducted for the Minority Orientation Program. Fulfilled at a Predominantly White Institution of higher education, the Minority Orientation Program aims to increase the retention for its participating students of color. The chosen frameworks for my study are Vincent Tinto's Theory of Student Integration and Critical Race Theory. Features of the chosen frameworks and it's connection the study's conceptual framework are explained in the following section.

Tinto's Student Integration Theory

Published in 1975, Vincent Tinto's seminal article "Dropouts from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research" provided a theoretical framework that explained student leaving behavior in higher education (Seidman, 2005). Since its initial publication, Tinto's model, with its focus on student attrition from higher education, is one of the most widely accepted and emulated theoretical models (Seidman, 2005). For example, in 2004,

Braxton, Hirschy, and McLendon reported more than 775 citations to this theory (Braxton, Hirschy & McLendon, 2004).

Tinto's Student Integration Theory viewed colleges and universities as organizations composed of two interacting systems: an academic system and social system (Tinto, 1975). Tinto believes students who become fully integrated both socially and academically are more likely to be committed to the institution and committed to securing a college degree (Eimers & Pike, 1997).

For a student to become fully integrated, Tinto believes students must successfully navigate three stages: separation, transition and incorporation (Milem & Berger, 1997). The separation phase involves the student's ability to disassociate themselves to some degree from the norms of past communities, including families and high school friends, among others. In the transition phase, students have separated themselves from norms of their past lives but have not yet adopted the norms of their new environment. The final phase of incorporation, appears when students adopt the norms and behaviors of their higher education community (Milem & Berger, 1997).

Please find a model of Tinto's Student Integration Theory **(Figure 1)** as follows:

Figure 1

(Connolly, 2016)
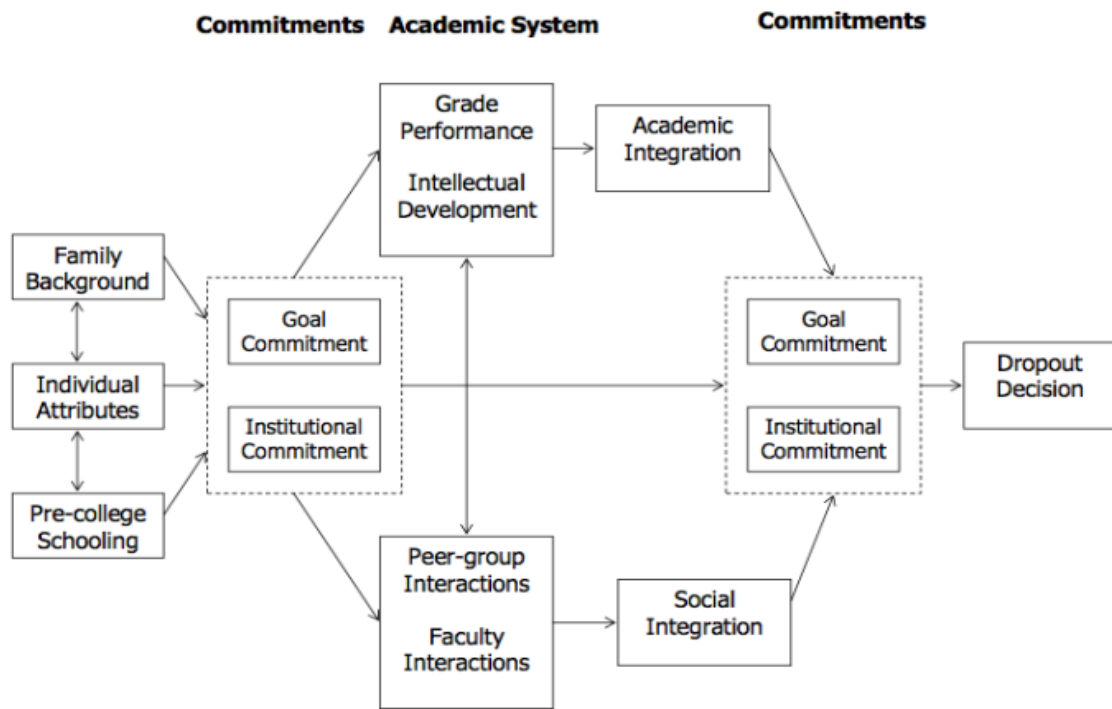
In Tinto's model, student integration into the academic system of the college directly affects the commitment to their goals. Furthermore, behaviors in a student's social system directly affects their commitment to the institution they attend (Tinto, 1975). In addition, Tinto's model suggest a student can achieve integration in one of the mentioned areas, without doing so in the other.

Tinto's model theorizes that students come to postsecondary institutions with a range of different background characteristics and secondary-school experiences (e.g., race; sex; family social, educational, and financial context; and secondary-school academic and social accomplishments). The background characteristics of students can impact their integration in multiple ways. Background characteristics influence not only the type of institution a student will attend, but will also impact how well the student will perform in college, how he or she will interact with, and subsequently become integrated into, the institution's social and academic systems (Pascarella et al., 1986; Tinto, 1975; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). Background characteristics can also determine a student's initial commitment to both, the institution they attend and the goal of graduation (Tinto, 1975). In Tinto's model, the goal of graduation is identified as the most influential factor for any enrolled student.

Tinto's model, supports that student integration is quantifiable. The model illustrates that a student's academic integration can be measured through grade performance and intellectual development (Tinto, 1975). In addition, the model supports that a student's social integration can be measured through their interactions in the college environment. According to Tinto, social integration for students occurs through informal peer group associations, semi-formal extracurricular activities, and interactions with faculty and administrative (Tinto, 1975).

While the impact of Tinto's work is documented, criticisms of his work have also surfaced. One of the criticisms for Tinto's Theory of Student Integration is the suggestion that important determinants of persistence/withdrawal behavior may not be specified (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). Another criticism is Tinto's heavy reliance on information from traditional

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students (Tierney, 1992). The model's focus on four-year, largely residential institutions (Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, 1986) and the model's confinement to studies of persistence/withdrawal behavior at single institutions over a relatively short period of time (Pascarella et al., 1986) are provided as additional criticisms of Tinto's work.

For a recent critique, Braxton, Doyle, Hartley III, Hirschy, Jones, & McLendon (2014), contended that an assessment of empirical backing should be applied to Tinto's theory. Implementing a revised theory of persistence in their study, Braxton et. al, found empirical support for student persistence in residential colleges and universities. In particular, five of the eight propositions, included in the revised theory of Braxton et. al. were supported in their study. Supported propositions included the student's level of psychological engagement and a positive influence between their perceptions of the commitment of the institution to student welfare, among others.

In response to concerns about his work and its applicability, Tinto addressed several aspects. First, Tinto supports his model may only be applicable to specific stages of the student process, such as separation, transition and incorporation, (Metz, 2004). Next, Tinto recognized that limited opportunities existed for two-year college students in his model (Metz, 2004). Finally, Tinto suggested the incorporation of institution specific studies as an alternative method to his work. In Tinto's opinion, the incorporation of institutions specific studies could provide better information about individual student outcomes (Metz, 2004).

Critical Race Theory

As referenced by Vincent Tinto, students arrive at higher education institutions with different characteristics. One of the different characteristics is race. Critical Race Theory (CRT), the second framework that will be utilized for this study, addresses race. Considered by many to be one of the most significant legal developments on issues of race and ethnicity since 1975, Critical Race Theory is committed to social justice and offers a liberating and transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Matsuda, 1991).

CRT originated through the work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. Bell and Freeman, sought to examine ways in which race, racism, and power continued to flourish in the years after the Civil Rights Movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The term CRT was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, a law school professor at UCLA and Columbia University (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Crenshaw and others believe CRT represents a racial analysis, intervention, and critique of traditional civil rights theory on one hand, and critical legal studies, on the other (Hilton, 2007).

CRT builds its validity through studying laws that support White authority and Black subordination. For its history, CRT theorists such as Delgado, Crenshaw and Bell previously concentrated on legal, constitutional and civil rights concerns. Presently, CRT theorists have shifted their focus on the associations between White power and law (Hilton, 2007).

Several tenets makeup Critical Race Theory:

1. CRT asserts racism is a normal and permanent feature in American society

(Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995). CRT also suggest the permanence of racism

controls the political, social, and economic realms of U.S. society. Racism is also

viewed as an inherent part of American civilization, privileging White individuals

over people of color in most areas of life, including education (DeCuir & Dixson,

2004; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

2. Race is a social construct. CRT suggests race is a category that society

    invents, manipulates or retires when convenient (Delgado, 2001). Racial

    categories also are not bound to any biological or genetic realities, but instead are

    given pseudo-permanent characteristics by society (Delgado, 2001) .

3. CRT utilizes storytelling. CRT asserts the voices of the dispossessed

    and marginalized group members in society are mute. CRT uses the role of

    "voice" to bring additional power to legal discourses of racial justice. (Ladson-

    Billings, 1998). In CRT, the "voice," can be found through stories of those who

    are oppressed, which are considered important to truly understanding their

    experiences. Delgado (1990) also supports storytelling from people of color is

    critical, as they speak from experience that is framed by racism. CRT supports

    that a common structure, warranting the term "voice", is found through the

    sharing of stories from people of color.

4. CRT has a critique on liberalism, which stems from the ideas of

color blindness, the neutrality of the law, and equal opportunity for all (DeCuir &

Dixson, 2004). CRT argues that racism requires sweeping changes but liberalism

has no mechanism for such a change.

5. CRT recognizes interest-convergence. The interests of the

oppressed are addressed only when they converge with the interests of the

dominant group (i.e. Whites) (Bell, 1980).

6. CRT acknowledges White individuals as the primary beneficiaries of

civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy,

2006). Although under constant attack, as a benefit for people of color, research

shows that the major recipients of civil rights legislation have been White women

(Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The incorporation of Critical Race Theory into this study is significant. Through its

utilization, CRT may provide insights into the influence, potential impacts and specific issues

that are faced by participating students of color in the Minority Orientation Program at North

Spirit University.

Centered in Tinto's Student Integration Theory, the conceptual framework **(Figure 2)** for

this study is displayed as follows:
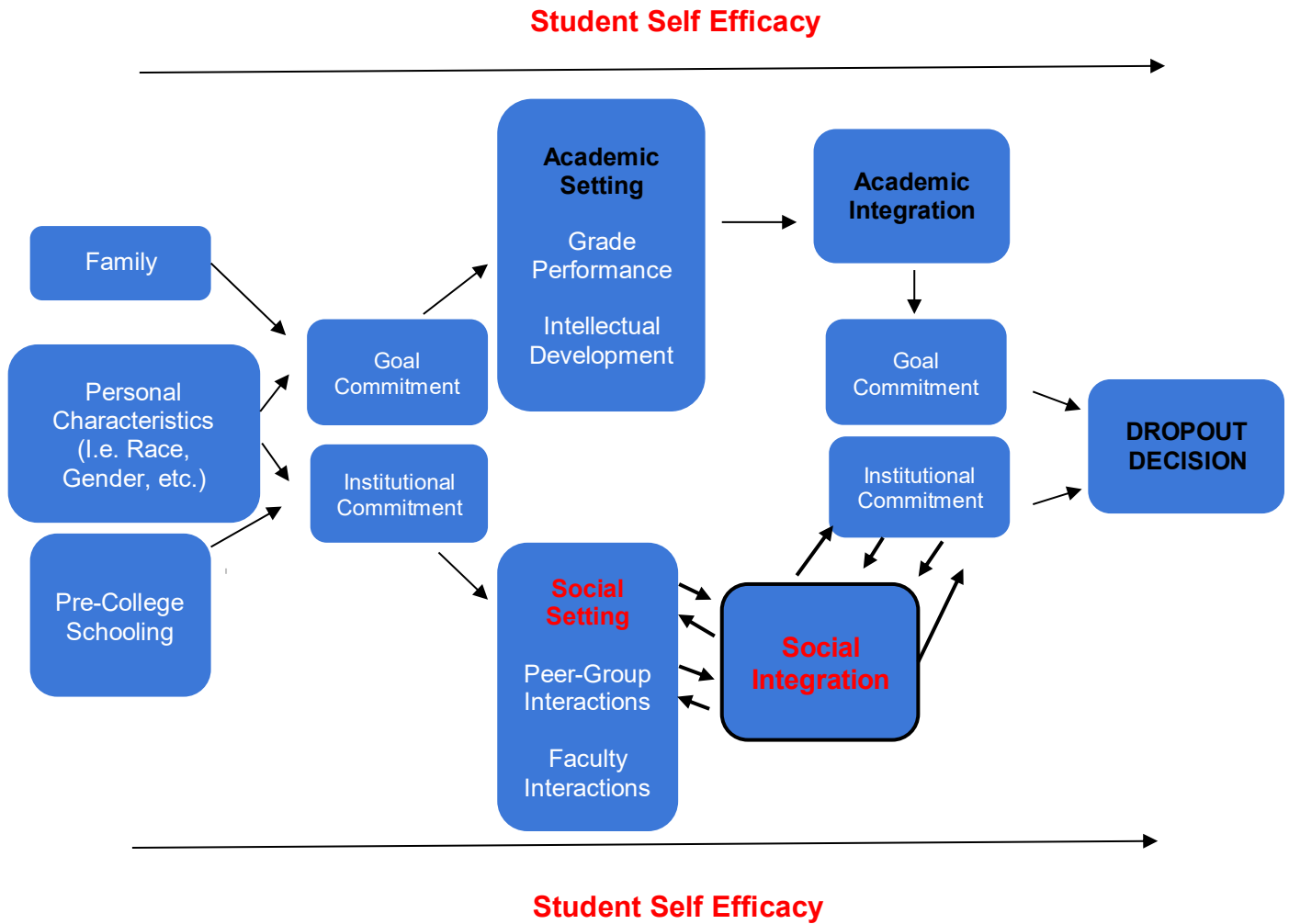
Student Self Efficacy

Figure 2

As the primary researcher for this study, I disagree with several areas of Tinto's model.

First, I disagree with Tinto's broad definition of social integration. In agreement with Tierney

(1992), who also believes Tinto's theory is also too broad in its treatment of social integration, it

is suggested that Tinto may possess a limited understanding and appreciation of the minority

element present in American higher education. Tinto may also not understand that minority

student groups tend to be alienated by the mainstream identity (Tierney, 1992).

In my opinion, the issues that students of color encounter in their social integration may

be unique and critical. For example, the adjustment to higher education for African-American

students may be different as a result of their lived experiences, prior to their enrollment. The

lived experiences for students of color may include times of isolation, issues with racism and

negative experiences directly attributed to their race, gender, sexual identity or socioeconomic

status, for example.

As referenced in the study's conceptual model **(Figure 2)**, the interactions for students of

color in their social setting including interactions with peers and faculty members is a crucial

part in their social integration. I also believe the interactions for students of color in their social

setting can, for better or worse, impact their commitment to the institution they attend. Overall, I

believe the outcome for a student of color's interactions in their social setting, has more impact

than Tinto attributes in his model.

Tinto's lack of acknowledgement for student self-efficacy is another area with which I

disagree. Self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce

designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives

(Bandura, 1994). According to Bandura, efficacy beliefs also influence how people feel, think,

motivate themselves, and ultimately behave. In Tinto's model, a student of color's approach and

response to adversity they encounter in the higher education setting is not clearly acknowledged.

As referenced in the study's conceptual model **(Figure 2)**, the self-efficacy for students of color is active during all phases of their enrollment in higher education. Such experiences at a PWI including isolation in the classroom and decreased odds of graduating based on race may resonate differently with students of color. The ability for students of color to influence their predicament through self-efficacy, may play a major role in their attempt to complete their respective degrees.

Overall, Vincent Tinto's Student Theory of Student Integration and its usefulness in addressing student retention is highlighted in many empirical studies. In an attempt to understand the wide array of factors, and the decision-making processes that influence retention of students in higher education, Tinto's theory and model can potentially serve as a useful framework.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively assess the Minority Orientation Program's impact on participating students of color at North Spirit University and the program's influence on their enrollment through the completion of their freshman year. In this chapter, the position of the researcher is discussed, the purpose of the study is provided, and the research questions for the study are stated. Next, a description of the study's research site is provided and the criteria for participant selection is provided. The data collection process and interview format are also highlighted in this chapter. Finally, the data analysis process and confidentiality measures implemented for the study are provided to conclude the chapter.

Researcher Positionality

For any qualitative study there is a need to discuss how the position of the researcher influences data collection, analysis, and interpretations (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). For this study, my role as an African-American, senior administrator in higher education directly connects me to students of color who participate in the Minority Orientation Program. Additionally, through my involvement in scholarship fundraising, assisting with job and internship placement, and by serving on several university retention committees, I am deeply ingrained in the development for students of color.

Through earning my undergraduate and graduate degrees from a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education, I personally encountered challenges in my ability to

acclimate to the higher education setting and in my development as a college student.

Challenges including family trauma and financial instability, directly threatened my ability to

complete an undergraduate degree. Furthermore, through participating directly in retention

initiatives that focused on freshmen students, I have familiarity with programs and services that

aim to acclimate and ultimately retain students in a higher education setting.

The following potential biases are noted in my role as the researcher. The first potential

bias, is my personal engagement with the Minority Orientation Program. As previously

mentioned, I am actively engaged with critical aspects of the Minority Orientation Program.

These aspects include but are not limited to student/family outreach, selection of student leaders,

and mentoring program students. It is conceivable that my personal experience could alter my

interpretation of the study's findings.

An additional bias I have is found in the overall knowledge and personal experience I

have as a senior administrator at a private, 4-year PWI. I have frequently witnessed the

misrepresentation or underrepresentation of students of color in the institutional setting. An

example of misrepresentation includes the reliance on students of color to share their experience

for wider audiences through interviews and media materials. An example of underrepresentation

for students of color appears in the tendency of professors to target them to share their collegiate

or personal experiences in front of non-minority classmates. Also, the limited amount of time

and attention given by university officials to raise awareness about critical resources and

additional supports for students of color is concerning. Such resources, including financial

assistance may be critical in the ability for students of color to complete their degrees respectively.

My exposure to areas including university budgets, student recruitment procedures, and retention strategies could also alter the interpretation of the study's findings. Through having personal access to funding streams, maintaining relationships with philanthropic entities, and assessing recruitment strategies for students of color, I am directly exposed to the multiple areas of a higher education institution that impact the retention for students of color.

Rationale for Methodology

For several reasons, qualitative research will be used for this study. First, the qualitative approach can produce a detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences (Denzin, 1989). As opposed to the broad approach of quantitative research, the qualitative approach will allow me to extract critical thoughts, and experiences from stakeholders of the Minority Orientation Program. Also, the qualitative approach allows researchers, such as myself, to discover the participants' inner experience and to figure out how meanings are shaped through the culture of which they are a part (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition to capturing stakeholder data for this study, the qualitative approach will help me assess the surrounding culture of the institution and its impact on the Minority Orientation Program stakeholders.

The qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews will also provide the opportunity for me to interact directly with Minority Orientation Program stakeholders. While the data collection will be subjective and detailed, the face-to-face interactions between myself and each stakeholder will enable me to note feelings, perceptions, and views about the Minority

Orientation Program that may not be captured through a quantitative approach. For this study, the qualitative approach provides the ability for a researcher to review earlier stages of research, and, if necessary, change the direction of the study or research questions (Willig, 2013). As a result, the flexible structure of the qualitative approach will provide an opportunity for me to work between the data and analysis as needed.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively assess the Minority Orientation Program's impact on participating students of color at North Spirit University and the program's influence on their enrollment through the completion of their freshman year. The following research questions will serve as a formal guide to gaining more insight into the effectiveness of the Minority Orientation Program:

- How does the Minority Orientation Program affect the collegiate experience of students of color?

- In what ways can student participants of the Minority Orientation Program connect their ability to advance in the completion of their degree at the university to their participation in the program?

Site Selection

North Spirit University, is a private, medium-sized, four-year university located in the northeast region of the United States. The institution's primary goal is to provide a well-rounded education that will challenge students academically while nourishing their spiritual and ethical development. During the Fall 2017 semester, North Spirit University had a total student

enrollment between 8,000 and 10,000 students. The composition of the total student population included these general numbers: White (78 %), African-American (5 %), Hispanic American (3 %), Asian American (2 %), and American Indian/Alaskan Native and Pacific Islander combined for under 1 % (North Spirit University Factbook, 2018). The one-year retention rate for students who entered in 2017 was over 85 %. The six-year graduation rate for students who entered in 2010 was over 75 % (North Spirit University Factbook, 2017).

North Spirit University will serve as an ideal study site. The site will provide direct access to students who qualify for the study and also has multiple venues to confidentially interview them.

Participant Selection

Program stakeholders including four participating students, four student parents, four upperclass student leaders and a staff member from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at North Spirit University will be selected for study interviews. Study participants will be chosen based on their direct involvement (i.e. planning events, student outreach, etc.) and experiences as a result of participating in the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University. The number of participants will be chosen to solicit diverse responses for the data collection process. The sample size of participants will be chosen to solicit representation from the student, parent and professional stakeholder categories. Each category may possess a unique perspective of the Minority Orientation Program in terms of their engagement, observations and their overall experience. Study participants will be solicited through several methods of outreach (i.e. e-mails, social media, flyers, etc.).

To qualify for the study, participating student and student parent stakeholders must fulfill one of the following criteria:

- Previously confirmed by Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff members as a first-time enrolled, full-time status student at North Spirit University, who physically attended and participated in the Minority Orientation Program

- Previously confirmed by Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff members as a family member of a first-time enrolled, full-time status student at North Spirit University, who participated in the Minority Orientation Program

- Self-Identify from one of the following groups: Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian-American, Black (African-American), Hispanic/Latino(a), Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

- Possess citizenship in the United States

To qualify for the study, upperclass leaders and staff members must fulfill one of the following criteria:

- Previously confirmed by Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff members as an office employee or designated upperclass leader for the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University

- Previously confirmed by Office of Diversity and Inclusion staff members at North Spirit University as a member with direct involvement in the Minority Orientation Program

- Self-Identify from one of the following groups: Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian-American, Black (African-American), Hispanic/Latino(a), Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander

- Possess citizenship in the United States

DATA COLLECTION

In the section, I will explain the data collection methods that are used in my study. The methods include the use of grounded theory, critical race theory and student integration theory approaches for stakeholder interviews. The semi-structured interviews and coding process, both based in grounded theory, will also be explained in this section.

For my study, a qualitative approach will be used. The qualitative approach will provide an opportunity for myself as the researcher, to retrieve critical opinions and perspectives from Minority Orientation Program stakeholders.

Grounded Theory Approach for Stakeholder Interviews

A grounded theory approach will be used as the qualitative measure for the semi-structured interviews of Minority Orientation Program stakeholders. Minority Orientation Program stakeholders including four participating students, four student parents, four upperclass student leaders and a staff member from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion will be interviewed for my study.

The objectives and benefits of using a grounded theory approach are well documented. The primary objective of a study utilizing the grounded theory approach is to construct a theory grounded in the views and experiences of the participants in the study (Hendricks, Smith, Caplow & Donaldson, 1996). For researchers, the grounded theory approach also encourages us to attend to what we hear, see, and sense while gathering data (Charmaz, 2014). A grounded theory approach also encourages the researcher to continuously review earlier stages of the research, and if necessary, to change direction (Willig, 2013). For analysis, a grounded theory also provides guidelines on how to identify categories (coding), how to make links between categories and how to establish relationships between them (Willig, 2013).

Overall, the grounded theory method itself is open-ended and relies on emergent processes (Charmaz, 2014). Ultimately, grounded theory supports that "we are a part of the world we study, the data we collect, and the analyses we produce" and that "we *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices" (Charmaz, 2014).

Critical Race Theory Approach for Stakeholder Interviews

Critical Race Theory (CRT), which emphasizes race and discrimination are social constructs which are used to assert power and maintain subordination (Brown, 2008), is an approach that will be used during stakeholder interviews for my study. Through a CRT approach, the narratives of individuals with a direct association to the Minority Orientation Program will be captured. Study participants include four participating students, four student parents, four upperclass student leaders and a staff member from the Office of Diversity and

Inclusion. As a reminder, the number and sample size of participants will be chosen to solicit diverse responses for the data collection process. Each stakeholder category may possess a unique perspective of the Minority Orientation Program in terms of their engagement, observations and their overall experience.

One of the major principles of CRT is that storytelling from people of color is critical, as they speak from experience that is framed by racism (Delgado, 1990). In addition, Ladson-Billings (1999) also theorizes the experiences of people's narratives, can represent confirmation of the way the society works as well. By utilizing CRT as an approach for my study, stakeholder stories in particular, can provide great context for understanding, feeling and interpreting thoughts on the Minority Orientation Program. Ultimately, the Minority Orientation Program with its focus on students of color and CRT's approach with a focus on race, may reveal unique viewpoints and experiences from stakeholders that provide profound insights.

Student Integration Theory Approach for Stakeholder Interviews

Vincent Tinto's Student Integration Theory will be also utilized during stakeholder interviews. Tinto's theory views colleges and universities as organizations composed of two interacting systems: an academic system and social system (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's theory supports that students who become fully integrated both socially and academically are more likely to be committed to the institution and committed to securing a college degree (Eimers & Pike, 1997). Additionally, Tinto's theory also mentions that as students enter a campus environment, they begin to interact with that environment. In entering a new, campus

environment, students encounter new values, attitudes, behaviors, and explore new experiences (Milem & Berger, 1997).

The use of Vincent Tinto's Student Integration Model and its impact is highlighted in many empirical studies on student persistence throughout the world (Seidman, 2005). Tinto's model is a potentially useful framework for understanding the process of student persistence/withdrawal decisions in postsecondary education.

Semi-Structured Interview Format

The semi-structured interview (SSI), a research method used to discover information about a certain experience from participants, will be utilized for my study (Buckley, 2017). The SSI format includes the use of a prepared set of open-ended, non-judgmental questions. The semi-structured interview also maintains a conversational style in which the interviewer probes the respondent and is free to ask questions in a different order for all respondents (McDougal, 2014).

For my study, thirteen stakeholders of the Minority Orientation Program will be asked to participate in the interview process. The identified stakeholders will be four participating students, four student parents, four upperclass student leaders and a staff member from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at North Spirit University. The number and sample size of participants will be chosen to solicit diverse responses for the data collection process. Each stakeholder category may also possess a unique perspective of the Minority Orientation Program in terms of their engagement, observations and their overall experience.

The are many benefits received from using the SSI format. In particular, the SSI format allows the researcher to ask additional sub-questions and develop new questions based on the responses of the interviewees (McDougal, 2014). This feature of the SSI format can aid my efforts as the researcher, to gain essential information from Minority Orientation Program stakeholders. For my study, the semi-structured interviews will be fulfilled on scheduled dates in Spring 2019. The individual interviews will be held in a setting that is comfortable and confidential for stakeholders. Pseudonyms will be incorporated to protect the identity of the interviewed stakeholders.

DATA ANALYSIS

Grounded Theory Coding

Situated in grounded theory, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to collect data from stakeholders who were associated with the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University. The collected data from my study will be coded. Coding, "involves translating or reducing data into categories based on patterns or themes" (McDougal, 2014). Acknowledged by Charmaz (2014) as a flexible process, grounded theory coding encourages researchers to return to the data and make new coding throughout the process, if needed. Charmaz also views grounded theory coding as a powerful tool that can enable a researcher to define what constitutes the data and to make implicit views, actions and processes more visible (Charmaz, 2014).

For my study, I will collect data through an interview process, place the data into categories through the coding process and create a narrative written in qualitative form. The written narrative will reveal the study's findings. My study's findings may be considered

relevant, if they align to McMillan and Wergin (2010). McMillan and Wergin state study findings, "are considered plausible if the specific descriptive themes are supported by textual evidence." McMillan and Wergin also state that study's findings are "considered illuminating if they provide the reader with a new and revealing understanding of the phenomenon as lived/described by participants" (McMillan & Wergin, 2010).

The audiotapes from Minority Orientation Program stakeholder interviews will be transcribed verbatim through a third-party provider. Each interview transcript will be analyzed and categorized based on themes. Pieces of the stakeholders' responses that imply significant meaning will also identified. The need for additional stakeholders in my study will be based on the emergence of potential themes. If no themes emerge, additional stakeholders will not be incorporated into my study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Informed Consent Procedures

The individual interviews for Minority Orientation Program stakeholders will be conducted on scheduled dates in Spring 2019. Each individual interview is scheduled to last between 30 and 45 minutes. The interview structure and allotted time are conducive for my study, based on the small number of interview questions and the need to be consistent in the giving of time for interviews at that point of my study. Prior to each interview, all procedures and documentation will be explained to the participating stakeholder. To start, each stakeholder

will be advised this study is being conducted as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an Educational Doctorate Degree in the School of Education at North Spirit University. After the explanation of procedures, if they are willing to proceed in the semi-structured interview process, each stakeholder will be prompted to give a verbal agreement if they are willing to proceed in the semi-structured interview process.

Next, the purpose of the study, interview intent, confidentiality, and institutional and federal regulations related to researching human subjects will be explained to each participating stakeholder. The consent to participate form **(Appendix A)** will also be reviewed with each stakeholder.

Prior to conducting each interview, a verbal authorization to record the interview will be granted by each stakeholder and recorded. As the researcher, I will ask guiding questions to each stakeholder in an attempt to assess the Minority Orientation Program's effectiveness on the students of color it aims to serve **(Appendix B)**. The questions will not provide any psychological, emotional, or physical harm to the stakeholders. There will be no additional requests that are asked of the stakeholders. Also, there will be no compensation for participation in the study. Stakeholders will not have to pay to participate in the study as well.

Using a digital recording device, the audio of each interview will be recorded. The audiotapes from the interviews will be transcribed verbatim through a third-party provider. In addition to the audiotapes, the researcher will take notes prior to, during, and after the SSIs are completed. All written and electronic forms of consent from stakeholders, along with audio recordings, will be placed in a secured location. Any materials with personal identification will

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be stored for three years after the completion of the study and then destroyed. All audio tapes including the verbal authorizations and semi-structured interviews of stakeholders will be destroyed after the dissertation has been approved.

The stakeholders will be under no obligation to participate in the study. Each stakeholder will be free to rescind their permission to participate in the interview process at any time, by speaking directly with the researcher. A summary of research results will be provided to them upon request at no cost. After the signing of the consent to participate form **(Appendix A)**, the stakeholders will be provided with the personal contact information and email of the researcher. If they have questions regarding the protection of human subject issues, they will be instructed to contact the Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at North Spirit University.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to qualitatively assess the Minority Orientation Program's impact on participating students of color at North Spirit University and the program's influence on their enrollment through the completion of their freshman year. The primary research questions that directed this study were: 1) How does the Minority Orientation Program affect the collegiate experience for students of color? 2) In what ways can student participants of the Minority Orientation Program connect their ability to advance in the completion of their degree at the university to their participation in the program?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I conducted thirteen interviews with stakeholders of the Minority Orientation Program, including participating students, upperclass student leaders, participating student parents, and a professional staff member. A profile of each program stakeholder along with perceptions of their experiences with the Minority Orientation Program is included in this chapter. As a result of my research on the stakeholder experience, three major themes emerged: (1) Releasing the Pressure, (2) Following in Footsteps, and (3) Out of the Woods.

Overall, the selected themes confirm an ability for the Minority Orientation Program to engage and assist students of color with their transition into a new higher education setting. Confirmed by stakeholders, the Minority Orientation Program provides a safe and supportive environment that contributes to student growth. In addition, the program environment

also provides the opportunity for stakeholders to develop relationships. Finally, the impact of

leadership with frequent recognition of the program's strong and dynamic upperclass student

leaders was also confirmed by stakeholders.

Stakeholder Profiles

This section provides an overview of the stakeholder demographics for this

study. Stakeholder demographics include age, race, affiliation to the program, year in school,

and academic major. Pseudonyms are being utilized in place of stakeholder names to protect the

confidentiality and anonymity of the study's participants.

Participating Students

Sarah

Sarah is an 18-year old female student in her sophomore year at North Spirit

University. Sarah provided her race as Asian-American. A Business Management major, Sarah

experienced the Minority Orientation Program as a participating student in the Fall 2018

semester. Sarah confirmed her experience with the Minority Orientation Program as, "one of the

best things I have experienced at North Spirit University." Sarah offered that she quickly noticed

the program leaders and their "eagerness to help her advance in any way."

Sarah attended a public school that was filled with non-minority students from middle

and high socioeconomic backgrounds. Sarah stated her class size was around 90 students and

that, "her and her sister were the only ones that had any diversity" in her high school. With an

ancestry from East Asia, Sarah mentioned that she was adopted by another family at an early

age. As a result, Sarah suggested she missed out on certain aspects in her upbringing before she

arrived at North Spirit University. In particular, she realized she had "no cultural experience" with her ancestry. Sarah also noted she was, "excited to meet students from other backgrounds," as she had little interactions with other students of color previously.

For her higher education career, Sarah suggested she had a certain image of what her experience at North Spirit University should be. Among all stakeholders, Sarah appeared to have the highest amount of self-imposed pressure. When it came to fulfilling the desired expectations of her university experience, including achieving academic success and developing friendships with her peers, Sarah had high expectations. In addition, Sarah suggested that she was always trying to make the things she participated in better, had a strong passion for helping others, and did not want to miss any opportunities in her growth and development overall.

Robert

Robert is a 21-year old male student in his senior year at North Spirit University. Robert provided his race was African American. A Digital Media Arts major, Robert was a participating student of the Minority Orientation Program in the Fall 2017 semester. Robert also served as an upperclass student leader for the program in the Fall 2018 and Fall 2019 semesters. Due to specific concerns about his background, Robert seemed a bit surprised that he ended up at North Spirit University.

Robert was accepted to North Spirit University through a conditional acceptance program that was offered by another office. With a focus on academics, Robert stated the conditional acceptance program, "was for students who were coming in with some type of struggle." The conditional acceptance program, which took place before the Minority Orientation Program,

included taking preliminary courses and learning study skills, among other things. In comparison to the conditional acceptance program, Robert acknowledged the Minority Orientation Program was "more formal and very engaging."

For his background, Robert attended a charter school, where 90% of his peers were students of color. Robert admitted he had major issues with developing relationships in high school. Coming from a low socioeconomic status, Robert suggested that he and his family also navigated financial issues during his upbringing. The family dynamics of Robert including a lack of connectivity with his father and other siblings, were also referenced.

Overall, due to his family dynamics and the need for certain supports, Robert suggested there was a dependency on the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at North Spirit University to provide him with guidance and encouragement. Robert emphasized the financial support in particular. He stated, "I definitely was worried about my financial stability and even small things, like paying for books."

Robert also implied there was a high degree of mutual trust between him and the professional staff members in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. To illustrate this relationship, Robert offered, "it was very comforting for me to know that I had that support system in place through the office." Robert, who visits the office daily to interact with his peers and staff members, also expressed his gratitude to certain personnel in the office for their help and feedback.

Mary

Mary is a 19-year old female student in her sophomore year at North Spirit University. Mary confirmed her race as African American. A Supply Chain Management major, Mary was a student participant for the Minority Orientation Program in the Fall 2018 semester. Prior to her engagement with the program, Mary suggested she did not believe the program would benefit her outside of networking opportunities. Mary admitted she was, "very reluctant to attend the program." Mary also suggested she had a high degree of independence and took great pride in finding solutions on her own.

For her background, Mary attended a widely respected private school that was filled with peers from high socioeconomic backgrounds. Mary's background suggested she had been afforded great opportunities in terms of her cultural experiences, peer engagement, and her ability to travel around the country. In addition, Mary implied she had many experiences with development programs that aimed to enhance her leadership and overall mindset.

Mary's connection to the North Spirit University was strong. She frequently visited campus prior to her enrollment, interacted with past graduates, and had relationships with a few enrolled students. For her experience, Mary discussed what she learned and how the Minority Orientation Program made her feel overall:

> It showed me there are resources and there is a community of people that I can talk to if I have any issues come out. I'm not gonna lie, it makes me feel special. It was special because someone actually took the time to make sure that I feel comfortable moving into school.

Keith

Keith is a 20-year old male student in his junior year at North Spirit University. Keith provided his race as African American. A Business Management major, Keith was a student participant for the Minority Orientation Program in the Fall 2018 semester. Keith arrived at North Spirit University, from a public school in an urban area that consisted of non-majority students from the middle socioeconomic class.

Based on having a parent who was previously active in the military, Keith suggested that he was raised in a household that was highly structured. Furthermore, through mentioning parts of the Minority Orientation Program, including his likes and dislikes, Keith also appeared to be structured in his approach and outlook. Keith suggested that his involvement with the Minority Orientation Program allowed him to relax in terms of developing relationships with "like minded peers, who were committed to achieving their goals."

Overall, Keith, in comparison to his peers, appeared to be guarded and selective in his responses during the interview process. Keith also did not seem to reflect on the potential impact, if any, that he received as a result of participating in the Minority Orientation Program. Keith did however, suggest he was aware of his surroundings and the interactions of his peers during his involvement with the program. Keith provided great details about the actions of other stakeholders during and after the program's conclusion.

Keith ultimately admitted that he found comfort in the university community through his participation in the Minority Orientation Program. Since his initial involvement with the

program, Keith mentioned he frequently visits the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. He stated, "It's a place I can go, where I feel comfortable and can relate to people."

Upperclass Student Leaders

Leah

Leah is a 21-year old female student in her fifth-year at North Spirit University. Acknowledging her family's race was from East Africa, Leah provided she is African American. A Pharmacy major, Leah served as an upperclass student leader for the Minority Orientation Program in the Fall 2017 and Fall 2018 semesters. A resident from another state, Leah highlighted the program's ability to orient her to new surroundings. Specifically, the program, "helped her understand where everything was prior to the rest of the students coming to campus."

