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NETWORK OF FOLX: APPLYING THE USE OF COMMUNITY CULTURAL
WEALTH TO THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FIRST-GENERATION HBCU
STUDENTS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Department of Educational and Organizational Leadership Development
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership—Higher Education

by
Maurice A. Williams, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

Despite improvements in the rates of college admission over the past few decades, college persistence and graduation rates continue to be problematic, particularly for marginalized students—students of color and students from low-income and/or first-generation families at all institutional types. When attention is shifted to Black first-generation students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), persistence research neglects to include how Black first-generation college students own their educational experience to gain access to college and persist through graduation nor does the research examine cultural factors that help these students persist through the college-going process. Building from both student persistence and community cultural wealth frameworks, the purpose of this study is to examine the lived pre-college experiences of Black first-generation HBCU students.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my ancestors, the tribe that raised me, those that continuously look out for me, and those that continue to bless me. I dedicate this work to my folx--my immediate family [Team 5] and my familial the Williams, Frasiere, Singletons, and Robinsons. Thank you for cultivating my cultural capital. You have all my love.

I dedicate this work to my educational communities for pushing me as well as exposing me to a positive, world class learning experience, and a firm foundation as I prepared for life after college. Charleston County School District and College of Charleston Upward Bound program, thank you for cultivating my cultural capital. You have all my love.

I dedicate this work to my mecca HBCU that sits on the Hill Top High in South Carolina, *Clafin University*, and my network of folx. Thank you for cultivating my Clafin Confidence and my cultural capital. You have all my love.

ASÈ.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“We don’t learn from experience, but by reflecting on experience.”
~Paulo Freire

When I reflect on the best years of my life, I often go back to my experience as a Black first-generation undergraduate student at my Historically Black College or University (HBCU), Claflin University. When I visited Claflin as a prospective student, I saw my future self being successful on campus. The environment was beautiful, warm, and nurturing, a place where I knew and felt I would be supported—A place where people looked like me and looked successful. Claflin University is the first HBCU in South Carolina and the first institution in the state to accept students regardless of ethnic origin, gender, race, or religion. It is also a place where Black students thrive. Claflin, my HBCU that sits on “The Hill Top High,” was what I needed as a Black, first-generation student in South Carolina. As the participants in the study reflect on their pre-college and HBCU experiences, I remember Freire’s quote by adding, “We learn from *our Black first-generation experience* by reflecting on *our Black first-generation experience*.”

Navigating American higher education institutions as a first-generation student is not easy. For Black first-generation students, navigating any college and/or university space can be overwhelming, as reflected by the alarming overall persistence and graduation rates for this group. However, HBCUs, a subset of minority-serving institutions (MSIs), were created to provide opportunities and structures of support for marginalized populations like Black first-generation students. For HBCUs, the average persistence rate overall is 61.7% (Baker et al., 2020). With a mission to advance Black Americans, these institutions boast high retention rates

for Black students. But...How do Black students at these institutions motivate themselves to earn their degree? Chapter one is organized to aid the reader in understanding the perspective of Black first-generation college students and the community cultural wealth they use to persist to and through college to earn their bachelor's degree at HBCUs and how HBCUs are structured to support Black first-generation students. This information is followed by the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research design summary, theoretical framework, limitations, delimitations, and defining key terms. The chapter culminates with a summary.

Background

Persistence research in higher education emerged in the early 1990s due to a need to understand patterns of student progression. It is increasingly common for students to transfer during their undergraduate education from two- to four-year institutions or to earn credits at multiple institutions. Since then, higher education institutions have spent the past decade making progress in enrolling and graduating students, particularly those who are the first in their families to go to college (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021). However, of the nearly 2.3 million students who entered higher education in 2013, approximately 1 million left their first institution within six years without receiving a college degree (Shapiro et al., 2019). This information includes all institution types. Today, student success has been recognized as the persistence to complete a degree at one or more institutions. Yet, persistence and graduation rates among Black college students, especially first-generation students, are essential in higher education.

According to the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (2019), 52% of students are first-generation, and these institutions are responsible for 22% of current bachelor's degrees granted to African Americans. HBCUs were founded and designed to support marginalized groups like Black first-generation students. These institutions originated in the mid-19th Century, a time in

the United States when educational opportunities for Black people were not merely limited but illegal in many regions, particularly the South (Butchart, 2010; Lovett, 2015). Since their existence, HBCUs have played essential roles in the perpetuation of Black culture, the improvement of Black community life, and the preparation of the next generation of the Black leadership (Allen et al., 2007). In addition to providing a supportive and nurturing environment for Black students, HBCUs graduate the most successful Blacks in America; however, little is known of how Black students at these institutions own their educational experience to persist through graduation from their perspective.

Much of the literature that focuses on the achievement and persistence of Black first-generation students in higher education is explained from a retention perspective (institutional efforts to retain students) instead of a persistence perspective (student motivation to enter and continue at the college). In addition, the literature neglects to examine or mention what types of cultural wealth they bring to their HBCU community to persist.

Statement of the Problem

College persistence and graduation rates continue to be problematic, particularly for marginalized students—students of color and students from low-income and/or first-generation families at all institutional types (Payne & Means, 2013). In 2017, Black students had the lowest persistence rate (66.2%), just over half of Black students returned to their starting institution (52.1%), and an additional 14.1% continued at a different institution (NSC, 2019). According to these stats, 30% of Black students leave higher education after the first year, on average. Largely absent from the existing literature are studies of persistence and graduation behaviors among HBCU students (Wilson, 2007). When attention is shifted to Black first-generation students at HBCUs, persistence research neglects to include how these students own their educational

experience to persist through the college going process, navigate their institution, and persist through graduation. This research examines cultural factors that help these students persist. Specifically, persistence to college. Despite limited examination of Black first-generation college student persistence, there is much to build upon as the higher education field manages the demographic shift (influx of students of color) on college and university campuses in America. Although HBCU graduation rates are low (32%), recent research indicates that HBCU graduates compare favorably with (non-Black) institutions when student-level factors are taken into consideration (e.g., first-generation student status).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived pre-college experiences of Black first-generation HBCU students. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do Black first-generation college graduates make sense of the community cultural wealth they brought with them to their undergraduate historically Black college or university (HBCU)?
2. What forms of community cultural wealth did Black first-generation students use during their pre-college journey, and how did it inform their student entry characteristics.

I identify Black first-generation HBCU graduates to understand how they persisted to their HBCU(s) from a cultural perspective. I illuminate their experiences using the community cultural wealth framework (inspired by critical race theory tenets) to provide a different perspective on how Black first-generation students navigate the entry point of higher education and persist through graduation using their voices and reflections. My lived experiences shaped my perspective to provide a critical lens and advocate for a different way of addressing the-Black first-generation student persistence phenomenon at HBCUs.

Research and Design Summary

For this study, I am interested in knowing how Black first-generation HBCU graduates make sense of the cultural capital they used during the college going process and persisted through to graduation. To do this, I utilized hermeneutic phenomenology, which allowed entrance into the participant's lived experiences and points of view. I utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to examine the lived experiences of Black first-generation HBCU graduates. Using this type of phenomenology as a research methodology, one must apply the skill of reading texts, such as the text of transcripts—spoken accounts of personal experience—and isolating themes as instructed by van Manen (1997). The study's goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the persistence behaviors of Black first-generation HBCU students and illuminate the forms of community cultural wealth they used to navigate their pre-college process and persist through to graduate from an HBCU with a bachelor's degree.

HBCUs are clustered mainly in the South and Southeast, with Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina having the highest concentration of these institutions (PNPI, 2019). I recruited participants who graduated from HBCUs located in the U.S. and abroad to conduct semi-structured interviews. After collecting data from the participants in the study, I analyzed the pre-college interview data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combine the statements into themes. I then wrote a textual description of the experiences of the participants, including a structural description of their experiences (the conditions, situations, or context in which they experienced the phenomenon). Finally, I developed a combined statement

of textural and structural descriptions to convey the essence of the experience (Creswell et al., 2007) using Microsoft excel.

Theoretical Framework

This study is centered on persistence. Specifically, pre-college persistence. Although I use a persistence framework in the literature review (Baker et al., (2020); Braxton et al, (2014); and Braxton et al. (2004)) to explain at what point of the college going process Black first-generation HBCU graduates use their forms of cultural capital, I also use the community cultural wealth framework to understand Black first-generation student pre-college persistence from a cultural perspective for this study. Community cultural wealth as a framework shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of communities of color and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005). Understanding these forms of cultural wealth and recognizing the community cultural wealth Black first-generation students use to gain access to their institution has the potential to play an essential part in understanding the persistence decisions of students at HBCUs.

Limitations

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of Black first-generation students at HBCUs. This study only captures the pre-college persistence journey. Also, the study lacks the voices of disabled and other marginalized communities. Another limitation was the unequal representation of genders. Lastly, the study was limited to the ability of participants to recall their experience. To address this limitation, I incorporated reflection activities for context.

Delimitations

This study investigated the lived experiences of Black first-generation HBCU students to understand how they make sense of the cultural factors they use to persist through the college going process. The graduates in the student had to be a first-generation college going student. I only interviewed HBCU graduates who went to schools federally designated as an HBCU. The participants (HBCU graduates) earned a bachelor's degree and identify as African American and/or Black.

Definition and Terms

- *African American and Black*—I use African American and Black interchangeably in the text. The participants in the study self-identify as African American or Black.
- *Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)*—The various forms of capital nurtured through cultural wealth include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005).
- *Cultural perspective*—referring to community cultural wealth framework and its forms of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).
- *First-Generation Student*—college students whose parents did not graduate from college with a bachelor's degree (Defreitas & Rinn, (2013); Center for First-Generation Student Success, (2020)
- *Folx*—substitution for “folk;” gender neutral language; a community of people
- *Historically Black Colleges or University (HBCUs)* - Institutions that were established prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans and meeting the criteria set forth in the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Higher Education Act, 1965).

- *Persistence*—is the desire and actions of a student to stay at the institution from the time they begin their first year of college through completion of a bachelor’s degree (Berger et al., 2012).
- *Persistence Rate*—is measured by the percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year (NCS, 2020).
- *Retention*—describes an institution’s ability to consecutively retain a student from admissions through graduation (Berger, et at., 2012; Falcone, 2011).

Summary

In chapter one, I provided an overview of the study that examined the lived experiences of Black first-generation HBCU graduates. The sections in this chapter are organized to orient the reader to how I provided a different perspective on Black first-generation college students, the cultural wealth they use to persist to college and earn their bachelor’s degree from an HBCU and learn how HBCUs are structured to support Black first-generation students.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2009, former President Barack Obama set an ambitious goal for the nation: By 2020, the United States will have the highest proportion of adults with college degrees. For the college-educated, the job market is growing (Reid & Moore, 2008). However, the United States currently ranks 19th in graduation rates among 28 countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development’s “Education at a Glance” report which tracks education investment and performance of wealthier democracies (Hanson, 2021). Back then, the President’s goal was central to what is now called the “college completion agenda,” a national effort aimed at increasing the number of students who graduate from college once they enroll (Schneider & Yin, 2011). With our country struggling to compete in the global marketplace — and with millions of skilled jobs left unfilled, there is a heightened focus on understanding how our students are performing academically and in ensuring that they are college and career ready (College Board, 2013). Only slightly more than half of the students who started at a four-year college or university graduated from that school with a bachelor’s degree within six years (Schneider & Yin, 2011). At the onset of the new millennium, at highly selective institutions, the dropout rate was 8%, and, at less selective institutions, it was as high as 35% (Berger & Metzner, 2005). At open enrollment institutions, the departure rate (percentage of students that leave and why they leave) was nearly 50% (Devarics & Roach, 2000). The numbers are worse when considering the retention and persistence rates for students from underrepresented minority groups, first-generation students, and lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Berger & Metzner, 2005) due to several contextual factors at play. The Obama administration saw the successful completion of postsecondary education as essential to American competitiveness (Schneider & Yin, 2011).

While it is widely acknowledged that increasing college completion is critical to sustaining our nation's competitiveness and prosperity long into the future, gains will only be possible if more students graduate from high school having acquired the skills and knowledge that research demonstrates are critical to college and career readiness (College Board, 2013).

Chapter two provides a review of literature on college access research, retention research, persistence research, first-generation college students, and the community cultural wealth model to ground the study. In accordance with Lochmiller & Lester (2017), I examine previous retention, and persistence research findings and identify salient opportunities for research; provide an opportunity to ground the study in persistence and community cultural wealth frameworks so that the findings and interpretations link to existing scholarly discussion; and provide the resources from which to frame my analysis. I continue the literature review, by conceptualizing the label *first-generation student* and review how these students persist to and through college. I then discuss the importance of using retention and persistence concepts interchangeably in higher education. Afterwards, I provide a brief review of literature on persistence at HBCUs, their enrollment, and the experiences of Black first-generation students. After explaining the model, I use the community cultural wealth framework to provide an anti-deficit perspective to the conversation on Black student persistence in higher education. The literature included in this chapter highlights aspects of current research to support the need for a shift in perspective away from deficit framing when studying Black first-generation college students at HBCUs and ground the study to link the findings to the existing conversation about these students. This is achieved by using two existing theoretical models (persistence and community cultural wealth) to better understand Black first-generation student college going process and persistence in higher education, specifically at HBCUs. After reviewing college

access, retention, and persistence research, I begin my examination of the literature by conceptualizing the term first-generation student. A group that has gained an immense amount of attention and institutional support over the years.

College Access and Readiness

Graduating from high school is no longer enough in American education for most families, yet students increasingly leave high school unready for college. Almost everyone will need some education or training beyond high school at some point in their career, and young people should create a habit of constantly improving their professional skills (Olwell, 2016). Even for those students who enroll in college, many struggle academically and personally in a post-secondary setting and eventually drop out (Conley, 2007; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). The transition from high school to college for students is a critical step that establishes the foundation for a student's educational attainment, career options, preparation, and social mobility (Contreras, 2011). The term college access links several different issues: how low- and middle-income families pay college costs, how students traditionally underrepresented in higher education overcome discrimination and social disadvantage, and how well high school graduates are prepared for college-level work (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2001).

The processes by which students move from high school to college—including college choice, access, readiness, matriculation, and completion—are more important than ever before (Green, 2006). However, not all students experience these processes in the same ways; for some students, the transition from high school to college can be extremely difficult (Green, 2006). For first-generation students of color, gaining access and being ready to transition to college can be a great challenge. In recognition of these challenges federal, state, and local governing bodies have instituted policies, practices, and programs to increase first-generation participation in higher

education (Green, 2006). States have also undertaken ambitious changes to high school graduation requirements to try to boost college going amongst these students (Olwell, 2016).

Several studies (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002) focuses on individuals, programs, and experiences that students perceived as influencing their decision to pursue postsecondary education and the experiences that contributed to their successes in postsecondary education (Reid & Moore, 2008). In pursuit, research on college access falls into four categories: (a) student trait indicators for college aspiration, attendance, and persistence; (b) school reform efforts for at-risk students; (c) college intervention and outreach programs; and (d) curriculum alignment of the P-16 system (Camblin, Gullatt, & Klopott, 2003). These four areas are outlined below in further detail. Ultimately, the goal is college readiness. According to Conley (2012) a student who is ready for college can qualify for and succeed in entry level, credit bearing college courses leading to a bachelor's degree without the need for remedial or developmental coursework.

Student trait indicators for college aspirations, attendance, and persistence. Many students aspire to postsecondary schooling but are under- or mis-informed about admission criteria, the application process, and financial requirements (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Research on college readiness systems highlight individual-level indicators of whether a student is on track to be ready for college. These systems rely on statistical models that incorporate data readily available to districts via administrative datasets, such as test scores and enrollment patterns, to signal whether a student is on track to graduate from high school (Kless, Soland, & Santiago, 2013). These indicators fall in three categories, standardized test preparation and scores (SAT and ACT), courses taken (college prep, advanced placement, etc.) and course performance (grade point average). According to Kless et al. (2013),

the literature on early warning systems fails to include important indicators of a student's college readiness: (1) the rigor of the courses he or she takes, (2) motivation to succeed in school and go on to postsecondary education, and (3) knowledge of how to enroll in, finance, and complete college.

Implicit in the author's approach is a shift from focusing on simply completing high school to graduating ready for college academically, attitudinally, and in terms of basic knowledge about how postsecondary education works. According to Conley (2012), a student's interest and post-high school aspirations influence the precise knowledge and skill profiles necessary to be ready for post-secondary studies. This notion of "being ready" aligns with the nature of this study.

Conley and French (2014) created a conceptual model that consist of 4 keys that encompasses a comprehensive list of constructs that have been tied empirically and theoretically to college and career readiness. The four keys are actionable and derived from analysis of entry-level postsecondary courses or from related research on college readiness and success. The four keys include:

“thinking skills (key cognitive strategies), attitudes toward and understanding of the structure of the content being presented (key content knowledge), ownership of learning in the form of self-regulatory behaviors along with specific methods for being an effective learner (key learning skills and techniques), and contextual knowledge required to select a college, apply successfully, cope with financial demands, understand the culture of college, and be aware of how the role of college student is different from that of high school student (key transition knowledge and skills).” (p. 1019)

School reform efforts for at-risk students. For various reasons, many underrepresented youths do not participate in college prep studies and therefore are unable to succeed in the transition from high school to college. According to St. John and Musoba (2011) there has been a concerted effort by states and the federal government to raise the standard for secondary education since publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). School reform efforts that explicitly address the predictors of college going behavior are best suited to helping students achieve successful college enrollment and completion (Martinez & Klopott, (2005).

Resources and expectations at the setting level in classrooms and schools are prominent factors affecting students' knowledge and aspirations about college (Kless et al., 2013). Conley et al. (2010) define college-going culture as "an environment where adults intentionally emphasize the value and attainability of postsecondary education" (p. 19). Components of a college going culture include informing, emphasizing, and providing support to students during their college going process. Studies suggest that students are more likely to enroll in college if school staff help them with components of the college going process like college applications or entrance exam preparation (Perna et al., 2007; Venezia & Kirst, 2005).

College intervention and outreach programs. Not all students, even high achievers, have access to the information within their school to successfully transition to college without the assistance of programs that either partner with schools or are in the community (Contreras, 2011). Intervention programs are often the place where high-achieving minority students receive a myriad of support services to excel academically (Contreras, 2011). These programs increase students' aspirations, expose them to the rigors of college at an early age, and provide interventions aimed at increasing their academic performance which are proven as instrumental

in illuminating the barriers to equitable opportunity for higher education (Fenske, Geranios and Moore, 1997; Perna, 2002). Pre-collegiate academic development programs are significant in helping disadvantaged students achieve the same scholastic achievement as their more privileged counterparts (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Local governments and other community leaders have launched initiatives to increase college completion rates, mobilizing stakeholders from the education, non-profit, and corporate sectors to share responsibility for achieving these goals (Pathways to College Network, 2012).

The American Youth Policy Forum (2009) found that students who participated in the programs were more likely to be engaged in school, take advanced courses, apply for financial aid, enroll in college, earn postsecondary degrees, and find employment. Pre-collegiate academic development programs also provide educationally disadvantaged students with alternative learning opportunities (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). In addition, these programs

offer direct services to students and families that provide information and assistance in college admissions; motivational activities that include mentoring, college visits, and advocacy; academic enrichment and support, including tutoring, study groups, instruction in college preparation subject matter and college entrance exam preparation; and counseling and advising (Gullatt & Jan, 2003, p. 3)

For example, federal programs such as Upward Bound and GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) have an explicit goal in mind: successful application to, enrollment in, and completion of college (Olwell, 2016). Gear UP programs are designed to get students both excited about and ready for college (Olwell, 2016). Programs such as GEAR UP have worked to help entire grades of middle school students (usually seventh grade). GEAR

UP, launched in 1999 as a partnership between low-performing, high poverty middle schools, universities, businesses, and community-based agencies, provides secondary school systems with exposure for every child to a pre-college curriculum (Fields, 2001; Perna and Swail, 2001).

Shifting from the middle school level, Upward Bound was founded in 1954 to help highly motivated high school students in low-income high schools graduate and attend college (Olwell, 2016). Upward Bound program participants are four times as likely to earn an undergraduate degree than those with similar backgrounds not in these programs (Fields, 2001). With a shared focus on first-generation, low-income students, both programs reach large numbers of educationally and economically disadvantaged students nationwide (Fields, 2001). Other state and private nonprofit programs include Math Engineering Science Achievement (MESA), Meyerhoff Scholars Program, BetterChance, Posse, and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Mehan and colleagues (1996) found that one of the primary benefits of intervention programs such as AVID is the relationship building and development of strong peer networks that occurs among the program participants. Although many of these programs help increase pre-collegiate opportunities for marginalized students, little is known about the actual impact of pre-collegiate academic development programs in increasing the number of students entering college, and even less is known about what specific program components are effectively assisting students to enter college (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Nevertheless, these programs attempt to provide students with the social capital necessary to achieve college enrollment (Perna, 2002). They expose students to peers on a college-going path, with similar interests and motivation, and are likely to influence one another in school and in extracurricular environments (Contreras, 2011).

Community based organizations. Research suggests community-based organizations play an important role in supporting young people’s postsecondary aspirations and success (Pathways to College, Network). For example, Communities in Schools (CIS) is an organization that was born out of the Civil Rights Movement, with the primary mission of preventing dropout among adolescents from underrepresented backgrounds (Contreras, 2011). The mission of CIS is to “champion the connection of needed community resources with schools to help young people successfully learn, stay in school and prepare for life” (Communities in Schools, 2008, p. 3). According to the Pathways to College Network (2012), community-based organizations provide support to young people along the education continuum from early childhood through postsecondary completion. Services such comprehensive serves (counseling, housing, health care, etc.), youth development (supporting growth), flexibility (less restrictive policies), trusted source of information and advice (staff understands social and cultural context).

Curriculum Alignment of P-16 system. For various reasons, many underrepresented youth do not participate in college prep studies and therefore are unable to succeed in the transition from high school to college (Bragg, Kim, and Rubin, 2005). Access to a rigorous curriculum in high school also determines the nature of the courses students can enroll in as they transition to higher education (Contreras, 2011). In the school context, the most common example of a rigorous high school curriculum is the presence of AP or honors classes. In support of college knowledge and college going research, Conley and colleagues (2010) developed indicators that measure broad contextual factors affecting student’s college knowledge and increase support for a college going culture for underrepresented groups. The College Career Ready School Diagnostic tool tracks college readiness of individual students. Using a variety of qualitative methods with participants I their study, Conley et al. (2010) identify strategies that

support college readiness: 1) aligning high school curriculum with college standards, 2) aligning high school assignments and grading policies with college expectations, and 3) ensuring that high school seniors take a challenging course load (Kless et al, 2013). Other studies show that setting- and system-level actions like expanding rigorous course availability can influence students' college readiness (Herlihy, 2007; Lee & Burkham, 2000; Rumberger, 1995). Rigorous academic preparation and a strong social and academic support network are crucial for students to enroll in and complete postsecondary education (Martinez & Klopott, 2005).

Retention and Persistence in Higher Education

The 1990 Student Right-to-Know Act requires postsecondary institutions to report the percentage of full-time degree-seeking students who complete their program within 150 percent of the standard time for completion (e.g., within six years for students seeking a 4-year bachelor's degree) (NCES, 2020). Most graduation rates reported by institutions are based on this measure. Graduation rates measure the percentage of first-time, full-time undergraduate students who complete their program at the same institution within a specified period. Moreover, graduation rates include students receiving bachelor's degrees from their initial institution of attendance only (NCES, 2020).

Student retention is one of the most widely studied areas in higher education (Tinto, 2006). Practically, higher education institutions have developed academic and social retention programs to help retain students, whereas less focus is on student motivation to attend college and earn their degree. The emerging practice of dedication to retention and persistence (terms used to describe college student success) is now growing into a significant institutional force in the field (Kinsey, 2017), yet retention and persistence concepts are often used interchangeably at different institutions, for example, retention and persistence rates. A *retention rate* is the

percentage of students who return to the same institution for their second year (Hagedorn, 2012). In contrast, the *persistence rate* is measured by the percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year (NCS, 2020). These rates will be discussed in depth in their perspective sections after a review of the foundation for retention.

College Student Departure

Currently, college student departure (foundation for retention) continues to be a huge phenomenon in higher education. The overall college dropout rate for undergraduate college students is 40% (Hanson, 2021). Thirty percent of the dropout rate comes from college freshman dropping out before entering their sophomore year (first-year retention). Additionally, the number of students that dropout of college within 6 years at four-year colleges is 56%. Lastly, Black students have the highest college dropout rate at 54% (NCES, 2019). Increasingly, student success in college is gauged by retention and graduation rates; therefore, it is important to understand the factors that influence student success. Educators use the contextual factors to study and address student retention and persistence in higher education: students, campuses, educator roles, socioeconomic conditions, policies and interventions, and knowledge bases. These contextual issues are interwoven throughout this chapter. Understanding these factors are also important because Schneider & Yin (2011) reminds us that much of the cost of dropping out of college is borne by individual students, who may have accumulated large debts in their unsuccessful pursuit of a degree and who forfeit the higher earnings that accrue with a bachelor's degree.

When studying college student departure, the terminology used to explain the phenomenon has changed and includes descriptions such as student mortality, college dropouts, student attrition, college retention, and student persistence (Seidman, 2012).

Although related, these are not synonymous. Table one is a review of the key concepts used to conceptualize retention in higher education according to Berger et al (2012).

Table 1

Retention-Key Concepts

Term	Definition
Attrition	a student fails to re-enroll at an institution in consecutive semesters
Dismissal	a student who is not permitted by the institution to continue enrollment
Dropout	a student whose initial educational goal was to complete a college degree but did not
Mortality	the failure of a student to remain in college until graduation
Persistence	the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from first year through degree completion
Stop out	a student who temporarily withdraws from an institution or system
Withdrawal	the departure of a student from a college or university campus

Source: Berger et al., (2012)

Students dropping out of college miss the opportunity afforded by universities to develop their critical thinking skills, tend to earn less in their careers, often leave university with loans to be repaid (Seidman, 2012). The two concepts of particular interest for this study are retention and persistence. Again, these two concepts are often used interchangeably when describing graduation rates and student success in the higher education field. In addition, retention and persistence rates are measured differently. One goal of this literature review is to understand how retention and persistence are interconnected in research then shift the focus entirely on persistence literature to recognize how college students stay motivated to earn their bachelor’s degree. The figures on student drop-out in North America provide an example of the magnitude of this problem, with over 30% of students failing to complete their college studies, a figure

which has remained stable over the last 20 years (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018; Morrison & Silverman, 2012).

