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A Case Study: Increasing the Persistence and Graduation Rates of Undergraduate Black Female College Students at a Predominantly White Institution

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by Catrina Lynette Smith-Edmond

This dissertation has been read and approved as fulfilling the partial requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Leadership.

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A CASE STUDY: INCREASING THE PERSISTENCE AND GRADUATION RATES
OF UNDERGRADUATE BLACK FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS AT A
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

by

Catrina Lynette Smith-Edmond

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Education
in Curriculum and Leadership
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Dedication

First, I give honor and thanks to God for the strength to carry me through this dissertation process. Without Him, I am nothing. This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother, Dorothy Daniel Smith. For it was your voice and spirit that kept me striving for excellence. To my father, Jay Smith, who has always believed in me. To my husband, Curtis Edmond, who has supported me through this journey. To my children, TyQuaysha, ShaMya, and My'Kell know that you are capable of achieving anything in life. Thank you for your support, patience, understanding, and belief in me. My prayer is that my journey in life has inspired and encouraged each of you. Never give up on your goals. I love you all.

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Abstract

Since 1954, Black females were presented with the opportunity to earn an education equivalent to non-Black females. Despite the challenges, Black females have made significant strides in their academic performance by attaining degrees at every level over the years. The purpose of the study is to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution. The researcher will conduct an exploratory single-case study to explore Black female undergraduate students' barriers to retention during their college experience.

The sample included 10 Black female undergraduate students and three staff members from academic and non-academic student support services on the campus of SEU. The findings of the study indicate that the Black female undergraduate student participants have encountered at least one challenge that had a potential effect on their college persistence. Many student participants were not aware of the student support services available to them or did not feel comfortable using the services for assistance. Black female undergraduate students need to be engaged and build relationships to encourage them and develop a sense of belonging at a PWI. For some Black female undergraduate students, it may be necessary for PWIs to provide intentional support for student support services for the population to benefit from available services.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

Background of the Problem

The future success and promises of Black females completing college are possible despite past struggles and obstacles preventing them from earning an education. Colleges and universities must understand Black females' backgrounds and experiences to identify and provide the support they need to aid in their college success (Farmer, Hilton, & Reneau, 2016). Black females faced racism, sexism, classism, social isolation, cultural incongruity, and an unwelcoming academic environment in higher education that limited their educational opportunities (Farmer et al., 2016). Their chances of earning college degrees increased with the ruling and laws related to the *1954 Supreme Court case Brown v. Board*, the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, and the *Higher Education Act of 1965* (Garibaldi, 2014). Although education plays a significant role in Black females' lives, they continue to experience difficulties in their college endeavors, preventing or delaying them from earning degrees (Farmer et al., 2016).

College enrollment of Black females has increased, but there has not been consistent improvement in the graduation rates, indicating that hindrances to complete a college degree still exist. Black females' access to education, academic success, and graduation suggest a need for more attention to their distinct needs and the variables associated with their college retention and completion.

Black female students who enroll at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) are more likely to complete their college degrees than those who attend a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). The classroom experience, interaction among majority and minority students, and the campus engagement at a PWI are different.

Racial labeling has been customary at PWIs, which causes an increased level of stress, frustration, and anxiety that have implications on the retention and graduation rates of Black female students (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, & Pollard, 2016; Walls & Hall, 2018). Many PWIs have made commitments to focus on Black female college students' needs but still struggle with developing programs that provide the support needed for academic success (Hannon et al., 2016).

Black female students are distinguished from their female peers by their life experiences. Their college journey may consist of challenges involving raising a family, financial difficulties, psychological disorders, social barriers, lack of voice, feelings of invalidation, or being a first-generation college student. Even though many Black females are successful in their educational endeavors, institutions should not overlook the negative college experiences they face. Higher education institutions can improve Black females' educational outcomes by breaking down barriers that hinder degree completion by identifying strategies that will enhance college retention (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Strategies to improve retention and degree completion include reducing financial barriers using emergency grants and scholarships, reducing the loss of credit hours through a seamless transfer process, promoting a sense of belonging, increasing mentorship opportunities, and reconstructing student support services for at-risk students (Mintz, 2019).

Colleges and universities are now intervening to assist and support the underrepresented groups facing any barriers that appear to be a burden to graduation (Farmer et al., 2016). Black females' academic achievement is supported by committed and strategic leadership and the development of scholarly communities that promote

success through assessing and mitigating barriers in higher education. Scholars recommend addressing issues such as academic support, social issues, and environmental factors related to Black females' achievement to increase retention and graduation rates (Whittaker & Montgomery, 2012; Banks & Dohy, 2019). Academic assistance can be addressed to prevent students from dropping out by focusing on students' needs to increase intellectual engagement. Colleges and universities can address professional and cultural socialization issues by promoting a sense of belonging for Black female students and creating a diverse curriculum (Banks & Dohy, 2019).

Many programs have been developed at institutions of higher education to address the academic success of Black females. The programs offer academic support, financial support, mentoring, networking opportunities, and encouragement to engage in research. Initiatives such as summer college programs, peer-led teaching and tutoring programs, faculty-student mentoring programs, peer-to-peer mentoring programs, and Learning in Communities programs are often an outgrowth of partnerships. The partnerships include a network of schools, educational organizations, and nonprofit organizations that collaborated to help underrepresented populations complete a college education (Tucker, 2014). A longitudinal study by Douglas and Attewell (2014) showed that students who took part in these programs performed better academically than non-participants and were more likely to stay in college and graduate.

For example, Claflin University's Learning in Communities programs experienced an increase in the retention rate to 95% for freshman-to-sophomore students after remaining stable at a 77% rate for several years. The institution created the program for first-generation college students in which 25 students are enrolled together in three

team-taught courses per cohort. The team-taught courses included University 101, English 101, and Math 111. The program provided a peer mentor for each student. Also, the program provided tutorial services and cultural enrichment activities for the students. The Learning in Communities program illustrated a strong positive impact on retention and supported the finding of the Douglas and Attewell (2014) study.

Institutions must be more consistent in intervening in areas or support programs that affect Black females' academic success. Setting requirements for establishing and implementing support systems will transform higher education and have a significant long-term effect on Black females' success. Colleges and universities could identify, recruit, retain, graduate, and track the success of students who enter college and participate in a support system program (Tucker, 2014).

For example, in 2017-2018, South Eastern University (pseudonym assigned) expanded the campus student information system and implemented the Education Advisory Board's (EAB) Student Success Collaborative (SSC) to gather information to keep students on target for graduation. The EAB SSC is a predictive analytics software that enhances intrusive advising and supportive strategies to keep "at-risk" students on target for graduation (Education Advisory Board, 2020). South Eastern University (SEU) recommends and refers students to institutional support services that allow advisors to document referrals and send students notifications with recommended services. Students who participate in support programs are connected to the right resources on campus that provide academic, moral, and social support critical to their college success (Tucker, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

College enrollment rates of Black females at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) have increased since passing laws that allowed them to earn an equal education in the United States. However, there has not been a corresponding increase in the graduation rates of undergraduate Black female students (Farmer et al., 2016). The racial gap between the retention and graduation rates of Black and White females at PWIs suggests that Black females' college experience should be examined to determine which factors hinder and which factors contribute to Black female undergraduate students' success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution. The researcher used an exploratory qualitative single-case study to examine the following questions:

Research Questions

1. What barriers to retention do undergraduate Black female students face in higher education when attending a Predominantly White Institution?

2. To what extent do Black females report knowledge and use of academic and non-academic student support services at a Predominantly White Institution?

3. To what degree do academic and non-academic student support services support a sense of belonging and retention for Black female students at a Predominantly White Institution?

Theoretical Framework

Sense of belonging was utilized as the theoretical framework to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution. A sense of belonging is a student's mental attachment to a society that measures the magnitude of the academic and social inclusion experience in a college environment. Every college student needs to feel a social belonging, but each college student's identity and experience will determine their sense of belonging experience (Strayhorn, 2012).

Minorities, underprivileged students, and first-generation college students are likely to feel disconnected from the campus environment, making sense of belonging more significant to these populations. Strayhorn (2008) reveals a lower sense of belonging is observed more frequently in minority students compared to their peers. College students who have a positive sense of belonging earned better grades, have higher retention rates, and are more readily responsive to college (Strayhorn, 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2019).

Sense of belonging is a blend of cognitive, affective, and behavior elements (Strayhorn, 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). Students who believe that they belong (cognitive) and feel connected (affective) are more inclined to attend classes (behavior) than students who experience a negative social belonging. Strayhorn (2012) describes a sense of belonging as a fundamental human need and motivation required of everyone.

Black female undergraduate students' success in college is connected to a sense of belonging, impacting the population's retention and graduation rates. Strayhorn's Model

of Sense of Belonging (Figure 1) indicates that students who experience a positive sense of belonging encounter a positive outcome in involvement, happiness in life, achievement, and retention (Strayhorn, 2012 p.25).
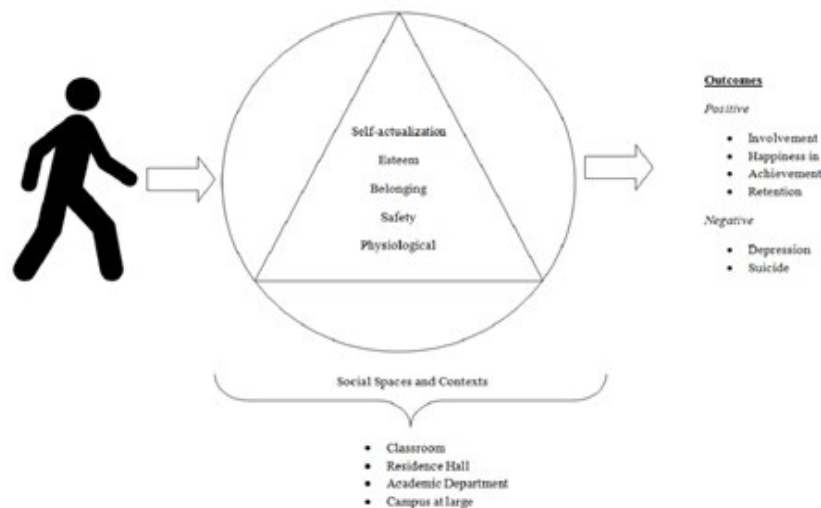
Figure 1. Strayhorn's Model of Sense of Belonging

Methodology Overview

The purpose of the study was to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution. The research took place on the campus of SEU, located in the southeastern United States. The participants included Black female undergraduate students from all classifications (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) and staff members from academic (SEU Advise, Academic Tutoring Center, and SEU Library Services) and non-academic student support services (Center for Servant Leadership, Office of Financial Aid, and SEU Counseling Center). Purposeful sampling was used to choose student participants from the Collegiate Women Organization. The researcher obtained demographic data (name, race, gender, classification, and major) and academic data (standardized test scores and GPA) from the Office of Institutional Research and

Effectiveness to recruit additional student participants and verify the self-reported demographic data from members of the Collegiate Women Organization. A purposeful random sample was used to generate a list from the data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness.

Qualitative research is valuable in providing an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences (Thastum, Johansen, Gubba, Olesen, & Romer, 2008; Klenke, Wallace, & Martin, 2015). As a type of qualitative research design, a case study allows the researcher to investigate a phenomenon in-depth and explore a single bounded system or multiple bounded systems (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Case study research aims to address questions that ask how or when and where the researcher does not influence the activities that are taking place (Yin, 2009). An exploratory qualitative single-case study enables participants to craft their own stories while providing the researcher the opportunity to interpret data through various critical lenses (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003; Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016). For this study, a qualitative single-case research design was used to examine Black female undergraduate students' college phenomenon at a PWI (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Multiple sources of evidence strengthen the data collection and are rated more highly in quality than studies that rely on single sources of information (Yin, 2018). The data collection methods included a survey to introduce the study to the participants and access relative information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The survey collected the population's self-reported demographics information (names, age, gender, race, major, enrollment status, current number of credit hours enrolled, classification, GPA, eligibility for Financial Aid Pell Grant, and participation in clubs/organizations). The researcher also

collected data that include knowledge of student support services, student support services usage, frequency of student support services used, students' perceptions of the benefits from student support services, and clubs/organizations the participants were involved in on-campus (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The survey data was evaluated to determine the level of familiarity with academic and non-academic student support services, identify the academic and non-academic student support services the participants used, how frequently the participants used academic and non-academic student support services.

Individual interviews were conducted with Black female undergraduate students and staff members of academic and non-academic student support services. The interviews with Black female undergraduate students were conducted to capture the participants' cultural experience, college experience, sense of belonging through student support services, relationships established with faculty/staff, acceptance by faculty, staff, and students, perceptions of the institution commitment and support, and their perceptions of inclusion and diversity. The staff members of the various student support services were asked to explain the process and procedures of their services, how a sense of belonging was promoted in their area, and how Black female undergraduate students were recruited to take advantage of the services.

The interviews were recorded through the web video conference software Google Meet, transcribed verbatim by a third-party software, analyzed individually, and then compared with all participants. The data analysis techniques for the interviews consisted of color-coding techniques to develop categories and disaggregate core grouping relevant to answering the research questions. Key themes and subthemes from the participants'

interviews were created by focusing on the keywords and repetitious words in their answers (Creswell, 2009). Combining these data collection methods provided a description of the institution's student support services and the students' perceptions of student support services as Black female undergraduate students.

An exploratory single-case study was used to explore Black female undergraduate students' perception of retention barriers during their college experiences. The knowledge obtained directly from the Black female undergraduate students will help provide recommendations to support their academic success. Existing programs and student services can be reevaluated to accommodate Black female students' unique needs to increase their retention and graduation rates. Therefore, a single-case study is significant for the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the issue (Gustafsson, 2017).

Limitations and Delimitations

Several limitations were considered when evaluating the findings of this study. First, this study exclusively explored and described the experiences of Black female undergraduate students who volunteered as participants. Black female students' experiences were not compared to the experiences of their White female peers. Second, due to the study's qualitative nature, there was a small sample size of undergraduate female students. The study's findings were restricted to the Black females enrolled in undergraduate programs who volunteered to participate in the research and did not represent all Black female undergraduate students attending the institution.

Some delimitations were also considered. The researcher was a staff member at the university where the study was conducted. The researcher's employment at the

institution may have caused students and staff members to be hesitant to participate in the study. Even with these limitations and delimitations, this study provided insight into undergraduate Black female students' experience.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined to avoid the possibility of misinterpretation:

- *Academic Support Services:* A range of teaching strategies, educational programs, and college resources offered to students in an attempt to assist them in improving their learning success, stay on track with their peers, meet academic expectations, or excel in college (Academic Support, 2013).

- *Black*: Used to describe citizens of color who identify as Black, African American, African, Caribbean, or mixed-race persons currently residing and employed in the United States (Aud, Hussar, Johnson, Kena, Roth, Manning, & Zhang, 2012).

- *Degree Completion*: Undergraduate four-year degree attainment within six years (NCES, 2017a).

- *Higher Education Institutions:* Two-year and four-year institutions that award associate and bachelor's degrees. This word may also be used interchangeably with "colleges or universities" (Li & Carroll, 2007).

- *Non-academic Support Services*: Activities and programs intended to enhance academic achievement but do not directly discuss educational content (Karp & Stacey, 2013).

- *Persistence*: To continue college enrollment without interruption through graduation. Full-time attendance at the same campus for at least eight months of the year. (Chen, Elliott, Kinney, Cooney, Pretlow, Bryan, & Campbell, 2019).

- *Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)*: A postsecondary institution of higher education with more than 50% White student enrollment (Ross, Kena, Rathbun, KewalRamani, Zhang, Kristapovich, & Manning, 2012).

- *Retention Barriers*: Obstacles that directly or indirectly affect student persistence in higher education (Silva, Cahalan, & Lacireno-Paquet, 1998).

- *Retention:* The continued enrollment at one institution (McFarland, Hussar, Zhang, Wang, X., Wang, K. Hein, & Barner, 2019).

- *Retention Rate*: Rate of first-time, full-time students in fall returning to the same institution to pursue their degree fall semester of the next year (McFarland et al., 2019).

- *Sense of Belonging*: Students' psychological sense of connection to a community that measures the extent to which students feel academic and social integration on a college campus (Strayhorn, 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2019).

- *Student Success*: A student's academic performance measurements consisting of standardized test scores, grades, and cumulative credit hours, which reflect the advancement to completing a college degree (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006).

- *Student Support Services*: Activities and programs intended to increase the

  number of college students in the United States who are underprivileged low-

  income, first-generation, and with disabilities to successfully complete a

  college degree (Department of Education, 2016).

Significance of the Study

Since 1954, Black females were presented with the opportunity to earn an

education equivalent to non-Black females. Despite the challenges, Black females have

made significant strides in their academic performance by attaining degrees at every level

over the years (Garibaldi, 2014). Between academic years 2011-2012 and 2016-2017,

bachelor's degrees awarded to Black females increased by 1.5%, master's degrees

increased by 3.09%, doctoral degrees increased by 20.89%. In comparison, bachelor's

degrees awarded to White females decreased by 1.74%, master's degrees decreased by

6.5%, and doctoral degrees increased by 2.8 (NCES, 2017a). Despite the notable

increase in degree completions for Black females, the racial gap in Black and White

females' degree attainment is still disproportionate in favor of White females (Garibaldi,

2014).

Efforts related to Black female students' academic success focus on academic

support, problems related to racial socialization, and environmental factors. Higher

education institutions and external agencies have developed programs and initiatives to

promote academic success, such as pre-college programs and Federal TRIO programs, to

help Black female students complete college. The support systems can transform higher

education to have a long-term effect on Black female students' academic success.

Summary

Black females encountered multiple obstacles that have prevented them from earning a higher education degree. They faced racism, sexism, classism, social isolation, cultural incongruity, and discrimination that limited their educational opportunities. The ruling of several mandated laws granted the opportunity for the population to earn college degrees.

Black females continue to face the same struggles after the mandated laws were passed, causing a disproportionate racial gap completing degrees in higher education compared to White females. College enrollment of Black females has increased over the years, but graduation rates have not increased consistently with the enrollment rates. Higher education institutions are intervening to provide assistance and support for Black female students that face barriers preventing them from completing college. Additional strategies to improve Black females' educational outcomes should be identified and implemented to increase graduation rates.

Chapter One presented an introduction and background of this research. Chapter Two will provide a comprehensive review of the literature exploring the historical and current relevant research of Black female college students' educational journey. The methodology process will be discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four will examine the college experience and social belonging of Black female undergraduate students' academic and non-academic student support services. The research will be concluded with a summary in Chapter Five, discussing the analysis of emerging themes and future research implications.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Mandated laws and rulings, such as the *1954 Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education*, the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, and the *Higher Education Act of 1965*, increased Black female college students' opportunities to earn college degrees. However, since granted the opportunity to enroll in college and obtain a degree, Black female undergraduate students' retention and graduation rates remain lower than those of their White female peers, suggesting that they still face barriers (Garibaldi, 2014). The notable difference in degree attainment between Black and White female students indicates that more research is needed on Black females' distinctive needs and the factors related to their retention in college and degree completion. In the past decade, Black females have been enrolling in colleges and universities in significant numbers; however, their experiences in higher education require additional research to understand how institutions can best support the population to increase their academic success (Garibaldi, 2014; Farmer et al., 2016).

Institutions developed programs to focus on the retention and academic accomplishment of Black females that included mentoring, counseling, and minority student support programs (Tovar, 2015; Farmer et al., 2016). Research studies (Tovar, 2015; Farmer et al., 2016) indicated that academic support, financial support, and mentorship were elements that impacted Black female students' retention and graduation rates.

Academic support, including the development of social, leadership, organizational skills, and critical thinking skills, has been shown to have a positive influence on the performance of Black female undergraduate students. Financial support has also been

shown to influence Black females' retention and academic success, as many cannot remain to complete college due to financial struggles (Farmer et al., 2016). The availability of mentors has also been shown to challenge and encourage critical thinking of Black female students. As a result, studies found that mentorship improved Black female students' overall retention and academic success (Farmer et al., 2016).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were a major part of providing Black students with academic and social advancement in higher education (Farmer et al., 2016). The role was influential throughout the past 150 years. HBCUs faced similar challenges relating to retention and degree completion as other colleges and universities. These challenges forced higher education institutions to focus on proven programmatic strategies for minority students to resolve retention and graduation rates (Farmer et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Sense of belonging was selected as the theoretical framework for this study to recognize how the connectedness on a college campus is significant and contributes to Black female undergraduate students' academic success. A sense of belonging can be described as a student's mental attachment to a society that measures the magnitude of the academic and social inclusion experience in a college environment (Strayhorn, 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2019). A sense of belonging has been associated with Black female students' determination to stay in college (Strayhorn, 2015). In the past, discrimination and bias experiences have been destructive to Black females' sense of belonging in higher education. A significant effect of discrimination is a lowered sense of belonging for Black females resulting in isolation and alienation. Social psychological research has

shown that it is nearly impossible for individuals to be recognized or achieve an education if they feel threatened, vulnerable, or lonely (Strayborn, 2015).

A mixed method study by Strayhorn (2015) found that students who have a strong sense of belonging receive better grades, have higher retention rates, and respond more readily to college than students who have no sense of belonging (Hussain & Jones, 2019). The need to belong is a continual effort as cultural changes, time changes, and people change. Students who feel like they have a sense of belonging are committed to an institution finding it difficult to drop out to avoid breaking social bonds with others on campus.

Strayhorn (2015) explored student sub-populations and campus environments through quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches. First-generation Black students need even more support because their sense of belonging is prone to be affected by race issues and racism on campus. According to Strayhorn (2015), social belonging varies based on students' race, gender, or campus environments. He concluded that social approval, encouragement, community engagement, growth, mental health, health, and academic achievement are critical to college students. A sense of belonging is a critical component of college success and affects students' degree of academic adjustment, achievement, aspirations, and the desire to stay in school (Strayhorn, 2015).

According to Hussain and Jones (2019), research showed that higher education institutions that encourage a greater sense of belonging for Black female students enable positive persistence and degree completion outcomes. Students who are convinced that they can be part of a welcoming college campus can build social connections and develop positive campus relationships. Hussain and Jones (2019) used moderated regressions to

investigate the impact of diverse peer relationships and an institution's dedication to diverse relationships amongst discrimination and a sense of belonging for the minority at a four-year Predominantly White Institution. The study found that perceptions of prejudice and bias lead to a decreased sense of belonging for Black female students; Black female students with a positive view of a college commitment can be protected against the destructive impacts discrimination and bias can have on their sense of belonging; and recommends that regular, diverse peer experiences are required to protect the sense of belonging of Black students from being influenced by discrimination and racism (Hussain & Jones, 2019).

The negative impact of racism on a sense of belonging can be lessened when Black females perceive that an institution is aggressively engaged in diversity efforts (Hussain & Jones, 2019). Mixed method research was utilized to explore the correlation between students' discrimination and bias experiences on the sense of belonging of African American and Latino students and on a college campus (Hussain & Jones, 2019). Research by Hurtado and Ruiz Alvarado (2015) showed that the relationship between discrimination and a sense of belonging was impacted by faculty and staff who recognized the problem. The research concluded that the negative association between discrimination and a sense of belonging was the strongest among Blacks. The study established that discrimination experiences negatively influenced a sense of belonging and retention among Black and Latino students. The results suggest that moderately diverse institutions can significantly diminish the influences of discrimination on students' sense of belonging and retention (Hussain & Jones, 2019). Attention to recruiting and retaining underrepresented minority students and improving intergroup

relationships on campus is required to diminish the effects (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015).

An Academic Mindset Survey study by SEU was distributed to 1033 freshman undergraduate students in August 2020 to measure their learning beliefs and perceptions of the institution. The survey measured students' responses in eight categories: Reasons for College, Expectations for College, Thoughts about Math, Thoughts about English, Grit, Faculty Mindset, Income, Scarcity, and Finance, and Demographics. The questions were answered using a six-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The Expectations of College category measured students' sense of belonging in which students were asked to rate their general feelings about their enrollment at the institution. However, out of 1033, 154 students listed their race as Black or African American, 149 students listed their race as White, and 690 students did not provide a race. The total freshman undergraduate students included 600 females and 104 males. When asked if "I belong at this college/institution," 765 students responded, 19 strongly disagreed, 28 disagreed, 58 slightly disagreed, 196 slightly agreed, 290 agreed, and 174 strongly agreed. Also, 765 students responded to the statement "I am very involved in groups and/or activities at this college/university"; 137 strongly disagreed, 165 disagreed, 136 slightly disagreed, 154 slightly agreed, 102 agreed, and 71 strongly agreed. Students were asked, "I sometimes feel like other students on campus have stronger academic skills than me"; 761 students responded, 57 strongly disagreed, 98 disagreed, 95 slightly disagreed, 166 slightly agreed, 196 agreed, and 149 strongly agreed with the statement (Columbus State University Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (n.d.). The survey data could not be disaggregated by race and gender to confirm the Black

female undergraduate students' responses. The information was still invaluable as it represented the beliefs and perceptions of the college experiences of all respondents.