For her background, Leah attended a high school that was highly diverse in terms of student background, race and socioeconomic status. Leah, a highly engaged student in high school, was a member of several student organizations and also held a few student leadership positions. For her family dynamics, Leah implied that her parents, through their high expectations, provided constant pressure on her. Through her family's influence, a connection between Leah's desire to pursue a rigorous major and the need to achieve success in the classroom was also implied.

Overall, Leah's involvement in the university community, inferred she was connected with a wide variety of students and professional staff members. From experiences such as traveling abroad, through receiving recognition for her community and mentoring efforts and

through her documented leadership with diverse student organizations, it appeared Leah was both overwhelmed and appreciative for her involvement in and around the university community.

The combination of extracurricular activities coupled with her academic pursuits, seemed to create both a dilemma and a heavy burden on Leah overall. Leah's dilemma involved her potential overcommitment to extracurricular activities versus her need to ensure success in the classroom. Leah suggested she found reprieve from her stress however, by frequently visiting with peers and the professional staff in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Cynthia

Cynthia is a 21-year old female student in her fourth year at North Spirit University. Also a Pharmacy major, Cynthia served as an upperclass student leader for the Minority Orientation Program in the Fall 2017 and Fall 2018 semesters. Cynthia provided she is African American.

For her background, Cynthia referenced the diversity that encompassed her high school experience. Born and raised in a metropolitan area, Cynthia was exposed to several different cultures and socioeconomic classes as a youth. Essentially, Cynthia suggested that diversity was interwoven in all facets of her life, prior to enrolling in North Spirit University. Through describing her family's ancestry, with its origins in East Africa, Cynthia also suggested there was a connection between her family's history, her upbringing and her diverse outlook on life.

For her experience with the Minority Orientation Program, Cynthia implied she initially had self-doubts about her ability to lead. Cynthia also suggested that she had a dependency to lean on her peers, in order to fulfill her abilities to lead during the early stages of her leadership. Cynthia discussed her evolution with the program. By alluding to what she learned and how she felt as a leader, Cynthia ultimately suggested she found a fit with the program. Of all the stakeholders, Cynthia exduded the most pride for her role in the program and for its ability to support others. She states:

> Having students come in a smaller set makes them feel comfortable. They don't become lost, they feel connected with the office, the people that work here. We let them know we are in support of them for whatever they need.

Jessica

Jessica is a 21-year old female student in her fourth year at North Spirit University. Jessica confirmed her race as Asian-American. A Pharmacy major, Jessica served as an upperclass student leader for the Minority Orientation Program in the Fall 2017 and Fall 2018 semesters. Jessica regarded her experience with the program as, "one of my most impactful experiences as a leader." In an emotional way, Jessica referenced validation in her leadership of the program. During her interview, Jessica offered, "I was and am incredibly happy" as several students have continued to approach her for advice on a variety of topics since the program concluded.

For her background, Jessica mentioned she attended a high school that was not diverse and was also situated in a rural setting. Jessica implied that her high school experience was filled with complacency. She suggested, she was not challenged academically and there was a lack of emphasis in her school for learning about other cultures. Referencing the diverse students at North Spirit University, Jessica suggested she welcomed the chance to engage with students from different backgrounds upon her arrival and was eager to contribute to something meaningful.

Through her experience with the Minority Orientation Program, Jessica offered that her leadership abilities and personal confidence were significantly influenced. Jessica suggested that her prior experience as a participating student, aided her abilities as an upperclass student leader. She states, "having been a participant, I was able to see everything that I wanted to change or would like to do better."

Jessica also alluded to her involvement in certain phases of leadership. In particular, Jessica suggested she went from a phase of being overwhelmed at the beginning to her current phase, which was characterized by comfort and a proven ability to lead others. Jessica also connected improvements in her ability to problem solve, referenced additional leadership positions she secured in the university community, and discussed community service opportunities that she sought, as a result of her involvement in the Minority Orientation Program.

David

David is a 22-year old male graduate of North Spirit University. David offered he is African American. Graduating with a degree in Integrated Marketing, David served as an upperclass student leader during the Fall 2016 and Fall 2017 semesters. David admitted he had several issues with his leadership, his personal confidence and in his overall development during his time at North Spirit University.

For his background, David forwarded multiple examples of disappointment. His disappointment referenced a toxic high school environment filled with uncaring professionals, inconsistent emotional and financial support from family members and a lack of trust in others, due to previous relationships that involved negative interactions. David attended a high school where the majority of his peers were students of color. In his opinion, the high school community was filled with behavioral issues, financial constraints and was an environment that did not encourage its students to pursue higher education opportunities.

For his family dynamics, David implied that he and his family are of low socioeconomic status. David also mentioned that he had strained relationships with both of his parents, that spanned through high school and continued through his enrollment at North Spirit University.

Serving as a strong advocate for the Minority Orientation Program, David suggested he was skeptical of the program support that was given by upper level administrators at North Spirit University. David suggested there was a disconnect between the university's desire to influence the experience for students of color and the program's current resources. David implied the university as a whole, needed to provide higher visibility for the program, greater financial

assistance, and also needed to increase the number of employees in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Through examples he provided, David implied that he was greatly influenced by the Minority Orientation Program. From discussing his trust in certain personnel, by providing examples of relationships with other peers and by connecting the program's ability to his success as a student leader, David suggested he was thankful and appreciative of his experience with the program. David also implied that his success inside and outside the classroom was largely attributed to his involvement with the Minority Orientation Program. David spoke frequently about the program's impact on his mentorship efforts as well. Through his experience with the program, David realized that "mentorship was big for him" and also learned the "true importance of giving back to others."

Participating Student Parents

Mr. Wilson

Mr. Wilson is the parent of an 18-year old female student in her freshman year at North Spirit University. Mr. Wilson confirmed he is African American. A resident from out of state, Mr. Wilson nor his family had a prior affiliation with the university community. Mr. Wilson expressed that he is proud of his daughter's decision to attend North Spirit University and was mindful not to pressure her in as an enrolled student. Characterizing his daughter as an "independent spirit," Mr. Wilson stated that his daughter, "fell in love with the university" as a result of her experience with the Minority Orientation Program. Mr. Wilson added, "it reinforced to her that she made the right decision."

Through his experience with an orientation program at another PWI as an undergraduate student, Mr. Wilson suggested he had initial doubts about the Minority Orientation Program and its ability to support students of color. In particular, coming from a major metropolitan area that was ethnically diverse, Mr. Wilson implied a concern for his daughter's ability to fit in to her new setting.

By mentioning the number of diverse students and how much he learned about the university and its resources, Mr. Wilson implied he was surprised in a positive way about the program. Referencing the program as "very informative," Mr. Wilson mentioned the program "allowed us to see the social life for minority students, the academic support for minority students, and their social activities." Mr. Wilson also suggested there was a connection between his daughter's comfort and the great leadership abilities of upperclass students.

Ultimately, Mr. Wilson advanced that he watched his daughter's comfort level increase during the program's duration. Mr. Wilson later implied that a personal connection with professional staff members in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion also greatly eased his concerns about campus safety and affirmed the university's ability to fulfill the needs of his daughter.

Mrs. Brown

Mrs. Brown is the parent of an 18-year old male student in his freshman year at North Spirit University. An out of state resident, Mrs. Brown was born and raised in the same city as North Spirit University but had never physically visited the university prior to her son's

arrival. Through her niece who graduated from North Spirit University in Spring 2017, Mrs.

Brown implied she is somewhat familiar with the university. Mrs. Brown provided her race as

African American.

Mrs. Brown offered that her son's high school situation was comparable to North Spirit

University, in terms of the low number of enrolled students of color. She offered, "Out of 275

students that graduated in his class, he may he have been one of 18 males of color - and it was an

all-male institution."

As a graduate of another PWI and with an older child enrolled at another PWI in the

Northeast region of the United States, Mrs. Brown had unique experiences with higher education

institutions. Mrs. Brown suggested she had a greater appreciation for the Minority Orientation

Program over her experience with similar programs at other academic institutions.

While Mrs. Brown characterized her son as "self-sufficient for his age," she had great

concerns about his ability to adjust to the new environment. By watching her son interact with

his peers and also seeing African American men as potential role models for him at North Spirit

University, Mrs. Brown suggested her concerns were eased. In addition, Mrs. Brown also

suggested there was a strong level of commitment and trust among all program stakeholders.

Overall, Mrs. Brown offered, "the program was a wonderful way for my son to start his career."

Of all the parent stakeholders, Mrs. Brown led the researcher to believe she had the

deepest level of trust in the Minority Orientation Program. An example of her trust is signaled in

the following summary:

As a parent, to see a program that says "we want your student to succeed and we're

putting options behind them to support them." That's really important because it shows commitment. It sends the message that students are valued.

Mrs. Morgan

Mrs. Morgan is the parent of a 20-year old female student in her sophomore year at North Spirit University. Mrs. Morgan provided she is African American. As a former student, employee, and previous member of several alumni committees for North Spirit University, Mrs. Morgan admitted she is "pretty acquainted" with the university community." Overall, Mrs. Morgan stated that she, "did not know what to think," in reference to her daughter's impending arrival to the university community.

Mrs. Morgan characterized her daughter as an "independent child that was motivated to succeed." Through providing opportunities for her daughter to travel, by securing her involvement in various professional development programs, and by enrolling her daughter into a prestigious private high school, Mrs. Morgan strived to provide a well-rounded experience for her daughter before she enrolled in higher education. Mrs. Morgan did, however, share concerns about her daughter's development at her previous high school. She offered, "her school was very rigorous, but they also kind of babied kids also."

As a result of her wealth of knowledge about the university community, Mrs. Morgan suggested she had a few internal conflicts. Mrs. Morgan implied that she wanted to keep her previous experiences with the university community separate and engage with the Minority Orientation Program solely as a parent. Mrs. Morgan also implied she wanted to be mindful that her previous experiences as a member of the university community would not overshadow or influence her daughter's time as an enrolled student. For example, in an attempt to give her

daughter space to develop, Mrs. Morgan was selective of the events she attended during the program and how long she stayed at them.

Through her experience with the program, Mrs. Morgan implied she was perhaps jealous. She offered, "I wish this program was around when I was in school, we didn't have anything like this." Through offering perspectives on her experience in comparison to the current offerings of the Minority Orientation Program, Mrs. Morgan signaled an appreciation for the program's ability to connect peers with each other and ease the concerns of parents.

Through her observations as a parent and from the other parents she interacted with, Mrs. Morgan suggested there was a connection between the program's ability to provide comfort to students and their ability to be retained in the university community. To illustrate her support of the program, Mrs. Morgan ultimately suggested the Minority Orientation Program could serve as a benchmark for other higher education institutions.

Mr. James

Mr. James is the parent of an 18-year old male student in his freshman year at North Spirit University. Mr. James offered that he is African American. As the former college roommate and close friend of a top administrator at North Spirit University, Mr. James admitted he is comfortable with the university community and its ability to help his son transition into a new setting. By enrolling his final child (last of four) in higher education at North Spirit University, Mr. James suggested his experience with the Minority Orientation Program was a positive experience overall.

For his background, Mr. James mentioned he was a graduate of a prestigious PWI. As a student at the PWI, Mr. James offered that "its enrollment for students of color was under ten percent." As a result, Mr. James insinuated that his son's experience at North Spirit University would perhaps be comparable to his, due to certain commonalities between his former institution and North Spirit University.

Through his involvement with the Minority Orientation Program, Mr. James offered that he was "surprised at how often he reflected and recalled his experiences as a minority student at a PWI". Through his reflection, Mr. James, suggested that the importance of orientation programs for students of color was reinforced to him. In his opinion, it was important for other students of color "to see each other and to establish relationships in an attempt to enrich their cultural experience." Mr. James suggested it was also important for students of color to navigate the communities that surrounded their academic institution. This importance stemmed from a need to explore other cultures, interact with peers at other higher education institutions, and to locate additional resources to support their needs (*i.e.,* haircut, hygiene items, etc.).

Mr. James possessed a great amount of pride for his son and was confident in his ability to succeed at North Spirit University. Speaking to his son's capabilities, Mr. James offered, "I had no doubt he would be a sufficiently strong student." The larger questions to Mr. James about his son were, "How well is he going to do? Is he going to excel? and Will he have the chance to be an honors candidate at the end of four years?"

Mr. James also implied that expectations had been established between him and his son in terms of his experience at North Spirit University. Based on his personal background and the

fact that his son is a third-generation member of the family to attend college, a connection

between the expectations for his son and pressure was potentially implied.

Professional Staff Member

Mrs. Smith

Mrs. Smith has directly assisted with the Minority Orientation Program for close to a

decade. A full-time employee at North Spirit University, Mrs. Smith has a strong belief in the

Minority Orientation Program. Mrs. Smith suggested that the program helps new students adjust

to their new settings and shows them they have support from the university community. Mrs.

Smith indicated her race as African American.

Through mentioning her role was "behind the scenes," Mrs. Smith exuded pride for her

ability to serve students and assist with the various program needs. From interacting with

student leaders, to scheduling and ordering items, Mrs. Smith implied she fills critical roles. She

stated that "she does what she needs to do" when it comes to ensuring the program is

successful. Mrs. Smith mentioned her highlight of the program:

> Seeing students come in as freshmen and then seeing them come back the next year
> as sophomores, wanting to be orientation leaders. It shows the impact of the program had
> on them.

Mrs. Smith also suggested there was a connection between her professional development

and her involvement in the Minority Orientation Program. She realized that she enjoyed

mentoring students. In her opinion, she states, "Everyone needs a good mentor and good person

in their life." Through her program involvement, Mrs. Smith also advanced she improved her

ability to truly listen to students, which enhanced their comfort and trust. As a result, Mrs. Smith

suggested that many students approach her for help and guidance, especially after the program concluded.

Through interacting with students of color and their families, Mrs. Smith recommended the enrollment process was complex and confusing. In Mrs. Smith's opinion, through digesting new information about the university and navigating the move-in process, for example, families may become "overwhelmed and confused."

Overall, Mrs. Smith is a staunch supporter of the program's upperclass student leaders. Mrs. Smith suggested the university, including certain professionals, do not comprehend the impact of upperclass student leaders. Characterizing them as "trusted leaders who were invested and engaged," Mrs. Smith suggested the university directly benefited from the upperclass student leaders of the Minority Orientation Program. Through aiding the experience of other students while also enhancing their own, Mrs. Smith suggested upperclass student leaders served as ambassadors for North Spirit University. Finally, Mrs. Smith implied that upperclass student leaders were also highly critical to the student retention efforts for the university community overall.

Research Themes

Stakeholders were asked to share their experiences with the Minority Orientation Program. Specifically, stakeholders were prompted to discuss what they learned and how their experiences impacted them. For the study, personal perceptions of the program along with lessons learned were intertwined throughout stakeholder responses.

A coding process outlined by Charmaz (2014) and McDougal (2014) for placing data into categories was utilized for this study. The coding process involved translating and reducing data into categories, based on discovered patterns or themes. To enhance the coding process, Charmaz and McDougal also encouraged the researcher to return to the data and make new codes throughout the process, as necessary.

For this study, the semi-structured interviews of each stakeholder were read and carefully analyzed, to identify common themes. Subsequently, the transcripts were categorized into the following themes: (1) Out of the Woods, (2) Releasing the Pressure, and (3) Following in Footsteps.

Theme One: Out of the Woods - "Can I touch your hair? It's so nice."

The theme "Out of the Woods," reflects stakeholder concerns and the Minority Orientation Program's ability to address them. While it may not be apparent on the surface, stakeholders suggested they are dealing with many unknowns prior to and during their arrival at North Spirit University. For students, apprehensions about their future experience in college, questions about their personal confidence, and their overall ability to complete a degree may be present. Other stakeholders, such as families may be dealing with the departure of a loved one as they enter higher education. Families may also have concerns about the support of the university community as it relates to helping their loved one. Once enrolled in the Minority Orientation Program, stakeholders may still have questions about the program, their involvement, and how it can help them as they move forward. The "Out of the Woods" theme recommends that through

their participation, program participants were comfortable enough to address their concerns and ultimately receive the help and guidance they needed.

For this theme, stakeholders alluded to a strong connection between race and its potential impact on participating students and upperclass student leaders. Stakeholders suggested the Minority Orientation Program has helped them understand their racial identities. Students, through discussing connections between their racial identities, their backgrounds, and family dynamics, implied a greater understanding of race. Stakeholders also recommended a greater understanding of race and its implications for students of color in the higher educational system. For example, certain financial implications for students of color were viewed as systemic racism by stakeholders. In a significant way, stakeholders also implied that the Minority Orientation Program environment was supportive and caring. Characterizing the program environment as "comfortable," "safe," and "welcoming," stakeholders suggested the program's environment has positively influenced them.

Lastly, stakeholders suggested their experiences with the Minority Orientation Program exceeded their initial expectations. Prior to their engagement, stakeholders indicated they had low or no expectations about their potential experience with the program. Through their experiences, stakeholders ultimately suggested they were incorrect about their initial expectations of the program.

Stakeholder responses for the "Out of the Woods" theme, were categorized in the following areas: (1) the impact of race, (2) unique stakeholder perceptions and (3) stakeholder sense of comfort.

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The Impact of Race

Stakeholder concerns about race and its implications on participating students and upperclass students of color was offered through multiple examples. By sharing examples of microaggressions, alluding to a lack of respect from faculty, and having to address racial slurs, stakeholders explained the implications of race.

The opportunity for stakeholders to discuss the impact of race through their experience with the Minority Orientation Program was characterized as a unique opportunity. Based on stakeholder feedback, opportunities to discuss race in the North Spirit University community appear to be infrequent and not authentic. As a result, stakeholder descriptions on the impact of race were plentiful and explicit.

Cynthia, an upperclass student leader, states, "there's a lot of cultural differences" among non-minority and minority students at North Spirit University. Cynthia mentioned that she had multiple experiences with "microaggressions" in the university community. Cynthia offered an example; she stated, "I'm in class one day and one girl's like, 'oh - can I touch your hair? It's so nice.'"" Cynthia suggested that her classmate had no concept of the racial and personal boundaries she crossed when the incident occurred. To address this issue and others she experienced with race, Cynthia offered that she frequently talks with other upperclass student leaders from the Minority Orientation Program. They talk about the experiences they face and how they are prepared to handle potential experiences in the future.

Leah, also forwarded concerns about race for students of color in the North Spirit University community. Leah offered, "you don't necessarily know what you're going to face in

terms of racism, prejudice, or the kind of comments that anyone might make." Leah also

mentioned the need to "filter yourself" as a minority student. She provided:

> I personally have not experienced anything outwardly racist, but you never know
> what could come out of any conversation you have. You kind of have to act a
> certain way to make sure you're not targeted by another student in your class or
> even professors.