Retention in Higher Education

Student retention is an organizational issue of global significance (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018). When the issue of retention first appeared on the higher educational scene (about 55 years ago), student attrition was typically viewed through the lens of psychology (Tinto, 2006). However, initially development of theories and models by Spady (1970, 1971) and expanded by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), and now referred to a student integration model (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993) is essentially sociological and founded on Durkheim's (1897) theory of suicide (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018). The importance of retention studies in higher education was not recognized by educators, researchers, and institutions until the early 1970's when enrollment began to appear as an issue (Berger & Metzner, 2005). In the 1970's the view of student retention shifted to take account for the role of the environment, in particular the institution, in student decisions to stay or leave (Tinto, 2006). In his article "*Dropouts from higher education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis*," William Spady (1971) introduced his sociological model of student departure to explain the college departure process as an interaction between the student and the college environment. In essence, if the student and the environment are a good fit, the student will adjust both socially and academically, increasing the likelihood of the student's motivation to persist (Seidman, 2012). Retention became an increasingly common topic within and among college and university campuses to systematically identify causes of and solutions to the realities of student dropout and satisfaction (Seidman, 2012). During this time Vincent Tinto built upon and enhanced Spady's model to create the interactionalist theory of student departure which became one of the best known and often cited theories related to student

departure (Seidman, 2012). Like Spady's model, Tinto's theory suggest that early and continued institution commitment will impact academic and social integration with the college or university (Tinto, 1975, 1993). This model brings psychological and organizational theoretical models. Other studies have been conducted using multi-institutional data (Kamens (1971), large national databases, and student involvement (Astin 1977; 1985). Alexander Astin's (1977; 1985) work serves as a basis for many retention interventions on campuses throughout the country. Building on Tinto's models, Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini developed operational measures of the core constructs (relating to academic and social integration) and a more systematic approach to studying retention (Seidman, 2012).

By the mid-late 1970's enrollment in higher education became stagnant and the enrollment boom of the previous decades was over. Shulman (1976) observed that colleges faced a decline in the number of potential freshmen and therefore needed to retain those students already enrolled to maintain their financial stability and the breadth and strength of their academic programs (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). During the 1980s, the anticipated decline in the number of traditional college-aged students provided the impetus for much of the student retention research, especially for many private institutions (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Also, around this time, the roots of "enrollment management" became a term when Jack Maguire of Boston College began to align efforts across the admissions, financial aid, registration, and institutional research areas at the college to better control enrollment (Hossler, 2002). According to Hossler (1988), enrollment management...

...is accomplished using institutional research in the areas of student college choice, student attrition, and student outcomes to guide institutional practices in the areas of new student recruitment and financial aid, student support services, as well as curriculum

development and other academic areas which affect the enrollment and persistence of students.

Enrollment management activities are designed to enable educational institutions to exert more influence over their student enrollments (Hossler, 1988).

There are many college retention theories, models, and concepts (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Models from Spady (undergraduate dropout process model), Tinto (institutional departure model), and Bean (student attrition model) have evolved over time and illustrate how institutions of higher education have a responsibility to increase student persistence for all students. By the end of the 1980s a number of these models and theories had become well established in the literature and a substantial body of empirical studies had been conducted across a wide range of institutional settings (Seidman, 2012). Since student enrollment at four-year institutions has traditionally been composed of traditional-age, full-time, and residential students, the retention theories, and models were mainly centered on the concepts of academic and social integration for them (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). More studies were being conducted on campuses, and campus-based strategies were being implemented for different types of students from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds, first-generation college students, and non-traditionally aged students. Most earlier studies tended to focus on four-year institutions; however, retention and persistence models are surfacing in the commuter college and online sectors more than ever before. Although an extensive literature has accumulated on the possible causes of student drop-out, with the number of studies running into thousands (Berger, Ramírez, & Lyons, 2012), there has been little theoretical development in the area since the 1970s–80s. In the 1990s Braxton et al. (1997) used Tinto's interactional model to empirically test its fifteen propositions and found that four propositions were "logically interconnected." The data suggested that social integration,

not academic integration, is key to understanding student departure. The authors recommended that future researchers explore psychological, social, and organizational influences that impact both social integration and commitment (institution and graduation) to improve upon Tinto's theory (Braxton et al., 1997). According to Dewberry and Jackson (2018) the development that has taken place (Braxton et al., 2014; Guiffrida, 2006; Tinto, 1993) has generally focused on revisions to the dominant, sociological, student integration theory of retention developed by Tinto (1975, 1987) or is based on systematizing and organizing research findings rather than on a set of underlying theoretical premises (e.g., Nora & Crisp, 2012).

From a practical perspective, retention describes an institution's ability to consecutively retain a student from admissions through graduation (Falcone, 2011); however, college students leave college for several reasons. Full-time student enrollments are critical to an institution's continued survival because enrollment numbers directly impact the budget and high levels of attrition adversely affect an institution's funding, facilities, and long-term planning (Simpson, 2004). When a student is dismissed from an institution, most of the time, it is due to academic issues (Adsitt, 2017); however, there are also other reasons students do not finish college (i.e., lack of motivation, minimum guidance, family emergency, etc.) when their initial goal was to complete a bachelor's degree. Earlier retention studies by Tinto (1975, 1993), Messersmith and Schulenberg (2008) found that the increase in educational attainment is associated with a lower dropout rate. In addition, *a student's desire to continue their education* is persistence, which is different from retention, as retention focuses on the *institutional efforts* such as advising, first-year experience, counseling, tutoring, and university programming (enrollment management) to retain students. Both concepts (retention and persistence) directly relate to student enrollment where retention refers to the institution's ability to retain a student and persistence refers to the

student's motivation to stay in college and complete the degree. However, not all retention models have a persistence (student motivation) component to them due in part because retention is an institutional measure and persistence is a student measure. In other words, institutions retain, and students persist (Hagedorn, 2012). While less is known about what motivates students to persist through graduation, retention efforts are well established on virtually every campus in the nation, have developed as a significant policy issue in the field, and are extensively researched (Berger, Ramírez, & Lyons, 2012). From the perspective of higher education, the power to retain students remains the most crucial outcome if students are to be successful in life (Hagedorn, 2012). Student persistence research is another area where new conceptions have emerged about the factors that influence students' ability and commitment to persist (NPEC, 2006).

Persistence in Higher Education

College student persistence constitutes a significant problem for many colleges and Universities (Baker et al., 2020). The 1990s is recognized by scholars as the era of the emergence of persistence and its distinction from retention due to students attending more than one college as a means of earning a degree (swirling or fluid movement) (Berger et al., 2012). This changing reality has led to new efforts for tracking and understanding patterns of student progression because it is increasingly common for students to transfer during their undergraduate education from two- to four-year institutions or to earn credits at multiple institutions (Berger et al., 2012). Enrollment patterns (full time or part time, 2-year or 4-year institution, direct or delayed enrollment) all influence students' long-term attainment and success (NPEC, 2006). Much of the research on students attending multiple institutions has focused on those who make a permanent transition from one institution to another (Bradburn and Hurst 2001; McCormick

1997), traditionally described as starting at a community college followed by transferring to a 4-year institution within a 5-year period (NPEC, 2006).

Student success in college requires persistence to graduation (Braxton & Francis, 2018). Student success has been recognized as the ability to persist to complete a degree at one or more institutions (Seidman, 2012). Students' decisions to persist are outputs of a longitudinal processes of various aspects of a student's lives that are influenced by constructs such as social integration, student support, finances (Seidman, 2012), and even racism. Studies of non-traditional students suggest the significant role that student characteristics and behaviors, including expectations and student effort, play in student persistence and other measures of success in college (Pascarella, Pierson et al. 2004; Pike and Kuh 2005; Terenzini et al. 1996). According to Nora and Crisp (2012) the factors found to increase the odds of student persistence beyond the first year of college include demographic characteristics, financial assistance, pre-college behaviors/experiences, social and academic experiences, environmental pull factors, and institutional characteristics. Table two outlines each persistence factor and its meaning.

Table 2

Persistence Factors

Factors	Meaning
Demographic Characteristics	gender, ethnicity, parental education, socioeconomic status, student's, and parents' educational goals (first-generation), transfer status
Financial Assistance	receipt of financial aid may increase the odds that a student will remain in college beyond the first year
Pre-College Factors/Experiences	role of high school curriculum in impacting students' decisions to remain in college
Social and Academic Integration	appropriate assessment entering college, seeking, and receiving counseling and attending orientation session,

	integration in classroom discussions, social connectedness, and commitment to college
Environmental Pull Factors	living off campus, working more than twenty hours per week on or off campus, and taking a reduced course load
Institutional Characteristics	the role of institutional characteristics on students' decision to remain in college, institutional type; orientation programs
Psychosocial and Study Skills	self-efficacy, personality, time management; skills related to organizing and completing schoolwork

Source: Nora & Crisp, (2012)

Demographic characteristics. Student demographics characteristics help scholar-practitioners understand the whole student, where they come from, what they bring to the institution, and other pertinent background information to better understand the student's history and story. Some, if not most institutions, use this information to manage campus enrollment and diversity statistics. Aspirations and family support foreshadow student success (Perna & Titus, 2005); therefore, understanding a student's social and economic background can be used as a reference to know their affordability. Approximately one in three college students come from families where neither parent had any postsecondary education (NSSE, 2005). Family education background is related to students' higher post-secondary aspirations and greater likelihood of enrollment, persistence, and attainment (NPEC, 2006)

Financial Assistance. Financial assistance is often determined by parental income and educational attainment and college generation status. Federal need-based financial aid is expected to foster student access because calculated need increases as family ability to pay decreases; it is also expected to encourage student choice because need increases as a student's price of attendance increases (NPEC, 2006). Gift aid in the form of scholarships and grants and

work-study as contrasted with loans is associated with higher retention and graduate rates (The Pell Institute, 2004), especially for low-income and minority students (St. John, 2002; Swail, 2003). In fact, students who are the first in their family to attend college may select an institution by the nature and amount of financial aid awards, perceptions of the amount of homework required, and being able to live at home and to work while going to school (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). According to DeAngelo and Franke (2016), factors adversely affect first-year college persistence for less-ready college students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The amount of financial assistance they receive (affordability) is related to the likelihood of fluidly moving or dropping out of college (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2007).

Pre-College Factors and Experiences. Pre-college factors (family background, individual attributes, and pre-college schooling) influence the student's initial institutional commitment to the college they are enrolled in and their goal commitment towards course completion (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018). A student's pre-college experience can provide some insight into whether a student will persist in college (Jones & Manigo, 2018). The quality of high school academic preparation strongly predicts chances for postsecondary success, measured by enrollment, persistence, grades, and educational attainment (NPEC, 2006). Research suggests that students with strong high school grade point averages and exposure to college curriculum were more likely to persist than those with lower grade point averages and no prior college preparation (Braxton et al., 2014). Approximately 9 of 10 (87 percent) students who complete four years of math, science, and English in high school stay on track to graduate from college compared with a 62 percent persistence rate among those who do not complete that coursework (Adelman, 1999; Warburton et al., 2001). In high school, completing high-level mathematics classes—algebra II, precalculus, trigonometry, calculus—is the single best high school predictor

of performing well academically in college (Adelman 1999, 2006). Students who are prepared coming out of high school are best positioned to do well in college, regardless of who they are, how much money they have, or where they go (Gladieux & Swail, 1998, Horn & Kojaku, 2001; Martinez & Klopott, 2003; Warburton et al., 2001). In addition, planning for college and postsecondary activities as early as the eighth grade increases the prospects for completing college (Swail et al., 2005). For example, GEAR UP, one of the largest and most well-funded initiatives, provides information about financial aid, family support and counseling, and tutoring, among other things (Hossler & Schmit, 1995; St. John, 2003; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Other promising encouragement initiatives include many of the TRIO programs funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act such as Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math/Science, Student Support Services, Talent Search, Educational Opportunity Center, and McNair Program (IHEP 2001; Pathways to College Network, 2004). For example, students in the Upward Bound program are four times more likely to earn an undergraduate degree. Students in TRIO Support Services programs are more than twice as likely to remain in college as those students from similar backgrounds who did not participate in the program (NFEC, 2006; <http://www.trioprograms.org/abouttrio.html>).

Social and Academic Integration. The student's institutional and goal commitment is modified by the extent to which they are integrated with the academic system and the social system in the college (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018). When students arrive at college, they assess their fit (whether they like an institution) within the student culture of an institution and their engagement with formal student organizations (Renn & Reason, 2013). Lastly, feedback from faculty on academic performance and the student's comfort when interacting with faculty members about educational issues aids in a student's persistence (Renn & Reason, 2013).

. ***Environmental pull factors.*** A student's ability to focus while in school and access to the academic building/environment is crucial for their persistence (Nora & Crisp, 2012). Also, students who enter a college environment where the predominant racial, ethnic, or religious culture differs from their own may encounter additional adjustment challenges (Allen, 1992). This is particularly the case for first-generation students at two-year and four-year institutions.

Institutional Characteristics. At the point of admission to an institution of higher education, the institution's approach to orient students and make them feel like they belong is essential for student persistence and helping them develop positive psychosocial and study skills and habits (Nora & Crisp, 2012). Student perceptions of the institutional environment and dominant norms and values influence how students think and spend their time (NPEC, 2006).

Psychosocial and Study Skills. Bean and Eaton (2000) used attitude-behavior theory to emphasize the importance of student characteristics to success in college. They proposed that self-efficacy helps a student persevere when faced with academic and social challenges; those with a strong, better-developed self-concept are more confident about their ability to succeed, while those who are less confident are more likely to founder and give up when encountering difficult circumstances (NPEC, 2006). A key factor in persistence is the effort students put forth, especially the amount of time they spend studying (Astin, 1993; Bailey et al., 2005). A student's attitude, well-being, level of support, self-motivation, and self-preparation-related thoughts and behaviors both socially and academically as a college student in the environment matters when understanding college student persistence (Braxton et al., 2014). For example, we now know that the ability to remain connected to their past communities, family, church, or tribe for some, if not many, students is essential to their persistence (Nora, 2001; Terenzini, et al., 1994; Tierney, 1992).

Persistence is the desire and actions to stay enrolled in an institution of higher education from the time they begin their first year of college through degree completion (Berger et al., 2012). This is due to the growing recognition that students increasingly complete degrees at schools other than the one they start at (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2007). Persistence is the primary key concept used in this manuscript. At the heart of college persistence is the idea that college is voluntary and is a student-initiated decision. However, very few or none of the millions of voluntarily enrolled postsecondary students pursue education in the same way, making it challenging to define and count student progress. Also, studies on first-generation students suggest the significant role that student characteristics and behaviors, including expectations and student effort, play in student persistence and other college success measures (NPEC 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh 2005; Terenzini et al. 1996). Persistence may also refer to the enrollment patterns of students at specific points along the educational pipeline (Troxel, 2010). For example, a student enrolls in a university, remains enrolled for two years, and stops out to return six years later (Hagedorn, 2012). In the stop-out concept (defined in Table 1), students have a plethora of reasons they do not continue and/or decide to take a break; however, the most common cause is financial issues (Goldrick-Rab, 2016), particularly after the first year. This is important because if a student decides to withdraw from college during a given term, they are responsible for tuition and fee charges associated with the class(es) and other expenses related to attending the institution. Institutional persistence to graduation, freshman-to-sophomore persistence measurement is important both because of student vulnerability at the beginning of college and because institutions can react quickly with interventions (Mortenson, 2012).

Measuring Persistence

Student persistence measurement activity is essential to understanding the progress of groups of students in the education pipeline; however, measurement of student persistence in education is complicated by the many ways students move through the education pipeline in the United States (Mortenson, 2012). In the undergraduate arena, major persistence measurement problems are student transfers between institutions, student progression at different rates, and stop-outs. Student persistence and graduation in higher education are measured in two ways: *institutional* persistence and graduation, and *summary* persistence and graduation (Mortenson, 2012). Practically speaking, institutional persistence and graduation occur when a student consistently enrolls at their first bachelor's degree-granting institution through graduation. Summary persistence and graduation occur when a student does not commit to one bachelor's degree-granting institution and moves between institutions to earn their degree. The difference is student swirling—enrollment in more than one institution between matriculation and graduation (Mortenson, 2012).

Theory of Student Persistence in Commuter Colleges and Universities

Much of the persistence research and theory developed over the past fifty years has explained students' decisions to withdraw from college during the first year at residential colleges and commuter institutions (Nora & Crisp, 2012). The development of persistence research uses different, yet overlapping, frameworks/models to include:

- Tinto's (1975, 1987) Student Integration Model— argued that student departure from colleges resulted from individual student attributes, skills, commitment, intentions, and interaction with members of the college.

- Bean's (1980,1985) Student Attrition Model—argued that student attrition was analogous to turnover in work organizations.
- Astin (1984, 1999) Student Involvement Perspective—argued that additional experiential factors upon entering the college can enhance student retention.
- Nora and Cabrera's (1996) Student Adjustment Model—a hybrid of the Student Attrition Model and the Student Integration Model that argues that perceptions of prejudice-discrimination are expected to have a direct effect on persistence decisions, while affecting a student's academic performance and their social and academic experiences at the institution (PWI context).

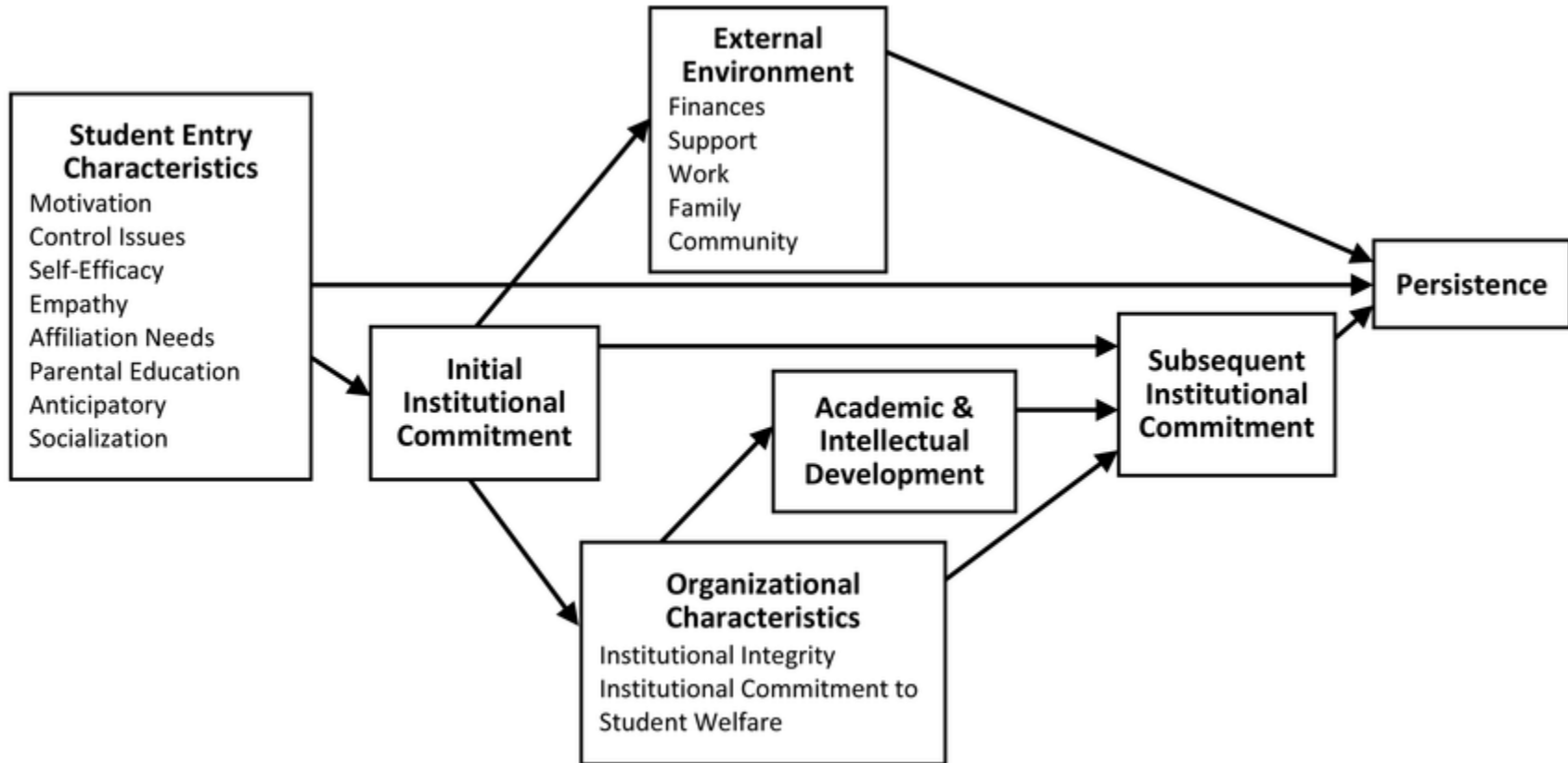
Theoretical modeling has been a widely used tool in student persistence research for many years (Braxton et al., 2014; Tinto, 1975). Theories of student persistence have been developed in Predominantly White Institutional (PWI) contexts, and the extent to which these theories—in whole or in part—apply to Minority Serving Institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) has not been studied (Baker et al., 2021). Scholars such as Rendón (1994) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) have modified and added several factors that impact the decisions of college students to remain enrolled in college or decide to drop out, temporarily or permanently (Nora & Crisp, 2012). These modifications and additions have led to the creation of Nora's (2004) student engagement model, and Braxton's et al (2014) theory of student persistence at commuter colleges and universities which could be used to understand student persistence.

According to Baker et al. (2021), the only existing HBCU-specific theoretical work related to student success and HBCUs is conceptual and comes from Arroyo and Gasman (2014). The authors advanced an institution-centric conceptual model grounded in the HBCU research

literature and interviews with HBCU students. However, one critique of the model is the authors did not conduct empirical test of their model nor did they consider HBCUs by institutional type (i.e., residential or commuter). Arroyo and Gasman (2014) posited that holistic student success improves to the degree that the distinctive HBCU supportive environment provides students a qualitatively different experience compared to PWIs. The authors conceptualized three distinctive influences on holistic student success: improved achievement, identity formation, and values cultivation (Baker et al., 2021). Like other retention studies, Arroyo, and Gasman's (2014) theoretical framework was built as an HBCU-based approach for Black student college success but is institutional rather than student centric. Building upon advancements of Arroyo and Gasman (2014), Palmer et al. (2015), and Arroyo et al. (2016) in HBCU theoretical research, Baker et al. (2020) extends the research with empirical tests of student persistence theories using original data collected in HBCUs. Baker et al. (2020) also drew from Braxton et al.'s (2014) framework as a means of examining student persistence at HBCUs (commuter institutions). The empirical test of this theory provided support for its key concepts using a longitudinal sample of 714 first-year students enrolled at five predominantly White commuter colleges and universities. They also used theories developed at PWIs to understand student persistence at HBCUs to see if they apply. Figure 1 outlines the theory of student persistence at commuter colleges and universities.

Figure 1

Theory of Student Persistence in Commuter Colleges and Universities



Source: Adapted from Braxton, Doyle, Harley, Hirschy, Jones, and McClendon (2014); Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon (2004).

As indicated by Figure 1, the theory of student persistence in commuter colleges and universities (Braxton et al., 2014) views persistence as a longitudinal process that includes six significant dimensions of student persistence of commuter students: (1) student entry characteristics, (2) the external environment, (3) organizational characteristics (perceived campus environment), (4) student academic and intellectual development, (5) subsequent institutional commitment, and (6) student persistence in the college or university.

Student Entry Characteristics. Student entry characteristics such as the record of high school academic achievement, gender, race or ethnicity, and parental educational level are important in the persistence decisions of students enrolled in commuter colleges and universities (Baker et al., 2020). Characteristics such as students' motivation to attend college, parental education level, and their need for social affiliation interact with the characteristics of the external environment and the campus environment of commuter colleges and universities to directly influence their persistence (Braxton et al., 2014). According to Tinto (1986, 1993), the propositions that involves the psychological and sociological perspective of each characteristic and processes to explain departure of college students include:

1. *Motivation to graduate from college exerts a positive influence on student persistence. Motivation to make steady progress toward college completion also positively impacts student retention.*
2. *The greater a student's need for control and order in their daily life, the greater the student's likelihood of departure.*
3. *The stronger a person's belief that they can achieve a desired outcome through their own efforts, the less likely the student will depart from college.*

4. *The greater a student's awareness of the effects of their decisions and actions on other people, the greater the student's likelihood of departure from college.*
5. *The greater a student's need for affiliation, the greater the student's likelihood of departure from college.*
6. *As parent's educational level increases, the likelihood of student departure from a commuter college or university also increases.*
7. *The probability of student departure from a commuter college or university increases for students who engage in anticipatory socialization before entering college.*

The student entry component of the model is most central to the study. Each characteristic can also be interpreted with the support of college access and readiness research. Students with strong motivation and drive, a desire to achieve goals, a belief in their own capacity for success, the ability to reflect on their learning strategies, and a willingness to persist in the face of obstacles can overcome specific shortcomings or obtain the knowledge necessary to succeed (Conley & French, 2014). Motivation must manifest itself in the potential for self-guided action, and students must be both emotionally and cognitively engaged to succeed (Conley, 2010). Motivation manifests itself such as the importance of oneself completing college and the purpose of completing college (Braxton et al., 2004). Once effective learners have set goals and have begun to develop a sense of control over the learning process, they exercise metacognition and the self-monitoring skills that enable them to determine how well they are employing the specific learning skills necessary to achieve their goals (Conley & French, 2014). Goal attainment hinges on the ability to control one's behavior and acknowledges the outcomes are

because of their own efforts, deliberate planning, and decision making (judgement). Self-efficacy pertains to an individual's belief that they can engage in actions necessary to attain a particular outcome (Bandura, 1986, 1977). Put differently, A strong sense of self-efficacy is the belief that they can indeed achieve their goal through hard work, the ability to self-monitor their performance and adjust as needed, and the willingness to persist when they encounter a setback or unexpected challenge (Conley & French, 2014). Exhibiting awareness and care for others and developing solid relationships grounded in empathy (Scholl, 2008) displays intellectual sophistication. Empathy enables students to relate to others in a way that promotes cooperation and unity rather than conflict and isolation as they persist (Konrath, O'Brien, Hsing, 2011). Stern (1979) indicates that the need for affiliation reflects the extent to which an individual is friendly, likes to participate in activities with others, and holds a group orientation. Students with high affiliation needs are most likely to participate in activities. The parental education, of a student is defined by family social economic status and the education level of the parent(s). As they anticipate college and start to emulate attitudes, beliefs, norms, and values of college this getting ready behavior constitutes a mechanism of anticipatory socialization. Nora, Attinasi, and Matonak (1990) identify early expectations for college and pre-matriculation experiences as forms of getting ready behaviors.

