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Stepping Stone or Road Block: An Evaluation of Community Colleges in the Midwest to Improve Attrition and Graduate Percentages of African American Students

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College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

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Transformational Leadership

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Abstract

The path towards higher education is not the same for all. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to graduation at the lowest percentages. Factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college were uncovered through interviews conducted with participants on community college campuses throughout the Midwest. Considering the findings of this study, it is suggested that professors and instructors use classroom interactions and instructional opportunities to provide mentorship to African American students that will support focus and ignite the determination to graduate. Additionally, career and life coaching should be offered to assist African American students toward graduation. Together these components of mentorship and assistance can encourage African American students to overcome the obstacles they face in reaching their goal to graduate.

Keywords: community college, two-year college, minority college students, low income, student motivation, qualitative study, African American college students.

Dedication

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.

Psalm 37:23

I dedicate this work to God who gave me the strength, the plan, and the insight to complete this task. There were many times along the way I needed His divine guidance. I felt His presence every step of the way and I am grateful.

To the spiritual leaders in my circle who prayed for me without ceasing and were with me every step of the way: Reverend Jackie Jordan and Elder Russell Thompson. I pray that God grants you the desires of your hearts for your support of me throughout this endeavor.

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To all who supported me in your special way, thank you. This completion process was not a standalone task. It took a village and I am thankful for being blessed with such an awesome one.

Now I can say, it is finished.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The expansion of higher education in the United States since World War II has impacted social and economic matters such as financial independence, wealth attainment, race and ethnicity, and social class (Liu, 2011). Though the opportunity to earn a college degree is widely available, the pathway to this opportunity is not afforded equally to all, specifically to African American students (Liu, 2011). Between 2000 and 2014, the percentage of African American students enrolled in college rose from 11.7% to 14.5% (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Although African American student enrollment has consistently increased, their college graduation rates still trail other racial groups. In 2017, 48% of African American students were enrolled in community colleges nationwide. Additionally, 35% of African American students completed the requirements to earn a 2-year college degree, which was lower than Caucasian students at 57.7% and Hispanic students at 59.4% (NCES, 2018). According to Blackwell and Pinder (2014) African American students have higher aspirations to attend college than students of any other race, but high aspirations are not enough to produce more college graduates. College success can be demanding for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background; however, the demand tends to be greater for many African American students (McGlynn, 2014).

Providing African American college students with academic and social support; classroom instruction by sensitive instructors; quality tutoring, guidance, and mentorship; exposure to off campus enrichment programs; goal setting skills and learning techniques; and attainments of better cognitive development increases this population of student's opportunity for college degree attainment (Fleming, 2012). Based on increased college dropout rates and inaccurate institution and program matching, 2-year degree programs may be a better degree-

attainment pathway for some African American students, and the opportunity to gain the skills needed for career advancement. According to former President Barack Obama (2016), "Real opportunity requires every American to get the education and training they need to land a good-paying job." For some people, a college degree represents a way out of an impoverished community of violence, crime, and hopelessness because of more opportunities for advancement (Crawford, 2016). Political, social, and economic empowerment are oftentimes afforded to college graduates than non-graduates (Wilson, 2006).

This qualitative, case study explored factors affecting African American students' ability to complete a 2-year degree and gain the skills for better economic opportunities. This study is an opportunity to uncover the unique obstacles presented to African American students and to determine ways to help overcome these obstacles to increase 2-year degree attainment.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

Junior colleges, later referred to as community colleges, were initially conceived to better prepare high school graduates for the academic rigor of a baccalaureate degree program (Beach, 2016). Community colleges have been the college selection of choice for African American students for decades. Some of the reasons for this choice include cost, background, academic skillset, high school performance, and proximity to home and work (Iloh & Toldson, 2013). With more available opportunities for financial aid for low-income students and the GI Bill which allows millions of military veterans to earn a college degree, open access to a college education is no longer reserved for the wealthy. As a result, most college classrooms across the nation reflect the American population of students of color, first generation college students, and students from diverse economic and academic backgrounds (Jones, 2013).

Many low-income African American students are encouraged to earn a college degree as a solution to reduce poverty and close wealth gaps in comparison to other ethnic groups in the United States. African Americans overall have made some progress; however, the unemployment rate amongst African Americans is nearly double that of Caucasians; many still see education as the key to upward social mobility (Strayhorn, 2011). According to Pendergrass (2011), African Americans are significantly impacted by unemployment and underemployment in the United States. As a result, this population of Americans is at greater risk of experiencing poor mental health, depression, anxiety, uncertainty about the future, anger, shame, and threatened identity.

According to O'Banion (2019) community colleges can be a viable option for higher education for a diverse population of learners, but is minimally effective because overall, community colleges in the United States do not have a clear mission. Over 100 years of history, community colleges have evolved to postsecondary institutions focusing on liberal arts, developmental, workforce, community, and general education or general studies (O'Banion, 2019). This constant change of focus could point to one of the factors hindering an increase in overall graduation percentages.

With the changing labor market and a more globalized economy, the need for postsecondary credentials is increasing as a standard requirement for entry-level positions. It is estimated that two-thirds of jobs in America will require college experience by 2020. Some projections indicate that 30% of jobs in the near future will require a 4-year degree at a minimum (NCES, 2018). As the job market becomes more competitive, more students must earn a college degree to remain competitive (Engle & Tinto, 2008). More community colleges nationwide are adopting the guided pathways approach to assisting students with 2-year degree completion

options by aiding students in developing a plan for graduation. This plan includes program and coursework selection, an assessment of academic skills, and determining the need for additional resources to improve developmental academic areas (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

Context. Some higher education administrators have redesigned academic programs and support services to mirror the guided pathway programs to improve curriculum quality to suit the needs of the student. This program overhaul is an effort to create course and program offerings that better integrate academic advising and support services to improve overall learning outcomes. The goal is to yield an increase in retention and graduation rates (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins, & Fink, 2016). This revised approach to educating 2-year college students may be the step in the right direction by providing easy to follow academic tracks based upon career goals and academic skillset yielding higher matriculation and graduation percentages (Kopko, Ramos, & Karp, 2018).

Community colleges could represent a viable pathway for degree completion for African Americans students, but only with essential improvements. It is important for 2-year institutions nationwide to develop new best practices and redevelop existing ones. These potential changes may impact student retention across various age, racial, and ethnic groups along with developing initiatives to strengthen students' academic skill sets. As a result, more community college students may become prepared for success and gain employable skills suitable for today's workforce or aid students in their pursuit towards a 4-year degree (Hunter & Wilson, 2018).

A key factor in student retention is student engagement. Student engagement initiatives should encourage students to participate in meaningful activities to have a positive impact as they persist toward graduation. Examples of effective student engagement are mentorship opportunities, programs stimulating mental health and provide services that improve students'

mental state, and college and career education and awareness (Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008). Student engagement is important to student retention when students are faced with distractions outside of learning (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Some of these distractions include family and personal issues, poverty, and lack of support.

On-campus activities promoting student engagement may not altogether alleviate off-campus distractions but may increase student retention because it gives students a sense of belonging and helps them focus on long-term goals (Windham, Williams, Pugh, & Tincher-Ladner, 2014). Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence and student retention is a theory that students who participate in socially integrating on campus activities, are engaged in college coursework and academically focused activities, and are satisfied with their degree completion track are more likely to graduate from college than students who do not. Tinto (1975) found it important to note that a student's precollege experiences and family background are factors to consider that may impact social and academic integration and can in turn impact college graduation rates.

According to Tinto (2012), there are a limited number of community colleges nationwide that have reshaped the classroom, curriculum, and the overall college experience to incorporate both social and academic integration. This reshaping could possibly increase retention and graduation rates for those who need additional support to persist to each academic year. It is Tinto's (2012) idea that minority students, specifically African Americans, would benefit from the suggestion for higher education reform that would change the lives of African American college students for the better.

Theoretical framework for the problem. Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence and student retention is a theory that students who participate in socially integrating on campus

activities, are engaged in college coursework and academically focused activities, and are satisfied with their degree completion track are more likely to graduate from college than students who do not. Tinto (1975) found it important to note that a student's precollege experiences and family background are factors to consider that may impact social and academic integration and can in turn impact college graduation rates.

Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence and student retention was used to design interview questions to uncover students' interests that are factors determining if a student persists from one academic grade level to the next. The existing research was reviewed using this model to create a literature review to establish a foundation for the study. Also, this model was used to further explore how the college experience impacts the attrition and graduation rates of African American community college students. Tinto's (1975) theory explains how each student approaches the college experience using three components: family background, individual attributes, and the precollege experience to establish a commitment to graduate. The level of social and academic integration needed to persist toward graduation is different for each student based upon these three components and was used to help formulate the research questions used for this study.

Statement of the Problem

African American student enrollment within 2-year colleges increased nationwide between 2000–2014 (NCES, 2018); however, college graduation rates were the lowest amongst African Americans in comparison to other racial groups. In 2017, 48% of African American students enrolled in community colleges nationwide and completed the requirements to earn a 2-year college degree was lower than Caucasian students at 57.7%, and Hispanic students at 59.4% (NCES, 2018). Existing research does not provide a complete explanation of why attrition and

graduation rates of African American community college students are lower than any other racial group. However, prior research highlights lack of family support, lack of self-efficacy, and limited conflict resolutions skills as contributors to low attrition and graduation rates amongst African American community college students.

This research study will supplement the prior studies and pursue a more complete understanding of this academic and social issue. Personal interviews conducted with participants for this study reflect a limited understanding of the college process, inconsistent mentorship, and unfavorable experiences with school personnel as factors contributing to low attrition and graduation rates. This study will add to the current body of research and provide updated information regarding the problem. This study is important because it contributes more insight into factors that may be prohibiting African American students from graduating.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into community colleges in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. Factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college were uncovered through interviews conducted with African American community college students who completed a minimum of nine semester hours at a 2-year college in the Midwest. Each of the 20 participants were interviewed individually by the investigator with the intent to uncover factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college.

Research Questions

The following research questions were the focus of this study:

RQ 1: What factors contribute to low transfer and graduate rates of African American community college students in the Midwest?

RQ 2: What programs or services could community colleges offer that could improve graduation rates of African American students?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Although the United States economy offered plentiful job opportunities in the past, some African Americans are challenged with a past criminal record, lack of work experience, lack of job skills, lack of experience with technology, challenged affirmation action and anti-discrimination laws by employers, a decline in union membership, and the slow increase to minimum wage. These factors have made it difficult for some African Americans to experience economic gains in comparison to other racial groups (Rodgers, 2018).

Percent **difference in median earnings** between college grads and non-grads

Legend: Under 65% | 65–80% | 80–95% | Over 95%

WA 86%, MT 50%, ND 38%, MN 71%, NH 67%, VT 42%, ME 64%, MA 89%, RI 71%, CT 95%, NY 103%, OR 77%, ID 59%, SD 60%, WI 61%, MI 93%, PA 81%, NJ 100%, DE 88%, WY 51%, IA 62%, OH 87%, WV 67%, VA 100%, MD 93%, NV 63%, UT 68%, CO 60%, NE 56%, IL 88%, IN 63%, KY 67%, CA 133%, KS 73%, MO 67%, TN 67%, NC 76%, DC 167%, AZ 83%, NM 79%, OK 60%, AR 72%, SC 79%, GA 93%, MS 60%, AL 69%, TX 98%, LA 72%, FL 79%, AK 65%, HI 57%
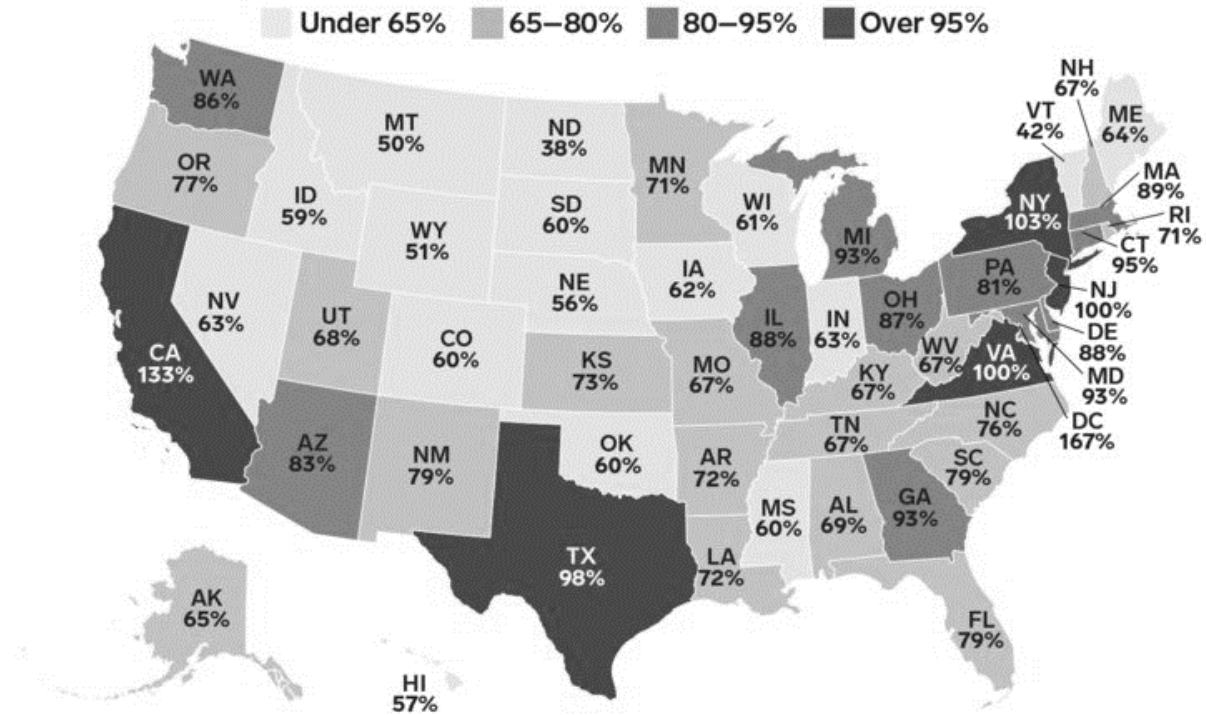
Figure 1. American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018)

College graduates earn nearly one million dollars more in a lifetime than non-college graduates (see Figure 1; Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011). Two-year colleges can be an important pipeline to 4-year institutions preparing students for challenging coursework, gaining academic and critical thinking skills, and exploring financial aid and ways to make college tuition affordable (Wyner et al., 2016). It is important that all students are provided with the best opportunities for academic success with the goal of becoming productive individuals. To help students become successful, higher education institutions and staff should work together to create an environment that fosters academic success especially for African American students who tend to lag behind other racial groups.

Relevance. This study is relevant because the contents and information taken from this study may help stakeholders further understand ways to support student retention and graduation

rates for African American students attending a 2-year institution. The relevance of this study was analyzed using the participants' family backgrounds, goal commitments, peer-group interactions, faculty interactions, academic integration, social integration, and institutional commitment. These components were compared to the obstacles African American community college students face throughout their academic experience while taking foundational degree coursework at a community college in the Midwest to explain low attrition and graduation rates to develop a solution.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms were used in this study. These definitions provide further understanding and insight regarding how the terms relate to this study.

Academic achievement gap. The academic achievement gap is also referred to as the learning gap and opportunity gap. It is any significant disparity in academic performance or education attainment between diverse groups of students (Barnes & Hinkson, 2018).

Academic underachievement. Also referred to as academic underperformance, this term is typically used to describe a higher learning institution generating students who academically perform lower than nationwide set standards that may result from the lack of self-efficacy, goals, or focus (Adelodun, 2017).

Academically underprepared. The result of prior educational experiences causing academic failure, poor preparation for upward mobility, and low expectations of the ability to succeed causing academic gaps and deficiencies in college level coursework (Pelkey, 2011).

Attrition rate. The number of students who leave a degree program before completion in one academic school year (Candal & Ardon, 2017).

