

A DIFFERENT WORLD: AFRICAN AMERICAN  
STUDENT PERSISTENCE IN A  
PRIVATE BLACK COLLEGE

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Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements  
for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION  
August, 2002

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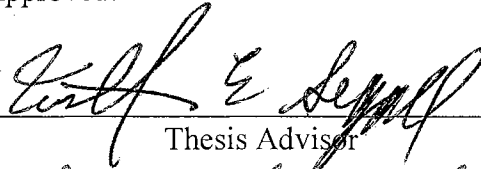
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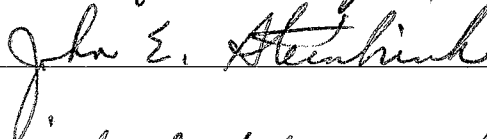
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August 2002

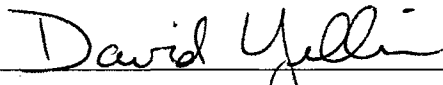
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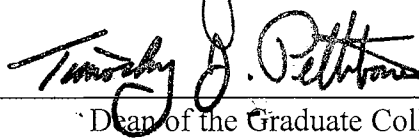
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research project was successfully completed because of the support and assistance of several key persons that helped me at various stages. I thank my advisor, Dr. Steinbrink, and my dissertation chair, Dr. Segall, for guiding me through the research process. I thank my committee members, Dr. Gunzenhauser and Dr. Yellin, for their advice and eagerness to assist me. I thank Dr. Burlingame for his guidance during my pilot study which helped me to refine the techniques necessary for conducting this project. I thank my fellow graduate student and lifelong friend, Robert Z. Carr, Jr. His friendship, support, scholarly criticisms, and competitive spirit helped to keep me motivated to complete this project.

I would also like to thank Dr. Artee Young, the faculty, administration, staff, and students of Tougaloo College for welcoming my presence and allowing me to conduct my study at their institution. I am especially thankful to the Tougaloo College students who participated in this project. Their thoughtful reflections and willingness to participate were instrumental to the success of this project.

I must also thank my wife, Latisha Latiker, parents, James and Bobbie Latiker, and a host of family and friends for their encouragement and support. Latisha lent a listening ear, constructive criticism, her proofreading abilities, and a great deal of understanding to this project. For that I am truly grateful. My parents, family, and

friends voiced their confidence in my ability repeatedly and helped me to maintain the confidence necessary to stay the course.

Most importantly, I thank the Lord for providing me with opportunities in life and surrounding me with a support system to help me take advantage of those opportunities. I realize that all that I am and all that I have the potential to become is because of Him. For this I am eternally grateful.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As America's system of higher education becomes increasingly more diverse, the need to understand college students and their different educational environments grows. We can no longer afford to assume that college students develop in the same manner or possess the same needs regardless of their race or the type of institutions that they attend. Nowhere has this become more evident than among African American college students. Even today, after decades of study and programs designed to retain more African American students the percentage of African Americans that matriculate through college to graduation is significantly lower than their Caucasian counterparts (Lang, 1992; Robinson, 1990; Astin, 1982; Thomas, 1981; Lang & Ford, 1992; Gosman, Dandridge, Nettles, & Thoeny, 1983). Subsequently, large numbers of African Americans are postponing their entrance into the workforce and incurring debts without reaping the benefits of a college education. Tracy Robinson (1990) of North Carolina State University summarizes the concerns of many with this statement, "It is not enough for African American students to simply enroll in institutions of higher education; enrollment does not necessarily result in degree attainment.... Given the significance of a college degree, African American student retention should be a priority for colleges and

universities.” (p.207) This is why it is important to understand the factors that affect African American student persistence in all types of colleges and universities.

For the past one hundred and fifty years Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been responsible for educating a large proportion of the African American community. The majority of African Americans with Ph.D.s, medical, and law degrees received their undergraduate education at a HBCU (Gray, 1997). Some of their graduates are among America’s most distinguished persons. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall, Douglas Wilder, and Leontyne Price all attended HBCUs. Even though HBCUs do not educate as large a proportion of African American college students as they once did (they currently enroll about 16% of African American college students) each year a third of all African American college graduates receive their degrees from HBCUs (Joiner, 1998; Gray, 1997).

There are currently about 1.4 million African American students in higher education. Approximately 300,000 of them presently attend one of 103 HBCUs. These HBCUs vary in size, type, and racial composition just as Predominantly White Institution’s (PWIs) do. Currently there are three predominantly white HBCUs, 50 public universities, and 53 private colleges (Gray, 1997).

Private Black Colleges are the only institutions of higher education considered to be controlled solely by African American people since public Historically Black Universities receive state funding and report to a State Board of Regents (Thompson, 1973). Their independence affords them the opportunity to remain more in line with the needs and demands of the African American community. In order to better understand the needs of the African American student and increase their persistence to graduation it

may be helpful to more thoroughly examine the experience of African American students in an educational environment that is reported to have evolved around the African American experience, the Private Black College.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is an abundance of research that examines the development and persistence of college students. However, there is only a small portion of it which specifically examines the persistence of African American college students. Prior to the 1970s African Americans were virtually ignored in college student persistence literature. There are several major reasons for this exclusion. Foremost is the fact that African Americans had only recently gained access to mainstream higher education because for the majority of its existence this system had been divided along racial lines (Brown II, 1999). Whites were educated in a system that evolved around their needs and reflected their culture and values, while African Americans were educated in their own system. Secondly, African Americans only made up a small percentage of the student body at Predominantly White Institutions. The studies conducted within them did not specifically examine the experiences of the minority groups, so even if African Americans were included their opinions would be poorly represented in the findings.