External Environment. Some commuter students have obligations distinct from attending college, including work and family (Tinto, 1993). Conflicts between the commitments of both work and attending college may negatively affect the families of commuter students (Braxton et al., 2014). Studies of nontraditional students, commuters, and other underrepresented populations have identified external factors that affect student persistence, such as parental encouragement, support of friends, and finances (Braxton et al., 2004; Cabrera et al. 1992; Swail et al. 2005).

Moreover, reductions in the actual price students must pay to attend college lessen the negative effects on families and/or working while enrolled (baker et al., 2020). Thus, the lower the costs of college attendance incurred by the student, the greater their likelihood of persisting in college (St. John & Starkey, 1995).

Campus Environment and Organizational Characteristics. Commuter students spend a limited amount of time on a commuter college or university campus, typically devoting time to attending class and meeting degree requirements (Tinto, 1993). These demands can positively motivate students to make steady progress towards their persistence to graduation. The lack of well-defined student social communities for commuting students poses problems to students with social affiliation needs (Braxton et al., 2014). Organizational characteristics such as the commitment of the institution to student welfare and institutional integrity also constitute essential aspects of the campus environment (Baker et al., 2020). These two organizational characteristics positively influence student perceptions of their academic and intellectual development. Institutional integrity is present when the institution remains true to its espoused mission and goals (Braxton et al., 2014).

Academic and Intellectual Development. Academic and intellectual development plays a pivotal role in this theory as it stands between its antecedents and subsequent institutional commitment (Braxton & Francis, 2018). The antecedents to academic and intellectual development include the organizational attributes of commitment of the institution to student welfare and institutional integrity (Braxton et al., 2014). These two organizational attributes influence academic and intellectual development in a positive manner which, in turn, positively affects subsequent institutional commitment (Braxton et al., 2014)

Subsequent Institutional Commitment. A student's subsequent institutional commitment positively influences student decisions to persist in a commuter college or university (Braxton et al., 2014). Greater levels of subsequent institutional commitment develop in students who perceive that their college or university exhibits a commitment to the welfare of its students and institutional integrity (Baker et al., 2020). Initial institutional commitment pertains to the commitment students hold for their institution as they begin their studies. In contrast, subsequent institutional commitment refers to the level of commitment students espouse due to their experiences with their institution while in attendance (Braxton et al., 2014).

Student Persistence. The greater degree of subsequent commitment students has to their college or university as their studies progress, the greater their likelihood of persistence in a commuter college or university (Braxton et al., 2014; Tinto, 1975). It is widely known that HBCUs are a welcoming environment for Black students; therefore, in this study, I spend less time on how the organizational characteristics support the academic and intellectual development of Black students to help them persist (retention perspective). Instead, I only draw on the student entry characteristics and external environment components of the framework to understand the cultural knowledge, skills, and talents Black students bring with them and use to persist and graduate. Current models that measure student persistence do not capture the cultural aspects of how Black students persist at HBCUs. In addition, from a practical perspective, the current lack of residential housing for college students (particularly at HBCUs) and the increase in off-campus college student housing, the theory of student persistence in commuter college and universities is used to understand Black student persistence (their motivation to persist and graduate with a bachelor's degree) at HBCUs from a cultural perspective, especially for Black, first-generation students (BFGS).

Conceptualizing First-Generation College Students

In the higher education literature and on campuses across the United States, reform efforts and research have focused on increasing access to higher education for previously marginalized groups (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016). This attention has contributed to dramatic increases in higher education attendance among underrepresented students (Astin & Osegura, 2004; Posselt et al., 2012). College campuses in the United States continue to become more diversified and, as a result, the retention and the persistence of underrepresented student populations have gained attention during the first decade of the twenty-first century (Seidman, 2005). One significant diverse population in higher education is comprised of first-generation students. Approximately one in three college students come from families where neither parent had any postsecondary education (NSSE) 2005). There is no question that first-generation students constitute a significant share of the undergraduate population (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021). In the 2015-16 academic year, 56% of undergraduates nationally were first-generation college students, meaning that neither parent had a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Of the more than 1.15 million students who submitted at least one application through the Common Application in 2020-21, 30 percent (almost 350,000) self-identified as first-generation (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021). Educational leaders know first-generation students to be extremely important to the higher education field; however, Ward et al. (2012) pointed to the inconsistency between how first-generation students are defined (i.e., students whose parent(s) who did not receive a college degree or their parent(s) did not receive a bachelor's degree) and the resulting implications (i.e., institution's lack of ability to support them) for the field of higher education. The lack of a single definition for first-generation students makes understanding the positions of researchers on the topic difficult (Peralta &

Klonowski, 2017). Practically speaking, the inconsistencies in the way colleges define first-generation students make it challenging to track the enrollment of these students which fluctuates the data reported to ranking agencies that parents and families use when deciding on college and which one.

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (2021), the term first-generation was coined by the council for opportunity in Education in 1980. Part of the confusion is that campuses and the federal U.S government defines these students (and the term) differently. For some colleges, it means neither of the student's biological parents attended college (Chronical of Higher Education, 2021). Other institutions' definitions include students whose parents did not graduate from a four-year college in the United States, or students whose parents completed their degrees as nontraditional students over the age of 25 (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021). On the federal level, Choy's (2001) report focused on high school graduates and broadly defined first-generation students as those whose parents did not attend college. Years later, Davis (2012) argued for a single, simple definition that college admissions officers could use: "Students can claim first-generation student status if neither one of their parents or guardians possesses a four-year degree" (p.2). Davis' definition matches that of the U.S. Department of Education. In this dissertation, I refer to first-generation students using the federal definition provided by Defreitas and Rinn (2013) and the Center for First -Generation Student Success, which describes *first-generation students* as college students whose parents did not graduate from college with a bachelor's degree for the scope of this study is centered on HBCUs that grant bachelor's degrees. This definition leaves room for the possibility that parents of first-generation college student may have received some formal college experience (i.e., attending a community college and receiving an associate's degree) which could explain forms of community cultural wealth a first-generation

student brought with them to their four-year institution which leads us to college enrollment for this group.

Enrollment and Degree Attainment

Enrollment and graduation rates suggest that the odds are stacked against first-generation students succeeding in college (Baum & Payea, 2004). Pulliam and Gonzalez (2018) referenced data for first-generation students and found that there are approximately 4.5 million low-income, first-generation students enrolled in post-secondary institutions, making up about 24% of total enrollment. The National Student Clearinghouse (2020) reported a 7% decrease in the number of high-school graduates who immediately enrolled in college in 2020 than in 2019 (the Covid-19 pandemic may have had an influence on these numbers) — and enrollment disparities were even higher among students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021). According to a 2011 report from the Higher Education Research Institute, first-generation students were less likely to complete their college degree in six years (50% first-generation versus 64% continuing-generation) (Postsecondary National Policy Institute [PNPI], 2020).

Additionally, 53% of first-generation students enrolled in a community college, and only 39% of first-generation students attended a traditional four-year institution. This could be due to several factors, including tuition cost or the need to stay near home. Higher education is experiencing an increase in first-generation students entering the field. Although the current pandemic and other environmental factors have caused a slight decrease in these students (PNPI, 2020), the data suggests that, of the first-generation students that enroll in college, an average of 50% persist to graduation with just a little over 50% starting their higher education journey at a community college or another minority serving institution. Of the nearly 40% of students that

attend a four-year college or university, there are several explanations of how they access college.

Persistence to College. This section builds on the college access and readiness research but specifically for first-generation students. Those students with the most difficulty in accessing college are often those who are the first to attend college (first-generation), children from immigrant families, and those from low socioeconomic status homes (ACT, 2004; Choy, 2001; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). In the higher education literature and on campuses across the United States, reform efforts and research have focused on increasing access to higher education for marginalized groups like first generation students (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016). However, as a marginalized group, first-generation college students are disadvantaged “when it comes to postsecondary access, a disadvantage that persists even after controlling for other important factors such as educational expectations, academic preparation, support from parents and schools in planning and preparing for college, and family income” (Choy, 2001, p. 4). Reid and Moore (2008), mentioned 5 disadvantages first-generation students experience as they proceed into their post-secondary education students when preparing for college to include, the task of applying to colleges without assistance from their parents (due to lack of knowledge of the process), lack of college preparation during high school, lack of rigorous academic preparation, selecting a college close to home that may not be a good fit (which leads to departure), and different personality traits (self-esteem and social acceptance level) and may live at home, work part-time while attending college (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004).

First-Year Persistence. Higher education institutions have spent the past decade making progress in enrolling and graduating students, particularly those who are the first in their families to go to college (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021). However, the first-year college

persistence rate has improved slightly, with a 2.2 percentage point gain between 2009 and 2017 (National Student Clearinghouse [NSC], 2019). The average national rate of first-to-second-year persistence stands at 68.5% (Baker et al., 2020). Of the nearly 2.3 million students who entered higher education in 2013, approximately 1 million left their first institution within six years without receiving a college degree (Shapiro et al., 2019). In recent years, the overall college first-year persistence rates barely changed from 2015 to 2018. For the fall 2017 cohort, 74%, or 2.6 million students, persisted beyond the first year as of fall 2018 (NSC, 2019). Although students are persisting at higher rates in higher education, there is an increase in the number of students first-year students that leave their first institution. According to the NSC (2019), among the 2.6 million people who enrolled in college as first-time undergraduate students in the fall of 2018, a higher percentage of students left their first institution after their first year than those that continued at the same institution their second year. Seventy-six percent (approximately 2 million people) persisted at any U.S. institution by fall 2019, while 67% (more than 1.7 million people) were retained at their starting institution. An average of 9.2% of freshmen transferred to a different institution in any fall term between 2009 and 2018 by the following fall (NSC, 2020). These numbers comprise all institutional types (historically white institutions and minority-serving institutions). When it comes to first-year college students' persistence rates in the U.S., the average transfer-out rate was higher for students who first entered as full-time (9.6%) than for those who began as part-time (7.4%) (NSC, 2020). Despite these improvements in college admission rates over the past few decades, college persistence and graduation rates continue to be problematic, particularly for marginalized students—students of color and students from low-income and/or first-generation families at all institutional types (Payne & Means, 2013). Using

institutional data, Ishitani (2003b) discovered a higher risk of departure among first-generation students in their first year of college.

Matriculation to Graduation. Due to low first-generation students' college completion rates, research has focused on college persistence and attainment (Melguizo, 2011). Other research indicates that the first two years in college are critical for predicting persistence at four-year institutions (Adsitt, 2017). First-generation college students often enroll in college to attain a degree, yet they encounter educational, financial, social, and/or cultural barriers (Johnson, 2020). First-year to second-year student retention hovers around 70% for baccalaureate private colleges and universities and 64.9% baccalaureate public colleges and universities (American College Testing Program, 2016). Private institutions generally have a slight edge over public institutions in freshman-to-sophomore persistence rates when admissions selectivity is controlled (Moretenson, 2012). In a study by Chen and Carroll (2005), the authors found that when controlled for demographic background, academic preparation, enrollment characteristics, credit production, and performance, first-generation students persisted at rates like their non-first-generation counterparts. While choosing a major is difficult for many students, it may pose a more significant challenge to first-generation students because their parents may be less able to offer them guidance (NCES, 2005). Aspiring to an advanced degree, taking a full course load, living on campus, and receiving financial aid were variables associated with increased persistence (Somers et al., 2004). In addition, Strayhorn (2012) stressed that developing a sense of belonging was significant for marginalized students in college contexts, such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, low-income students, first-generation, and gay students (LGBTQIA+). In another comparative study (between first gen and non-first gen), Pascarella et al. (2004) found that, during the second and third years of college, first-generation students completed fewer

credit hours and worked several more hours per week, which delays progress and likelihood to complete their four-year programs promptly (Ishitani, 2003a). In a different study, Ishitani (2005) investigated the longitudinal persistence behavior of first-generation college students and their graduation rates at four-year institutions and found a decline among first-generation students in the first year. The gaps in persistence and graduation rates between first-generation students and their peers widened during the first 2 years due to causes like the number of remedial courses one must take, financial-aid needs, student background characteristics, and their interaction with the institutional environment. The most significant benefits for explaining college success of first-generation students result from a thorough examination of both precollege attributes of students and the quality of their interactions with institutions of higher education (Ishitani, 2005)

Demographics

The demographic shift in the population in the United States, in concert with the enrollment increase of first-generation students on college campuses, has encouraged many colleges and universities to prioritize recruiting and retaining first-generation students. Yet, first-generation students are not a homogenous group, and their experiences cannot be reduced to one static category without losing sight of the complexities of their lived realities (Adsitt, 2017). According to Pappano (2015), over a third of all 15- to 17-year-olds were first-generation students, with an estimated 20% of all college undergraduates representing first-time college attendees. In addition, 59% of first-generation students were also the first sibling in their family to go to college which practically suggests a tremendous demographic shift in higher education. Much of the literature on first-generation students describe these students from a deficit perspective such as their increased likelihood to be low-income (scholars like Davis (2012) warn

us against this assumption), from communities of color, and arrive at college with fewer resources than their continuing generation peers (Adsitt, 2017) In addition, 55% of first-generation students work through college to fund their education which detracts from their success and puts them at a higher risk of not graduating from college (Brown-Nagin, 2014). Lastly, studies have been conducted comparing first-generation students who are also students of color to their continuing generation counterparts in the context of traditionally white college spaces, leaving much research to be done to understand the first-generation students' persistence experience at HBCUs. As undergraduates, first-generation students face a myriad of barriers in their pursuit to become the first in their families to graduate with a bachelor's degree (PNPI, 2020). Since higher education leaders intentionally focus on what it takes to keep first-generation students engaged and enrolled, it is crucial to understand the difference between retention and persistence concepts and rates in the higher education field.

Black First-Generation Students. Navigating American institutions of higher education can be difficult for any student. However, when attention is shifted towards marginalized populations, navigating these institutions can be extremely challenging, especially for Black first-generation college students (BFGSs). Among all undergraduate students, the U.S. Department of Education classified 41% of Black (African American) students to be first generation in comparison to 25% of White and Asian combined were determined to be first-generation students. In 2017, Black first-generation students had the lowest persistence rate (66.2%); just over half of Black students returned to their starting institution (52.1%) and an additional 14.1% continued at a different institution (NSC, 2019). Much of the literature that focuses on the achievement and persistence of Black first-generation students in higher education is explained from a retention perspective (institutional efforts to retain students) instead of a

persistence perspective (student motivation to continue at the college). For example, in America, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) boast high rates of retaining Black students; however, much of the literature neglects to examine how Black students own their educational experience to navigate their institution and persist through graduation, nor do they mention what types of social and cultural capital Black first-generation students bring with them to their HBCU community.

Black Student Persistence at HBCUs

Of the 16.6 million undergraduate students enrolled in the fall of 2018, Black students made up 1.1 million or 13% of students (PNPI, 2020). This percentage has decreased since 2011 when the number of U.S. enrolled Black was 15% (U. S. Department of Education, 2019). Black students made up 12% of the student population at 4-year public institutions, 13% of the student population at 4-year private nonprofit institutions, and 29% of the student population at 4-year private for-profit institutions. However, by 2021, enrollment for Black students is projected to increase to 42% (Pulliam & Gonzalez, 2018). In 2018, Black students earned 20% of bachelor's degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions.

Persistence among Black college students is an essential issue in higher education. Although America's colleges and universities have made determined efforts to create racially diverse campuses for the last almost six decades, Black students attending HBCUs are more likely to see growth academically and have higher levels of self-concept (Brooks & Allen, 2016). Allen (1992) suggested that Black students, like many individuals, are more successful in environments where they feel valued. Overall, the average persistence rate for HBCUs is 61.7% (Baker et al., 2020); however, largely absent from the existing literature are studies of persistence behavior among HBCU students (Wilson, 2007).

African Americans tend to be concentrated at two-year community colleges, less selective four-year institutions, and HBCUs (Thomas & Perna, 2004). HBCUs have played a significant role in educating African American students. Williams and Ashley (2005) report, “When HBCUs were opened in the United States, they continued the tradition of scholarship and higher education begun in Africa” (p.10). The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, defines an HBCU as any historically Black college or university that was established and accredited (or making progress toward accreditation) prior to 1964 and whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans (Arroyo & Gasman, 2015). In 2020, there were 101 HBCUs located in 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Of the 101 HBCUs, 52 were public institutions and 49 were private nonprofit institutions (NCES, 2022). Enrollment for women at HBCUs have been higher than male enrollment every year since 1976. Women enrollment increased from 53% in 1976 to 64% in 2020. According to HBCU Digest (2018), Black students attending HBCUs are likely to be in the majority, much like White students tend to be in the majority at predominately white institutions (approximately 80% of HBCU students are Black). HBCUs primarily serve low-income (71%), first-generation students (53%), and they strive to create and maintain a family-oriented environment to foster student success and a sense of belongingness. Despite enrolling only 9% of the nation’s Black college students, HBCUs produce 15% of all bachelor’s degrees earned by Black students, 17% of all bachelor’s degrees in engineering earned by Black students, and 26% of all bachelor’s degrees in mathematics earned by Black students (PNPI, 2019).

Some scholars have used theoretical frameworks derived from PWIs and majority students to understand student persistence and departure within HBCUs (Himelhoch et al., 1997) and among Black students generally (Strayhorn, 2013). One study that validates HBCUs at

supportive environment is Allen's (1992) work on African American college student success. Allen (1992) conducted a national study of 1,800 Black students (872 attending PWIs and 928 enrolled at HBCUs). Their specific focus was to investigate how students' backgrounds, campus experiences (racial composition/unity), and individual personality orientations were associated with outcomes connected to academic achievement, social involvement, and occupational aspirations. His quantitative, multivariate study found that a combination of individual and institutional characteristics was a significant predictor of academic achievement, social engagement, and occupational goals (Kim & Hargrove, 2013). Findings suggest that a student's interpretation of, and reaction to, the stressors associated with an institutional setting determined the level of success, highlighting those students at HBCUs outgained their counterparts attending PWIs. Other findings from comparative studies (between HBCUs and PWIs) by Allen et al. (1991) and Nettles (1998) also support the claim that the HBCU supportive campuses cultivate Black college student success.

Again, most persistence studies tend to focus on institutional factors and programs that promote continuous student enrollment instead of students' effort (NPEC, 2006). Despite the importance of persistence and graduation rates, little research has been done to study how cultural factors influence Black college student success at HBCUs. Like existing persistence research, the literature on Black student persistence at HBCUs is also positioned from a retention perspective (institutional commitment to student) instead of a student persistence perspective. Although retention theories provide a framework when studying college persistence, many of these theories do not account for cultural and family variables such as parental, family, and community relationships, particularly for Black first-generation students at HBCUs. In addition to retaining students at HBCUs, understanding how Black first-generation students persist

through graduation from their perspective using the persistence factors previously outlined provides a more wholistic view of the student and what they bring to the institution. Although scholars like Harper (2009) have investigated the impact of social capital on Black students' success, little research exists to explain the social capital Black student bring with them to their HBCU. When the social capital concept to Black first-generation students at HBCUs, the community cultural wealth framework can be used to illuminate components of the forms of capital these students use to navigate the HBCU environment and persist through graduation successfully.

Community Cultural Wealth

The failure to understand student persistence from a cultural perspective diminishes the importance of students' cultures of origin, elevates assimilation into a White, Western culture of higher education as the primary means to persistence, and negates the positive effects on student persistence (Renn & Reason, 2013) Yosso (2006) uses counterstories to invoke and develop multiple possibilities for challenging the barriers within the educational pipeline, imagine alternative scenarios for success through schooling in Chicana/o communities, and hold schools accountable for all young people in America. Counterstories reflect on the lived experiences of people of color to raise critical consciousness about social and racial injustice (p. 10).

Specifically using composite counter-narratives Yosso (2006) draw on multiple forms of data to recount the experiences of people of color. Yosso's work explores stories and lived experiences of people who struggle to analyze and challenge oppressive relationships and institutions critically, and to imagine and create more just and inclusive alternatives. It also addresses the need for more attention to the entire pipeline from kindergarten through higher education and reduces the barriers that block movement through the pipeline for Chicanas/os students (p. xi).

According to Yosso (2006), educators often perceive Chicana/o students' culture and language as deficits to overcome instead of strengths to cultivate. The cultural low model is the most widely used in the deficit tradition. The cultural deficit model finds dysfunction in Chicana/o cultural values and insists such values cause low educational and occupational attainment (Yosso, 2006). These supposedly deficient cultural values include a present versus future time orientation, immediate instead of deferred gratification, an emphasis on cooperation rather than competition, and a tendency to minimize the importance of education and upward social mobility (p. 22-23). Yosso's (2006) work represents the various stages in the educational pipeline for Chicanas/os. It brings to life the qualitative, often hard-to-see dimensions of the struggle for equal education in Chicano/o communities due to schools defaulting to methods of 'banking education' critiqued by Paulo Freire (1970). Such deficit practices overgeneralize family background and fail to acknowledge the ways personal views of educational success shape "social-cultural and linguistic experiences and assumptions about appropriate cultural outcomes." (p. 23).

Cultural Capital. Cultural capital, or social assets that stimulate social mobility, plays an integral role in the success of all students in higher education (Squire, 2013). Yet, cultural capital is not accrued by everybody equally nor defined complexly (Bourdieu, 1986; Yosso, 2005). Cultural capital is associated with familiarity with certain norms and expectations, which allows for navigation within certain situations (Bourdieu, 2002). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has been interpreted to mean that some communities are culturally poor, which cultural capital "exposes White, middle-class culture as the standard, and therefore, all other forms and expressions of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm'" (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). Yosso (2005) recognized that, while Bourdieu was trying to make a structural critique, Bourdieu's work

supports deficit theories, which posit that students of color are responsible for poor academic performance because they do not possess the cultural knowledge or skills that have become normative within schools. The constructs of cultural capital are used as analytical frameworks that make sense of first-generation college students' experiences (London, 1989; Massey et al. 2003; Pascarella et al., 2004; Perna, 2000). Although the theory of cultural capital is prevalent in the literature regarding first-generation college students' experiences, this framework is often used to describe first-generation (and many other groups) students through the lens of a deficit model. Much of the research does not capture or recognize the forms of cultural capital that diverse groups of students (i.e., Black first-generation) draw upon because it does not align with the dominant cultural capital typically privileged in school settings (Banks, 2006; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) uses a critical race theory (CRT) lens to challenge traditional interpretations of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) and introduces community cultural wealth as an alternate concept to understand the community of color.

Critical Race Theory. Yosso (2005) defined CRT “as a theoretical and analytically framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses” (p. 74). Building on Solórzano and Yosso's (2001) conceptualization of critical race theory (CRT), Yosso (2005) introduced community cultural wealth. Yosso utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) to expand the view of cultural capital beyond the characteristics associated with White, middle-class values to include capital that is cultivated by cultural wealth. CRT is concerned with how power structures are maintained through racism (Crenshaw, 1995) and has grown to include branches of FemCrit, LatCrit, TribalCrit, AsianCrit, and WhiteCrit. Yosso (2006) engaged Latina/o critical race (LatCrit) theory scholarship which brought a Chicana/o, Latina/o consciousness to CRT in examining racialized layers of subordination based on

immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent, and surname. Moreover, LatCrit consciousness extends critical race discussions to address the layers of racialized subordination that comprised Chicana/o, Latina/o experiences within and beyond U.S. borders (Yosso, 2006).

Research using CRT centers the lived experiences of people of color (Rendón et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005), in this case, Black first-generation college students. The theory of community cultural wealth does this by moving away from deficit theorizing to focus on the inherent strengths of marginalized groups. Yosso (2005) described deficit thinking as “the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills, and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (p. 75). Several other authors also challenged the use of deficit models in education (Coles et al., 2002; Fassett & Warren, 2005; Harper, 2009; Strayhorn, 2010; Tierney; 1999). Bank’s (2006) research recognized the different forms of capital that Black women undergraduates drew upon in their college experiences and how these alternate forms of capital contributed to their success in college. Banks (2006) found her participants brought forms of capital with them that they used to negotiate their experiences in higher education. Unrecognized capital included support systems, strategies, and negotiations that contributed to their educational success. Strayhorn (2010) posited that much of the previous research on cultural and social capital treats minority students as a homogenous group, which is also problematic. To remove deficit thinking, the concept of capital must be thought about, articulated, and utilized in more complex ways (Squire, 2013). Rather than forwarding deficit thought, higher education scholars have begun to reimagine existing structures to honor people’s cultural backgrounds (Reyes & Duran, 2021). As post-secondary education challenges deficit-

based thinking that harms students of color and other minoritized populations, researchers have called for an increased understanding of how they mobilize anti-deficit thought in scholarship and practice (Reyes & Duran, 2021).

Community Cultural Wealth Theory. Yosso (2005) would argue that first-generation students have many different types of capital. Her community cultural wealth model provides six distinct types of capital that inform cultural capital in communities of difference. One type is aspirational capital, defined as the ability to “maintain hopes and dreams of the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p. 77). Research has shown that people of color do aspire to enroll in college (Rose, 2012; Yosso, 2005). The Community Cultural Wealth model builds on the work of Solorzano and Vilalpando (1998) and is described as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). These forms of capital often go unrecognized when referring to Black-first generation students and the multiple strengths they use to serve a larger purpose and persist through college (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) identified six forms of capital in the community cultural wealth theory: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. As previously mentioned, aspirational capital can be understood as the ability to maintain goals and aspirations for the future, despite obstacles perceived barriers. It includes aspiring to dreams without the tangible means to attain them. Yosso defines aspirational capital as the “hopes and dreams” students have. She explains that African American and Latina/o students and their families continue to have high educational aspirations despite persistent education inequities. Navigational capital refers to the skills needed to move through social institutions, including institutions not designed with communities of color in mind. Yosso further explains that

students' navigational capital empowers them to maneuver within unsupportive or hostile environments.