To address her issues with race, Leah mentioned she is mindful of the backgrounds of the

non-minority individuals she interacts with. Leah also theorized that the non-minority

individuals she interacted with could potentially lack exposure to people from other races. She

added, "perhaps they've been surrounded by people that look like them their entire lives and

have never had to step out of their comfort zones."

The examples shared by Cynthia and Leah imply a connection to Tinto (1997, 2005) and

Bandura (1994) in the literature review. Tinto's model theorizes that students come to

postsecondary institutions with a range of different background characteristics. Both accounts

suggest there are potential differences for students that are attributed to their backgrounds and

experiences. By highlighting the need to "filter yourself" as a student of color, Leah also offers a

potential connection to Bandura and self-efficacy. Bandura mentions that efficacy beliefs

influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and ultimately behave.

Participating students also provided their concerns about race in the North Spirit

University community. Sarah's concerns on race focused on "acceptance" and "understanding."

Sarah suggested that certain university stakeholders are skeptical and hold biases about students

from diverse backgrounds. Sarah summarized her thoughts:

I think a huge challenge is people accepting and understanding each other and their backgrounds. I think a lot of students struggle with that. I also think there's just going to be an underlying skepticism or belief about students of diverse backgrounds. People will always have their prejudices.

Sarah also believes that students of color face additional concerns, as opposed to White students in the North Spirit University community. She states, "especially at a PWI, they have to deal with racial issues on top of their academics, their social life, and everything else that comes with being a college student." Ultimately, Sarah believes the Minority Orientation Program helps students of color feel supported, accepted, and safe.

Sarah's perspectives suggest a connection to Tinto (2005) in the literature review. Tinto believes students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that are committed to their success and provide the needed supports. Sarah's belief in the Minority Orientation Program's ability to help students of color aligns with Tinto.

In another finding, stakeholders suggested that based on race, there were differences for students of color because of their backgrounds. David offered:

Minority and African American students are brought up in different ways than most White students at North Spirit University. We have different struggles than they do.

David suggested students of color were "more protected" and "encouraged to be stronger on the inside," as a result. Ultimately, David suggested there were potential connections between students of color, their appearance and how they are perceived. He offered, "sometimes they are seen as a threat or appear to be angry, when the overall issue is they are just being misunderstood as a person."

David believes the Minority Orientation Program has helped him overcome issues with race in the university community. Through the program, David realized, "we as people go through different things, which makes us act a certain way." While seeking commonalities in others, David offered, "we are all still humans, at the end of the day."

David's perspective alludes to a possible connection with Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the literature review. One tenet of CRT is that race is a social construct. As a social construct, CRT suggests race is a category that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient (Delgado, 2001). The tenet also mentions that racial categories are not bound by any biological or genetic realities. David's reference that students of color are "seen as a threat," and "appear to be angry," aligns with the social construct tenet of CRT. Specifically, the connection between students of color, their appearance, and their assumed behaviors in this example have been invented.

Related to student background, David offered that financial concerns exist for students of color at North Spirit University. David implied that students and their families frequently misunderstand the financial aid process. To complicate financial matters, David believes "North Spirit University tends to be expensive for students and their families."

David's perspective on student financial concerns also implies alignment with Tinto (1975). In the literature review, Tinto recommends students come to higher education institutions with a range of different background characteristics, including their financial context. David's account signals an ability to identify and acknowledge that students of color and their families have different financial predicaments that can potentially impact their

experience at North Spirit University. As a result, David's perspectives on financial aid and its confusion for students of color and their families suggests that systemic racism may also be present. If the university understands that minority students and their families are likely to not understand the financial aid process, in comparison to non-minority families, an ability to address the issue is present. If the university is aware of the issue and have not addressed it, this trend would qualify as systemic racism.

In another finding, stakeholders addressed the potential challenges that students of color face as they enter higher education. Mr. James believes that African American students who attend higher education institutions, "must make certain psychological and mental adjustments upon entry." Mr. James also indicated these adjustments may include additional difficulties for certain students of color depending on their past experiences. For example, Mr. James believes students that navigated racial incidents or who have been made to feel inferior, prior to their enrollment in higher education, may face additional challenges.

In another unique perspective, Mr. Wilson made a potential connection between higher education institutions and certain activities in their communities that slight students of color. He theorized:

> The majority of cultural activities and social events are geared towards students who are from the majority. I think having an orientation program for minority students, gives them information and access to culturally relevant events that support them.

At an institutional level, Mr. Wilson recommended that faculty members, through their perceptions of race play a critical role for students of color in the classroom. He offered:

> I think there is a problem with faculty thinking minority students can't perform at the same level as other students. Students of color face low expectations from staff.

At a deeper level, Mrs. Morgan, shared her thoughts about students of color that specifically enter North Spirit University. As a former employee at the university, Mrs. Morgan believes students of color that enter the university, are socially disadvantaged, in comparison to their non-minority peers. She recommended:

> Just looking at North Spirit, I noticed a lot of students of color, had a social disadvantage. Some of them may not have been as well traveled as the average White student. I also noticed that a lot of students of color were more sheltered in terms of what they knew existed out there and their accessibility to resources.

Stakeholder perspectives about issues that students of color face as they enter higher education implies a connection to the literature review in several ways. References by Mr. James and Mrs. Morgan about potential student of color issues and their backgrounds connects with Tinto. Tinto's model believes that students come to postsecondary institutions with a range of different background characteristics and secondary-school experiences (Tinto, 1997). These differences include, race, sex, educational, and financial contexts. Mr. Wilson's support for orientation programs and their ability to support students of color also aligns with Tinto. Tinto suggest students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that provide needed supports (Tinto, 2005).

Mrs. Morgan also believes there are differences between students of color who enter higher education based on their sex. Specifically, Mrs. Morgan inferred that African American females and males each have certain behaviors that impact them. She advanced:

> It's the average African American male, who is coming into a PWI, that seems to get lost in the cracks. I think they're more hesitant to not seek assistance, because of the pride factor. Whereas, black girls tend to be independent, and more assertive, because they've been raised that way.

The study's findings also suggested that participating students and upperclass student leaders experienced feelings of isolation and being overwhelmed. A connection between their described feelings and the low number of students of color in the university community was suggested. Mary suggested she was overwhelmed by the high number of White students at North Spirit University. She stated:

> I think one of the biggest challenges here as a person of color, is just being surrounded by more White students. Coming here was a bit more of a culture shock. You know the first day of class, I was the only black student in my entire class of 40 students. That's intense, when I'm walking to class and I only see one or two black students.

Similar to Mary, Leah and Jessica also shared examples of isolation that occurred in their respective classes. Leah offered that in a single class that contained over 100 students, she was the lone person of color for the duration of a semester. Next, Jessica recalled a classroom experience that transpired during her first week of school at North Spirit University. Jessica stated, "I was the only Black student among 40 other students and the professor." Jessica mentioned the experience "made her stand out visually."

Mrs. Morgan's belief of differences between students of color, based on their sex offers a potential connection to Tinto. Tinto believes that students come to postsecondary institutions with a range of different background characteristics and secondary-school experiences (Tinto, 1997). Mrs. Morgan's specific mention of how students were raised signals a connection to Tinto.

The examples of classroom isolation provided by Mary, Leah, and Jessica also alludes to a connection with Tierney (1992). Tierney suggests Tinto may possess a limited

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understanding and appreciation for minority students who are enrolled in American higher

education. In addition, based on the issues forwarded by stakeholders, it is plausible that

students of color face additional concerns in the classroom, in comparison to their non-

minority peers.

Additional examples of student isolation attributed to race were provided by Robert and

Mrs. Smith. Robert shared a personal example with isolation, that occurred in his residence hall.

He recalled:

> In my freshman year, there were only two students of color on my floor - myself
> and my roommate from Puerto Rico. It was a new environment and new culture
> for the both of us. I didn't see it as a problem. With the social skills I developed
> in the program, I was able to make friends with many of my floormates. I found a
> way to relate to them.

From her perspective, Mrs. Smith shared several examples of students who have

approached her to discuss their experiences with isolation in the university community. She

offered:

> Isolation and feelings of disconnect are factors they face. They also feel like they
> might be targeted or picked on more. Students come back into the office and tell
> me stories about what's going on in their classes, what happened with certain
> professors and discuss issues in their residence halls.

The perspectives of Robert and Mrs. Smith signal a connection to the literature

review. The ability for students to navigate the issues they face implies a connection to self-

efficacy. Bandura (1994) mentions that efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think,

motivate themselves, and ultimately behave. Robert alluded to lessons he learned through his

participation in the Minority Orientation Program. Finally, Mrs. Smith's account aligns with

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Tinto, as he suggested that students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that provide needed supports (Tinto, 2005). Mrs. Smith's perspective also implies that students found needed support through visiting the office to share their stories.

The need for stakeholders to "act a certain way" due to their race was revealed in the study's findings. Stakeholders implied they have acted a certain way and viewed other stakeholders modeling certain behaviors in an effort to not bring attention to them and their race. Cynthia, an African American female offered that she watches how she acts in the university community. She stated, "you don't want to seem like aggressive or excited - you also don't want to seem angry or have a bunch of inflection in your voice". Mary also suggested that students of color potentially "act a certain way," during their assimilation into the university community. She offered:

> I see a lot of people of color here that assimilated in a different way. They tried to hide parts of their identity so that they can be more accepted by the masses. People are stripping away what they believe in by letting people say words or act a certain way. And it's sad, because you shouldn't have to change who you are to be accepted by your peers.

Mary also suggested that some students of color "act a certain way" depending on situations they face in the university community. She mentioned:

> I think for black students, sometimes when they hear a microaggression or something, they don't want to say anything because they're afraid they're not going to be accepted or going to be liked.

Through mentioning the need for students of color to "change who they are" in order to be accepted, Cynthia and Mary's perspectives align with CRT, and its tenet of race as a social construct. The need for students to change is based on their race, which is a social construct.

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Also, through their ability to act a certain way, a connection with Attinasi and anticipatory socialization for students of color could potentially be established. Anticipatory socialization refers to a premature taking on or identification with the behavior and attitudes of an aspired group (Attinasi, 1989). The need for students to act a certain way could be indicative of their desire to be accepted by a certain group of peers in the campus community.

Lastly, the study's findings also revealed an importance for stakeholders to engage non-minority individuals in the Minority Orientation Program. Cynthia referenced the need to have "truly diverse leaders." Specifically, Cynthia stated, "we definitely tried to make it a point to get White leaders." Cynthia reasoned that, "having different types of leaders for different students can make everyone comfortable to a certain extent."

David also suggested the importance of making sure the program was "not just an all Black thing." He added, "you come in contact with so many different kinds of people, from different backgrounds. When you put that all together in one room, there's so much more and many things you can learn."

Stakeholder perspectives on the importance for the incorporation of non-minority individuals, shows an understanding of CRT and its race as a social construct tenet. Stakeholders also suggested they have an understanding of Delgado and his belief that racial categories are not bound by any biological realities (Delgado, 2001). Overall, participants realized they deserved the same opportunities as other races, and sought to even learn from them, regardless of the pseudo-characteristics that society had placed on them. As a result of this

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understanding, stakeholders were able to come "Out of the Woods" with their thoughts and feelings.

Unique Stakeholder Perceptions

Stakeholders implied that the Minority Orientation Program exceeded their initial expectations. Through their perceptions, certain stakeholders also suggested they had skepticism about the program prior to their involvement. Stakeholders were skeptical of the program's ability to serve students of color and acclimate them to the North Spirit University. Ultimately, through "feeling valued," "cared about," and "special" based on their experiences with the program, stakeholders confirmed they were less skeptical of the program and its ability to serve students of color.

Stakeholders shared examples to illustrate their perceptions of the Minority Orientation Program. Cynthia shared:

> When I reflect on how much I learned, how much I experienced and who I connected with - I know exactly where it came from. It came from the Minority Orientation Program. The seeds for much that I accomplished, were planted at that time, and I had no clue.

As an incoming student, Jessica stated, "I truly did not think much of my decision to attend the Minority Orientation Program." She proceeded to characterize her involvement in the program as a student and upperclass student leader in the following way:

> In that moment, you know, I simply didn't think much of it at all. Eventually I wanted to be a leader, because I thought it was something that would be good for my resume. After doing it, I quickly realized there was some real potential with the program and that the program was really important to a lot of people.

Similar to Jessica, Sarah also didn't think much about her decision to participate in the Program, prior to becoming involved with the Minority Orientation Program. She forwarded:

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I gave the program a try and didn't really have any expectations. Coming through it and helping out with it now, I now realize how much it's impacted me. It was definitely eye-opening and has definitely changed my life. It opened me up to a whole different aspect that I never really thought I would desire or want in my life.

Jessica and Sarah's reflections on their decision to participate in the Minority Orientation Program offers a connection to improvements in their self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) mentions that efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and ultimately behave. Specifically, Jessica offers a connection between her positive feelings about the program as a factor in her decision to become a leader. Next, Sarah indicates that her feelings and behaviors were influenced directly through her program involvement.

Keith, a student participant, believed his experience with the program would compare to "attending a summer camp." By participating, Keith realized, "the program wanted to build a bond between students and the office." Keith added, "the program went much deeper than what I thought it would." Another participating student, Mary, believed the program "was going to be all Black students." Upon reflection, Mary stated she was impressed with the "equal amount of male and female student participants, along with diversity of participants beyond just Black students" that were found in the Minority Orientation Program.

Mr. Wilson provided a final perspective on stakeholder perceptions of the Minority Orientation Program. Mr. Wilson offered that he was "surprised" and "thankful" to see so many diverse student participants in the program. Recognizing the program "was open for everyone," Mr. Wilson added that his "preconceived notions about the program were wrong."

The reflections of Cynthia, Keith, and Mr. Wilson recommend alignment with Tinto (1997, 2005) in the literature review. Tinto suggests students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that provide needed supports. Tinto's model also theorizes that students come to postsecondary institutions with a range of different background characteristics and secondary-school experiences. These differences include, race, sex, educational, and financial contexts.

Cynthia's acknowledgment of what she learned suggested she found the needed supports for her success. Next, Keith's mention of the connection between students and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion insinuates an appreciation for certain relationships. Lastly, Mr. Wilson offers a potential connection with Tinto's model in the area of student background characteristics. By mentioning the program "was open for everyone," Mr. Wilson leads the researcher to believe he is referencing student race. As a result, Mr. Wilson portrays an understanding of the potential different characteristics for incoming students at higher education institutions.

Another unique perspective delivered by stakeholders was found in the "value" they received from the program. Sarah and Mary mentioned how they felt valued. Sarah mentioned, "I felt like I had value here, that I mattered, and people cared about me." She added, "the staff respected me, my dreams, and goals. I felt my success was important to them." Mary also indicated that she felt valued. She offered, "it made me feel special and comfortable to move into school a few days early."

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The examples shared by Sarah and Mary offer potential alignment with Tucker & Hemphill (2018), in the literature review. Tucker & Hemphill support that the ability to make students feel valued is a primary purpose of an orientation program. Sarah and Mary also suggest that they have successfully integrated into their new communities.

The final unique perspective discussed by stakeholders was found in the Minority Orientation Program's ability to, "create a foundation of success" for its student participants. David credited the Minority Orientation Program for "creating a foundation for his experience at North Spirit University." In addition, David suggested that students may not have a clear purpose when they arrive in the university community. David also offered, "many students don't realize they are kind of just walking around without an end goal."

Keith also alluded to a connection between the program and maintaining a certain focus for his future success. Keith realized the following:

> I realized I was here for a purpose and needed to maximize it. I had that mindset that I was here to get a degree but wanted to have fun at the same time. There was a purpose to participate in different things that take place on campus, while also paying close attention to your academics.

Robert suggested the Minority Orientation Program influenced his foundation for success through "challenging him personally." He offered:

> I realized, coming into a new environment, I had to take steps to better myself. In order to better myself, I had to know what my weaknesses were, and I had to step out of my comfort zone. That's what the program did for me. It set the standard for what I expected to do.

As a parent, Mr. James mentioned the program gave students a potential "head start" in comparison to other students, in several distinct ways. He stated:

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It helped assuage some concerns and anxieties for students. Therefore, it gave them a head start, at least in terms of putting them in the mental and psychological frame of mind where they were ready to compete and learn.

Through a final perspective, Mrs. Morgan implied that the Minority Orientation Program created a foundation for student success through influencing certain characteristics in them. She stated:

The program environment developed their confidence and self-esteem. They had a safe space that allowed them to develop. You all had pretty much taught them how to think clearly and seek assistance when they needed help or get overwhelmed. I don't think they will shut down when they face tough situations.

Stakeholder perspectives on the program's ability to create a foundation for their success alludes to a connection with self-efficacy. In particular, Keith's realization of his purpose and a changed mindset, indicates a change in his beliefs and behaviors. Robert's mention of "taking steps to better myself," also alludes to an influence on his behavior. Lastly, through connecting students to mindset changes, and improvements in self-confidence and self-esteem, Mr. James and Mrs. Morgan's perspectives also suggest alignment with the self-efficacy beliefs in the study's literature review.

Self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). According to Bandura, efficacy beliefs also influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and ultimately behave.

Stakeholder Comfort

Members of each stakeholder group indicated that they received comfort through their involvement with the Minority Orientation Program. Jessica believes students, "show their

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comfortability with the program by coming back to the office and staff for help once the program is over." Through "knowing they have someone they can always talk to on campus," Keith also implied program students were comfortable.

Mrs. Morgan advanced her thoughts on the program's ability to provide comfort to students. She states:

> It's important for them to realize they're not the only ones that have gone through issues or college in general. This program has a relate-ability, between the faculty, staff, students, and alums. The students are very comfortable as a result.

In another perspective, Mrs. Brown suggested that the program provided safety and comfort to its student participants. In addition, Mrs. Brown offered, "if students feel they're in a safe place, where they can truly excel and be themselves, they may believe they can succeed."

Lastly, Mrs. Smith believes many parents are concerned about their child's ability "to find comfort in the North Spirit University community." Mrs. Smith indicated that once parents learn about various community resources, including access to certain personnel, they typically have, "peace of mind about their child's safety."

The perspectives shared by stakeholders about comfort offers a connection to the literature review. As previously stated, Tinto (2005) believes institutional commitment to student success includes a specific commitment from the leadership of an institution, among other things. Jessica's example of program students utilizing the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and its staff after the Minority Orientation Program concluded, hints at the fulfillment of student needs. Next, Keith's reference that, "program students know they have someone to talk to on campus" through professional staff members, proposes alignment with the program's

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conceptual framework **(Figure 2)**. The framework emphasizes the importance of certain interactions for students of color, including relationships with professional staff members in the university setting.

Finally, participating students and upperclass student stakeholders recommended they found a "safe place" in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion during and after the conclusion of the Minority Orientation Program. Leah stated, "it was powerful to have a safe place to go - through the office." Leah added, "the office is a place where students belong and feel supported."