Historical Overview

Morrill Act of 1862

Senator Justin Morrill of Vermont introduced the *Morrill Act* (1862), also known as the Land Grant College Grant, on July 2, 1862. The Act was adopted to build colleges for citizens of new western states. Public land was donated to States and Territories to establish institutions focusing on agriculture and the mechanic arts. The *Morrill Act* (1862) provided the first federal funding for higher education. The Federal government was required to award 30,000 acres of public property to each state Legislative members and senators in the form of "land scrip" certificates. More than 100 million acres of land were allocated for school construction to establish a national system of state colleges and universities Instead, several states misused the proceeds from the grant by selling the land. Land purchases funded several institutions that were already in operation, and the states chartered new schools. Nebraska University, Washington State University, Clemson University, and Cornell University were authorized as land-grant institutions.

Higher education was placed beyond the scope of millions of students, reshaping the nation's social and economic foundation. Blacks were not permitted to attend the South's original land-grant institutions. Separate but equal facilities were built as a provision for institutions in Mississippi and Kentucky. As a result, the Second *Morrill Act* was passed that extended grant programs to Black institutions. Over the years, the Morrill Acts have been a valuable educational resource and have proven to be an essential component of the education system. Fiscal support was given directly from the

government for institutions of higher education. The Act ensured that money would be available to fund facilities of chartered institutions and provide continued government support.

Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)

The 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* ended formal discrimination for American public P-12 and higher education schools. The case was a consolidation of cases within five jurisdictions: *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Briggs v. Elliot*, *Bulah v. Gebhart and Belton v. Gebhart, Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, and *Bolling v. Sharpe* (Lewis, 2016).

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) included case-related information from the *Mendez v. Westminster* case that fought for justice and the same opportunities for minority groups. Sylvia Mendez was an 8-year-old girl whose father believed his children were worthy of the chance to have an equal education. Mendez's father decided to enroll her in an all-White school close to their home with books and equipment of higher standards than the school designated for minority students. Mendez and her sister were refused admission to the all-White school due to their color. Mendez enrolled in the all-White school on April 14, 1947, after winning the desegregation case (Brevetti, 2017). The Mendez case was crucial to the deliberation and legal assessment used to effectively prosecute *Brown v. Board of Education's* case before the U.S. Supreme Court (Blanco, 2010).

The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case acted as a mechanism for the new civil rights movement, motivated reform of education, and created a legal means to challenge segregation across society. The case opened educational doors for all students,

as its primary goal was to deal with segregation. The court gave a detailed statement

noting that a standard education was important to all children and that it was the duty of

the state to ensure equality of education (Lewis, 2016). Segregation had a negative

impact on Black children, and its influence was more profound because it was a sanction

of the law (Lewis, 2016). Black women have made significant strides in their academic

success, enrollment, and degree completion since the *Brown* case ruling. However,

progress is still needed to focus on Black female students' academic success and

graduation rates as they continue to be persistently lower than those of their White female

peers (Garibaldi, 2014).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

The *Civil Rights Act of 1964* was considered one of the greatest political and

social readjustments of the century. The act was the first significant effort in which

Black females gained equality in higher education (Button, 2014). The *Civil Rights Act*

of 1964 had a more substantial effect on racial justice than any other law passed

(Bowman & Ryan, 2015). The core of the *Civil Rights Act* was to ensure individuals

were entitled to have access to higher education and were not discriminated against based

on race, gender, religious belief, ethnicity, and nationality (Ford, 2014). A decade earlier,

school segregation was declared unlawful in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The

desegregation of K-12 public schools and higher education began happening promptly

with the passing of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Bowman & Ryan, 2015).

The *Civil Rights Act of 1964* included eleven titles that targeted employment and

public accommodations. The Act changed the opportunities for Black females across the

country profoundly. Each title addressed racism differently or granted the federal

government power to fix discrimination (Bowman & Ryan, 2015). The *Civil Rights Act of 1964* titles are:

- Title I – Voting Rights

- Title II – Public Accommodation

- Title III – Desegregation of Public Facilities

- Title IV – Desegregation of Public Education

- Title V – Commission on Civil Rights

- Title VI – Nondiscrimination in Federally Assisted Programs and Activities

- Title VII – Equal Employment Opportunity

- Title VIII – Registration and Voting Statistics

- Title IX – Intervention & Procedure after Removal in Civil Rights Cases

- Title X – Establishment of Community Relations Service

- Title XI - Miscellaneous

The *Civil Rights Act of 1964* was exceptionally useful in countering racism and discrimination. Individuals have the responsibility to prevent common-law nuisances and misdeeds as participants of an interdependent community. Racism, sexism, and other discriminatory behavior are social problems that society members should work together to eliminate. The issues causing the civil rights movement still linger despite the effort of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination are still present that hinder Black women from attending higher education and completing their degrees (Button, 2014).

Title VI and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the most far-reaching title. Any organization receiving federal funding

is prohibited from racial discrimination under the act that includes all public schools in the country and many private schools. The *Title VI* strategy was to counter social inequality and segregation in all aspects of society where the federal government allocated its money. Complainants can pursue administrative and litigation remedies for racial inequality under *Title VI* (Bowman & Ryan, 2015).

Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 addressed gender discrimination in education and was administered by the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The law protects pre-school, elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, vocational and technical schools, community and junior colleges, and graduate and professional schools. In *Title IX*, Congress developed an open solution requiring the cancelation of federal grants where an organization delivering educational services discriminates against a person based on sex. Funding can be retracted if institutions violate the statute. In 1992, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that schools could be prosecuted for compensatory and punitive penalties if they did not comply with *Title IX* (Green, 2017).

Deliberate behavior or failure to act in a manner that encourages, perpetuates, or leads to segregation or disadvantages arising within the program is an infraction of *Title VI* and *Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Violation of *Title VI* and *Title IX* occurs if prejudice and disadvantage exist when the defendant intentionally avoids or declines to respond, even if the defendant did not initially wish or attempt to create discrimination or disadvantage (Bowman & Ryan, 2015).

Neither *Title VI* nor *Title IX* describe the core terms of equality and discrimination. Congress provided that "no person in the United States shall, on the

grounds of race or sex be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" in the *Title VI* and *Title IX of the Civil Rights Act* (Black, 2013, pp. 18 & 41). Congress was uncertain about what was meant by discrimination. Therefore, they refrained from providing a definition. The Court was left with the duty to define discrimination and conclude if victims experienced discrimination and inequality (Black, 2013; Bowman & Ryan, 2015).

Higher Education Act of 1965

The *Higher Education Act of 1965* improved colleges' and universities' educational resources to provide financial support to postsecondary and higher education students. The *Higher Education Act* (1965) consist of eight titles (Thompson, 2014):

- Title I – General Provisions

- Title II – Teacher Quality Enhancement

- Title III – Strengthening Institutions

- Title IV – Student Assistance

- Title V – Developing Institutions

- Title VI – International Education Programs

- Title VII – Graduate and Postsecondary Improvement Programs

- Title VIII – Additional Programs

Grants, loans, and other programs were established by the Act to help students get a college education. The *Higher Education Act of 1965* also emphasized the importance of additional higher education programs being available for lower to middle-income families, program funding for small and underdeveloped colleges, expanded library

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services for colleges, and addressed the issue of poverty within the community through the use of college resources (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). The Act has been revised and modified many times since 1965 and reauthorized eight times. In 2008, the *Higher Education Act* was most recently comprehensively reauthorized and renamed as the *Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008*, which permitted programs through the fiscal year 2014 under the *Higher Education Act*. Several other legislations have amended the *Higher Education Act* since implementing the *Higher Education Opportunity Ac*t. Most notably, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act's revision eliminated the Federal Family Education Loan Program's power to form federal student loans (Thompson, 2014).

  Title IV of the Higher Education Act campus-based programs have three financial aid programs for students, the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant program, the Federal Work-Study Program, and the Federal Perkins Loan program (*Higher Education Act, 1965)*. The programs were reauthorized under the *Higher Education Opportunity Act*, which revised and expanded the authorization for programs sponsored by the *Higher Education Act* (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019). Federal assistance is given to higher education institutions through campus-based programs that provide students with need-based financial aid. Colleges and universities must match one-third of the federal government's funding. The programs are distinctive among the need-based federal student assistance programs. Each school's financial aid administrator decides the combination and amount of funding provided to students based on college-specific award requirements. The criteria must conform with federal program requirements instead of

fiscal year award criteria, such as Pell Grants and Subsidized Stafford Loans (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019).

Figure 2 shows federal funds awarded to Black and White females at SEU for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Financial Aid Awards
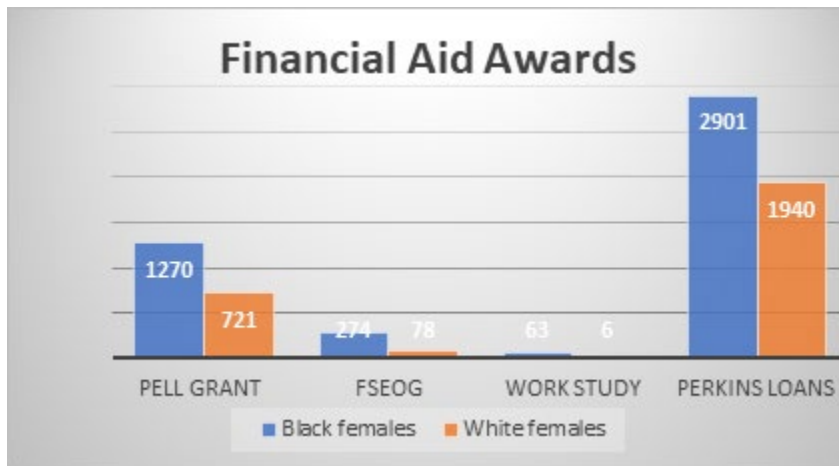
Figure 2. South Eastern University Financial Aid Awards for 2018-2019 Academic Year

Based on the 2020 data, White female students enrolled at SEU appeared to be more financially stable than Black females. A significant number of Black females were awarded Perkins loans suggesting that Pell Grant and FSEOG funds were not enough to cover their educational needs.

Minority-serving institutions are colleges and universities with a high enrollment of underrepresented students, such as Black females. Several minority colleges have encountered difficulties accessing sufficient financial resources that impact their ability to grow and expand their academic offerings and represent Black female students (Thompson, 2014). Federal higher education strategy acknowledges the significance of colleges and universities representing minorities and distributes funding to them. Various federal agencies distribute funding to minority-serving organizations. Many of these

financial resources are offered to minority-serving colleges and universities through grant programs such as Pell Grants, Federal Work-Study, and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant authorized under the *Higher Education Act of 1965*.

Higher Education Act (1965) programs that support minority-serving institutions have expanded over the years and now include programs for colleges and universities serving a diverse population of students to include Black females. In the fiscal year 2019, minority-serving institutions' programs were appropriated $225 million under the *Higher Education Act* (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019). The most critical *Title IV* programs under the *Higher Education Act* offer financial aid to students and their families. The *Title IV* programs provided approximately $129.5 billion in financial assistance to students in the fiscal year 2019 (Department of Education, 2019).

Federal pre-college programs such as the TRIO programs were initiated within the *Higher Education Act of 1965* under *Title IV* to increase Black females' possibility to attend college. The TRIO Programs are government recruitment and student services programs intended to recognize and connect underprivileged students with resources as they pursue college degrees (Palmer et al., 2014). The programs were implemented to resolve socioeconomic, educational, and racial issues for a less stressful college transition for Black female students. TRIO programs provide "college readiness workshops, college academic instruction, counseling, mentorship, tutoring, and financial aid awareness as early as the sixth grade." All the services offered play a vital role in improving college enrollment, retention, and achievement for underprivileged minority students (Palmer et al., 2014, p. 1937).

TRIO pre-college programs allow students to experience college life by taking courses during the summer. The programs are offered in sessions for up to seven weeks and focus on a range of mathematics and science subjects. Black females who take part in the pre-college programs can enhance their understanding of the benefits of pursuing and completing a degree. Their exposure to faculty and staff and the relationships they build are much more significant, which supports degree completion (Garibaldi, 2014).

Black Females in Higher Education

The inconsistencies in retention and graduation rates of Black and White females in higher education must be examined to identify and address Black females' difficulties across college campuses. Black undergraduate females' experience is not well known, and what is assumed has been constructed outside of the Black community (Patton & Croom, 2017). Patton and Croom (2017) found that Black females' higher education experience varied considerably from their peers' experiences. White females were initially denied access to education in the early nineteenth century but were educated separately for "female education." In contrast, Black females were denied access to necessary literacy skills. Black parents had to make a great sacrifice to educate their daughters as opportunities for education became available to Black females (Patton & Croom, 2017). White state colleges were established through the *Morrill Act of 1862*. Despite the purpose of the *Morrill Act of 1862* to educate students, Black females were denied entrance to White state colleges. In 1890, Congress passed the Second *Morrill Act* that provided for separate land-grant institutions in 17 southern and border states for Blacks (Bracey, 2017).

Two single-sex colleges, Bennet College, founded in 1873 in Greensboro, North Carolina, and Spelman College, founded in 1881 in Atlanta, Georgia, were established for Black females while the remainder of institutions of higher education for Blacks were coeducational (Patton & Croom, 2017). Cheyney University, the first historically Black college, was established in 1837. Supporters of college desegregation questioned the significance of these institutions in the mid-twentieth century. Cheyney University provided access to an equal education and a better life for Black females constrained by bigotry, discrimination, and poverty.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision reversed the ruling of racial segregation in primary and secondary schools. The *Hawkins v. Board of Control* case first introduced desegregation among higher education institutions in 1956. A Supreme Court ruling on the *Hawkins v. Board of Control* case did not disrupt the discriminatory system that existed in higher education. The case petitioned the right for Blacks to be entitled to prompt admission to graduate professional schools. It was not until President Lyndon Johnson passed the *Civil Rights Act in 1964* that initiatives began to encourage the admission and retention of minority students to Predominantly White colleges and universities (Harper, 2019).

An outbreak of legal attacks followed President Johnson's passing of the *Civil Rights Act in 1964*. The case of *Knight v. Alabama* was initiated in 1971. The case attacked the *Lid Bill*, which caused disadvantaged and lower-middle-class children to receive unfair funding rates. The *Ayers v. Thompson* case was also significant. The plaintiffs in the lawsuit against the state of Mississippi won a $503 million settlement stemming from Mississippi Valley State University and Alcorn State University's

inadequate funding. The dismantling of the dual systems in higher education prompted PWIs to identify and offer exceptional Black students enrollment opportunities. The goals of the legal attacks were to provide Black students with equal access to the extensive resources of the largest and most prestigious universities in the world while enabling the same universities to obtain a more diverse student population and experience (Harper, 2019).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (NCES, 2017a), Black females' college enrollment has changed significantly since 1976. An increased number of Black female students indicates progress despite an unequal system of higher education (Allen, McLewis, Jones, & Harris, 2018). Figure 3 reflects the enrollment for undergraduate Black females in a bachelor's degree program from 1976 to 2016.
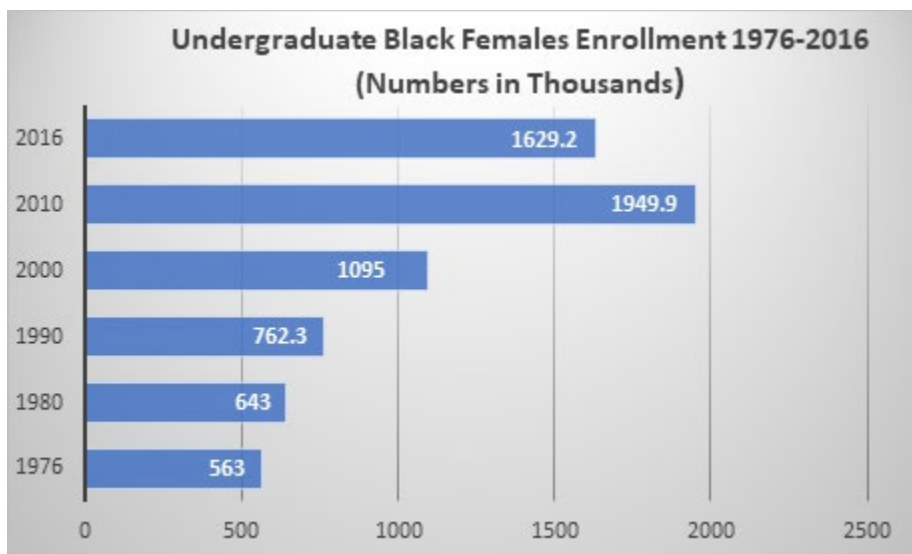
Figure 3. Institutions of Higher Education Undergraduate Black Females Enrolled Data from 1976-2016 (NCES, 2017a).

In 2010, the enrollment of Black female college students peaked at the highest at 1,949,000. Although the number dropped slightly to 1,629,000 in 2016, enrollment for the year was impressive compared to previous years.

Black women have represented much of the United States' undergraduate population over the past 30 years, exceeding their Black male peers in academic performance and degree completion (Williams & Johnson, 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019b), 195,014 baccalaureate degrees were awarded to Black students in 2017-2018. Of this number, 70,316 of bachelor's degrees were awarded to Black males, and 124,698 were awarded to Black females in 2016. A review of degree attainment by race and gender shows that Black females continue to represent a low share of the degrees awarded within racial groups. Black females earned 13.9% of associate's degrees and 11.4% of bachelor's degrees from 2017 to 2018 compared to 52.8% of associate's degrees and 61.7% of bachelor's degrees earned by White females (NCES, 2018). Figure 4 provides the college enrollment for the 2017-2018 academic year. Black females' enrollment shows an alarming low enrollment compared to the enrollment of White females.
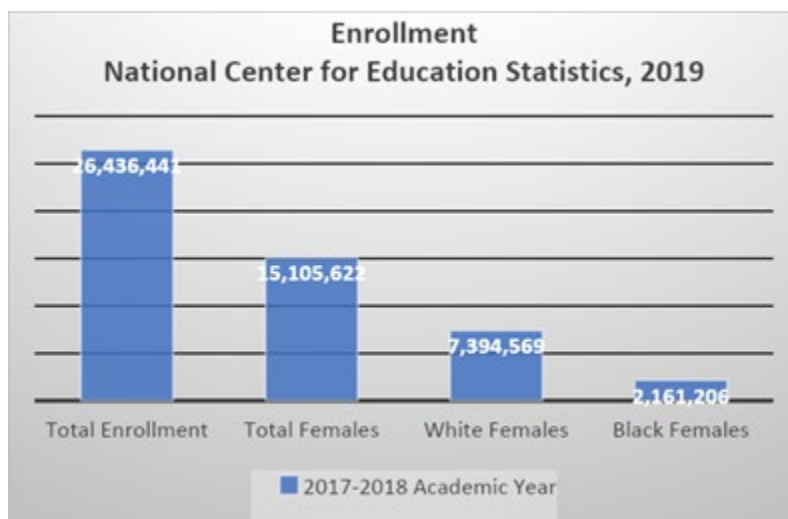
Figure 4. 2017-2018 Academic Year Enrollment (NCES, 2019b)

HBCUs have played an essential part in helping Black females achieve academic success (Williams & Johnson, 2018). According to research, Black female college

students feel more welcome at HBCUs than PWIs (Bracey, 2017; Williams & Johnson, 2018). Many PWIs struggle with retaining and graduating Black female students despite the appearance of having a diverse campus population. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017b), HBCUs graduate a higher percentage of undergraduate Black female students than PWIs (McClain & Perry, 2017). In the 2017-2018 academic year, bachelor's degrees accounted for about 68% of the 48,300 degrees conferred by HBCUs. A total of 74% of degrees granted at HBCUs were awarded to Black students, with 52% of the degrees awarded to Black females (NCES, 2019a).

Student Support Services for Undergraduate Black Females

Student support services include academic and non-academic resources that play significant roles in increasing student persistence in higher education. These programs assist college students in addressing educational challenges and provide resources that help them take full advantage of their intellectual and social capital. Student support services include academic tutorial programs, mentoring (faculty members and peer-to-peer programs), academic advising, and social adjustment strategies. These services are intended to promote retention and lead to graduation by helping students transition to college (Tovar, 2015). Black undergraduate female students have been neglected as a population in need of assistance for student support services. Patton and Croom's (2017) study emphasized the lack of support Black undergraduate female students receive from specific offices and campus resources (Patton & Croom, 2017).

There are assumptions that Black undergraduate female students do not need the same form of support services as other populations (Patton & Croom, 2017). Faculty and staff members perpetuate the status quo ignoring racial and systemic difficulties that put

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Black female students at a further disadvantage. The population's progress is oppressed, preventing them from advancing in college. Faculty and staff members cannot move toward the goals of eliminating inequality until there is collaboration in recognizing and reforming the campus environment that oppresses non-dominant populations.

Consistently ignoring racial and systemic complexities puts Black female students at a further disadvantage. The absence of student support services such as mentorship, counseling, tutoring, and a lack of student knowledge of institutional resources raises concerns about where Black female students can find the support needed for the opportunity to excel in their educational experience (Patton & Croom, 2017).

At PWIs, Black female students have difficulties engaging with White female peers and are left feeling isolated due to the educational system's inequities (Patton, McEwen, Rendón, Howard-Hamilton, 2007; Patton & Croom, 2017). Black female students create their own support and survival systems, often implementing and using their own strategies to cope with the lack of support. Black females rely on spirituality and religion to manage and participate in communities of women of color, sister circles, or sororities to endure hostile campus environments (Patton & Croom, 2017). Regular audits of student support services in higher education are required to determine strategies and services that effectively fulfill Black female students' demands. The audits should be conducted through the lens of intersectionality to ensure Black female students' needs are addressed in the process (Patton et al., 2007; Patton & Croom, 2017).

Black females have been leading their way through higher education. In contrast, institutions have been devastatingly negligent in confronting the various types of racism, sexism, bias, and other types of inequality surrounding Black female students (Patton &

Croom, 2017). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Black

female undergraduate students are completing college; 40% of Black females between 18

and 24 were enrolled in a degree-granting postsecondary institution in 2017.

Subsequently, 11.7% of Black undergraduate female students earned a bachelor's degree

in 2017 compared to 62.6% of their White female peers (NCES, 2017a).

Figure 5 reflects the graduation rates for Black and White females. Although

there was only slight growth in the graduation rates for the Spring 2013 and Winter 2017-

2018 academic year, White females' graduation increased by 2% while the graduation

rates of Black females lagged with an unnoticeable increase of 0.6%.

Six Year Graduation Rates
National Center for Education Statistics, 2018

43.30%	64.90%	43.90%	66.90%
SPRING 2013		WINTER 2017-2018	

BACHELOR'S DEGREE

■ Black Females   ■ White Females
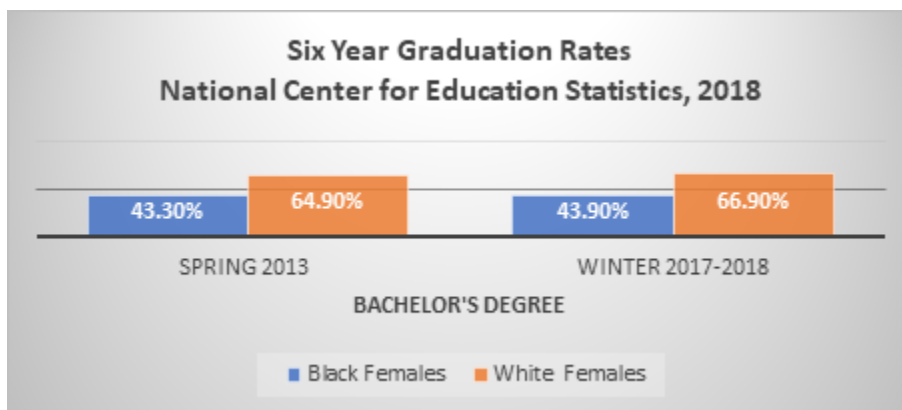
Figure 5. Institutions of Higher Education in the US – Graduation Rates (NCES, 2018).