Social capital includes networks of social contacts, including community resources. Social capital is a form of capital that Yosso defines as students' "peers and other social contacts" and emphasizes how students utilize these contacts to gain college access and navigate other social institutions. These relationships provide support to navigate societal institutions. Linguistic capital refers to academic and social skills acquired by using more than one language and/or style. This capital refers to the various language and communication skills students bring to their college environment. Yosso further defines this form of capital by discussing the role of storytelling, particularly for students of color. She argues that because storytelling is a part of students' lives before, they arrive on college campuses, they bring with them "skills [that] may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme." (p. 79). Familial capital includes cultural awareness cultivated among family members, which expands the idea of family to include kinship, which transmits community history and memory. Familial capital also refers to students' social and personal human resources in their pre-college environment, drawn from their extended familial and community networks. Yosso explains that students' pre-college experiences within a communal environment come with the knowledge that campuses can help students leverage into positive experiences in college. Resistant capital refers to knowledge and skills supported by activities that challenge inequality and injustice. Resistance capital has its foundations in the experiences of communities of color in securing equal rights and collective freedom. According to Yosso, this form of capital comes from parents, community members and an historical legacy of engaging in social justice. This historical legacy of resistance leaves students of color

particularly well-positioned to leverage their higher education training to enter society prepared to solve challenging problems regarding equitable health, educational, and other social outcomes. These forms of capital draw on the knowledge students of color and other marginalized communities (in this case, Black first-generation students) bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom and the college environment. Community cultural wealth requires that those who use it for research or practice also engage in the struggle for social justice. CCW serves as a framework for analyzing and documenting how Black first-generation students in this study “utilized assets already abundant in their communities” (Yosso, 2005, p. 82) to successfully negotiate their educational journey into HBCUs and graduate with a bachelor’s degree. Other studies have also used the CCW framework to study the lived experiences of students of color and other marginalized populations in higher education.

Operationalizing CCW in Higher Education. Reyes & Duran (2021) conducted a content analysis to understand how higher education scholars combat anti-deficit thinking about minoritized populations using the CCW framework. They found 67 articles that used qualitative methodologies to investigate the presence of cultural wealth for minoritized communities moving through postsecondary environments. Illustratively, authors most frequently acknowledge aspirational capital in their manuscripts, appearing in 59 articles. Their findings also emphasize the importance of familial networks in minoritized college students’ lives and educational trajectories. “About half of the articles brought attention to how intersecting identities, like race and gender, influence the unique ways minoritized students deployed their cultural wealth” (p. 16). Reyes and Duran’s (2021) analysis also illuminated 11 emergent capitals, indicating the variety of inherent talents that minoritized individuals bring to the educational environments.

Additional studies by Cuellar (2019) and Sablan (2019) highlight how researchers are beginning to conduct quantitative methods to empirically examine CCW in higher education (Ryes & Duran, 2021). Kouyoumdjian et al.'s (2017) study used the CCW framework to examine unacknowledged student resources and challenges for first-and second-generation college students at Hispanic serving institutions. The student sample identified various forms of CCW to include aspirational, familial, navigational, and social capital as sources of support. In addition, students reported challenges that impede their academic progress, such as financial stability and knowledge of academic skills (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). In a study on Latinx athletes, Ortega and Grafnetterova (2021) drew upon Yosso's (2005) model to explore the educational and athletic experiences of former NCAA Division I Latinx college athletes who enrolled in graduate school. The themes that emerged from the study included family influence and support (familial capital); athletic department's encouragement (social and navigational capital); and Latinx faculty representation (navigational and resistance). Rooted in Yosso's (2005) CCW, Garrow et al. (2014) defined Deaf community cultural wealth as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by the [Deaf community] to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 5). Like students of color, deaf students have been judged and labeled as having deficit skills needed to be academically and socially equal to hearing people (Stapleton, 2014). These students have also developed skills to resist and persist through oppression.

Adsitt's (2017) study identified factors that contributed to the success of first-generation students of color using the CCW framework. The author utilized intersectionality (i.e., how race and class intersect), cultural capital, and the CCW model as frameworks to analyze the educational experiences of 19 first-generation students of color from three private four-year

institutions. Adsitt's (2017) research centers on the experiences of first-generation students in the higher education pipeline and by moving away from commonly utilized deficit models and frameworks that serve to construct at-risk identities. Adsitt found that first-generation college students of color in the study provide many examples of how they drew on several forms of capital outlined in the community cultural wealth model to include:

- Showing agency as they drew on the resources within their families and communities while negotiating complex educational structures.
- Families and mentors provided aspirational capital in the form of high expectations and emotional support.
- Families showed their commitment to their high expectations for their children by pursuing opportunities that they felt would better meet their educational goals.
- How first-generation students of color drew on their social networks to navigate the path to these opportunities.
- How they drew upon their own strength and developed some strategies for managing the complicated emotions that were connected to this work (Adsitt, 2017 p. 208-209).

In higher education, most research studies that focus on the cultural capital of first-generation students of color have a common theme that these students demonstrated their resiliency in the ways they drew upon often unrecognized forms of capital and their strength to find their way through the educational system (Paquette, 2018). However, most studies use the CCW framework to describe how students of color persist at Hispanic serving institutions

(Squire, 2013) and predominantly White institutions (Adsitt, 2017). As of 2021, there are no studies that use the CCW framework to understand how Black students matriculate to HBCUs.

Summary

The processes by which students move from high school to college—including college choice, access, readiness, matriculation, and completion—are more important than ever before. Understanding how students persist to access college is equally as important particularly to aid in the college retention and persistence process. Research on college access falls into four categories student trait indicators for college aspiration, attendance, and persistence; school reform efforts for at-risk students; college intervention and outreach programs; and curriculum alignment of the P-16 system.

Much of the earlier college retention work was drawn from quantitative studies of primarily residential universities and students of majority backgrounds (Tinto, 2006). As such, it did not, in its initial formulation, speak to the experience of students in other types of institutions, two- and four-year, and of students of different gender, race, ethnicity, income, and orientation (Tinto, 2006). Nor did they speak to the marginalized population as first-generation students. As higher education becomes increasingly essential for success in a society that has become knowledge- and technology-oriented, retention and persistence for all students is more critical than ever (Berger et al., 2012). However, it is vital that we understand the difference between the two and not use them interchangeably. A persistence rate is measured by the percentage of students who return to college at any institution for their second year, while retention rate is by the percentage of students who return to the same institution and graduate from their initial institution. These concepts have been mandated as a core indicator by accrediting agencies and states for the resource allocations. These rates are valuable to

institutions (particularly HBCUs) because it assures a continued flow of revenues into the institution through tuition payments. It is also crucial for public institutions because institutional support from state and federal governments is based on the size of the student body.

Furthermore, most national rankings, such as the *US News & World Report* and others, use retention (and persistence) numbers to help rank institutions. Many American families use that information as a guide when choosing colleges.

Student success in college requires persistence to graduation. Without persistence to graduation, other markers of college student success become less likely to achieve (Braxton & Francis, 2018). In addition, college students' stagnant persistence and completion rates matter for both the college itself and society in general (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Although access to higher education is becoming more widely available to all in the United States, current persistence data shows many students leave the field before completing their educational goals. To promote greater degree completion, institutions should pay more attention to the student perspective and ask how they should perform to retain their students and how they should perform so more of their students want to persist to completion (Tinto, 2016). When considering the retention and persistence rates for students from traditionally marginalized groups in higher education, such as Black first-generation students, the numbers are worse (Falcone, 2011; Pulliam & Gonzalez, 2018); therefore, this study answers two call to action. First, it is a response to former President Obama's call for the United States to regain the lead as the nation in the world with the highest concentration of college and university degrees (Sxchnider & Yin, 2011). Second, it pursues a different perspective in addressing this persistence phenomenon of better understanding how Black first-generation students at HBCUs persist through graduation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Goodness criteria require that the methodology be philosophically appropriate, theoretically justified, and able to aid in uncovering participants' perspectives and stories (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). The purpose of this study is to explore the persistence experiences of Black first-generation HBCU alumni and the forms of community cultural wealth they used during their pre-college journey their HBCU. Guided by both persistence and the community cultural wealth frameworks, I ask the following research questions:

1. How do Black first-generation college graduates make sense of the community cultural wealth they brought with them to their undergraduate historically Black college or university (HBCU)?
2. What forms of community cultural wealth did Black first-generation students use during their pre-college journey, and how did it inform their student entry characteristics?

In this chapter, I first discuss my positionality, hermeneutic phenomenology, and the research design. Secondly, I describe how I selected participants for the study and outline my plan using hermeneutic thematic data analysis to make meaning of the data and explain my steps for data generation and analysis to answer my research questions. Lastly, I outline methods used to decrease researcher bias while promoting the trustworthiness of the study.

Positionality

Since qualitative research is interpretive and influenced by the researcher, it is important I note my positionality and background as the researcher (Sarcedo, 2014). People make meaning of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Bereiter, 1994). I identify with Black culture and as a first-generation student from a low socioeconomic background. As a Black man who grew up in predominately Black American neighborhoods in downtown, and North Charleston, South Carolina, I have a personal understanding of Black culture, identity, and norms from my own lived experience. I must be open to the idea that my participants' experience of Black culture (rituals, traditions, practices) may be vastly different from my own.

The foundation of all research is grounded in the beliefs and assumptions of researchers (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). As a researcher, I seek to systematically address problems of practice and challenges I hope to improve within an organization (Smith, 2020). This goal fits with the philosophy, strategies, and intentions of the constructivist research paradigm. Therefore, my approach to the study aligns with constructivism. A constructivist assumes that multiple realities can be studied and that I [as the researcher] derive to my understanding of these realities by working with and through the participant's perspective of my problem of practice (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017, p. 13). This approach is to understand and interpret what my participant is thinking or the meaning they make of the context (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). More specifically, a constructivist epistemology underscores the mean making of individual participants and

acknowledges that such understanding is socially constructed (Crotty, 1998). Again, the key tenet of the constructivist paradigm is that reality is socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Throughout this research process, I focus on learning the meaning that my participants hold about the problem, not the meaning I brought to the research or written expressions I have read in literature (Creswell, 2009). Every effort is made to understand the viewpoint of the participant, rather than my viewpoint as well as understand the individual and their interpretation of the world around them (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). To do this, it is important that I acknowledge my position in the world, articulate how I make sense of my realities and truths, and examine my underlying belief system and philosophical assumptions as the researcher. This helps to orientate my critical thinking about the research problem (Black first-generation student pre-college persistence at HBCUs), its significance, and how I approach it to answer my research questions, understand the problem investigated, and contribute to its solution (understanding the cultural capital Black first-generation students bring to their institution). In the following sections, I reflect on my anti-deficit approach to the research, my college going process, describe my persistence experience as a first-generation student, and describe my viewpoint as an experienced enrollment officer.

Reflexivity

A reflexive approach to the research process urges the researcher to talk about themselves, presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process (Mruck & Breuer, 2003). As a Black first-generation scholar, and HBCU

graduate with several years of experience as a college enrollment officer and student affairs practitioner, and now in my research, I am directly connected to this study. I come to this study with assumptions and beliefs about the college going process as well as how HBCUs are structured to support Black first-generation student college students to help this group succeed in college. My lived experiences have shaped my perspective to provide a critical counternarrative on Black first-generation students as well as advocate for a different way of addressing the Black first-generation student persistence phenomenon in the United States. After reading current literature on first-generation students, little has been conducted on the persistence experiences of Black first-generation students at HBCUs, particularly in the south. Learning from Black first-generation HBCU graduates as they reflect on their undergraduate experience provides a different voice and understanding of how these students use forms of community cultural wealth to navigate their institution and persist to graduation. Reflection is also required on my part as the researcher.

Jones et al. (2006) stressed the importance of the researcher's reflection process on maintaining goodness, as it has implications on data analysis and presentation. My anti-deficit approach and perspective to my research stems from my lived experience as a Black first-generation college student and member of the HBCU community (graduate and administrator). I adopt Harper's (2009) approach to develop an anti-deficit framework for the study.

Anti-deficit approach. Harper (2009) adopted a framework from the *National Black Male College Achievement Study* (NBMCAS) as a lens through which to explore

the enablers of student achievement in Science Engineering Technology and Math (STEM) at various components of the STEM pipeline, from K–12 schools through doctoral degree attainment and transitions into science research and long-term industry careers. Though conceptually like the framework used in the NBMCAS, Harper customized the framework for students of color (women and men) as well as various underrepresented minority groups in STEM fields (Harper, 2009). Harper’s research places emphasis on reframing deficit-oriented research questions regarding students of color and their trajectories in STEM fields. Inspired by Harper’s framework, I framed the research questions, and the interview protocol questions for this study to explore Black first-generation student persistence and achievement at HBCUs.

It was not until graduate school in my mid-twenties at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, United States where I learned about anti-deficit frameworks. Until that point in my life I existed as a Black man in South Carolina having grown up in Charleston. As I reflect on my educational experiences (particularly pre-college), I had a diverse group of grade-school teachers except for Black male teachers. However, in my community as well as at home, I had a wealth of Black men to look up to as coaches, instructors, mentors, and advisors, who were also family. I mentioned this because I recognize that this is not every Black person's story in America. I do not assume that every Black person that attended public schools in America during the early 1990s and early 2000s had a positive experience. Apart from the lack of Black contributions to society embedded in the public-school curriculum, I had a mostly positive K-12 grade school experience. The cultivation of my knowledge, skills, and

talents I developed in the Charleston County School District and in the Black community in Charleston is the reason for my anti-deficit world view and approach to this study.

In graduate school, I participated on a research team for a study centered on Black and Latino male achievement (*Succeeding in the City: Report from the NYC Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study.pdf*). Throughout the research process I learned the importance of framing and re-framing components of a research study (e.g., using anti-deficit framing questions instead of deficit-oriented questions) to focus on Black and Latino male achievement instead of rehashing depressing data about these groups. Also, participating on this research team with other Black and Latino men helped me realize the importance of framing a study that focuses on more of an asset-based perspective as well as reflect on my own educational histories as a Black man.

Common deficit framing narratives about Black students, particularly Black boys and Black college men is that they tend to be disengaged, disrespectful, unprepared, underperforming, and violent (Harper & Associates, 2014); have higher school suspension rates (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011); low graduation rates; and the lowest college completion rates in the United States (Harper & Harris, 2012). Going back to my experience on the research team, when using anti-deficit framing, instead of asking, “Why do so many drop out of high school,” we wanted to know “what helps Black and Latino males graduate” (Harper & Associates, 2014). Because this study is focused on Black first-generation student persistence and achievement, I do not devote much energy to resurfacing depressing data. Instead, I use components of the Community Cultural Wealth framework to structure my questions to understand the assets (cultural wealth)

Black first-generation HBCU graduates used to persist to their degree which may require reflecting on pre-college experiences. Further, Harper's (2010, 2012) anti-deficit achievement framework supports the use of qualitative interviews to answer research questions pertaining to the success of students who are traditionally studied using deficit approaches. Instead of focusing questions on underrepresentation and educational disadvantages among other barriers, this framework allows me to invert questions to focus on successes and positive attributes of participants and deliberately attempt to discover how some students of color (in this case, Black first-generation students) have managed to succeed (Harper, 2012).

Black first-generation pre-college experience. Black students need varying levels of support upon entering college to ensure persistence and completion. College and career readiness for high school students is a major focus of the education reform movement (College Board, 2013). There is a heightened focus on understanding how students are performing academically and in ensuring that they are college and career ready. (College, 3013). The four elements of college readiness are cognitive strategies (ways of thinking and processing information for college level work); content knowledge (knowledge in all subject areas as foundation for future learning); academic behaviors (behaviors that reflect student self-awareness, monitoring, and control); and contextual skills and awareness (understanding of college system and culture) (Conley, 2010).

African American young people graduate high school unprepared for the rigors of college (Bryant, 2015). African American students are far less likely to be ready for college due to many factors like course provision, teacher quality, and access to school

counselors with those in high-poverty schools being the least prepared (Bryant, 2015; ACT, 2013). According to the office of Civil rights at the US Department of Education, 57% of African American students attend schools where they have access to full complement of courses necessary to be college ready. This level of preparedness I keep referring to is measured in several ways to include high school exit exams, and college entrance exams to name a few. Put differently, college readiness is the combination of core academic knowledge, skills, and habits that youth need to be successful in a postsecondary setting without remedial coursework or training (Lombardi, Seburn, & Conley, 2011). In their college transition study on the experiences of ten successful first-generation HBCU college seniors, Rick and Warren (2021) found that the transition experience led to confusion with academic and financial procedures, various emotions including anxiety and fear, the realization that students have deficits in academic skills, and the receipt of support from family members and others.

Among all undergraduate students, the U.S. Department of Education classified 41% of African American students to be first generation (cite). Unfortunately, we must continue in the deficit-framing research when describing first-generation students' pre-college experiences. Researchers have suggested that first-generation students possess limited knowledge of the role of a college student and college culture, and they complete fewer credit hours during the first year of college when compared to continuing-generation college students (Ardoin, 2018; Garrison & Gardner, 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004; Zeisman, 2012). First generation college students often are at a distinct disadvantage “when it comes to postsecondary access—a disadvantage that persists even

after controlling for other factors such as educational expectations, academic preparation, support from parents and schools in planning and preparing for college, and family income” (Ricks & Waren, 2021; Choy, 2001, p. 4). This lack of social capital makes it difficult to navigate the college going process as a high school student which may be the reason many first-generation students opt out of pursuing a college degree. According to Bourdieu (1977, 1992), first-generation students feel that a college degree is not for them, and they do not have the same sense of entitlement or belonging as their continuing-generation counterparts. As a former admission counselor, I have encountered students and families that believe a college degree is not for them. Furthermore, Ntiri’s (2001) argued that the socioeconomic and political structure that currently exists in the United States presents several obstacles also related to college access to higher education and successful completion of a college degree by African Americans and first-generation students. Due to the lack of anti-deficit research centered on the college going experience(s) of Black students, I am motivated provide a different perspective of how I was prepared for the college going process and gained acceptance into the college of my choice.

In high school, I had access to rigorous college preparatory and honors courses, experienced teachers, guidance counselors and career counseling. *Introduction to HBCUs*. The acquired knowledge about HBCUs from watching television shows like *A Different World* and *The Cosby’s* where HBCU culture was often portrayed. I was in college when films like *Drumline* (2002) and *Stop the Yard* (2007) came out, which showed students engaged in HBCU culture through participation in social groups. These

TV shows/movies betrayed an image of HBCUs as a safe space to develop as a Black young adult. While these shows were interesting to me, I do not want to assume this was every Black person's introduction to HBCU culture. However, it was my experience as a participant in an institutional structural pre-collegiate program Upward Bound that helped me cultivate my social, navigational, linguistic, and aspirational forms capital.

In high school, my experience as an Upward Bound scholar at the College of Charleston prepared me for the college going process. However, I recognize that not all first-generation high school students can participate in such program or find value in participating in such program. The goal of Upward Bound is to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). This preparation is achieved through programming efforts like college tours/exposure, academic tutoring, summer enrichment, professional development workshops, and college application assistance. During the school year, Upward Bound staff provide weekly, academic support for program participants through high school visits, tutoring and mentoring relationships (Pathways to College Network, 2003). My aspiration was to be admitted to the college of my choice. As a result of my participation in the program, I successfully gained admission to a college of my first choice HBCU, Claflin University located in South Carolina. Through my participation in the Upward Bound program at the College of Charleston, I received college awareness, application assistance, and test preparation that ultimately prepared me for the college admissions process. That level of guidance

contributed to the successful admission offer to the college of my choice and provided me with the social capital necessary to achieve college enrollment (Perna, 2002).

Black First-Generation HBCU Student. Again, deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education (Yosso, 2005). These racialized assumptions about Communities of Color most often leads schools to default to the banking method of education critiqued by Paulo Freire (1973). I begin this section with a deficit perspective because my assumption (and lived experience) is that HBCUs like other American college and university types do not acknowledge the cultural wealth Black first-generation students bring with them to the institution and they create countless programs and efforts to retain as well as assimilate Black first-generation students to the campus environment. Although not the scope of this research project, my participation in the institutionalized student Support Services Program is an example of a retention perspective to retaining the student to help them persist instead of the focus being the student's motivation to persist.

As an undergraduate and first-generation HBCU student, my participation in the Student Support Services (SSS) program helped me successful navigate college and persist to my bachelor's degree. The goal of SSS is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). SSS was instrumental in helping me stay motivated to persist because I received academic tutoring that included instruction in reading, writing, study skills, mathematics, science, and other

subjects; advice and assistance in postsecondary course selection; assistance with information on financial aid programs, benefits, and scholarship resources; and assistance with completing financial aid applications (U.S. Department of Education, 2021) that ultimately cultivated my social, and navigational capital. While in college, the SSS program also provided individualized counseling for personal, career, and academic purposes which contributed to my navigating and persistence to earn my bachelor's degree. This also helped cultivate my aspirational capital. I could not be prouder to be a graduate of an HBCU. First, given the history of these institutions and why they were created, I am honored to be a graduate of the first HBCU in the state of South Carolina, Claflin University. HBCUs are institutions where students, faculty, staff, and surrounding communities form the environment, which knit the culture's fabric of HBCUs (Hall, 2018).

Enrollment Officer. My college admissions career began at my alma mater (Claflin University) in the Office of Admissions in January 2008 (during the recession). In my role, I engaged with students and families about what it took to get into college, own their educational experience, and graduate from college. As a college admissions counselor/recruiter, I often met with Black first-generation students who were unaware of the plethora of opportunities available after high school, nor did they recognize the cultural wealth they possessed to matriculate and graduate with a college degree. During my interaction with students at college fairs, to my surprise, some students only attended a college fair or program because their teacher or career counselor forced them to do so. Seemingly, they were unenthusiastic. I would often find myself personally walking

students through the college application and/or admission process because many of them were first-generation college applicants. As an HBCU recruiter, most of the students I engaged with identified as Black or African American and consisted of first and continuing-generation status.

For this study, I specifically focus on first-generation HBCU *graduates* because of their experiences navigating these institutions and to illuminate forms of cultural wealth they used to persist during the college going-process and in college. Personally, I have experienced firsthand how my HBCU (Clafin) was designed to support and retain me as a Black first-generation student but negated to acknowledge the cultural wealth I possessed and used to persist to my degree. My lived experience as a Black first-generation HBCU graduate and college enrollment officer is unique to me. However, as mentioned before, the social world cannot be understood from the perspective of an individual.

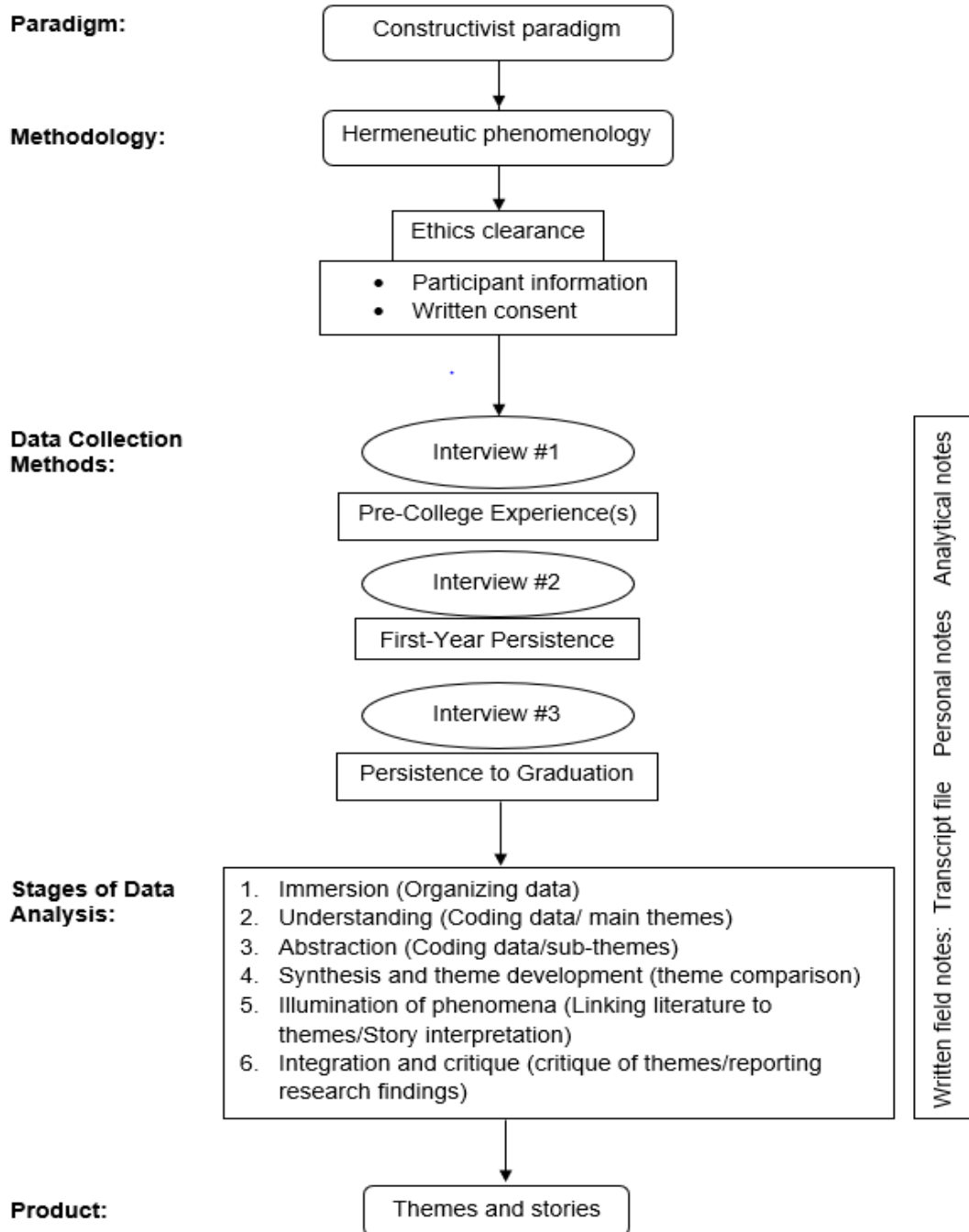
Research Design

Research is an undertaking through which we strive to increase our world knowledge (Glanville, 1999). Research related to a practical situation or that tries to resolve a practical issue is called applied research (Oliver, 2010). Applied research sheds light on a widely generalizable research issue. According to Lochmiller and Lester (2017), a research design is an overall plan to study a problem of practice that articulates the research questions, methodology, methods, and research approach to analyzing the data. A qualitative design was chosen to allow the voices of those who are often marginalized to be heard (Ingram, 2013). As a constructivist, I want to know how Black

first-generation HBCU graduates make sense of the community cultural wealth they used to navigate their college going process and persist through graduation. To do this, I utilize hermeneutic phenomenology, which allows entrance into the participant's lived experiences and points of view. After sharing my research approach, I then outline the qualitative research methods I used for the study as well as the stages of data analysis. The next section outlines the research approach which is explained by the sections that immediately follow.