In the last three decades research examining African American student persistence has increased significantly, but much of it is based on models or tests the applicability of models developed from white students in Predominantly White Institutions (Pascarella & Terenzinni, 1991; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The applicability of these theories and

models should be questioned when applied to minority groups even within the same institutions (Pascarella & Terenzinni, 1991). If the relevance of these theories to African American students is questionable within the same institution, then surely it is between institutions that are oriented towards different students. In one of the few studies conducted on the topic Desousa and Kuh (1996) found that their model of African American student attrition developed at the predominantly white University of Indiana did not fit African American students attending HBCUs. They suggested that research conducted at similar institutions might be transferable in many ways, but that research done between institutions with educational environments so different is problematic to say the least.

African American students attending Private Black Colleges (PBCs) may be the least represented in persistence literature. PBC's represent more than one half of all HBCUs, send a large proportion of their graduates on to graduate and professional schools, and represent a unique set of educational environments. Still they have not been explored in the effort to more thoroughly understand the persistence process among African American students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study addressed the void in current literature by identifying and describing the positive and negative influences on the persistence of African American students attending a Private Black College. Because this study was specifically designed to address a student's voluntary decision to remain in college rather than the college's

attempt to retain students, the word persistence was used instead of retention. The information gathered in this study was used to develop a model of persistence for African American students in Private Black Colleges that aids in explaining the relationships between the student, environment, and factors that influence persistence.

### **Guiding Questions**

This study was organized around the following questions:

- What are the major factors that have assisted / hindered African American students' persistence within a Private Black College?
- How do these factors influence African American college students' decision to remain or leave college?
- How do students perceive the institutional climate and culture of a Private Black College as helping or hindering their persistence?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study extended present research on student persistence by examining the perspectives of African Americans within a unique educational environment. This study was timely and needed especially among Private Black Colleges because currently there are not any models of persistence based on the perspectives of students within these schools. This investigation provided a deeper understanding of the educational conditions that foster African American students' commitment to attaining a degree

within one of the fifty-three Private Black Colleges. This knowledge could greatly aid developers and implementers of retention programs in Private Black Colleges in addressing the needs of their students.

Furthermore this research provided another perspective from which to assess the persistence of African American students within PBC's, the African American student. For years African American educators have stated that Black colleges are successful in retaining students largely because of their nurturing environments. For years this statement has been accepted at face value. A model based on African American students' perspectives contributed to academic knowledge by showing the interactions of students with the PBC environment and within it. This study gives those not directly involved with PBC's an opportunity to hear the stories of students being educated within PBC's and the opportunity to draw their own conclusions about its affect on African American student persistence.

Aside from adding to limited knowledge about African American students in Private Black Colleges and informing developers of retention programs in PBC's there was a larger benefit to this study. It also provided greater insight into cultural / racial issues significant in the persistence of students in all of higher education. Since American higher education is made up of many diverse educational environments it is important for persistence / retention research to become more institution specific (Tinto, 1987). This study aided in showing such a need.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

This section reviews the evolution of research in college student attrition/retention literature including major categories of studies, models, and theories. It furthermore examines the history of African Americans in higher education and major factors affecting African American college student persistence. The chapter concludes with theoretical perspectives on the education of African American students within Historically Black Colleges and Universities both public and private.

#### **Evolution of Attrition and Retention Literature**

##### Descriptive Studies

In its earliest stage attrition research was primarily descriptive. It told which students were most likely to drop out of college and when they were most likely to drop out by making empirical generalizations about the characteristics of students that do not remain in college until graduation. These descriptive attrition studies were responsible



for compiling large amounts of demographic data about students that drop out of college (Bean, 1982).

The major weakness of this type of research is that it does not attempt to explain why students possessing certain characteristics are more likely to drop out. Descriptive research is designed to show correlations between variables rather than causation. John P. Bean (1982) refers to this early form of attrition research as atheoretical because there is no rationale attempting to explain why variables or student characteristics are linked in certain ways. However, this type of research laid the foundation for future attrition research by providing hard data for researchers to draw inferences from.

### Predictive Studies

In the late 1950s and early 1960s attrition research began to evolve from being primarily descriptive to being predictive in nature. This predictive approach sought to identify factors that would aid in predicting which students would stay or leave college. The vast majority of this research focused on pre-collegiate factors that generally fell into these three major categories: academic, demographic, or financial (Bean, 1982; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This type of research was important to college personnel during this era because it told them who was most likely to succeed or not succeed, thereby allowing colleges to set their admissions standards accordingly.

This form of research shares the same weakness as its immediate predecessor (descriptive research). Even though it aids in identifying the type of student that would be successful, it does not explain why some students possessing similar or dissimilar

characteristics remain while others do not (Bean, 1982; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). An explanation for this occurrence may be that this type of research came about during an era when more emphasis was being placed on whom should be admitted to college than what occurs after entry.

The 1950s and 60s marked a time when people of different races and classes were attempting to gain access to a system of higher education that traditionally served a largely demographically and financially homogenous group of people. The descriptive research of that time largely showed that nontraditional students were less successful as a whole than their traditional counterparts while predictive research placed the emphasis solely on the potential student. It examined the student's background characteristics to determine if they were likely to stay and thereby be worthy of the investment of the institution's resources. It did so without examining the role of the institution itself in the attrition/retention process.

As higher education became more diverse during the 60s and 70s nontraditional (poor and minorities) students continued to have higher attrition rates than the traditional ones (Astin, 1982). This recurring pattern in part led to research attempting to explain why some students drop out when others do not.