Figure 6 reflects the bachelor's degrees awarded to Black and White females for

the 2015-2016 academic year and 2016-2017 academic year. Despite the increase in

bachelor's degrees awarded to Black students, the number of degrees awarded to Black

women was still racially disproportionate compared to those awarded to White females.

Bachelor's Degree Awarded
National Center for Education Statistics, 2019
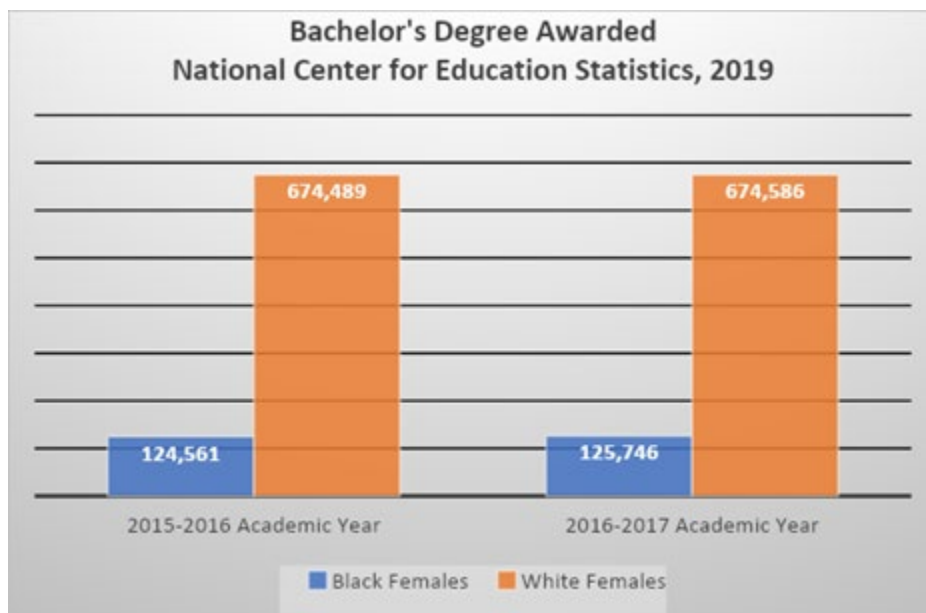
Figure 6. Bachelor's degrees Awarded at Institutions of Higher Education in the US (NCES, 2019b).

According to Patton and Croom (2017), higher education administrators have decreased the distribution of economic resources to Black females' unique experiences. The financial resources were reduced under the belief that graduation is an indicator of education success. Black undergraduate female students are overlooked as a distinct population worthy of support and struggle more than their peers. Black females' educational achievements at the collegiate level seem to occur despite and not because of institutional support (Patton & Croom, 2017).

Increasing student support services for Black undergraduate female students requires continuous support instead of infrequent, temporary, or one-time resolutions. Many Black female undergraduate students have not used available student support services to aid in academic success, guidance, and encouragement. The non-usage of student support services raises concerns about how strategies can be developed to link students to the appropriate student support services and resources for academic success

(Ferrell, DeCrane, Edwards, Foli, & Tennant, 2016). Holistically embracing Black female students and valuing their backgrounds tends to bind relationships that encourage their success. Black females' backgrounds can be appreciated, and these students can experience a positive sense of belonging by treating them as individuals first and as students second, respecting their cultural experiences, and fostering an environment where they can share their resources while gaining additional forms of help (Luedke, 2017).

Higher education student support services are an essential resource and framework for Black female undergraduate students. They may be a crucial mechanism for providing sufficient access to and delivering academic assistance to Black female students. If there is a lack of sense of belonging with the institution, Black female undergraduate students may continue to avoid seeking help, leading to mediocre or unsuccessful outcomes. While academic success is an essential objective for many Black undergraduate female students, the threats and pressures they experience in college should present higher education institutions with the opportunity to provide the academic and personal support needed for this population (Thompson, Ponterotto, & Dyar, 2019).

Cultural Competence

The past experiences of other Black female students contribute to the higher education institution Black female students choose to attend. Their decisions to attend a college is based on the institution's support of social belonging versus how much they feel threatened by their identity. An institution that supports and engages in the population's overall success is significant to Black female students. Therefore, the cultural competence of faculty and staff engaging directly with the population, and of

administrators who make decisions in the interest of the population that can influence

their college experiences, is even more important (Thompson et al., 2019).

Cultural competence is knowledge of one's own culture and perspectives on

disparities and the willingness to understand and build on students' different cultural and

community expectations and their families' backgrounds. It is practicable to conclude

that there should be a minimum standard of care and priority in student support services

in higher education institutions, considering the importance of cultural competence. The

quality of services provided contributes significantly to Black female students "feeling

understood, cared for, included, and well served," which are all essential components in

assuring the population gets the help needed to promote a positive sense of belonging,

retention, and success (Thompson et al., 2019, p. 127).

The Relevance of Motivation and Academic Support Services

Academic support services represent a critical factor in the retention of Black

female students. Academic support services can be identified as the availability of

resources, programs, and higher education institutions that help students succeed. These

academic support services addressed in this study consist of academic advising, tutoring,

and academic library services (Phinney, Torres Campos, Padilla Kallemeyyn, & Kim,

2011; Isacco & Morse, 2015).

Academic motivation is an individual's intrinsic desire to attain academic

achievements and skills and leads to satisfactory academic performance (Isacco & Morse,

2015; Han, Farruggia, & Moss, 2017; Leath & Chavous, 2018). Academic support and

academic motivation are intertwined in the higher education experience for Black female

students. A qualitative case study by Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005) found

that academic support services led to Black undergraduate female students' retention and success by teaching required academic and social skills such as public speaking leadership, organization, and critical thinking. These skills help students to become more involved in their learning and to enhance academic success. Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista's (2005) study used purposeful and snowball sampling to recruit 45 diverse student organizers and six full-time professional staff members on the University of California campuses, Berkeley and University of Wisconsin, Madison. The students who participated in the study worked with Student-Initiated Retention Project (SIRP) related programs and activities during their research, and the staff members were affiliated with or knowledgeable of SIRP. Organizers and leaders of SIRPs were made up of students of color that constructed knowledge from students' experiences and encouraged students to build critiques of knowledge, dispositions, and social connections determined to be of value through student-initiated retention activities (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005).

Academic support from peers and faculty adds to Black female students' purpose to complete their degree and directly affects Black female students' behavior to increase their chances of college success (Isacco & Morse, 2015; Patton & Croom, 2017). The ability to form a foundation of supportive relationships with faculty, advisors, staff, and peers is one reason why institutional support is critical to Black females academic performance (Tovar, 2015; Isacco & Morse, 2015; Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, & Serrata, 2016; Soria, Laumer, Morrow, & Marttinen, 2017). Positive relationships with faculty, advisors, and staff help Black female students obtain useful insight into their

academic programs and enhance self-confidence, inspiration, commitment, and performance (Isacco & Morse, 2015).

Academic support services are directly connected to an increase in Black undergraduate female students' desire to stay in college and graduate. Owen and Rodolfa (2009) proposed that the sense of belonging can be strengthened by academic support, which typically makes students feel supported, too (Isacco & Morse, 2015; Soria et al., 2017). Academic support and academic motivation are linked to increased retention and form a group of variables such as active engagement, self-confidence, and positive relationships with faculty that play a significant role in improving academic performance and retention. Students become more involved in campus activities and perceive the campus as safe and welcoming (D'Lima, Winsler, & Kitsantas, 2014; Isacco & Morse, 2015).

Academic Support Services

Academic Advising

Academic advising is a strategy within higher education to inform students of their educational needs, help them locate resources, and acquaint students with the college culture (Smith & Allen, 2014; Suvedi et al., 2015). Academic advising fosters student retention, helps students solve their academic problems, and prepares them for success in their academic and professional careers. Academic advisors help students to navigate the pathways of higher education, make strategic and considerate decisions about their future, adjust their life skills to the new academic environment, and promote the college skills and knowledge required to be successful (Suvedi, Ghimire, Millenbah, & Shrestha, 2015; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Gabriel, 2016; Soria et al., 2017).

As the Black female undergraduate student population continues to increase in higher education, many are not prepared to excel in college academically and socially (Roscoe, 2015). Black undergraduate females' academic performance and the cultural competence of the faculty members serving the population in higher education to encourage them to succeed are of great significance as enrollment increases. Black female students who form relationships with faculty members tend to be retained at higher rates. Academic advising increases the contact between students and advisors, encourages active learning, and exchanges prompt feedback as a part of acceptable undergraduate education practices (Suvedi et al., 2015; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Soria et al., 2017).

Higher education institutions should examine how academic advising services are offered and how useful they are to Black undergraduate female students as a regular practice. Input from Black undergraduate females should be sought to improve academic advising services and provide firsthand information to colleges and universities with an insight of academic advising services offered from the Black undergraduate female students' point of view (Suvedi et al., 2015; Soria et al., 2017).

Academic advising has shown to be significant in the success of college students. A 2017 longitudinal study (see Figure 7) showed fewer Black females used academic advising services than White females (NCES, 2017b). Students who use the services can obtain needed advice during enrollment, decrease the likelihood of departure before completion, and decrease time to degree completion (Suvedi et al., 2015).
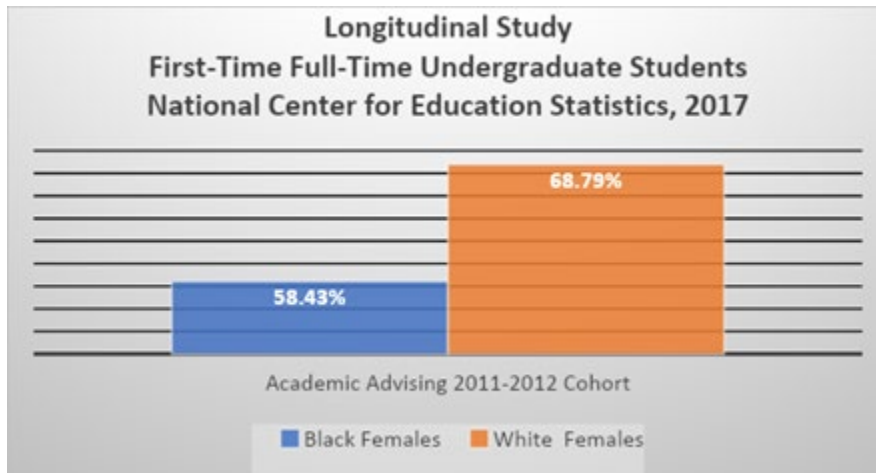
Figure 7. Usage of Academic Advising Services (NCES, 2017b).

The NCES (2017b) longitudinal study showed fewer Black females used academic advising services for the 2011-2012 cohort than White females. Black females must understand the importance of academic advising services to decrease their time to degree completion. Mentors can help students to recognize the value of academic advising and encourage Black females to use the services to stay on track with their degree. The retention and degree attainment gap between Black females and White females could be decreased if more Black females took advantage of academic advising services.

Tutoring

Tutoring has been a useful tool to improve the academic success of students who are at-risk from economically and academically deprived families. Academic tutoring delivers practices, structures, and standards that encourage skill development and subject proficiency. A study by Dupere, Crosnoe, and Dion (2010) found that students who took advantage of tutoring performed better academically, had a positive attitude towards tutoring programs, and improved self-concept compared to students who did not participate in tutoring (Tolbert, 2015).

Higher education institutions have established tutoring centers to support students' retention and graduation rates. Tutoring services have expanded dramatically at colleges and universities in the last thirty years, as more underprepared students begin college. There are different types of academic tutoring services intended to serve the general student population. In contrast, others target a specific group of populations such as freshmen, students in the TRIO programs, or student-athletes. Besides serving the general student population and specific groups within the population, academic tutoring services are intended to help students in specific areas such as math, science, or writing skills. Any academic tutoring services' focus is to advance students academically to promote learning and obtain higher grades (Gabriel, 2016).

The goals of academic tutoring centers are significant for first-year students and underrepresented students. Academic tutoring centers are a necessity at four-year colleges that have a high enrollment of underrepresented students. Tinto and Pusser (2006) suggested the need for more research on effective ways of addressing the academic needs of academically underprepared students from low-income and underserved backgrounds.

A multi-institutional study by Opp (2002) found that student affairs professionals are instrumental in advocating for interaction among students and used a survey to identify retention barriers and methods contributing to Black students' success from 573 colleges chief student affairs officers (CSAOs). A regression analysis was performed and identified the critical program completion rates predictors for Black students. The study found that providing Black students with minority peer tutors was a good indicator of increasing retention and graduation rates for academic support. Peer interactions between

Black students help encourage a sense of belonging and commitment to higher education institutions (Gabriel, 2016). Peer tutoring provides an alternative to change study patterns and maximize the learning outcomes in higher education institutions. Peer tutoring is offered free or at a low cost and includes students in behavior specifically meant to enhance students' academic performance (Gabriel, 2016; Pugatch & Wilson, 2018).

Academic Library Services

Academic libraries support the goals of retention, success, and completion rates in higher education by creating services, instructions, resources, and study spaces. Library services help improve the future of institutions by contributing to student success. Academic libraries develop campus partnerships that build an efficient education infrastructure while promoting retention.

Spaces within libraries are designed to fit the needs of students when using the library. All the furniture required to complete the work and the different types of spaces needed are considered. The design features and unique spaces provide a setting for students to collaborate, create ideas, and experience learning and discovery that contribute significantly to retention, success, completion, and support for underrepresented students (Godfrey, Rutledge, Mowdood, Reed, Bigler, & Soehner, 2017).

Academic libraries provide services and resources for different populations of students who struggle to meet their educational goals (Godfrey et al., 2017; Arch & Gilman, 2019). Minority students are inclined to face more difficulties than White students in acquiring information, technologies, and educational opportunities. The

academic challenges and technological struggles experienced by minority students continue to illustrate the significance and need for libraries to introduce proactive measures to underrepresented students (Love, 2017).

Various library resources are available to students for usage. These resources include but are not limited to physical library collections, electronic library databases, library computer labs, interlibrary loan/document delivery, library instruction sessions, literacy courses, writing center, and communication center (Murray, Ireland & Hackathorn, 2019). Providing excellent resources and information literacy instruction are ways academic libraries can support student retention (Godfrey et al., 2017; Arch & Gilman, 2019).

According to Walter (2005), academic libraries seldomly take advantage of existing campus partnerships. Partnering and networking with student services foster a campus environment that supports diversity. A partnership with library services and student services can illustrate a shared value and promote learning outside the classroom to inspire students' critical thinking skills. A multicultural library outreach to ethnic and minority groups across academic communities is critical to retention and graduation rates. The support from academic communities could help prevent social, educational, technological, institutional, and financial barriers that put minority students at risk. The combination of challenges and obstacles faced by underrepresented groups on college campuses should encourage more libraries to introduce inclusive programming to resolve the retention and graduation gap between Black and White female college students (Love, 2017).

There is growing evidence that libraries have affected the performance and retention of undergraduate students. A variety of benefits are provided by the collaboration between academic libraries and student services. The partnership changes the role of academic libraries from reactive to proactive team members. An outreach to student services increases a sense of belonging and the probability for minority students to become familiar with and visit the library, which leads to the enhancement of student learning. The partnership and outreach reflect the dedication of the academic library to diversity. They can lead to expanded cultural awareness among faculty, staff, and students while adopting a campus environment that is supportive and inclusive (Love, 2017). Nevertheless, students view library amenities, resources, or services as daunting or inconvenient, which creates an obstacle to academic success (Arch & Gilman, 2019).

Non-Academic Student Support Services

Mentoring

Mentoring is a technique in which an experienced individual encourages and assists a less experienced individual in their professional and personal development and offers social encouragement that strengthens academic inspiration, connection to education, social networks, and self-confidence (Bynum, 2015; Tolbert, 2015). Mentoring takes place formally or informally. A mentorship relationship developed through an approved mentoring program is formal mentoring. Informal mentoring is developed naturally. Mentors serve many informal and formal roles in higher education, consisting of helping to socialize students in a specific discipline, acting as role models, and providing academic or career advice. Informal and formal mentoring can support

protégé social interaction in a specific field or subject (McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, & Luedke, 2015; Sinanan, 2016).

Mentoring includes psychosocial support to assist in the development of protégés. Psychological functions involve role modeling and validation in a professional position that increases integrity, identity clarification, and efficiency. Informal mentoring focuses on psychological growth, which transpires over a long period of time while a long-term and trustworthy friendship is established between the mentor and the protégé (McCoy et al., 2015).

Although students of all ethnicities benefit from effective mentoring, research has discovered that particular factors such as race and gender impact mentoring relationships (Griffin & Reddick, 2011; McCoy et al., 2015). This influence illustrates the importance of cultural diversity in mentoring due to a shortage of Black female leaders in higher education. Cross-cultural mentorships help to address trust issues by not being dismissive of historical and current racial concerns. It is vital that mentors have the cultural competence to develop a positive mentorship and understand Black female students' backgrounds. Nonetheless, mentoring is a significant piece of the puzzle to increase Black female students' overall retention rate. Cross-culture mentoring can help close the racial gap between Black and White females' retention and graduation rates (McCoy et al., 2015).

Mentors are critical to the academic success of Black female students. They can serve as influential people to help promote on-campus participation among Black female students. Mentors can build a friendly and positive campus environment, assist students with adjusting to the campus environment, advise students about campus participation

opportunities, and counsel students through the enrollment process (Palmer et al., 2014).

Campus engagement leads to an enhanced sense of belonging and commitment. Campus involvement relates to an increased sense of belonging and persistence.

A quantitative study by Pope (2002) examined minority students' views about the concept of various forms of mentoring on college campuses. The research included 375 minority students enrolled in 15 colleges focusing on the students' impression of the campus environment, cultural diversity, mentoring, and diversity support from administration. The institutions were randomly selected from the 2,000 Carnegie Foundation classification of higher education institutions. The results from Pope's (2002) study indicated that Black students believed that multiple types of mentoring (administrative mentor, peer mentor, or being a mentor) were essential and related to their college success. Additionally, the study confirmed that students involved in mentoring programs were more pleased with their college experience than students who were not involved (Pope, 2002).

Mentors share their vital perspectives and resources, assist students in interacting with essential information networks and expose them to campus engagement opportunities (Palmer et al., 2014). Mentors are influential in Black female students' academic performance. Many of these students are the first to pursue a college degree in their families, and mentors should be mindful of the students' racial backgrounds during any interactions (McCoy et al., 2015). Mentors are known to question their protégés to promote critical thinking and leave their comfort zone for the opportunity to change their identity (Palmer et al., 2014).

The racial gap in the retention and graduation rates of Black and White female students leads to a racial gap in representing Black females in leadership roles in higher education (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Black females only accounted for about 1% of leaders in higher education. Employing Black females in higher education leadership positions can promote mentorship, improve diversity awareness, and encourage professional development for Black female students (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Colleges and universities have implemented diversity programs to attract and retain minority students. However, it has failed to expand positions for minority faculty, staff, and administrators to represent diversity. Creating a sound diverse foundation in employing staff will result in colleges and universities realizing the importance of diversity within higher education and setting proper procedures to inspire Black females in higher education (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Institutions often refuse to acknowledge that their employment recruiting policies and practices exclude minority groups. Acknowledging the issue and taking action would create a diverse hiring pool to eliminate underrepresented leadership positions and ultimately increase students' diversity in return (Gasman, Abiola, & Travers, 2015).

Faculty members are a vital mentoring resource for Black female students. They are praised for going beyond their professional obligations to foster and promote Black female students' academic achievement and social growth (Palmer et al., 2014). However, Black faculty members in higher education are typically not engaged in mentoring opportunities. Their mentoring opportunities are often limited due to challenges such as assumptions from their colleagues about not being qualified to serve as mentors (McClain, Bridges, D. Bridges, E., 2014).

Mentoring offers encouragement from experienced individuals to less experienced individuals to help develop them personally and professionally. The technique can create a relationship through an approved program (formal) or naturally (informal) to assist protégés with social encouragement and provide academic or career advice (McCoy et al., 2015; Sinanan, 2016). Mentoring is significant to Black female college students being academically successful by enhancing their social belonging and commitment (McCoy et al., 2015). Diversity programs have been implemented in colleges and universities to increase the representation of Black female students but fail to expand Black females in leadership roles to represent diversity. Nevertheless, employing Black females in leadership roles can promote mentorship, social belonging, improving diversity awareness, and encourage professional development for Black female students (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Doing so will help close the racial gap between Black and White females' retention and graduation rates (McCoy et al., 2015).

Counseling

College counseling centers are essential for offering strategies to at-risk students concerning academic success. Low retention and graduation rates often contribute to students' mental, psychological, and personal challenges in college. Although students can learn how to manage these issues, few students seek support services to aid in their struggle. The relationship between counseling and retention impacts the success of colleges and students' mental health. Out of 39% of students who pursue counseling support for serious mental issues, 33% persisted in college using counseling services. A formal connection to a counseling center should be promoted upon students' arrival at a

college (Gallagher, 2013; Bishop, 2016; Seon, Prock, Bishop, Hughes, Woodward, & MacLean, 2019).

Retention risk factors that increase students' chances of withdrawing from college are diagnoses with a mental health condition, such as depression and anxiety, cultural background, parent level of education, social and economic status, and high school grade point average. Many retention risk factors influence the college experience of Black females. Compared to White females, Black females often have to deal with gender discrimination, race discrimination, isolation, and constant assumptions about their population (Jones & Sam, 2018). These problems can present major academic and psychological implications that warrant intervention from a college counseling center (Ashley, 2014; Jones & Sam, 2018).

Psychological researchers have ignored the experiences of Black females because the group is compared to Black men and females of other racial groups instead of highlighting Black females' unique experiences (Jones & Sam, 2018). Black females make up 70% of the overall number of Black students who take advantage of college counseling centers' services. The growing enrollment of Black female college students and their usage of college counseling services illustrate the need to concentrate on Black females' college experience (Jones & Sam, 2018).

Despite the challenges during their college experiences, Black females are underutilizing campus counseling services. Sharkin (2004) proposed counseling as a successful method to improve Black female college students' retention and graduation rates. Counseling interventions, tranquility methods, and academic performance methods help mitigate stress and are efficient in reducing stress and other indicators (Avent Harris

& Wong, 2018). Many Black females receive information about counseling and assistance from their churches. Religious leaders offer help to people with mental health issues, but the necessary treatment is postponed or avoided if care from a professional is not pursued. College counseling centers are the ideal resource for Black female college students, given the advantages of counseling and the challenges students face (Avent Harris & Wong, 2018).

Financial Support Services

Financial factors are among the most significant non-academic predictors of Black female students' decisions to leave college. Financial aid is vital to the advancement of Black female college students, as many cannot stay to complete their degree due to financial struggles. An increase in retention and graduation rates has been associated with scholarships and grants for Black female students. Evidence suggests that some types of financial aid, such as scholarships and grants, positively influence students to complete their degree, while other types of aid, such as student loans, have a questionable impact. The persistence and degree completion rates for Black female students increased for those who received scholarships and grants. Studies show that Black female students who earn an extra $1,000 in grants reduced their chances of leaving college before completing their degree by 7%-8% (Palmer et al., 2014).

Black female students are forced to work long hours due to insufficient funds or the obligation to financially help their families, which adversely affects their retention and success. Many of them need jobs to pay for school and living expenses due to inadequate finances. The need for low-income Black female students to work while in college has increased due to the economic downturn in 2007. Working to pay for

expenses can be a positive influence if a limit on the hours worked per week is set so that Black female students' academic success is not hindered (Palmer et al., 2014).

Jobs may have an affirmative influence on Black female students' academic success if employed on the college or university campus. Off-campus employment negatively influences Black female students' success as they tend to work more than 25 hours per week (Palmer et al., 2014). Students' work hours on campus are limited to 19 hours a week, allowing them to focus more on academic and social engagement. Students employed on campus can apply what they learned in the classroom in a practical setting. Additionally, students who work on campus create bonds with peers, faculty, and staff expanding their support systems. On-campus employment supports academic success allowing students to persist through college earning a degree (Fede, Gorman, & Cimini, 2018; McClellan, Creager, & Savoca, 2018).