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College preparation. The use of academic coursework, benchmarks, standardized testing, and other scholastic requirements to determine if a student fulfills entry requirements into a 4-year degree program (Aidman & Malerba, 2017).

Cultural barriers. A set of rules or standards in any culture that prevents or hinders someone from outside of that culture from being included equally (Porta & Last, 2018).

Cultural capital. An asset that cannot be converted into specific monetary value, but supplies knowledge, practical, and social skills contributing to one's educational success (Harris & White, 2018).

Dropout rate. The number of students who discontinue a college degree program without fulfilling the requirements for graduation (Shea & Bidjerano, 2016).

First-generation college student. A student whose parent(s)/legal guardian(s) have not completed a college degree program (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Matriculation. The student enrollment or registration numbers or percentages within a college level academic program with the intent to earn a college degree (Maxwell, McNeely, & Carboni, 2016).

Postsecondary education. Education received within a 2-year, 4-year, certificate, technical, or vocational program in pursuit of a certification or college degree (McFarland et al., 2018).

Remedial coursework. Also referred to as developmental coursework. It is a reference of courses offered to college students who are not prepared for college level work, used to help students gain the knowledge to eventually complete college level courses (Xu & Dadgar, 2018).

Self-efficacy. The confidence in one's ability and competence to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance outcomes (Greene, 2018).

Social capital. Social influences such as parental expectations, personal obligations, beliefs, and social networks that exist within the family, school, and community impacting students' success (Burchardt & Borgonovi, 2018).

Student persistence. The continuous enrollment in college coursework until all requirements are met for degree completion (Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012).

Traditional college age. This term is used to reference post-secondary students under 25 years old who enroll into college directly from high school (Madrigal, 2009).

Underserved students. A classification of students who lack access to high quality educational and career planning opportunities and resources who are in most cases minorities, low income, or first generation college students (Goode, 2017).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

When considering the assumptions of this study, it is understood the investigator was not fully aware of the participant's level of honesty and thoroughness when providing responses to the interview questions. Although the interviewing method for collecting qualitative data is appealing to researchers because it offers the opportunity to uncover information from participants that would probably not be accessible using other data collection techniques, there are drawbacks that should be considered (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

A possible assumption the investigator considered throughout this study included the possibility that the results of the study were limited by the honesty and thoroughness of participants' responses. Qualitative interviews are sometimes deceptively difficult because participants may provide responses to interview questions they think the researcher wants (Hermanowicz, 2002). Also, it was Hermanowicz's (2002) idea that interview responses are sometimes shaped by the interview questions which can be considered another assumption. To

address this assumption, the semistructured interview format allowed participants to provide

rich, textural data and minimize researcher bias of participants' responses. It is the assumption of

the investigator that the collected data would provide sufficient insight to address the research

questions. It was assumed by the investigator that the participants offered sufficient knowledge

to answer the interview questions. It is common for the qualitative investigator to assume the

participants should answer interview questions with honesty and thoroughness. It is also

common to assume the collected data would help the researcher gain further insight into the

research topic.

The study was delimited to 20 African American students attending a 2-year college in

the Midwest. African American students with nine credit hours or more earned prior to the

interview were qualified to participate. This study was delimited to African American students to

address the previously mentioned concern that African American students attend community

colleges at higher percentages than any other racial group, but graduate at the lowest

percentages. To specifically study African American students only may provide further insight

into the concern while uncovering ways to remedy the issue. This study was open to an unlimited

number of African American students attending a community college in the Midwest to

participate; however, 20 students volunteered.

As a limitation, a smaller sample size may limit the amount of new knowledge the

researcher can gain to in turn share with the readers. This study consisted of 20 participants

which is a relatively small sample size. In consideration of the small sample size, the findings are

limited in the extent in which they can be applied to the larger population of African American

students who attend community colleges, but it may support theoretical transferability (Hunter,

2011). A nonprobability sampling approach was used for this study. Nonprobability sampling is

a method of recruiting participants who meet a specific criterion for a research study (El-Masri, 2017). Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of participants based on set criteria the participants possess relevant to the study (Tongco, 2007). The purposive sample for this study were African American community college students in the Midwest that earned nine or more semester hours of college credit prior to the participation in this study.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into a community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. Factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college were uncovered through interviews conducted with participants on community college campuses throughout the Midwest. Factors were identified using existing research and through qualitative, semistructured interviews. There were 20 participants interviewed who attended community colleges throughout the Midwest. Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence and student retention was introduced as the theory which guided the study. The research questions were introduced and were used to frame the interviews conducted on the participants used for this study. The problem statement was introduced along with the purpose of the research. The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were considered by the researcher while working to preserve the confidentiality and integrity of the research. Chapter 2 of this study will outline the literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into a community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group, but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. Factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college were uncovered through interviews conducted with participants on community college campuses throughout the Midwest. Chapter 2 presents the conceptual framework, a review of research literature and methodological literature, a review of methodological issues, a synthesis of findings, and a critique of previous research.

Title Searches and Resources

The method used to develop the literature review for this study included the use of electronic search engines to explore ebooks, scholarly articles, dissertations, and peer reviewed journals. Documents used for this study were found using ERIC, ProQuest, Wiley, and JSTOR, which provided a variety of peer reviewed journals. Key words used to search for online sources were: college, African American, college student, 2-year college, community college, retention rates, attrition and African American students, drop-out rates, graduation rates and African American community college students, student services, college success and African American students, first generation college students, and low income college students. Each online search either aligned with the current outline of the research or uncovered new ideas that created a deeper connection to the current research, the conceptual framework, and the data collected for this study. Books were also used. The process for completing this study spanned over an 18-month period.

Historical Context of 2-Year-Colleges

      Junior colleges, also known as community colleges, were initially conceived to better prepare high school graduates for the academic rigor of a baccalaureate degree program (Beach, 2016). The expansion of higher education in the United States since World War II has impacted social and economic matters such as financial independence, wealth attainment, race and ethnicity, and social class (Liu, 2011).
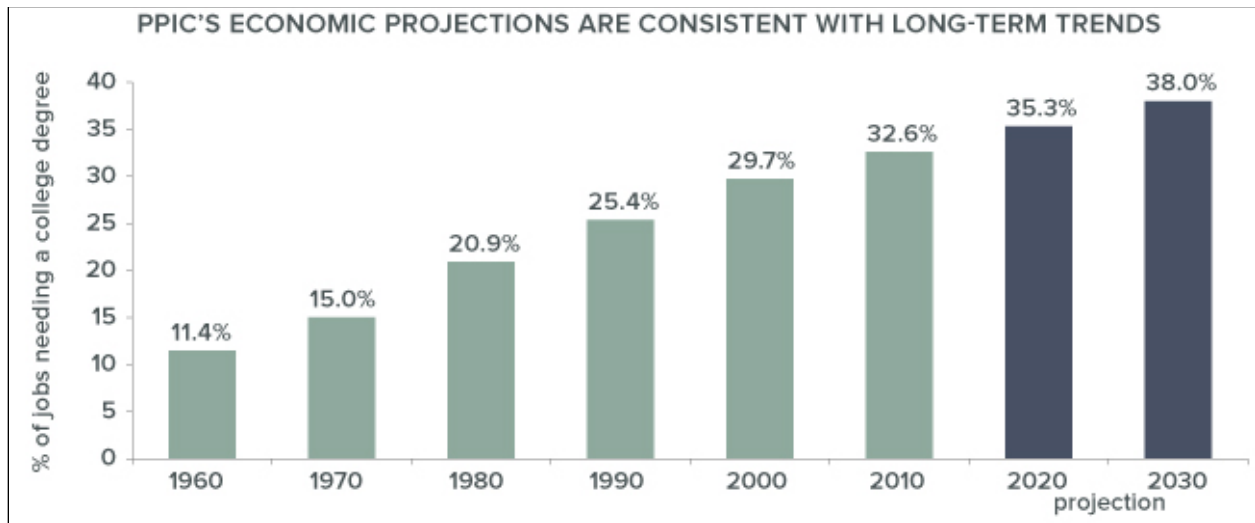
Figure 2. Trend of jobs requiring a college degree in the near future, American Community Survey, 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018)

      By popular demand, community colleges have evolved to more than just open access institutions to higher education with low cost tuition in comparison to 4-year institutions. Two-year colleges have become a training ground for developing skilled workers while creating a pipeline to meet the employment industry needs (Sydow & Alfred, 2013).

      With the changing labor market and a more globalized economy, postsecondary credentials are increasing as a standard requirement for entry level positions (see Figure 2). It is estimated that two-thirds of jobs in America will require college experience by 2020 (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Some projections indicate that 30% of jobs in the near future will require a 4-year

degree at a minimum. As the job market becomes more competitive, more students must earn a college degree to remain competitive.

African American students are especially in danger of being left behind as a result of lacking the academic skill set to withstand college level coursework. As the demographics of the United States shift and the population of students of color increases, these students' failure in school and lack of preparation for postsecondary opportunities continue to have significant implications for the American labor market and economy (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Although 48% of African American undergraduates have attended a 2-year college at some point in their postsecondary career (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014), degree attainment continues to hover around 10% (NCES, 2018).

Although employment qualifications for higher paying wages evolve, African Americans are still not interested in obtaining a 4-year college degree. Individuals from poverty-stricken households with a desire to enter the workforce full time as soon as possible find community colleges a viable option. Two-year colleges provide students with the ability to improve their opportunity in the workforce through relevant coursework specific to a job or trade, certification programs for employment above minimum wage, and associate degree programs in fields where a 4-year degree is not required (Shulock, Lewis, & Tan, 2013). Although earning an occupational certificate does not always guarantee a significant wage increase immediately, it allows for more marketability long term coupled with work experience (Xu & Trimble, 2014).

A closer look into the first-year college experience may offer insight into community college programs that help students gain immediately employable skills. The lagging success of African American students may be found in the exploration of the concept of academic momentum. Academic momentum is based on the number of credits earned over the prior

academic year and maintaining a grade point average at or above the minimum standards set by the institution (Attewell & Douglas, 2014). Academic momentum established during the first year of college could identify academic, social, and other obstacles that can result in a negative impact on graduation rates. Important services offered within the community college network or outside resources that can help resolve problems working against the increase of academic momentum are important to analyze by community college administrations and retention specialists (Attewell & Douglas, 2014).

According to Wang et al. (2015), community college curriculum and academic advising does not focus on helping students build academic momentum. The researchers proposed that academic momentum should be promoted within 2-year colleges to help students build college readiness skills especially for those who enter college as first generation college students or those who did not engage in college preparatory coursework in high school. When college readiness is incorporated into academic momentum it helps to yield a successful academic career, increased grade point average, and higher retention percentages (Wang et al., 2015).

Some higher education administrators have redesigned academic programs and support services to mirror the guided pathway programs or similar programs to improve curriculum quality to suit the needs of the student. This program overhaul is an effort to create course and program offerings that better integrate academic advising and support services to improve overall learning outcomes. Community colleges could represent a viable pathway for degree completion for African Americans students, but only with the right improvements.

This literature review begins with an overview of the theoretical framework identified for this study which is used to further explore factors that may attribute to low attrition and graduation rates of African American community college students in the Midwest. Included in

this literature review is also current research and what it uncovers regarding motivating and discouraging encounters experienced that impact student persistence, program, and services that offer insight on the impact of academic and social integration, and students' overall college experience. Lastly, this literature review will reveal gaps in the current research that may be fulfilled as a result of this study.

Conceptual Framework

Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence and student retention was the foundational framework used to analyze and further understand student persistence and low graduation rates amongst African American students attending 2-year colleges. Tinto's (1975) theory focuses on academic and social integration as factors that determine if a student remains or drops out of college. Academic integration includes students' grades, classroom performance, personal development and student values, students' personal assessment of the overall academic performance, students' personal feelings towards coursework, instructors and instruction method, the ability to identify with the academic subject matter and life application to new knowledge obtained, and the ability to understand the role of a student (Tinto, 1975). Social integration includes the student's ability to make a number of friends from different backgrounds and different experiences, interaction with faculty and staff, overall feelings toward the institution, and the level of acceptance felt by the student (Tinto, 1975).

As theories of student persistence have evolved, Tinto (1997) critiques his own model of persistence from a theory that social and academic systems of colleges were separate from a new concept to integrate both the social and academic college experience to provide structure for the student, social support to handle academic and personal issues that may impact learning, enhance college identity, offer a sense of belonging for the student, and increase academic competence. It

is important for a student to experience a balance of both social and academic integration to increase student persistence percentages. Together, the student's commitment to their educational goals and to their institution of choice are reinforced and supports students' values, social rules, and sets the expectation of the academic quality of the institution.

A favorable racial climate at higher education institutions toward African Americans may improve both academic and social integration for this population of students. A nurturing environment can positively impact retention and graduation rates (Slater, 2007). Tinto's (1975) model claims the better integrated a student is to the higher education process, the more likely the student will graduate. Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence and student retention focuses on the increase in the number of students who both persist and graduate from college and identifies possible hinderances students face that could prohibit degree attainment. If there is no intervention once these hinderances are identified, there is a higher probability that the student will not persist but will drop out instead (Tinto, 1975). A possible remedy to decrease attrition and student dropout rates is a balance between social and academic integration (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005).
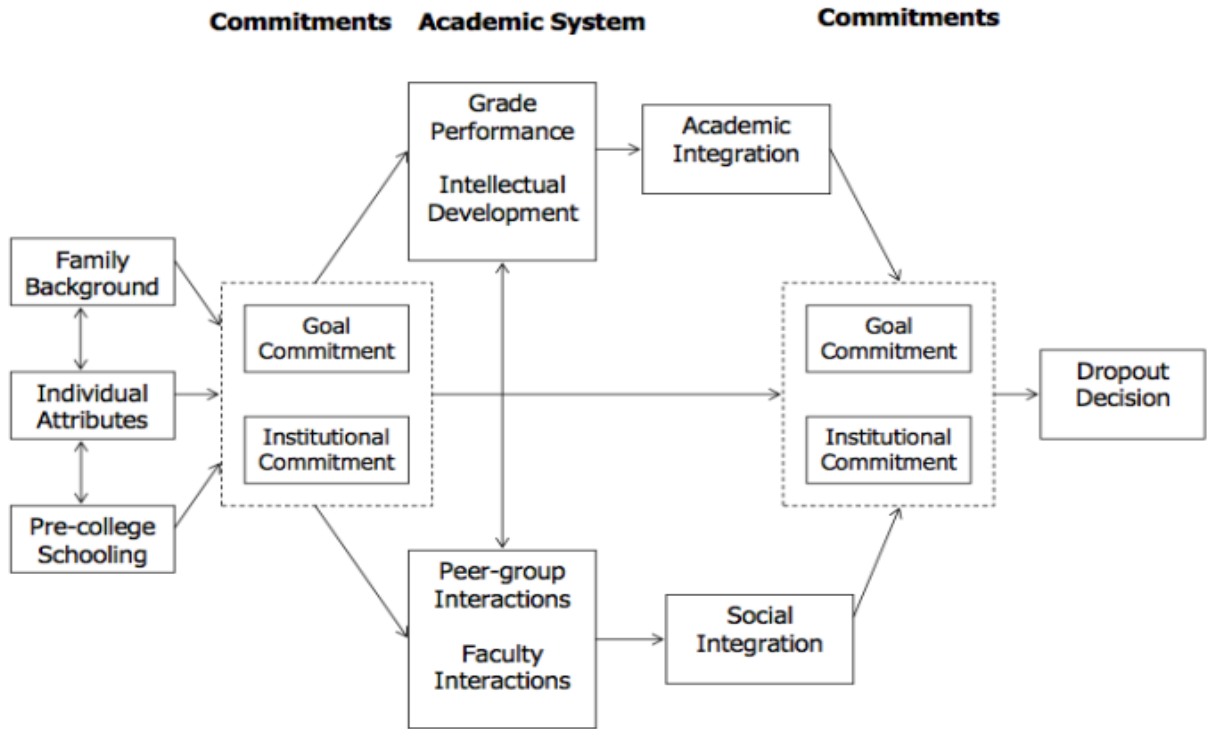
Figure 3. Tinto's (1975) Model of Student Retention

Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence and student retention (see Figure 3) was used as a guide for the researcher to design interview questions used for this study. The interview questions stimulated discussion used to uncover students' interests. By uncovering these interests, the researcher sought to discover factors that determine if a student persists from one academic grade level to the next. The existing research was reviewed to evaluate this model and to create a literature review to establish a foundation for the study. Also, this model was used to further explore how the college experience impacts the attrition and graduation rates of African American community college students.