Research Approach

Figure 2. *Research Approach*



Adopted Source: (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 615) <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR12->

Methodology

Qualitative methodologies represent a variety of interpretive, inductive approaches to the study of human experiences (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Per the constructivist paradigm, I employ a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to examine the lived experiences of Black first-generation HBCU graduates. According to van Manen (1984, 2015),

a combination of methodological suggestions to help conduct a hermeneutic-phenomenological research: (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and (6) balancing there search context by considering parts and whole (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al, 2018).

The goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to develop a dense description of the phenomenon being investigated in a particular context. The goal for this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the persistence behaviors of former Black first-generation HBCU students and illuminate the forms of cultural capital (using the community cultural wealth framework) they used to navigate the college going process and persist through graduation at their HBCU. I make meaning of this phenomenon by understanding participants' lived experience using hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutic phenomenology. Also known as interpretive phenomenology, presents a unique opportunity for capturing the lived experience of participants (Frechette et al., 2020). Hermeneutic phenomenology originates from the work of Martin Heidegger, a student of Edmund Husserl's student. For Heidegger, interpretive phenomenology considers an individual's personal history and the culture in which they were raised. Phenomenology is a theoretical point of view advocating the study of individuals' experiences because human behavior is determined by the phenomena of experience rather than objective, physically described reality that is external to the individual (Cohen et al., 2007). The focus is on the way things appear to us through experience or in our consciousness, where the phenomenological researcher aims to provide a rich, textured description of lived experience (Kafle, 2011). When using phenomenology as a methodology, there are criteria for data gathering and data analysis. For the study I follow a set of tasks that required me to collect data, analyze them and report the findings. The findings—or outcome—of this type of study is a collection of descriptions of meanings for individuals of their lived experiences; experiences of concepts or phenomena (Creswell, 2007). The use of hermeneutic phenomenology enabled the exploration of participants' experiences with further abstraction and interpretation by the researchers based on researchers' theoretical and personal knowledge (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

Hermeneutics is the relationship between the reader and the text. It can be used to merge social, cultural, and interpersonal contexts. Hermeneutics also adds the interpretive element to illuminate meanings and assumptions in the participants' texts that

participants themselves may have difficulty in articulating (Crotty, 1998). Using this type of phenomenology as a research methodology, one must apply the skill of reading texts, such as the text of transcripts—spoken accounts of personal experience—and isolating themes as van Manen (1997) put it. For understanding, the themes can be viewed as written interpretations of lived experience. So, in the application of hermeneutic phenomenology, the requirement is to examine the text, reflect on the content, and discover something ‘telling,’ something ‘meaningful,’ something ‘thematic’ (van Manen 1997, p. 86). Having isolated common themes, one rewrites the theme while interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon or lived experience (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology is a type of phenomenological methodology among *interpretive* phenomenological methodologies.

As a method of analysis in qualitative research, it is easy to make mistakes in identifying experiences (i.e., isolating themes). It is difficult to know that one has extracted proper lived experience and defined the meaning of an individual’s (a research participant’s) experience because the phenomenological view of experience is complex (Smith et al., 2009). The rationale for my use of hermeneutic phenomenology is that it allows for the summarization of the experiences of Black first-generation HBCU graduates and their motivation to persist to their bachelor’s degree. It allow me to identify the essences of the phenomena of Black student persistence as well as interpret the phenomena to provide a richer research picture of their situation as Black first-generation students. When employed as a research methodology, hermeneutic phenomenology provides the best opportunity to ‘give voice’ to the experiences of Black first-generation

HBCU graduates as they share their persistence journey. Its use also allowed me to work from the participant's specific statements and experiences because the research of hermeneutic phenomenology does not look for 'truth' but for the participants' perceptions of 'their truth'—their own experiences as they perceive them." (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Participant Selection

First, I would like to reiterate why I am interested in interviewing Black first-generation HBCU alumni because the participant sample is a critical component to the research study HBCUs are a uniquely American institutions. Whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans (Arroyo & Gasman, 2015). Most HBCUs in America are in the southeastern part of the United States, however, for this study participants could have graduated from any HBCU in the U.S. In terms of graduates, in the academic year 2018-2019, HBCUs conferred 48,400 degrees (68% bachelor's degrees). Black students earned 80% of the 33,100 bachelor's degrees conferred by HBCUs. This study reflects the experiences of graduates from HBCUs. These institutions graduate Black first-generation students at high rates. Participants for the study were recruited using several networks.

The overall 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2012 was 62 % (NCES, 2020). Which means, by 2018 approximately 62% of students persisted and received a bachelor's degree at the same institution where they started in 2012 (NCES, 2020). This is important due to the swirling phenomenon happening at

American institutions. Therefore, the participant selection included HBCU graduates who *started* college between 2009-2015. That is, I interviewed HBCU alumni who *graduated* college between 2013-2020. At the time of the study, HBCU alumni who graduated between 2013-2020 were able to recall their lived pre-college through graduation persistence experience more readily as a Black first-generation college student during their interviews. I also wanted the graduates to be a few years removed from their pre-college lived experience.

Participant Criteria. The participant criteria below were selected because the majority of HBCU students are low-income, first-generation students. HBCUs graduate the most Black first-generation students with a bachelor's degree in America. To participate in the study each participant must identify as Black or African American. I specifically focus on Black or African American students due to the systematic indicators college and universities use to racial identify students at these institutions. Also, participants must have graduated from college (undergraduate) as a first-generation (neither parent or guardian has received a bachelor's degree) student and hold an undergraduate degree from a 4-year degree granting HBCU. Lastly, participants must have graduated from an HBCU between 2013 and 2020 (these years are also highlighted in recent persistence and graduation data). These criteria were also designed in support of the research questions, which are specifically tailored towards the persistence experiences of Black first-generation HBCU graduates in the United States.

Participant Recruitment. To recruit participants, I used a variety of methods. I deployed a snowball recruitment technique in hopes to gain participants for the study.

Patton (2015) defined snowball recruitment as the ability to “create a chain of interviews based on people who know people who would be good sources given the focus of inquiry” (p. 270). I used my personal connections with HBCU alumni networks and folks, Upward Bound staff, student support services staff. A recruitment email (Appendix B) was sent to the Directors of Upward Bound and Student Support Services programs as well as other first-generation support programs at HBCUs to recruit participants. I targeted these programs because they are specifically designed to support first-generation students and alumni. In addition, I a flyer (Appendix J) to share on social media platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) as well as GroupMe groups (i.e., Black men in student affairs) with all pertinent information about the study (Appendix K for social media recruitment plan). The recruitment efforts above yielded 19 prospects. Eleven participants (referred to as graduates) completed the screening process and fit the participant criteria. The sample size for this study aligns with Patton’s (2015) notion that qualitative inquiry typically focuses on small sample sizes.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data sources, rather than rely on a single data source. The researcher must collect information from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon, but there are various methods for collecting data including long interviews, conversations, action research, focus groups, and participant observation (Patton, 2002). Then the researcher reviews all the data, make sense of it, and organize it into categories or themes that cut across all the data sources (Creswell, 2009). I used multiple methods to collect data directly aligned with hermeneutic phenomenology

methodology to include interviews, conversations, observations to capture background and other information. I then collected data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals—what they experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). I used a questionnaire and the three-series phenomenological interviews as the data collection tools for this study.

Participant Questionnaire

The participant questionnaire (Appendix C) was a tool used to screen prospective participants and select each graduate for the study. The participants responded to all questions and submitted the questionnaire to express their interest in participating in the study. The identified questions uncovered demographics including race/ethnicity, first-generation status and HBCU affiliation. The HBCU related questions uncovered where and when the graduates completed their undergraduate education and received a bachelor's degree. The purpose of the questionnaire was to thoroughly screen prospects and select a purposeful sample of diverse HBCU graduates.

Building Rapport Phone Conversation

According to Arminio and Hultgren (2002), I must reflect upon my relationship with my participants and their relationship with the phenomenon. Building rapport with the graduates (participants) is an essential element to goodness in qualitative research. I needed to establish a positive rapport with the graduates to build trust. Responses from the participant questionnaire were used to make personal connections, be aware of

pronouns, make HBCU connections, and sharing who I am, as a means of connecting with the graduates and building trust. I used the rapport building conversation script (Appendix) to guide the conversation. As the researcher, I wanted the graduates to feel comfortable and excited to share their persistence journeys and give them space to reflect and make meaning of their experiences. After building rapport I explained what the study was about and clearly stated my intentions, biases, and assumptions. After discussing the role and expectations for participating the study, I proceeded to schedule three separate interviews with each participant. As an initial meeting, these conversations lasted 30-45 minutes via telephone call. After each building rapport conversation with the graduates, I sent a follow up email with participant interview instructions (Appendix E) detailing information about the study, interview appointment details, and a copy of the consent form (Appendix F).

Three Part Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants (Creswell, 2009). Interviews can generate discussions about the influence of social identities and sociohistorical forces on participants' experiences and how they make meaning of those experiences (Ortiz, 2003). Given the need to explore the experiences of Black first-generation HBCU graduates in response to the research questions, qualitative research methods and the anti-deficit achievement framework guided this research. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary source of data generation. Semi-structured interviews provide greater breadth or richness in data compared with structured interviews and allow participants freedom to

respond to questions and probes, and to narrate their experiences without being tied down to specific answers (Morse & Field, 1995). Specifically, I used the three-series phenomenological interview method to conduct interview with the HBCU graduates.

Interview One. The first interview exercise (Appendix G) consisted of open-ended questions to initiate conversation with each graduate about their pre-college experiences. As outlined in previous sections, there are a several deficit framed research studies to describe the pre-college experiences of Blacks first-generation students. In addition to understanding the participant experience, I wanted to know how they came to learn about the HBCU they attended to earn their bachelor's degree. Before we began the interview series, I used interview one to review the consent form and create a pseudonym with each graduate. This interview focused on their background (and sense of community), their educational experience, and their college preparatory experience.

Interview Two. The second interview exercise (Appendix H) consist of open-ended quested related to their transition to college and being a college student. At the beginning of this interview, I engaged each participant in a reflection activity to start the graduate's reflection process from the day they left home and moved to college. More specifically, I wanted to understand how they persisted in their first year of college as a Black first-generation student at their HBCU. This interview focused on their transition from high school, resources they used to navigate the first year of college, and aspiration(s) they had during their first year.

Interview Three. The third interview exercise (Appendix I) consisted of open-ended questions related to the graduate's college experience after their first-year,

motivation to continue as a college student, and their persistence experience to graduation. The intent of this final interview was to understand how the participants navigated their HBCU using their personal knowledge, abilities, talents, and skills to earn their degree. This interview focused on their preparation to be an upperclassman and motivation to obtain their bachelor's degree. The third interview ended with a reflection question seeking their advice for current Black first-generation students

For this study, three semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted via video and audio platform (Zoom). I used the three-series phenomenological interview method to conduct participant interviews. All three semi-structured video recorded interviews were between 45 minutes and 90 minutes. The three interviews allowed me as the interviewer to delve deeply into social and personal matters because the purpose of the qualitative research interview is to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are often the sole data source for a qualitative research study (as it was for this study) and are usually scheduled in advance at a designated time and location outside of everyday events (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Most of the interview increments with each graduate were scheduled a day apart with a few exceptions. Scheduling the interviews within close time spans kept the graduates engaged and eager to share their lived experience during the next interview. Each of the three interview protocols (designed to investigate forms of community cultural wealth) guided each interview conversation using open-ended questions. Time was allotted for me to build rapport (trust and respect

for the interviewee and the information they shared) and for the participant to make meaning of their lived experience in a safe and comfortable environment. Particularly, for sharing of personal experiences and attitudes as they occurred. Each interview allowed the graduates to reflect on their pre-college experience, first-year college experience, and their persistence to graduation. After each interview, the observational, audio, and virtual transcription file were used as data sources to analyze.

Data Analysis

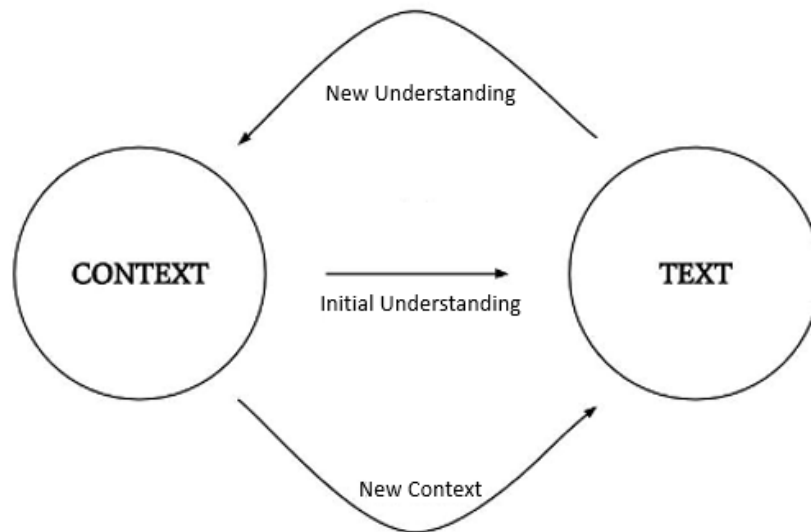
The analysis of data in qualitative research begins at the onset of data collection. Although I conducted a three-part interview series with Black first generation HBCU graduates, I only used data from the first interview (pre-college experiences) to answer the research question for the study. However, all transcripts were used in my understanding of the phenomenon. The data analysis procedures, illustrated by Moustakas (1994), consist of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007). As part of the data analysis process, I used a paid transcription service (REV.com) to transcribe all video recorded interviews. Participants were offered the opportunity to review their individual interview transcripts to provide feedback concerning transcript accuracy and make any additions, deletions, or clarifications (Sarcedo, 2014). After collecting data from the graduates in the study, I only used the first interview (pre-college experience) data. I analyzed the first interview series data by reducing the information to significant statements and quotes and combined the statements into themes. Qualitative researchers build their patterns,

categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. This inductive process illustrates working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researcher has established a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 2009). The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and a color-coding scheme when organizing the data into themes, categories, and codes. According to Sloan & Bowe (2014), the researcher must listen to and read each statement of each interview, consider its context, and discern which are good data and which are not. This interpretation, by the researcher, with its complexity, is what makes hermeneutic phenomenology difficult, but it is what makes phenomenology hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen 1997). From inductive analyses of the data sources (observational and interview data, critical reading information summaries, and individual reflection notes), I wrote a textual description of the experiences of the participants, a structural description of their experiences (the conditions, situations, or context in which they experienced the phenomenon), and develop a combined statement of textural and structural descriptions to convey the essence of the experience (Creswell et al., 2007). To guide me in this data analysis process I used the hermeneutic circle.

Hermeneutic circle. To practice critical reading of the transcripts, it is crucial to be aware of the context in which a text is read. Figure two outlines the components of the process. The hermeneutic circle is a method I used to capture the complex interaction between myself and the text. The interpretive work of hermeneutic phenomenology is not bound to a single set of rule-bound analytical techniques; instead, it is an interpretive

process involving the interplay of multiple analysis activities (Neubauer et al., 2019). When I first read the participants transcript, I form an initial understanding. As I process through the text, I keep evaluating my initial understanding based on the new knowledge that unfolds within the text. This new knowledge forms the basis of a new understanding, which will change my personal context in terms of beliefs and expectations (Cuff, 2021). In turn, the new context will inform the way I interpret the text. I kept considering the context as I re-read the text from the participant's transcript and allow for my initial understanding to change (Le Cuff, 2021). This improved understanding of the context was used to update my interpretation. The point of me using the hermeneutic circle is to constantly refine my interpretation in addition to critically understanding the text.

Figure 3. *Hermeneutic Circle*



Source: The hermeneutic circle: a key to critical reading - Ness Labs

Community cultural wealth model. Another analytical framework used to analyze data is the community cultural wealth (CCW) model (Yosso, 2005). When studying diverse populations, it may require the use of multiple frameworks to understand, analyze, and more fully grasp their lived experiences. Using an interdisciplinary approach, Yosso (2005) drew from ethnic studies, sociology, linguistic studies, and others to identify six forms of capital, which make up CCW model. These forms of capital include: 1) *aspirational capital* which is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p.77); 2) *Linguistic capital* which is the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (p.78); 3) *Navigational capital* which are the “skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (p.80); 4) *Social capital* are the “networks of people and community resources” (p. 79); 5) *Familial capital* are those cultural knowledges nurtured among familial (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition” (p. 79); and 6) *Resistance capital* are knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality” (p. 80). When engaging with the transcription text I used this framework to identify forms of cultural capital possessed by Black first-generation HBCU graduates to best frame their experiences within the community cultural wealth framework.

Stages of Data Analysis

Microsoft Excel software was used to organize, analyze, and find data insights from the interview transcripts, written observational field notes. Throughout the analysis process, two analytic questions sensitized my process: (a) What forms of community

cultural wealth did the graduates use to navigate their college going process? (b) How do BFG graduates describe their talents, abilities, and contacts? This study went through two phases of analysis using the hermeneutic circle as the foundation.

Phase 1: First, I organized the transcripts and data in accordance each interview series. The audio and video recordings were constantly reviewed throughout the interview process for robust meaning. Initial interviews were often revisited to understand and create themes. Each transcript script went through two rounds of coding during the first phase. First, I reviewed each transcript line by line to capture how the graduates made meaning of their experience and to apply a summary theme to the quote. A prior code was applied to each quote using forms of cultural capital from the community cultural wealth model. A memo was attached to each quote to identify each graduate's was reflection. The transcripts were reviewed a second time to mark meaning units (statements from the interview) using the student entry characteristics as a sub-code.

The second round of coding allowed me to understand what context the graduates used their form of cultural capital. Using a color coded excel spreadsheet, I applied each quote in accordance with the form of cultural capital and the corresponding student entry characteristic. On the spreadsheet, the left column lists the following: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant. The bottom row were tabs that listed each student entry characteristic (each characteristic had its own sheet with forms of capital listed on left). After organizing and making sense of the data using a conceptual map, I proceeded to look across the data for each form of community cultural wealth (displayed as a different color in each concept map) to synthesize the information,

develop themes, and understand how Black first-generation graduates made sense of their cultural capital. The data was examined several times to capture the individual and the collective experience of the graduates. The thematic analysis was conducted across all forms of cultural capital within each student entry characteristic to show common patterns, relationships and connections connected to the phenomenon. Patterson and Williams (2002) stated, “Seeing, understanding, and explain the interrelationships among themes is one of the key features of hermeneutic analysis that offers the possibility of a holistic and insightful interpretation” (p. 48). After illuminating the themes, I returned to the transcripts and observation notes to ensure the themes were appropriate to support the findings.

Phase 2: Phase two was more of a descriptive analysis to illuminate how forms of cultural capital informed the graduate’s student entry characteristics collectively. I use bar graphs to illustrate data across all forms of cultural capital captured during the interviews for each student entry characteristic. During phase two of the data analysis, I interpret how forms of community cultural wealth emerged in each entry characteristic for Black first generation HBCU graduates. Table 3 is a key when reading each bar graph. Each bar graph contains qualitative data from all graduates across each form of cultural capital. The text replaces the typical shading normally seen in a bar graph. Each row of the Figures 4-11 represents a form of cultural wealth. The further right the text stretches, the more reports of that form of cultural capital were provided by graduates. The text in each bar graph is not meant to be legible.

Table 3

Color Coded Key Forms of Cultural Capital

KEY

Aspirational
Navigational
Social
Linguistic
Familial
Resistant

The motivation student entry characteristic output displays the forms of cultural capital for Black first generation HBCU graduates as they articulated their purpose for attending college and the importance of completing college. Aspirational and familial forms of capital were captured the most, closely followed by linguistic capital. Navigational, social, and resistant forms of cultural capital were also qualitatively represented in relatively equal measures.

Figure 4
Motivation Student Entry Characteristic Output

The table displays a grid of text snippets, organized into six horizontal categories: Aspirational, Navigational, Social, Linguistic, Familial, and Resistant. Each category contains multiple columns of text, representing various student entries or data points related to the 'Motivation' theme. The text is dense and appears to be a collection of individual responses or observations.

The control issues student entry characteristic output illustrates the forms of cultural capital Black first-generation HBCU graduates used when articulating their locus of control. Graduates acknowledged that their outcomes were because of their own effort and made deliberate, planned decisions by mostly using aspirational, navigational, and resistant forms of cultural capital as they prepared for college. Linguistic and familial forms of cultural capital hardly surfaced in comparison. However, social capital was not

The affiliation needs student entry characteristic output illustrates the forms of cultural capital Black first-generation HBCU graduates used when articulating their friendliness and participation with others during their college going process. All forms of community cultural wealth emerged with the graduates acknowledged using social capital the most. Navigational capital was also prevalent but not as much as social capital. The graduates used aspirational and linguistic forms of capital relatively equally. However, familial, and resistant capital hardly surfaced.

Figure 8
Affiliations Needs Student Entry Characteristic Output



The parental education student entry characteristic output illustrates the forms of cultural capital Black first-generation HBCU graduates used to engage in college preparatory actions to attain college admission. To describe their family's social economic status and parents educational level, the only form of capital that surfaced was familial capital. All other forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, and resistant) did not show up as forms of wealth used during college going process.

Figure 9

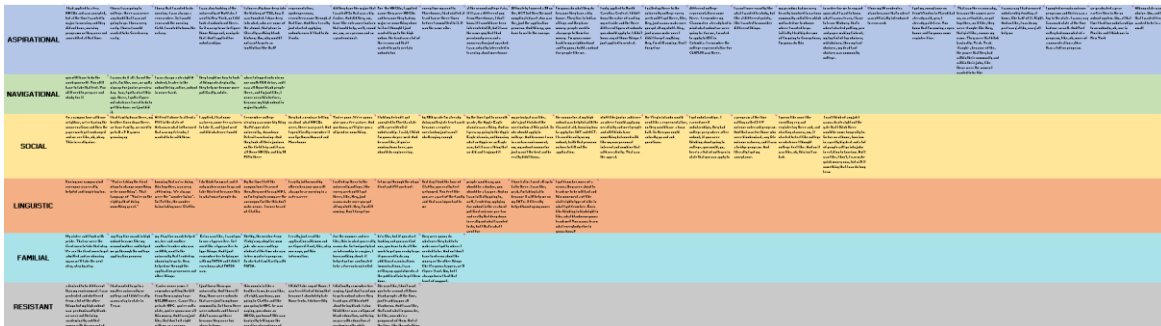
Parental education student entry characteristic



The anticipatory student entry characteristic output illustrates the forms of cultural capital Black first-generation HBCU graduates used as they emulated college going attitudes, values, and behavior. All forms of community cultural wealth were used. The forms of cultural capital the graduates used the most were navigational and social. Saturation started to occur in aspirational capital with social capital trailing closely behind. The graduates also used linguistic, familial, and resistant forms of cultural capital relatively equal amounts. Navigational capital also surfaced but not as much as the other forms of cultural capital used to prepare for college.

Figure 10

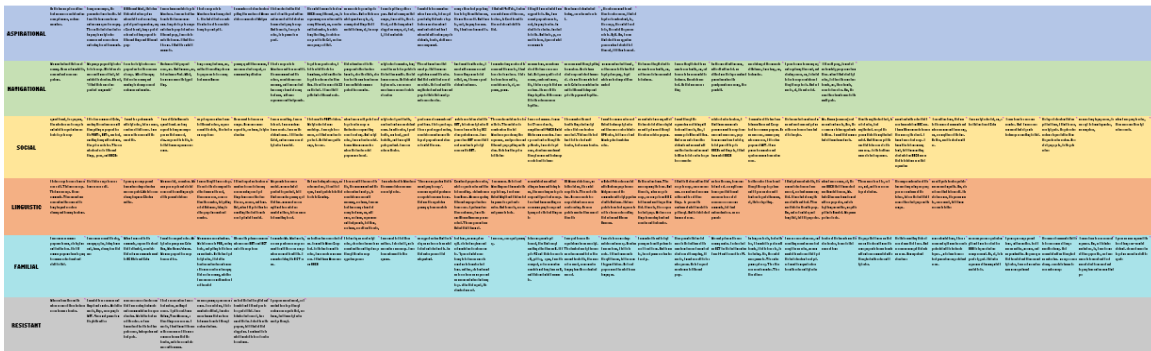
Anticipatory Student Entry Characteristic



The socialization student entry characteristic output illustrates the forms of cultural capital Black first-generation HBCU graduates used to get ready for college. During their early expectations of college and pre-matriculation process the graduates used all forms of community cultural wealth. They acknowledged using social and familial forms of capital the most as saturation occurred in these areas. Linguistic and navigational forms of capital trailed closely behind. Aspirational capital also surfaced but not as much as linguistic and navigational capital during their pr-matriculation process. However, the form of cultural capital used the least by the graduates in the socialization entry characteristic was resistant capital trailing the furthest behind the others.

Figure 11

Socialization Student Entry Characteristic



Aspirational and familial forms of capital were most commonly use as the graduates constantly remembered their purpose of attending and finishing college. Aspirational, navigational, and resistant forms of capital were most used as they made deliberate plans for going to college. Familial capital was most used in their expressing care for others

and social capital in their participation with other during the college going process. As for parental education, familial capital was represented as a form of cultural capital possessed by BFG HBCU graduates' pre-college experience. The graduates used aspirational and social capital when emulating attitudes, values, and college going behaviors. Lastly, BFG HBCU graduates commonly used social, linguistic, and familial forms of cultural capital to prepare and matriculate to college.