A qualitative study by Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2011) reported that students working on campus had gained leadership skills, decision-making, and organizational skills. The study consisted of 20 diverse colleges and universities that promoted learning environments where participation and achievement changed enrolled students' perceptions. A university included in the study emphasized the seriousness of work and increased persistence rates by encouraging student employment on campus. More than half of the university students were employed on the campus to promote student-faculty interaction, student-staff interaction, and connect students to the campus. The work experiences provided students opportunities to apply what they learned to practical, real-life situations, introduced students to the professional working world, and prepared them for employment after graduation (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011).

In providing financial support, student loans are unlikely to improve the success of Black female students. Students who depend on loans to fund their education cannot secure loans due to politicians adjusting the loans' requirements. Changes made to the Parent PLUS loan have led to the rejection of underprivileged Black female students for the Parent PLUS loan due to recent modifications to its requirements (Palmer et al., 2014).

In 2011, parents applying for the Parent PLUS loan were no longer eligible if they had accounts in collections that were 30 days late. Changes to student loan eligibility requirements have severely affected the enrollment and persistence of Black female students. The population faced additional burdens due to rising college tuition and changes in student loan requirements (Palmer et al., 2014; Gasman & Collins, 2014).

Lack of Funds Leads to Food Insecurity

Insufficient financial resources have increased the risk of food insecurity among underprivileged college students. Food insecurity is experienced when food is limited or inaccessible to students due to financial constraints (Watson, Malan, Glik, & Martinez, 2017: Wood & Harris, 2018). Colleges and universities have developed student services operations to reduce food insecurity among students. Dubick, Mathews, and Cady (2016) reported that food insecurity is expected due to an increase in the cost to attend college and the increased enrollment of students from disadvantaged neighborhoods. Institutions are pressed to focus on food insecurity as a priority due to an increase in enrollment of low-income and Black students (Wood, Harris, & Delgado, 2016a; Wood & Harris, 2018).

Food insecurity appears to be linked to poor academic results that limit student success in which students are less likely to be high achievers (Bruening, van Woerden, Todd, & Laska, 2018; Wood & Harris, 2018). Wood et al. (2016b) found that students who encountered food insecurity did not report a sense of belonging, unlikely to be connected with faculty, and unlikely took advantage of campus services. Students who encountered food insecurity lacked confidence in their academic capabilities, considered college ineffective, and had no interest in pursuing an education (Wood & Harris, 2018).

College students who endure food insecurity tend to be Black students, financially independent, immature, and single parents. Students with food insecurity are inclined to be unhealthy, less likely to eat breakfast, and experience worse mental health effects. Food insecure students have more difficulties focusing than students with food security. Researchers have discovered a connection between food insecurity and low-grade point averages among students (Reppond, Thomas-Brown, Sampson, & Price, 2018). However, no study has examined the effects of food insecurity on students' physical and mental health over a period of time despite the evidence of the potential impact (Bruening, van Woerden, Todd, & Laska, 2018).

A study by Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, and Hernandez (2017) found that 67% of students experience food insecurity while enrolled in college (Reppond, Thomas-Brown, Sampson, & Price, 2018). As state and federal financial support in higher education is decreased, food insecurity is increased. Many institutions have created food pantries and formed partnerships with food banks because of food insecurity (Wood et al., 2016a; Reppond, Thomas-Brown, Sampson, & Price, 2018; Wood & Harris, 2018). Faculty and staff have started food pantries out of concern for students skipping meals and those who

need to make choices between buying books or food. College campus pantries function separately to combat food insecurity. Increased knowledge about campus food pantries can help coordinate efforts to address students' food insecurity (Reppond, Thomas-Brown, Sampson & Price, 2018).

Summary

The *Morrill Act of 1862, 1954 Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education*, the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, and the *Higher Education Act of 1965* granted Black females the opportunity to earn college degrees. Although college enrollment for Black females has increased over the years, the graduation rate has fluctuated, suggesting that academic and non-academic support services to assist this population was limited. Many Historically Black Colleges and Universities were founded during the desegregation era to serve the Black community and granted Black females access to college, providing a welcoming environment (Farmer et al., 2016). Black females enrolled at Predominantly White Institutions' experiences were the opposite of those attending an HBCU institution. The population feared the campuses of PWIs, which negatively affected their motivation to persist through college (Bracey, 2017; Williams & Johnson, 2018).

Sense of belonging was used as a theoretical framework to explore Black females' perspectives as undergraduate students. Black females have faced years of discrimination and marginalization in education. The population has a higher percentage of discrimination and bias than their White female peers. Discrimination, marginalization, and bias are counterproductive to the sense of belonging required to improve Black females' retention rates in higher education. Students who perceive a positive sense of belonging have higher retention rates (Strayhorn, 2015).

Student support services are essential in promoting the academic development of Black females (Tovar, 2015). Academic support services, such as academic advising, tutoring, and academic library services, are significant (Phinney et al., 2011; Isacco & Morse, 2015). Academic advising helps students find the resources needed and promotes the academic skills and knowledge needed for college (Smith & Allen, 2014; Suvedi et al., 2015). Tutoring is available for academic advancement and to improve the academic motivation for students at-risk (Tolbert, 2015). Academic libraries support students' college goals by providing students with resources and information to enhance their learning experiences (Arch & Gilman, 2019).

Non-academic student support services such as mentoring, financial aid, counseling, and food pantries are significant to Black female students' retention. Mentoring provides role modeling, enhances the sense of competence, identity clarity, and helps develop students by supporting them psychosocially (McCoy et al., 2015). Financial factors support Black female students' retention by providing financial assistance, such as grants, scholarships, and on-campus employment. Students should take advantage of scholarships, grants, and on-campus employment to avoid financial struggles (Palmer et al., 2014). Counseling is available to students who encounter emotional, psychological, and personal issues that are retention risk factors (Gallagher, 2013; Bishop, 2016; Seon er al., 2019). Food insecurity has increased, prompting college campuses to create food pantries and partnerships with food banks (Wood et al., 2016a; Reppond et al., 2018; Wood & Harris, 2018).

College programs and student support services are vital to retention (Tovar, 2015). Black females continue to encounter and overcome obstacles as they maneuver

through college. College programs and student support services were implemented to address difficulties students face in college that jeopardize their retention and degree attainment. Even with these programs and services, the gap in the retention and graduation rates of Black and White female students is a concern. Higher education institutions should ensure that Black females take full advantage of these programs and student support services to close the retention and graduation gap by addressing their college difficulties. An intense review of college programs and student support services may be necessary to identify what Black females require to provide the proper academic success resources (Tovar, 2015; Farmer et al., 2016).

Chapter 2 explored the historical background of mandated laws and rulings that allowed Black females the opportunity to earn college degrees. Sense of belonging was used as a theoretical framework to study Black females' perspectives as undergraduate students and examine the factors that affect their retention and degree attainment. Academic student support services and non-academic student support services were critical to Black female undergraduate students' success and supported a sense of belonging to the population. Further research is needed to thoroughly address the factors influencing the retention and graduation gap between Black and White female college students.

Chapter III: Methodology

College enrollment rates of Black females at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) have increased since passing laws that allowed them access to higher education in the United States without being discriminated against based on race or gender. However, there has not been a corresponding increase in the graduation rates of undergraduate Black female students (Farmer et al., 2016). As of 2017, Historically Black Colleges and Universities had a higher percentage of Black female undergraduate students to graduate than Predominantly White Institutions (NCES, 2017a). According to research, Black female college students feel more welcome at HBCUs, contributing to them being more academically successful than Black females who attend PWIs (Bracey, 2017; Williams & Johnson, 2018).

The racial gap between the retention and graduation rates of Black and White females at PWIs suggests that Black females' college experience should be examined to determine which factors hinder and which factors contribute to Black female undergraduate students' success. The purpose of the study was to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution. The researcher used an exploratory qualitative single-case study to examine the following questions:

Research Questions

1. What barriers to retention do undergraduate Black female students face in higher education when attending a Predominantly White Institution?

2.   To what extent do Black females report knowledge and use of academic and non-academic student support services at a Predominantly White Institution?

3.   To what degree do academic and non-academic student support services support a sense of belonging and retention for Black female students at a Predominantly White Institution?

Research Design

Qualitative research is valuable in providing an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences (Thastum, Johansen, Gubba, Olesen, & Romer, 2008; Klenke, Wallace, & Martin, 2015). A qualitative study starts with an interest, problem, or question that leads to reading texts or talking with knowledgeable individuals about the topic or setting. The research method sought to understand how people experience the world and then try to make sense of their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The researcher used an exploratory single-case study to explore Black female undergraduate students' perception of retention barriers during their college experience. The exploratory single-case study method serves best when attempting to gather the personal experiences of the participants. The case study involved examining the Black female undergraduate students' real-life experiences with the researcher having no control over the related incidents. A case study was selected to obtain clear evidence between the Black female college students' experiences, Black females knowledge and use of student support services at SEU, and Black female students development of a sense of belonging as supported by SEU student support services (Yin, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2018). Furthermore, a case study seeks to understand an issue better and not

primarily focus on an individual (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). The knowledge obtained directly from the Black female undergraduate students helped provide new ideas to support their academic success. Therefore, a single-case study was significant for the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the problem (Gustafsson, 2017). Existing programs and student services can be reevaluated to accommodate Black female students' unique needs to increase their retention and graduation rates.

A case study allowed the researcher to investigate a phenomenon in-depth and explore a single bounded system or multiple bounded systems as a qualitative research design. Data can be collected through multiple sources of information, such as documents, focus groups, interviews, observations, reports, and articles (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Case study research also seeks to address questions that ask how or when and where the researcher does not influence the activities that are taking place (Yin, 2009). In this case study, the researcher focused on an issue or concern, and one bounded case was selected to explain the issue (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). Therefore, a single-case study was significant for the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the problem (Gustafsson, 2017). A single bounded case study was the best option when only one case and one group were involved. The researcher studied and explored the case more thoroughly to get richer insight into the issue. In the single bounded case study, the data was analyzed in one location and not compared to other cases (Yin, 2003; Gustafsson, 2017).

An exploratory qualitative single-case study enabled participants to create their own narratives while allowing the researcher the ability to view evidence from different perspectives (Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016). For this study, a qualitative single-case research design was used to examine Black female undergraduate students' college phenomenon at a Predominantly White Institution (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

The participants were selected from SEU, where the researcher was employed. The researcher is a Black female student who earned her undergraduate degree from another PWI, which separates her from the study conducted at SEU. The researcher faced marginalization, a lack of sense of belonging, and the absence of student support services, which provoked an interest in focusing on Black female undergraduate students' experiences at SEU. The researcher has personal perceptions of attending a PWI. The researcher perceived that inclusion and diversity were not promoted at the PWI she attended. Student support services were not brought to the awareness of Black females. The researcher had to find resources on her own to persist through college during her enrollment at the PWI. The researcher often assisted Black female undergraduate students with issues or concerns as an employee at the institution in this research study.

Therefore, reflective journaling and member checking were used to reduce the effect of bias from the researcher. Reflective journaling is the practice of keeping notes of the researcher's thoughts throughout the research process. The researcher explained the self-assessments, reflections, and personal experiences throughout the study to ensure the researcher did not influence the responses. Member checking was used as a

validation strategy to allow the researcher to check in with the participants and to verify the researcher's interpretation of the analysis is accurate (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Participants

Population and Setting

The participants included 10 Black female undergraduate students of traditional and non-traditional age from all classifications (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) and three staff members from academic and non-academic student support services. Student participants enrolled as post-baccalaureate, audit, transient, or certificate-seeking were excluded from the study. Purposeful sampling was used and is the critical sampling method for qualitative research that allows the researcher to purposefully select the Black female undergraduate students and academic and non-academic support personnel who can provide the experience and information needed to address the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The study focused exclusively on the experiences of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at SEU. The institution is one of nine comprehensive universities within the University System located in the southeastern state. SEU had a total enrollment of about 7,800 students for the 2019-2020 academic year, which consisted of about 6,300 undergraduate students. The total enrollment of Black undergraduate students was 2,449 that includes 1,683 Black females for the 2019-2020 academic year. In addition to the main campus, the institution has an uptown campus and three educational outreach centers. SEU offers a selection of undergraduate programs and degrees to include certificates, nexus associates, associates, and bachelors. Graduate

degrees and programs offered at the institution include certificates, doctorate, masters, and specialists.

Sample

The researcher focused on members of the Collegiate Women Organization to select student participants. Collegiate Women of SEU is an all-female multicultural organization focusing on empowering Black women and encouraging community service to help become better women to improve the community. The organization was selected because many of its members are Black female undergraduate students who fit the study's inclusion criteria. The selected students were a purposeful sample. Additionally, demographic data (name, race, gender, classification, and major) and academic data (standardized test scores and GPA) were obtained from the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness to recruit additional Black female undergraduate students who were not members of Collegiate Women of SEU. A purposeful random sample was used to generate a sample list of student participants from the data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness.

A staff member from each of the seven academic and non-academic student support services listed in the student participants survey (Appendix C) was selected to participate in the study. The selected staff members served in a leadership role and were a purposeful sample. The staff members were selected to describe the processes, procedures, and goals in their area and how they relate to the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students.

Student Participants

After obtaining permission from the IRB to conduct the study, the researcher solicited the advisor of the Collegiate Women of SEU and the Associate Vice President for Institutional Research & Effectiveness for assistance in the recruitment process of Black undergraduate female students as participants for the study. The advisor of the Collegiate Women of SEU organized for the researcher to meet and propose the study to the organization's 182 members. The advisor also promoted the study and encouraged the members to participate in the study to improve Black females' experiences at SEU. The members' names and email addresses provided by the organization advisor were collected from the Collegiate Women membership roster. All Collegiate Women members who identify as Black was selected to participate in the study.

The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness provided the researcher a list of Black female undergraduate students with demographic and enrollment information to verify the student participants' self-reported demographic data and the names and email addresses of currently enrolled Black undergraduate female students. The Collegiate Women members' names were cross-checked and removed from the list provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness to prevent duplication. Students were randomly selected from the list provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness to solicit participants for the study. The researcher uploaded the dataset list into Microsoft Excel. A purposeful random sample strategy was utilized to generate a sample list of approximately 75 students using the Excel random selection tool (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The Excel tool produced a random list without duplication by the researcher, indicating the total number of students on the list.

The researcher contacted all potential student participants by email, providing the informed consent form to participate in the study and the survey. The researcher requested the student participants return the survey within three days if they agreed to participate in the study. Participants were scheduled to take part in an interview upon the return of the survey. Interviews were scheduled and conducted for over two weeks.

Student participants were expected to provide information as it related to their experiences at SEU. Their perception of academic student support services (academic advising, tutoring, and academic library services) and non-academic student support services (mentoring, counseling center, financial support services, and campus food bank) at SEU identified how the services promoted a sense of belonging and assisted in their determination to persist through college and graduate.

Staff Members of Student Support Services

Furthermore, purposeful sampling was used to select a staff member from each student support services listed in the study's student participants survey (Appendix C). Seven staff members were selected from the student support services that consisted of academic student support services (academic advising, tutoring, and academic library services) and non-academic student support services (mentoring, counseling center, financial support services, and campus food bank). The academic student support services fall under the office of SEU Advise, Academic Tutoring Center, and SEU Library Services. The non-academic student support services fall under the Center for Servant Leadership, Office of Financial Aid, and SEU Counseling Center. The staff of academic student support services (academic advising, tutoring, and academic library services) and non-academic student support services (mentoring, counseling center,

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financial support services, and campus food bank) provided the services processes, procedures, and goals for their area. The provided information helped determine how the student support services contributed to Black female undergraduate students' sense of belonging and retention.

The names and email addresses of the staff members serving each leadership role in the student support services were collected from the university website and directory. The researcher contacted the staff member from each student support services listed in the student participants survey (Appendix C) by email, introduced the study, and provided the informed consent form to participate in the study. The researcher requested the staff members to return the informed consent form within three days. Interviews were scheduled upon the return of the consent forms.

Instrumentation

Student Participants

The survey (Appendix C), designed by the researcher and administered using the Qualtrics software survey, contained closed-end questions to collect the information. Close-ended questions were used to collect self-reported demographics to include the students' names, age, gender, race, major, enrollment status, number of credit hours of current enrollment, classification, GPA, Pell Grant eligibility, and involvement with clubs/organizations.

The knowledge of student support services, student support usage, frequency of student support services used, and benefits from student support services was collected using closed-end questions. The survey design was derived from an online Likert scale academic advising perception survey and sense of belonging survey (Hausmann, Ye,

Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Suvedi, Ghimire, Millenbah, & Shrestha, 2015). The survey

collected the student support services usage from the population, and how frequently the

student support services are used by selecting a rating with the options *0, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5

or more* using a 6-point Likert scale to represent the number of visits. The knowledge of

student support services was collected using a 4-point Likert scale format with the

choices varying from *extremely unknowledgeable* to *extremely knowledgeable.* The

benefits from student support services were collected using a 4-point Likert scale format

with the choices varying from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (Whittaker &

Montgomery, 2012; Walls & Hall, 2018; Banks & Dohy, 2019).

The researcher utilized a 14-question interview protocol (Appendix D) in

individual interviews with the student participants. The interview protocol entailed open-

ended questions addressing the participants' experiences as a Black female student at a

PWI. The researcher addressed challenges and barriers the participants encountered,

student support services that contributed to their commitment and persistence, students'

perceptions of Black female role models, experiences with student support services,

involvement with club/organizations, perception of feeling valued and included,

commitment to obtaining a degree from SEU, recommended changes to improve student

support services, and perception of inclusion and acceptance on campus.

Staff Members of Student Support Services

The researcher utilized a 10-question interview protocol (Appendix H) in

individual interviews with the staff members of student support services. The interview

protocol entailed open-ended questions addressing how their area provides services for

Black female students at a PWI. The researcher addressed unique processes for serving

Black female students, steps utilized to assist Black female students; processes, procedures, and goals to assist in persistence; processes, procedures, and goals based on knowledge of Black female students on campus; recruitment of Black female students to encourage them to use the services; promotion of inclusion and diversity; promotion of social belonging; the importance of social belonging to student support services; and how Black female students are made aware of their service.

Vetting and Rehearsing the Instruments

The researcher utilized vetting and rehearsing to revise and redefine the survey (Appendix C), the student participants' interview questions (Appendix D), and the staff members' interview questions (Appendix H) to ensure the instruments align with the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher selected faculty and staff members knowledgeable of the content to create an expert panel. Four faculty and staff members were selected with a minimum of 10 years of higher education experience. The selected individuals' expertise varied from enrollment management, student support, and retention. The researcher introduced the study and provided the survey and interview questions to the expert panel by email. The individuals were asked to provide feedback and suggestions to revise the instruments by email. The survey and interview questions were redefined and submitted to the expert panel for additional feedback and suggestions. Next, the researcher utilized the expert panel to rehearse the survey and interview questions.

The survey (Appendix C) and the consent form were created using the Qualtrics software and emailed to the expert panel. A meeting was scheduled to rehearse the interview process with the expert panel after the researcher received the consent form.

The individuals received an email confirming a meeting date and time. The meeting was

conducted and recorded using the video conference software Google Meet. After

conducting the interview, the researcher asked the expert panel to provide feedback and

suggestions from the survey and interview questions. The expert panel was questioned

about the flow and clarity of the survey. For the interview, the expert panel was asked

about the questions' clarity, the interview questions' flow, the relevance of the follow-up

questions, the need to add or eliminate questions, and any concerns they noticed during

the interview process that could be revised. The researcher observed each question's

response to determine if there was any confusion about the questions. The instruments

were improved based on the expert panel's feedback and suggestions before the formal

study.

Data Collection

The researcher contacted all potential participants by email and provided consent

to participate in the study and the survey. The researcher requested the participants

return the survey within three days if they agreed to participate in the study. A follow-up

email was sent to non-respondents weekly. The follow-up emails were repeated until the

researcher collected the sample size needed for the study. The researcher used the survey

(Appendix C) to collect the population self-reported demographics (names, age, gender,

race, major, enrollment status, credit hours enrolled in, classification, GPA, eligibility for

financial aid, Pell Grant, and clubs/organizations), knowledge of student support services,

student support services usage, frequency of student support services use, and benefits

from student support services.

Individual interviews with Black female undergraduate students were conducted to capture the participants' cultural experience, college experience, sense of belonging through student support services, relationships established with faculty/staff, acceptance by faculty, staff, and students, the institution commitment and support, and their perception of inclusion and diversity. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using Google Meet with two hours allotted for each student participant. The student participants were instructed in writing and in-person to answer each question to the best of their knowledge. The student participants were informed follow-up questions or afterthoughts could be sent by email if necessary. The students' interview process consisted of a series of 14 questions generated by the researcher. All participants were asked the same questions in each interview. The researcher asked follow-up questions as needed for clarification. The interviews were recorded through Google Meet, transcribed verbatim by a third-party software, and read multiple times for data analysis. The participants were given a copy of the interview transcripts to review for accuracy as a part of member checking.

Reports that include demographic (name, race, gender, classification, and major) and academic data (standardized test scores and GPA) from the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness were collected. The institutional report consisted of students who met the inclusion criteria and was used to confirm the self-reported demographic information acquired from the students.

Individual interviews were conducted with staff members of academic and non-academic student support services. A staff member from each student support service listed in the student participants survey (Appendix C) was contacted by email, introduced

to the study, and invited to participate in an interview. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using Google Meet with a one-hour allotment.

The staff members were instructed in writing and in-person to answer each question to the best of their knowledge. The staff members were also informed follow-up questions or afterthoughts could be sent by email if necessary. The staff members were asked to explain the process and procedures of their services, how a sense of belonging is promoted in their area, and how Black female undergraduate students are recruited to take advantage of the services. The staff members' interview process consisted of the same 10 questions generated by the researcher. The researcher asked follow-up questions as needed for clarification. The interviews were recorded through Google Meet, transcribed verbatims by third-party software, and read multiple times for data analysis. The staff members were given a copy of the interview transcripts to review for accuracy as a part of member checking.

Data Analysis

The survey responses were organized using Qualtrics survey software by the researcher to determine how knowledgeable the participants were with academic and non-academic student support services, which academic and non-academic student support services the participants used, how frequently the participants used academic and non-academic student support services, and how the participants perceived they benefited from using student support services. Qualtrics software is an online, cloud-based tool used to create surveys and collect data for the research study, educational surveys, and departmental surveys. The software also organizes responses from surveys in real-time and provides a report of each question's results.

The students and staff members interviews were recorded through Google Meet, transcribed verbatim by a third-party software. The researcher utilized the Dedoose software to assist in organizing the data. The Dedoose analysis software facilitates coding and organizes qualitative data in different formats with images, audio, video, and texts. The software enriches the qualitative research approach considering the data management, excerpting and coding, and analysis to make the qualitative data-efficient, effective, and collaborative. The theoretical framework was used to organize the data through the Dedoose analysis software. A code system was built from the framework to define codes and capture all key content. The data from the semi-structured interviews was excerpted to identify significant content and labeling codes that are appropriate to the study. Dedoose generated visualizations of informative and interactive data assisted the researcher in discovering and exploring important patterns in qualitative data. The qualitative data visualizations were provided to the researcher to support the theoretical argument of the study.

The researcher concentrated on the a priori (defined beforehand) research questions, goals, and purposes to stay on track with the study as the analysis progressed (Saldaña, 2013). Themes related to the participants' cultural background, college experiences, perception of student support services, and sense of belonging as a Black female student enrolled at a PWI were used to create the themes and subthemes (Creswell, 2009).

Initial coding, also referred to as open coding, is relevant for a qualitative study due to the various data forms (i.e., interview transcriptions, documents, field notes, journals) used. Initial coding disaggregates qualitative data to examine and compare

them closely for similarities and differences. Codes can be arranged from the descriptive, conceptual framework, and theoretical frameworks when using the method (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher wrote down keywords, repetitious words, and phrases from the student participants' semi-structured interviews to build the code system for Dedoose. An inductive strategy was applied to analyze the data recognizing that the data collected was clear and self-explanatory (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The method was responsive to emerging themes throughout the data collection and analysis phases. The inductive method established a systematic approach as data was collected and analyzed to conduct rigorous qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher read the interview notes and transcriptions multiple times for accuracy and for emerging themes to update the Dedoose code system as needed.