Social integration. Tinto's model on student persistence and student retention is the conceptual cornerstone of the theory that social integration or a sense of belonging and acceptance into a community is a deciding factor in a student's decision to persist through college or drop out (Deil-Amen, 2011). Social integration is evident in students' participation in

on campus activities. College students involved in student-focused, on-campus activities are more likely to graduate than students who are not (Andrews, 2018). Furthermore, research supports student engagement in high-impact student activities has increased the potential to persist and be retained in a college degree program than students who do not.

 First-year college experience initiatives may increase student retention and persistence toward college degree attainment (Kuh, 2008). Some of these high-impact initiatives are orientation and classes; participation in on-campus student and college experience, focused lectures, workshops, and seminars; involvement in student learning groups and study sessions; taking writing enhancement and writing intensive coursework; and engaging in group classroom assignments and projects, internships, research opportunities, and community or service projects. These types of programs may increase student retention and persistence to graduation. Overall, social integration supports the emotional and psychological well-being of the student.

Social integration for college students is an important aspect of the college experience and can impact academic outcomes. For this reason, Tinto (2012) considers both social and academic integration vitally important to student persistence and retention. Social capital is a concept used to explore resources and expectations that arise from social relationships (Thomas, 2014). Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith (2014) suggested developing social capital by interacting with family, friends, faculty members, student affairs personnel, and college support services.

Moreover, school personnel impact the successful outcomes of college students. Institutions with a desire to retain and graduate a diverse population of students should develop curriculum and create a campus culture to support these population of students' different learning needs and personal life matters which impacts their academic success (Ingram &

Gonzalez-Matthews, 2013). College students who are aware of the value of social capital are more likely to have a set plan for future endeavors, which include at minimum earning a certificate or 2-year degree than students who do not (McGlynn, 2014).

Building social capital for African American college students is important because it brings together students who share some of the same characteristics and may be able to both empathize and support each other through challenges both inside and outside of the classroom. Student activities specific to African American college students may build social capital to positively impact social integration. On-campus Black student unions and college programs or concentrations, specific clubs, and activities for African American students can also help community college students build social capital, improve social integration, and in turn, impact retention and graduation rates among African American students (Thomas, 2014).

Academic integration. Academic integration refers to the students' ability to adjust to educational environments (Tinto, 1975). Academic integration is further explored by evaluating the level in which a student benefits from an academic experience. Examples of ways academic integration can be evaluated are through a closer look into college level coursework, students' grades, grade point average, and the student's ability to meet the institution's minimum standards and prerequisites to matriculate through the next academic level in good academic standing (Clark, Middleton, Nguyen, & Zwick, 2014). Overall, academic integration focuses on the students' academic pursuits. Examples of academic integration opportunities are first-year college seminars that explain course offerings, programs and concentrations, college expectations, college overview of the course catalog, and mentorship in building positive faculty and staff relationships, support services, coaching, career selection and development, off-campus internships, and other learning experiences (Guiffrida, 2005).

Percent of 2013–2017 ACT-tested high school graduates meeting three or more college-readiness benchmarks, by race
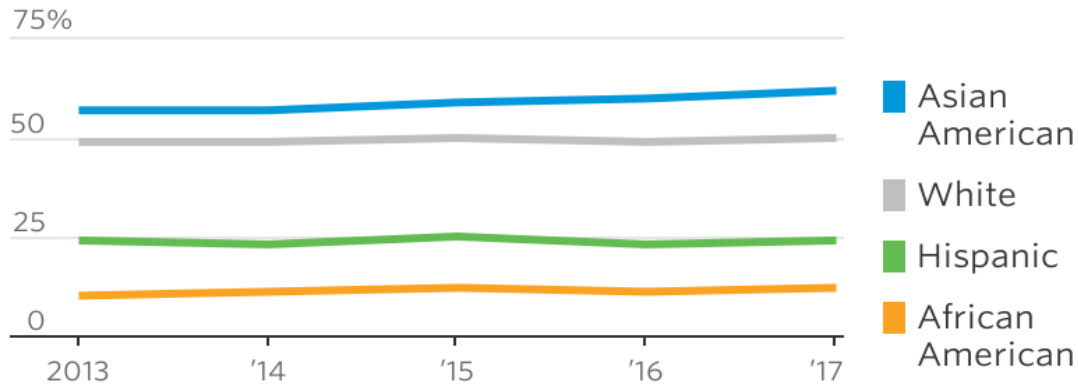
Source: ACT, The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2017

Figure 4. College readiness by ethnicity (ACT, 2017).

Strong academic integration and student faculty relationships are vital to student persistence for African American college students (Boyraz, Horne, Owens, & Armstrong, 2013). This present study highlights the faculty relationships with both Black and non-Black faculty members within 2-year colleges in the Midwest and the impact on student persistence amongst African American college students. A similar qualitative study conducted by Guiffrida (2005) documented African American faculty imposing higher academic standards on African American students as a means to encourage African American students to perform at higher academic levels than other racial groups.

Museus and Ravello (2010) conducted a survey to evaluate the impact of social and cultural influence on retention rates of African Americans and Latino college students. The findings of the study suggest that effective academic advising improves retention and persistence of students of color. Effective academic advising is considered advising with the following components: humanize approach to advising; student focus advising sessions; advising focused

on personal, family, academic, and financial challenges; and offers a proactive approach to developing problem solving and critical thinking skills (Booker & Brevard, 2017). These components of counseling increased persistence and retention rates of 45 African American and Latino community college students surveyed by Museus and Ravello (2010) and may help this population of students experience academic success.

The retention of African American college students is important to potentially decrease generational poverty and help students gain the knowledge and skillset to attain resources and services that increase success and open the door toward upward mobility (Derritt, 2018; Strayhorn, 2011, 2014). Students from poverty-stricken households with a desire to enter the workforce full-time as soon as possible find community colleges a viable option.

Much of the research on African American students and college readiness focuses on under preparedness and other academic deficiencies which impact academic performance (McGlynn, 2014). There are deep disparities in high school education (see Figure 4) that severely impact minority students and students from poverty-stricken communities: college readiness, access to college preparatory coursework, and classroom instruction facilitated by inexperienced teachers (United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2016). These disparities can negatively impact the attainment of higher education and impede academic success.
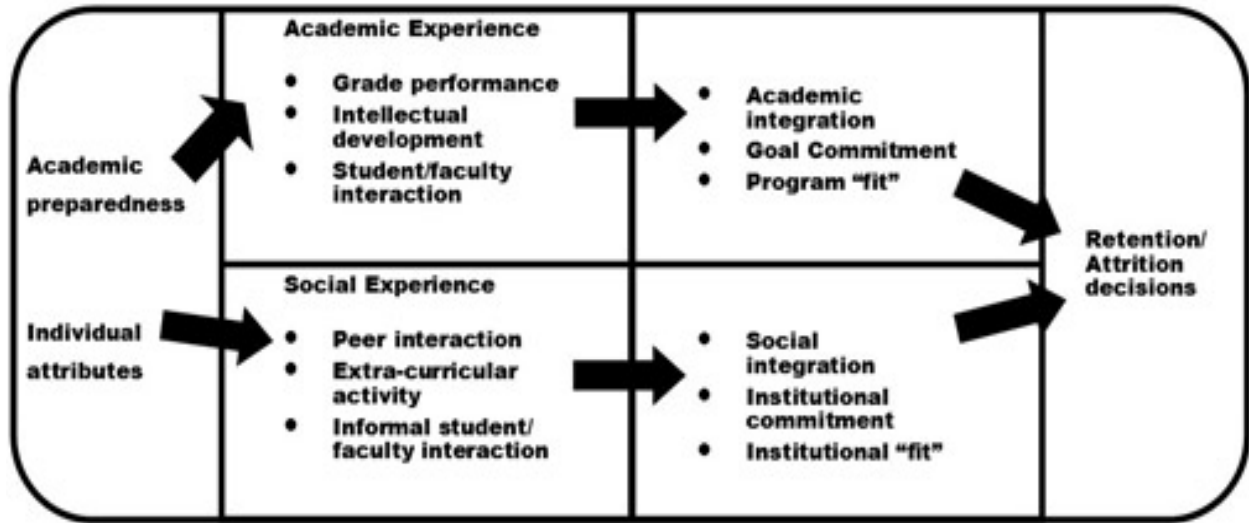
Figure 5. Examples of academic and social integration

Other researchers outside of Tinto evaluated factors considered to help or hinder the

academic success of community college students. Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014) conducted a

study on 22 African American and Latina(o) students attending college in an urban community.

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of gaining social and cultural capital as a

measurement of students' success. The study found students' academic success was aided by

building social capital through relationships with fellow students, family, friends, faculty and

staff, a supportive family, solid student services resources, and other campus support services

and resources (see Figure 5). Student support services positively impacts college students'

transition into college, help students improve grades, allow students to interact and to develop

personal, academic, and professional skills pertinent to higher degree completion at higher rates

when used consistently (Williams, 2015). Student support services may motivate and support

students and families with academic, social, prevention, and intervention matters.

These services are offered to all college students with specific programs and services for

students from disadvantaged backgrounds such as low-income, first-generation college students,

academically at-risk students, and students with disabilities. Several studies have advocated that

student support services should be impactful in assisting students' progress through college to obtain an associate or baccalaureate degree or in the transition from one academic level of higher education to the next (Collins, 2011; Engle & O'Brien, 2007).

The Sandoval-Lucero et al. (2014) findings factor culture into student retention. Students who are considered insignificant in higher education often have negative thoughts which produce a lack of confidence in their personal ability to achieve their academic goals. As a result, these students may lack a sense of belonging in a higher education setting and may drop out. African American students experience a lack of cultural capital and its negative impact far greater than any other racial or ethnic group (Rice et al., 2015).

The nationwide graduation rate of African American undergraduate college students steadily increases annually but remains 20 percentage points behind Caucasian students (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). African Americans may be academically underprepared for college as a result of hunger and poor nutrition, lack of parental support, poor curriculum, poor teacher quality, inferior schools, school segregation, and school culture, which includes lower expectations from administrators and teachers (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Braun, Wang, Jenkins, & Weinbaum, 2006).

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

This study explored why African American students enroll into a community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. The conceptual framework is explored through the theories of social and academic integration impacting the community college student's ability to persist toward graduation. The following studies highlight themes within research to further

expound on the theory of social and academic integration in relation to attrition and graduation rates.

The impact of social and academic integration was evaluated by Museus and Ravello (2010) resulting in a positive impact on student retention and persistence of African American and Latino community college students. College readiness skills offered while in high school may also have a positive impact on success beyond high school (Boyer, 2014). College and career readiness are also defined by softer skills such as the ability to fit in to a college environment, organization, time-management skills, and the ability and knowledge to seek assistance for academic, social, and other needs. To display college readiness, a student must be able to process information; have a basic mastery of English, math, science, and reading as a foundation for remediation; possess problem-solving and disciplined study skills; become familiar with college culture; and develop a plan to adopt either all or some of the culture as the students sees fit (Conley, 2010).

For African American students, there are many inhibiting factors presented before they ever enroll in a community college. Some of these factors may continue to take a toll while these students experience community college. African American students are less likely to have quality early care and education that prepares them for kindergarten than Caucasians (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2014). Lack of quality education is often the weak foundation of education offered to African American students. This is where the academic struggle begins.

African American students in part are underprepared for college due to the inability to effectively manage their academic talent (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). This idea is manifested in poor study habits and the concern that education, specifically higher education, is undervalued by African American students overall (Fleming, 2012). High school students from low-income

urban communities are less likely to have access to high level coursework, challenging curriculum, access to experienced teachers, and modern educational materials less than Caucasian and Asian high school students (Martinez & Welton, 2014; Tinto, 1999).

Teachers' expectations for student performance influence the manner in which they teach and may impact the student's relationship and confidence with the teacher. For example, research documents teachers' perception of low income and African American students' academic ability is lower than that of the middle and upper class of all racial groups, and Caucasian students overall (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2004). Lower teacher expectations result in less rigorous academic instruction. Over time, these students do not gain the academic foundation needed for college readiness (Hauser-Cram, Sirin, & Stipek, 2003). It is important that teachers are properly trained and have the desire to participate in both social and academic integration tactics to help African American community college students become successful using quality teaching instruction, a positive demeanor, and display an overall positive influence on the student (Craig, 2011; Hardy, 2010; Mouzon, 2015; Tucker et al., 2002). Both social and academic integration are effective in increasing students' commitment to goal attainment and strengthens the ability to persist toward graduation (Mullins, 2011; Tinto, 2006).

Culture abandonment and lack of racial identity may cause psychological and behavioral disorders especially in minority students living in an environment where discrimination and verbal and physical abuse are present due to ethnicity (Stewart, 2014). A further look into culture abandonment and the search for racial identity among African American community college students uncovers the exploration of racial identity and racial identity development which may impact students' self-perception (Williams et al., 2014). For example, African American students

may require mentorship, extra assistance from college faculty and staff with coursework, and additional student support services to be successful academically. African American students may view these barriers and the need for additional resources and assistance as negative events and psychologically equate the need for special support services to racism, especially if Caucasian students do not require the same assistance (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006; Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995).

These factors are more evidence of issues related to academic underperformance and other hinderances that widen the achievement gap between African American community college students and other racial groups. This notion also supports the need to further explore student retention and persistence practices to remedy African American community college students' struggles to succeed in college (Graybill, 1997; Lindsey & Walker, 2016; Tinto, 2012). Some students are unable to withstand the mental pressure that accompanies these feelings and, as a result, drop out, impacting persistence, retention, and graduation rates (Tinto, 2012).

In recent years, research evaluating diversity in higher education further explored the lack of theories and practices that uncover variables impacting a diverse student body. This research is specific to 4-year institutions. Community colleges tend to have a student body reflective of the communities/neighborhoods that surround the institution with no efforts placed on creating diversity within the student body. Lack of student diversity can possibly be a correlation to low graduation rates from community colleges (Bahr, 2011).

Racial diversity within the community college student body creates an environment where students can learn more from cross-racial interaction (Jones, 2013). Cross-racial interaction can promote increased academic engagement and critical thinking skills that could, in

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turn, improve students' grades and grade point averages. This idea currently lacks a sufficient amount of supporting research but is relevant to this study.

Another added component to cross-racial interaction is the further exploration of the transition of African American students from high school to community college. Existing research on high school to college transition focuses more on 4-year institutions than 2-year institutions. There is limited research available exploring how diversity impacts attrition and graduation rates amongst community college students. Additionally, there is limited research on the transition of African American students from high school to college.

Limited research explores the overall results of community college students in general with no in-depth study specifically on African American students. Sanchez (2017) suggested that community colleges develop a thorough support and transition program made available to all community college students incorporating school personnel, students, and family. Although this suggestion is ideal, it may pose a problem and may become ineffective for students who lack family support.

Review of Methodological Issues

Research about the attrition and college graduation rates for African American community college students has been evaluated by both qualitative and quantitative researchers. The studies reviewed for this present study evaluated social and academic integration as key factors in student persistence. Both supporting and opposing views are presented in this section of the study. Metz (2004), Attewell and Douglas (2014), and Woods (2016) analyzed student persistence and retention amongst college students. Woods (2016) conducted a quantitative study to explore the causes of poor retention rates amongst community college students.