#### Rootman's Personal Role Fit Model

In the early 1970's Rootman developed his Person-Role Fit Model. It expanded upon the predictive literature by not only examining the characteristics of individuals, but by acknowledging that there is some interaction between the individual and the

institution. The basic premise of Rootman's model is that the better the fit between the person and what is required of that person within an institution, the more likely they are to become highly integrated. He developed this model based upon a study that he conducted at the Naval Academy testing his hypothesis that interpersonal fit (friendship-support) and personal – role fit (shared group values) are negatively associated with withdrawals (Bean, 1982; Rootman, 1972).

Possibly the most glaring weakness of the Person – Role Fit Model is the defining of what the student role is at an institution. Bean (1982) states that,

The definition of the student role at an institution is extremely complexed. This complexity arises in part because there is not just one student role at an institution, and individual perception of the student role is probably more important to the individual than is any abstract definition of student role. (p.21)

Even though this model helped to move attrition research more towards a focus on the interaction between students and their college environments like its predecessors, the outcomes of studies using this model were primarily used to provide information about what type of student should be admitted. Other models being developed around this time took Rootman's basic premise, that the higher the level of similarity between student characteristics and student role the more likely a student is to stay, to another level by attempting to more thoroughly explain the process whereby student come to leave (Bean, 1982). These models would come to be known as the Longitudinal Process Models.

### Longitudinal Process Models

Longitudinal Process Models are those that study the attrition process over a period of time. They may also be referred to as College Impact Models (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991). They differ from descriptive and predictive research in several ways. They are greatly influenced by the fields of sociology and anthropology, not just psychology. They take into account pre-collegiate characteristics of students, but they primarily focus on what occurs while a student is matriculating through college. Finally, they stress interaction and the experience of students in college (Tinto 1993, Bean 1982, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Three of the major Longitudinal Process Models (Spady's, Tinto's, and Pascarella's) also share another commonality. They all used Durkheim's idea, by analogy, that shared group values and friendship support reduces suicide as part of the foundation for their models (Bean, 1982).

Durkheim categorized suicide into four different types: altruistic, anomic, fatalistic, and egotistical. Altruistic suicide is a form of taking one's life that may be considered morally desirable under certain conditions because of culture and societal norms. Anomic reflects a breakdown of normal conditions of society that guide conduct for people's lives. Fatalistic arises from excessive control over individuals exerted by society. The last form of suicide, egotistical, was focused on more heavily in the longitudinal process models because it deals with social conditions in society which give rise to its occurrence (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) states that:

Egotistical suicide provides the analogue for our thinking about institutional departure from higher education. It does so not so much

because voluntary leaving may be thought of as a form of educational suicide, but because it *highlights the ways in which the social and intellectual communities that make up a college come to influence the willingness of students to stay at that college* [italicized in original quote] (p.104)

### Spady: The First Theoretical Model of the Dropout Process

In 1970 Spady developed the first full-blown theoretical model of the dropout process. He identified background characteristics such as family, academic potential, ability, and socio-economic status as being important in the decision to drop out; however these factors alone did not serve as the basis for his model. In his model, shared group values and support from friends while in college were also key determinants in a student's decision to remain in college. According to his model all of these factors come together to lead to greater social integration. This in turn is expected to increase satisfaction, thereby increasing the institutional commitment of the student to the college. According to Spady's model (and later ones as well) institutional commitment is the direct antecedent of dropping out (Bean, 1982).

### Tinto: A Model of Individual Departure

The most popular and widely cited of the Longitudinal Process Models is the one developed by Vincent Tinto (Bean, 1982; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Like Spady he drew upon the work of sociologist Emile Durkheim to develop his model, but the work of

another man in another field also played a major role in Tinto's conceptualization of his model. It was social anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep.

Arnold Van Gennep could be classified as a stage theorist. His research was primarily concerned with the movement of individuals and societies over periods of time and with the mechanisms involved in maintaining social stability throughout these periods. Van Gennep felt that there was a great degree of commonality between the ways people deal with transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next (Van Gennep, 1960).

In the *Rites of Passage* Van Gennep argued that there are three distinct stages that mark the transmission of relationships between succeeding groups. They are the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. Each of the stages consists of a change in patterns of interaction between individuals and the rest of society. Separation is characterized by a decline in interaction with members of a former group. In the transition stage a person begins to interact in new ways with the group into which membership is sought. During this stage one comes to learn the knowledge and skills necessary for new roles sometimes through mechanisms such as isolation, training, distancing of old ties, and adoption of new behaviors and norms. The final stage, incorporation, involves developing new patterns of interaction within the new group and becoming fully integrated within it (Tinto, 1987).

The influence of Van Gennep's stage theory can be seen throughout Tinto's model. Tinto described its usefulness in this manner,

Despite its limits, the work of Van Gennep allows us to begin our search for a theory of student departure by isolating for us the interactional roots of the *early stages of withdrawal from institutions of higher education*. It does so by providing us with a conceptual framework identifying three

distinct stages or phases of association of the individual with other members of the institution- stages which we will refer to here, as does Van Gennep, the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation. [italicized in original quote] (Tinto, 1993,p.4)

In his theory Tinto identified six major causes of voluntary withdrawal from colleges that arise from different individual and institutional sources. They are adjustment, goals, uncertainty, commitment, incongruence, and isolation. Adjustment suggests that some students leave because they are unable to adapt socially and academically to college life. Some departures may reflect the goal a person has in mind initially or a change in them as the person interacts within the college environment. Uncertainty is a lack of clearly defined goals. Lack of goal clarity may undermine the willingness of a student to meet the demands of college life. Commitment reflects the desire to complete a program at a particular institution. It is believed to be significantly correlated with the experiences within a setting. Incongruence is when the individual perceives a mismatch between personal interest/needs and what the institution provides. The final major cause, isolation, is the lack of interaction between an individual and other members of an institution (Tinto, 1987).