Phase 3: To abide by goodness criteria, phase three of the analysis involved the graduates reviewing their transcripts and audio files for accuracy. I emailed my general findings to each graduate to get their feedback and as a form of member checking. I used these methods to maintain the integrity and accuracy of each participants story and allow each graduate to make sure their voice is interpreted correctly. The graduates emailed their thoughts and clarifying notes

Trustworthiness

According to Lockmiller and Lester (2017) trustworthiness is defined as the degree to which your data collection, analysis, and presentation of the findings are presented in a thorough and verifiable manner. It is the level of confidence one has in the methods, data, and interpretation. Trustworthiness is also a goal of the study and, at the same time, something to judge during the study and after the research is conducted (Cypress, 2017). In this section, I outline the criteria for what constitutes trustiness in qualitative research following the evaluation criteria by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that the trustworthiness of a research study is essential to

evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For this study, I use a series of techniques to establish trustworthiness as outlined by Cohen and Crabtree (2006):

Credibility: According to Tobin and Begley (2004), credibility addresses the synergy between the study participants' views and the researcher's understanding and interpretation of those views. I provided an opportunity for the participants in the study to review their transcript for accuracy (member checking).

Transferability: According to Tobin and Begley (2004) transferability concerns a study's generalizability. For the study, I made the patterns of cultural and social relationships explicit by providing a detailed account of each participant and how they persisted at their HBCU and what forms of cultural wealth they used. Transferability was met by selecting a group of participants that were able to answer research questions based on their lived experience to provide a robust data set. The interview protocols serve as a tool to duplicate the study to similar groups at minority serving institutions.

Dependability: Dependability emphasizes the need for the research to account for the context and show the replicability and repeatability of the research. I recruited another scholar practitioner (not involved in the research study) to examine the process and findings of the study to evaluate whether the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data. Also, multiple sources of data were collected to include field notes, observational notes, and video/audio taped interview transcripts.

Confirmability: I use multiple data sources to ensure that the study is robust, comprehensive, and well-developed (triangulation). As identified by Denzin (1978) and

Patton (1999), two types of triangulations of interest are *methods triangulation* (consistencies in finding generated by different data collection methods) and triangulation of sources (consistency of different data sources from within the same method). Confirmability was met by maintaining a reflexive journal during the research process to keep notes and document introspections daily that would be beneficial and pertinent to the study (Cypress, 2017). In addition, multiple viewpoints were provided from two or more graduates to support y claims.

Summary

In this chapter, I outline the research design for the study. First, I outline my positionality by articulating my direct connection to the research and my assumptions. Then I describe the research methodology and methods. In addition, I highlight the methodological considerations of hermeneutic phenomenology concerning my research paradigm, my epistemological stance, the research questions, how I plan to recruitment participants, data collection, and data analysis for this study on Black first-generation college going persistence at HBCUs.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this chapter, a factual reporting of the study results is presented. The findings are organized around the research question and tables used to summarize information. The purpose of this study was to explore the pre-college experiences of Black first generation HBCU graduates. Specifically, I aim to understand how Black first-generation graduates make sense of the community cultural wealth they brought from their homes and communities to the HBCU community using components of the theory of persistence in commuter colleges and universities as a guide. As the graduates prepared to attend college, I wanted to know how they experienced the college-going process. This study was guided by the following research questions: 1). How do Black first-generation college graduates make sense of the community cultural wealth they brought with them to their undergraduate historically Black college or university (HBCU)? And 2) What forms of community cultural wealth did Black first-generation students use during their pre-college journey, and how did it inform their student entry characteristics. After discussing sensemaking, I review the most prevalent forms of capital Black first-generation HBCU graduates used during their pre-college experiences and discuss how forms of community cultural wealth informed components of college entry characteristics for Black first-generation HBCU graduates. This is the part of the study where we start to see how Black first-generation HBCU graduates navigated American higher education institutions to gain college admission to an historically Black college or university.

Introduction of Participants

Table 4 outlines the profiles of the participants (graduates) in the study. The 11 graduates in the study graduated from 9 different bachelor's degree granting American HBCUs (6 public and 5 private) located in 5 different states in the southeastern United States. One of the HBCUs is in a US territory. Eight of the participants identified as women and 3 identified as men. Three of the participants (2 women and 1 man) were from the same state and attended the same HBCU; however, they graduated with a bachelor's degree at different times. The graduates navigated their college going process in various locations throughout the country to include the Southeast (6), Midwest (2), and Southwest (1). Two of the graduates navigated their pre-college process on an island nation and on an island considered US territory. Geographically, 4 of the graduates prepared for college in rural settings, 4 in urban settings, and 2 graduates prepared for college in international locations. Lastly, the year the graduates received their bachelor's degree varied with each graduation year represented between 2013-2020 with the exceptions of 2015 and 2018.

Table 4*Black First-Generation Graduate Profiles*

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Geographical Setting (College Going Process)	HBCU (Institutional Type)	Graduation Year
Lisa	Woman	Rural Southeast US	Private HBCU	2013
David	Man	Rural Southeast US	Private HBCU	2014
Nicole	Woman	Urban south Midwest US	Public HBCU	2017
James	Man	Urban Southwest US	Private HBCU	2019
Violet	Woman	Urban north Midwest US	Public HBCU	2014
Danni	Woman	Urban Southeast US	Public HBCU	2014
Sophia	Woman	International	Public HBCU	2013
Jay	Woman	Rural Southeast US	Public HBCU	2013
Renee	Woman	Rural Southeast US	Private HBCU	2020
Kate	Woman	International (US territory)	Private HBCU	2016
Michael	Man	Urban Southeast US	Public HBCU	2017

Sensemaking

The Black first-generation graduates in the study give meaning to their collective experiences, which could be interpreted in multiple ways. When the graduates were introduced to the idea of college, sensemaking entails being active, self-conscious, motivated, and purposeful to earn college admission (Fitzgerald & Palincsar, 2019). Louis (1980) explains:

Sensemaking can be viewed as a recurring cycle comprised of a sequence of events occurring over time. The cycle begins as individuals form unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions, which serve as predictions about future events... discrepant events, or surprises, trigger a need for explanation... based on attributed meanings, understandings of actors, actions, and settings are updated and predictions about future experiences in the setting are revised. (p. 241)

Black first-generation HBCU graduates were asked to recall the reoccurring events during their pre-college or college-going process. The graduates had assumptions about the college-going process and often asked themselves questions like, “Is college the right decision for me?” and “Will I be able to afford college”? The need for explanation is often based on the attributed meaning that no one in their immediate family earned a bachelor’s degree. Black first-generation student actors often include family, friends, and other social contacts. The action they take part in to understand the process happened through their pre-college exposure. In this chapter, the graduates made sense of their pre-college journey. The following section highlight themes within each form of cultural capital from the community cultural wealth model using quotes from Black first-generation HBCU graduates. Their themes are used to discuss how Black first-generation HBCU graduates make sense of their cultural capital.

Black First-Generation Community Cultural Wealth

Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.

-Harriet Tubman

In this section are dreamers; dreamers who dared to be the first. Not knowing or understanding what lay ahead, they still dared to dream. Then, they started to put their dream into motion by taking the first step—submitting the college application. This section illustrates how Black first-generation HBCU Graduates made their dream a reality. These are their themes.

Black First-Generation Graduates

Time was dedicated to Black first-generation HBCU graduates who shared intimate realities of their lived pre-college experience as the first to pursue a bachelor's degree in their immediate families to answer the research question. Some of the graduates came from situations where they lived in multiple households growing up, were raised by guardians, experienced a low-income, single parent situation or a low-income situation with two parents, or came from working middle class situations where their parents received an advanced credential and that was enough.

However, the graduates in the study wanted and saw more for themselves and their families. They saw more through engaging with others, learning from others, and being vulnerable with others in their communities. At some point, they recognized their promise and potential and the idea that college was the right avenue to help them achieve

it. Their situations, at the time, was not the end all be all. In terms of their race, the graduates' Blackness was normal to them. They felt confident that they could compete in other spaces with anyone, particularly other Black people. In fact, they celebrated the opportunity to learn with people that looked like them. Embedded in their statements are the various forms of community cultural wealth that they used along their college-going journey as Black first-generation college-bound students.

All forms of cultural capital within the community cultural wealth model were detected by the Black first-generation graduates in the study. Black first-generation HBCU graduates used various forms of community cultural wealth during their college-going process to gain admission into college when informed by the student entry characteristics components of the theory of student persistence in commuter colleges and universities framework. This section of the findings outlines themes to show the ways that community cultural wealth was highlighted by the graduates as well as how they collectively made sense of the community cultural wealth they used during their pre-college experience. Using the psychological and study skills persistence factors, this section outlines themes to describe the ways that the Black first-generation HBCU graduates participating in the study made sense of the cultural capital they used during their college-going experience using these themes: *I Prepared for the Unknown, I Stayed Busy, I Saw a Future for Myself, and Make 'em (and myself) Proud*. Embedded in the overall themes are quotes describing the graduates' pre-college persistence journey. Within each quote are the forms of cultural capital Black first-generation used to navigate the college-going process. The graduates' lived pre-college experiences were different;

therefore, the way the graduates made sense of their use of community cultural wealth is interpreted differently. These are their stories.

I Prepared for the Unknown

The Black first-generation HBCU graduates in the study (who graduated between 2013-2020) were introduced to college (specifically, historically Black colleges and universities) at different points in their lives. For example, Lisa was presented with the “life after high school options” early in her life. She stated:

“My mom gave us those three options. You go to school, you work, or you go into the military.”

Her mother (single parent) provided her with the “three options” and was instrumental in helping her see what life could look like after high school. This form of familial capital allowed Lisa to weigh her options and eventually decide that college was her decision, Jay used social capital by turning to her school resources and close contacts within her network to prepare for the unknown. She stated:

“I have to give credit to my teachers, I had some really good teachers and I'd say, uh, the people that I kept around me, best friend, she was very focused on work as well.”

Both graduates were introduced to important work ethic very early in their lives. They had people around them to help them prepare for the unknown and stay focused on graduating high school.

The graduates in the study also had different motivations and reasons for doing well in high school and becoming college students. For some, it happened early in life;

for others it happened during or after high school. Annual HBCU family festivities like homecoming and other traditions served as an early college motivator. Jay mentioned:

“My grandparents went to my HBCU’s homecoming all the time with my uncle, and they literally have pictures of me of like from age five all the way up until 10.”

Jay’s statement describes social and familial capital. Her uncle served as the HBCU alumni (HBCU affiliate), documenting her early exposure to college, and her grandparents supported her exposure to the HBCU culture. However, they did not graduate from college. Other reasons for attending college resulted in family circumstances and an opportunity to achieve more. Renee explained:

“My mom’s disability motivated me to continue to do well in school. I saw school as like the golden ticket. I just felt like there was more, like with me and my mom than what I was experiencing at the time, like my circumstances. Coming from a low-income family and wanting to progress motivated me to stay focused on graduating high school to get to the next step in life to achieve in college.”

Much of Renee’s aspirational capital came from her actively resisting (by doing well in school) her current circumstance; having a single, disabled parent; and being low-income status. This was her reason, and the golden ticket for her decision was college. Like Renee, David expressed his current home and life circumstances as a low-income first-generation student as a motivating factor. He recognized he needed something differently by stating:

“I'm motivated cuz I really want something different. At this point I absolutely need something different.”

David just wanted to get out of his current situation. He wanted something promising for himself and his family. He used aspirational capital to help him find something different. Once the decision was made that college was the way to go, the college-going process began.

Navigating the American higher education college-going process as Black first-generation pre-college students was not a self-isolating journey for the graduates. They made sense of the help they received along their pre-college journey through identifying various forms of cultural capital. Danni described familial capital by stating,

“I really just read the application with mom, and we figured it out, like, step one says, put this information.”

Although her mom did not attend college, Danni did not feel alone at the beginning of her college-going process because of her parental support. Sophia also described parental support. She explains,

“They were gonna do whatever they had to make sure I got to where I needed to be. And so, I don't have to stress about the money or the other things like it's gonna happen, we'll figure it out. Um, but I always knew I had that level of support.”

Sophia's familial capital came from having the support of both parents and their middle-income status to support her financially. Her parents had her back if she was motivated to figure it out. The graduates in the study also had parents who allowed them to participate

in community college preparatory programs and attend schools that had a college prep curriculum. In her description, Lisa stated:

“I did all four summers in Upward Bound at my HBCU, including the academic year with them getting us prepared for the PSATs, SATs, any test, anything dealing with academics, they got us ready for. They also introduced us to different things, places, and other HBCUs.”

Lisa’s college-going process was not isolating. To help her prepare for the unknown, she used her social capital to participate in a community college prep resource (Upward Bound) to help her prepare for components of the college admissions process. Other community resources include the high school and the social contacts within their schools. David drew on his social and familial capital by explaining that his college prep process was because of his principal’s support. David said,

“I went to a magnet school. My high school principal was an alum of my HBCU, Ms. Johnson. We were prepared for college because of her.”

Both James and Sophia also used their social capital through high school resources as they prepared for the unknown process of going to college. James explained,

“Nobody really told me about the SAT, but luckily my high school did because I was in the top 10% of my graduation class. I was given a free SAT course that I could learn how to get a high score on the SAT.”

James’ social status as a student in the top 10% of his class gained him access to knowledge and free testing services to successfully prepare for the college entrance

exam. On the other hand, Sophia utilized information from her classes to learn what college is and what it was like. She explained,

“The school we went to and those extra career courses, it helped us to understand, this is college, this is what it could be like, this is what the process looks like. Right. I even think about my application process when I started to fill them out, I did them by myself.”

Once the graduates decided college was the right decision for their hopes and dreams after high school, they became self-motivated and determined to understand the process. Forms of cultural capital illuminated as the graduates articulated what kept them self-motivated and determined. Violet (from Midwest United States) shared,

“I had an older brother that would sit on the porch with me, and we would just talk about my dreams about going to college and he was like, if you go to school, like it's gonna be so great.”

The type of support from an older sibling actively supporting her dream to pursue college illustrates her familial capital. Her aspirational capital was expressed through her talking about her dreams of going to college. On the other hand, Jay, who was from rural southern United States expressed using social and familial capital by learning from community members during her college-going process. She stated,

“I had to lean on other community members who did go off to college, to get an understanding of what college would look like but also my church family”

Although these contacts were not in Jay's immediate household, they were a part of her family network at the time. They were in here community and the church. However, not

all the graduates in the study had the opportunity to learn from other college graduates. Several of the graduates also stayed motivated and determined to understand the college-going process, even if it meant learning on their own using technology. James used navigational capital by using the Google search engine to conduct his college-going research. He stated,

“I feel like I was expected to, like figure it out. I would Google how to write a purpose statement or how to ask for letter recommend, and I would look at it and I would find different examples”

At the time, James entered college at a time when it was common practice to get a virtual sense of how the college experience would look and learn what materials were needed to apply for college. His ability to use the internet as a navigational tool along his journey speaks to his use of navigational capital.

Black first-generation HBCU graduates learned how to navigate the college-going process by relying on several resources and stakeholders to decide that college was the next step for them after high school. As the graduates prepared for the unknown, they used several forms of community cultural wealth to learn about college and understand the process to determine if college was the right choice for them. Their persistence in pursuing college admission kept them busy. The next theme explains how preparing for college kept them busy.

I Stayed Busy

Once the graduates decided and knew they wanted to go to college, they had to plan and prepare to be a college student. They (along with support for parents and

guardians) had to take actions that involved being actively engaged in college-going activities like gaining early exposure to college preparation and participating in college-related activities and events. Lisa and her mom drew on their social capital in the form of community resources to prepare for college. Lisa stated,

“I was always in summer programs. Mom kept me and brother busy. Like I did summer programs from going to summer school, upward bound and stuff like that.”

Lisa was actively engaged in preparing for college. Even during the summer months with summer programs. Another form of social capital was having access to test preparatory services. Violet shared community resources she had access to help her prepare for the ACT. Violet stated,

“My aunt put me in the silver learning center. I took my ACT for the first time when I was 14 and I scored like a 19.”

Actively engaging in the learning center to prepare for the college entrance exam is college preparation. Lisa drew on her social capital as a community resource, whereas Nicole drew on her social capital by way of her flag line coach, who was a social contact. Nicole stated,

“My flag line coach in high school became like my second mother and helped me go through the college application process”

Nicole, Violet, and Lisa also made sense of their experience by using their familial capital. For Violet, it was her aunt who was college educated with a bachelor’s degree. For Lisa, it was her mom who did not have a bachelor’s degree at the time but knew the

importance of keeping her occupied during the summer months. Like Lisa's experience, Michael made sense of his social capital by sharing his experience with the GEAR-UP program. He stated,

"We were able to go on trips to tour schools. And so that's really what opened me up to, uh, learning about things that I needed to know, for college."

Embedded in Michael's statement was another form of cultural capital, aspirational capital. The tours inspired him to continue learning more about being a college student and fulfill his aspiration of getting into college. The graduates realized that college was not just something that happens by happenchance; it is a goal you work toward. Lisa explained her processing toward her end goal by stating,

"I already had an end goal, or it was starting that process of figuring out an end goal and realizing you just don't get to college, you have to prepare for it. I think that's why I stayed busy."

Lisa's mindset and goal-setting abilities were tools she used to achieve her end goal. This form of navigational capital kept her as well as other graduates in the study busy. The college preparation process kept them busy. There were other ways the graduates articulated their busyness by actively participating in college-related activities and events.

It Takes a Village to Attend an HBCU

Some of the graduates gained early college exposure by participating in college-related programs and events for the community. Danni made sense of her social capital by stating,

“By the time I got to seventh grade, the Aggie Eagle classic was a thing. And so, I grew up to the Aggie Eagle classic, not knowing what an Aggie or an Eagle was, but it was a thing that we did, and I enjoyed it”

Danni used her middle school experience at the Aggie Eagle classic to explain her social capital. Attending HBCU college football classics provides exposure to a component of the college world. However, Kate’s experience participating in college-related activities looked much different as an international college-going student. Kate stated,

“I ended up, um, enrolling, at my HBCU, so still in the Caribbean. The perspective there was so unique, um, cuz that's the only HBCU in the Caribbean. So, then you have like the Caribbean culture is really embedded there.”

Kate lived on the American island where the HBCU was located and had firsthand access to the institution to experience the culture. David described another cultural experience of the HBCU environment. The experience occurred during a campus tour with his neighbor (social capital) who was accepted to the university. He stated,

“On a campus tour with our neighbor, we're having the conversations and then the paperwork gets exchanged and we are like, oh, okay. This is really nice. During our campus visit everyone was really helpful and inspiring too. "You're taking the first steps to change something or be something". That language of “You're on the right path of doing something great.”

David used linguistic capital to make sense of his college visitation experience. He engaged with the college representatives and reported that they were pleasant and communicated a sense of helpfulness and inspiration. In the same vein, Renee also used

linguistic capital to make sense of how the campus environment made her feel welcomed and a part of the family. Renee stated,

“That day I took the tour of my HBCU, you really feel welcomed. You feel like you are a part of the family and that was important to me”

The forms of linguistic capital articulated by David and Renee display how they used forms of language and communication skills during their campus visit. Parents also use various communication skills to encourage college-going participation. Violet explains where her family wanted her to go and what to major in. She stated,

“My family wants me to do pre-med I'm thinking about my HBCU in Louisiana, and I've already sent them the money. Cause I had already sent them everything like I'm coming.”

Violet made sense of her familial capital by sharing how her family supported her as she pursued her aspiration of attending her HBCU. Some graduates also explained various aspects of the college aesthetics and programmatic aspirations. For example, Nicole stated,

“For the HBCUs, I applied cause they were HBCUs and because they had my major or something close to it or I thought the band was a lot of the reason and that I wanted to go to certain schools too.”

The graduates in the study drew on several forms of cultural capital to make sense of the community cultural wealth they possessed to gain early exposure to college preparation and participate in college-related activities and events. Their preparation helped them

prepare an application packet to submit and become one step closer to gaining access to college and being a college student.

I Saw a Future for Myself

Ball In My Court (Independency)

Deciding to attend college and be a college student can be a process. For some, they knew what college they wanted to attend from the beginning of their college-going process. James explained,

“My HBCU was the only school I applied to. And by the grace of God, I got accepted with scholarship, so it happened the way it was supposed to. I wanted to grow up. It was my first time having been able to make own decision. And so, moving away from home, but also going to my HBCU was what I felt at the time, the right thing. Like, that was the one time in my mind I said it does not matter what anybody else thinks. This is my first time to pick exactly what James wants to do. My college decision was the first time in my life where I could make the decision for me.”

James uses his aspirational capital and hopes to get into his dream first college choice. He was confident in his academic abilities and was excited about making his own decision for the first time in his life. Developing a sense of independence was a common theme amongst the graduates. Many of them had part-time jobs and participated in clubs and other high school activities. The graduates expressed a sense of control in understanding the process and not becoming overwhelmed. David explains how difficult it was to

conceptualize going to college as a first-generation student from a low-income community before he was going through the college-going process. He stated,

“Being first generation for one, nobody around you that can really speak to it. Two, if you're Black and from a low-income area, it's a far away concept of you walking on a campus where the grass is so green, the buildings are tall, or the people are so polished.”

Before David decided to go to college, he knew it was an option but could not see it as an option for himself because his focus was set on his current circumstances. For him to see beyond his circumstances, he used navigational and aspiration capital to move through institutions in hopes of simply seeing something different. He knew something different was out there and eventually got on the college-going track. Whereas Michael used resistant capital to move past the scar of his older sibling, who departed college without a bachelor's degree. He stated,

“My brother could not handle, uh, the pressure of the whole racial thing. that ended up pushing him to drop out. So, I knew while learning all this information I had to get to college. I had to get there because I had to make a difference of something from my family. My brother could not handle, uh, the pressure of the whole racial thing. That ended up pushing him to drop out. So, I knew while learning all this information I had to get to college. I had to get there because I, I had to make a difference of something from my family. I wanted to change the trajectory of what I was seeing in my life. Okay. Yeah. I, I was tired of the paycheck to paycheck living.”

Michael used resistant capital by learning from his brother's experience and attending an HBCU. He did not want to repeat the same mistake of attending college, dealing with racism, and not completing college. He also wanted to make a difference in his family. His older siblings' stories and experiences also show the linguistic capital Michael possessed to help him make his college decision. The graduates who identified as Black men in the study articulated forms of cultural capital differently when sharing stories of how they came to the point of seeing a future for themselves and persisting in gaining college admission.

Focused on the Dream. The Work Will Get Done.

The dream was to gain college admission and become a college student. It took work, and the graduates used several strategies to prepare themselves to submit their application. Lisa and Renee made sense of preparing for the college-going-process by using navigational capital. Lisa stated,

“I already had an end goal, or it was starting that process of figuring out an end goal and realizing you just don't get to college, you have to prepare for it. I think that's why I stayed busy.”

Lisa used her goal-setting skills to navigate the process, whereas Renee used her ability to shift her mindset and focus on her career choice. Renee stated,

“I know that I wanna go to college and I know that, um, I need to go to college. Like that was my mindset at the time I need to go to college to pursue this career.”

Renee knew that she needed to attend college to get to her achievement as a nurse. Her ability to focus on her mentality towards the process is how she navigated the college application process. Nicole also aspired to become a nurse, and some of the work she conducted during the college-going process. Nicole made sense of the work she put in by stating,

“I knew that I wanted to do nursing. I was always a researcher. So, I would research the nursing field. I wanted to know the salary.”

Nicole activated her navigational capital by deploying her research skills to help her navigate her decision-making process. The information she read about the nursing career informed her decision about attending college and which college to attend if they had her major. Nicole put in work.

Like Renee, Violet used cultural capital pertaining to have a certain mindset to navigate the process. However, Violet was more interested in a collective mindset. She states,

“I found some friends who had a similar mindset. They wanted to go to college, and I would just stick with that group. And we would all work and take classes together and we would just be together. It was a togetherness and, I just developed friendship and felt a kinship and a family within a family.”

Violet used social capital to pursue her dream of gaining college admission to be a college student. She had a close friend group to help her get the work done. These social contacts served as a support group that felt like family. Danni also had a friend group she could share her college acceptance with. She stated,

“I told all my friends that I was going to college, and they were like, oh, okay. We all are going to college. I’m like, no, I’m going in January. And they were like, what? Like, cause we were all first gen. So, none of us knew what we were doing. And so, they were like, bro, that’s cool.”

Although they had no idea what it was like to have a friend attend college, Danni’s peers (social contacts) were supportive and happy that she was leaving high school early to attend college. Danni made sense of her social capital by sharing the assistance she received from her high school administrator and her friends when deciding to attend college early and when deciding which type of college to attend.

A New Environment

The graduates in the study articulated the reasons why they wanted to attend college and how they envisioned themselves as a college student. Violet explains one of the pivotal reasons she chose to go away for college by stating,

“If I went to school, I would be safe cuz it was about getting me out of the ghetto because I had seen so much trauma. I was like, if I just go to college, that’s gonna be my saving grace.”

Violet made sense of her resistant capital by pursuing college as a way of getting away from negative experiences and challenging the stereotype that Black first-generation, low-income students from her community do not attend college. Violet’s reason for choosing college was deeper than the social aspects and her major. Becoming a college student was her “saving grace.” Jay also made sense of one of her reasons for deciding to apply to HBCUs by stating (in a joking manner),

“I also knew that I would get tired of, dealing with white folk <laugh> and so, I was like, okay, I’ll apply to Howard and Hampton.”

Jay used resistant capital by actively deciding not to apply to institutions where White folk are in the majority. Her high school was majority white, and she knew she did not want a similar experience as a college student.

The graduates in the study also made sense of the cultural capital they possessed during their college experience by articulating how they envisioned themselves as college students. Renee stated,

“I started picturing myself being a student there. I liked what I saw. I liked the atmosphere and the vibes that I seen when I got there. I saw a few students from my high school that were there.”

Renee saw herself through other current college students while visiting the HBCU campus. Her aspirational capital and her taking the step to visit the institution further confirmed that her hopes and dreams were becoming a reality. She could see herself as a college student. Michael also made sense of his aspirational capital by stating,

“I wanted to go off and see what was outside of the county limits, because I’ve seen all these good things. I’ve studied all these good things so far in high school, that’s what inspired me to go off and pursue college. I never thought I wasn’t going. I always knew I was. I just, I guess it all just came together. I don’t even think I remember being stressed out about it. I just was, was like, I was gonna do all these things to get to where I need to get to.”