Keith believes the office, "helps many students overcome isolation while providing a sense of comfort." Mrs. Brown referenced the office as a "place of support" and one that "provided students with a space to be heard." Through their examples, Leah, Keith, and Mrs. Brown imply a connection between the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and its ability to influence student success. Taken from the literature review, Tinto believes institutional commitment is found through institutions that are committed to the goal of increasing student success for under-represented students (Tinto, 2005). In addition, Tinto believes student access to ethnic centers in higher education is important, as it enhances their social support. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion at North Spirit University qualifies as an ethnic center in higher education.

Finally, stakeholders recommended that North Spirit University had an institutional commitment to the goal of increasing the success for students of color. David was impressed by the university's ability to address the financial needs of students of color. He offered, "I noticed

they offer additional aid to students who are minorities, I have seen them try to help those students out a little bit more."

Sarah acknowledged the university's ability to assist students of color through providing specific initiatives. Specifically, during her arrival as a freshman student, Sarah "learned there were amazing opportunities the university had to offer students from diverse backgrounds, especially through the help of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion."

Mrs. Morgan believes North Spirit University does a great job of addressing students of color needs in comparison to other higher education institutions. She offered:

> North Spirit does a much better job than other local schools. With your food pantry, clothing drive and book loan program that you've developed, I think those are wonderful. I think North Spirit does a good job of identifying student needs.

Mrs. Morgan's acknowledgement of additional resources and their potential roles in students of color success offers potential alignment with Tinto. Tinto states, students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that are committed to their success, hold high expectations for their success, and provide the needed supports (Tinto, 2005).

Stakeholders also suggested that North Spirit University could enhance its institutional commitment to students of color. Issues related to the Minority Orientation Program's visibility and growth were implied by stakeholders. Jessica thinks the Minority Orientation Program should be promoted at a higher level in the future. She offered, "I think once the school recognizes it as an important fixture for this institution, it will run even smoother."

Mary suggested a stronger institutional commitment for students of color could be achieved through the implementation of training. With a focus on addressing microaggressions in the university community, Mary offered:

> I really think the university needs to implement some type of race class or some type of class like that. All the students should be required to take it. It would truly help them be more tolerant of others.

Overall, North Spirit University, as an institution, has opportunities to enhance the experiences for its students of color. By increasing institutional commitment in certain areas, students of color could have less doubts about their abilities and the university's ability to support them. As a result, students of color could also be inclined to come forward to various university members with their respective issues and essentially "Out of the Woods."

Theme Two: Releasing the Pressure - "Getting a chance to meet the staff and students, I could see it put my daughter at ease"

All stakeholders indicated the Minority Orientation Program provides an opportunity to develop relationships. In addition, upperclass student leaders and participating students suggested that relationships created during the Minority Orientation Program, spanned beyond the program's completion. Finally, by referencing the program atmosphere as, "welcoming" and "comfortable," stakeholders alluded to a connection between their ability to develop relationships and the program environment.

For the theme of "Releasing the Pressure," stakeholder responses were placed into three categories: (1) stakeholder concerns, (2) creating relationships, and (3) lasting relationships. The theme of "Releasing the Pressure" is presented for several reasons. While stakeholders provided

examples of how they addressed their personal and relationship concerns, there seemed to be underlying pressures that impacted each of them. To a degree, the underlying pressure for stakeholders seemed to be self-imposed.

Self-imposed pressure for stakeholders was implied through their expectations of relationships. In addition to self-imposed pressure, stakeholders also alluded to potential self-doubts in their ability to develop relationships. In particular, new students suggested they established relationship expectations with peers, professional members, and others prior to their arrival to campus. As a result, new students suggested they felt pressured to create relationships as soon as they arrived on campus.

Through my lens as the study's researcher, the self-imposed pressure by students was perceived as unavoidable. To complicate matters, the majority of students also implied they had a limited context of university resources that could assist their relationship development needs, prior to their arrival. While certain resources such as financial aid and academic supports were known, the majority of the incoming students of color were not aware of the campus culture, in terms of its ability to foster relationships.

Overall, the self-imposed pressure for students of color, combined with a limited context of university resources, potentially contributed to their anxiety, especially during the early phases of their involvement with the Minority Orientation Program. Students also implied they were potentially dealing with additional concerns during the early phases of the Minority Orientation Program as well. In a simultaneous manner, students of color suggested they were attempting to

be accepted by their peers, build certain competencies, develop relationships, and learn about their new community.

Significant pressures associated with being a college student in the current society were also present. The high cost of higher education in general, pressure from family members to graduate from college, and student health concerns, including potential issues with stress, anxiety, and eating disorders, are significant factors for current students. In addition, the probability of securing a job once a college degree is completed, continues to fluctuate for students who are entering today's workforce.

Lastly, to add to their pressures, stakeholders implied that they were attempting to understand how their status as a person of color at North Spirit University could potentially impact them as well. In conclusion, potential connections between stakeholders and the Minority Orientation Program's ability to release certain pressures was strongly encouraged in the study's findings.

Stakeholder Concerns

Stakeholders from all levels indicated they had concerns prior to their engagement with the Minority Orientation Program. Stakeholders suggested they had issues with personal confidence, concerns with creating relationships, and reservations about the North Spirit University community and its ability to help students of color acclimate. Through their interviews, stakeholders confirmed the Minority Orientation Program addressed their concerns and released their pressures respectively.

The concerns of program stakeholders offered potential alignment with Tinto's model in the literature review. Tinto's model theorizes that students come to postsecondary institutions with a range of different background characteristics and secondary-school experiences (Tinto, 1975). Differences in student background characteristics, based on race, and sex among others were specifically referenced by participating students. According to Tinto, student background characteristics can potentially impact their integration.

Relationship development issues were a concern for stakeholders at all levels. Stakeholders provided several examples to illustrate their concerns about relationships. Sarah, a student participant, cited "a nervousness in creating relationships" before she participated in the Minority Orientation Program. She offered:

> Coming into college, I was really nervous about making new friends and being accepted into college. I also had no experience with students from other cultures. Then I got to the program and it was like automatically everybody was so welcoming. It was easy for me to make friends.

Sarah's account aligns with Tinto's thoughts on student transition in the literature review. To become fully integrated into their new community, Tinto believes students must navigate a separation phase. The separation phase involves the student's ability to disassociate themselves from the norms of past communities, including families, among others (Milam & Berger, 1997). Through forming friendships, especially with peers from other cultures, Sarah indicates a separation from her previous norms. These norms included a lack of exposure to other cultures in particular.

Similar to Sarah, Mary offered, "finding friends in the program was what I was most anxious about." Mary acknowledged she met her first friend at North Spirit University, through

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the program. As a result, Mary offered that she "gained confidence in building friendships." To illustrate her improved confidence, Mary mentioned that she eventually "created a smaller friend group."

Mary's ability to form friendships and create a friend group supports Tinto's beliefs on social integration in the literature review. According to Tinto, associations with informal peer groups are linked to social integration for students (Tinto, 1975). Mary's created friend group serves as an informal peer group. Mary's characterization of developing friendships alludes to improvements in her confidence and also points to the Minority Orientation Program's ability to release pressure.

In another perspective, Keith, a former participating student, admitted that, "I was shy coming out of high school," and also "struggled to create friendships in high school." Keith summarized how the Minority Orientation Program helped him develop relationships, among other things. He affirmed:

> The orientation program was a relief to me. It provided an outlet for me to meet two or three people here, instead of like 50 people at once. So for me, it felt more comfortable for me. It felt easier to approach different people and engage.

The connection between the Minority Orientation Program and its influence on Keith's comfortability implies alignment with Tucker & Hemphill (2018) in the literature review. Tucker & Hemphill believe a purpose of orientation programs is for students to find comfort. Keith's examples suggest the Minority Orientation Program released pressure for him to develop relationships and influenced his social integration into the university community.

At a different stakeholder level, parents of participating students offered their concerns about the Minority Orientation Program and its ability to release pressure. Mrs. Morgan indicated she had concerns about her daughter's adjustment to a new environment. She characterized her daughter's adjustment in the following way:

> My daughter had a sense of trepidation initially when she went. However, the moment I walked into the welcome luncheon and saw her, I knew she was fine. She was completely comfortable where she was, she was conversing with people, and she was sharing info about herself.

Another parent, Mrs. Brown, indicated that the Minority Orientation Program addressed her personal concerns and influenced her son's adjustment. In her words:

> We live 300 miles away from him here. As a parent I truly did worry about him adjusting. I could however see right away that he felt really good about his decision to attend North Spirit University. I watched his body language as we were moving in. It put a lot of my fears to rest that day.

Mr. Wilson also implied a potential connection between the program and its ability to ease the concerns of his daughter as a student participant. He offered:

> It was great to hear about the mission of the university as it related to our specific situation. Getting a chance to meet the staff, hear from the students and hear of their experiences, I could see that it put my daughter at ease.

Finally, Mr. James suggested that he received comfort by interacting with a variety of university stakeholders during the program. He states:

> It was very positive and comfortable. It was good for the parents to get a sense of the campus, the sense from other students, that sense of the administrators and a sense of the region as a whole.

The examples provided by parent stakeholders suggest potential links between the Minority Orientation Program easing their respective concerns and their child's ability to find comfort. The potential connection to student comfort also supports Tucker & Hemphill (2018)

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in the literature review. As a reminder, Tucker & Hemphill believe a purpose of orientation

programs is to provide comfort to students.

Creating Relationships

Stakeholders from all groups recommended that the Minority Orientation Program

provides an opportunity to create relationships. Stakeholders signaled the program environment

for its critical role in creating relationships. Stakeholder responses on creating relationships

indicates alignment with the literature review. In particular, the conceptual framework of this

study **(Figure 2)**, proposes that interactions for students of color in the social setting is critical to

their integration. The importance and influence of relationships with peers and professional staff

members was signaled by stakeholders.

Upperclass student leaders and participating student stakeholders shared examples of how

the Minority Orientation Program released their pressure with creating relationships. Sarah, a

participating student, believes her ability to create relationships would be different, had she not

participated in the Minority Orientation Program. She mentioned, "Without it, I don't think I

would be the person I am or have the friendships and connections - the program is definitely is a

huge part of my success." Sarah offered creating relationships as "the most memorable thing"

about her experience with the Minority Orientation Program. By creating friendships, Sarah also

mentioned that "she found a safe haven" and "knew she had a group backing her up."

Robert, a former participating student, stated he had "major struggles with social

engagement in high school." Robert discussed how the Minority Orientation Program ultimately

released pressure in the area of social integration. He stated:

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Before beginning the school year, I had already built a friend base. I didn't need to go out and try and find my friend group anymore, because I had already established that before school even started.

Sarah acknowledged the influence of relationships on their development at North Spirit University. Through creating friendships, Sarah suggested an alignment with Tinto's beliefs on social integration in the literature review. According to Tinto, engagement with informal peer groups is an act of social integration by students (Tinto, 1975). Sarah's created friendships serve as an informal peer group.

Robert's acknowledgment of social engagement issues offers an alignment with Tinto's model in the literature review. Tinto's model supports that students come to postsecondary institutions with a range of different background characteristics and secondary-school experiences (Tinto, 1975). Through his experience with the Minority Orientation Program, Robert identified social issues that could impact his integration into the university community. Robert also implies that a certain pressure in "finding his friend group" was also relieved through his involvement with the Minority Orientation Program.

As student parents, Mrs. Brown and Mr. Wilson discussed the Minority Orientation Program's ability to create relationships. Mrs. Brown shared a personal account:

As we pulled into the parking lot, we were approached by a group of leaders. They were very friendly and very informative. One student in particular started talking with my son and they clicked. It was just really nice to see that take place.

Mr. Wilson believes his daughter's ability to create relationships was aided through relationships she developed prior to arriving on campus. Through social media, Mr. Wilson confirmed his daughter was able to, "meet with other peers and student leaders of the program."

As a result, Mr. Wilson suggested his daughter was able to integrate into the university community sooner, was comfortable, and clearly had established a connection with upperclass student leaders.

As stated in the literature review, Tinto believes students must successfully navigate a separation phase (Milem & Berger, 1997). The separation phase involves a student's ability to disassociate themselves to some degree from the norms of past communities, including families, and high school friends, among others. The examples shared by Mrs. Brown and Mr. Wilson align with student involvement in the separation phase. By forming new relationships with upperclass student leaders during and prior to their arrival, Mr. Brown's son and Mr. Wilson's daughter, moved beyond their previous norms. Also, through forming new relationships with upperclass student leaders, potential pressures associated with developing relationships were potentially eased for Mrs. Brown's son and Mr. Wilson's daughter.

Lasting Relationships

The sustainment of relationships beyond the Minority Orientation Program's completion was indicated by all stakeholders. Lasting relationships by stakeholders has a potential connection to the Minority Orientation Program. The program's ability to foster relationships between stakeholders during the early phases of the program was previously confirmed.

Leah, a former student participant, believes much of the Minority Orientation Program's overall success, is found through its influence on lasting relationships. Leah provided a perspective on lasting relationships:

I think lasting relationships - that's a big part of success for the program. Just

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knowing I am still friends with everyone I did the program with says something. Even if they do not go to school here anymore, I still talk to them.

Another upperclass student leader, David, connected his experience as a program mentor to lasting relationships. David, a graduate from the class of 2018 at North Spirit University, offered that, "I still have relationships with all of my mentees and follow up with them regularly."

Keith mentioned he has remained friends with several of his peers from the Minority Orientation Program. Keith linked a personal observation to lasting relationships. Keith observed several former student participants around campus, who have developed lasting relationships with one another. He forwarded, "I've seen other Minority Orientation peers become good friends. They are like the best of friends. I always see them together on campus."

Characterized by Leah, David, and Keith, the presence of lasting relationships created through the Minority Orientation Program proposes an alignment with the study's conceptual model **(Figure 2)**. The conceptual framework focuses on the interactions for students of color in their social settings. In particular, the importance of peer to peer interactions between students of color is also supported by the accounts of Leah, David, and Keith.

From a parent perspective, Mr. James observed his son's efforts to develop lasting relationships with upperclass student leaders. Mr. James attributed his son's ability to develop lasting relationships to the program layout. Mr. James provided that program sessions, led by the upperclass student leaders, is an "effective strategy for relationship development and an influential part of the program."

A final perspective on lasting relationships was provided by Mrs. Smith. As a professional staff member, Mrs. Smith shared a personal account about her student intern. The student intern was a former participant in the Minority Orientation Program. She recalls:

> I remember meeting Nikki (pseudonym) for the first time. I actually set at the table with her, her dad, and stepmom after they arrived for the program. A few years later, she ended up being my student worker. Meeting Nikki and forming that relationship - it started during the Minority Orientation Program.

Mr. James and Mrs. Smith recommend support for the study's conceptual framework **(Figure 2)**. The importance of certain interactions for minority students in their social settings is emphasized. Through emphasizing the connection between the program layout and his son's ability to develop relationships, Mr. James implies the Minority Orientation Program can release certain pressures for stakeholders.

Overall, the Minority Orientation Program's ability to release the pressure of its stakeholders was supported by several stakeholders. Support for the theme of "Releasing the Pressure" appeared in stakeholder examples that addressed their personal and relationship concerns. In addition, the Minority Orientation Program also helped participating students of color navigate self-imposed issues and issues that impact students who are currently enrolled at higher education institutions.

Theme Three: Following in Footsteps - "To see how they were achieving success, I tried to mimic them to achieve my own success."

Minority Orientation Program stakeholders advocated for the impact of upperclass student leaders. Specifically, the ability for upperclass students to lead program activities and

mentor younger students was noted at all stakeholder levels. Overall, stakeholders proposed that upperclass student leaders are a distinguishing feature of the Minority Orientation Program.

The theme of "Following the Footsteps" is focused on the relationship between new students and upperclass student leaders. All program activities are aimed at orienting new students to the North Spirit University community. The most critical element of the program is the active leadership of upperclass student leaders. Through their interviews, former participating students recommended that upperclass student leaders impacted them in substantial ways. As a result of their impact, participating students implied a willingness to follow in the path of upperclass student leaders.

For context, it is important to note that at the conclusion of the Minority Orientation Program, the relationship between new students and upperclass leaders had existed for only a few months prior. Overall, the willingness of new students to follow in the footsteps of upperclass student leaders is significant. Stakeholders suggested that upperclass student leaders have a unique set of leadership skills that can significantly influence the development of their peers. For example, a connection between the desire for participating students to serve as future leaders, mentors, and ambassadors for the Minority Orientation Program was directly attributed to the influence of upperclass student leaders. Members from each stakeholder group provided examples to support the dynamic leadership of upperclass student leaders.

Stakeholder responses for the "Following in Footsteps" theme were categorized in the following ways: (1) mentorship influence, (2) upperclass student leader influence, (3) personal

confidence, and (3) unique factors for program success. Stakeholders also forwarded unique

factors, including potential strengths and challenges for the Minority Orientation Program.

Mentorship Influence

The mentorship efforts of upperclass student leaders was referenced by all

stakeholders. As a result of their mentorship experience with upperclass student leaders,

participating students suggested they had a desire to follow in their footsteps and mentor other

students. The mentorship efforts of upperclass student leaders offers a potential connection to

Tinto in the literature review. Tinto (2005) believes access to a mentoring program is important

for students as it enhances their social support.

Stakeholders discussed how they were influenced by mentorship during the Minority

Orientation Program. Leah stated that she, "had a desire to mentor others" as a result of her

experience. As a reminder, all participating students were assigned an upperclass mentor prior to

their arrival at North Spirit University. Upperclass mentors are also encouraged to interact with

their assigned new students before they arrive to campus.

Cynthia, spoke about the mentorship impact she received from upperclass student

leaders. Cynthia stated:

> After seeing how they (upperclass leaders) engaged us, I knew I would love to do
> this and help the next group of students. I wanted to move them forward and help
> them feel comfortable here on campus too. It also showed me I could be a mentor
> to someone else.

Another student leader, Mary, referenced a connection between mentorship and her

academics. By having a mentor with the same major, Mary offered that she received advice on

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professors, class structure, and tips for managing schoolwork. Through her mentorship experience, Mary mentioned she had a willingness to give back to others.

Mr. James suggested his son gained critical information on his academics through the mentorship of upperclass student leaders. Mr. James stated, "it was great that he (his son) was able to engage with upperclassmen who shared their experiences and helped him avoid potential pitfalls in the classroom."

The previous examples provided by upperclass student leaders and a program parent suggest a connection to the importance of mentors. By highlighting the benefits they received from mentorship, stakeholders also suggested a willingness to follow in the footsteps of others, in terms of mentoring other people. As referenced in the literature review, Cervantes (1988) and Bandura (1982, 1989) state, "having mentors who have successfully traversed the academic and racially and ethnically similar peers who are persisting in their education may create a sense of vicarious self-efficacy, or a belief in one's abilities to complete certain tasks to obtain a specific outcome." In alignment with Cervantes and Bandura, the perspectives of the upperclass student leaders and program parent leads the researcher to believe that program participants are influenced to mentor others. The perspectives also suggest there is a mutual appreciation between upperclass student leaders and their ability to share their previous experiences at North Spirit University with new students.