Tinto's model emphasizes the role of formal (intellectual) and informal (social) interaction within an institution as being connected to each other and central to the process of student departure. It recognizes that individual characteristics play a substantial role in the decision to leave, but it argues that this role cannot be understood without reference to the intellectual and social context of the institution. It further argues that the institution is transformative in nature, meaning that the experiences one has within it continually modify the individual/ institutional dynamic.

Individuals enter institutions with various attributes that will affect their college experience. These attributes affect the educational intentions and commitments of the person. According to Tinto (1993), "Intentions or goals specify both the level and type of education and occupation desired by the individual." (p.113) Commitment indicates the degree to which individuals are committed both to the attainment of these goals (goal commitment) and to the institution into which they gain entry (institutional commitment). External factors and commitment are also recognized as having some effect on intention and commitment.

The model then focuses on the institutional experiences of the individual, which include the academic and social realms. It argues that those experiences correlate with the decision to stay or leave. Positive integrative experiences raise institutional commitment while negative ones lower it. It also points out that the academic and social systems within colleges are linked. The experience of an individual in one system may affect the other. This model suggests that integrative experiences in both systems and the interplay between them greatly influence voluntary departure (Tinto, 1993). To better understand the individual characteristics of the academic and social systems they will each be explained separately.

The academic system in higher education is broken down into two major categories, formal and informal, which are related in the same manner as the academic and social systems. The formal category includes the academic performance of the student, while the informal includes interaction between the students and faculty/staff. In the formal system academic difficulty is explained using a congruency/ incongruency continuum, meaning that when demands may be too great on a student, not challenging



enough, or there is a perceived mismatch between the orientation of the student and the institution, academic dismissal or voluntary withdrawal becomes more likely. The informal category centers on the influence of academic interaction inside and outside of the classroom. It particularly highlights the importance of the faculty/staff. The amount of contact between students and faculty influences effort, grades, institutional commitment, and persistence by increasing or reducing the student's involvement (membership) in college life (Tinto, 1993).

The social system is also divided into the same two categories. The formal represents extracurricular activities (school related) and the informal represents open interaction. When discussing the social system of a college it is important to realize that it is typically composed of a variety of subcultures, some of which have characteristics that are more in line with mainstream college life, making them dominant. Others are aligned differently. The position of these groups from the "norm" of college life may affect feelings of membership within the college, thereby altering institutional commitment (Thompson, 1973; Tinto, 1993).

The major critique of Tinto's model is that goal commitment and institutional commitment appear twice in his model, once at the beginning and once at the end. The first goal and institutional commitment are believed to be related to pre-collegiate characteristics of the student while the latter are considered to be mostly influenced by college factors. The latter would be the most relevant in determining whether a student would persist or not. The criticism is that at any point in a college student's career he/she will possess goal and institutional commitment (Bean, 1982). From viewing the model it appears that this is not the case.

### Pascarella's General Model for Assessing Change

In 1985 Pascarella developed a general causal model for student change that focused more on an institution's structural characteristics and general environment than previous models. It was initially designed to explain changes in student's learning and development, however, it can and has been applied to other areas such as attrition and retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Bean, 1982). In this model Pascarella suggests that growth is a function of direct and indirect effects of five major sets of variables. Two of them focus on students' backgrounds and institutional characteristics. They combine to form the third variable set, the institutional environment. Student characteristics interact with the environment to influence student's frequency and quality of contact with faculty and other students. This is the fourth set. The fifth set of variables, a student's quality of effort, is shaped by all of the aforementioned sets. The fifth set is believed to directly affect student development and/or student's decision to stay or leave college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

### Astin's Theory of Involvement

The roots of student involvement theory lie in the Longitudinal Study of College Dropouts. According to Astin (1984) virtually every factor identified in longitudinal attrition literature that significantly affects college student's persistence can be rationalized in terms of involvement. Astin defines involvement in this manner, "Quite simply, student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy

that the student devotes to the academic experience.” (p. 297) Astin felt that involvement manifests itself in the actions of the students, so it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels but his behavior that identifies involvement. Astin (1984) states,

a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Conversely, a typical uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, abstains from extracurricular activities, and has infrequent contact with faculty members or other students. (pp.297 – 298)

Astin’s theory of involvement has five basic postulates that can be paraphrased in this manner:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy. It can be focused on the general or the specific.
2. Involvement occurs along a continuum, meaning that different students manifest different degrees of involvement at different times.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative qualities (quality as well as quantity are involved)
4. Learning and development are directly proportional to quality and quantity of involvement.
5. The effectiveness of educational policy and practice is directly related to whether or not it increases involvement (Astin, 1984).