The responses from the semi-structured interviews with the student participants and staff members of student support services were organized using Dedoose software, analyzed by the researcher, and then compared with the participants within each group. The researcher examined the cultural background, college experiences, the students' perception of student support services, and sense of belonging that applies to Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a PWI and student support services (Garibaldi, 2014; Tovar, 2015; Farmer et al., 2016; Patton & Croom, 2017; Banks & Dohy, 2019; Hussain & Jones, 2019). The researcher examined the data from the staff members of student support services for insight into the practices, goals, and mission of the SEU student support services to identify how the services promote a sense of belonging (Tinto & Pusser, 2006; Tovar, 2015; Farmer et al., 2016; Ferrell et al., 2016).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established using credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Student surveys, student participants' semi-structured interviews, and staff members of student support services' semi-structured interviews served in the effort to triangulate the data to confirm and corroborate the findings (Yin, 2018). Data triangulation was used to collect data from multiple sources to enhance the study's validity as the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students were examined (Maldonado et al., 2005; Cooper, Porter, & Davis, 2017; Garcia, 2020). A key component of qualitative research design is trustworthiness to achieve rigor in a research design that leads to a methodological validity necessary for studies to be considered reliable (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four strategies in qualitative research designs for ensuring trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility or internal validity is one of the most essential elements in determining trustworthiness to validate a research measure or tests what it intends to (Strayhorn, 2015; Hannon et al., 2016; Meador, 2018). Prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checks were used to establish credibility for the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The research methods and procedures adopted for the study were outlined. Prolonged engagement was utilized to gain trust between the student participants and the researcher. The researcher spent an adequate amount of time with the participants during the interview process to establish trust while thoroughly listening to obtain in-depth

information on the Black female undergraduate students' college experiences. The

purposeful sampling method was employed to ensure the study included participants that

can answer the research questions based on their experience as a Black female college

student attending a PWI (Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista, 2005; Hannon et al.,

2016; Garcia, 2020). The random selection process was utilized to enhance the study's

credibility to dismiss bias and to ensure the researcher did not influence the sample

(Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Strayhorn, 2015). The researcher utilized

triangulation through the surveys, student participants semi-structured interviews, and

staff members of student support services semi-structured interviews to enhance the

study's validity (Walls & Hall, 2018; Garcia, 2020). The student participants were

informed in writing that their participation was voluntary and to answer all questions to

the best of their knowledge. Participants were asked the same questions and asked

follow-up questions as deemed necessary to support their responses (Ravitch & Carl,

2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The instruments were validated using the vetting and rehearsing process to

redefine the survey and interview questions. The researcher reviewed the survey

responses for each question to determine how many participants answered each category.

The data from the semi-structured interviews were read multiple times before analyzing

and developing the key themes and subthemes. A reflective journal recorded the

researcher's thoughts and feelings throughout the study (Shenton, 2004). Self-

assessments, reflections, and personal experiences were explained throughout the study to

ensure the researcher did not influence the responses (Walls & Hall, 2018; Garcia, 2020).

Also, member checking was used for data accuracy. Member checking is a crucial validity strategy to check in with participants to determine what they think about the researcher's analysis and interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The answers to each question were read back to the participants, and a transcript was provided to the participants to ensure their answers were conveyed accurately. The participants were asked to provide feedback, correct responses that were misinterpreted, and presented with the findings to confirm the results.

Lastly, an audit trail was made available to include the student participants and staff members of student support services reflections and direct quotes (Shenton, 2004; Meador, 2018). The research steps, survey responses, interview transcripts, findings, and all notes were included in the audit trail to ensure the responses were the participants' thoughts and not the researcher's thoughts. The audit trail also included the researcher's reflections with an explanation of the color-coding techniques and how the themes and subthemes were constructed to analyze the data (Strayhorn, 2015; Hannon et al., 2016; Meador, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability or external validity is the degree to which one study's findings can be generalized and applied to other situations or contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability was demonstrated by supporting similar themes based on the Black female undergraduate students' experiences and the process, procedures, mission, and goals of student support services at SEU that make it possible for the study to be replicated in other populations or institutions. A thick description was provided detailing Black female students' full context and experiences

and the student support services' processes and procedures for the reader to form their own conclusion of the study (Hannon et al., 2016; Meador, 2018). The researcher used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. The research provided the full experience of Black female undergraduate students, the goals and mission of SEU student support services provided by the staff members, the research process, and the study results to make the idea of transferability plausible to other institutions and populations. The thick description context was compared with other contexts based on the description of important factors. The readers could form a conclusion from the in-depth details in the study and interpret the research's validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability addresses the issue of reliability and refers to the stability of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). An exploratory qualitative single-case study was utilized as the prototype model to support the study's analysis and address its quality. The research design allowed the researcher to discover and learn more about Black female undergraduate students' experiences.

Dependability was established by providing transparent details of the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The student participants were chosen using purposeful sampling from the Collegiate Women of SEU and the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness report. Collegiate Women of SEU is an all-female organization focusing on empowering Black women and community service to help them become better women to improve the community. The institutional reports consisted of demographics such as name, race, gender, and classification. The participants were

emailed a survey to collect self-reported names, race, gender, classification, major, the familiarity of student support services, student support services used, the frequency of their use of student support services, and the perceived benefits from using student support services. A semi-structured interview was scheduled with the participants after the consent forms and the surveys were returned to the researcher. The staff members of student support services were emailed and provided information on the study, with a request to schedule the semi-structured interview.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using Google Meet with two hours allotted for student participants and a one-hour allotment for staff members. The participants were instructed in writing and in-person to answer each question to the best of their knowledge. The participants were also informed that follow-up questions or afterthoughts could be sent by email if necessary. The interviews were recorded through Google Meet, transcribed verbatims by a third-party software, and read multiple times for data analysis.

Color-coding techniques were used to develop categories and disaggregate core grouping relevant to the research questions. Key themes and subthemes were developed by focusing on the keywords and repetitious words in the student participants' responses to cultural background, college experiences, perception of student support services, and sense of belonging as a Black female student enrolled at a PWI. The survey responses were reviewed, and each rating and Likert scale question was analyzed to determine how student participants answered each category.

An audit trail was created to provide the study's research steps and findings for transparency from the start to the end of the project. The audit trail included the research

steps, survey responses, interview transcripts, findings, and all notes to ensure the responses were the student participants' thoughts and not the researcher's thoughts were available. The audit trail included the researcher's reflections with an explanation of the color-coding techniques and how the themes and subthemes were constructed to analyze the data (Strayhorn, 2015; Hannon et al., 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Meador, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability ensures the research findings result from the participants' perspectives and suggestions and not the researcher's preferences and objectives (Shenton, 2004 & Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability was established through the transparency of the study. An audit trail included the research steps, survey responses, interview transcripts, findings, and all notes to ensure the responses were the participants' thoughts and not the researcher. The audit trail also included the researcher's reflections with an explanation of the color-coding techniques and how the themes and subthemes were constructed to analyze the data (Strayhorn, 2015; Hannon et al., 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Meador, 2018).

Lastly, member checking was practiced allowing the findings and responses to be tracked back to the participants. The answers to each interview question were read back to the participants, and a transcript was provided to the participants to ensure their answers were conveyed accurately. The participants were granted the opportunity to correct any information that may have been wrongly interpreted. The findings were also provided to each participant to verify the concluded thesis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The table below (see Table1) reflects the research questions, data collection, and trustworthiness elements.

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Table 1

Research Questions Analysis Table

Research Question	Instrumentation/Analysis	How will the strategy answer the research question?	Trustworthiness Elements
1. What barriers to retention do undergraduate Black female students face in higher education when attending a Predominantly White Institution?	Semi-structured Interviews. The researcher's interview procedure identified barriers experienced by Black female undergraduate students from their perspective. There were questions posed to the population that includes: ● Challenges faced (personal, academically & financial) ● Black females' experiences ● Motivation to persist through college	The semi-structured interview gave full details of what encounters the participants have faced at SEU that have negatively influenced their enrollment as a Black female student at a PWI.	Credibility: Prolonged engagement, purposeful sampling, random selection process, triangulation, vetting instruments, rehearsing instruments, reflective journaling, and member checking. Transferability: Supported similar themes, pseudonyms, and thick description. Dependability: Transparent details of the research process will be provided. Confirmability: Transparency, Member checking, and an audit trail.
2. To what extent do Black females report knowledge and use of academic and non-academic student support services?	Survey, semi-structured Interviews. The researcher's interview procedure identified the usage of academic and non-academic student support services by Black female undergraduate students. There were questions posed to the population that includes: ● Academic student support services used/perceived benefits ● Non-academic student support services used/benefited from ● Knowledge of student support services ● Campus Involvement/Interaction ● Clubs/Organizations	The survey provided information about the participants' usage of academic and non-academic student support services, how often services were used, and the student support services' familiarity. The semi-structured interview provided in-depth details on the student support services and how the support services impacted their college experience.	Credibility: Prolonged engagement, purposeful sampling, random selection process, triangulation, vetting instruments, rehearsing instruments, reflective journaling, and member checking. Transferability: Supported similar themes, pseudonyms, and thick description. Dependability: Transparent details of the research process will be provided. Confirmability: Transparency, Member checking, and an audit trail.
3. To what degree do academic and non-academic support services support a sense of belonging and retention for Black female students at a Predominantly White Institution?	Semi-structured Interviews. The researcher's interview procedure identified Black female undergraduate students' experiences with academic and non-academic student support services and the institution's commitment and support from the population perspective. The staff members of student support services explained the process, procedures, mission of	The semi-structured interview allowed the sample to provide in-depth details and express their perception of student support services and inclusion. Students described their sense of belonging related to the student support services they	Credibility: Prolonged engagement, purposeful sampling, random selection process, triangulation, vetting instruments, rehearsing instruments, reflective journaling, and member checking. Transferability: Supported similar themes, pseudonyms, and thick description.

	the services, inclusion, and recruitment. There were questions posed to the sample that includes:	have taken advantage of at any point in their educational endeavors.	Dependability: Transparent details of the research process will be provided.
	• Campus environment • Acceptance by Faculty, Staff, & Students • Valued • Institutional Commitment and Support • Inclusion and Diversity • Process, Procedures, & Goals of student support services		Confirmability: Transparency, Member checking, and an audit trail.

Table 2 lists the items in the data collection instrument, the supporting literature, and the

related research question the items would address.

Table 2

Qualitative Item Analysis Chart – Student Interview Questions

Item	Research	Students Interview Question	Research Question
Black female background	Farmer et al., 2016; Garibaldi, 2014; Patton & Croom, 2017	1	1
Experience as a Black female undergraduate student	Farmer et al., 2016; Garibaldi, 2014; Patton & Croom, 2017	2	1
Challenges/Barriers as a Black female student at PWI	Farmer et al., 2016; Hannon et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2018; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Harper, 2019; Patton et al., 2007;	3	1, 2, 3
Individual or student support services contributing to commitment and persistence at PWI	Tovar, 2015; Patton & Croom, 2017; Suvedi et al., 2015; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Soria et al., 2017	4	2, 3
Perceived representation of Black female role models and leaders	McCoy et al., 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Gasman et al., 2015; McClain et al., 2014	5	1, 3
Experiences with student support services	Tovar, 2015; Patton & Croom, 2017	6	2, 3
Described experiences with student support services	Maldonado et al., 2005	7	2, 3
Support from student support services	Thompson et al., 2019	8	2, 3
Clubs/Organizations that encourage and motivate to accomplish academic goals	Tucker, 2014; Patton & Croom, 2017	9	2, 3
Valued and included to take advantage of student support services	Luedke, 2017; Thompson et al., 2019	10	1, 3
Commitment to earning a degree	Isacco & Morse, 2015; Gabriel, 2016; Allen, McLewis, Jones, & Harris, 2018; NCES, 2017; Williams & Johnson, 2018	11	1, 2, 3
Student support services contribution to commitment and persistence	Tovar, 2015; Farmer et al., 2016	12	2, 3
Recommend changes to student support services	Patton et al., 2007; Patton & Croom, 2017; Ferrell et al., 2016; Tinto & Pusser, 2006	13	2, 3
Inclusion and acceptance on campus	Whittaker & Montgomery, 2012; Banks & Dohy, 2019; Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2017; Strayhorn, 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2019; Thompson et al., 2019	14	1, 2, 3

Table 3

Qualitative Item Analysis Chart – Staff Members Interview Questions

Item	Research	Staff Members Interview Question	Research Question
Student support services represented	Phinney et al., 2011; Isacco & Morse, 2015; Tovar, 2015	1	3
Unique processes for serving Black female students	Tinto and Pusser, 2006; Suvedi et al., 2015; Tovar, 2015; Gabriel, 2016; Patton & Croom, 2017; Soria et al., 2017	2	1, 3
Steps utilized to assist Black female students	Tinto and Pusser, 2006; Patton et al., 2007; Suvedi et al., 2015; Tovar, 2015; Gabriel, 2016; Patton & Croom, 2017; Soria et al., 2017	3	1, 3
Processes, procedures, and goals to assist in persistence	Tovar, 2015; Farmer et al., 2016; Patton et al., 2007; Patton & Croom, 2017; Thompson et al., 2019	4	1, 3
Processes, procedures, and goals created based on Black female students	Gamble & Turner, 2015; Ashley, 2014; Jones & Sam, 2018	5	1, 2, 3
Student support services target Black female students	Palmer et al., 2014; Ferrell et al., 2016; Luedke, 2017	6	2, 3
Promote inclusion and diversity	Whittaker & Montgomery, 2012; Banks & Dohy, 2019; Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2017; Strayhorn, 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2019; Thompson et al., 2019; Love, 2017	7	1, 2, 3
Promote social belonging	Owen and Rodolfa, 2009; D'Lima et al., 2014; Isacco & Morse, 2015; Thompson et al., 2019;	8	1, 2, 3
Importance of social belonging	Strayhorn, 2015; Tovar, 2015; Isacco & Morse, 2015; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Soria et al., 2017; Hussain & Jones, 2019	9	1, 2, 3
Black female students made aware of student support services	Ferrell et al., 2016;	10	1, 2, 3

Summary

This study examined the factors that affect Black female undergraduate students' retention and graduation rates at a PWI. The researcher utilized an exploratory single-case study for the research. The participants were solicited through the assistance of the Collegiate Women of SEU advisor and reports from the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. The

researcher vetted and rehearsed the instruments using an expert panel for feedback and suggestions to redefine the survey and interview questions before the formal study. Consent forms and surveys were sent to the potential participants' SEU email addresses. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled after the survey was returned from the participants with consent to participate in the study.

A survey was utilized to collect the Black undergraduate female students' demographics (name, race, gender, classification, and major), how knowledgeable the students were with student support services, the usage of student support services, how frequent student support services are used, how the students perceived they benefited from student support services, and what clubs/organizations the students were involved in on campus. The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness's institutional reports were used to verify the self-reported demographic information acquired from the student participants.

The survey was analyzed to determine how knowledgeable the participants were with academic and non-academic student support services, which academic and non-academic student support services the participants used, how frequently the participants used academic and non-academic student support services, and how the participants perceived they benefited from using the student support services. The survey responses were reviewed, and each rating and Likert scale question was analyzed to determine how many participants answered each category.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the respondents to collect perceptions of Black undergraduate female students to capture the participants' cultural experience, college experience, sense of belonging through student support services, relationships established with faculty/staff, acceptance by faculty, staff, and students, the institution commitment and support, and their perception of inclusion and diversity.

An email was sent to the staff members' SEU email addresses to introduce the study and request an interview. A semi-structured interview was conducted with three staff members from the student support services to explain their services' process and procedures, how a sense of belonging was promoted in their area, and how Black female undergraduate students were recruited to take advantage of the services.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim by a third-party software, analyzed individually, and compared for all the study participants. The transcripts were reviewed several times to create key themes and subthemes from repetitious words. The results of the analysis were presented in tables, columns, and narrative form. Chapter 4 will discuss the survey results, interview results, and provide the findings to each research question.

Chapter IV: Results

An exploratory single-case study was conducted to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution. Black female undergraduate students have been enrolling in college at an increased rate since laws were passed allowing them to earn an equal education in the United States (Farmer et al., 2016). However, there has not been a corresponding increase in their graduation rates (Farmer et al., 2016).

This chapter includes the results of the student participants' survey and the student participants' and student support services staff members' interviews. The findings were analyzed to determine which factors hinder and which factors contribute to Black female undergraduate students' success at SEU. The research questions that guided the study were: (1) What barriers to retention do undergraduate Black female students face in higher education when attending a Predominantly White Institution?; (2) To what extent do Black females report knowledge and use of academic and non-academic student support services at a Predominantly White Institution?; (3) To what degree do academic and non-academic student support services support a sense of belonging and retention for Black female students at a Predominantly White Institution?

Participants

The study included Black female undergraduate student participants and the staff members of academic and non-academic student support services. An email invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 1,589 Black female undergraduate students, and 84 (5.29%) students responded. Out of the 84 students who responded to the survey, 68 students provided their student classification:10 Freshmen, 8 Sophomores, 16 Juniors, and 34 Seniors (see Table

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4). Out of those 68 students, 56 attended as full-time students, and 12 attended as part-time

students (see Table 5).

Table 4

Student Participants' Classification

Classification	Percentage	Count
Freshman	14.71%	10
Sophomore	11.76%	8
Junior	23.53%	16
Senior	50.00%	34

Table 5

Student Participants Course Load

Course Load	Percentage	Count
Full-Time	82.35%	56
Part-Time	17.65%	12
Total	100%	68

The researcher sent interview invitations to 48 Black female undergraduate students who

indicated that they were willing to participate in the interview phase; 17 (35.42%) students

consented to participate in an interview, 11 (64.71%) students confirmed a date and time to

conduct an interview, and interviews were conducted with 10 students. The researcher sent

interview invitations to six staff members of student support services, and three (50%) staff

members responded. Interviews were conducted with three staff members of academic advising,

the academic library services, mentoring, and the campus food bank. Mentoring and the campus

food bank are within the same student support service; therefore, the same staff member was

interviewed for both mentoring and the campus food bank.

Findings

The researcher explored factors that affect the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a PWI. The findings for the study were organized by the student participant survey data, student participant interview data, and staff member interview data. Figure 8 and Figure 9 show the themes and subthemes identified from the students and staff member interviews. The color-coded tables were produced in the Dedoose analysis software to depict how frequently each theme and subtheme was applied to the student participants' and staff members' interview data. The themes created during the initial coding process were derived from the theoretical framework to address the research questions. These themes were *isolation*, *identity affirmation*, *student engagement*, *relationship building*, and *institutional support*. The subthemes emerged from the students' and staff members' interview data. The themes and subthemes holistically described the experiences and perceptions of the Black female participants and their persistence at SEU. These themes led the researcher to the findings of the study.

Media	Identity Affirmation	Mental stability	Stigma	Intentional Support	Mandatory mentorship for	Offering scholarships	Isolation	Being looked over	Not feeling included	Relationships Building	Diversity	Feeling cared for	Motivation	Self-confidence	Student Engagement	Peer support	Positive Attitude	Totals
Nina				4			15	5	7	10	6	1	1		8	4	2	63
Maya	10	1	5	5			5	2	1	20	5	5	2	1	4	1	1	68
Madison	11	4	5	16	2	2	8	2	3	14	2	5	2	1	9	3	2	91
Lily	3		2	10	1	2	7	2	4	14	7	1	1	3	6	2	1	66
Krystal Michelle	5	2	2	6	2	1	6	1	3	21		6	3	6	10	3	1	78
Jessie		2	2	4		1	6	3	4	4	6	1	1		3	2		39
Jay	1			4			3			17		5	1	1	7	1	1	41
Diamond	3	2	6	9		1	4	2	1	19	1	8	2	1	8	5	3	75
Ashley C.	2		1	7		1	4		3	13	2	4	2	1	5		1	46
Ajed	1		1	11		1	4		2	16	3	2	5	1	2			49
Totals	36	11	24	76	5	9	62	17	28	148	32	38	20	15	62	21	12	

Figure 8. Themes and Subthemes Identified from Student Participants Interviews (Pseudonyms used for confidentiality)

Media	Identity Affirmation	Mental Stability	Stigma	Intentional Support	Mandatory Mentorship	Scholarships Opportunity	Isolation	Being looked over	Not feeling included	Relationship Building	Cared for	Diversity	Motivation	Self-confidence	Student Engagement	Peer Support	Positive Attitude	Totals
Mentoring				16	1					6			2		4	2	1	32
Campus Food Bank				11			1			10	5	1			2	1		31
Academic Library	1		1	9			1		1	4	3	1						21
Academic Advising	2			18			4		1	8	3	2	1					39
Totals	3		1	54	1		6		2	28	11	4	3		6	3	1	

Figure 9. Themes and Subthemes Identified from Staff Members Interviews

The major findings of this study and research question (RQ) to which they were related are:

1. As Black female college students at SEU, the students encountered obstacles such as being first-generation college students, invalidation, alienation, and financial difficulties, which may have affected their persistence (RQ1).

2. A diverse or culturally competent faculty and staff could motivate Black female students to persist through college (RQ1).

3. The student participants were most knowledgeable about academic advising, tutoring, the academic library, counseling center, and financial support services; however, they did not take full advantage of the services and use the services (RQ2).

4. The student participants were not well informed about the opportunities for mentoring and did not know about the campus food bank to take advantage of the services (RQ2).

5. The student participants did not perceive that they benefited from the following student support services tutoring, the academic library, counseling center, and financial support services, even though they were most knowledgeable of them (RQ2).

6. The student participants' sense of belonging was enhanced through their involvement with clubs and organizations versus student support services (RQ3).

7. The student support services staff members were aware of the importance of Black female students developing a sense of belonging but did not target the population to promote a sense of belonging (RQ3).

Research Question 1

What barriers to retention do undergraduate Black female students face in higher education when attending a Predominantly White Institution? There were two key findings related to research question 1. The researcher identified the major themes *isolation*, *identity affirmation*, *intentional support*, and *relationship building* that led to these findings. The emerging subthemes were developed from the student participants' repetitive responses to the interview questions related to research question 1. The subthemes that emerged were *being looked over*, *stigma*, *scholarships specifically for Black females*, and *motivation*.

Finding 1. As Black female college students at SEU, the students encountered obstacles such as being first-generation college students, invalidation, alienation, and financial difficulties, which may have affected their persistence. The researcher identified the major themes isolation, identity affirmation, and intentional support that led to finding 1. The subthemes that emerged were being looked over, stigma, and scholarships specifically for Black females.

Theme 1. The researcher identified the theme *isolation* during the initial coding process in which the emerging subtheme *being looked over* was developed from the responses such as, "*It like invalidated me,*" "*Black female students don't feel like they're being heard by their professors,*" "*they need to check their voicemail,*" "*didn't answer me directly.*" The researcher determined from the interview data that the student participants faced pre-existing barriers and encountered institutional barriers as Black female college students attending a PWI. Three student participants were first-generation college students, four participants were raised in single-family households, two participants were forced to transfer to SEU due to financial hardships, and one participant was a wife and mother. The students' pre-existing barriers should have been identified upon acceptance to SEU or identified during their enrollment at SEU to identify

strategies that could enhance their retention considering their background (Banks & Dohy, 2019).

Diamond stated, "*I live with my grandfather currently. My mother died at the age of 11."* Lily stated, *"I am the product of a single-family household of a single mother."* Ashley C. stated, *I ended up meeting my husband. We later got married and had our two kids."* One participant expressed being a non-traditional student with a full-time job as a challenge to persist through college. The students' circumstances could have posed barriers such as financial difficulties, delayed enrollment in college, or completion of classes at a slower pace, but still, they vowed not to let these barriers prevent them from earning a college degree. The student participants' backgrounds represent challenges and barriers faced among Black female college students that could prevent or delay them from earning higher education degrees (Farmer et al., 2016). The 10 participants were at-risk and faced barriers that could influence their persistence in college.

Out of the 10 participants, seven students indicated they had encountered institutional challenges during their enrollment at SEU. Five of the student participants' responses revealed their experience was with a faculty member or student support services. Jessie stated the following about an experience with a faculty member, "*One semester I was so uncomfortable, to the point where I didn't participate in class. It like invalidated me, probably like to the point to where I feel like I couldn't really do. Kind of just leaked into this semester where I'm not motivated to stand up and ask questions*." Maya stated, "*The fact that I do have to kind of work twice as hard to get any type of recognition for anything that I do, especially as a researcher, you kind of want that validation at the end of your work or you want to have these intellectual discussions.*" Lily stated, "*I might want to ask a question in class, and I don't feel like my*

question is being answered. Black female students don't feel like they're being heard by their professors."