Woods' (2016) study compared retention percentages of 2-year community college students versus 4-year private institution students. The researcher used Tinto's (1975) model on student persistent to guide the study. Data were collected for this longitudinal study conducted on 4,562 participants was used to analyze student persistence, degree completion, and transition to employment for students enrolled during 2003–2009 academic years using data generated from the Beginners Post-Secondary Survey by the NCES (2018). The racial make-up consisted of 62% Caucasian students attending community colleges nationwide and 80% attending a private institution nationwide, 12% of African American participants attending a community college nationwide, and 22% African American participants attending a private institution nationwide. The results showed social integration was higher amongst participants attending a private 4-year institution than community college students. Academic integration was higher amongst participants attending a community college than those attending a private institution.

Overall, participants attending a 4-year private institution persisted and graduated at higher percentages than participants attending a 2-year college. Persistence and graduation rates were higher among participants attending private 4-year institutions because these institutions are centrally located, offer more career-oriented majors, promote immediate job placement after graduation, and promise to graduate students faster with accelerated degree completion programs (Woods, 2016). Woods (2016) offered an opposing view to Tinto's (1975) theory on student persistence and retention. Woods (2016) indicated that students who participate in on campus, student-related activities are negatively impacted by this affiliation which correlates to low matriculation rates from one academic year to the next.

Metz (2004) offered an alternative to Tinto's (1975) model using Tierney's (1992) theory on student persistence as a guide. Metz (2004) suggested that Tinto's (1975) model cannot be

applied to all college students, specifically minority students. Minority college students have different life experiences that disrupt what is considered the standard college student experience (Metz, 2004). These life experiences hinder the student's ability to understand how to persist toward graduation. As a result, minority students consistently drop out of college at rates higher than any other racial group. It is Metz's (2004) idea that the application of Tinto's (1975) model to the minority student college experience may be harmful.

Attewell and Douglas (2014) conducted a mixed methods study on 15,000 participants attending a City University of New York (CUNY) community college and were Pell grant eligible during the 2010–2012 academic years. This randomized controlled trial evaluated students persisting toward graduation. Participation in the Summer Bridge Program offered before the first semester and CUNY transcripts of the participants evaluated each academic year were used for this study. According to the findings, attrition and graduation percentages were higher amongst students who participated in the Summer Bridge Program and received consistent transcript audits from an academic advisor than students who did not participate and did not receive consistent transcript audits. The Summer Bridge Program emphasized social integration and the transcript audit emphasized academic integration supporting the need for both increased attrition and graduation rates as indicated in Tinto's model (Metz, 2004).

Odom and McNeese (2014) conducted a study on 36 African American male college graduates between the ages of 22 and 27. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of parental involvement on the decision to persist and graduate from college. Data were collected using an online survey. The findings of the study indicated parental involvement including providing a supportive home environment, establishing rules and behavior limits, engaging in

meaningful dialogue with children, and assisting with homework and other academic needs contributed to higher college graduation rates amongst African American males.

Synthesis of Findings

A complete review of the literature for this study pointed to a need for more research to further explore the need for more programs, resources, assistance, and support to increase the number of African American students graduating from community colleges both in the Midwest and nationwide. Regarding the need for more programs and services to assist African American community college students, Attewell and Douglas (2014), McCurrie (2009) identified college bridge programs as a tool to strengthen social and academic integration. The researchers also suggest bridge programs prepare students to deal with the challenges of the overall college experience without dropping out. Summer bridge programs are proven to increase student attrition; however, lawmakers and those with political interests do not support nor adequately fund these programs because remedial education is far more financially profitable (McCurrie, 2009). Minority students, specifically African American students, are enrolled in remediation education higher than any other racial group. With the lack of funding and other resources to support remedial education, students who are academically challenged and need quality remediation consistently drop out (Mangan, 2017).

Regarding the need for assistance and support Odom and McNeese (2014) discovered parental involvement supports academic integration based on a study conducted on 36 African American male graduates between the ages of 22 and 27. The overall theme expressed by the participants was parental involvement encouraged student accountability, instilled the value of hard work, mandated rule following, encouraged curiosity and the exploration of self-identity

and self-awareness, fostered personal and academic enrichment, and required academic excellence as a standard were all a solid foundation for academic success.

Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines (2010) considered parental involvement as a key contributor toward an overall positive college experience for African Americans but may be unrealistic. As an alternative, school-family-community partnerships involving academic advisors, off campus community organizations, and other educational leaders working collaboratively with the family if possible or solely with the student to develop a family culture centered on the student is more realistic. According to the researchers, family culture is a significant form of social integration and provides the student with the support needed for degree completion in the midst of an absent family or limited family support.

It is also significant to point out the suggestion of Rosenbaum, Becker, Iwanaga, Kennan, and Zapata-Gietl (2016) that attrition and graduation percentages are higher amongst students attending centrally located institutions with an accelerated degree completion track, and immediate job placement; however, these factors are not considered primary reasons. Additionally, Woods (2016) documented institution location, faster degree completion options, and immediate job placement along with Rosenbaum, Becker, Iwanaga, Kennan, and Zapata-Gietl's (2016) findings are key factors in student persistence and degree completion. It is also important to note Attewell and Douglas' (2014) research that documented bridge programs, regular transcript audits, and consistent academic advising also as key factors in student persistence and graduation in addition to the factors highlighted by Woods (2016). With the understanding that African American students graduate from community college at percentages lower that any other racial or ethnic group, Rosenbaum et al. (2016) and Wyner (2014) concluded that community colleges are an opportunity for degree completion, especially for

academically challenged students even though graduation rates are significantly low. Students attending institutions that meet realistic expectations and offer a positive college experience can potentially increase attrition and graduate rates.

These studies identified both the problems and potential solutions in closing the academic achievement gap for underserved and underprepared college students nationwide. Additionally, the researchers presented ways Student Services can play a role in the persistence and retention of this population of students. This study may also be an effective tool used by community college executive leadership to devise a plan that may have a positive long-term impact on graduation percentages of African American students. Lastly, as the result of impacting graduation percentages, this study may improve opportunities for African American students to find employment that may improve their socioeconomic status as well as their overall quality of life.

Critique of Previous Research

Qualitative research is rooted in its participants' perspectives and experiences (Adams, 2007; Cho, 2018). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research because it allows for the inclusion of research variables that cannot be manipulated or inputted into a hypothesis or theory (Adams, 2007). Research programs should incorporate accurate data, credibility, for participants' interpretation of data, transparency by the researcher thereby exposing methods and challenges, and the adherence to ethical procedures (Cho, 2018). This section of the literature review offers a critique of the literature incorporated into this study. It is understood that research will have limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. It is further understood that the analysis and interpretation of the data are subject to the understanding of the data by the researcher.

Woods (2016) evaluated both community college and for profit-college students during the 2003–2009 academic years. The goal was to identify factors affecting degree completion. Data for this study were retrieved using the Beginning Postsecondary Survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) and the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey. Woods (2016) used the data from these surveys to conduct a secondary analysis of existing data using new research questions. This study adds to the body of research by providing further analysis on factors that impact attrition percentages; however, the data was not collected to address Woods' (2016) specific research questions. As a result, the important variables associated with the research questions may have been identified in a clearer more specific fashion using a new sample of participants.

A study conducted by Attewell and Douglas (2014) evaluated the number of credits attempted by 1,570 first year community college students between the ages of 18–25 attending college within the City University of New York (CUNY) network. The goal was to evaluate how transcript data increases academic momentum. Data collected from the Beginning Postsecondary Survey was used to triangulate the findings of the research.

Attewell and Douglas (2014) concluded that community college students who participated in bridge and curriculum enhancing programs had increased academic momentum than students who did not. The researchers used a quantitative approach to the research. A mixed method approach including semistructured interviews could provide the researcher with a further understanding of other non-academic factors contributing to academic momentum.

Rosenbaum et al. (2016) examined students' expectations of college and their institutional confidence, conducting interviews with 757 participants from eight community colleges and two private occupational colleges. The purpose of the interviews was to explore

participants' confidence of their institution of choice in meeting their expectations of college, providing resources to help matriculate toward graduation, offer relevant coursework and curriculum, and offer job placement. Educational leaders and instructors were not interviewed for this study. Exploring personnel may have provided the researchers with a deeper understanding of available resources to help students persist toward graduation. Also, interviews with school personnel could have provided the researcher with all available resources including those underutilized but could improve students' confidence in college meeting their expectations.

Mullins (2011) conducted a study on 95 African American college students attending a Predominately White Institution (PWI) in the Midwest. The purpose of the study was to examine the predictability of race and culture related factors on social and academic integration. The participants completed four surveys: Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS), Societal Familial and Environment Acculturation Stress Scale (SAFE), Index of Race-Related Stress-Brief Version (IRRS-B), and the Institutional Integration Scale (IIS). The researcher indicated in the study the number of participants listed by institution. Other was indicated for those participants who did not disclose where they were enrolled in the Midwest. Including a list of institutions where participants are enrolled could possibly uncover the identities of the participants and reduce the level of confidentiality.

Odom and McNeese (2014) conducted a study using 36 participants who graduated from a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). The purpose of the study was to examine parental involvement and parenting styles from K–12 grades to determine how parental influence in the participant's primary years impact academic success in college. Two scales were created from the responses: High School and Family Partnership Questionnaire for Students and the Parenting Style Dimensions Questionnaire. No parents were surveyed for this study.

Incorporating data from parents' responses could have provided the researcher with further information from the source to learn in more detail how parenting styles and involvement impacted students' academic success.

Senegal (2011) used a qualitative study to show the impact of a male mentoring program specific for African American males attending community college in the Southeast. There is still more to uncover within this study to better understand the full impact of the mentoring program on retention and persistence of the participants. Scott (2016) conducted a qualitative study to determine the impact community colleges have on retaining females and African American students in STEM programs. There is still more to uncover regarding factors that make the community colleges efforts less effective on African American students and more effective on Hispanic male and female students as reported in the study.

Walker, Pearson, and Murrell (2010) conducted a quantitative study on 500 White and 500 Black community college students to determine the impact Student Support Services programs have on career preparation. There is still more to uncover such as reasons why White students place less value on faculty, staff, and peer relationships than Black students. There is also more to uncover regarding if the lack of relationship building is impactful enough that it influences White students in building the necessary skills for career preparation needed to be successful in the workforce.

Grimalli (2018) presented evidence to support Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence and student retention and emphasized the more cultural capital is developed by the student the more likely they will persist toward graduation. Metz (2004) and Tierney (1992) presented an opposing theory to Tinto (1975) using the notion that culturally diverse students interpret cultural capital, and social and academic integration differently, therefore making the

topic too broad for researchers, including Tinto, to truly evaluate its effectiveness toward persistence, retention, and graduation. With a lack of evidence, Metz (2004) considered the application of this theory harmful to the African American student's community college experience.

When research focuses more on the challenges and less on the successes, it may tacitly support an implication that historic and consistent academic underperformance of African American students is either by choice as the result of deficit thinking, or the result of circumstances stemming from educational background or socioeconomic status (Collins, 2011; Mungo, 2016). Without effective strategies and programs to increase the education, retention, remediation, and graduation of African Americans in higher education, the number of African American professionals will consistently decrease over time, affecting not only the African American community but society as a whole (Moncree-Moffett, 2013).

Through considering the research and theories presented in this chapter, the best suited theories to further explore this topic were considered and used to develop the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual framework was designed to determine factors contributing to African American community college students' persistence and retention rates and contributors to these percentages that cause African American community college students to lag behind other racial groups. This framework was guided by responses to the following research questions:

RQ1: What factors contribute to low transfer and graduate rates of African American community college students in the Midwest?

RQ2: What programs or services could community colleges offer that could improve graduation rates of African American students?

Each of the aforementioned studies were used to connect the research questions to the chosen methodology. Additionally, the existing research included in this literature review established a foundation for this study. Both qualitative and quantitative research were incorporated in this section to provide a balance in the exploration of existing research.

Research presented within this chapter indicated the success of African American community college students overall is rooted in positive relationships established with peers, faculty, and staff. Mentorship, either formal or informal is an important factor in student persistence because it helps the student become focused on career preparation beyond retention and graduation. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were used to future explore the theory used as the foundation of this study.

Summary

Chapter 2 outlined research used to further explore the conceptual framework used as the foundation for this qualitative case study. History on 2-year colleges in the United States was presented in this chapter. Chapter 2 highlighted the key components of the model on student persistence and student retention with specific emphasis on social and academic integration. Supporting and opposing research on social and academic integration and retention and graduation rates were further explored through the evaluation of current qualitative and quantitative research. The research questions used to guide this study were introduced. Research reviewing methodological issues were explained, synthesized, and critiqued. The current body of research incorporated within Chapter 2 was used to frame the study and provide a foundation for the research phenomenon further explored in subsequent chapters. Chapter 3 of this study will outline the Methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into a community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. Factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college were uncovered through interviews conducted with participants on community college campuses throughout the Midwest.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: What factors contribute to low transfer and graduate rates of African American community college students in the Midwest?

RQ2: What programs or services could community colleges offer that could improve graduation rates of African American students?

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into a community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. Existing research and interviews with 20 participants were used to uncover theories, programs, and services that can improve how African American community college students persist toward graduation. The qualitative case study design method was used to analyze the phenomena of the community college experience for African American students and its impact on retention and graduation. This design allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon using different approaches and data sources. Additionally, the qualitative case study design is an opportunity for

the researcher to uncover several aspects of the phenomenon that may be supported by existing research or newly discovered factors (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study was appropriate since the researcher sought to explore multiple facets of the African American community college student experience impacting attrition and graduation rates. Although the researcher identified common themes shared by the participants during the interviews, there were several factors specific to each participant's experience uncovered using the qualitative case study design.

A case study approach to qualitative research facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon through the view of the research participants. From this view, the researcher is afforded the opportunity for many sides of the phenomenon to be uncovered, evaluated, and understood (Ellinger & McWhorter, 2016). The case study approach was ideal for this study because it allowed the participants to share a variety of views on their overall college experience and the individual facets of their experiences important to their personal educational goals to persist toward graduation.

The open-ended nature of a qualitative case study design allows the researcher to gain an understanding of its research participants' experiences. The qualitative case study design is appropriate when the researcher seeks to inquire more about a research topic through the perspective of its subjects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Semistructured interviews were conducted using 20 participants from community colleges throughout the Midwest. The use of semistructured interviews in qualitative research can address specific topics related to the phenomenon of the study. Additionally, semistructured interviews allows space for participants to offer to the investigator a new approach to the study's focus (Galletta, 2013). The qualitative case study design was appropriate for this study because it allowed the researcher to inquire more on the community college experience from the perspective of the participants in hopes of

uncovering factors impacting attrition and graduation rates of African American community college students.

Research Population and Sampling Method

Population. The population identified for this study was African American students attending community colleges throughout the Midwest specifically students from Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Iowa. The population of a study can be either finite or infinite. A finite population is when the number of items is known; an infinite population is when the items are unknown and cannot be counted (Godwill, 2015). A finite population was selected for this study of African American community college students 18 years or older attending an institution in the Midwest.

Sample size selection. The selection of an appropriate sample size provides an opportunity for the researcher to offer a thorough understanding of the phenomena to explore within the study (Boddy, 2016). First, the researcher designed the criteria for the sample which was African American students attending a community college in the Midwest with nine semester hours or more earned. African American students with nine or more semester hours earned or more was the criteria for the study in an effort to interview students that have been enrolled in college long enough to offer in-depth feedback. Student Services recruited students by sending a word-of-mouth request for students to participate. Student who visited Students Services were informed of the study, the criteria for participation, and the contact information of the researcher. In response, 23 students volunteered to participate. The researcher coordinated with campus personnel to confirm interview dates and times. A total of 20 participants followed through with the interview. All students who were available were interviewed for the study.

Instrumentation

The researcher's choice of a survey instrument may be influenced by the purpose of the study, the study context, and the source of data (Latif & Sajjad, 2018). The data collection instrument consisted of 12 demographic questions (see Appendix A) that included age, gender, academic status, employment status, and if the participant were a first-generation college student. Upon completion of the demographic questions, each participant was interviewed using a semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix B). The semistructured interview consisted of 13 questions designed to align with the research questions which guided this study. The goal was to create questions that would provide further insight into the subject matter and to determine if the participant's responses would support or oppose the existing research. Additionally, the questions used for the interviews were designed to uncover new information not documented in the existing research.