By reading his first four postulates it might seem as though Astin places the responsibility of becoming involved solely on the student, however that assumption would be inaccurate. Astin sees the institutional environment as providing students with a variety of opportunities for encounter and change. The amount of change or “growth” by the

student depends upon the extent that the student becomes involved (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991; Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

A major criticism of Astin's Theory of Involvement is that it is not an actual theory. It is often referred to as principles for guiding thought rather than as an actual theory because it does not meet the generally defined definition of a theory. Terenzini & Pascarella (1991) describe it in this manner, "Astin offers a general dynamic, a principle, rather than any detailed systemic description of behaviors or phenomena being predicted, the variables presumed to influence involvement, the mechanisms by which those variables relate to and influence one another, or the precise nature of the process by which growth or change occurs." (p. 51)

#### Principles of Effective Retention

In the last three decades much of the research done on attrition and retention has increased its focus on what occurs after entry into college largely because of the influences of research by Vincent Tinto (Grosset, 1989). Tinto developed principles of effective retention to help guide future developers of retention programs. Tinto based his principles of effective retention on commonalties of action and thought shared by successful programs of retention rather than on specific actions taken by any one program. Tinto identified the following three commonalties as the principles of effective retention:

1. An emphasis upon the communal dimensions of institutional life
2. An enduring commitment to student welfare

3. A broader commitment to the education, not mere retention, of all students  
(Tinto, 1987)

When Tinto states that successful programs place an emphasis upon the communal dimensions of institutional life, he means that these programs seek to integrate individuals into the mainstream of the institution and communities within it socially and academically. The institutions make a conscious effort to establish personal bonds between students and between faculty/ staff and students (Tinto, 1987). The communal nature stresses the informal interactions that occur within an institution socially and academically.

An enduring commitment to student welfare reflects the presence of an identifiable ethos of caring throughout the institution. The character of institutions lies in the underlying values that govern policy and practices. Tinto (1987) states that “Communities, educational or otherwise, which care for and reach out to its members and which are committed to their welfare, are also those which keep and nourish its members.” (p.8)

Until now Tinto’s principles have largely focused on the informal, but formal aspects also affect retention. His last principle, a broader commitment to the education of all students, suggest that the goal of providing a quality education is key to retention. It further suggests that institutions have an obligation to educate the students they admit. Tinto believes that even though institutions have this obligation the way they fulfill it does not have to be the same. He states, “It must reflect the unique educational mission of the institution.” (Tinto, 1987,p.9)

## **African Americans in Higher Education**

For the vast majority of our nation's history its system of higher education has been segregated along racial lines. Masses of African Americans were restricted by law or common practice from receiving a minimal amount of education, much less the opportunity to attend a college before the Civil War. Prior to 1860 there were only twenty-eight acknowledged African Americans that were able to overcome racial and educational barriers to obtain a baccalaureate degree from an American college (Harris III, Figgures, & Carter, 1975; Thompson, 1973).

The first large-scale efforts to organize educational facilities for African American people did not occur until the close of the Civil War. In 1865 an act of Congress created the Freedman's Bureau. The Freedman's Bureau gave protection and assistance to churches and associations that established schools for African Americans throughout the South. (Thompson, 1973). Between 1865 and 1900 more than 200 institutions designed to educate African Americans were founded in the South (Brown II, 1999). Many of them were funded by Northern missionaries, philanthropists, African American churches, or the American Missionary Association (AMA). Many of these would evolve into what we know today as Private Black Colleges (PBC's).

Many of the public black college and universities were formed in the following manner. In 1890 the Morill Act ordered that states must either provide separate facilities for the education of African American students or admit them to existing colleges (Fleming, 1984). This further paved the way for legally separate public African American and white colleges because the idea of African Americans being educated

alongside whites was socially unacceptable for much of the nation's population. Many black colleges came about during this time because of the desire to keep African American students out of white institutions. The Supreme Court ruling in Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) further enforced a dual system of education at all levels by ruling that racially segregated institutions were legal as long as they were "separate but equal." African Americans and whites, especially in the South, would continue to be educated in two separate systems for decades to come. During this time the needs of African American students continued to evolve, as did black colleges. Educators such as W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington continuously debated the needs of the African American community, the nature of African American education, and the role the black college should play in uplifting the race. Many African Americans came to view these colleges as safe havens for their students. These institutions began to represent a place where African Americans could develop their talents and skills somewhat isolated from the racial pressures of the outside world. However, 1954 marked major change for the future of the African American student. The Supreme Court case of Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) case ruled that "separate but equal" was unconstitutional (Brown II, 1999). Despite the fact it was a primary and secondary educational ruling, it set precedence for later legislation on higher education and helped to spark integration attempts of Southern Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) by African American students and civil rights activists.

These early desegregation efforts served as a precursor to present debates on African American students' experiences in higher education. An occurrence known as the "Mississippi Insurrection" is just one example of the educational climate that many

African American students would have to face in PWIs. In 1962 James Meredith attempted to enter the University of Mississippi after receiving an order from federal court stating that he could attend. Mississippi governor, Ross Barnett, personally blocked Meredith's entry to the university twice and had it blocked another time. Barnett stated, "There is no case in history where the Caucasian race has survived social integration" (Bennett, 1988). Following an intervention from President John Kennedy, riots at the University of Mississippi and surrounding communities, the death of two people, and an escort by federal marshals, James H. Meredith registered October 1, 1962, a year and a half after he applied to the university (Bennett, 1988). This example represents the type of attitudes, if not actual environments that many African American students would come to face in higher educational settings.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 continued the desegregation process for African American students. It stated that no person should be excluded, denied, or subjected to discrimination based on race/ethnicity under any program receiving federal funds (Brown II, 1999). The Act was enforced by the threat of denial and withdrawal of federal funds from any institution that did not comply. Title VI regulations required the desegregation of faculty, administration, and other personnel in public schools and universities. However, there was some uncertainty (that remains to this day) as to the application of the regulations of Title VI. The uncertainty revolves around the issue of whether Title VI enforcement applies to *de facto* (by practice) segregation as it does to *de jure* (by law) segregation (Alexander & Alexander, 1998). Regardless of the confusion, Title VI made large-scale integration of higher education possible and thus began a trend



of African Americans attending PWIs. By the mid 1970's more than three-quarters of all African American college students attended PWIs (Hall & Allen, 1989).