Upperclass student leaders and participating students also suggested a greater appreciation for their personal mentorship efforts. For example, Jessica "learned that she loved

mentorship." Jessica also indicated she could serve as a "trusted leader" and "could create something people could enjoy."

David offered that he realized mentorship was "important to him." David theorized that most college students will face issues. Specifically, David mentioned, "you as a student truly need people around you as mentors, to help you get through college." Mentoring others was suggested by David as a tool for new students to offset their issues.

David also highlighted the mentor relationship between him as a new student and how it ultimately influenced him:

> I think about how I was able to connect with Bobby (pseudonym). He came in as a freshman and came back the next year as a leader. He ended up starting a new organization at school. I don't want to take credit for it, but he looked up to me for a lot of things. I was his mentor, and I think it all comes back to our initial experience together in the program.

In another perspective, Robert stressed the importance of having a mentor "you can trust and who is nurturing." Robert shared a personal story of his mentorship development. Robert states:

> I learned there's different kinds of mentorship. There is career mentorship and there is mentorship from someone who's older than you. There is mentorship from others who may be in your same peer group, but they might have more wisdom. They can pass their wisdom to you from mistakes they previously made.

The examples provided by Jessica and David, suggest an alignment with Cervantes (1988) and Bandura (1982, 1989), in the area of self-efficacy. By referencing the ability to lead others and the need to have people around you for support, Jessica and David suggested they improved their beliefs and abilities. Robert's account of mentorship, with a focus on engaging

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mentors who have previously navigated the path that others intend to follow, also recommends

alignment with Cervantes and Bandura.

Upperclass Student Leader Influence

The outstanding leadership of upperclass student leaders in the Minority Orientation

Program was suggested on all stakeholder levels. Stakeholders believe that much of the

program's success is found through the guidance and support of upperclass student leaders.

Described as "dynamic, impressive, and trusted," stakeholders proposed they received

tremendous value through interacting with upperclass student leaders. Stakeholders ultimately

advocated for a connection between the influence of upperclass student leaders and a willingness

to follow in their footsteps.

Leah discussed how upperclass student leaders influenced her. In particular, Leah

received guidance on maximizing her social time, as a result of being influenced by upperclass

student leaders. She offered:

> I noticed that leaders, especially sophomores were all involved in different organizations
> on campus. Whether it was related to their academic major or not, they were involved.
> By watching them I said, okay, I'm going to join all the organizations they're
> in. Because they were all leaders in their organizations too - that's why I decided to take
> on leadership roles.

Sarah also forwarded the influence she received from upperclass student leaders. Sarah

stated she wanted to, "mimic upperclass student leaders." She offered:

> It was great to have them guide me and show me how to go about my studies. To
> see their work ethic up close and see how they were achieving success, it helped
> me focus on my academics. I tried to mimic them to achieve my own success.

In his opinion, Robert proposed that upperclass student leaders, "were just different" in comparison to other students. Robert explained the differences of the leaders:

> They were more actively involved in different campus activities. I would see them all over campus. They also seemed liked they had more friends, and they were comfortable and relatable. They seemed to adjust a lot quicker, compared to other students.

An additional perspective of upperclass student leadership was provided by Jessica. As a former upperclass student leader, Jessica believes the "honest approach" and "consistent treatment of others" that upperclass student leaders exhibit, truly distinguishes them. She states:

> Our leaders are honest with incoming students. I think that's something that gets lost in other orientations. We tell them what we don't like about this school, but we also tell them what we do like. We don't give them this false sense of the true reality.

A final perspective on upperclass student leadership was provided by Mrs. Smith. As a professional staff member, Mrs. Smith implied a potential connection between the outstanding leadership of upperclass students and their previous experience in the program as new students. She recommended:

> All the leaders have experienced the program as an incoming student. I think this increases their commitment to the program. They are more engaged, and they are all invested to improve the program and experience for others.

The perspectives of Leah, Sarah, and Robert proposes alignment with the literature review. Leah and Sarah's perspectives suggest that new students were greatly influenced by watching upperclass student leaders. Through referencing certain qualities about upperclass student leaders, such as "honest" and "relatable," the accounts of Robert and Jessica also imply that stakeholders believe in upperclass student leaders. Believing in upperclass student leaders

may also serve as a catalyst for stakeholders to follow in their footsteps. Mrs. Smith's account addresses the program environment of the Minority Orientation Program. Settings that are committed to success, is referenced by Tinto (2005) in the literature review, as a feature that can lead to greater student success.

In further recognition of their leadership, parents and professional staff stakeholders viewed upperclass student leaders as "unofficial ambassadors" for the Minority Orientation Program and North Spirit University. Since she was involved in the program, Mrs. Morgan has frequently observed her daughter engaging with potential students to encourage their enrollment into the university. As an ambassador, Mrs. Morgan's daughter has "provided tours, provided tips, and discussed academic choices with potential students."

In Mr. James's opinion, program students who evolve into ambassadors is a "best case scenario." He states:

> You want to turn those student leaders into ambassadors. You want to create ambassadors for the university. You want somebody who leaves the university, to reflect on their experience, and ultimately be prepared to sell North Spirit University to their family members and their friends.

Mrs. Smith proposed that upperclass student leaders are advocates for the program and university. Mrs. Smith confirmed a "pattern of upperclass student leaders evolving into advocates for future students." Through the identified pattern, Mrs. Smith suggests the university community, upperclass student leaders, and participating students have all benefited. In addition, Mrs. Smith believes that the experience of upperclass students as leaders and participating students as new members of the community, if positive, enhances the university's ability to retain them.

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The perspectives shared by Mrs. Morgan, Mr. James, and Mrs. Smith recommends

alignment with the literature review. To become fully integrated into the university community,

Tinto proposed students must navigate an incorporation phase (Milem & Berger, 1997). The

incorporation phase appears when a student adopts the prevailing norms of their college or

university community (Milem & Berger, 1997). Through representing North Spirit University

and the Minority Orientation Program as ambassadors, upperclass student leaders recommend

they believe and support the norms of the university.

The perspectives of Mrs. Morgan, Mr. James and Mr. Smith also suggests that other

stakeholders may want to follow in their footsteps. By serving as ambassadors, upperclass

student leaders could be viewed as active leaders and not followers by their peers, future

students, and the other stakeholders they interact with.

Personal Confidence

Through participating in the Minority Orientation Program, upperclass student leaders

and participating students suggested they improved their personal confidence. Jessica, an

upperclass student leader, discussed the program's influence on her confidence. In her words:

> I never thought of myself as a person who could fulfill that kind of leadership
> role. Having the opportunity to try and be a leader really boosted my confidence and
> gave me the encouragement to try more leadership positions. I realized I had people
> looking up to me for guidance and I had more responsibility. Being a leader helped me
> come out of my shell, be less timid in situations, and just be bolder.

Similar to Jessica, Leah suggested she was surprised at her ability to serve as a leader for

the Minority Orientation Program. She advanced:

> I never thought I would take on such a position as a program leader in the
> program. I actually ended up leading NBCA (pseudonym), and becoming the

president of a pharmacy club. So, doing organizations, even beyond minority ones, I didn't think that was possible for me and getting leadership in them, it's not something I saw coming.

Leah also provided an example that implied a connection between her improved confidence and an ability to lead others. In her words:

I was pretty quiet and quite scared to be an orientation leader. I'll never forget, I had to gather everyone together to move them to another event during the program. I just used my voice and told everyone we needed to move. Everyone kind of listened and respected me at that point. Since then, I realized I can move whatever I'm leading in certain directions now.

With a focus on improved confidence, the examples of Jessica and Leah propose a connection with self-efficacy in the literature review. According to Bandura (1994), efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and ultimately behave. Both Jessica and Leah acknowledged how they previously viewed leadership and how the Minority Orientation Program ultimately influenced their leadership. Also, Leah's mention of gaining attention and respect from participating students suggests a willingness for them to follow in her footsteps.

In another perspective, Sarah, a participating student, stated, "I would not have the confidence I now have" if she did not participate in the Minority Orientation Program. Through the program, Sarah offered, "there was a desire to know more about who I was," including her ancestry from East Asia. Sarah eventually traveled to East Asia to learn more about her ancestry.

Sarah's ability to learn more about her family's history alludes to her involvement with the separation phase of student development. The separation phase involves the student's ability

to disassociate themselves from the norms of past communities, including families, among others (Milam & Berger, 1997). In addition, by traveling to East Asia to learn about her ancestry, Sarah suggested she had acquired enough confidence to fulfill her goals.

Finally, Mrs. Smith suggested that students display improved confidence through visiting the Office of Diversity and Inclusion for support. She forwarded:

> It gives them the confidence they need to approach the office for help. If something is going on, they will come back to us for help. They may note reach out to other offices, but they reach out to us as a resource, due to their involvement in the program.

Mrs. Smith's account also implies elements of trust and comfort between professional staff and program students.

In another area of the study's findings, stakeholders indicated that they acquired certain leadership skills through participating in the Minority Orientation Program. Stakeholders provided several examples to show how their leadership skills were enhanced. At first, Jessica admitted she was "overwhelmed" with the variety of tasks that needed to be fulfilled as a program leader. In particular, Jessica referenced the constant need to handle issues, build relationships with peers, and fulfill meetings. As a result, Jessica learned how to multitask.

A defining moment in Jessica's leadership occurred after the program concluded. While studying in the library one day, a former program student approached Jessica for advice on a situation. Jessica offered that she was, "caught off guard by the situation." Ultimately, through realizing that her leadership had influenced the student to approach her, Jessica suggested that her leadership efforts were validated.

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Jessica summarized what she learned about leadership. Through her summary, Jessica also insinuates a potential connection between the program and how it enabled students to follow in her footsteps:

> I think the role of leadership is constant. I think you always have to be thinking someone in the program could be using you as a role model. Being a role model, it made me as a leader want to be a better student and work even harder. I also realized that I had consequences for my actions. This would cause issues if I wanted to make a good impact on someone else.

David provided lessons that he learned about leadership. David, who states, "leadership is not easy," provided his thoughts:

> When you are a true leader of others, there is no easy leadership position. There are situations and you have to resolve them. You have to figure out how to go about and solve them. On top of that, there are meetings. You have to also make sure that everything is being done as ethically as possible.

Through his participation and perspective, Robert identified campus resources he could utilize, learned the physical location of certain places, including the library, and gathered information about upcoming social events prior to his first day of classes.

For a parent stakeholder perspective, Mrs. Morgan believes her daughter learned how to develop relationships with professional staff members in the university community. Mrs. Morgan noted the variety of relationships her daughter developed and suggested that improvements in her daughter's self-confidence and self-esteem were connected to her involvement with the Minority Orientation Program.

Lastly, as a professional in the university community, Mrs. Smith suggested she learned how to "be a better listener" and also was reminded of "the need to be present for students." Additionally, Mrs. Smith was reminded not to "overcomplicate things," as the needs

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of students might be simple. Overall, Mrs. Smith implied a potential connection between her physical presence and its ability to provide comfort to program students she interacts with.

Through their examples, Robert, Mrs. Morgan, and Mrs. Smith indicate an alignment with Tinto (2005) in the literature review. Tinto (2005) suggests students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that provide needed supports, among other things. Through locating resources, establishing relationships with professionals, and being physically present for students, the perspectives of Robert, Mrs. Morgan, and Mrs. Smith signaled a potential connection between resources and student success. In addition, Mrs. Morgan's account of her daughter's ability to form relationships with professionals and Mrs. Smith's ability to provide comfort to students, recommends a potential connection between certain stakeholders and their willingness to follow in the footsteps of others.

Unique Program Factors

During the interview process, stakeholders advanced unique factors about the Minority Orientation Program. Stakeholders from all levels implied that the program's intimacy and a deep level of trust between its members served as a potential connection between stakeholders and their willingness to follow in the footsteps of others.

Stakeholders specifically mentioned the "closeness" and "family like atmosphere" of the Minority Orientation Program. Jessica, a former upperclass student leader, "supports having students come in smaller groups for the program, makes them comfortable." Jessica "believes the connection is stronger for program students," due to the program's format.

Similar to Jessica, David also referenced the program's intimacy. David characterized the program as a "close knit group" that has a "strong sense of family and community". In further support of the program's intimacy, David frequently referenced other program stakeholders as "family," throughout his interview.

The accounts from Jessica and David, with specific mention of certain program attributes, indicates an alignment with Tinto and the literature review. In particular, Tinto believes students must navigate a separation phase to become fully integrated into the higher education setting. The separation phase involves the student's ability to disassociate themselves from the norms of past communities, including families, among others (Milam & Berger, 1997).

Jessica and David's reference to "family" is significant. By referencing the program as a "family," Jessica and David allude to a potential connection between the program and increases in their comfort. As relatively new members of the North Spirit University community, the reference of "family" may also increase the comfort for new students. For new students, potential uncertainties about their experience, including their ability to adjust, may be present. As a result, new students may recall dynamics of the families they previously separated from. Revisiting previous family dynamics may provide new students with support, confidence, and a sense of comfort as they proceed in their new settings. Overall, new students may gravitate towards their previous family dynamics until they have developed enough to guide themselves and build trust with other members in the university community.

The program's intimate size and its ability to help students of color, in comparison to a larger orientation program, was also indicated as a differentiator by program stakeholders. The

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theme of potentially "being overwhelmed" by a larger orientation program was frequently

mentioned by stakeholders. Keith shared his perspectives on the program's size:

> It would have looked drastically different if I would have went to the larger,
> freshman orientation. To be honest, when the actual freshman orientation came, I
> was like, my goodness, there's thousands of kids here. It would have been hard
> for me to determine what I wanted to do and who I wanted to meet.

Robert implied that his ability to develop relationships with his peers as an upperclass

student leader would have been altered if the Minority Orientation Program was not offered. He

mentioned:

> While there's leaders there for the other program, I would not have had the
> chance to get engaged in a deep way. Since it's a smaller group, it allowed us to
> be more active with the new students. It kind of felt like someone was actually
> there for you and actually wanted to develop more of a relationship, versus the
> larger orientation.

In a resounding way, a strong connection between the trust of upperclass student leaders,

participating students, and professional staff members from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion

at North Spirit University was signaled in the study's findings. A connection between

stakeholder trust and their willingness to follow in the footsteps of others was also implied.

Jessica characterized the trust between upperclass student leaders and professional staff

members:

> There was a lot of trust in the process. You asked us to be leaders - you allowed
> us to direct and lead pretty early on. It was very self-directed work. We were
> allowed to make it as fun or boring as we wanted.

Cynthia, another upperclass student leader, believes professional staff members earned

their trust. Cynthia offered that professional staff members, "believed in their abilities to lead,"

and "saw the potential in us as leaders." In another perspective, David shared, "the professional

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staff's trust spoke volumes to him." In a unique way, David suggested there was self-imposed pressure on him, as result of the trust he received from professional staff members. Being personally compelled, David was, "determined to make sure the program would be successful for others," as a result.

Finally, Leah confirmed a strong connection with professional staff members. Characterizing herself as "a frequent visitor to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion for guidance," Leah discussed the evolution of her trust with the professional staff members:

> The relationship developed over time. From the beginning you guys made it clear that you were here for us and the office has very much made it clear that we can come in for anything.

The accounts of Jessica, Cynthia, Leah, and David, with a focus on trust between students and professional staff members, indicate alignment with the literature review and a desire to follow in the footsteps of others. To reiterate, Tinto (2005) believes students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that are committed to their success and provide the needed supports.

In accordance with Tinto in the literature review, David's experience signals that he was potentially engaged in the incorporation phase of student development (Milam & Berger, 1997). Due to the trust he received from professional staff members, David mentioned that "he wanted to give back to other peers." David appears to have adopted the norms and expectations of the Minority Orientation Program. The program intends for younger peers to follow in the footsteps of upperclass student leaders, with a focus on helping peers.

Through an additional perspective, David signaled a deeper level of trust between program students and professional staff members. David offered his personal struggles as a student and addressed his relationship with myself, as a professional staff member. David recalled a time in his academic career where he was "100% not going to graduate." Facing academic dismissal, David believed he would "drop-out, go back home, and face the fact of being another college dropout."

David identified a conversation in our relationship that challenged him not to dropout and also changed his mindset. He offered:

> I remember you brought me into the office and challenged me to find my true path as a college student. You challenged me to ask "why I was here." You recalled the first time we met and how excited I was to be in college. That was big to me - you believed in me and held me accountable. I was able to turn it around from there.

David's perspective implies alignment with Tinto's view of student success in the literature review. Tinto (2005) believes students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that hold high expectations for their success and provide needed supports. David indicates he found a person that was committed to his success, challenged him to achieve success, and provided the needed supports. Ultimately, David appears to make a connection between our interactions and his desire to follow in my footsteps as a trusted figure in his life.

As a parent, Mr. Wilson also indicated a trusting relationship between his family and the professional staff members in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Mr. Wilson specifically recalled a meeting that was held in the office during the Minority Orientation Program. He recalled:

We were concerned about letting our daughter go. We came to your office and had an impromptu meeting. We wanted to make sure our daughter was not there, and it was only us as parents and you. We wanted to be frank about our conversation with you as well. In terms of letting our daughter go, I will say the meeting put my wife and I at ease. It was clear that you cared. We knew you in particular, would care for her and we felt comfortable leaving her there, thanks to that meeting.

Mr. Wilson's experience proposes alignment with Tinto (2005) in the areas of student success and institutional commitment. Tinto states institutional commitment is a specific commitment from the leadership of an institution and a willingness from leadership to invest resources to enhance student success (Tinto, 2005). Mr. Wilson's experience suggests he was comfortable with the program, my leadership abilities, and the university's ability to provide support to his daughter for her eventual success.

Stakeholders offered additional factors about the Minority Orientation Program that seemed to aid their experiences, Leah linked the influence of multiple stakeholders and an increased accountability for participating students. In her words:

You have the office staff pushing you to do better and be the best you can be. You have your mentors pushing you to be the best you can be. You have your new friends, who push you. Other students don't get any of this, if they just do the regular orientation program.

With exposure to other orientation programs, Mr. Wilson and Mrs. Brown discussed features of the Minority Orientation Program that distinguish it from other programs. Mr. Wilson recalled his previous experience with a program that focused solely on African American students. Open for all students of color, Mr. Wilson offered an appreciation for the program and its "inclusion of all minority students."

With a younger son who experienced the Minority Orientation Program and an older son enrolled at another PWI, Mrs. Brown had experience with multiple orientation programs. Mrs. Brown mentioned her experience with the Minority Orientation Program was "significantly better," and there were "clear differences," in comparison to other programs she participated in. Ultimately, Mrs. Brown suggested her positive experience with the program, was attributed to how the university community welcomed her and her family.