Data Collection

Each participant signed a letter of consent (see Appendix C) allowing their responses to be used for this study. A random interview number was assigned to each participant by the investigator to preserve confidentiality throughout the process. Each interview was semistructured in nature (see Appendix B). All interviews were audio recorded, with the permission of the participant. Participants were made aware by the investigator when the audio recordings began and ended. Interviews conducted ranged between 19 and 82 minutes. Although some interviews exceeded the time allotted by the investigator, participants were allowed to continue sharing responses. All interviews were conducted within the Office of Student Services on each of the community campuses of the participants. Interviews were conducted in a closed door setting individually with only the investigator and the participant present.

Identification of Attributes

The attributes that framed and guided this case study were academic resources, social services, communication, minority student awareness, and faculty–student interaction. The interviews conducted with participants provided insight to the researcher in an effort to better understand factors prohibiting African American community college students from persisting and graduating from a community college at equal or higher percentages than other racial groups. The perceptions and the overall community college experience of African American students attending a community college in the Midwest were the focus of this qualitative case study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The process of analyzing data are transformed into meaningful conclusions that may result in action taken by the researcher or the reader (Raskind et al., 2018). The investigator collected each consent form prior to the start of the interview. The investigator explained to each participant that the interview would be audio recorded. All audio recordings were played back by the investigator to draft into transcriptions. The transcriptions were uploaded to Dedoose, a confidential, password protected, online platform specifically for qualitative data analysis.

Each transcript was analyzed by the investigator to determine primary and secondary codes to determine themes and sub-themes. The investigator recoded the data a week later to determine if the same themes or sub-themes emerged. This process was repeated a month later. The data collected was evaluated using a thematic analysis method. Codes were used to classify data into groups and subgroups for further analysis. The purpose of coding is to identify themes within the data that possibly support the existing research or shed light on new ideas or theories based on the research topic (Cormack, Postăvaru, & Basten, 2018; Yin, 2012b).

After organizing and preparing the data for analysis, each of the transcribed interviews was reviewed to gain a general perspective on the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. Words and phrases thought to be important to the study were highlighted and used to develop codes. These codes provided direction for the investigator to determine what to look for in the data (Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003). Primary or emergent codes are the result of working the data to discover new codes or findings (Creswell, 2013; Renner & Taylor-Powell, 2003). Throughout the process, secondary or sub-codes were generated. Overall, the researcher followed the data analysis procedure identified by Creswell (2013) for analyzing qualitative research.

A thematic analysis of the interview data used codes to identify patterns or themes within the data (Cormack et al., 2018). The themes identified in this study supported the research questions developed after a review of the existing research. Thematic analysis is a way to identify themes that provide a framework used by the researcher to incorporate the use of codes to make analytical observations (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Thematic analysis was used to organize both the data collection and coding processes and to help organize the research. The data analysis process within either a quantitative or qualitative research study is important because it provides a well-rounded view of both positive and troubling findings that are more valid than testing theories using a gut feeling (Babbie, 2013; Dodd & Epstein, 2011). The reported findings of this study are presented in Chapter 4 outlining the collection and analysis of results.

Limitations of the Research Design

Qualitative research, often criticized as biased, captures a small view of the research and the data and lacks rigor; however, when conducted appropriately, this methodology can be a tool

used by the researcher to assess complex human interactions explaining them in simple terms (Anderson, 2010). The small sample size may be considered a limitation because it may reduce generalizability; however, the results can still be used in other contexts outside of this study.

Validation

Validation is the strength of qualitative research as it requires the researcher, participants, and the readers to confirm the accuracy of the results of the study (Sousa, 2013). Potential concerns that could affect the validity of this study are found in three parts: interpretive validity, research bias, and descriptive validity. Interpretive validity occurs when the researcher is unable to accurately interpret the series of events occurring while the interview is taking place (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Participants' feedback and existing research are important when interpretation validity is a concern within the research to verify the findings of the researcher instead of allowing the researcher's own explanation of the research to be the primary focus. Research bias occurs when the researcher approaches the research and the process of data collection in favor or prejudice against the research topic, the participants, or other components found within the research (Cohen et al., 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

To reduce research bias, the data was coded and recoded in an effort to properly interpret the data and present the results within this study. Thorough reporting of the entire research process is important so the reader can understand the conclusion solely on the data. To establish the content validity of the survey instrument, each interview question was evaluated using the research questions as a guide to assess the appropriateness of the interview questions within the foundation of the study. As another mean of establishing validity, the researcher remained neutral during the interviews in an effort not to influence the participant's responses.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the researcher reporting the truth of the data or the participants' responses and views. This reporting is based on the survey instrument used to collect data. It is the responsibility of the researcher to share credible research with readers thereby engaging in methods of data auditing to ensure credibility (Cope, 2014). Credibility is attained when the researcher accurately reports the data collected from the participants. To ensure credibility, the researcher included blind excerpts from the participant's interviews to support the finding and to share in detail the expressions of the participants. The researcher allowed each participant to review the interview transcript prior to the coding process to provide feedback on the accuracy of the transcript. The researcher also provided each participant the opportunity to clarify statements made during the interview or to revisit any questions asked by the researcher. The purpose was to allow the participant to add more comments or clarify statements made during the interview as suggested by Creswell (2013) for the purpose of member checking.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the constancy of the data applied to similar conditions when released with similar participants. Triangulation is a way for the researcher to attain validity through the use of multiple data sources such as institutional documents and data, and interviews incorporated together within the research (Heale & Forbes, 2013). The use of triangulation and transferability together can further establish validity in research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). To establish dependability, the researcher conducted a code-recode procedure on the data. Once the data was initially coded, the investigator waited a

week, then returned to the data and recoded the same data and evaluated the results. Afterwards, the researcher waited a month and repeated the process.

Expected Findings

This qualitative case study was designed to uncover how African American students successfully persist toward graduation of a 2-year degree program. It was the intent of the researcher to share these findings as a way to provide published information that can benefit African American community college students experiencing challenges persisting toward gradation from a 2-year degree program. Also, these findings can provide insight to higher education professionals on ways to increase graduation percentages.

Ethical Issues

Confidentiality. Participants were assigned random interview numbers in place of names to obscure the identity of the participants. At the request of the investigator, participants were assigned to several waiting rooms out of view of campus personnel so the order in which each participant was interviewed was not disclosed to any on campus personnel or other participants. The responses of each interview were made available only to the investigator. Transcripts of the interviews and signed consent forms were stored in a password protected laptop accessible solely by the investigator.

Conflict of interest assessment. The interim president of one of the community colleges evaluated for this study and the researcher share a connection through church fellowship and service. The interim president was not involved in the data collection process and delegated the supervision of the data collection to the Dean of Student Services. The Veteran Affairs Coordinator for one of the community colleges evaluated in this study is a former colleague of the investigator from previous work at a university in the Midwest. The Veterans Affairs

Coordinator was not involved in the data collection process and delegated supervision of data collection to a colleague in Student Services. Prior to conducting the research, the researcher did not have any association with any of the students, personnel, or participants outside of the aforementioned parties.

Researcher's position. An investigator should be conscious of prejudices and interact with participants and collect responses in a non-judgmental manner (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). The use of pre-designed research questions along with the thematic analysis, were used to aid the researcher in remaining within the set guidelines of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to limit influence on participants' responses. The pre-designed questions used were open-ended to allow for free-flowing expression within the participant's responses. The probing or follow-up questions asked were designed for the researcher to gain clarity on responses of the participants and to attain a full understanding of the ideas to minimize the researcher's interpretation of the responses.

Ethical issues in the study. The purpose of this study and its procedures was explained to each participant before the data collection process began. Each participant signed a consent form prior to data collection. This study has been approved by the Concordia University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and complies with all ethical standards required for researching human subjects as stipulated by the Belmont Report used by the IRB to evaluate proposed research.

The rights and welfare of the participants were important to this study. To ensure the integrity of the data, this study was conducted on community college campuses throughout the Midwest in an environment safe for the participants and the investigator. A foreseen risk to participants identified in the study was the concern of retaliation taken by campus personnel if

participants' responses were disclosed. The researcher addressed this concern with participants and informed them of the mandatory IRB requirements on confidentiality.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the methods used to complete the research portion of this study. A review of the research paradigm identified the basic steps followed while the research was conducted, and the data was collected. The sample population was also described in this chapter as well as an overview of the instrument used for data collection along with a description of the researcher's preservation of the confidentiality of the study as a whole. Finally, the method for processing the data along with analysis procedure was listed.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into a community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. Factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college were uncovered through interviews conducted with participants on community college campuses throughout the Midwest. Chapter 4 of this study will outline the Data Analysis and Results.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The results of this study feature the experiences of African American community college students throughout the Midwest. This study is designed to explain and further explore factors that impact retention rates as this population of students persist toward degree attainment. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions were reintroduced in this chapter to further explain the results incorporated within this chapter.

Problem statement. African American student enrollment within 2-year colleges increased nationwide between 2000–2014 (NCES, 2016); however, college graduation rates were the lowest amongst African Americans in comparison to other racial groups. African American students enrolled in community colleges nationwide completed the requirements to earn a 2-year college degree at lower percentages of both Caucasian and Hispanic 2-year college students (NCES, 2018). The problem is 2-year colleges throughout the Midwest do not know the effect of institutional strategies on retention efforts specifically for African American community college students and the role in which these strategies impact this population of students' ability to persist toward graduation.

Purpose statement. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into a community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. Factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college were uncovered through interviews conducted with participants on community college campuses throughout the Midwest.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ 1: What factors contribute to low transfer and graduate rates of African American community college students in the Midwest?

RQ 2: What programs or services could community colleges offer that could improve graduation rates of African American students?

Chapter 2 established Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence as the theoretical framework for this study. The key components of the model highlighted in this chapter were social and academic integration. Research presented within this chapter indicated the success of African American community college students overall is rooted in positive relationships established with peers, family, faculty, and staff. Mentorship, either formal or informal is an important factor in student persistence because it helps the student become focused on career preparation beyond retention and graduation.

Tinto's (1975) model on student persistence and student retention was the foundational framework used to analyze and further understand student persistence and low graduation rates amongst African American students attending 2-year colleges. Tinto's (1975) theory focuses on academic and social integration as factors that determine if a student remains or drops out of college. Academic integration includes students' grades, classroom performance, personal development and student values, students' personal assessment of the overall academic performance, students' personal feelings towards coursework, instructors and instruction method, the ability to identify with the academic subject matter and life application to new knowledge obtained, and the ability to understand the role of a student (Tinto, 1975).

Chapter 3 is detailed information on the data collection and analysis procedures of this study. The qualitative research methodology was introduced and discussed. Chapter 3 also includes the limitations and ethical considerations relevant to this study.

Chapter 4 is a report of the results of the semistructured interviews conducted with 20 African American students attending a community college within the Midwest. The interviews revealed the influence of both on and off-campus relationships in the participants' decision to persist toward degree attainment, the perception of Student Government Association (SGA) and other student focused organizations, the overall collegiate experience, specifically identified academic resources, and an evaluation of the effectiveness of these resources according to the participants.

Description of the Sample

This study consisted of 20 African American students (see Table 1). One of the 20 participants earned an associate degree during the spring semester when the interview was conducted. Twelve of the participants are male and eight are female. The age of the participants ranged from 18–42 years old. Of the 20 participants, four were first-generation college students. Of the 20 participants interviewed for this study, 31% of the participants were 20 years old at the time of the interview. In relation to academic status, 63% of the participants were second-year students with 31–60 semester hour credits completed at a community college in the Midwest. All of the participants were full-time students with a minimum course load of 12 credit hours per semester and a maximum of 16 credit hours per semester. Regarding finances, 83% of participants received some form of financial aid to attend school. Financial aid consisted of the Pell Grant, student loans, military benefits, scholarships, and work-study. Internal scholarship recipient students made up 2% of the participants. The scholarship recipients did not use any other form of financial aid.

A nonprobability sampling approach was used for this study. Nonprobability sampling is a method of recruiting participants who meet a specific criterion for a research study (El-Masri,

2017). Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of participants based on set criteria the

participants possess relevant to the study (Tongco, 2007).

Description of Participants

This section offers detailed information on the participants in this study. Table 1 is an

overview of the age range of the participants for this study.

Table 1

Participant Age Ranges

Age Range	Male	Female	Total
18–21	8	2	11
22–23	1	4	5
24–27	1	1	2
28–31	1	0	1
32–Older	0	1	1
Age not specified	1	0	1

There were 20 participants interviewed for this study. Of the 20 participants 11 were

between the ages of 18-21 and five were between the ages of 22-23. According to Madrigal

(2009) the traditional college age is between 18-24. The traditional college age makes up the

largest population of college students nationwide (Madrigal, 2009; Bent-Jones, 2016). According

to Bent-Jones (2016) traditional college age students rank in the bottom tier of 2-year college

graduates nationwide.

Table 2

Participant Academic Status and Levels

Academic Status	Male	Female	Total
Part-time 1–11 credit hours per semester	2	0	2
Full-tune 12–15 credit hours per semester	9	9	18
Academic Level			
High school diploma	11	7	18
GED	0	1	1
Other	0	1	1

Table 2 is an overview of the participants' academic status and levels. Of the 20 participants interviewed for this study 18 of the participants carried the academic status of full-time (see Table 2). According to Torres, Gross, and Dadashova (2010) traditional college age students attending a 2-year college are at risk of unsuccessful completion of a degree seeking program. Some of the hinderances to degree completion include working 30 hours or more per week to help with household responsibilities, taking the wrong prerequisite courses based upon area of study, and the lack of the overall knowledge and college preparatory skills needed to make good decisions on course and program selection. As a result, this population of students is

at a higher risk of dropping out (Torres, Gross, and Dadashova 2010).

Table 3

Participant Aid Types

Type of Aid	Male	Female	Total
Federal Pell grant	8	7	15
Federal work study	8	7	15
Military benefits	4	2	6
Scholarships	0	1	1
No financial aid	0	1	1

Table 3 is an overview of the types of financial aid participants used to pay for tuition. Of the 20 participants interviewed for this study, 15 used federal and state need based financial aid to pay tuition (see Table 3). According to Park and Scott-Clayton (2018) the complexity of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application and the late notice of Pell grant eligibility each academic year should be considered when analyzing the drop out rates of college students in financial need. Another potential explanation for college drop out rates for students using financial aid to pay tuition may require a further look into state and institutional policies,

and formulas used to determine financial aid eligibility. In some cases students in need are not awarded enough financial aid to pay the full cost of tuition and are unable to pay out-of-pocket expenses. As a result, these students drop out (Carruthers & Welch, 2019).

Research Methodology and Analysis

This study was conducted at community colleges throughout the Midwest. It was the intent of the researcher to formulate a study that will add to the body of research on African American community college students and to also conduct further research on this population of students' academic and social experiences as it relates to their ability to persist toward graduation. A case study analysis was selected to acquire descriptive data from the participants. Data analysis was a repeated process of coding, categorizing codes into themes, identifying thematic relationships, reexamining data, and developing further coding.

Data for this study consisted of the demographic survey (see Appendix A) and audio interview recordings that were reviewed and transcribed into interview transcripts. Throughout the interviews, participants highlighted programs and services offered through the Office of Student Services that were both favorable and detrimental to the advancement of their academic pursuit towards graduation. The data collected was evaluated and codes were used to classify data into groups and subgroups for further analysis.

After organizing and preparing the data for analysis, each of the transcribed interviews was reviewed to gain a general perspective on the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. Words and phrases thought to be important to the study were highlighted and used to develop codes. The themes identified in this study supported the research questions developed after a review of the existing research. Thematic analysis was used to organize both the data collection and coding processes and to help organize the research. This study was not designed to

critique the programs and services offered by community colleges, but to identify these offerings and explore further to determine if there is a relationship between student persistence.