The shift in enrollment patterns of African American college students heightened interest in their experiences at PWI'S. Research (Fleming, 1985; Garibaldi, 1984; Gosman, Dandridge, Nettles, & Theony, 1983; Harris III, Figgures, & Carter, 1975; Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Smith, 1981) revealed that even though African American enrollment was climbing to new highs, graduation was not. Alexander Astin (1982) estimated that African American student completion rates were approximately a third of white students. This phenomenon led to research that began to focus on the factors that contribute to racial differences in college dropout rates (Hall & Allen, 1989). The bulk of studies on black college students fall in this category.

Gosman, Dandridge, Nettles, and Thoeny (1983) studied the influence of race, student, and institutional characteristics on student progression. They found that significant differences existed between African American and white student cohorts in terms of attrition and graduation rates. Furthermore, they stated that evidence existed that the racial compositions of the institutions that students attend affects attrition, progression pattern, and the relationship between race and performance. Gosman, Dandridge, Nettles, and Thoeny stated their findings in this manner, "Specifically we found that the underrepresented racial group at both predominantly white and predominantly black universities had higher mean attrition rates than the majority group and was less likely to follow the prescribed progression patterns."(p.222) Nettles' (1983) study involving African American and white students at thirty private and public institutions echoed these findings. Nettles found that regardless of race students in the

racial minority group felt discriminated against on campus and they performed worse in terms of progression and GPA.

These findings are aligned with those of many other researchers that have concluded that a “lack of fit” between African American students and PWIs largely explains the difference in attrition rates (Hall & Allen, 1989). The “college fit” concept is similar to Rootman’s basic premise that the better the fit between the person and what is required of that person in an institution the more likely they are to become highly integrated. According to “college fit” the greater the congruence between students’ goals, values, and attitudes and those of the colleges that they attend the greater the probability of successful performance in terms of persistence and achievement (Jones, Pascarella & Terezini, Pfeifer). Many African American scholars also agree with the college fit concept as a partial explanation for the differential patterns of college success that exist between African American and white students. Adair (1984) states that the white school environment largely reflects the culture and heritage of the dominant group forcing African Americans to cope with an alien experience. Also, alienation and lack of environmental support emerge repeatedly as predictors of attrition in research related to African American students (Davis, 1994; Desousa & Kuh, 1996; Fleming, 1985; Trippi & Baker, 1989).

#### Factors Affecting African American Student Persistence

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) state that the vast majority of studies in attrition/retention literature have focused on traditional students. They deal principally

with change and growth among them, therefore the universal applicability of these theories and models should be questioned when applied to minority groups. Bennet and Okinaka (1984) feel this way,

A problem with much of the research on Black college student attrition is that it has often been conceptualized from a white point of view, with white students serving as models, controls, or points of comparison for black students. This is based on the erroneous assumption that the same variables are predictors of persistence for Black and White students. (p.74)

Astin's (1984) research on factors affecting minority educational progress supports the prior conclusions. He found that there are indeed differences in the factors that affect African American and white student persistence. He found that standardized test scores and high school grades were much weaker predictors among black college students and that tutoring is more positively related to African American persistence. Robinson (1990) also found that among African American students at Private Black Colleges (PBCs), there is little difference academically before college between those who persist and do not. Robinson found that the high school GPA was just slightly higher among African American persisters than non-persisters, that there was no significant difference in SAT scores, and that the college GPA's were much higher for grads than non-grads even though about the same percentage made use of remedial courses. Interestingly, Astin (1982) also found that attitudes and values are not important predictors of African American student performance, but that perceived academic ability is an indicator of later academic achievement. So it appears that for African American students support and a positive self-concept or belief in one's ability is more important for persistence than pre-collegiate characteristics.

Even though studies (Astin, 1984; Desousa & Kuh, 1996; Gosman, Dandridge, Nettles, & Thoeny, 1983; Lang & Ford, 1992) state that there are some differences between the factors that are most important in affecting the persistence of African American and white students, some influences have been identified as being key to student development and retention regardless of race. Chickering and Reisser (1993) identified seven of them. Each of them represents in-college characteristics. They are clear and consistent objectives; institutional size; student-faculty relationships; curriculum; teaching; friendships and student communities; and programs and services. The first six will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) feel that the objectives of an educational institution must be clear and taken seriously by all. They recognize that institutions have a culture that embodies certain values that may be absorbed by the students sometimes unwittingly. It is important for the student to understand or at least be aware of this.

Institutional size is a key influence because it affects students opportunities for involvement. Chickering and Reisser (1993) describe the situation in many large universities as a barrier to the integration of students into the life of the college because the number of students exceeds the opportunity for active participation and satisfying experiences. Small colleges are believed to have an advantage over larger ones because students have more of an opportunity to participate in mainstream college life. Chickering and Reisser (1993) believe that as opportunity and involvement increase student development also increases.

Of all the key influences described by Chickering and Reisser, student-faculty interaction may be one of the most frequently cited ones in retention literature. It is a

major component in all of the longitudinal process models. Chickering and Reisser (1993) state that when student-faculty interaction is frequent and friendly it furthers the development of the student and increases satisfaction and commitment. Allen (1986) found that grades were higher for African American students with positive faculty relationships and that in HBCUs African American students are twice as likely to claim positive relationships with white faculty.

Curriculum is also important. One that is relevant to the students back ground and prior experience; that recognizes individual differences between students; that challenges preexisting information, assumptions and values; and that help students integrate them can be powerful (Banks, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fleming, 1985). It encourages the development of intellectual and interpersonal competence, identity, purpose, and integrity of all students.

The fifth influence, teaching, is directly related to the previous two. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993) teaching can foster autonomy, identity, and a sense of purpose in students if done the right way. For them good teaching calls for active learning, encourages student-faculty contact, and emphasizes high expectations for the student.