Michael used his aspirational capital to see a life for himself beyond his current community. Like many of the other graduates, he wanted to practice what he learned in high school and knew he wanted to be a college student. The graduates used several forms of community cultural wealth to make sense of why they wanted to attend college and become college students. As Black first-generation high school students, some of their reasons for wanting to attend college were due to their current circumstances and, at the time, the graduates had the ability to see a future for themselves, particularly when they visited the college campus.

Make ‘em (and myself) Proud

Paying it Forward

The graduates expressed empathy as they discussed their pre-college journey. Mostly, praising those people and institutions that aided in their processing of being admitted to college and how they planned to pay it forward. The graduates used several forms of community cultural wealth within their empathetic expressions. Renee expresses her interpretation of the value of college for her and her mom. She stated,

“School is gonna lead me into more opportunities and to become more better to help my mom and to, just to help us.”

Renee uses aspirational capital to speak life into what school will do for her family and the opportunities available. Her awareness and care for her mom were her priorities.

David also attributed his success to his mom and the motivation she instilled in him to support his hopes and dreams. He stated,

“We never felt, secondary. My mom gave us pride and she told us we could be anything despite the present obstacles.”

David made sense of his linguistic capital by sharing the motivational mantra that kept him uplifted. He recognized the importance of her words and how far they had gotten him. James attributed much of his persistence in college acceptance to the high expectations others had for him. He stated,

“There was slight competition among siblings, but at the same time I was fully supported because we pushed each other. I was always expected to do the most, cuz I had seen my sisters do it before. Sometimes we were trying to prove ourselves to make our parents or other people happy, even when we shouldn't have to, but I enjoyed not messing up the trend. If my sisters brought something great home, I wanted to bring something good as well.”

James drew on his familial capital to make sense of his motivations for doing well and getting into an HBCU. Growing up in a healthy, competitive environment kept him aware of what the expectations were and how high they were. On the other hand, Nicole attributed her success to her network of folks. She stated,

“So many people invested in me. So many people kept me outta trouble and other people invested their time, their knowledge, connecting me to their networks, for me to be successful.”

Nicole drew on her social capital to make sense of how she successfully made it to college. She appreciated the time and energy her network and community invested in her. Nicole's college acceptance was a way of showing appreciation and paying it forward.

Family and Community Investment

The graduates in the study shared several ways family members and community contacts influenced their decision to attend college and where they wanted to be a college student.

“I have a cousin and right now he's already with his doctorate degree and in his family, he was a first-generation college student as well.”

Renee uses familial capital to explain that she had an older family member who successfully navigated college as a first-generation student. This information made her more comfortable as she was preparing to leave home. In addition, Lisa made sense of her familial capital by stating,

“When it came out to the community, especially the church that I attended, everybody that lived in my community went to my HBCU and the HBCU next door.”

In the rural community she grew up in, college graduates surrounded Lisa. Her direct access to social contacts who attended college and earned a bachelor's degree motivated her to stay on course to become a college student. As a pre-college student seeking admission to an HBCU in the Caribbean, Kate linguistically expressed

“We have the saying... We small but wet a lot. You might come from a place that doesn't necessarily have a lot of resources or a very small community, but don't underestimate us. We are powerful.”

Kate used linguistic capital to explain where some of her motivational help comes from. She draws on a community-wide statement of power and resistance to express her social

capital and sense of togetherness. Kate pays homage to her culture, community, and the power they bestowed upon her. Meanwhile, David shared tools he used to navigate toward becoming a college student. He stated,

“I really feel like high school years prepared me for the curriculum of college. While still developing that love for learning and wanting to challenge yourself academically and mentally.”

David used navigational capital to move from kindergarten through twelfth grade. He used his skills to be a model student and keep himself academically and mentally motivated. Due to his academic success in high school, he attributed his pre-collegiate academic preparation to his high school community. David also made himself proud by choosing to continue developing his love for learning.

Black First-Generation Community Cultural Wealth and Entry Characteristics

The student entry characteristics component of the persistence framework for this study focuses on the demographic characteristics (parental education), pre-college factors/experiences (anticipatory/socialization), and psychological and study skills (motivation, control issues, self-efficacy, empathy, affiliation needs) persistence factors previously discussed in chapter two. During the interviews with the graduates, multiple forms of community cultural wealth were used by Black first-generation students in relation to the student entry characteristics component of the framework. Table 5 illustrates how various forms of cultural capital from the community cultural wealth model informed each student entry characteristic for Black first-generation HBCU graduates. These forms of cultural capital were the most frequent forms of wealth the

graduates used during their pre-college experience. Motivation, self-efficacy, and socialization entry characteristics and the forms of cultural capital are most frequently used by the graduates in the study.

Table 5*Forms of Cultural Capital informed by Student Entry Characteristics for BFG**HBCU Graduates*

Cultural Capital	Students Entry Characteristic
Aspirational	Motivation purpose of attending college; importance of completing college
Familial	
Aspirational	Control Issues locus of control (outcome as result of own effort) judging (deliberate planned decision making)
Navigational	
Resistant	
Aspirational	Self-Efficacy ability to engage in actions to attain a particular outcome
Navigational	
Familial	Empathy exhibits awareness and care for others
Social	Affiliation Needs friendly, likes to participate with others
Familial	Parental Education family social economic status; parents educational level
Aspirational	Anticipatory emulate attitudes, values, behaviors
Social	
Linguistic	
Social	Socialization getting ready; early expectations of college and pre-matriculation
Familial	

The theory of student persistence in commuter colleges and universities proposes that if a student enters college with the following entry characteristics, the higher the likelihood of them persisting to graduation. Within each student entry characteristic, several forms of community cultural wealth illuminated for the graduates during their interviews. However, there were characteristics like empathy and parental education where the graduates used fewer forms of community cultural wealth. The student entry characteristics where Black first-generation HBCU graduates displayed use of all forms of community cultural wealth (to the point where saturation occurred) were I motivation, self-efficacy, and socialization entry characteristics.

Motivation Characteristic

The motivation student entry characteristic output (Figure 1) displays the forms of cultural capital for Black first generation HBCU graduates as they articulated their purpose for attending college and the importance of completing college. Each bar graph contains qualitative data from all graduates across each form of cultural capital. The text replaces the typical shading normally seen in a bar graph. Each row of figures 12, 13, and 14 represents a form of cultural wealth. The further right the text stretches, the more reports of that form of cultural capital were provided by graduates. Aspirational and familial forms of capital were captured the most, closely followed by linguistic capital. Navigational, social, and resistant forms of cultural capital were also present in relatively equal measures.

Figure 12

Motivation Student Entry Characteristic Output 2

Navigational Capital and Self-efficacy. To engage in actions geared toward gaining college admission, Black first-generation graduates used skills to move through college-preparatory institutions. To show self-efficacy, some graduates held a job or multiple jobs to pay for college expenses, balanced multiple commitments, negotiated with adults, and codeswitched when engaging with college administration. Other graduates used their ability to figure things out during the college-going process, advocating for themselves and their abilities to negotiate funding and understanding the value of transfer credits to decrease their time to degree.

Socialization Characteristic

The socialization student entry characteristic output illustrates the forms of cultural capital Black first-generation HBCU graduates used to get ready for college. Each bar graph contains qualitative data from all graduates across each form of cultural capital. During their early expectations of college and the pre-matriculation process, the graduates used all forms of community cultural wealth. They acknowledged using social and familial forms of capital the most as saturation occurred in these areas. Linguistic and navigational forms of capital trailed closely behind. Aspirational capital surfaced but not as much as linguistic and navigational capital during their pre-matriculation process. However, the form of cultural capital used the least by the graduates in the socialization entry characteristic was resistant capital trailing the furthest behind the others.

Figure 14

Socialization Student Entry Characteristic Output 2

Linguistic Capital and Socialization. Black first-generation HBCU graduates used various forms of linguistic capital to prepare for college and during the pre-matriculation phases. Some graduates listened and learned from stories about mistakes older siblings made during their college-going process. Other ways the graduates were socialized using various language and communication skills include exposure to ethnicities and languages and exposure to HBCU traditions and stories from familial members.

Social Capital and Socialization. The graduates also used forms of social capital during their socialization process of attending college. Programs like Upward Bound and other TRIO programs and other community resources were common forms of social capital the graduates used to understand the college-going process and gather college application materials. The graduates also used social capital in their college socialization process to participate in college visitation programs sponsored by their high school or community organizations. Some of the graduates also learned about HBCU culture from peers and mentors.

Familial Capital and Socialization. Familial capital played a significant role in the socialization of Black first-generation HBCU graduates. Besides parents encouraging

pre-college participation in summer programs and college preparatory curriculum, other forms of familial capital the graduates used were school administrators and members from their village. As the graduates prepared to be college students, they stayed actively engaged in developing their college-going attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Summary

All forms of cultural capital within the community cultural wealth model were detected by the Black first-generation graduates in the study. The graduates used various forms of community cultural wealth during their college-going process to gain admission into college. During the interviews with the graduates, multiple forms of cultural capital were illuminated concerning the student entry characteristics component of the persistence framework. When informed by the student entry characteristics components of the theory of student persistence in commuter colleges and universities framework, the findings outline how Black first-generation HBCU graduates made sense of the community cultural wealth they used to navigate the college-going process. In addition, the graduates made sense of the cultural capital they brought from their homes and communities to their HBCU community.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black first-generation students at Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) to understand the forms of community cultural wealth they used during their pre-college preparation and college-going journey. The research questions for this study were:

1. How do Black first-generation college graduates make sense of the community cultural wealth they brought with them to their undergraduate historically Black college or university (HBCU)?
2. What forms of community cultural wealth did Black first-generation students use during their pre-college journey, and how did it inform their student entry characteristics.

This study was grounded using the theory of student persistence in commuter colleges and universities framework (Braxton et al., 2014, 2004) and the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005). I employed a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology (van Manen, 1984, 2015) which allowed me to interpret the graduates' lived experiences of being a Black first-generation college-bound student. The study consisted of eleven participants who earned a bachelor's degree from one of the nine HBCUs represented in the study. To collect data, I used a three-part semi-structured interview series (pre-college, first-year experience, and persistence to graduation). Each of the three interviews lasted 60-90 minutes; however, for this study, I only used the pre-college interview to

understand the graduates' college-going persistence journey. I used hermeneutic thematic analysis to make meaning of the graduates' college-going experience as Black first-generation on a path to attend an HBCU. In this chapter, I summarize the research findings, discuss the connection of the findings in relation to the current body of literature, provide implications for future practice, and offer directions for future research.

Summary of Research Findings

“Those who were the first in their immediate family to attend college are breaking, not continuing, family tradition” (Terenzini et al., 1994, p.63).

The findings can be summarized in two ways. Answering the first research question, Black First-generation HBCU graduates made sense of the community cultural wealth they used during their college-going journey in multiple ways which resulted in the following four themes: *I Prepared for the Unknown, I Stayed Busy, I Saw a Future for Myself* and *Make 'em (and myself) Proud*. The themes align with steps of the college-going process such as deciding to attend college, planning, and preparing for college, and seeing themselves as college students. Embedded in these themes were stories of how the graduates used all forms of cultural capital to navigate the college-going process to include: aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, and resistant capital.

I Prepared for the Unknown. Black first-generation HBCU graduates used a network of folx during their college-going journey. They used several forms of cultural capital to prepare for the unknown and get to the point where college was the next step. For example, the graduates used capital in the following ways:

- familial capital: parental support and community members;
- aspirational capital: continuing to hope and believe in a higher purpose or to seek a career goal;
- social capital such as friends and other community resources like Upward Bound; and
- navigational capital to conduct research via the internet.

Also, even though their parents/guardians did not have a bachelor's degree they still provided encouragement and moral, emotional, social, and financial support to the graduates in the study.

I Stayed Busy. The graduates expressed how the college-going process kept them very busy as they prepared to be college students. For example, social capital was used by some of the graduates in the form of test preparation services, summer enrichment, social contacts, and college-related activities and events. Familial capital such as immediate family members, distant relatives, and mentors also aided in them being busy preparing for college. Aspirational and navigational capital were reported in the form of college touring and goal setting. Lastly, the graduates used forms of capital to understand the HBCU culture. For example, graduates used social capital and leaned on their village

to gain early HBCU exposure through social events, and linguistic capital was described in the form of storytelling and cultural mantras for empowerment.

I Saw a Future for Myself. To see a future for themselves, the graduates recognized a sense of independence. For example, some of the graduates used aspirational capital in hopes of getting into the HBCU of their choice; navigational and aspirational capital to see past their current circumstances; or resistant capital to be the first in their immediate family to finish college. In addition, the graduate saw a future for themselves by focusing on their dreams. For example, this was accomplished by using navigational capital to get to the end goal, proper planning, or focusing on life after college; social capital such as support groups and friend groups to motivated them academically and kept them in a positive mindset. Furthermore, the graduates saw a future for themselves by envisioning themselves in a new environment as college students. For example, resistant capital was used to express the desire to leave behind their low-income circumstance and start a new life or get away from negative experiences; or social capital to tour campus campuses and visit their potential new HBCU home.

Make 'em (and myself) Proud. Graduates in the study used forms of capital to pay it forward and make their network of folx and institutions proud. For example, aspirational capital is used to speak life to dream and work toward making it a reality; linguistic capital includes mantras learned from loved ones in remembrance of them and showing appreciation. Students also felt a need to make 'em proud because they

recognized the sacrifices and investments family and community members made for them. The graduates used several forms of capital as they decided to attend college as well. For example, graduates used familial capital by recognizing the help they received from older kin members in college or having grown up around college graduates; linguistic capital was used to explain where their motivational help comes from and social capital to describe a sense of togetherness.

Black first-generation HBCU graduates made sense of their pre-college persistence journey by using various forms of cultural capital from the community cultural wealth model. Embedded in their experiences were stories of how they developed an interest in attending their HBCU and why they wanted to become a college student. The following section collectively summarizes the forms of cultural capital used to inform the graduates' student entry characteristics.

Collectively, Black first-generation HBCU graduates used forms of community cultural wealth to inform their student entry characteristics. Some forms of cultural capital informed multiple student entry characteristics. For the graduates in this study, aspirational and familial forms of capital commonly motivated them to attend college and complete college. Their locus of control and deliberate college planning was commonly informed by aspirational, navigational, and resistant forms of cultural capital. Their self-efficacy and ability to engage in the college-going process was commonly informed by aspirational and navigational capital. The graduates' care for others during their college-going journey (empathy) was mostly informed by familial capital, whereas their social

capital mostly informed their participation with others during the college-going journey. For the parental education student entry characteristic, familial capital was the only form of capital used by the graduates as that characteristic focuses on their parent(s) or guardian(s). The graduates also commonly used aspirational and social capital to anticipate college and emulate college-going attitudes, values, and behaviors. Lastly, as the graduates got ready for college and participated in the pre-matriculation process, their socialization was informed mainly by linguistic, social, and familial forms of cultural capital.

Discussion

This study provides information by expanding the understanding of Black, first-generation graduates' experiences and perceptions of their secondary preparation for postsecondary education. This section was inspired by Cabrera's (2014) question, "What can we do in order to better prepare and increase access for the first-generation minority students in their pursuit of higher education?" (p. 17). First, we can acknowledge that Black first-generation students come to the HBCU community with cultural capital. For this study, all forms of cultural capital within the community cultural wealth model were described by the Black first-generation graduates participating in the study. Black first-generation HBCU graduates used various forms of community cultural wealth during their college-going process to gain admission into college when informed by the student entry characteristics components of the theory of student persistence in commuter colleges and universities framework.

Connection to College Access Research

This research study sits at the intersection of college access research and first year persistence research. However, my focus is more so about the gifts and talents of Black first-generation students as they access college. Research on college access falls into four categories: (a) student trait indicators for college aspiration, attendance, and persistence; (b) school reform efforts for at-risk students; (c) college intervention and outreach programs; and (d) curriculum alignment of the P-16 system (Camblin, Gullatt, & Klopott, 2003). This study is situated in the first category because it focuses on Black first-generation students' cultural capital during their college-going process and persistence to college. Promoting college as the road to success is widely accepted in the United States, so it is no surprise that nearly every youth aspires to attend (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). However, the aspiration to attend college (especially an HBCU) is not equally realized by all youth. This study supports this notion. This work adds to the literature to understand college access for underserved students such as Black first-generation students. Students are exposed to college-going messages from the media, those in their neighborhood, churches, community centers, and especially from their most immediate source of knowledge, their family (Carey, 2016). Graduates in the study, such as Lisa and Jay, expressed their exposure to television shows like “A Different World” or people in their church community that attended an HBCU.

The graduates in the study realized college was the right choice for them at different points in their lives. Drawing upon the conceptual frameworks proposed by Eaton, St. John, and associates, and others, Bragg et al. (2005) recognize and value the

multiple dimensions of access in terms of its academic, financial, personal, cultural, and political factors. While the study focused primarily on cultural factors, the graduates articulated their experience with the other factors as well. For this study, academic access was linked to the graduates' high school preparation for college-level work. Many factors contribute to differences in college attendance among diverse student groups, one of the most important being K-12 academic preparation (Bragg et al., 2005). Black first-generation HBCU graduates in the study linked their academic college preparation to their high school and other community resources. For example, David felt like his high school curriculum was aligned with the college-level curriculum, which made him confident in his academic abilities in college.

Many underserved populations in postsecondary education are from economically depressed urban areas and remote rural locations (Bragg, Kim, & Rubin, 2005). Misperceptions about college costs are widespread and are most prevalent among students from the lowest-income backgrounds, likely contributing to persistent gaps in post-secondary attainment and undermatch by socioeconomic status (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Radford, 2013). Financially speaking, financial access was achieved using financial aid and grants for 80% of the graduates in the study who identified as low-income. Although this was an anti-deficit study, stories of family hardships surfaced to describe financial access. For example, Renee mentioned how she received funds based on her parents' disabled status, which helped her afford school. According to Bragg et al., 2005, students and parents believe college is the ticket to high-wage professional careers

and fulfilling personal lives. Both Renee and her mom believed college was the ticket to getting to her professional career.

Financial access also showed up for Sophia and her parents investing in her to attend an HBCU because there were none located in her native country. In addition, personal access included individual, familial, and peer group influence and self-motivation (Bragg, Kim, & Rubin, 2005). The graduates in the study mentioned family members, mentors, and friend groups as influencers in accessing their HBCU. Graduates in the study were self-motivated in their purpose of attending college and completing college. For example, Nicole was motivated by keeping her mind set on her future career and becoming a member of the Black Greek community. This study supports cultural access in college access literature by examining the community cultural wealth that influenced Black first-generation students' commitment to an HBCU. For example, Kate's community was predominately Black, which made her choice in attending an HBCU second nature. James used school/community resources from both high schools he attended to learn more about his HBCU. Furthermore, political access refers to the effects of federal, state, and local government and boards legislation, administrative rules and mandates, and funding on college-going. The graduates described their participation in local, state, and federal academic pathway programs that support minoritized communities. For example, Lisa, Jay, and Danni mentioned academic pathway programs such as Upward Bound, Gear Up, and Junior Achievement as resources that prepared them academically and socially for college. According to Perna (2000), short-term consumption benefits of attending college include the enjoyment of the learning

experience, involvement in extracurricular activities, participation in social and cultural events, and enhancement of social status. This study supports this notion. For example, David developed a love for learning and wanted to continue his learning experience in the HBCU environment; Michael aspired to be on the HBCU band, and all the Black-first-generation HBCU graduates in the study aspired to enhance their social status. Like Carey's (2016) work, this research also advances literature that uses the community cultural wealth model to illuminate various ways Black students used forms of capital during their college-going process.

Connection to Community Cultural Wealth Framework

This study's findings support insights consistent with the literature about communities of color possessing forms of cultural capital. Although created for the Chicana/o community, Yosso (2005) introduces community cultural wealth as an alternative concept to understand communities of color. This alternative concept challenges traditional interpretations of Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory (the money you have and the people you know) as well as critiques Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) notion of cultural and social reproduction. The model is commonly used in the context of marginalized students at Hispanic serving institutions and predominately white institutions. The research uses the model to illuminate forms of cultural capital Black students bring to HBCUs, which advances the use of the model to different populations (Black first-generation students) and different institutional types (HBCUs). According to Yosso's (2005) interpretation of cultural capital, Black first-generation HBCU students

come to their HBCU community with cultural capital that often goes unrecognized, particularly when describing how these students persist during their pre-college process.

This study's findings support and add to current research centered on forms of cultural capital possessed by communities of color. Aligned with Yosso's (2005) research, at the pre-college-level, Black students and their families continue to have high educational aspirations despite persistent education inequities. Regarding navigational capital, Yosso explains that this form of capital is used to maneuver within unsupportive or hostile environments. The findings support Yosso's interpretation. As the first in their family to embark upon the college-going journey to earn a bachelor's degree, many of the graduates felt unsupported by parents or guardians who did not know the process and had to find other means of getting the information they needed. Like Kouyoumdjian et al. 's (2017), student sample using the CCW model, Black first-generation graduates in this study also identified aspirational, familial, navigational, and social capital as sources of support during their pre-college journey. The study adds to the body of knowledge that uses the community cultural wealth model to focus on the cultural capital of Black first-generation students and how these students demonstrated their resiliency in the ways they drew upon often unrecognized forms of capital and their strength to find their way through the educational system (Paquette, 2018).

Connection to Student Entry Characteristics

Much of the literature on student educational achievement suggests that pre-college, student-level factors matter (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). These pre-college

student factors accounted for about two-thirds of the differences between institutions' graduation rates (Richards & Awokoya, 2012). According to the theory of student persistence in commuter colleges and universities (Braxton et al., 2014), the students enter characteristics lead directly to persistence. Psychological and sociological student entry characteristics components from the framework is mostly used to study the retention and persistence of Black first-generation students who are already in college. This study uses the student entry characteristics differently, that is, to understand Black first-generation students' pre-college persistence journey to an HBCU and how forms of capital informed each characteristic.

College student departure literature often describes these characteristics from a retention perspective using Tinto's (1993) propositions. Black first-generation HBCU graduates in the study had the most verbal interaction in the motivation, self-efficacy, and socialization student entry characteristics. To align with the pre-college focus of the study, Tinto's propositions involving psychological processes in the pre-college decisions of Black first-generation students can be re-written as:

Motivation: Motivation to graduate from college exerts a positive influence on student persistence (Braxton et al., 2004). Motivation to make steady progress toward pre-college tasks positively impacts college-going persistence.

Self-Efficacy: The stronger a person's belief that they can achieve a desired outcome (college admission/acceptance) through their own efforts,

the less likely the Black first-generation student will depart from the college-going process.

Nora, Attinasi, and Matonak (1990) identify early expectations for college and pre matriculation experiences as forms of getting ready behaviors. The sociological perspective stresses the influence of social structure and social forces on Black first-generation pre-college persistence. To fit the study, Tinto's proposition involving the socialization student entry characteristic can be re-written as:

Socialization: The probability of pre-college persistence to an HBCU increases for Black first-generation students who engage in anticipatory socialization before entering college.

The purpose of this study was to study the desire and actions of Black students during their pre-college persistence journey. The community cultural wealth model and the student entry characteristics from the persistence theory were used to provide an anti-deficit perspective to explain how Black first-generation students persisted to college. Following student persistence research (particularly Tinto's propositions), the formula tested in this study is that *the greater degree of subsequent commitment Black first-generation students have to their college-going process, the greater their likelihood of persisting to a college/HBCU.*

Implications for Practice

The expectations of college attendance by the school, parents, and peer group are important indicators for students' expectations of college attendance and success (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005). Based on the results of this study, there is significant evidence indicating that if first-generation students are supported and encouraged by their families, peers, high school educators and high school mentor programs, the likelihood of transitioning from high school to college is increased. It is important for Black first-generation students, families, school counselors, and HBCU faculty and administrators to recognize, understand, and cultivate their talents and abilities (cultural capital).

Black First-Generation Students and Families

Letter From the Admissions Officer

As a Black first-generation student, when you have decided college is the next step in your life, the process does not have to be difficult. Seek professional guidance. Professional people, programs, and services are available to assist you along your journey. Start preparing for life after high school at the beginning of your high school years. Decide that college is the right choice early in high school and go for it! This leaves room for proper planning and for taking the courses needed to put you on the right track for college preparation. Other things to practice early in your college-going journey are developing a passion for learning, looking for your own college funding, and capitalizing on your talents and abilities.

To get off to a good start to be ready for college is to develop a love for learning. College requires that you know how to learn. But you must be motivated to learn as well. Understand what drives your passion for wanting to learn more? A key point to know about college is that the longer it takes for you to earn your degree, the more college will cost. If you learn your passion (declaring a major) early in college and stick with it, you will reduce the time it takes to earn your degree. To offset the cost of college as a first-generation student, you must search for your own scholarships while you are in high school. Every year millions of dollars of scholarship funding go unused because college-going students do not apply for the opportunities. Deciding your major in college can help you narrow your scholarship search. Another way to secure scholarship funding within your control is to capitalize on your talents and abilities. Whether you are academically sound, an athlete, or seeking a career path in public service, understand what talents and skills you can bring to the HBCU community to help you pay your bills and alleviate financial stress. Proper planning to have your tuition paid without having to take out loans during your undergraduate experience will allow you to focus on why you chose to attend college and graduate with your bachelor's degree.