Eight of the 10 participants described feeling isolated in the classroom as a barrier. The participants' responses revealed that being the only Black female in classrooms was discouraging, and they often felt overlooked in the classroom. Another participant expressed being uncomfortable with the tone of response and lack of assistance from a faculty member when she requested help with Degree Works as a challenge. The participants felt invalidated, lacking care, and ignored as a Black female undergraduate student at SEU, which hindered the students from feeling a sense of belonging. The participants' negative encounters with the faculty members could have possibly been avoided if cultural competence were considered or a minimum standard of care was practiced to positively contribute to Black female students' college experience (Thompson et al., 2019).

Theme 2. The emerging subtheme *stigma* was developed from the student participants' responses "*the stigma between Black people and therapy*, "*we get really hesitant to ask people for help*," and "*we have this stigma around counseling.*" The subtheme was connected to the major theme *identity affirmation,* which was determined during the initial coding process. The participants voiced the stigma related to counseling among the Black community and hesitance with Black females seeking counseling service that contributes to college challenges (Gallagher, 2013; Bishop, 2016; Seon, Prock, Bishop, Hughes, Woodward, & MacLean, 2019). Five students had used the counseling center out of the 10 participants, but only one student shared a positive experience using the services. Ashely C. stated, "*It's already a stigma enough and our community to go and get go get help and go into a counseling building. So it's like it's not a warm welcome. But once I did get in and start seeing my counselor, she, me and her we're like,*

really close like two peas in the pod, really." Two students indicated they had not used the counseling service but needed the service; one student adding that she felt overlooked after leaving a message seeking counseling support but not receiving a call back. Krystal Michelle stated the following about the counseling center, "*I was in the process of filling out, the paperwork it's like a really long packet but I haven't got to that and is incredibly long.*" Nina stated, "*So, I did call the Counseling Center at one point just to like, you know, to get help, I guess but they didn't answer. And I even left my voicemail and everything and a call back number and they still haven't called me back to this day.*"

Four student participants used tutoring; two student participants described their experience as feeling ashamed and stigmatized as a Black female student using the service. The students stated that they did not feel welcome at the check-in area, felt labeled as a Black female undergraduate student in need of tutoring, or a tutor was not available for the subject they needed. Diamond stated," *So tutoring was interesting. I'd go in there and it did seem like the front desk, it was always something, I don't know. Like, I don't know. Tutoring I kind of just felt like sometimes I was just like a number, just some incompetent student that is going in there.*" Jay stated, "*I don't go to tutoring because I feel like, I don't. Because I like, I feel stupid.*" Jessie stated, "W*hen I actually try to schedule tutoring, they either don't have my class, they don't have a student for the class I'm taking or the availability of it.*" The subthemes that emerged described the barriers the student participants faced that affected their persistence at SEU.

Theme 3. All the student participants stated there was a lack of intentional support from the student support services to target Black female students. The researcher identified the major theme *intentional support* during the initial coding process in which the emerging subtheme

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scholarships specifically for Black females was developed from responses such as "*more scholarships and grants for Black women,*" "*financial support for Black students specifically,*" "*scholarship just for being Black,*" and "*I had to look for money outside of school.*" Nine of the 10 participants have utilized financial support services. One student described herself as a burden to the financial support services staff members, while another elaborated on her relationship with her financial aid counselor due to her unique situation. Three participants recommended scholarships specifically for Black female students to eliminate the need for student loans. Madison stated, "*I definitely think as far as just the financial process itself, it would be a big help to Black females just again to give that security and also um having more resources like scholarships and um financial support for Black students specifically. So, I think that would be super helpful.*" Ajed stated, "*...promoting like more scholarships and grants for Black women or you know, oh, not just Black women, but for every demographic I feel like it lacks specific specificity to, you know, certain demographics, such as Black women.*" Krystal Michelle stated, "*More information on scholarships and they're more information on funding instead of the student loans.*" Scholarships tend to increase the retention and graduation rates of Black female students awarded scholarships and grants (Palmer, Wood Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014).

The participants who were able to take advantage of mentoring were able to better understand their place at SEU as a Black female student, did not feel judged when discussing their challenges in college, and contributed the student support services for their success. Students who feel welcomed on campus build connections and develop positive campus relationships that improve their retention and graduation rates (Hussain & Jones, 2019).

Despite her negative experience, Maya stated, "*I just encountered more positive than negative. I've been able to find my niche.*" All 10 participants described positive experiences at SEU. The participants were able to connect with faculty, staff, or students to get the support they needed to persist through college. The positive experiences enhanced their sense of belonging at SEU. However, the negative experiences should not be overlooked but instead used as a tool to break down the barriers preventing another Black female student from experiencing the same (Banks & Dohy, 2019).

Out of the 10 participants, four students described having a great experience with academic advising and have built a relationship with their advisor, which made them feel included on campus. Diamond stated, "*And she would really walk me through the process and like, tell me where I need to be at and how I need to do it. And if I had concerns, she was really good about getting back and supportive. You know, make sure my I stayed on track pretty well.*" Seven student participants utilized the academic library; three of the seven students that used the academic library expressed their love for the staff members and the services offered to support them as a Black female undergraduate student.

The interview data revealed that nine student participants were committed to SEU, but their commitment was not based on a sense of belonging promoted from the student support services. The participants expressed their desire and goal was to earn a college degree despite the barriers they faced as Black female students at SEU. When asked how committed she was to earn a degree from SEU, Krystal Michelle stated, "*I am regardless of all of the experiences. There's nothing that's gonna stop me from applying and reaching and getting my degree.*" All 10 participants expressed how important it was to complete college to break cycles within their family or continue the trend their parents have started with it being a standard to earn a college

degree. Out of the 10 participants, one student indicated that she was not committed to SEU.

Jessie stated, "*Oh, currently at the moment of how things are going. I'm kind of tempted to*

transfer." The researcher concluded that the student participants' educational achievements and

commitment to earning a degree were not because of the support from student support services

or support from SEU (Patton & Croom, 2017).

The student participants' interview data revealed that more work was needed within the

student support services to improve Black female undergraduate students' experience at SEU.

Nina stated, "*I think they need to actually, like find a way to let genuine relationships build*

between advisors and the students." PWIs should consider the unique challenges and cultural

background of Black female undergraduate students to provide the assistance needed to improve

their academic success. Embracing Black female students and valuing their backgrounds build

relationships that motivate and encourage their success (Luedke, 2017). PWIs that consider

recommendations from Black female students allow the students to share resources from their

cultural background to improve student support services while getting the necessary help they

need to be academically successful (Luedke, 2017).

Finding 2. A diverse or culturally competent faculty and staff could motivate Black

female students to persist through college.

Theme 4: The researcher identified the major theme *relationship building* that led to

finding 2, and the emerging subtheme was *motivation*. Five student participants recommended

improving diversity among faculty and staff or ensuring that faculty and staff are culturally

competent to better understand Black female students.

Employing a diverse faculty and staff can increase mentorship opportunities and enhance

Black female students' sense of belonging (McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, Luedke, 2015). The

students stated the need for a better recruitment and hiring process to create diversity among faculty and staff that could inspire them. The students responded that culturally competent faculty and staff members are important when faculty and staff were not diverse. Nina stated, "*I think they should be more diverse in their hiring as far as professors and faculty goes. From my experience, I only have one Black female professor at the school* ." Diamond stated, "*I didn't even have any Black female teachers. Up until this point, I haven't, I haven't had one except one substitute like a day.*" The staff member of the campus food bank stated, "*I do worry that because our campus food pantry is ran by two White females and currently our student assistant who works for us is a White female as well.*" The researcher determined that the student participants were motivated when they could connect with a faculty or staff that understood their experiences as a Black female student. The student participants revealed that the students were aware that faculty and staff were not as diverse as the student population. Diversity among faculty and staff members or culturally competent faculty and staff members could make the students feel welcome and build positive relationships to motivate students to persist through college.

Although research shows that a sound diverse foundation of faculty and staff inspire Black female students in college, cross-cultural mentorship and culturally competent faculty and staff can assist in closing the racial gap between Black and White females' retention and graduation rates (McCoy et al., 2015). Out of the 10 participants, three students had a role model with a Black female student, faculty, or staff member. Three student participants stated they had a role model consisting of a White female faculty member, a Black male faculty member, and an Asian male staff member who provided academic advice, recommended resources, and motivated them to persist through college. Four student participants did not have a role model.

Research Question 2

To what extent do Black females report knowledge and use of academic and non-academic student support services at a Predominantly White Institution? There were three key findings related to research question 2. The researcher identified the major theme *relationship building* and the emerging subtheme *not feeling cared for* was developed from the student participants' survey results and interview responses.

Finding 3. The student participants were most knowledgeable about academic advising, tutoring, the academic library, counseling center, and financial support services; however, they did not take full advantage and use of all of the services. Table 6 and Table 7 show the survey results of students' knowledge and frequency of using the student support services.

Table 6

Survey Item 1 Likert Scale Results

Please indicate if you are knowledgeable of the following student support services at South Eastern University.				
	Extremely Knowledgeable	Slightly Knowledgeable	Slightly Unknowledgeable	Extremely Unknowledgeable
Academic Advising	68.18%	24.24%	4.55%	3.03%
Tutoring	40.91%	40.91%	9.09%	9.09%
Library Services	37.88%	33.33%	19.70%	9.09%
Mentoring	18.18%	27.27%	27.27%	27.27%
Counseling Center	30.30%	28.79%	25.76%	15.15%
Financial Support	31.82%	31.82%	16.67%	19.70%
Campus Food Bank	16.67%	19.70%	25.76%	37.88%

Table 7

Survey Item 2 Likert Scale Results

How often have you used the following student support services during your enrollment at South Eastern University?						
	0 Time	1 Time	2 Times	3 Times	4 Times	5 or More Times
Academic Advising	6.06^%	6.06%	10.61%	12.12%	12.12%	53.03%
Tutoring	54.55%	9.09%	7.58%	9.09%	3.03%	16.67%
Library Services	53.03%	9.09%	9.09%	7.58%	3.03%	18.18%
Mentoring	90.91%	4.55%	1.52%	1.52%	0%	1.52%
Counseling Center	78.79%	4.55%	6.06%	1.52%	0%	9.09%
Financial Support	54.55%	7.58%	15.15%	3.03%	4.55%	15.15%
Campus Food Bank	90.91%	4.55%	1.52%	0%	1.52%	1.52%

The students explained why they did not use the student support programs. Maya stated,

"I don't really need academic advising. Um, I think as much as we do it, it's kind of always the

time personally. So, I don't think there's any other support services that I truly take advantage of." Jessie stated, *"when I actually try to schedule tutoring, they either don't have have my class, they don't have a student for the class I'm taking or the availability of it."* Nina stated, *"I go to library, but I don't like use any of their service or anything like that or check out any book. or anything like that."*

  Theme 5. The researcher identified the theme *relationship building* during the initial coding process in which the emerging subtheme *not feeling cared for* was derived from the students' interview responses. Although survey results were positive, in their interviews students stated that they did not feel welcome to establish or build relationships with staff members from the student support services they were familiar with, leaving the students feeling as though they are overlooked or abandoned. Jessie stated, *" So my advisor doesn't really give me much advice on, you know, the things I should do or asking me about things. I might like and helping me decide on classes, she just gives me a general overview of things. I need to do for my degree, which is pretty much stuff. I feel like I could just do on my own."* Nina stated, *" I did call the Counseling Center at one point just to like, you know, to get help, I guess but they didn't answer. And I even left my voicemail and everything and a call back number and they still haven't call me back to this day. I guess it's like hard to like, go to family than go to counseling. So I thought I could have went through the school since, you know, the service was offered."*

  The analyzed data from survey item 1 demonstrated that Black female students' level of knowledge varied between the student support services. Based on the survey results, the researcher determined from the student participants' survey data that Black female students were most knowledgeable of academic advising, tutoring, the academic library, counseling center, and financial support services. Maya stated, *"I have not had counseling, but I need to."* Madison

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stated, "*I just don't feel like academic advising does much for me. My advisor doesn't really give me much advice on, you know, the things I should do or asking me about things I might like and helping me decide on classes. She just gives me a general overview of things.*" Nina stated, "*I usually just do it (advising) by myself. Like, go through my Degree Works and see what classes I need to take. I just emailed him and asked him to lift the advising hold.*"

Student participants were most knowledgeable of academic advising as a student support service based on the survey results and students' interview responses. However, only three participants credit academic advising for strategically preparing them for academic success in the interviews. Krystal Michell stated, "*Academic advising has not been very worked in my favor since I've been at SEU. I've had more than one negative experience with academic advising. My advisor, she placed me in in classes that I didn't have the prerequisites to attend.*" Academic advising is an important strategy to informing and helping Black female students locate the appropriate resources for their educational needs (Smith & Allen; Suvedi et al., 2015).

The interview data revealed that student support services were critical to Black female students' success and sense of belonging at SEU (Yin, 2009; Ravitch & Car, 2016; Yin, 2018). Even though students did not make full use of the services, all the participants were able to connect with one student support service for assistance and credited the services for contributing to academic success. In describing her advisor, Diamond stated, "*And she would really walk me through the process and like, tell me where I need to be at and how I need to do it. And if I had concerns, she was really good about getting back and supportive. You know, make sure my I stayed on track pretty well.*"

Finding 4. The student participants were not well informed about the opportunities for mentoring and did not know about the campus food bank to take advantage of the services.

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The researcher identified the theme *isolation* during the initial coding process in which the emerging subtheme *not feeling included* was developed from the responses to survey item 1 and survey item for knowledge of the services of mentoring and the campus food bank. The participants felt they were uninformed of the services and did not feel included to take advantage of using them. Based on the results of survey item 1, the researcher determined that 27.27% of students were extremely unknowledgeable of mentoring and 37.88% were extremely unknowledgeable of the campus food bank; 90.91% of students reported not having used the mentoring services, and 90.91% reported not having used the campus food bank. The student survey analysis showed that mentoring and the campus food bank yielded the lowest ratings with students' familiarity among the student support services. The Black female students were not familiar enough with the student support services to take advantage of the services when there was a need.

The interview results were consistent that the students were not aware of the campus food bank and mentoring. Therefore, Black female students could not take advantage of the services. Student participants stated the following, "*I don't know about mentoring,*" "*I didn't know about mentoring,*" "*I had no clue we had a campus food bank,*" and "*Is that like the cafeteria?*"

Three student participants shared that they have used the campus food bank and described how welcoming the student support services were in their time of need. In discussing the campus food bank, Madison stated, "*It was more than just, you know, we're giving you food. It was also, you know, a mental check-in making sure everything was okay.*"

Of the 10 participants, four students were familiar with mentoring, but only three used the mentoring services. The participants who were able to take advantage of mentoring were able to better understand their place at SEU as a Black female student, did not feel judged when

discussing their challenges in college, and contributed the student support services for their success.

The data analyzed from survey item 2 revealed that students were not utilizing student support services to their full extent. Collectively, data from survey item 1 and 2 data revealed that the participants were most knowledgeable with academic advising, tutoring, and the academic library services and have utilized the services at least one time during their enrollment at SEU; the participants were most unknowledgeable with mentoring, and the food bank and 90.91% of the students had not utilized these services during their enrollment at SEU. All the students who used the campus food bank and mentoring had developed a relationship with the staff members from the areas, which enhanced their sense of belonging during a difficult moment in life. Students who feel welcomed on campus build connections and develop positive campus relationships that improve their retention and graduation rates (Hussain & Jones, 2019).

Finding 5. The student participants did not perceive that they benefited from many of the student support services of which they were most knowledgeable.

Table 8

Survey Item 3 Likert Scale Results

Please indicate if you have benefited from the following student support services at South Eastern University.				
	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Academic Advising	7.58%	12.12%	40.91%	39.39%
Tutoring	37.88%	7.58%	25.76%	28.79%
Library Services	34.85%	15.15%	25.76%	24.24%
Mentoring	65.15%	13.64%	9.09%	12.12%
Counseling Center	56.06%	15.15%	12.12%	16.67%
Financial Support	50.00%	10.61%	25.76%	13.64%
Campus Food Bank	65.15%	12.12%	10.61%	12.12%

The researcher identified the theme *isolation* during the initial coding process in which the emerging subtheme *not feeling included* was developed from survey item 3 yielded high rating results and the students' interview responses such as "*I haven't dealt with any counseling*

as of yet," "*financial aid is kind of hit and miss for me*." Based on the survey item 1 results, the

researcher revealed that students were knowledgeable of academic library services, the

counseling center, and financial support services, but the students perceived they had not

benefited from the student support services in survey item 3. The student participants did not

take full advantage of the academic library, counseling center, and financial support services to

benefit from the available services.

Students were asked to indicate if they benefited from academic and non-academic

student support services using a Likert scale format with the options ranging from strongly

disagree to strongly agree. The survey yielded 26 (39.39%) students strongly agreed, and 27

(40.91%) students somewhat agreed with benefiting from academic advising. While 80.3%

strongly or somewhat agreed they had benefited, students did share negative experiences in the

interviews. Three student participants described their experience with academic advising as

clerical and neutral. The students shared that they had no connection with their advisor and only

met with them because it was mandatory. Ajed stated, "*I feel like my experience with the*

academic advising was more so to get the hold off, the advisor hold off. Not so much for me

personally. I feel like the academic advising where more, so just for the requirement."

The survey yielded 25 (37.88%) students strongly agreed, and 17 (25.76%) students

somewhat agreed that they benefitted from tutoring. While 63.64% strongly or somewhat agreed

that they had benefited, the following students shared negative experiences in the interviews.

Krystal Michelle stated, "*It was kind of the location of where tutoring is. it can just be*

intimidating to go inside the building and then just walk out in front of like everyone." Lily

stated, "*I went to tutoring a few times. I didn't use it often. I only used it when I took calculus.*

That was like a waste of my time. It wasn't very useful from how we were taught in the

classroom to like, how she was presenting the things to me."

The survey yielded 23 (34.85%) students strongly agreed, and 17 (25.76%) students

somewhat agreed with benefiting from academic library services. Madison stated, "*I go to the*

library, but I don't like use any of their service or anything like that or check out any book." All

the student participants shared in the interview that they used the academic library services as a

study hall. Only two students perceived that they had benefited from the academic library's

other services. The lack of intentional support could leave students feeling isolated and not

included if a sense of belonging is not promoted to make students feel welcome and comfortable

enough to use the student support services.

Although mentoring was one of the least knowledgeable student support services at SEU

among Black female students and 43 (65.15%) students strongly disagreed that they benefited

from the service, Diamond's response indicates how mentoring can be invaluable for other Black

students if the service was available to all. Diamond stated, "*The mentor services, really critical*

in helping me formulate exactly how I wanted to try to make my mark in the world." However,

mentoring was only openly available to students who were a part of the servant leadership

program. The interview data revealed that the mentoring was not available to all Black female

students but impacted one student by helping her find her identity through the process.

Survey item 1 and survey item 2 revealed that students were knowledgeable of financial

support services and have used the services during their enrollment. However, survey item 3

data revealed that 40 (60.61%) students for financial support services disagreed that they had

benefited from the services. While one participant shared a positive experience with using

financial support services, three other student participants described their experience with

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financial support services as overwhelmed, with one student stating that she felt like a burden to the financial aid counselors. Madison stated, "F*inancial aid is kind of hit and miss for me. That's one of those services that I feel like has kind of hurt me a little bit as a Black student because like I said um school, school has never been something that I've questioned that I wanted to do until I encountered financial aid services. I was just very overwhelmed.*"

Survey item 1 and survey item 2 also revealed that students were knowledgeable of counseling and have used the services during their enrollment. The survey revealed that 37 (56.06%) students for counseling strongly disagreed that they had benefited from the services. Student participants stated that they had not utilized the counseling center but expressed the need for the service. Krystal Michelle stated, "*I haven't dealt with any counseling as of yet.*"

Out of the 10 participants, two students give credit to academic advising for contributing to their persistence at SEU, two students credit tutoring, three students credit mentoring, two students credit counseling, and one student credits the food bank for contributing to their persistence. The participants stated that the services provided guidance and clarity and helped them cope with stress when challenged mentally. The lack of knowledge of student support services and resources raises concerns about Black female students finding the proper support they needed to excel in college (Patton & Croom, 2017).

The data for the interviews revealed that every encounter with Black female students has a determining factor in the students taking advantage of the available services. The students took into account how they were greeted and served when taking advantage of student support services. Black female students are likely to feel disconnected from student support services and campus environments, which makes enhancing the sense of belonging more important to the population (Strayhorn, 2015).

Research Question 3

To what degree do academic and non-academic student support services support a sense of belonging and retention for Black female students at a Predominantly White Institution? There were two key findings related to research question 3. The researcher identified the major themes *student engagement*, *intentional support*, and *relationship building* that led to these findings. The emerging subthemes were derived from the student participants' and staff members' patterns and repetitive responses to the interview questions related to research question 3. The emerging themes were *peer support*, *mandatory mentorship*, and *diversity*.

Finding 6. The student participants' sense of belonging was enhanced through their involvement with clubs and organizations versus student support services.

Theme 6. The researcher identified the theme *student engagement* during the initial coding process in which the emerging subtheme *peer support* was developed from the student responses, "*it was really Students for Sustainable World that was pushing me to reach my academic goals*," "*the student tutors did make me feel welcome*," "*we're competing with each other a little bit and helping each other along*," "*it's nice to have like your peers helping you ,*" and "*that club kind of has different connections and so you can talk with your peers.*" The researcher determined that student participants' sense of belonging was enhanced when involved in a club or organization.

All 10 participants were involved in a student club or organization at SEU. Four participants were members of multiple clubs or organizations. The participants shared that the clubs and organizations provided a safe place to express themselves, helped them find their identity, provided campus networking opportunities, and motivated them to reach their academic goals. The researcher determined that the clubs and organizations the student participants were

involved in enhancing their sense of belonging at SEU. The student participants were also able

to obtain peer support from their club or organization members, which motivated them to persist

through college.

All 10 student participants developed a sense of belonging from the clubs and

organizations they were involved in even when the student support services missed the

opportunity. The students were able to experience a balanced campus environment as a member

of the clubs and organizations, which welcomed them and gave them the perception of SEU

being a safe campus as a Black female student (D'Lima et al., 2014; Isacco & Morse, 2015).

Madison stated the following about her involvement in the Student Government Association,

"*So, we talk directly to students about what can help them with. Being able to hear, you know,*

students' experiences individually. And as a whole, you know, as part of certain groups and

colleges and stuff like that helps us make changes and make everyone feel more included and

successful at SEU." The students could connect with peers through the clubs and organizations

that motivated and encouraged them to persist.

 Finding 7. The student support services staff members were aware of the importance of Black

female students developing a sense of belonging but did not target the population to promote a

sense of belonging.

Theme 7. The researcher identified the major theme *intentional support* during the initial

coding process in which *mandatory mentorship* was derived as an emerging subtheme from

responses such as "*having that Mentor would have been super helpful*," "*recommend any student*

to definitely use mentoring," and "*I wish mentoring more mandatory*." Madison stated the

following about mentoring, "*I would love if that service could be offered um earlier in my degree*

program, even if not my freshman year. Um, I think at the beginning of this year would have

been my sophomore year. It would have been really helpful as well. I'm just because I'm already into a lot of my upper-level major courses since I did a lot of dual enrollment and stuff. And so having that Mentor would have been super helpful." Krystal Michelle stated, "*I love it and I would definitely recommend any student to definitely use mentoring. I wish I could use mentoring instead of academic advising. I wish mentoring was more mandatory because if I didn't have that, you know, that that situation or that obstacle that I had to go through to even be in the situation to meet a mentor. I don't think I would have ever even, you know, reached out and seek any direction.*"

Out of 10 participants, three student participants were able to take advantage of mentoring and credit the service for contributing to their persistence. Diamond stated, "*The mentor services, really critical in helping me formulate exactly how I wanted to try to make my mark in the world.*" Krystal Michelle stated the following about mentoring, "*I didn't feel that it was just, it was non-judgmental. It was to to help understand who I was. And what type of learning that would help me be successful.*" Five student participants were not familiar with mentoring but expressed they could have used the service for a better college experience. The mentoring service was available to students who were a part of the servant leadership program. The staff member representing the mentoring service recognized the importance of mentorship and has partnered students with mentors even if they were not students in the servant leadership program. Mentoring can increase students' integrity, identity clarification, and efficiency, which increases their academic performance and success (McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, & Luedke, 2015).