While reviewing the interview transcripts, a list of primary codes was created based on the participant's responses to the interview questions, from preexisting research, for this study. The primary codes list captured on campus and off campus programs and services used to motivate students to persist toward graduation, strengths and weaknesses in student-teacher and peer relationships, and program offerings in relation to student career goals. As a general statement, student-teacher and positive family influences increased students' desire to persist toward graduation.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study uncovered community college students in the Midwest are faced with challenges both in and out of the classroom hindering persistence and degree completion. Some of the factors in the classroom identified by participants were the inability to connect with instructors, lack of confidence in instructors, language barriers posing a challenge to understanding classroom instruction, and disruptive and violent classmates interfering with classroom instruction. Some factors outside of the classroom identified by participants hindering student persistence and graduation were lack of family support, student responsibility to the family interfering with class attendance, low self-esteem, and long commutes from home to campus.

Throughout the interviews, participants offered suggestions to the researcher on ways to improve student persistence for African American students. A revised orientation offered at the beginning of each semester for both new and returning students was one of the highlighted suggestions. Courses are the basic building blocks of a college degree. In some cases, students

are required to take lower division or non-college credit courses when their academic skillset is below the minimum standard for college coursework. Remedial classes are designed to prepare students to complete and pass college level coursework. Overall, passing both college credit and non-college credit coursework on the first attempt is the fastest pathway to both academic momentum and degree completion (McKinney, Novak, & Luna-Torres, 2018).

Academic momentum is based on the number of credits earned over a prior academic year and maintaining a grade point average at or above the minimum standards set by the institution (Attewell & Douglas, 2014). Academic momentum established during the first year of college can potentially identify both academic, social, and other obstacles that can result in a negative impact in graduation rates. Important services offered within the community college network or outside resources that can help resolve problems working against the increase of academic momentum are important to analyze by community college administrations and retention specialists (Attewell & Douglas, 2014). An in-depth understanding of courses and programs could aid in increased graduation rates.

Presentation of the Data and Results

Research Question 1: What factors contribute to low transfer and graduate rates of African American community college students in the Midwest? Four themes emerged from the data in reference to the first research question. The themes that emerged were: (a) hindrances to student persistence, (b) college experience, (c) instructor experience, and (d) tuition cost. These themes are presented below based on how prevalent or dominant they were in the data. Throughout this section excepts from the interviews conducted on the 20 participants for this study will be included in relation to each theme.

Hinderances to student persistence. One of the most dominant themes that emerged

from the data related to the first research question was hinderances to student persistence. The

theme of hindrances to student persistence refers to the factors that obstruct, delay, or prevent

students from staying at a community college (Tinto, 2006). The factors most reported by

students in this study were caring for a sick loved one, unhealthy relationship with peers, and

issues with school personnel. The themes emerged from the following research question: "Have

you ever contemplated dropping out?" Participant 12 discussed during the interview an

unhealthy relationship with peers specifically fellow veteran students in relation to the decision

to drop out,

> So yeah, I, I dropped. I had no problem, no shame because now I did you know when I
>
> dropped umm, I didn't want to come back. So, you know there were, people were calling
>
> me especially this veterans club thing and then umm it was like oh why you drop out?
>
> And I just you know I just block, block, and block and those people you know because
>
> people just assume that because you take this class or that class that you're supposed to
>
> see it through and that's not necessarily true. You know I don't, I don't have to do
>
> anything on anybody's time but mine. So yeah, I blocked them I wasn't talking to them.
>
> And when I came back, I still wasn't talking to them. I just did my work and left.

> Participant 1 also shared how an unhealthy relationship with a peer impacted the decision

to drop out. During the interview, Participant 1 shared:

> My boyfriend and I went to high school together. After high school, we decided we were
>
> not in a place where we should entertain going away for college. I was actually enjoying
>
> my college experience until our relationship became rocky and even violent at times. I
>
> left school because he was here and I was just tired of all the arguing and fits fights in

public. There was no way I could focus so I left. He eventually went to the military, thank

God. When he left, I came back and honestly that's the only reason I came back. If he

was still here I would have stayed dropped out because I can't afford to go away and I

just didn't want to deal with him. It all worked out though.

The following is the response from Participant 13 on the interview question, "Have you

ever contemplated dropping out?" Participant 13 shared thoughts of dropping out of college were

attributed to the concern with violence within their community and a lack of understanding from

school personnel on the issues that become obstacles prohibiting academic success. This lack of

understanding from school personnel identified by Participant 13 is an example of issues with

school personnel:

[Laughs]. Yeah, I mean, this is a lot. I mean, look it's so much that we deal with and I

don't think y'all really even know. Like it's a lot to the point where I'm thinking about

moving to Wisconsin after I'm done because it's bad and you really don't even have time

to like focus. It's just like these teachers don't even know what we be going through and

they be on us about every little thing. I know we grown and all, but really? Sometimes I

just wake up and be like, I ain't going today, it's too much. I did take a break for a few

days, but I was more stressed out when I got back cuz all that work just piled up [Sighs].

It's hard, it's so much we have to deal with that I just don't really know sometimes. So

yeah, I think when you get to a certain point [Sighs] we all think about dropping out.

Participant 7 expressed concern living in an urban community associated with

contemplating dropping out:

People think when you young you don't have problems, but it's crazy out here. In

Chicago it's crazy. People getting killed every day, and we have to deal with that. That's

stressful. When things not right at home and you trying to do the right thing, that can be stressful too. So yeah, I think about dropping out, because I just get stressed out sometimes.

Participant 19 expressed during the interview the difficulties with time management to balance work, school, and carrying for a sick loved one. As a result, Participant 19 shared during the interview thoughts of dropping out:

I went to school on the strength that me and my girl [girlfriend] would make a better life together, but it didn't turn out that way. I, I umm, tried to stay to make it work and she ended up getting pregnant. Our son got all kinds of physical challenges and I ain't even gonna take your through all of what it takes just to get him ready and then get myself ready every single day [Sighs]. Then I have to deal with my ex [girlfriend] who gives me a hard time now that we're not together. It's like I feel like all of this is working against me and it's too hard sometimes. So I thought for a minute like, if I just pause on school and get a job then maybe that's the move right now because we need money because my little man needs a lot of medical care, but then I think to myself, like man, if I stay in school I can make more money and not struggle to take care of him and me. Ain't no way I can get a good job now without a degree. So, it's hard and I'm always tired. I think about dropping out all the time.

Participant 11 expressed concern with lack of time management skills and the negative impact of grades:

My time management is horrible because I've never had to do this before. I went to my academic advisor for help and she gave me these sheets on how to plan out my week. The sheet was for school, work, and other stuff. I don't know how to do that. They think just

because we adults we should just be able to figure this out. She ain't explain it to me and I told her I was lost. I'm still not sure what to do. How she expect some worksheets to help me with my time management?

Community college experience. The second dominant theme that emerged from the data related to the first research question was community college experience. The community college experience refers to students building a community, gaining an academic foundation, the institution offering student enrichment and engagement opportunities, the institution offering on and off campus employment opportunities, and campuses providing an outlet for students to develop a sense of identity while gaining a college education (Rowh, 2011). The factors reported by the participants in this study contributing to a positive college experience were campus personnel, family, friends, and an overall positive college personal outlook on their academic career. Factors reported by participants in this study contributing to a negative college experience were campus personnel, poor time management skills, poor academic advising, and challenges associated with the daily commute to campus.

Participant 18 attended a 4-year institution prior to enrollment into a 2-year institution and compared the overall experience between the two learning environments. Throughout the interview, Participant 18 discussed how school personnel attributed to a positive college experience:

> It's been overall it's good and it's, it's, I think it's better than a university because I went to a university first so, I have the experience. The city college is like, you're able to build a relationship with your teacher easier than at a university because it's not some enormous campus where they have like thousands of students a day. They may have a couple hundred and they may forget your name from time to time, but you still will build

a relationship. They'll be able to recognize you in the hallways and things like that, umm. The office hours like, are extensive so you could drop by whenever. Like, it's, it's not hard to get in touch with the teacher basically.

Participant 20 shared how family plays a role in a positive college experience. During the interview, Participant 20 expressed how their grandmother is a motivator to persist toward graduation:

My grandma is like in her 80s and she's still going strong. She had cancer and it really messed me up when I found out you know, but grandma was like you got to keep going, you got to. She told me no matter what that I can't let what's going on stop me, you know? Like don't worry about me, I'll be all right, but you young and you have to make something out of yourself. So, when I come here [Campus] I think about grandma and how she beat cancer and I just smile cuz that hype me up to get through this and make something out of myself.

Participant 1 shared how a positive outlook on their academic career factors into their overall college experience. Additionally, Participant 1 expressed how being surrounded by positive people impacts their overall positive experience:

So, being on the dance team is good for me because we [The dance team] spend a lot of time together. One of the girls we went to high school together and she was always cool, always stayed out of trouble. I don't have any kids yet because I like my freedom and I don't want nothing to hold me back from my dreams. So, I hang with people who think like me.

Participant 11 shared their experience with campus personnel specially campus security and the negative impact the relationship with campus personnel regarding the overall community college experience:

Sometimes they [campus security] act like they don't have nothing else to do but bother us [Students]. It's like you see us every day and you know us, but you give us a hard time when we forget our IDs at home. And they act real funny questioning us and everything asking all these questions to make us prove we are students. I know they just doing they job, but come on, really? That's what makes me late for class and I have to hear the teacher mouth for being late. Now when I get up there to security and I see I don't have my ID, I just leave, and I know it may lower my grade when I don't come. Forget it because we grown and they still treat us like when in high school.

As it relates to poor time management, Participant 7 shared the difficulty in balancing work and studies:

I just don't have time to do it all. It's like the work be piling up, but I have to wait until the weekend to get it all done and by then I just be so tired from work. I should study in between classes, but it's too many distractions.

Participant 4 expressed the long commute from home to campus as a factor in a negative community college experience:

Dr. Martin Luther King Community College is like right down the street from me, but they have this thing now where every community college has a specialty, so I have to go all the way out West because my specialty is nursing. It takes me a train and a bus to get here. In the wintertime, I have to be honest I don't come every day, because it's too cold

to be standing out on the bus stop. I wish the school down the street had nursing. I could

walk and be there in 15 minutes every day.

Participant 9 shared how poor academic advising impacts their overall college

experience:

Have you met Ms. Jones yet? Well you should because you would see what I'm talking

about. I have to go to the dean for help because she always direct me to the website or the

portal for help. If that's the case, why do I have you?

Instructor experience. The third dominant theme that emerged from the data related to

the first research question was instructor experience. The theme instructor experience refers to

the overall student experience, whether it be positive or negative as it relates to the participant's

interaction that participants had with instructors both inside and outside of the classroom

(Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2018). Of the 20 participants interviewed for this study two reported

a positive instructor experience, two reported a negative instructor experience, and 10 discussed

their overall instructor experience without indicating specifically if the experience was negative

or positive.

Participant 10 expressed concern with connecting with black professors as a negative

instructor experience:

And it is more like I would say like the black professors. Caucasian professors, they don't

really have a preference; they just teach in a standard way. Like if you hear it you hear it

no matter your age or whatever. And I guess that is more the black professors trying to

like to connect in a way but I don't know. Sometimes it gets to the point where it's like

OK you're going overboard. I'm still an adult and there's just somewhat of what you will

be able to tell me cuz [because] I'm not your child. It's just different situations that. And like I say it's not all of them but it's a lot them to the point where you'll see it.

Participants 8 shared an overall view of the instructor experience as related to the interview question, "What influence does faculty/staff have on you as a student?" The response to this interview question by Participant 8 was an overall evaluation of the instructor experience. This response was viewed by the researcher as a neutral response to the overall instructor experience.

Like I said, more on the part of the professor. More on like being umm what's the word I want to use? Not lenient, but umm [Pause] umm, I don't know. Like, because I feel as though like my professors focus on so much like, well the professor, a few of the professors I had focus on so much of the stuff that you don't see as a problem. But I mean it might be a problem but it's not the learning skills. Like I feel as though like some stuff you just learn it just to get a grade. Well, doing it to get a grade and not actually learning it. I don't feel like they take the time to, to you know actually teach it fluently through the whole process. It's like you go from this to that to this to that. And I can keep up with the pace. It's like once I'm done with that class, I might remember a few things but I'm not gonna remember what I really need to know like unless I'm reviewing it again so. It's basically like I'm just doing it to get the grade.

Participant 19 expressed concern with some instructors' lack of understanding of diverse cultures.

Umm, I just think they, they need more teachers who understand what's going on in our communities. I umm feel like a lot of teachers here they ummm just look at students well, they look at the African American students as just [stares at the floor]. I, I don't think they

truly grasp like where some of these kids are coming from and what they have to do to get here. Not every student is umm you, not everyone lives in the best community or they might live in a OK community but they still have to travel through bad communities where it's kind of a hassle for them to get here. And to some teachers that either are not from that area or they don't have to go to those areas they just don't understand it. And like, they like if a student is like going through something or gets upset about something like I don't, I just don't see the teachers handling it well, well some teachers.

Participant 14 discussed a negative encounter with an instructor:

One thing you cannot do is disagree with him. We were reading A Midsummer Night's Dream and I had a different interpretation of Hippolyta's role in the marriage. He told me that he marked by paper one grade lower because my interpretation was off. I mean this is college. Aren't we suppose to challenge the status quo? When I asked my instructor to validate his comments on my paper, he told me he didn't have to. So, in other words, he can just do as he pleases. What angers me the most about instructors like Dr. Kline is they know if I complain nothing is going to happen to him because they all stick together.

Tuition cost. The fourth dominant theme that emerged from the data related to the first research question was tuition cost. Tuition cost refers to the amount of money that is required to pay for classes, textbooks and associated fees (Herzog, 2018). Participants were asked the interview question, "What aspects of being a community college student do you dislike?" Nearly half of the participants expressed that the cost of tuition in comparisons to the amount of financial aid received was too expensive. For example, Participant 2 is a veteran and is provided with military benefits, which reduce the out-of-pocket cost for tuition. Although military financial aid is available, there is still a shortfall covered by the participant. During the interview,

Participant 2 expressed the use of military benefits to pay for tuition but concerned with the remaining outstanding balance:

Well, for me, I spend time in the Veterans Affairs office getting as much information as I can on money to help pay for college. Tuition can be expensive. I'm saying for other students that's what I hear is their complaint.

Participant 17, who completed the FAFSA to qualify for financial aid, expressed, "I would say financial aid, ok, because sometimes student loans and stuff like that can put you in a student debt debacle, I guess." Participant 3 expressed:

You know so hey, I got this job. And so, I chose to apply the money I make to my tuition. It's better than having this huge debt like going to a university. And then also the fact that the school and the more you go to school the more you get out of it and the more you learn the more people you are able to find other options to find a better job to make more money and still pay for tuition. Like, it's people here from 2015 taking one class at a time. I just pay and get it over with.

Research Question 2: What programs or services could community colleges offer that could improve graduation rates of African American students? Four themes emerged from the data in reference to the second research question. The themes that emerged were: (a) motivating college experience, (b) campus resources, (c) more tutoring and tutor options, and (d) student government involvement. These themes are presented below based on how prevalent or dominant they were in the data.

A motivating college experience. The most dominating theme that emerged from the data related to the second research question was a motivating college experience. The theme a motivating college experience refers to factors such as a personal satisfaction of earning a degree

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from a structured program or specific courses that will help the student gain specific skills, or from the student's desire to compete against others, especially in the job market, or other factors that encourage students to persist toward graduation (Henning, 2015). Of the 20 participants interviewed for this study, six reported being self-motivated. Participant 11 explained the ways in which students can motivate themselves to persist toward graduation:

Just umm, push yourself. Don't feel like you're a statistic and things of that nature. Don't feel like just because your parents didn't go to college, you're like, you're like a first-generation college going umm, you know enrolled in college don't feel that you're going to fail because some of your family might say that oh, you're just going to community college you're not going to make anything of yourself. So, don't listen to other people who put down what you're doing because what you're doing is still important.