The experiences of Leah, Mr. Wilson, and Mrs. Brown offers potential alignment with Tinto (2005) and certain fulfillments for student success. Tinto encourages that students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that are committed to their success, hold high expectations for their success, and are provided needed supports. Through highlighting stakeholder accountability and acknowledging the Minority Orientation Program environment as welcoming and committed to student success, alignment with Tinto is suggested.

Stakeholders noted potential challenges for the Minority Orientation Program. Specifically, stakeholders forwarded concerns about student connectivity and the length of the program overall. Stakeholders suggested it was difficult to connect with students overall and that not all students would benefit through their participation in the program. As a university employee, Mrs. Smith recommended it was challenging to keep students engaged during all phases of the program. In her words:

> It's a challenge to get them to come. Once we get them here or welcome them back, there is the challenge of keeping them engaged during the rest of the program. We also want to make sure they connect with the office after the program is over.

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From her experience as an upperclass student leader, Cynthia believes that differing attitudes and beliefs of the entering classes students of color makes it's difficult to connect with them. She offered:

> I learned you never know what you're going to get every year as every class is not the same. People's attitudes can be completely different. I mean the reality of it is, some people may not like what you have planned for them.

Similar to Cynthia, Keith suggested it was hard to connect potential student participants to the benefits they would receive through participating. He forwarded:

> It's hard to get students of color to participate. I don't know if they don't want to or if they don't see the benefit, but it's hard to get them to see the benefit if they don't participate. It's a hard dilemma.

While the program may have benefits for its participants, stakeholders suggested that not all participating students of color would benefit. Lisa shared:

> Although you can try, you can't help every single person. We can give them all the resources they need, but not everyone will use all the resources given to them. Although the program is amazing, there are a few students who may fall through the cracks.

Several stakeholders also forwarded their concerns about the overall length of the Minority Orientation Program. Stakeholders including Lisa and Mary, signaled a desire to extend the program's length. In Lisa's words:

> There's just not enough time. You're always wishing that you could have spent a whole week with the people of color on this campus. I hope it's feasible in the future.

Expressing her praise for the program, Mary also suggested the program's length could be extended. In her words:

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I didn't want the Minority Orientation Program to end. I really thought, we all could have used two or three more days at least. My hope is that it will be longer in the future and much bigger, in terms of students.

Another unique area of the study's findings was signaled through stakeholders and their ability to identify the main goals of the Minority Orientation Program. Specifically, stakeholders suggested that acclimating students to their new university setting and making them feel welcomed and comfortable were the main goals of the Minority Orientation Program. Stakeholders also indicated there was a willingness for them to follow in the footsteps of others, as a result of fulfilling program goals.

Stakeholder responses aligned with several of orientation program goals that appeared in the literature review. The main goals of orientation programs are to facilitate the student's successful integration into a new and unfamiliar academic and social setting. In addition, successful new student orientation programs set the stage for academic success, foster students feeling valued and included, and connect students with their new campus community (Tucker & Hemphill, 2018).

The freedom of the Minority Orientation Program was provided by stakeholders as a final, unique feature. Stakeholders referenced several program attributes to support the program's freedom. Cynthia realized she was provided freedom as an upperclass student leader to make decisions and lead the program. As a leader, Cynthia felt empowered to "do what I wanted to do, and make it as fun or as boring as I wanted to."

Jessica connected the program's freedom to an appreciation for the professional staff members. Jessica credited the staff for "letting them take control as leaders." In another

perspective, David connected the Minority Orientation Program's freedom to a balance in

leadership professional staff members and upperclass student leaders. David forwarded:

> There were times where you all were hands off, in letting us lead the charge and give feedback. You allowed us to make mistakes and learn from them, without mentioning it was a mistake. That spoke volumes to us, because you don't learn unless you mess up.

As a parent, Mr. James implied a connection between the program's freedom and the

students "not feeling rushed" in their development. Mr. James offered:

> It's nice to be able to slowly acclimate yourself at a deliberate pace and have the campus to yourself for a few days. It lets things marinate slowly for them, so they aren't all of a sudden entering with all the other students.

Finally, Mrs. Morgan believes the program's freedom was reflected by not having

professional staff members run all facets of the program. In her words:

> You allowed the students to participate. And that's rare, because most programs involve kids being lectured to. You allowed them to ask questions, to interact with each other, you allowed times of comfort and bonding. You made it fun and approachable.

Overall, the theme of "Following in Footsteps" was exemplified through several

stakeholder examples overall. Through sharing their experiences with mentorship,

improvements in personal confidence, and trust among participants, participants signaled a desire

to follow in the footsteps of others. In addition, participating students of color supported that

upperclass student leaders influenced their growth and development in significant ways. As a

result, participating students of color aspired to follow in the footsteps of upperclass student

leaders of the Minority Orientation Program.

Limitations and Ethical Concerns

Limitations in this study were related to participant selection, context, and researcher perception. This study focused on the perspectives of students of color and stakeholders who participated in a pre-entry orientation program at a PWI. For participant selection, the study solely examined the perceptions of stakeholders who volunteered to participate. Using criteria-based sampling, the recruitment of qualified study participants relied heavily on stakeholders with a connection to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at North Spirit University.

For context, each stakeholder provided individualized information. Overall, no information was collected from stakeholders at other types of higher education institutions (*i.e.,* large, public, non-religious, etc.). While the study's findings focused on the perceptions of stakeholders, the overall findings are not representative of all students of color and stakeholders with an affiliation to retention programs in higher education.

Finally, as the researcher I have personal experiences and biases that may be reflected in the analysis of the data. As an African American, male, I have experienced a Predominately White Institution as an undergraduate student, graduate student, and in my professional role as a senior administrator. Specifically, as a student I participated directly in retention programs and other resources that aimed to retain students of color.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed three emerging themes that were revealed during interviews with stakeholders of the Minority Orientation Program. The themes were: (1) Out of the Woods, (2) Releasing the Pressure, and (3) Following in Footsteps.

Stakeholders suggested the Minority Orientation Program has a proven ability to engage and transition students of color into a new higher education environment. Stakeholders also offered a connection between the program's ability to foster lasting relationships among its stakeholders. In addition, several stakeholders also suggested that gains in their personal confidence and leadership abilities were directly connected to their participation in the Minority Orientation Program.

All stakeholder groups advocated for a connection between the Minority Orientation Program's environment and its ability to acclimate student participants. Lastly, all stakeholders suggested that the outstanding leadership of upperclass student leaders and trust shared among certain stakeholders, were true differentiators for the Minority Orientation Program.

Overall, stakeholders for this study confirmed that the Minority Orientation Program affects the collegiate experience for students of color in several ways. Additionally, stakeholders successfully connected their ability to advance in the completion of their degree at North Spirit University to their participation in the Minority Orientation Program.

The final chapter of this study will address the guiding research questions and implications from the findings. The study's implications on the researcher, theory, and future research will also be discussed in this chapter. Recommendations for future practices will conclude the final chapter of this study.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The final chapter includes an overview of the study and major findings. The guiding research questions for this study along with implications for theory and the study's researcher are also provided in this chapter. Recommendations for future research and future practices conclude the chapter and study overall.

This study explored perceptions of stakeholders who participated in the Minority Orientation Program, a pre-entry initiative focused on retaining students of color at a PWI. Specifically, the study qualitatively assessed the program's impact on participating students of color. Program perceptions, lessons learned, and factors that shape the student of color experience in higher education were included in the assessment.

Centered in grounded theory, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from Minority Orientation Program stakeholders. The interview process utilized open-ended questions to gain knowledge about the stakeholders and their experiences. Thirteen stakeholders, including four participating students, four student parents, four upperclass student leaders, and a professional staff member shared their experiences. Stakeholders were chosen based on their previous, direct involvement with the Minority Orientation Program at North Spirit University. Overall, each stakeholder category possessed unique perspectives about the Minority Orientation Program.

Overview of Study

The conceptual framework for this study **(Figure 2)** was grounded in Tinto's (1975) student integration model. Tinto's model viewed colleges and universities as organizations composed of two interacting systems: an academic system and social system (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's model proposes that a student's commitment to personal goals and the institution they attend can be influenced by their social and academic integration. Critical Race Theory (CRT), which focuses on race and the asserts that marginalized group members in society are mute, was an additional framework that was utilized in this study (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995). Storytelling, an important tenet of CRT, was incorporated in this study. Delgado (1990) argues that supports storytelling from people of color is critical, as they speak from experiences that are framed by racism

Overall, extant literature reveals that students of color experience issues in their ability to enroll, acclimate, and persist at higher education institutions. With a decrease in the national yield of eligible students, the confirmation of large gaps in degree completion rates between minority and non-minority students, and a low rate of degree completion (Farrugia & Andrejko, 2017; Shapiro et al., 2017; Astin, Tsui & Avalos, 1996), the ability for enrolled students of color at institutions of higher education to persist beyond their Freshman year is concerning. In addition, commonalities in the inability of students of color to integrate into college are found in a lack of a critical mass of students with similar ethnic characteristics as well as financial challenges (Seidman, 2005). Students of color may also have issues that are attributed to their

personal backgrounds (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). Finally, researchers believe students of color who attend predominantly white institutions (PWIs) experience alienation and chilly campus climates (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Nelson-Laird et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

As a result of the identified issues for students of color in higher education, this study explored the following questions: 1) How does the Minority Orientation Program affect the collegiate experience of students of color? and 2) In what ways can student participants of the Minority Orientation Program connect their ability to advance in the completion of their degree at the university to their participation in the program?

Overview of Major Findings

Through their interviews, stakeholders discussed factors that contributed to their experience with the Minority Orientation Program. Factors relating to their backgrounds, family situation and certain experiences with the Minority Orientation Program, among others, were addressed by stakeholders. Overall, three major themes emerged in the study's findings: (1) Out of the Woods, (2) Releasing the Pressure, and (3) Following in Footsteps.

Stakeholders suggested the Minority Orientation Program has an ability to engage and transition students of color into a new higher education environment. Stakeholders also offered multiple connections between the program's ability to foster lasting relationships. Next, several stakeholders indicated that gains in their personal confidence and improvements in their leadership abilities were attributed to their participation in the Minority Orientation Program. In another area, all stakeholder groups advocated for a connection between the program

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environment and its ability to acclimate student participants. Lastly, all stakeholders signaled

that outstanding leadership from the program's upperclass student leaders and trust shared

among certain stakeholders were true differentiators for the Minority Orientation Program.

Through providing their insights, stakeholders addressed the study's research

questions. Overall, the study's findings confirmed that the Minority Orientation Program affects

the collegiate experience for students of color in several ways. The following are examples of

how the program affected students. Students identified the program's environment for its safe,

welcoming, and family-like qualities. As a result, all stakeholders implied the environment was

conducive to students of color and their success. Next, the program addressed stakeholder

concerns related to race, developing relationships, isolation, and personal confidence.

Students of color, including upperclass student leaders and participating students also

connected their ability to advance in the completion of their degree at North Spirit University to

their participation in the Minority Orientation Program. Students highlighted qualities of the

program environment and credited specific resources, including offices and initiatives in the

university community, to their ability to graduate. Next, students recommended that certain

stakeholders in the university community, including peers and professional members, positively

influenced their degree pursuit. Lastly, in an attempt to increase their ability to graduate,

students noted that the Minority Orientation Program positively influenced their personal

development.   Improvements in student self-confidence and self-esteem, for example, indicated

the program influenced student behavior as they advanced in the completion of their degree.

Implications for Researcher

As an African-American, senior administrator in higher education, I have been involved in initiatives that aimed to acclimate and retain students of color. Such initiatives focused on providing financial assistance, emotional support, and full-time employment opportunities for students of color. As the researcher for this study, implications relating to my role as a higher education administrator and my ability to better serve students of color were revealed in the study's findings. Please find my researcher implications as follows.

My first implication as a researcher is focused on identifying potential gaps in my service to students of color in the higher education setting. These gaps may appear in student connectivity and in my ability to identify concerns for students of color. Due to diminishing contact with students of color as a result of increased administrative responsibilities and the rapidly changing environment of higher education, my ability to truly discern student of color needs may have diminished. As a result, my ability to understand concerns for students of color and how I can specifically help them needs to be reviewed. In my role as the researcher, I should further investigate influences for students of color, potential gaps in service and my ability to influence their conditions for success.

The next implication is the importance of physical spaces for students of color in the higher education setting. I deeply undervalued the importance of physical spaces such as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at North Spirit University, for students of color and their overall development. Documented in the study's findings, students of color connected comfort, trust, and safety, as well as the fulfillment of certain needs, to physical spaces in the university

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community. In further support, stakeholders also recommended that ethnic centers, such as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at North Spirit University, provide an opportunity for students to directly interact with peers and professional members in the higher education setting. In line with the study's conceptual framework, students of color connected improvements in personal confidence and overall self-efficacy beliefs to physical spaces that show a commitment to their success.   In my role as the researcher, I should further investigate how physical spaces impact students of color and examine additional ways for physical spaces to contribute to their success during and after the Minority Orientation Program has concluded.

The third researcher implication is focused on upperclass student leaders and their positive impact. The study's findings suggest that North Spirit University and the Minority Orientation Program has greatly benefited from the leadership of upperclass student leaders. As a community, North Spirit University is simply not aware of the impact that upperclass student leaders provide to students of color. Upperclass student leaders exhibit great pride for the program, are proven mentors to incoming students and serve as ambassadors for North Spirit University. Upperclass students for the Minority Orientation Program also play a critical role in the acclimation and overall success of incoming students of color. As a result, upperclass student leaders enable North Spirit University to receive additional tuition revenue from students of color. Aside from the benefits they provide, all upperclass student leaders for the Minority Orientation Program are volunteers. Overall, the study's findings suggest there is an opportunity for upperclass student leaders to increase their leadership in the Minority Orientation Program.

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In my role as the researcher, I should further investigate additional ways to increase the leadership roles and capacities of upperclass student leaders.

The final implication for me as a researcher points to the connection between students of color and their self-efficacy beliefs. While the study's findings revealed that the Minority Orientation Program provides assistance to stakeholders in different ways, improvements in self-efficacy beliefs by participating students of color was frequently noted. Regardless of their engagement with entities in the university community, such as the Minority Orientation Program, the study's findings indicated that students of color have to personally navigate issues. These issues include isolation, acceptance, and racial implications. Improvements in self-efficacy beliefs are currently delivered as a by-product in the Minority Orientation Program. Based on the program structure, there are no specific events that address self-efficacy for participating students. As the researcher, I should further investigate how the Minority Orientation Program can incorporate programs that specifically seek to enhance self-efficacy beliefs for participating students of color.

Implications for Theory

Tinto's Student Integration Theory

Tinto's Student Integration Theory viewed colleges and universities as organizations composed of two interacting systems: an academic system and social system (Tinto, 1975). Tinto believes students who become fully integrated both socially and academically are more likely to be committed to the institution and committed to securing a college degree (Eimers & Pike, 1997).

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Through their participation in the Minority Orientation Program, stakeholders suggested that the social integration of students of color was enhanced. For example, influences in relationship development, personal confidence and, comfort for students of color were noted by stakeholders. Stakeholders also observed a connection between students of color, their participation, and a positive influence on their academic integration. Through highlighting issues such as skepticism by faculty and classroom isolation, students of color discussed how the Minority Orientation Program addressed their concerns and ultimately influenced their academic integration.

The conceptual model **(Figure 2)** for this study is centered in Tinto's Student Integration Theory. The conceptual model for this study suggests that social integration and self-efficacy beliefs for students of color are undervalued by Tinto and his model. In particular, the conceptual model supports that interactions for students of color in their social setting, especially with peers and faculty members, is a critical part of their social integration as new members of a higher education community. Next, the conceptual model proposes that self-efficacy, which is not present in Tinto's model, is active during all phases of enrollment for students of color. The ability for students of color to enhance and utilize self-efficacy beliefs is viewed as a critical factor in their pursuit of a degree.

As suggested in **Figure 2**, the importance of social integration for students of color was supported by this study's findings. As theorized, students of color may possess unique experiences and background characteristics that highlight the importance of certain social interactions. As previously mentioned, Tinto believes that students come to postsecondary

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institutions with a range of different background characteristics and secondary-school

experiences (Tinto, 1975). Differences in race, sex, and family, along with social, educational,

and financial contexts are included in background characteristics.

For this study, stakeholders acknowledged the importance of certain social interactions

for students of color in several ways. First, students of color connected interactions with certain

peers and professional members in the university community to solving issues related to race,

relationship development, and isolation. Students of color also demonstrated the importance of

certain social interactions when describing how they felt valued and cared for by certain offices,

peers, and professional members. Lastly, students of color connected the importance of their

social interactions to mentorship. Through highlighting interactions with upperclass student

leaders, including receiving advice on academics, social engagement opportunities, and

accountability, students of color confirmed the importance of certain social interactions.

The study's findings also support the belief that Tinto's Student Integration Model does

not account for issues that students of color face at higher education institutions. In agreement

with Tierney (1992), students of color in this study noted differences between their experiences

versus their non-minority peers. For example, differences based on race, finances, acceptance,

and how they are perceived in the university community were identified by students of color in

this study's findings. As a result, the differences noted by students of color in the study's

findings align with the literature review and the inability for students of color to successfully

integrate. Specifically, issues attributed to personal backgrounds, financial challenges, personal

alienation, and chilly campus climates all surfaced during the study (D'Augelli & Hershberger,

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1993; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Nelson-Laird et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Seidman, 2005).

Students of color also acknowledged the importance of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Identified as a welcoming and safe space that is committed to their success, students of color connected the importance of physical spaces to their wellbeing and overall development in the university's community. In addition, by interacting with the staff and peers, students of color were able to resolve issues, improve their confidence and gain access to resources to enhance their overall success.

The conceptual framework for this study **(Figure 2)**, also suggested the need for students of color to incorporate self-efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and ultimately behave (Bandura, 1994).   Students of color in the Minority Orientation Program provided examples that signaled improvements in their self-efficacy. Through creating a foundation for success, building their confidence as leaders, and providing them with resources, students of color acknowledged the Minority Orientation Program's impact on their self-efficacy. Stakeholders also connected the influence of upperclass student leaders as peers and professional members in the university community to improvements in self-efficacy and the ability to complete their degrees.

While the Minority Orientation Program was helpful, this study's findings also revealed that students of color had to address issues directly and identify needed resources aside from their involvement with the program. For example, as a result of previous experiences and due to certain background characteristics, students of color described how their beliefs were challenged

prior to enrolling in higher education. In several cases, students were made to feel inferior and were also involved in racially charged incidents prior to enrolling in North Spirit University.

Moving forward, researchers can use this study's conceptual framework to evaluate aspects in the social setting that are important to students of color in higher education. This study's conceptual framework can be utilized to identify how certain social aspects for students of color have a larger impact on their integration and retention as opposed to others. Ultimately, researchers must understand and acknowledge that students of color, while attempting to integrate into their new surroundings of higher education, may encounter influences in their social settings and self-efficacy beliefs that can significantly impact their standing and chances for success in higher education.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is committed to social justice and offers a liberating and transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Matsuda, 1991). CRT builds its validity through studying laws that support White authority and Black subordination (Hilton, 2007). With a focus on race, CRT was a chosen framework for this study.