Forming friendships and participating in student communities is also one of the most frequently cited influences. Chickering and Reisser (1993) had this to say about student culture, "Student culture can affect the development of identity and purpose by encouraging wide-ranging exploration or curtailing it"(p.276). According to them once students identify with a group it becomes both an anchor and a reference point for college

students to identify with. This reference point gives them the security and support needed to explore and become more involved in college life.

Each of the aforementioned factors has been identified as being important to African American student persistence. Proponents of Black colleges argue that these things naturally occur within many of their institutions because of their size, orientation towards African Americans, and their history (Gray, 1993; Jordan, 1975; Willie, 1981).

### Private Black Colleges

When the first Black Colleges were founded, ninety percent of African Americans lived in rural southern communities. The vast majority of this population was illiterate. Black colleges were created to address the needs of these people and to educate them. These institutions were called colleges and universities, but in reality they were responsible for the education of African Americans at all levels. African American church related colleges assumed the responsibility for reducing illiteracy and for the training of preachers, teachers, leaders and other professionals (Thompson, 1973).

These private black colleges share a lot of characteristics. One of the most pervasive seems to be that they are poorly funded. This often shows in their physical plant and resources for students (Thompson, 1973). In 1967 Christopher Jencks and David Riesman published an article on the role of American Negro Colleges which criticized much of what occurs within them. Jencks and Riesman (1967) found that these colleges were ill financed, ill staffed, and were almost never academically selective by white standards. They recruited students with limited academic promise and placed

modest academic demands on them. Based on this they concluded that the majority of Negro Colleges were academically inferior institutions modeled after white ones. They felt that African American college graduates would be at a disadvantage and that they would not grow to be significantly racially diverse in the future because white students and faculty would not be inclined to go there (Jencks and Riesman, 1967).

Educators involved with HBCUs or teaching at them offer a different perspective. Although they tend to acknowledge the financial problems of many Black colleges they vehemently disagree with the assessment that Black colleges are academically inferior or modeled after white colleges. Private Black colleges have remained true to their original purpose, the upliftment of African American people in spite of financial situations and funding barriers. Research (De Sousa & Kuh, 1996) has concluded that these colleges provide richer learning environments for African Americans and that their students devote more effort to academic activities.

Another characteristic PBCs share is their small size. Most of them average less than three thousand students. African American educators cite this as a strength. Thompson (1973) states, "They believe that students in small colleges will ordinarily have the best opportunities to develop positive self-identities, establish meaningful personal relationships with teachers, and acquire the skills and attitudes necessary to become socially conscious leaders."(p.37)

Early black colleges also set a pattern of admissions that still exists today to some extent. Since black colleges were created to educate a race of people that were largely illiterate after slavery, they had a responsibility of educating the masses. In keeping with this responsibility throughout history they have tended to accept students with little

regard to their class or high school record (Willie & Edmonds, 1978). Calvert H. Smith (1981) states that:

Traditionally, predominantly black institutions have educated the spectrum of talented and untalented students. Whatever the pool of black students created by society, predominantly black institutions worked with them all.... Through the commitment and creativity of these institutions, they developed a capacity to provide a broad range of academic experiences to challenge each category of student, to facilitate their growth and to satisfy their educational needs. (p. 5)

Black colleges' flexible admissions practices and academic standards were unprecedented in U. S. higher education (Willie and Edmonds, 1978). Their practices and standards reflected a commitment of black colleges to the African American community and the goal of racial uplift. According to Willie (1983) "Blacks have been taught in their institutions that the greatest of all is first a servant of all." (p.9) This means that personal success is of limited advantage if it is not used to benefit others.

Beliefs such as this one have contributed to PBCs being described as having a family atmosphere. Within this atmosphere there are very few white students, but the socio-economic backgrounds of the African American students attending PBCs tends to be diverse. Students represent nearly all of the major social and economic backgrounds, thereby reflecting the diversity within the African American community. PBCs consist of students ranging from poor to affluent that are encouraged to interact, thus promoting an inhospitable environment for social class stereotypes (Willie and Edmonds, 1978). This allows students to benefit from one another through experience and gain a wider understanding of human nature. These informal relationships are an important source of support (Fleming, 1984). They help to provide students with an empathetic support community to deal with problems and stress that may occur in college life. According to



Beverly Tatum (1997) this is common and useful, but support systems similar to this are more easily noticeable in other environments. Tatum states, "We need to understand that in racially mixed settings, racial grouping is a developmental process in response to an environmental stressor, racism. Joining with one's peers for support in face of stress is a positive coping strategy." (p.52) Black colleges provide students with a larger pool of support to draw from in dealing with racially mixed environments outside of the campus.

There is no encompassing definition of what a nurturing environment for the education of African American students entails, but HBCUs often stress their orientation toward the African American experience. James Banks (1993) observes that the most productive environment for learning is one that is consistent with the student's culture and experiences. Seeing reflections of themselves such as pictures on the wall, faculty/staff, leaders, and other students helps minorities feel as if they are a part of or have an invested interest in campus life. Positive reinforcers such as this often motivate students and affirm their sense of self-worth. Beverly Tatum (1997) believes that stereotypes, omissions, and distortions may cause African Americans to begin to value the role models, lifestyles, and images of the dominant group more so than their own. On the contrary, in environments where people actively seek to encourage positive racial identity by providing students with positive cultural images and messages of being Black the impact of dominant societies' messages is reduced (Tatum, 1997). James Earl Davis (1994) performed a study that supports this argument. One of the major threads of this study was to examine perceived social support and its contribution to student achievement between African American males at HBCUs and PWIs. He found that "the black males attending black colleges were integrated into the academic life of campus,

got better grades, and perceived their colleges as providing more institutional support.” (p.627) He also found that African American males at HBCUs also got better grades. He explained that this is consistent with existing literature. He gave two possible explanations for this. One is that the curriculum and faculty are less challenging at HBCUs, but he feels that the rates of graduate school admission and performance of HBCU graduates at PWIs seem to undercut this argument. The other explanation is that stronger perceptions of institutional support and higher levels of academic integration at HBCUs is largely responsible for African American male students performing better at black colleges.