Participant 2 shared a similar perspective on being self-motivated:

To graduate, I'm pushing myself. I mean I think, could something be set in place to motivate students to graduate? I mean you know they should be driven by themselves, but I guess if there were something in place it will make things a lot easier and give them something to chase.

Participant 20 expressed the incentive to matriculate into a 4-year degree program as motivation to persist toward the completion of a 2-year degree. This incentive is a self-motivating goal that was established by the participant:

I think that the connection with the 4-year institutions. So, our transfer director, she has like different connections with each of the four years [Institutions] especially around the city, umm, especially A University and College X. Like, she loves pushing those schools, but mainly because they're like, our degrees almost completely transfer to those schools.

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So, it's, like, it's umm, basically it's, like, your golden ticket to those schools. Her, her

being our connection to them is like a golden ticket and they love working and helping us

through the admissions process.

Campus resources. The second dominant theme that emerged from the data related to the

second research question was campus resources. The theme campus resources refers to programs

and services that make it easier for students to earn a 2-year degree housed within divisions or

departments which provide services and student support in higher education (Russo-Gleicher,

2013). The participants interviewed for this study shared an overview of the community college

experience and the use of on-campus resources designed to help students persist toward

graduating. When discussing campus resources Participant 1 discussed how the campus tutoring

resources improved their grades:

When I was in high school, I like, really didn't think I would go to college because I like,

I like, what am I trying to say? I think different. I need a lot of help because it takes me

some time to get it, like what the teacher is saying. I stay in tutoring, I stay asking for

help because my grades would be bad, but nobody makes me feel like I can't do it, you

know? Like everybody helps me, my friends, my teachers, when I go to tutoring, they

don't get mad because I don't get it. They really be trying to work with me.

Participant 20 reflected on the use of campus resources to aid with dealing with a crisis

and improving mental health. During the interview, Participant 20 shared a personal story that

related to the use of the Wellness Center for mental health services during a personal crisis.

Participant 20 observed,

About three years ago I lost my best friend to him being shot out on the street. And man,

it was over for me. I didn't want to do nothing. I didn't want to do nothing, but just stay

in the house because it was just wild how it happened. I don't care what nobody say, you

ain't never gon get use to your homies dying in the streets. I lost my man, my for real

homie that had me shook. People was calling me telling me to come back [to school]. I'm

looking at them like, [Frowned facial expression]. So, Director Smith hit me up and I just

came because like he said my homie wasn't coming back so I had to live for him and his

two-year-old, you see what I'm sayin'?" So, I came back, I was talking to them

counselors they have upstairs [The Wellness Center] just to get me back on my square.

Participant 16 identified during the interview as a veteran of the United States Armed

Forces. Participant 16 shared during the interview the use of the Veterans Office as an on-

campus resource impacts their overall experience as a student. Participant 16 said, "Umm. I can

say the Veterans Office you know because it's a place to kind of relax you know if you're you

know stressed or want to take a break and actually it's a good environment there."

More tutoring and tutor options. The seventh dominating theme that emerged from the

data related to the second research question was more tutoring and tutor options. The theme more

tutoring and tutor options refers to the option of offering online tutoring using platforms where

the tutor and tutee are visible, extended touring hours, staffing tutoring centers with more tutors

and other learning aids, along with offering tutoring in all major subjects are what is understood

as more tutoring and tutor options. These options are unique and teach specifically what the

student needs to know in that setting where instructors follow a set curriculum (Chin, Rabow, &

Estrada, 2011). The factors reported by students in this study were extended tutoring hours for

night students, online tutoring options, and off campus tutoring options.

Participant 3 discussed the use of resources within Students Services and the impact on

their academic performance. Participant 3 shared how the tutoring options have positively

impacted the participant's academic performance. Participant 3 shared the following statements regarding the writing lab:

> Umm, well, what we are we like, the program that we're in sometimes you know we have writing assignments. And I have really learned how to do, umm, citations and sometimes we need help with umm, graphs and charts and stuff like that. So, I do, I use tutors to help me because I haven't really learned how to umm, navigate umm, all the like when you doing research. You know you have to pull up charts and record data. So, I haven't learned all of that yet I'm working on it, but I haven't learned yet. So sometimes I need the support guys to help me out.

Participant 18 discussed the use of resources within Students Services and the impact on their academic performance. Participant 18 expressed the on-campus tutoring hours are extensive but should be longer to accommodate night students. The response was to the interview question, "What variables impede your ability to be successful as a student?"

> Another one I'd have to say is that the hours of like the tutoring center and the library. They're like, are really, really extensive so they'll, they'll be until like 9:00 [am] until like 7:00 [pm] and I'm like because I get off of work at 4:30 [pm] I'm going to need like other times I'm sure the other city colleges don't have such extensive hours and it's, it's like that puts a strain because night students kind of need those services, but can't get them, but our, our night students kind of have access up to a certain point.

Participant 17 discussed the use of resources within Students Services and the impact on their academic performance. During the interview, Participant 17 expressed the need for more available tutors and accessible tutoring resources. Regarding the tutoring resources available on campus, below is an excerpt of the interview with Participant 17:

You can try to reach out to the professor, but he's not always readily available. And so,

then you want to go to tutoring, but it's like it might be packed. And it's like, well I can go

to tutoring but it's a lot of people here. So, what do I do? Do I wait? And then some

professors might not always have time to assist.

Participant 2 expressed the desire for off campus options for tutoring. Participant 2 noted,

"Everyone is really busy and technology is amazing. It is such a great way to get so many things

done at a distance. It would be nice to explore distance tutoring maybe through Skype or other

remote options."

Student government involvement. The third dominant theme that emerged from the data

related to the second research question was student government involvement. The theme student

government involvement refers to organized campus associations that allow students to become

involved in the decisions making process at colleges and universities representing the needs of

students both on and off campus (Miles, Miller, & Nadler, 2012). Participants in this study

involved in student government overall expressed their involvement provided an opportunity to

develop leadership skills and used their involvement as a platform to voice opinions on any

campus related issues to offer a solution to be considered by the campus president.

Participant 9 shared how involvement in the Student Government Association (SGA) is

an opportunity to offer solutions to campus leadership to improve the overall college experience.

Participant 9 noted:

I like how they, they try to listen, like SGA [Student Government Association]. They

listen to the students you know and try to incorporate some of their ideas and what they

have going on in the school because I know they had made a big, big step from last year.

Like they listened to a lot of stuff. They get more active. They got the interactive stuff on

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Wednesday where you got a job fair and you know and more getting more hands on so that's a big step.

Participant 4 shared how involvement in the Student Government Association (SGA) positively impacted their student experience and college career noting,

I like being a part of Student Government. It really gives me a chance to help make decisions for the students. Like one event we are hosting where all the students can come on the lawn and have free food and we can meet other people on campus. Then we have spoken word coming up. There are a lot of things we do through Student Government that's why students should get involved.

Participant 5 shared how involvement in the Student Government Association (SGA) positively impacted their student experience and college career by providing a platform to voice opinions that could possibly benefit students with special needs. Participant 5 observed, "SGA [Student Government Association] is fun. They let me represent students with disabilities because we need stuff too." Participant 10 expressed how participation in SGA has improved their leadership skills saying,

At first, I was like really shy and nervous to talk in front of all these important people, but the more I kept coming to our meetings and the more the campus president got to know me, she told me that I was doing a good job and that helped me. She's so amazing. Then I started taking on tasks to help with the meeting and I think it has helped me become a leader. I feel more comfortable with putting together presentations in class because I had to do that for SGA meetings. I'm glad I joined.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into a community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. Factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college were uncovered through interviews conducted with participants on community college campuses throughout the Midwest.

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of the data collected for this study. Demographic information on the 20 participants was shared within this chapter. Direct quotes from semistructured interviews were also incorporated within this chapter. This study incorporated the interview responses of 20 participants randomly selected using purposive sampling.

Participants' responses addressed the eight primary themes identified during the coding process: (a) hindrances to student persistence, (b) college experience, (c) instructor experience, (d) tuition cost (e) motivating college experience, (f) campus resources, (g) more tutoring and tutor options, and (h) student government involvement. Chapter 5 of this study will outline the Discussion and Conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into community colleges in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group, but do not persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. Factors that prohibit African American students from persisting toward graduation and eventual degree completion from a 2-year college were uncovered through interviews conducted with participants on community college campuses throughout the Midwest. Chapter 5 is a summary of the study results, a discussion of the study results, a discussion of the results in relation to the literature review, a discussion of the limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

Existing research indicates that the expansion of higher education to include community colleges provides an opportunity for students to attend college regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. In light of this opportunity for a college education, African American college graduation rates trail other racial groups (NCES, 2018). According to Blackwell and Pinder (2014), African American students have higher aspirations to attend college than students from any other race; however, high aspirations are not enough to produce more college graduates. African American community college students who are provided academic and social support, are taught by sensitive instructors, receive quality tutoring, guidance, and mentoring, are exposed to off campus enrichment programs, become more goal oriented, develop new learning techniques, and attain better cognitive development, persist and graduate at higher percentages than African American students who do not (Fleming, 2012). Tinto's (1975) theory suggested community college leaders should create a college experience

emphasizing both social and academic integration consistently to increase graduation rates specifically amongst African American students.

This study was an exploration of African American community college students enrolled in the Midwest's perception of the community college experience at it relates to the current 2-year college model. The study further explored if the community college experience helps this population of students persist and eventually graduate. Interviews were conducted with 20 African American participants that earned nine semester hours or more within the community college network in the Midwest. The interviews were an opportunity for the investigator to view the community college experience from the student's perspective.

Summary of the Results

This study was guided by two research questions:

RQ 1: What factors contribute to low transfer and graduate rates of African American community college students in the Midwest?

RQ 2: What programs or services could community colleges offer that could improve graduation rates of African American students?

The findings of this study revealed community college students in the Midwest face multiple challenges hindering both the desire and the ability to persist and graduate from a 2-year degree program. Some factors identified as hindrances are the inability to connect with instructors, lack of confidence in instructors, language barriers posing a challenge to understanding classroom instruction, disruptive and violent classmates interfering with classroom instruction, lack of family support, student responsibility to the family interfering with class attendance, low self-esteem, and long commutes from home to campus.

The participants of this study suggested school personnel consider a revised orientation session each academic year for both new and returning students. The orientation would outline accurate program matching, remedial and college level course selection, program selection, and test taking skills. According to the participants either obtaining or refreshing upon these componets of the college experience may help community college students gain the academic momentum needed to persist toward graduation and can in turn produce more 2-year college graduation in the Midwest and nationwide.

Discussion of the Results

Below are the research questions that guided this study along with the results interpreted by the researcher:

Research Question 1: What factors contribute to low transfer and graduate rates of African American community college students in the Midwest? African Americans attending college in the Midwest have many options for a 2-year college education. Community colleges in the Midwest use limited marketing and do not recruit students from neighboring high schools to create a pipeline to secure steady enrollment. Students rely on guidance from school counselors, teachers, educational leaders, and family and friends to offer advice on the decision to attend either a 2-year or a 4-year institution. Based on the insight gained from the study some students make the decision to start at a 4-year institution then transfer to a 2-year institution.

Based upon the interviews conducted for this study overall, community college students are looking for a blend of a college experience that would provide quality education, the development of entry level employable skills, an opportunity to develop a community, the development of leadership skills, and open access to 4-year institutions. The blend that makes up the ideal college experience may be connected to academic integration. Based on the responses

by the participants, the community college model is ideal for students who attend a community college with a plan in place and know specifically what they would like to accomplish from a 2-year education; however, this is not a true reflection of the community college student body in the Midwest. Students come through the doors of a community college with deficiencies that are not always addressed either because the institution does not offer programs or services to address the issue(s) or students do not seek out the resources and gain the assistance needed to be successful.

Research Question 2: What programs or services could community colleges offer that could improve graduation rates of African American students? Based upon the responses by the participants for this study there appears to be a connection between programs and services on campus to meet the needs of issues occurring both inside and outside of the classroom. These issues may become determining factors resulting in a student's decision to persist toward graduation or not. These programs and services shape the overall college experience which includes the student's academic pursuits, peer and school personnel relationships, and involvement in extra-curricular activities. The connection through clubs and activities, mentorship, and peer relationships make up the components of social integration. Participants who decided not to connect with the institution socially contemplated dropping out on more occasions than students who acquired social capital through social integration.

To address the research questions that guided this study, both student connection through Student Services offered clubs and activities along with ongoing orientation sessions can allow school personnel to identify new and existing factors contributing to low attrition and graduation rates of African American community college students in the Midwest. Identifying these factors may allow school personnel an opportunity to develop and implement programs and services to

address hinderances to student persistence and gradation identified within this study in enough time to positively impact 2-year graduation rates.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Literature

Eight themes emerged from the coding and analysis of the participant interviews. These themes were categorized by their relation to the two research questions which guided this study. The eight themes are as follows: (a) hinderances to student persistence, (b) college experience, (c) instructor experience, (d) cost of tuition, (e) a motivating college experience, (f) campus resources, (g) more tutoring and tutoring options, and (h) student government involvement.

Hinderances to student persistence. Interviews revealed that students experienced family, financial, and personal issues that were hinderances in their ability to persist toward graduation. These barriers that are formed outside of the classroom have an impact on students' studies and supports Fleming's (2012) belief that African American college students are in need of social support to successfully persist toward degree attainment. These hinderances are considered barriers that impact a student's decision to discontinue post-secondary education for personal and academic reasons. Interviews revealed caring for a sick loved one, a poor campus and college experience, unhealthy relationships with peers, and issues with school personnel are hindrances to student persistence.

The reasons or hinderances impacting student persistence should be evaluated to determine if they are the results of natural attrition or if they can be remedied to salvage students from dropping out (Wright, 2015). Based on the participant's responses, a connection with an on-campus mentor is the best solution to prevent dropping out and combating these hinderances. A revised approach to educating 2-year college students to include support both inside and outside of the classroom may be a step in the right direction to yield higher matriculation and

graduation percentages specifically for African American students (Kopko, Ramos, & Karp, 2018).

Community college experience. Interviews revealed that the community college experience was evaluated by participants based upon positive relationships with campus personnel, supportive family and friends, and an overall positive personal outlook on their academic career. One of the important factors in developing a positive college experience is student engagement. Student engagement initiatives should encourage students to participate in meaningful activities to have a positive impact as they persist toward graduation (Greene et al., 2008). The community college experience should allow students to build a community, gain an academic foundation, offer students enrichment and engagement activities, provide on and off campus employment, and provide an outlet for students to develop a sense of identity while gaining a college education in a smaller environment in comparison to a 4-year institution environment (Rowh, 2011). Community college should offer job related skills, a pathway to a 4-year institution, and entry level degree completion and certificate programs as a means of building a foundation for a career (Rowh, 2011).

Instructor experience. Interviews revealed instructor experience evaluated by the student, whether it be positive or negative as it relates to the participant's interaction with the instructors both in and outside of the classroom. Participants rated the instructor experience based on the participant's perception of the instructor's availability outside of the classroom, teaching style, diversity in the classroom, the offering of mentorship, and willingness to offer personal tutoring. A negative evaluation of the instructor experience included a language barrier for instructors where English is not their first language, instructors unavailable to assist with tutoring, outside of the classroom, insensitivity displayed by instructors, instructor's lack of

understanding of diverse cultures and backgrounds. Teachers' expectations for student performance may impact the instructor's experience though the eyes of the student and may influence the instructor's teaching style. The instructor's experience may also impact the student's relationship and confidence in the teacher (Diamond et al., 2004; Perry et al., 2004).

The instructor experience is not the only deciding factor in a student's ability to persist toward college graduation; however, it is important to note that African American students who attain college readiness skills from classroom instructors and are taught within a positive and supportive classroom environment perform better academically than African American students who are not. Students are more engaged in learning and achieve at higher academic levels when teachers are involved in their lives both inside and outside of the classroom (Hardy, 2010; Mouzon, 2015).