Below are other words of wisdom from Black first-generation HBCU graduates on things to consider as you prepare and engage in the college-going journey:

“Don't stop. Just keep going, just keep going. If it's something that you want going forward, you are going to come across some things, some

challenges, some obstacles, but just keep going. It's going to be hard, but just keep going.” --Lisa

“Stay motivated to earn your bachelor's degree. Have a real deep belief in your ability. Really believe in yourself because when you bet on yourself, you will overcome anything.” -David

“Learn to depend on yourself and internally motivate yourself. Know how to clap for yourself because there will be battles that you will face that people will not know, people will not see, and you are going to be the only person you can depend on to press forward and get through.” -Nicole

“... the biggest thing is self-motivation. Why do you want to go to college? Why did you select the school you want to go to? If you can't answer those questions for yourself, college is probably not it. But, if you got a solid answer as to what you see yourself becoming, or what you think the experience can develop you into, who can tell you not to go for it? Even if it doesn't work, at least you tried.” -James

“Develop some independence for yourself. Your mom and dad are not going to be able to speak for you. You are going to have to make the phone calls and speak for yourself. Even though you have parental support, they're not there with you physically on campus.” -Violet

“Number one, ask for help. Anytime you're not sure. Ask for help. Number two, lean on your village. That's what they're there for. They don't expect you to have all the answers and know all the things cuz they don't know it either but lean on them for that motivation and support that you need.” -

Danni

“Trust the process. That does not always look easy, but it means finding people that have your best interests.” -Sophia

“Introduce yourself to those people in the financial aid office and the registrar's office, student conduct, student affairs, housing, and residence life office. Make those people know who you are by commanding their attention.” -Jay

“The journey will not be easy. The obstacles and challenges will be there. But that is a part of life. I encourage you to keep going. Don't let those obstacles and challenges stop you. Remember why you started and why you chose to go to college. That's the main thing, remembering why you started and your purpose for being there. That is what's going to keep you motivated.” -Renee

“You don't have to do this alone. There will be some battles that you yourself would've never expected and won't know how to navigate. There are people out there who are willing and able to share unlimited resources with and give you different tips to look out for.” -Kate

“Take the journey serious. When you get on campus, understand where you are and what the college or university has to offer you. When you do that take advantage of your resources available to help guide your way through the process.” -Michael

Black first-generation students and families should decide college is the right choice early in high school and go for it! Adults can cultivate their student’s *aspirations* by connecting them to resources and motivating them to dream as well as help students and families *navigate* the complexities of going to college. Parents and guardians can set a family policy by making it mandatory to submit college inquiry forms online once their student gets to high school. This gets them started with the research processes for schools, scholarships, and academic programs.

School Counselors and District Administrators

School counselors play a critical role in the college success of first-generation minority (Black) students. If parents, students, and school educators are involved, the student develops higher college aspirations and transitions successfully into college (Cabrera (2014). In whatever counseling capacity (professional counselor, teacher, or mentor), it is important to remember that even though families of first-generation students come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the “lack the first-hand knowledge of the college experience and university system” (Dennis et al., 2005, p.233), this does not mean that they are not important influential factors. Despite the lack of first-hand college experience and the university system, families can “instill in their children the

expectation of attending college and can provide encouragement and emotional support” (Dennis et al., 2005, p. 224). This goes for school counselors as well. Actively engaging Black first-generation students as early as middle school to motivate and prepare them for the college-going process takes time and resources; however, investing in Black students that early increases their interest and awareness of college. Through such activities, students can begin the research processes for schools, scholarships, and academic programs; they can “receive their first introduction to the attitudinal and behavioral norms of a new academic and social setting” (Terenzini et al., 1994). Also, starting the college going conversation early helps first-generation students and families cultivate their *linguistic* capital. Districts can also either hire a first-generation student specialist at the district level to support first-generation students in schools or create policy making it mandatory that at least one staff member understands research centered on first-generation students and their *socialization* needs. In alignment with college access and readiness research, it is essential that districts include college exploration and planning programs throughout middle and high school (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002). Understanding the link between secondary education preparation and success in postsecondary education requires communication and outreach between postsecondary educational institutions and high schools (Adelman, 2006). Adding identifying administrative staff at the district level to communicate and coordinate such programs and efforts between higher educational institutions and high school is a start.

HBCU Faculty, Administrators, and Staff

This study provides examples of ways teachers, faculty, administrators, and staff members took time with Black students during their pre-college years to ensure their success. The graduates reflected on folx who “knew them as students and as individuals.” Their relationship with their folx left a lasting impact on them. Understanding the forms of cultural capital these students used to get to the point of applying to the HBCU should happen at the entry point with the admissions staff. Admissions teams can pay closer attention to the personal statements of admitted students and engage faculty in the process. Adding a faculty representative to the admissions team adds a different perspective to the admissions and decision-making process. This also allows HBCU admission staff to keep up with the current shift of diverse Black students showing up on campus. This study also provides HBCU faculty and practitioners from various backgrounds with new information that may help shape how HBCUs address the needs of Black first-generation students.

We are starting to see a number of first- and second-year experience programs on campuses to support students. However, understanding the forms of cultural capital students used to get to the point of applying to the HBCUs should happen at the entry point with the admissions staff. HBCU admissions staff should consider **(1) intentionally** following up with families to cultivate their college *aspirations*, *socialize* them to the community, and help them *navigate* the admissions process; **(2)** policies should be developed for admissions teams to pay closer attention to the personal statements of

admitted students; (3) training on understanding the experiences of first-generation students should be mandatory; and (4) I recommend adding two faculty members to the admissions process with at least one being a first-generation scholar.

In support of Black student persistence, HBCUs can create policies for the entire campus community (faculty, staff, administration) to cultivate the cultural capital Black first-generation students bring to the environment by implementing supportive persistence practices, particularly in the first and second years of college. In addition to creating a warm, family-oriented environment for Black students, HBCUs must go a step further and be more intentional in developing the talent and abilities of all students and not a selective few. The HBCU graduates in the study used multiple forms of cultural capital to make it to college and while in college. Once they go to college, it is the institution's responsibility to cultivate these forms of capital to help retain and graduate Black students. Understanding the forms of capital Black first-generation college students use to persist through the college-going process and attend HBCUs should happen in the early stages of the students' college-going journey to better understand the student and services they need to navigate successfully.

Implications for Future Research

This study captured the experiences of eleven Black first-generation students at nine HBCUs primarily located in the southeastern United States. This study examines a population not widely discussed in the first-generation literature, and if themes of community cultural wealth can be identified in just eleven students, these experiences are

most likely widespread. In this section, I have three recommendations to expand Black first-generation student inquiry, expand college access research, and expand community cultural wealth research.

Recommendation 1

Expanding the inquiry of Black student college-going persistence to graduates from HBCUs in other geographical regions should be done to compare results nationally. In addition, expanding Black first-generation student inquiry at other minority-serving institutions gives us a clearer picture of their experience and various institutional types to increase graduation rates across the board.

Recommendation 2

Attention is increasingly turning to college completion rather than college access alone. Still, improving college access remains among the most promising strategies for raising college degree attainment overall, particularly if we conceptualize access not as getting students in the door of any college, but instead as getting them off to a good start at an institution that is well aligned with their interests and capabilities (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). In support of getting Black students off to a good start is to expand research that helps Black students and families see themselves in the college-going process, particularly from a cultural perspective using frameworks like community cultural wealth. In addition, marketing Black students in college-going materials helps them see themselves potentially going to college. Lastly, increasing strong relationships

with Black alumni to talk to Black students about their college-going journey and how they got to their careers more frequently at the middle and high school levels introduces these students to the college conversation at an early age. By giving them an insight to what higher education can offer, students can better determine what school, major, or career they would like to pursue.

Recommendation 3

With this study limited to eleven participants, further study is recommended with a larger sample size for extensive data. Understanding of how forms of cultural capital show up in other components of the persistence theory for Black first-generation students (particularly the external environment component) can help the field understand how external factors informed their forms of community cultural wealth as first and second-year students. The model can also examine how higher education institutions cultivate forms of community cultural wealth for Black students to retain them, especially HBCUs.

Conclusion

Black first-generation students have as much potential to attend college as other students if they have the personal motivation and support to do so (Cabrera, 2014). The preparation and decision to go to college requires research, access to resources, support, and most of all, the motivation (Cabrera, 2014). This study provides a different perspective on how Black first-generation students persist through the pre-college process. This information is vital for a few reasons: 1.) to empower Black students to be

more involved in their pre-college journey once they decide college is for them; 2) to provide authentic voices and stories from former HBCU students who successfully persisted in college and graduated; 3) to provide another perspective (asset-based) on how Black students use their skill, abilities, and contacts (cultural capital) to navigate the entry point of higher education.

To understand the forms of cultural capital that Black first-generation students use to navigate the pre-college process, I propose understanding how the forms of cultural capital from the community cultural wealth model inform Black first-generation student entry characteristics component of the student persistence in commuter college and universities framework. This knowledge provides scholar-practitioners with another set of factors to focus on and help them learn from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by Black first-generation student that often goes unrecognized and unacknowledged. Additionally, recognizing the cultural capital Black first-generation students use to navigate their pre-college process has the potential to play an important part in the pre-college decisions of Black students, increased enrollment of HBCUs (2-year and 4-year residential and commuter HBCUs), and increased first- and second-year persistence rate.

Message to HBCUs

We must not lose sight of the mission of our nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities. If we focused solely on graduation rates, this would presuppose that graduation rates are, in and of themselves, the HBCUs' primary mission (Richards &

Awokoyo, 2012). A more commendable mission, and one more in keeping with HBCUs' legacy, is to provide educational opportunities and success to students who might not otherwise have access to a quality higher education. High graduation rates are merely an indicator of success in this mission—they are not the mission itself (Richards & Awokoyo, 2012).

HBCUs currently graduate 15% of bachelor's degrees earned by Black students. However, these institutions were founded and created to educate most Black first-generation students seeking an education with nowhere else to go. When studying marginalized populations like Black first-generation students and their forms of cultural capital, administrators at HBCUs should reconsider using the same forms of cultural capital as described by Bourdieu (1986) to understand how these students get to college and graduate from college. Rather, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework challenges traditional forms of capital and serves as a better model fit to examine the forms of cultural capital Black first-generation students bring to HBCUs and other higher education institutions. HBCUs also cannot rely on Black first-generation students to retain themselves. Instead, HBCU communities should cultivate their cultural capital throughout the pre-college matriculation process and during their undergraduate experience (inside and outside of the classroom) as they persist to graduation. To cultivate their cultural capital, it is important to understand the desire and actions of Black first-generation students to stay within the system of higher education from pre-college matriculation through degree completion. The rate at which students continue in higher education at HBCUs is 62%; however, the retention/graduation rate is 35%. In

response to these stats, the findings add to the body of literature by providing multiple ways that Black students gain access to their HBCU because much of the research on Black students and their pre-college experience articulates how HBCUs socialize Black students in the hope of retaining them as first-year college students. This research adds to the literature by examining the entire pre-college experience of Black first-generation students to understand how they persisted at their HBCU and the community cultural wealth they bring from their homes and communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Clemson University IRB Approval

6/30/22, 8:25 PM

Clemson University Mail - Protocol IRB2021-0982 has been approved



Maurice Williams Jr <maw@g.clemson.edu>

Protocol IRB2021-0982 has been approved

3 messages

- **IRB Office** <irb@clemson.edu>
To: Natasha N Croom <NNCROOM@clemson.edu>
Cc: "Mr Jr. Williams" <MAW@clemson.edu>

Wed, Feb 16, 2022 at 2:14 PM

PI: Natasha N Croom

IRB Record Number: IRB2021-0982

Study Title: Navigating American Higher Education Institutions: Experiences of First-Generation HBCU Graduates

IRB Office Comments: Your submission was approved. The determination notice is attached.

A signed consent is not required for this study. Please remove the signature lines on the consent document before starting data collection.



To: Natasha N Croom
Re: Clemson IRB Number: IRB2021-0982
Exempt Category: D2
Determination Date: 16-Feb-2022
Expiration Date: 28-Feb-2027
Funding Sponsor: N/A
Project Title: Navigating American Higher Education Institutions: Experiences of First-Generation HBCU Graduates

The Office of Research Compliance determined that the proposed activities involving human participants meet the criteria for Exempt level review under 45 CFR 46.104(d). The Exempt determination is granted for the certification period indicated above.

Principal Investigator (PI) Responsibilities: The PI assumes the responsibilities for the protection of human subjects as outlined in the [Principal Investigator's Responsibilities](#) guidance.

Non-Clemson Affiliated Collaborators: The Exempt determination only covers Clemson affiliated personnel on the study. External collaborators have to consult with their respective institution's IRB office to determine what is required for their role on the project.

Modifications: An Amendment is required for substantial changes to the study. Substantial changes are modifications that may affect the Exempt determination (i.e., changing from Exempt to Expedited or Full Board review level, changing exempt category) or that may change the focus of the study, such as a change in hypothesis or study design. **All changes must be reviewed by the IRB office prior to implementation.**

PI or Essential Study Personnel Changes: For Exempt determinations, submit an amendment ONLY if the PI changes or if there is a change to an essential study team member. An essential team member would be an individual required to be on the study team for their expertise or certification (i.e., health expert, mental health counselor). Students or other non-essential study personnel changes DO NOT have to be reported to the IRB office.

Reportable Events: Notify the IRB office immediately if there are any non-compliance issues, unanticipated problems involving risks to participants, complications, adverse events and/or any complaints from research participants.

Closing IRB Record: Submit a Progress Report to close the IRB record. An IRB record may be closed when all research activities are completed. Research activities include, but are not limited to: enrolling new participants; interaction with participants (online or in-person); collecting prospective data, including de-identified data through a survey; obtaining, accessing, and/or generating identifiable private information about a living person.

New IRB Application: A new Exempt application is required if the research activities continue for more than 5 years after the initial determination. **Exempt determinations may not be renewed or extended and are valid for 5 years only.**

Non-Clemson Affiliated Sites: A site letter is required for off-campus sites. Refer to the [guidance on research site/permission letters](#) for more information. An Amendment is required to add additional sites to the study.

International Research: Clemson's approval is based on U.S. human subjects protections regulations and [Clemson University human subjects protection policies](#). Researchers should become familiar with all pertinent information about local human subjects protection regulations and requirements when conducting research internationally. We encourage you to discuss any possible human subjects research requirements that are specific to your research site with your local contacts, to comply with those requirements, and to inform Clemson's IRB office of those requirements. Review the [FAQs](#) for more information about international research.

Contact Information: Please contact the IRB office at IRB@clemson.edu or visit our [webpage](#) if you have questions.

Appendix B: Recruitment Email Script

Email Request to Share Research Study Information

Dear Upward Bound Staff,

I need your help with a research study to understand the cultural wealth Black first-generation HBCU students bring with them from their home and communities to their HBCU community. I am recruiting first-generation HBCU graduates to participate in a study focusing on the persistence of Black first-generation HBCU graduates. Will you please share the email note below with your Black first-generation HBCU graduates?

Dear HBCU Graduate,

As a Black first-generation HBCU graduate, I invite you to participate in an interview regarding your motivation(s) to persist and earn your bachelor's degree. Your feedback is very important, and your willingness to participate would be greatly appreciated.

The interview would be approximately 60 minutes in length and take place via Zoom at a date/time that is convenient for you.

Participation in the interview is voluntary, and you can decide not to participate at any time.

To ensure that you are comfortable participating and to protect confidentiality, I will be the only person present during the interview for this study. All data collected will be de-identified.

If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact me Maurice Williams Jr via email at: maw@clemsun.edu or by phone at: xxx-xxx-xxxx. I hope to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Appendix C: Pre-Screening Questionnaire Tool

**Thank you for taking 60 seconds to complete the HBCU
First-Gen research study questionnaire.**

Your response is completely confidential and will have no impact on your participation.



What is your name?

What is your email address?

Do you identify as Black or African-American?

Yes

No

Did you graduate from a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) with a bachelors degree?

Yes

No

Which HBCU did you attend?

What year did you earn your first bachelors degree?

Were you a first-generation college graduate (neither parent earned a bachelors degree before you

graduated)?

Yes

No

That's it! Hit submit to share your responses.



Powered by Qualtrics [↗](#)

Appendix D: Rapport Building Conversation Script

Greetings _____,

My name is Maurice. Again, thank you for participating in this study. I just want to take a few minutes to discuss your role as a participant and discuss who I am. For this study I want to capture your persistence journey at 3 stages:

- (1) pre-college stage
- (2) first-year college experience, and
- (3) persistence as an upperclassman to graduation.

Each interview will take about 45-60mins and we can schedule them over the course of 3 days or at the most convenient time for you. Whatever you prefer. This is the only requirement for participation. Are you ok with the 3 interview and the time length for each (45-60mins)?

Next Steps: Which week works best for you to conduct the interviews?

I will follow up with a note outlining the participation details and the consent form for the study. I will also follow up with calendar requests for each of the interview appointments. Do you have any other questions for me?

Ok, thanks again _____. I look forward to our conversations.

Appendix E: Informed Consent

Navigating American Higher Education Institutions: Experiences of Black First-Generation HBCU Graduates

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Dr. Natasha Croom and doctoral candidate Maurice Williams Jr, invite you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Natasha Croom is an Associate Dean in the Graduate School and Maurice is a PhD Candidate in the Educational Leadership (Higher Education) program at Clemson University.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the persistence experiences of Black first-generation undergraduate students and the forms of community cultural wealth they use to navigate their Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

Voluntary Consent: Participation is voluntary, and you have the option to not participate.

Activities and Procedures: Your part in the study will be to complete (3) 45–60-minute interview conversations. Each interview will be recorded using a digital recording device and Zoom video meeting platform to capture how you persisted in college to earn your bachelor’s degree at your HBCU. Maurice will also follow-up with you via email to request that you review your interview transcript for accuracy. This may take up 30 minutes should you choose to review the transcript.

Participation Time: Each of the three interviews is 45-60 minutes and another 30minutes to review your interview transcript therefore, it will take approximately 3 hours to be in this study.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study. Should you feel discomfort, may choose not to continue to participate in the interview.

Possible Benefits: Your participation will illuminate the cultural wealth/capital first-generation students bring with them from their home and community to their HBCU community. Your responses will provide a different perspective (a cultural perspective) of how Black first-generation students navigate higher education and persist through graduation.

EXCLUSION/INCLUSION REQUIREMENTS

For eligibility to participate, one must identify as Black or African American as identified on their admissions application, attended an HBCU as a first-generation student, and graduated from an HBCU with a bachelor's degree.

AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING

Your part in the study will be to participate in an Internet facilitated (Zoom or WebEx), recorded interview. All sessions will be audio recorded. Audio recordings will be kept for 5 years. Audio will be transcribed by a professional transcription service. After data analysis findings from the study will be shared through publications and presentations in professional academic settings.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations. Identifiable information collected during the study will be removed and the de-identified information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participants or legally authorized representative.

Either pseudonyms or participant numbers will be used within study documents (e.g., interview transcripts) rather than the individual's names. We will maintain a key wherein participants' names will be associated with a pseudonym or number. This key will be stored within a password-protected laptop in a secure Clemson Box account.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Maurice Williams Jr at maw@clemson.edu or by phone at 843-371-0133.

CONSENT

By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.

Appendix F: Participant Interview Instructions

Greetings,

Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in my research study entitled, "*Navigating American Higher Education Institutions: Experiences of Black First-Generation HBCU Graduates*". I am humbled to have you on board, and thank you for the time, energy, and brilliance you'll bring to the conversations ahead of us. Outlined below are next steps for participation. In addition, attached is a copy of the 'Participation Consent Form' for your review prior to the study.

Overview of Participation Timeline

As discussed, participation in this study includes two required parts:

- *Pre-Interview Questionnaire*
- *Virtual 3-part Interview* (dates below)
 1. Monday, February x, 2022 @ 5:00pm est
 2. Tuesday, February x, 2022 @ 5:00pm est
 3. Thursday, February x, 2022 @ 5:00pm est

Virtual Interview (Conversation Held Using Zoom Platform)

Below are a few tips to keep in mind as you prepare for our 3-part interview conversation:

- Once a date/time is finalized, you will receive an email 24 hours in advance of the scheduled interview with a Zoom link and password to participate (must have Zoom downloaded on your personal computer or phone prior to interview). Please do not share this information with anyone.
- On the day of the interview, if possible, please be sure to sit in a quiet space with an adequate wi-fi connection or phone signal. I will be sharing my screen with questions and images displayed on a PowerPoint to guide our conversation over the 90 minutes.
- After finishing the interview, your participation in the required parts of this study will be complete.

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study, as your contributions are invaluable. If you need accommodations for any of the study's components, or have questions/concerns, feel free to contact me at any time.

Talk to you soon.

Appendix G: Interview Protocol 1

Interview Participants: Black First-Generation HBCU Graduates

Pre-College Experiences

1. Tell me a little about yourself and how you grew up.
 - Was there a sense of community? What was it like?
2. Tell me about your educational experience(s) to this point.
 - What kind of student were you in elementary and middle school?
 - What kind of student were you in high school?
 - Were you involved in extracurricular activities? Where did you learn to get involved?
3. What motivated you to attend college to be a college student?
 - How was your college going process like?
 - Explain your process for submitting the college application.
 - What was your process for taking and completing the SAT or ACT?
 - Did you receive assistance completing personal statement/essay?
 - When did you realize that you were going to college?
4. Describe your college preparatory experience.
 - How involved was your high school during your college going process?
 - What school or community resources did you use to gain access into college?
 - How did you learn what you needed to do to get into college?
5. Choosing which college to attend is a big decision, how did you come to select the HBCU you attended?
 - Why did you choose to attend a Historically Black College?
 - Were you introduced to HBCUs at a young age?
6. Looking back, what would you have done differently to prepare for college?

Appendix H: Interview Protocol 2

Interview Participants: Black First-Generation HBCU Graduates

First-Year Persistence Interview

1. What was it like transitioning from high school and home life to college life?
 - How did you adjust to college life and how long did it take you?
 - How far were you away from home?
 - How did you know what to do and where to go?
2. Describe your first-year college experience.
 - What type of high school environment did you come from?
 - What were similarities and difference from your high school experience and your first year of college experience?
 - What was your first-year experience like as a Black first-generation student at your HBCU?
3. What motivating resources did you use to help you navigate your HBCU during your first year?
 - How did you know to use these resources?
4. What aspirations did you have for yourself as a first-year college student?
 - If so, what aspirations did you have for yourself?
5. If you could change one thing about your first-year college experience, what would it be?

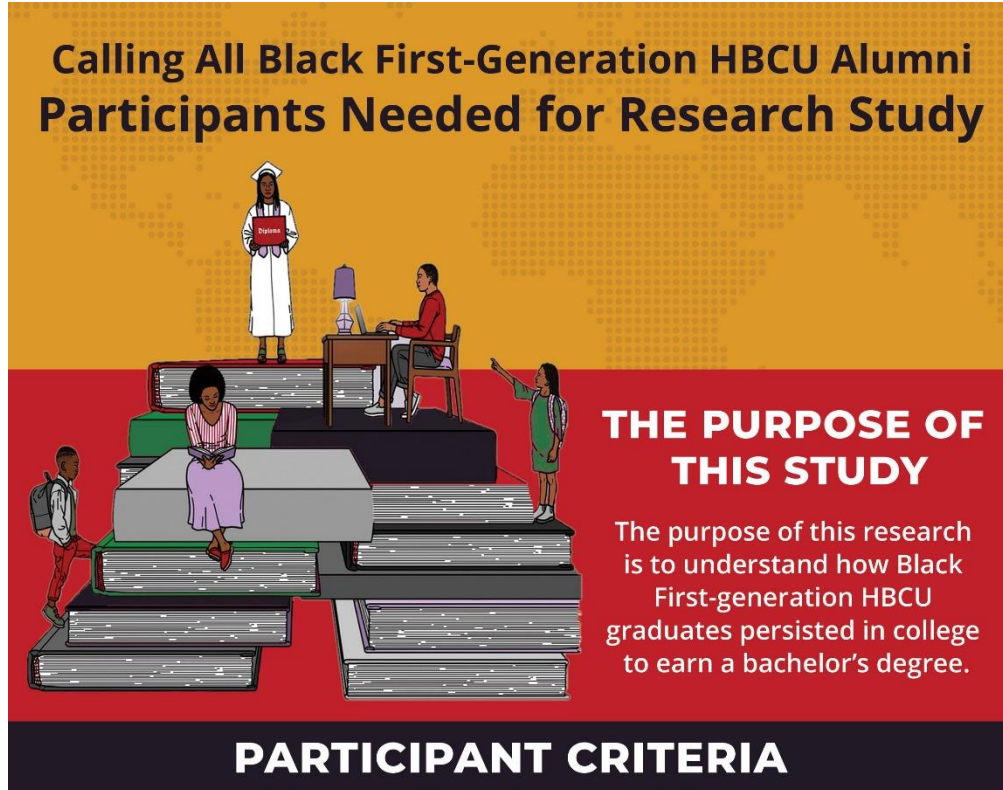
Appendix I: Interview Protocol 3

Interview Participants: Black First-Generation HBCU Graduates

Beyond the First Year (Persistence to Graduation)

1. Why did you decide to return to college after your first year?
2. How did you prepare to be an upperclassman?
3. Describe your undergraduate experience as a Black first-generation student at your HBCU?
4. How did you stay motivated to obtain your bachelor's degree?
5. Tell me about a time when you were struggling in college... what happened?
 - o Follow up: How did you know what to do to improve this situation?
 - o Follow up: How did you end up not allowing that situation to shatter your confidence and your goal to finish college?
6. What personal characteristics did you use to help you navigate college as an upperclassman at your HBCU?
7. From your experience, why are some Black first-generation HBCU students more successful in college than others?
 - o What helped you succeed in college?
8. As you reflect on your persistence journey to graduation, think about current high school students who may be the first in their family to go to college. What advice do you have for them on how to stay motivated to earn their bachelor's degree?

Appendix J: Recruitment Flyer



**Calling All Black First-Generation HBCU Alumni
Participants Needed for Research Study**

**THE PURPOSE OF
THIS STUDY**

The purpose of this research is to understand how Black First-generation HBCU graduates persisted in college to earn a bachelor's degree.

PARTICIPANT CRITERIA

- Black/African American
- First-Generation College Graduate
 - Attended an HBCU
- Graduated with a Bachelor's degree between 2013-2020

INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

Contact Maurice Williams, Jr. at maw@g.clemson.edu,
or to indicate interest, please visit
https://clemson.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_byI9vWEIbDAM3iem

Your participation in this study is confidential.



Appendix K: Social Media Recruitment Plan

Social Media Outlet	Messaging
Facebook/Facebook Story	Flyer Attached; Note: I seek to understand how Black First generation HBCU Graduates persisted [in undergrad] to earn their bachelor's degree. If you are a First Generation HBCU Graduate (between 2013-2020) please consider participating in this study.
GroupMe (3 groups: fraternity group and 2 Clemson Black Community Groups)	Flyer Only
Instagram	Flyer; Note: If you are a first generation HBCU graduate (between 2013-2020) please consider participation in this study
LinkedIn	Same as Facebook
Slack (2 groups: Fraternity Group and Clemson Community Group)	Flyer Only
Snap Chat	Flyer only
Twitter	Flyer Attached; I seek to understand how Black First generation HBCU Graduates persisted [in undergrad] to earn their bachelor's degree. If you are a First Generation HBCU Graduate (between 2013-2020) please consider participating in this study.
WhatsApp	Flyer Attached; Note: "Black First Generation HBCU graduate...How did you do it? We need your voice. Please consider participating.