Several tenets of CRT aligned with the study's findings. First, the tenet of storytelling was incorporated. CRT confirms the voices of the dispossessed and marginalized group members in society are mute (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As a result, CRT asserts that "voice" can be found through stories of those who are oppressed, which are considered important to truly

understanding their experiences (Delgado, 1990). The semi-structured interviews of this study provided a "voice" for stakeholders to share their experiences with the Minority Orientation Program.

Race as a social construct was the next tenet that aligned with this study. CRT suggests race is a category that society invents, manipulates or retires when convenient (Delgado, 2001). In addition, racial categories also are not bound to any biological or genetic realities, but instead are given pseudo-permanent characteristics by society (Delgado, 2001) .

The tenet of storytelling was incorporated through stakeholder interviews. In several examples, stakeholders shared experiences and issues they faced, as marginalized members of society. For example, stakeholders discussed their experiences with race-related issues including microaggressions, lack of respect by faculty/staff, and racial slurs. In addition, students of color in this study provided their "voice" by identifying experiences with isolation, feeling disconnected and being targeted in the classroom setting because of their race. Lastly, through storytelling, students of color attributed their growth and development to support they received from peers, professional staff members, and certain offices in the university community.

The tenet of race as a social construct was also documented in this study's findings. Students of color connected negative experiences in the university community to their race. Students shared experiences with racism and prejudice, as well as contextual signals that they needed to act a certain way because of their race. By acting a certain way, underrepresented students suggested they would not stand out or perhaps draw attention to their racial identities. In addition, students of color shared experiences where "they were viewed as

disgruntled and angry" by peers and other members of the university community, simply based on their mannerisms, such as the inflection in their voices or their physical appearances; these experiences confirm CRT's perspective regarding race as a social construct.

Through identifying commonalities between people of all races, students of color also signaled an ability to understand CRT's tenet of race as a social construct. Specifically, by acknowledging the world as a global society and underscoring the need to learn from other people's backgrounds and perspectives, students of color secured program participation from White and other non-minority students. With no regard to race, students of color signaled an understanding of Delgado (2001), who believes racial categories are not bound to any biological or genetic realities.

Through understanding the tenet of race as a social construct, students of color also indicated a separation from their previous norms and beliefs on race. Tinto believes students must navigate a separation phase as they attempt to integrate into higher education. The separation phase involves the student's ability to dissociate from previous norms (Milam & Berger, 1997). Contrary to their previous thoughts, students of color in the study provided examples that connected a greater understanding about race and its perceptions.

Lastly, stakeholders theorized that race played a critical role in how students of color acclimated to the higher education setting, as opposed to their White counterparts. In alignment with CRT, whereas Whites have authority and Blacks are subordinate, stakeholders acknowledged that students of color have to make psychological and emotional adjustments upon entry to increase their chances of success. Stakeholders also noted that cultural and social

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activities provided by the university may be geared for non-minority students. In addition, stakeholders suggested issues related to the financial aid process, including confusion and lack of clarity for students of color and their families, may result from systemic racism. Specifically, if North Spirit University is aware that students of color and their families have a higher likelihood of not understanding the financial aid process, but they take no action to remedy the situation, systemic racism may be present. Lastly, stakeholders mentioned that students of color, due to their backgrounds in comparison to White peers, are potentially disadvantaged in terms of their accessibility to resources and cultural exposure prior to their enrollment.

Overall, race played a significant factor in the experiences of all Minority Orientation Program stakeholders. Through their experiences, students of color in particular revealed that they faced unpredictable treatment in how they would potentially be perceived and even treated in the university community, based on their race. In addition, from their initial arrival to campus and beyond the completion of the Minority Orientation Program, several students of color remarked that race, its impact, and any potential implications on their experience as a result, were frequently noted.

The experiences of stakeholders, including their understanding of race and the Minority Orientation Program's influence on race, was aided through the use of CRT. Moving forward, researchers can explore potential intersectionalities of CRT based on student characteristics, backgrounds, and their acclimation experiences as they enter higher education.

Implications for Future Research

Current research identifies issues that impact students of color as they transition into higher education and also delivers methods to retain them. While the methods are helpful, the lived experiences for students of color is often not included in research. Through their experiences, students of color can provide critical information about issues they face and unique factors that impact their overall acclimation process. This study specifically supports the need to identify issues for students of color as they transition into a PWI institution of higher education.

Based on the results of this study, three recommendations for future research are provided: 1. Review program structure, 2. Enhance student development opportunities, and 3. Conduct research on retention programs at other types of higher education institutions.

First, reviewing the overall structure of the Minority Orientation Program may prove beneficial to students of color. In an effort to enhance relationship development and overall acclimation to their new surroundings, stakeholders expressed an interest in extending programs associated with the Minority Orientation Program throughout the academic year. Programs such as student socials, mentor breakouts, and well-being initiatives were forwarded by stakeholders. A desire to have additional interactions with the Minority Orientation Program, including peers and professional staff members, may produce additional benefits in the areas of relationship development, safety, and comfort for new students of color at North Spirit University. Overall, an attempt to enhance the personal development and experience of students of color may be realized by conducting research on the structure of the Minority Orientation Program.

Second, this study's findings suggest the Minority Orientation Program influences the overall development for students of color in numerous ways. Influences in relationship development, personal confidence, and mentorship were confirmed by students of color in this study's findings. Based on the Minority Orientation Program's current structure, the previous influences are a by-product of their involvement with other facets of the program. Moving forward, an opportunity exists to fulfill activities in the Minority Orientation Program that specifically target certain areas of development (i.e. self-efficacy, resilience, etc.) for students of color. Future research on additional opportunities for student development along with their official incorporation into the Minority Orientation Program should be conducted.

Lastly, this study included limited research on retention programs at other institutions of higher education that are comparable to the Minority Orientation Program. Conducting research on additional retention programs may add value to incoming students of color who participate in the Minority Orientation Program. For example, unique factors for student of color success, best practices, and the opportunity to identify trends can be achieved through conducting research on retention programs at other institutions of higher education. Ultimately, future research on retention programs may provide an opportunity for the Minority Orientation Program to strengthen the acclimation process and eventual success for its students of color.

Implications for Practice

This study documents the need for higher education institutions to ensure that services for students of color are aligned to help them transition into higher education. With a focus on

addressing student of color needs, the following implications for practice are offered: 1. Investing in student needs, 2. Training faculty, staff and student leaders, and 3. Creating an integrated program model for student services.

This study encourages higher education institutions to identify and address the needs of students of color in additional ways. While the Minority Orientation Program assists students of color in multiple ways, the study's findings confirmed that certain needs were not fulfilled. For example, the program did not assist students with financial issues nor address issues related to classroom isolation. Addressing the needs of students of color can significantly influence their experience and the institution's overall ability to retain them. In alignment with the literature review, Tinto believes institutions that are effective in student retention continually ask themselves how their actions serve to further the welfare of students (Tinto, 2003). The Minority Orientation Program and North Spirit University have an opportunity to ensure their actions enhance the experience of students of color as well as their overall welfare.

While entities such as the Office of Diversity and Inclusion provides services to students of color, additional resources are needed. A clearer understanding of issues that students of color navigate could enhance their experience and also provide an opportunity for the Minority Orientation Program and North Spirit University to be proactive in serving them. Furthermore, as opposed to simply raising awareness about services for students of color, North Spirit University and its leadership could seize an opportunity to engage students directly by investing in their needs. In conjunction, an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to students of color would also be presented to the North Spirit University community overall.

The next implication for practice found through this study's findings relates to training for the university community. Students of color described their experiences with classroom isolation, detailed incidents involving racial slurs, and highlighted issues related to their acceptance by other non-minority peers and faculty members into the university community. In addition to the noted experiences, this study also revealed that stereotypes and potential biases contributed to social and emotional stress for students of color in the Minority Orientation Program. Lastly, students in this study discussed a need for faculty, staff and peers to understand the backgrounds of students of color who are entering the university community.

Mandated cultural competency training for faculty, staff, and the Minority Orientation Program student leaders can help them understand the intersectionalities that exist between students of color, their backgrounds, and ultimately their experience as members at a PWI. Faculty members in particular may have an opportunity to implement changes in their classroom to ensure that minoritized students feel included and supported, and don't see the curriculum as culturally exclusive.

In alignment with the literature review, Person & Christensen (1996) revealed that students of color experience discrimination in the classroom setting and may view the curriculum as culturally exclusive. As a result of understanding students of color and their issues through training, faculty members may feel inclined to personally engage with them in meaningful ways. Upperclass student leaders of the Minority Orientation Program may also benefit from training. By understanding issues facing incoming students of color face, upperclass student leaders may have an opportunity to address their needs. An opportunity for upperclass student leaders to gain

greater insight into how they have navigated their journey as students at a PWI may also be realized through implemented trainings.

The need for an integrated program model for the Minority Orientation Program is the final implication for practice. In the study's findings, stakeholders discussed the need to build a coalition of additional support from campus and surrounding community partners. Offices at North Spirit University related to academic success, student recruitment, and residence life were deemed helpful by stakeholders during the Minority Orientation Program. In addition, community entities that surrounded North Spirit University, including ethnic hair shops, ethnic food eateries and community organizations also added value for program stakeholders. Next, several stakeholders discussed their involvement with students of color, who were participating in programs comparable to the Minority Orientation Program at neighboring institutions of higher education.

Establishing an integrated program model would provide the opportunity to incorporate additional support for students of color. An integrated program model would offer strategic opportunities for departments to partner with each other and share resources, which would ultimately allow for other campus members to identify and address student of color needs. As a result, an opportunity for greater alignment between the programmatic efforts of the Minority Orientation Program and North Spirit University's ability to retain students could be achieved, while promoting their success at the same time. According to Tinto (2005), a condition for student success is found in three types of student support: academic, social, and student involvement. Through the creation of an integrated program model, the Minority Orientation

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Program would have an opportunity to positively influence all three types of support for its students of color.

Conclusion

In this qualitative assessment, I sought to uncover the experiences of thirteen stakeholders from the Minority Orientation Program, a pre-entry program aimed to increase the retention and eventual success for students of color at a PWI. Overall, this study confirmed the program's ability to successfully engage and transition students of color into a new higher education environment.

This study revealed that students of color face various issues as they enter and attempt to remain enrolled in the university community. Issues related to race, developing relationships, isolation, and personal confidence were acknowledged by stakeholders of this study. Through their direct participation in the Minority Orientation Program, stakeholders confirmed the program's ability to resolve their issues in multiple ways. In addition, stakeholders highlighted the program's ability to foster lasting relationships and also suggested that gains in their personal confidence and leadership abilities were directly attributed to their participation.

This study's findings indicate that North Spirit University, is the beneficiary of a strong network of both incoming and returning students of color. While guidance and help was provided to stakeholders by certain professionals in the university community, the study's findings suggest North Spirit University does not completely understand the issues that new students of color face as they enroll. Furthermore, through identifying complexities for incoming students of color, including self-imposed pressures, unique background characteristics

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and issues related to acceptance, the study revealed that potential gaps between the needs of students of color and university assistance may be present. As a result, North Spirit University may not be aware of the circumstances that many students of color have previously navigated and overcome in their social and academic settings respectively.

Overall, this study's findings confirmed that the Minority Orientation Program enhances the collegiate experience for students of color in several ways. Positive influences in student acclimation were connected to the program's safe and caring environment, support from professional members, and outstanding leadership from upperclass student leaders. Underlying the positive influences was a deep level of trust among all program stakeholders.

Finally, stakeholders successfully connected their ability to successfully complete their degree at North Spirit University to their participation in the Minority Orientation Program. Stakeholders identified specific resources, including certain offices and initiatives in the university community, as important factors in their ability to persist to graduation. Stakeholders also noted that peers and certain professional members in the university community, positively influenced their degree pursuit and overall outlook. Improvements in their overall self-efficacy beliefs also indicated the Minority Orientation Program influenced stakeholder behavior as they advanced in the completion of their degree at North Spirit University.

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APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Participating Student Group

1. What are your thoughts on the Minority Orientation Program?
2. What have you learned from your involvement in the Minority Orientation Program?
3. Has the Minority Orientation Program helped you adjust to your new surroundings? In what ways?
4. What do you see as the main goals of the Minority Orientation Program?
5. Has the Minority Orientation Program helped you develop academically?
6. Has the Minority Orientation Program helped you develop socially?
7. Do you feel the Minority Orientation Program impacted your ability to stay enrolled through the completion of your Freshman year and beyond?
8. What challenges do students of color face as they enter a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education?
9. What challenges do students of color face as they remain enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education?
10. What are strengths and challenges for the Minority Orientation Program?

Student Parent Group

1. What are your thoughts on the Minority Orientation Program?
2. What is your perception of the Minority Orientation Program?
3. What do you see as the main goals of the Minority Orientation Program?
4. Did the Minority Orientation Program help your son/daughter adjust to his/her new surroundings?
5. Did the Minority Orientation Program impact your son/daughter's ability to stay enrolled through the completion of his/her Freshman year and beyond?
6. Did the Minority Orientation Program help you adjust as a parent?
7. Do you believe pre-entry programs such as the Minority Orientation Program, are beneficial for students of color?
8. What factors do students of color face as they enter a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education?
9. What factors do students of color face as they remain enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education?

Upperclass Student Leader Group

1. What are your thoughts on the Minority Orientation Program as a former participant and upperclass leader?
2. What have you learned from your involvement in the Minority Orientation Program? How did the program help you develop?
3. What does it mean to be a leader for the Minority Orientation Program?
4. What do you see as the main goals of the Minority Orientation Program?
5. How does the Minority Orientation Program impact a student's ability to stay enrolled through the completion of their Freshman year and beyond?
6. What factors do students of color face as they enter a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education?
7. What factors do students of color face as they remain enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education?
8. What are strengths and challenges for the Minority Orientation Program?
9. What do you envision for the future of the Minority Orientation Program?

Professional Staff Member Group

1. What are your thoughts on the Minority Orientation Program?
2. What have you learned from your involvement in the Minority Orientation Program?
3. What are the personal and professional challenges in fulfilling your commitment to the Minority Orientation Program?
4. In what ways do pre-entry programs such as the Minority Orientation Program, truly help students of color adjust to their new surroundings?
5. What do you see as the main goals of the Minority Orientation Program?
6. What value does the Minority Orientation Program provide to the university community?
7. What factors do students of color face as they enter a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education?
8. What factors do students of color face as they remain enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of higher education?
9. What are strengths and challenges for the Minority Orientation Program?
10. What do you envision for the future of the Minority Orientation Program?

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:	The Impact of Retention Efforts on the Collegiate Experience of Students of Color at a Predominantly White University (PWI)
INVESTIGATOR:	Jeff A. Mallory, Doctoral Student
	malloryj@duq.edu
	Ed.D. in Educational Leadership
	(412) XXX-XXXX
ADVISOR:	Dr. Gretchen Givens Generett, Associate Professor
	generettg@duq.edu
	Educational Foundations and Leadership
	School of Education, Duquesne University
	(412) XXX-XXXX

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:

This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in the School of Education at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE:

You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to understand the experiences of stakeholders involved in the Minority Orientation Program (pseudonym), a pre-entry program for full-time, first time-enrolled students of color at North Spirit University (pseudonym) that aims to influence their development and retention.

In order to qualify for participation, you must be a stakeholder in the program during the years of 2014-2018.

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:

To participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Participate in an interview that will take approximately 30 minutes to 45 minutes in Spring 2019. Interviews will take place through a one-on-one, conversational format. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are no known risks associated with this research for your participation.

Your participation will aid the development of the Minority Orientation Program and potentially impact similar programs at other institutions of higher education.

COMPENSATION:

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Participation in this project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your participation in this study and any personal information that you provide will be kept confidential at all times and to every extent possible.

Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept in the researcher's office and/or in a locked filing cabinet. Your response(s) will only appear in qualitative data summaries. Any study materials with personal identifying information will be maintained for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

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You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time by contacting me to let me know if you would like to withdraw. If you choose to withdraw, I will destroy any identifiable information you provided.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Jeff A. Mallory (412) XXX-XXXX or Dr. Gretchen Generett at (412) XXX-XXXX. Should I have any questions regarding the protection of human subject issues, I may contact Dr. Jim Jones (pseudonym), Chair of the North Spirit University - Institutional Review Board, at (412) XXX-XXXX.

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

E-Mail To Prospective Study Participants

Good Afternoon,

I am contacting you for an opportunity to participate in a study about the impact of the Minority Orientation Program (pseudonym) at North Spirit University (pseudonym), a private, medium-sized, four-year university located in the northeast region of the United States. The study, which seeks to complete a qualitative assessment of the Minority Orientation Program, is focused on the experience of stakeholders who were involved with the program.

Your participation will aid the development of the Minority Orientation Program and potentially impact similar programs at other institutions of higher education. Please find a letter of invitation and consent to participate form attached for your review. If you are interested in participating, please sign the attached consent forms, upload them and return to them to me in a reply to this message. If you desire the attached materials as hard copies, or have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at this email address.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of participating.

Jeff Mallory
Doctoral Student, Ed.D in Educational Leadership
Duquesne University, School of Education, Pittsburgh, PA

Invitation Letter to Prospective Study Participants

Dear Mr. Johnson:

I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Duquesne University. I am conducting a research study on the impact of the Minority Orientation Program (pseudonym) at North Spirit University (pseudonym), a private, medium-sized, four-year university located in the northeast region of the United States.

I am investigating the experiences of stakeholders who were involved with the program. Specifically, I will be completing a qualitative assessment on the Minority Orientation Program to assess the impact of the program on the social and academic development of participating students along with the program's influence on their ability to persist at the university.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to:
- Participate in a 30 minute to 45 minute semi-structured interview which will be conducted in a one-on-one, conversational format. The interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed with your permission.

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Research information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and electronic data will be secured on systems that are password protected. I am the only one with access to the information. The results of the study may be presented at professional meetings or conferences, in addition to being published; your identity will not be revealed.

You may withdraw your consent and participation at any time. There are no benefits to participation in this study, nor are there any consequences for refusing participation.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign the attached consent forms, upload them and return to them to me in a reply to this message so we can make arrangements. If you desire the attached consent materials as hard copies, please notify me by emailing or calling me. Also, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about my research study or your rights as a study participant. You may contact me at (412) XXX-XXXX or via email at malloryj@duq.edu.

Additionally, you may contact Dr. Jim Jones (pseudonym), Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board at (412) XXX-XXXX if you have any questions about your rights.

Sincerely,

Jeff A. Mallory
Doctoral Student, Ed.D in Educational Leadership
Duquesne University, School of Education, Pittsburgh, PA