Tuition cost. Interviews revealed participants relying solely on financial aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to pay for college expressed that the cost to attend community college versus a 4-year institution was one of the deciding factors on the selection of a 2-year institution. Although the cost of tuition for a 2-year institution is attractive to some students over a 4-year institution, the option to gain employable skills faster and at a reduced cost in comparison to a 4-year institution is also a draw. 2-year institutions have evolved to more than just open access institutions to higher education with low cost tuition in comparison to 4-year institutions. 2-year colleges have become a training ground for developing skilled workers while creating a pipeline to meet the employment industry needs (Sydow & Alfred, 2013). Individuals from poverty-stricken households with a desire to enter the workforce full time as soon as possible find community colleges a viable option. 2-year colleges provide students with the ability to improve their opportunity in the workforce through relevant

coursework specific to a job or trade, certification programs for employment above minimum wage, and associate degree programs in fields where a 4-year degree is not required (Shulock et al., 2013).

A motivating college experience. Interviews revealed the overall perception of a motivating college experience included personal reflection and experiences, as well as family and friends. College degree attainment stems from a student's motivation to graduate and is considered an important factor in student persistence, specifically low-income students from poverty-stricken backgrounds (Bryant, 2015). Students' motivation to earn a college degree may come from a personal satisfaction of earning a degree, from a structured program or specific courses that will help the student gain specific skills, or from the student's desire to compete against others, especially in the job market (Henning, 2015). It was a common theme throughout the interviews that participants were either self-motivated or motivated by their current socioeconomic background to complete a college degree to gain higher paying employment.

Campus resources. Interviews revealed participants considered effective campus resources as program and services that make it easier to earn a 2-year degree**.** According to the participants, commonly used campus resources are the writing center, tutoring, career services, academic advising, financial aid, the library, the computer lab, and mental health services. These offerings are managed through Student Services. Students Services is designed to provide resources and services to current and past students that support and promote higher education. Student Services is also designed to enhance student growth and develop a student's academic experience.

The use of campus resources can enhance social capital as it requires the student to interact with faculty members, student affairs personnel, and college support services (Thomas,

2014). It was further discovered through the interviews that community colleges throughout the

Midwest offer limited campus resources to address mental health related issues. This concern

was addressed by participants. Institutions with a desire to retain and graduate a diverse

population of students should develop curriculum and create a campus culture to support these

population of students' different needs and personal life matters which impacts their academic

success (Ingram & Gonzalez-Matthews, 2013).

More tutoring and tutor options. Interviews revealed the option of offering tutoring

online using platforms where the tutor and tutee are visible to each other for remote tutoring,

extended tutoring hours, staffing tutoring centers with more tutors and other learning aids, along

with offering tutoring in all major subjects is what is understood by the investigator the

sentiments of the participants when discussing more tutoring and tutor options. Tutoring is

naturally individualized and can be a compliment to classroom instruction. Tutors can teach

specifically what the student needs to know in that setting where instructors follow a set

curriculum in the classroom (Chin et al., 2011).

African American community college students with a background of poor academic

performance may need additional resources to be successful in the pursuit of a college degree.

Higher education institutions admitting these students should provide more effective educational

support programs, including remedial coursework, extensive access to tutoring, and writing aids

(Sethna, 2011). There is available research used as evidence that community colleges should

prepare its students to graduate by offering more programs suited for the interest and academic

levels of a wide range of students from remedial to high scholars. More selections focused on in-

demand skills and jobs may motivate more students to graduate.

Student government involvement. Interviews revealed student government associations involvement help participants gain leadership skills because it provides a platform for students to voice opinions on any campus related issue and offer a solution to be considered by the campus president. Student government associations provide an opportunity for students to gain leadership skills, become engaged in the campus community, and increase retention and graduation rates (Miles, 2011). Student engagement which includes the involvement in student government is important to student retention when students are faced with distractions outside of learning (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Some of these distractions include family and personal issues, poverty, and lack of support. On-campus activities promoting student engagement may not altogether alleviate off-campus distractions but may increase student retention because it gives students a sense of belonging and helps them focus on long-term goals (Windham et al., 2014).

Limitations

The interview and other available resources used for this study provided a small window into the college experience of African American community college students. This study was conducted within community colleges in the Midwest; therefore, the findings may not apply fully to all community colleges. However, there are parts of this study that offer transferability. Descriptive information on the background of the subject matter and the research is presented to allow the reader, specifically educational leaders to determine transferability. The study was limited to African American students with nine semester hours of earned college credits and did not capture the perspective of new students and their insight into the community college experience.

Although the goals was to recruit 50 total participants, due to schedule restrictions, class schedules, and campus activities, 20 participants volunteered to take part in the study. The

smaller sample size did not meet the researcher's initial expectations, but did not negatively impact the accuracy of the results of this study in comparison to a larger sample size.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

The results of this qualitative case study identified how participants perceived programs offered by Student Services as a means to support student persistence and retention of African American students. The interviews conducted by the researcher provided insight into how both on and off campus engagement can impact drop out percentages for African American community college students. Positive interaction with Student Services personnel and unofficial mentorship offered by class instructors was not the primary factor in student retention but considered important to the participants.

The purpose of establishing mentorship is to improve academic performance, increase college retention rates, and assist students with career planning (Gershenfeld, 2014). Mentoring opportunities during the first year of college is an important factor in student retention and graduation rates (Booker & Brevard, 2017). Other reasons mentorship is important is to assist students with attaining quality study habits, time management skills, develop social skills, and improve faculty–student relationships. Participants used for this study offered an alternative method for mentorship that may have a positive impact on the retention of African American community college students enrolled in the Midwest. The participants considered mentorship as a welcomed additional resource to the college experience with further exploration of how mentorship can meet the needs of students with different learning styles and college and career goals.

Mentorship is a resource for college students that can become costly (Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2018). According to Oreopoulos and Petronijevic (2018), individual mentorship is

more costly than group mentorship, but to be effective may require more funding than what is available. The use of technology may be an effective way to offer a quality, yet a cost-reduced, platform allowing mentors the opportunity to develop more mentees outside of the traditional institutional operating hours through the use of technology.

Students dealing with challenges such as lack of family support, household and living situation concerns may benefit from mentorship to prevent emotional decision making that may result in the decision to drop out (Sommers, 2015). The idea of developing a customized approach to mentorship and providing more options for students derived from the interviews conducted with the participants of this study. This concept was not considered in previous chapters of this study.

The results of this study indicate that African American community college students overall are unprepared to deal with the social and academic obstacles they encounter. Incorporating opportunities to develop these skills within the curriculum by the instructor and offering programs and services through Student Services could be a way to address the needs of the students.

The results of the study further revealed self-motivation and the motivation to improve the quality of life for the family were the major factors why participants persisted toward graduation. The insight offered within this study can become the foundation to build improved strategies, initiatives, and programs that may increase graduation rates of African American community college students. Higher education leaders should consider the proposed recommendations:

1. Developing partnerships with organizations to offer on campus resources for low income students to encourage consistent class attendance.

a. Develop free or reduce meal programs for low income students to ensure students have the nourishment needed throughout the day to learn.

b. Provide part-time, career focused, employment to create enthusiasm around graduation.

2. Consider redesigning academic advising to include additional resources that offer life coaching, the development of conflict resolution and time management skills, along with resume writing, job search, interviewing, and business etiquette skills.

3. Offer resources for grants, scholarships, internships, fellowships, and other enrichments opportunities that are not based solely on merit or academics.

4. Consider revamping the new student orientation process to include resources offered both on and off campus to meet students' social and academic needs along with follow-up appointments scheduled throughout the academic year.

5. Encourage and foster student-campus personnel relationships and possible mentorship opportunities.

6. Institute activities and clubs to promote leadership, academic achievement, and social integration amongst African American community college students outside of student government.

The results of this study indicate social and academic integration identified within Tinto's (1975) model of student persistence and student retention are not consistently implemented within the curriculum of community colleges. It is further understood that Tinto's (1975) model is not incorporated within the overall college experience. The development of polices to properly prepare students to acquire social and academic integration as suggested by Tinto (1975) on a

consistent basis throughout their 2-year college career may increase the number of African American community college graduates.

Recommendation for Further Research

There are a number of gaps in the current research and knowledge regarding retention and graduation rates of African American community college students. It would be beneficial and add to the body of research to further explore workforce development programs offered to low-income community college students. Participants interviewed for this study expressed struggling financially to meet the basic needs for survival while earning a 2-year degree. Employment within the workforce development program can be contingent on enrollment in a community college. Further research can evaluate if workforce development programs with enrollment contingencies increases retention percentages, or the impact of workforce development programs in assisting low-income students, specially African American students gain employable skills while in college that aid in earning higher wages upon degree completion.

Future studies on this subject should explore in detail the impact of both social and academic integration specifically on African American community college students. The study should incorporate how Tinto's (1975) theory on student persistence impacts African American community college students who drop out without an alternate plan for either degree or career attainment. A longitudinal study on African American community college students who drop out may shed light on ways to help this population of students persist outside of what was uncovered in this study.

As indicated in the limitations section of this chapter, this study provides a piece of information and perspective of African American community college students. In relation to this particular study using both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in further

research could provide more insight on the subject. The use of predetermined questions to rate participants' college experience using specific questions to evaluate social and academic integration along with student retention could further add to the existing body of work. The data collected during the quantitative research phase could be used by the researcher to develop interview questions to uncover more within the student experience that points to low graduation rates. Questions developed by the researcher using the results of the quantitative analysis could be incorporated into semistructured interviews conducted by the researcher with each participant. Additionally, a longitudinal study conducted on a larger sample size could provide a deeper analysis of the effectiveness of the student orientation process, academic advising, and curriculum to meet the needs of African American students. Further study may help this population of students persist toward graduation at higher rates.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore why African American students enroll into a community college in the Midwest at higher percentages than any other racial group but persist to each academic grade level and graduate at the lowest percentages. This research study revealed the following eight themes that can be used for further study along with the development of actionable goals for educators, educational leaders, and students: (a) hinderances to student persistence, (b) college experience, (c) instructor experience, (d) cost of tuition, (e) a motivating college experience, (f) campus resources, (g) more tutoring and tutoring options, and (h) student government involvement. These eight themes support Tinto's (1975) theory that academic and social integration are major factors that determine if a student remains or drops out of college.

A discussion of the result for the current study was identified in this chapter comparing the interview research questions with the interview results. The results of the study were outlined in this chapter in relation to the literature reviewed and used as a foundation for this study. The limitations of this study were outlined by the researcher. The implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory were identified along with other related subject topics that could further build on the research topic.

This study addressed the research questions using Tinto's (1975) theory on student persistence and student retention. This theory was used as a framework to explore low attrition and graduation rates of African American community college students in the Midwest. This study was designed to explore the unique college experience of this population of students.

Overall, African American students attending a community college in the Midwest have taken advantage of the open access to a 2-year degree thereby enrolling in numbers higher than other racial groups. The concern lies within the percentage of African American students completing a 2-year degree program which is lower than all other racial groups. African American students are faced with a variety of hinderances impacting advancement through an associate's degree program such as lack of finances to pay tuition, poor study habits, lack of family support, lack of trust and support from instructors, and lack of support and trust in school administrators, along with other factors.

Community college leadership should consider reorganizing programs and curriculum to attract all learning styles and students from diverse backgrounds. A more structured approach to remedial education may help students, specifically African American community college students use remediation as the foundation to successfully complete college level coursework and persist toward graduation. Lastly, student support services should be evaluated to determine

its effectiveness and provide opportunities to explore new programs and advising techniques that may produce more African American community college graduates. Incorporating the findings of this study into a thorough plan may improve the graduation rates of African American community college students nationwide.

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Appendix A: Community College Student Demographics Questionnaire

1.   Male___ Female ___   Age_____   Interview Number _____

2.   Are you African-American? _____ Yes   _____ No

3. Academic Status/Standing for the 2017-2018 Year

    __1st year (0-30 semester credits earned)

    __ 2nd year (31-60 credits earned)

    __ Other (61+credits earned)

4. Are you currently receiving financial aid? Please check all that apply:

    __ Federal Pell Grant

    __ Federal Student Loans

    __ Federal Work Study

    __ Scholarships

    __ Grants

    __ No Financial Aid

5. On average, how many credits are you enrolled in each semester?

    __ Part time (1–11 semester credits)

    __ Full time (12–15 semester credits)

    __ Other (16+ semester credits)

6. Are you the first person in your family to attend college? Yes__   No__

7. What is your highest level of completed education?

       __ High school diploma

       __ GED

       __ Alternative high school diploma

       __ Homeschool high school diploma

       __ Online high school diploma

       __ Other

8. Do you work?___ yes ___ no

9. If you answered yes to Question 8, please check your employment status below:

       ___ Full time on campus

       ___ Full time off campus

       ___ Part time on campus

       ___ Part time off campus

       ___ Work study

       ___ Unemployed

       ___ Other (Please explain)_____

Appendix B: Community College Student Interview Questions

Interview Number _____

1. How long have you been a community college student?

2. How many community colleges in the Midwest have you attended? Please share dates/timeframe if you can recall.

3. What does a typical school day look like for you?

4. Describe your overall experience as a community college student.

5. What aspects of being a community college student do you like? Please explain.

6. What aspects of being a community college student do you dislike? Please explain.

7. On average, how many hours of your day are devoted to studying?

8. What aspects of the community college experience improve your ability to be a successful student?

9. What aspects of the community college experience impede your ability to be a successful student?

10. What programs/services offered within the community college network help you toward graduating?

11. What resources if offered could help you become a better student?

12. Do you utilize Student Services? If so, what aspects of Student Services do you use?

13. Do you ever feel you are not on track to graduate?

14. (For a no response to Question 13): How do you remain on track toward graduation?

15. (For a yes response to Question 13): What are some of the issues you have experienced?

16. Have you ever contemplated dropping out of college?

17. (For a yes response to Question 16): Did you discuss your thoughts with an Academic

Advisor, Student Services Counselor, or any community college staff for support?

18. (For a no response to Question 16): Did you discuss your thoughts with anyone outside of the

community college network? If so, who?

19. If you spoke to someone about dropping out, what advice did they share?

20. How has the leadership within your college impacted the culture and academics of your

pursuit to graduate?

21. What programs offered on campus motivate you to graduate?

22. What off campus programs motivate you to graduate?

23. What influence does faculty/staff have on you remaining a student within the community

network?

Appendix C: Consent Form

Research Study Title: Stepping Stone or Road Block: An Evaluation of Community Colleges in

> the Midwest to Improve Attrition and Graduate Percentages of African American Students

Principal Investigator: Tamela Odom
Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Neil Mathur

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the overall college experience for African American students attending community college in the Midwest. It is the intent of the investigator to uncover factors that prohibit this population of students from degree completion. We expect approximately 125 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on June 19, 2017, and end enrollment on August 28, 2017.

To be eligible to participate in this study by completing the survey, participants must meet all of the following requirements:

- Must be currently enrolled in a community college it the Midwest.
- Must have nine (9) semester credits completed at a community college
- Must be African American

If you do not meet all of the requirements listed above, please inform the principal investigator for further instructions.

The surveys will take place on community college campuses throughout the Midwest. All surveys and audio recordings will be completed in one setting. Each survey and audio recording will be securely stored to maintain confidentiality. Once surveys and recorded interviews are completed, they will be stored in an unmarked file locked file cabinet accessible to the principal investigator (Tamela Odom).

This survey should take less than 30 minutes of your time. Audio interviews should take less than one hour.

Risks:
There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside of a file cabinet. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed three years after we conclude this study.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help identify ways to help African American students graduate from a community college at higher percentages. You could benefit this by identifying ways in which you will be on track to graduate and move on to completing your college and career goals.

Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Tamela Odom at email: [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503- 493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____   _____

    Participant Name   Date

_____   _____

    Participant Signature   Date

_____   _____

    Investigator Name   Date

_____   _____

    Investigator Signature   Date

Investigator: Tamela Odom; email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Dr. Neil Mathur
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix D: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

> As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

> "Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

> "Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work

Statement of Original Work Continued

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly references and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.

Tamela Odom
Digital Signature

Tamela Odom
Name (Typed)

November 20, 2019
Date