Theme 8. The researcher identified the major theme *relationship building* during the initial coding process in which the emerged subtheme *diversity* was derived the response such as "*More representation*," "*there is not a lot of Black females compared to, you know, White males,*"

or White females in administration," *I didn't even have any Black female teachers,"* and *"ran by two White females."* All the staff members echoed the importance of Black female students developing a sense of belonging in college to be academically successful.

The Servant Leadership program, which is the service that offers mentoring, has been intentional with building the program to include Black females from different classification levels so that they can build relationships and connect with each other. The mentoring staff member shared that their philosophy is to have a strong representation of Black female mentors to produce Black female leaders within the community. The staff member's response was, "*Having that representation of Black females is something that we are able to build on throughout the program because those Black females are able to connect in with each other, across the different class levels and grade levels.*"

The academic advising staff member revealed that social belonging was promoted through their area through the availability of different staff members from different backgrounds that allow students to encounter a staff member to whom they feel they can connect. The Servant Leadership staff member representing the campus food bank expressed the concern of not having a Black female staff member as a barrier for Black female students to feel welcome in their area. Student support services staff members can demonstrate the importance of a sense of belonging from their area by creating a positive sense of belonging for each student they encounter. For student support services that do not employ a Black staff member, ensuring that non-Black staff members are culturally competent is necessary to promote a positive sense of belonging for students to be successful (Thompson et al., 2019).

The campus food bank and mentoring services promote social belonging through relationship orientation with students. The staff member responded, "*I personally try to be a*

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very open book. A very, like relationship-oriented kind of person. And I know both of my team members do as well." The academic library staff member indicated that a sense of belonging was not promoted to an extent but thought social belonging was necessary for every student to succeed. How student support services promote a sense of belonging contributes to Black female students "feeling understood, cared for, included, and well served" (Thompson et al., 2019, p.127). Initiatives to promote a sense of belonging are just as significant as the quality of the service provided to Black female students and initiatives to promote academic success to increase Black females' retention and graduation rates. If a sense of belonging is not promoted within the student support services, Black females could be hesitant to seek support from the different areas when necessary.

The researcher determined that the student support services staff members that were interviewed were aware of the importance of Black female students developing a sense of belonging at SEU. The student support services did not promote a sense of belonging in any unique way. Therefore, the Black female students did not think the student support services outreach to address their needs was enough to connect them with their services. There is a need for diversity to be extended within the student support services to enhance Black females' sense of belonging. If diversity cannot be extended, staff members in student support services must be culturally competent in understanding Black female students' experiences and need to promote a positive sense of belonging for the population.

Student Support Services Processes, Procedures, and Goals

The student support services processes, procedures, and goals were aimed at assisting the general student population and did not intentionally support Black female undergraduate students. The academic advising staff member stated their overall goal was to help students

better communicate what they need to get them the resources they need to succeed. The academic library staff member indicated that their area was working on a partnership with the tutoring center to provide short videos on using different services within the library. The staff member's response was, "*So we would be working with Academic Center for Tutoring. We would be working with them and trying to record some videos so that when they see students who need help, then they could be referred to those videos because they might see people before we see them, and then that we could have a partnership with them.*" The campus food bank staff member stated that their mission was to make sure students were not worried about their next meal, building relationships, and establishing trust with students to help them persist. Although all the support service staff members expressed ways their area aims to support students, Black female students must feel the connectedness on campus to develop a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2019). The student support services are directly connected to increasing Black female undergraduate students' retention and graduation rates by making students feel supported (Isacco & Morse, 2015; Soria et al., 2017).

The data from the interviews revealed that academic advising, the campus food bank, the mentoring, and academic library student support services do not have any unique processes within their areas that serve Black female students in particular. Academic advising is mandated at SEU, which could present an opportunity for Black female undergraduate students' sense of belonging to be developed from academic advisors to support their academic success. The staff member of academic advising stated, "*We don't really address there that population of students as an individual population. We, we work with all students equally.*" The student support services serve Black female undergraduate students within the general population and work with all students equally. However, the academic library indicated that their area has a panel

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discussion in observance of Black history that allows Black students in general to interact and a small display of African American books that could draw in Black female students. The researcher determined that Black female students were not intentionally marketed to which could lower the sense of belonging for the population if they do not connect mentally to the student support services (Strayhorn, 2015).

Intentional Support

Although the student support services did not target specific populations, academic advising, the campus food bank, and mentoring stated that they target at-risk students in general. Academic advising was mandated for all students in which they were contacted at multiple points in the semester through different channels and cannot opt-out of the service. The academic advising role serves the purpose of being cognizant of students' needs to make them aware of other available student support services. Academic advising utilized predictive analytics software to suggest if additional support was needed for at-risk students based on their academic performance. The staff member of academic advising responded, "*Advising is mandatory for every student. I don't know. I haven't really considered a separate sort of program targeting African American, Black females etc, or any other subset of the population, specifically. Because we do see everybody.*"

The campus food bank targets at-risk female students through the health center and female campus resources. The campaign informs female students of feminine hygiene products available to them in addition to food. Targeting at-risk students could draw Black female undergraduate students to the student support services. However, targeting Black female undergraduate students specifically could be a challenge for student support services considering that the staff of the areas is already at capacity. According to research, students need to be

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strategically targeted to address educational challenges and available resources to help them take advantage of academic services (Tovar, 2015).

All the student support services used different communication channels to make the general population aware of their services. For academic advising, students were made aware of advising at orientation. The campus food bank reaches female students through the student health center by providing care kits. The academic library advertised its services to the general population through social media platforms. The staff member of the academic library responded, "*I think on the website any services that were available, definitely through the social media. They were able to see what was going on and to keep, keep themselves informed. We do have an Outreach librarian, who does the Facebook or Twitter and Instagram and that we do have a YouTube channel now so we're working on that also.*" Different networks must be employed to reach Black female students to take advantage of student support services. Students who are not strategically targeted to be made aware of available resources will suffer academically (Tovar, 2015).

Inclusion and Diversity

The interview data revealed that the student support services operate around inclusion. The academic advising staff member stated, "*So, everything is about inclusion, it's just part of our culture. Nobody is excluded.*" The staff member described how academic advising participates in diversity campus events to welcome Black female students to their area. All the student support services had a diverse staff team except the campus food bank. The staff member indicated the campus food bank staff and student workers were not Black, but the team was very intentional and relationship-oriented in supporting Black female students. Although the staff members indicated inclusion and diversity were important to Black female students,

they must be aware of Black female undergraduate students' experiences to promote inclusion and diversity. Getting insight from Black female undergraduate students could influence how inclusion and diversity are promoted to provide intentional support to the population (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Out of the 10 participants, six students stated that SEU put forth great effort to make Black female undergraduate students aware of student support services to feel included on campus. Three student participants stated that student support services could be better advertised to target specialized populations as Black female students strategically. The three students stated that SEU advertises student support services to the general population. Lily stated, "*I think it's just everything is generalized at SEU. and it's like a one size, fits all*" before recommending that SEU consider expanding Diversity Services as a liaison for supporting and connecting Black female students to student support services. Lily's recommendation could promote inclusion and diversity and help advocate for Black female students' academic success while building a culture of intentional support. It may be necessary for SEU to assess student support services to determine if the current strategies and services effectively meet the demands of Black female students (Patton & Croom, 2017).

Out of the 10 participants, three student participants indicated that academic advising played a factor in making them feel valued and included at SEU as a Black female student. The students built relationships with their advisors that possibly enhanced their sense of belonging and improved their retention and graduation rates. Ashley C. described how she checked in with her academic advisor after going through a difficult semester, "*I went and talked to him every two weeks, I think. And he set me up with the counseling. He set me up and made sure I went to the appointments and he was like my backbone*." Two student participants described how they

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connected with the campus food bank staff members during their time of need and instantly felt

lifted despite their circumstances. However, all the student support services played a part in

making one of the 10 participants feel included and accepted when using their service. One

student participant did not feel included or accepted by any of the student support services. The

data for the interview question support research that every student needs to feel included and

accepted, but the student's identity and experience will determine if they can develop a sense of

belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). The student participant who did not feel included or accepted from

the student support services indicated that she was seeking to transfer from SEU. The lack of

sense of belonging could be a motive for the student's lack of commitment to SEU.

Summary

The students who participated in the interviews provided in-depth information and open-

ended responses of their experience and perspective as a Black female undergraduate student at a

PWI. All the student participants faced pre-existing and institutional barriers and were

considered at-risk upon becoming an SEU student. Three student participants were first-

generation college students, four participants were raised in a single-family household, two

participants had financial hardships, and one participant was a wife and mother. The student

participants encountered challenges as a Black female student at SEU that could have affected

their persistence at the institution. However, the student participants were able to connect with

faculty, staff, or a student support service for a positive sense of belonging after a negative

encounter. All the student participants were involved in a club or organization that provided peer

support, motivation, and mental stability to enhance their social belonging as a Black female

undergraduate student.

Additionally, the staff members gave an insight into the practices, goals, and mission of the different academic and non-academic student support services. The student support services served the general student population and did not promote a sense of belonging to Black female students. Sense of belonging and inclusion, and diversity were important elements for the student support services assisting students. However, the failure to promote a sense of belonging could be a barrier preventing Black female students from seeking support from the student support services and increasing their retention and graduation rates. Collectively, the data identified factors that hindered Black female undergraduate students' progression to graduation and factors that contributed to their academic success. Black female undergraduate students' perceptions of the student support services should be considered to better assist the population and to create a positive sense of belonging.

Chapter V will outline the research summary, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications of the study.

Chapter V: Discussion

College enrollment rates of Black females at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) increased after passing laws that allowed Black females to earn an equal education in the United States. However, there has not been a corresponding increase in the graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students (Farmer et al., 2016). The racial gap between the retention and graduation rates of Black and White females at PWIs suggests that Black females' college experience should be examined to determine which factors hinder and which factors contribute to their success. The researcher used an exploratory qualitative single-case study to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a PWI. A summary, analysis of key findings, the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications will be provided in this chapter.

Summary of the Study

Black females have faced racism, sexism, classism, social isolation, cultural incongruity, and an unwelcoming academic environment in higher education that limited their educational opportunities (Farmer et al., 2016). Education plays a significant role in Black females' lives despite past struggles and obstacles intended to prevent them from earning a college education (Farmer et al., 2016). College enrollment of Black females at PWI has increased over the years, but the graduation rates have been inconsistent with the enrollment rate. The inconsistency in enrollment rates and graduation rates caused a disproportionate racial gap between the retention and graduation rates of Black and White females at PWIs.

An exploratory qualitative single-case study was conducted to examine the factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a PWI. Using an exploratory qualitative single-case study allowed the researcher to gather a

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narrative of the participants' own stories while providing the researcher the opportunity to interpret data through various critical lenses (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003; Coffey & Farinde-Wu, 2016). The themes were created during the initial coding process, and emerging themes were identified from the student participants' and staff members' interview transcriptions.

The researcher employed a survey to Black female college students currently enrolled at SEU. The survey was distributed to all currently enrolled Black female undergraduate students seeking a bachelor's degree for the first time. The survey consisted of close-ended questions and was appropriate to collect self-reported demographics and students' knowledge, usage, and benefits of student support services.

The survey was followed by semi-structured interviews with student participants and staff members of student support services during Phase 2 of the study. Semi-structured interviews were the appropriate method of data collection for an exploratory research method. The semi-structured interviews collected data from the student participants' perceptions of their experience at SEU. The student support services' practices, goals, and missions were collected from staff members' semi-structured interviews to identify whether the areas promoted a sense of belonging for Black female undergraduate students.

Analysis of the Findings

Social belonging was utilized as the theoretical framework to guide this study. A sense of belonging is a student's mental attachment to a society that measures the magnitude of the academic and social inclusion experience in a college environment (Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is a blend of cognitive, affective, and behavior elements (Strayhorn, 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). Students who believe that they belong (cognitive) and feel connected (affective) are inclined to attend classes (behavior) more than students who experience a negative

social belonging. Strayhorn (2012) describes a sense of belonging as a fundamental human need and motivation required of everyone.

The major findings of this study were:

1. As Black female college students at SEU, the students encountered obstacles such as being first-generation college students, invalidation, alienation, and financial difficulties, which may have affected their persistence (RQ1).

The findings from the student participants' semi-structured interviews were quite interesting and unexpected. The results indicated that all the students had encountered a challenge or barrier before and during their college journey. The Black female college students' experiences included many challenges, including the responsibility of raising a family, financial difficulties, psychological disorders, social barriers, lack of voice, feelings of invalidation, and being a first-generation college student in which their experiences distinguish them from their female peers (Banks & Dohy, 2019). These barriers were reflected in student statements such as the following Krystal Michelle stated, "*I'm the only one in my family to go to college.*" Madison stated, "*So financial aid is always something that I just like dread having to do with just because it just makes the process of just getting into my classes and going to school harder because I have to worry about, you know what if this doesn't come in in time and what if I have to leave my classes or leave my dorm, which I'm currently staying in and so it can be a little bit anxiety.*" Strategies to reduce or break down these challenges could improve retention and degree completion rates and promote a sense of belonging (Mintz, 2019).

2. A diverse or culturally competent faculty and staff could motivate Black female students to persist through college (RQ1).

The student participants voiced the need for better diversity and representation of Black females within faculty and staff positions to serve as role models. Two students described several faculty members as culturally incompetent and unable to support their needs as Black female undergraduate students. Cultural competence is important in contributing to Black females' academic success and the quality of services provided to promote a positive sense of belonging, retention, and success (Thompson et al., 2019, p. 127). Several student participants have not had the opportunity of being taught by a Black female instructor. Diamond stated, "*I didn't even have any Black female teachers. Up until this point, I haven't, I haven't had one except one substitute like a day.*" Ashley C. stated, "*I probably had one professor who looked like me and she was in diversity. So, I feel like that's kind of a problem.*" Jessie stated, "*I feel it when it comes to the diversity, I don't see a lot. And even though like I know SEU, they're trying to like promote diversity and everything. My whole time being here, I think only had one female Black professor. I had a lot of professors, I had one Black professor. I had two Asian professors and the rest of my professors White male.*"

The students reiterated the importance of diversity within the departments and how discouraging it could be not to have Black female instructors to connect with or build a relationship with for guidance. Minorities, underprivileged students, and first-generation college students are likely to feel disconnected from the campus environment, making sense of belonging more significant to these populations (Strayhorn, 2015; Hussain & Jones, 2019). Improving diversity within faculty and staff could encourage professional development for Black female students and a sense of belonging (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

3. The student participants were most knowledgeable about academic advising, tutoring, the academic library, counseling center, and financial support services; however, they did not take full advantage and use the services (RQ2).

The researcher established that students are slightly or extremely knowledgeable of academic advising, tutoring, academic library, counseling center, and financial support services from the survey results. Although knowledgeable of the counseling student support service, six student participants did not use the services out of fear of being judged and stigmatized, lengthy paperwork, or the inability to schedule due to a waitlist, but they expressed the need for the service. Maya stated, "*I have not had counseling, but I need to.*" Krystal Michelle stated the following about the counseling center, "*I was in the process of filling out, the paperwork it's like a really long packet but I haven't got to that and is incredibly long.*" Ashley C. stated the following, "*It's already. a stigma enough and our community to go and get go get help and go into a counseling building. So, it's like it's not a warm welcome. It's just like in, I can't help you. Okay, do this? When instead of them inviting you warmly.*" Depression and anxiety are mental health conditions that decrease students' chances of persisting through college (Ashley, 2014; Jones & Sam, 2018). Taking advantage of the counseling center would help reduce Black female students' stress that would connect them to the college, increasing their sense of belonging (Avent Harris & Wong, 2018).

4. The student participants were not well informed about the opportunities for mentoring and did not know about the campus food bank to take advantage of the services (RQ2).

The results of the student participants survey indicate a large percentage of students are extremely unknowledgeable or slightly unknowledgeable of the campus food bank and

mentoring student support services, which lead to a large percentage of students that have not taken advantage or benefited from the campus food bank or mentoring student support services. Five student participants elaborated in the interview how they were unaware of the campus food bank or thought it was only available during the holiday seasons. Jessie stated, "*I didn't know, we had it*." Nina questioned, "*Is that like the cafeteria?*" before the researcher explained the food bank and the purpose of the service. Krystal Michelle elaborated, "*I didn't know of any resources for that. I haven't tried because I didn't know where, how were the hours or they and there's no information on the food bank or the eligibility or what you have to provide in order to receive any food*." The students recommended for the campus food bank service to be better advertised to Black female students.

The staff member from the campus food bank indicated that the service is not heavily advertised but that they partner with the campus health center to target female students to make them aware of available food resources and feminine hygiene products. From the literature, food insecurity is a known concern among disadvantaged neighborhoods and Black students (Wood et al., 2016a; Wood & Harris, 2018). Students who encounter food insecurity experience a low sense of belonging, unlikely to connect with faculty, unlikely to take advantage of campus services, lack confidence in their academic abilities, consider college ineffective, and unmotivated to pursue an education (Wood & Harris, 2018).

As well, five student participants were not aware mentoring was an option. Ashley C. responded, " *I never, I didn't know we had mentoring, That's one of the services. I wish they would have let us know or been more promoted so that I could have utilized that myself*." Nina replied, "*I don't even know there was like a mentoring thing going on. They definitely need to promote that because I didn't even know there was a mentor program of student service offered*

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on campus." The students indicated that mentoring was definitely a student support service they would have taken advantage of to make their college journey and experience more pleasant, included, and accepted. Madison was aware of mentoring being available and stated "*So I have not had any mentoring yet. I think I'll be assigned to a mentor next semester when I start my junior year. I would love if that service could be offered earlier in my degree program, even if not my freshman year. I think at the beginning of this year would have been my sophomore year. It would have been really helpful as well. I'm just because I'm already into a lot of my upper-level major courses since I did a lot of dual enrollment and stuff. And so having that Mentor would have been super helpful, a little bit earlier.*" The literature explains how mentoring supports students' social interaction and can promote campus engagement to build a friendly, positive campus environment that enhances students' sense of belonging (McClain et al., 2014; Palmer et al., 2014).

Mentoring is a service available to students who apply to the servant leadership program in which students are required to maintain a minimum 2.5 GPA. However, the staff member of mentoring has connected Black female students who were not a part of the servant leadership program with mentors. Students who are in the servant leadership program are assigned a mentor their freshman year. Mentoring develops relationships that could encourage, aspire, support, and strengthen Black female students' self-confidence in college, leading to increased retention and graduation rates (Bynum, 2015; Tolbert, 2015). SEU has recognized the importance of mentoring. The mentoring staff member has assisted staff members from other areas to develop a servant leadership program and a first-generation mentoring program open to all SEU students. The two initiative can assist Black female students by promoting a sense of

belonging and supporting their academic needs by addressing some of the barriers Black female students encounter.

5. The student participants did not perceive that they benefited from the following student support services tutoring, the academic library, counseling center, and financial support services, even though they were most knowledgeable of them (RQ2).

Although students are knowledgeable of tutoring, academic library services, and financial support services to some extent, many have not used or benefited from the student support services. All the student participants used the academic library services as a study hall, rented a book, or borrowed a laptop; one student indicated that they participated in the Black history month activities.

Although the survey data indicated high knowledge and use of advising, the student participants' interview responses varied for academic advising. While some students have built a relationship with their academic advisor, others expressed how their advisor was not helpful or did not contribute to their college commitment.

Seven student participants revealed they had not used or continued to use tutoring out of fear of being judged or a tutor's unavailability for their subject area. Two student participants who used tutoring explained how they felt unwelcome at the reception area but felt more comfortable during their one-on-one with their tutor. Providing academic tutoring to Black female students provides peer support and encourages a sense of belonging, increasing their retention and graduation rates (Gabriel, 2016; Pugatch & Wilson, 2018).

The student participants who utilized the campus food bank and mentoring student support services indicated that the two student support services played a significant role in

contributing to their commitment and persistence. The campus food bank and mentoring made the Black female students feel valued and connected during difficult and uncertain moments as college students.

Krystal Michelle described her experience with mentoring, "*It was non-judgmental. It was to help understand who I was. And what type of learning that would help me be successful. Like, I felt more the most personal because I shared the strategies that helped me back in high school to pass, you know, I have to have some type of, you know, study skills. So I just described that with them and you know and it made me feel important that they asked and listened and took that into consideration.*" Maya stated, "*I'll say the mentoring helped a lot. I feel like if I didn't have that Mentor or if I didn't connect with the food bank, then I will have a lot less Clarity on what I want to do.*"

6. The student participants' sense of belonging was enhanced through their involvement with clubs and organizations versus student support services (RQ3).

The student participants were all involved in a club or organization that enhanced their sense of belonging at SEU. Four student participants were involved in multiple clubs or organizations. The student participants were able to get peer support from their club members that made them feel welcome which motivated and encouraged them to persist through college. Ashely C stated, "*I got involved with SAC. And they're very well diverse and they have, they host a lot of events, of course. And they do make you feel welcome.*" Jay stated the following, "*I joined the pride Club. So, that was a good experience for me. It's a student-led organization. I mean, we don't all we do. We're okay. So, we, we just get together and encourage people who are maybe part of community, community allies, whatever to come, you know, speak and be free. That's really all we do. Just let them be free and speak if they want to speak.*" Diamond stated

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the following, "*I'm a part of three clubs. You can have connections in different clubs and it it just gives you something else. You know, filter for your time where besides academics and they're kind of when you're around like-minded people, that pushes you to want to, you know, keep going for yourself.* " Campus engagement enhanced the Black female students' sense of belonging and commitment to SEU (Palmer et al., 2014). Students involved in clubs and organizations are encouraged through knowledge, dispositions, and social connections from student-initiated retention events (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005).

      7. The student support services staff members were aware of the importance of Black female students developing a sense of belonging but did not target the population to promote a sense of belonging (RQ3).

The staff members of the student support services provided some very insightful information. The student support services have processes, procedures, and goals to increase the student population's retention and graduation rates, but none geared towards Black female undergraduate students' college experiences. Academic advising is mandated for all students. However, several student participants reiterated how their academic advisor is not helpful or contributed to their SEU commitment. The mandated advising can be utilized as an opportunity to connect with Black female students to help them break down retention barriers and develop a sense of belonging for Black female students during their first semester of enrollment.

The campus food bank processes, procedures, and goals targeted at-risk students. The student support services provide resources to students in a discreet method. The food bank recognized food insecurity being a barrier for students and did not want to impose any additional barriers to students seeking food resources. Therefore, the questions on the food bank request form are kept to a minimum. Although the food bank does not have a diverse staff, the student

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support services have established relationships with Black female students utilizing the service. The food bank operates on a relationship-oriented approach which has created a positive experience for Black female students during a difficult moment. The three student participants that used the services spoke of the quality of services and the relationship developed from the food bank staff members.

The academic library does not seem to promote a sense of belonging and does not target Black female students to take advantage of their services. African American readings and Black history month panel discussions are programming services the student support services host could draw Black female undergraduate students to the academic library for a positive social belonging experience. The academic library goal is to meet students at their level of need to assist in their academic progress. The library staff members seek assistance from the undergraduate faculty members and tutoring to notify the academic library of what is needed in the classroom. The academic library partnership with other offices can help build and improve an effective education infrastructure while promoting retention for Black female undergraduate students (Godfrey et al., 2017).

Student support services are an important factor to Black female students' persistence in college and can enhance their academic success (Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista, 2005). The availability of resources, programs, and the ability to build supportive relationships with faculty and staff is critical to Black females' academic performance (Phinney et al., 2011; Isacco & Morse, 2015). Student support services are a direct connection to increasing Black female retention rate. Student support services help build relationships to provide useful insight into academic programs and enhance self-confidence, inspiration, commitment, and performance (Isacco & Morse, 2015). Students should be strategically targeted and aware of student support

services to address educational challenges and available resources to help them take full advantage of their available academic services (Tovar, 2015). Although SEU student support services do not target specific student populations, the staff members expressed the importance of students taking advantage of services within their area, developing a relationship with Black female undergraduate students to promote a sense of belonging, and employing a diverse staff.

Limitations of the Study

The study explored the experiences of Black female undergraduate students at a single PWI. The study was limited to the experiences and perceptions of Black female undergraduate students' who volunteered to participate in the study. A limitation of the study was the sample size of the student participants' interview pool. There was a low response rate for the semi-structured interviews with the student participants. Although many students consented to participate in Phase 2 of the study, they did not follow through with confirming an interview date and time. The student participants' experiences do not reveal or represent all Black female undergraduate students' experiences attending a PWI. The Black female students' experiences were not compared to the experiences of their White female peers.

Several of the staff members of student support services that were invited did not participate in the study. Therefore, the researcher was unable to corroborate the Black females' experiences with using their service. Additionally, no further information was available to understand the processes, procedures, and goals of the student support services and how they relate to the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of the study, the researcher recommends the following for future research.

1. The study should be replicated with White female undergraduate students. Doing so would allow the researcher to compare White female undergraduate students' findings with Black female undergraduate students' findings to determine if the two populations' college experiences and perceptions differ.

2. The study be extended to other PWIs within the state to compare the perceptions and college experiences of Black female undergraduate students.

3. Extend the study to include all student support services. Two of the student participants were in their senior year and questioned why career services were not a part of the study. Expanding future research to include all student support services could address Black female undergraduate students' needs from all areas of support to improve their retention rates by enhancing their sense of belonging.

Research studies have shown that Black female undergraduate students' college experiences at a PWI have implications on their retention and graduation rates (Hannon et al., 2016; Walls & Hall, 2018). Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a PWI continue to face challenges and barriers as they struggle to support the population's needs for academic success (Hannon et al., 2016).

Implications of the Study

Every encounter with Black female students has a determining factor in the students taking advantage of the available student support services. As Black female students' college enrollment rates increase at PWIs, the institutions must improve the resources and support for Black female students to enhance their social belonging. Institutions should:

1. Solicit insight from Black female college students could influence changes in policies, procedures, and marketing of student support services for intentional

support. However, targeting Black female undergraduate students specifically
could be a challenge for student support services considering the staff of the areas
is already at capacity.

2. Evaluate student support services based on the students' insight could ensure
    institutions are not operating as one size fits all and can help students connect to
    the appropriate services.

3. Be aware of Black female undergraduate students' college experiences as they
    promote inclusion and diversity on campuses. Higher education institutions have
    implemented diversity programs to attract Black female students but have failed
    to expand faculty, staff, and administrators' diversity. Increasing the diversity or
    cultural competence among faculty, staff, and administrators is important and can
    promote mentorship, social belonging, improve diversity awareness, and
    encourage Black female college students (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Utilizing
    higher education job announcements diversity and inclusion platforms and
    websites could attract qualified Black females to fill open faculty and staff
    positions.

4. Identify pre-existing barriers upon acceptance and periodically evaluating how a
    sense of belonging is promoted throughout the campus could close the racial gap
    between the retention and graduation rates of Black and White females.
    Intentionally supporting Black female students could decrease their feelings of
    invalidation and isolation and help them defeat challenges they encounter to
    enhance their sense of belonging to be academically successful.

Conclusion

This exploratory qualitative single-case study examined 10 Black female undergraduate students' college experiences to explore the barriers they faced at SEU. This study found that the Black female undergraduate students encountered a challenge at one point or another and needed assistance or encouragement to persist through college. The researcher found that students engaged in clubs or organizations and have built a relationship with faculty, staff, or students had determination and confidence as a Black female undergraduate student enrolled at a PWI. However, the students were committed to earning a degree from SEU as a personal goal despite their challenges. Many students shared that they were not aware of student support services or did not feel comfortable using the services offered.

Therefore, PWIs should be intentional and strategic in marketing student support services to Black female undergraduate students. Providing intentional and relevant support to Black female undergraduate students could address those challenges the participants experienced. This study highlights how important it is for Black female undergraduate students to be engaged and build relationships with faculty, staff, or students to encourage and develop a sense of belonging. Furthermore, PWIs need to recognize how critical it is to have diversity within faculty, staff, and administration as mentors and motivate Black female undergraduate students.

The study contributes to the higher education sector, specifically PWIs, by emphasizing how critical a sense of belonging is to increase the persistence and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a PWI. The study's implications could assist PWIs in developing and implementing initiatives that directly target Black female undergraduate students to make them aware of available student support services and enhance their sense of belonging.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Students Participant Invitation Email

Dear _____

My name is Catrina Smith-Edmond, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling, Foundations, & Leadership at Columbus State University. I am conducting a research study to fulfill my doctoral degree requirements, and I am inviting you to participate in the study. Phase 1 of the study would consist of a web-based online survey that would take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

A case study on the perception of Black female undergraduate students at South Eastern University will be conducted. The topic of my dissertation is "*Increasing the Persistence and Graduation Rates of Black Female Undergraduate Students at a Predominantly White Institution*." The purpose of my study is to explore factors that affect the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution.

It is important to know the following:

- Participation is voluntary
- Your identification will be confidential
- Data gathered will be confidential

Please follow the link to the survey if you are interested in participating in the study. You will first approach a consent form before being directed to the survey. Please feel free to contact me at smithedmond_catrina@columbusstate.edu or 706-326-0637 if you have additional questions. Thank you for your consideration.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Best Regards,

Catrina Smith-Edmond

Student Participants Survey Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Catrina Smith-Edmond, a student in the Doctoral of Education program within the Department of Counseling, Foundations, & Leadership at Columbus State University. The study will be supervised by Dr. Tina Butcher.

I. Purpose:

The purpose of this project is to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution.

II. Procedures:

You have been identified as a Black female undergraduate student currently enrolled at South Eastern University. To participate in the data collection phase of the study, you will be required to complete and submit a self-reported survey, which will collect your demographics (names, age, gender, race, major, enrollment status, current number of credit hours enrolled, classification, GPA, eligibility for Financial Aid Pell Grant, and clubs/organizations). In addition, your student support services usage, frequency of student support services used, knowledge of student support services, benefits from student support services, and clubs/organizations the participants are involved in on-campus will also be collected. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. You will be asked to complete the survey within three days. The self-reported survey will be constructed using Qualtrics, a web-based survey software application available through Columbus State University's Technology Department. The web-based survey will include a check box for student participants who are willing to participate in phase 2 of the study, consisting of a semi-structured interview with each participant. The survey will be available for two weeks from the initial email date. The duration of the research project is expected to last approximately four months. The data collected may be used for future research projects.

III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:

The Principal Researcher is an employee at South Eastern University. Therefore, the student participants could have been assisted by the researcher with their admission process. This could cause the student participants to be hesitant in participating in the study. The student participants will have the option to select a pseudonym. A password-protected computer will be used to collect data and stored on a SEU network drive accessible by the researcher and Co-Principal only.

IV. Potential Benefits:

The benefits to the student participants could expose students to academic and non-academic student support services they may not be fully aware of. The study could also encourage students to seek assistance from the academic and non-academic student support services to increase their potential of academic success. The anticipated benefits

of this study could impact future students at this institution and other colleges and universities. The implications include developing and implementing unique processes to recruit and promote student support services and provide new ideas to support Black female undergraduate students' academic success.

V. Costs and Compensation:

There is no cost or compensation associated with the study.

VI. Confidentiality:

The student participants will be given the option to use a pseudonym to protect their identity. Data collected and analyzed will be stored on a password-protected computer to ensure the participants' confidentiality is maintained and to store the electronic files. The data will be stored on a SEU network drive accessible by the researcher only. All data will be deleted after five years. The files will be deleted if the researcher's employment ends before the five years and transferred to a secure personal drive accessible by the researcher only.

VII. Withdrawal:

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve a penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Catrina Smith-Edmond at 706-326-0637 or SmithEdmond_Catrina@ColumbusState.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu.

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By selecting the *I agree* radial and *Submit*, I agree to participate in this research project. [If participation is dependent upon the participant being 18 years of age or older, you must include a statement here confirming the age.]

     ○ I agree.   ○ I do not agree.

<div style="text-align:center">

Submit

</div>

Student Participants Survey

Name:	
What name do you want to use in the research for confidentiality?	
What is your age?	
What is your major?	
Are you enrolled as a Full-Time student?	
Are you enrolled as a Part-Time student?	
How many credit hours are you enrolled in?	
What is your student classification?	
What is your grade point average (GPA)?	
Are you eligible for the Financial Aid Pell Grant?	
What clubs/organizations are you involved in?	

Please indicate if you are knowledgeable of the following student support services at South Eastern University:

Student Support Services	Extremely Unknowledgeable	Slightly Unknowledgeable	Slightly Knowledgeable	Extremely Knowledgeable
Academic Advising				
Tutoring				
Academic Library Services				
Mentoring				
Counseling Center				
Financial Support Services				
Campus Food Bank				

Please indicate how often you have used the following student support services during your enrollment at South Eastern University:

Student Support Services	0 Time	1 Time	2 Times	3 Times	4 Times	5 or more Times
Academic Advising						
Tutoring						
Academic Library Services						
Mentoring						
Counseling Center						
Financial Support Services						
Campus Food Bank						

Please indicate if you have benefited from the following student support services at South Eastern University:

Student Support Services	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Academic Advising				
Tutoring				
Academic Library Services				
Mentoring				
Counseling Center				
Financial Support Services				
Campus Food Bank				

Phase 2: Individual Interview of the Research Study

Please check the following box if you are willing to participate and schedule an individual interview after the researcher has analyzed this survey data. The interview will be conducted via Google Meet web video at a future date and time agreed upon by the participant and researcher. An email will be sent to confirm the date and time.
_____ I am willing to be contacted and participate in an individual interview as part of the research study.

Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Catrina Smith-Edmond, a student in the Doctoral of Education program within the Department of Counseling, Foundations, & Leadership at Columbus State University. The study will be supervised by Dr. Tina Butcher.

I. Purpose:

> The purpose of this project is to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution.

II. Procedures:

> You have been identified as a Black female undergraduate student currently enrolled at South Eastern University. To participate in phase 2 of the study, you will be required to complete and submit a self-reported survey, which will collect your demographics (names, age, gender, race, major, enrollment status, current number of credit hours enrolled, classification, GPA, eligibility for Financial Aid Pell Grant, and clubs/organizations). In addition, your student support services usage, frequency of student support services used, knowledge of student support services, benefits from student support services, and clubs/organizations the participants are involved in on-campus will also be collected. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. You will be asked to complete the survey within three days. The self-reported survey will be constructed using Qualtrics, a web-based survey software application available through Columbus State University's Technology Department. The web-based survey will include a check box for the student participants to indicate if they are willing to participate in Phase 2 of the study, consisting of a semi-structured interview with each participant. You will be asked whether you agree or disagree to be contacted for a person-to-person semi-structured interview. The interview will include 14 semi-structured interview questions and will be conducted via web video that should not exceed 2 hours. Interviews will be conducted for two weeks from the initial date. The duration of the research project is expected to last approximately four months. The data collected may be used for future research projects.

III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:

> The Principal Researcher is an employee at South Eastern University. Therefore, the student participants could have been assisted by the researcher with their admission process. This could cause the student participants to be hesitant in participating in the study. The student participants will have the option to select a pseudonym. A password-protected computer will be used to collect data and stored on a SEU network drive accessible by the researcher and Co-Principal only.

IV. Potential Benefits:

The benefits to the student participants could expose students to academic and non-academic student support services they may not be fully aware of. The study could also encourage students to seek assistance from the academic and non-academic student support services to increase their potential for academic success. The anticipated benefits of this study could impact future students at this institution and other colleges and universities. The implications include developing and implementing unique processes to recruit and promote student support services and provide new ideas to support Black female undergraduate students' academic success.

V. Costs and Compensation:

There are no cost or compensation associated with the study.

VI. Confidentiality:

The student participants will be given the option to use a pseudonym to protect their identity. Data collected and analyzed will be stored on a password-protected computer to ensure the participants' confidentiality is maintained and to store the electronic files. The data will be stored on a SEU network drive accessible by the researcher only. All data will be deleted after five years. The files will be deleted if the researcher's employment ends before the five years and transferred to a secure personal drive accessible by the researcher only.

VII. Withdrawal:

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve a penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Catrina Smith-Edmond at 706-326-0637 or SmithEdmond_Catrina@ColumbusState.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu.

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By selecting the *I agree* radial and *Submit*, I agree to participate in this research project.

○ I agree.
○ I do not agree

Submit

Student Participants Interview Protocol and Questions

Date:

Time:

Hello:_____. How are you today? Thank you for taking the time to talk with me and participating in phase 2 of my research study. As you may already know, I am Catrina Smith-Edmond, a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling, Foundations, & Leadership at South Eastern University. The purpose of this interview is to explore factors that affect the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution. You will be asked about your experience as a Black female undergraduate student at SEU. As a participant of the study, you need to know that:
·   Your participation is voluntary
·   There are no right or wrong answers to any questions
·   You can ask questions at any point throughout the interview
·   You are asked to answer each question to the best of your knowledge
·   The interview will be recorded to reference later and to avoid delays in writing down your answers
·   Your information and data gathered will be confidential. A pseudonym will identify you.
·   Follow-up questions or afterthoughts after the conclusion of the interview can be emailed to me
·   There are no risks associated with participating in the study
·   There is no financial incentive for participating
Before we start the interview, I want to confirm that you received a copy of the consent form. If not, I can provide you with a copy. The interview will take approximately two hours. Do you have any questions? If not, we can get started with the interview not to hold you longer than needed.

1. Tell me a little about yourself?
   ● Where are you from?
   ● What is your family background?
2. How would you describe your experience at CSU as a Black female undergraduate student?
   ● Can you tell me about a negative experience you may have encountered and how that made you feel?
   ● Can you tell me about a positive experience you may have encountered and how that made you feel?
3. What challenges/barriers have you encountered as a Black female student at CSU that influence your decision to persist through college?
   ● Why were these experiences challenges/barriers?
   ● If none, why do you think you did not encounter any challenges/barriers?
4. How committed are you to earning a degree from CSU?
   ● Why are you committed to earning a degree from CSU?

- Why are you not committed to earning a degree from CSU?
5. Do you think there is enough representation of Black females on campus that can serve as role models? Role models can be students, faculty, or staff.
    - Can you tell me if you have a Black female role model on campus and if the individual is a student, staff or faculty? If so, who is the individual, and what department does the individual work?
    - Why are they a role model for you?
    - How did you connect with the individual to establish a relationship?
    - If no role model, why do you think you do not have a role model on campus?
6. Can you tell me about your experience with clubs/organizations you are involved in that encourage and motivate you to accomplish your academic goals?
    - How do you think these clubs/organizations support your academic goals?
7. As a Black female student, can you describe how these areas help you feel included/accepted on campus?
    - Academic Student Support Services (Academic advising, tutoring, academic library)
    - Non-academic student support services (Mentoring, counseling, financial support services, campus food bank)
    - Faculty
    - Staff
8. What individual or student support services contributed to your commitment and persistence as a Black female student at CSU?
    - If an individual or student support services contributed, how did they contribute to your commitment and persistence?
    - If no, why do you think you have not encountered an individual or student support services to contribute to your commitment or persistence?
9. Can you tell me about any experiences you have had with any student support services you have taken advantage of at CSU?
    - i. Academic Student Support Services (Academic advising, tutoring, academic library)
    - ii. Non-academic student support services (Mentoring, counseling, financial support services, campus food bank)
    - How would you describe these experiences and how they made you feel as a Black female student?
    - Can you tell me if these experiences had any effect on you using the service?
10. How would you describe your experiences with using the student support services?
    - i. Academic Student Support Services (Academic advising, tutoring, academic library)
    - ii. Non-academic student support services (Mentoring, counseling, financial support services, campus food bank)
    - What was your perception of the student support services you used?
    - How do you think these experiences have contributed to you as a Black female college student?
11. How do CSU student support services support you as a Black female student?
    - i. Academic Student Support Services (Academic advising, tutoring, academic library)

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        ii.   Non-academic student support services (Mentoring, counseling, financial support services, campus food bank)

12. Can you tell me about any student support services that you credit for contributing to your commitment/persistence at CSU?
        i.   Academic Student Support Services (Academic advising, tutoring, academic library)
        ii.   Non-academic student support services (Mentoring, counseling, financial support services, campus food bank)
- Why is the contribution from the student support services important to you?
- If no contribution, what student support services could you use to contribute to your commitment and persistence at CSU?

13. How would you describe CSU's effort to make you feel valued and included to take advantage of the student support services?
        i.   Academic Student Support Services (Academic advising, tutoring, academic library)
        ii.   Non-academic student support services (Mentoring, counseling, financial support services, campus food bank)

14. What changes would you recommend to CSU student support services to improve the experience for Black females?
        i.   Academic Student Support Services (Academic advising, tutoring, academic library)
        ii.   Non-academic student support services (Mentoring, counseling, financial support services, campus food bank)

That will conclude our interview. Thank you again for taking the time out of your day to speak with me. I appreciate your time and responses. The recorded interview will be transcribed, and a copy will be provided to you to review for accuracy. I will contact you as soon as the transcription is available to review your responses as a part of the study's member checking process. Please feel free to contact me by email if you have any follow-up questions, would like to add anything to what was said today, or have afterthoughts.

Appendix F

Staff Members Interview Email:

Date:

Dear Staff,

My name is Catrina Smith-Edmond. I am an Ed.D. candidate in Curriculum and Leadership - Higher Education at Columbus State University. Currently, I am working on a research project titled A CASE STUDY: INCREASING THE PERSISTENCE AND GRADUATION RATES OF UNDERGRADUATE BLACK FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS.

The purpose of this project is to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution. Black females have been interviewed and provided their experience at SEU and their perception of your area. Your assistance is needed to understand the process and procedures from a student support services perspective to conduct the study successfully. This research may encourage Black female undergraduate students to seek assistance from academic and non-academic student support services to increase their potential academic success.

You have been identified as a staff member of a student support services. Therefore, you are being invited to participate in an individual interview that should take approximately 45-60 minutes to conduct. The interview will be conducted and recorded via Google Meet for research purposes only. The interviews will be later transcribed for data analysis purposes. Please complete the consent form enclosed at the provided link to participate. The consent form must be signed and returned before the interview. You will be asked to provide your available dates and time to schedule.

I kindly ask for your support in completing this study. You can contact me via email if you have any questions. I look forward to speaking with you.

Thank you for your participation in advance.

Best,
Catrina

Appendix G

Staff Members of Student Support Services Interview Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Catrina Smith-Edmond, a student in the Doctoral of Education program within the Department of Counseling, Foundations, & Leadership at Columbus State University. The study will be supervised by Dr. Tina Butcher.

VII.   **Purpose:**

The purpose of this project is to explore factors that affected the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution.

II. **Procedures:**

You have been identified as a staff member of an academic or non-academic student support service. To participate in the study's data collection, you will be required to complete and submit the consent form agreeing to participate in a person-to-person semi-structured interview for the study. You will be asked whether you agree or disagree to be contacted for a person-to-person semi-structured interview. The interview will be conducted via web video and should not exceed 1 hour. An agreed upon time and date for the scheduled interview will be sent by email after the completed consent form is received. The interview will include 10 semi-structured interview questions and will be conducted via web video that should not exceed 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be conducted for two weeks from the initial date. The duration of the research project is expected to last approximately four months. The data collected may be used for future research projects.

III. **Possible Risks or Discomforts:**

The Principal Researcher is an employee at South Eastern University. Therefore, the staff members may know, have worked, or will work with the researcher at some point. This could cause the staff members to be hesitant in participating in the study. A password-protected computer will be used to collect data and stored on a SEU network drive accessible by the researcher and Co-Principal only.

IV. **Potential Benefits:**

The benefits to the student participants could expose students to academic and non-academic student support services they may not be fully aware of. The study could also encourage students to seek assistance from the academic and non-academic student support services to increase their potential for academic success. The anticipated benefits of this study could impact future students at this institution and other colleges and universities. The implications include developing and implementing unique processes to recruit and promote student support services and provide new ideas to support Black female undergraduate students' academic success.

V. Costs and Compensation:

There is no cost or compensation associated with the study.

VI. Confidentiality:

The staff members' names will not be published. Data collected and analyzed will be stored on a password-protected computer to ensure the participants' confidentiality is maintained and to store the electronic files. The data will be stored on a SEU network drive accessible by the researcher only. All data will be deleted after five years. The files will be deleted if the researcher's employment ends before the five years and transferred to a secure personal drive accessible by the researcher only.

VII. Withdrawal:

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve a penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Catrina Smith-Edmond at 706-326-0637 or SmithEdmond_Catrina@ColumbusState.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu.

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By selecting the *I agree* radial and *Submit*, I agree to participate in this research project.

      ○ I agree.

      ○ I do not agree.

Submit

Staff of Student Support Services Interview Protocol and Questions

Date:

Time:

Hello:_____. How are you today? Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I am Catrina Smith-Edmond, a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling, Foundations, & Leadership at Columbus State University. As you may or may not know, there is a gap between Black female undergraduate students' retention rate and graduation rate compared to White females at Predominantly White Institutions. The purpose of this interview is to explore factors that affect the retention and graduation rates of Black female undergraduate students enrolled at a Predominantly White Institution. Black females have been interviewed and provided their experience at SEU and their perception of your area. Your assistance is needed to understand the process and procedures from a student support services perspective to conduct the study successfully. Ultimately, I hope that this study enhances Black female undergraduate students' college experience to improve their retention and graduation rates. As a participant of the study, you need to know that:

·   Your participation is voluntary
·   There are no right or wrong answers to any questions
·   You can ask questions at any point throughout the interview
·   You are asked to answer each question to your best of knowledge
·   The interview will be recorded to reference later and to avoid delays in writing down your answers
·   Follow-up questions or afterthoughts after the conclusion of the interview can be emailed to me
·   There are no risks associated with participating in the study
·   There is no financial incentive for participating

You received an introductory letter and consent form by email before today. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes to conduct. Let me know if you have any questions about the study. If not, we can get started.

1. What student support service do you represent as a faculty/staff?
   ● Tell me a little about your role.
2. Can you tell me about any unique processes your area has for serving Black female students on campus?
   ● If yes, can you explain how these processes have helped a Black female student you assisted and the steps you took?
   ● If not, what unique processes do you think could be implemented to serve Black female students on campus?
3. Can you tell me about a time you assisted a Black female student and describe the steps you utilized to help the student?
4. How much of your process, procedures, and goals were created based on what you know about Black female students on campus?

5. How do these processes, procedures, and goals aim to assist Black female students in persisting?
6. Can you describe how the student support service you represent promotes inclusion and diversity?
    - How do you think promoting inclusion and diversity would welcome Black females to use the student support services you represent?
    - If no promotion, do you think promoting inclusion and diversity is necessary for Black female students and foresee it happening in the near future? Can you explain in detail?
7. How does the student support service that you represent market/target/recruit Black female students to take advantage of your area's service?
8. What are you doing to make Black female students aware of the student support service you represent?
    - What are you not doing that could make Black female students aware?
9. Can you describe how the student support service you represent promotes social belonging?
    - How do you think promoting social belonging would welcome Black female students to use the student support service you represent?
    - If no promotion, do you think promoting social belonging is necessary for Black female students and foresee it happening in the near future?
10. How important does the student support service you represent think social belonging is to Black female students to persist through college?

That will conclude our interview. Thank you again for taking the time out of your day to speak with me. I appreciate your time and responses. The recorded interview will be transcribed, and a copy will be provided to you for accuracy. I will contact you as soon as the transcription is available to review your responses as a part of the study's member checking process. Please feel free to contact me by email if you have any follow-up questions, would like to add anything to what was said today, or have afterthoughts.

Appendix I

IRB Approval Letter

CSU IRB Application Protocol 21-062 Exempt Approval

3 messages

irb <irb@columbusstate.edu>   Wed, Mar 3, 2021 at 8:01 AM
To: Catrina Smith-Edmond <SmithEdmond_Catrina@columbusstate.edu>, Tina Butcher <Butcher_Tina@columbusstate.edu>
Cc: Institutional Review Board <instituional_review@columbusstate.edu>, CSU IRB <irb@columbusstate.edu>

Institutional Review Board

Columbus State University

Date: 03/03/2021

Protocol Number: 21-062

Protocol Title: INCREASING THE PERSISTENCE AND GRADUATION RATES
OF UNDERGRADUATE BLACK FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS

-

Principal Investigator: Catrina Smith-edmond

Co-Principal Investigator: Tina Butcher

Dear Catrina Smith-edmond:

The Columbus State University Institutional Review Board or representative(s) has reviewed your research proposal identified above. It has been determined that the project is classified as exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations and has been approved. You may begin your research project immediately.

Please note any changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at irb@columbusstate.edu or (706) 507-8634.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,

Andrew Dorbu, Graduate Assistant

Institutional Review Board
Columbus State University

*** Please note that the IRB is closed during holidays, breaks, or other times when the IRB faculty or staff are not available. Visit the **IRB Scheduled Meetings** page on the IRB website for a list of upcoming closures. ***