Many African American educators feel that one of the major things that black colleges do is help minorities develop a “double consciousness.” This term was coined by Dubois and it means that this environment enables minorities to see themselves as they are seen by the majority and it gives minorities the opportunity to become the majority at some point in their educational lives (Willie, 1981). By becoming the majority, African Americans are able to reap the benefits that come with this status and gain new insight into majority/minority perspectives.

Although not all black colleges are the same, they tend to share some other tendencies. One is that a greater emphasis is placed on teaching or teaching is considered more central to the mission of the college than at most other colleges. Teachers are also believed to hold a higher status among students than they would elsewhere because teaching is considered a more prestigious field within the African American community (Willie & Edmonds, 1978). The status or amount of respect afforded teachers influences the nature of their interaction with students. Teachers are often expected to fill the roles

of mentor, counselor, and role model for students. These roles often are not formalized, but they develop during the course of interaction. For example, most counseling sessions are really tutorial, but these private sessions provide opportunities for faculty to pass on course content and personal knowledge as well (Willie & Edmonds, 1978). Teachers in black colleges interact with their students in a number of ways each influencing the development of the student.

### **Summary**

The study of college student persistence developed out of research conducted on college student attrition and retention. The early studies rarely used the word persistence because they were conducted on behalf of the institution of higher learning. They were not designed to elaborate upon the students' perspectives. They simply described which students remained / dropped-out or predicted which students would based upon background characteristics.

In the late 1960s and early 1970's this research started to expand. Rather than simply describing or predicting, it would now be directed at explaining the process that students go through in their decision to remain / leave college. This research developed into the Longitudinal Process Models. These models explained how students make their decisions over time and how the college's environment influenced their decisions.

During the time that the Longitudinal Process Models were being developed African Americans began entering PWIs in large numbers. Research found they dropped-out at disproportionately high levels when compared with their white

counterparts. The majority of research on African American college students attributed their lack of persistence to inhospitable educational environments and a lack of fit between African Americans and PWIs. This lead to studies comparing African American students' experiences within PWIs and HBCUs. Most of these studies found HBCUs to be more conducive to African American persistence than PWIs. They also found that there are differences in the factors that affect African American and white student persistence.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

#### **Introduction**

This research study employed qualitative case study methods and qualitative data analysis methods as outlined by Merriam (1998), Yin (1989), Anderson (1998), and Miles and Huberman (1994) to examine the perspectives of African American students at a Private Black College concerning their persistence. The primary methods of data collection consisted of observations and interviews (both informal and formal). An examination of college literature (school handbook, flyers, programs, curriculum material, etc.) and a literature review served as secondary sources of data. Triangulation, member checks, peer examination, thick description, and an audit trail (these terms will be defined throughout the chapter) were used to further ensure the trustworthiness of the research. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to clarifying my rationale for choosing a qualitative case study design, Tougaloo College as the study site, the process of participant selection, further elaboration upon methods of data collection and analysis, the role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and the limitations of the study.

## **Assumptions and Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

Anderson (1998) explains that qualitative research explores phenomena in their natural settings and attempts to interpret, understand, explain, and bring meaning to them. It is based upon a key assumption that reality is constructed by individuals interacting within their social worlds. So, qualitative research seeks to make sense of that world and the experiences that individuals have within it (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research also places its emphasis on process more so than the product. For the qualitative researcher understanding is an end in itself. Anderson (1998) states, "A fundamental assumption of the qualitative research paradigm is that a profound understanding of the world can be gained through conversation and observation in natural settings rather than through experimental manipulation under artificial conditions." (p. 119) I have chosen a qualitative design for this study because I am interested in understanding the perspectives of African American students and how they develop within "their world", a PBC. A qualitative design that does not seek to separate the experience of the African American student from his surroundings or influence them will be most conducive to my purpose.

Merriam (1998) believes that qualitative research is an umbrella concept that covers several forms of inquiry that aid in the understanding and explanation of social phenomena. These forms of inquiry are bound by several characteristics that are common to them all. They are:

- Understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participant's perspective not the researcher's,
- The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis,
- It usually involves field work,

- Primarily employs an inductive research strategy, and
- The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. (Merriam, p.6-7, 1998)

A research design maintaining these characteristics guided this study.

### **Qualitative Case Study**

Case studies are frequently used to conduct research in education because educational phenomena are often process oriented and may not readily allow tight control or experimental manipulation, as is the case in this study (Anderson, 1998). Robert Yin (1989) defines case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p.23). Merriam (1998) defines it in a less technical manner, “A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p.27). Both of these definitions share similar concepts that are representative of the general nature of case study. They speak of a boundary or unit, context, and holistic description even though they use different words to describe these concepts. It is also important to note that neither names specific methods. Merriam (1998) explains that holistic description is necessary, while Yin (1989) states that it may be attained by using multiple sources together. The job of a case study researcher is to gather available information through a combination of techniques in order to provide a holistic picture to be analyzed and interpreted.

Merriam (1998) believes that case study can be further defined by looking at its characteristics. She explains that case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic in nature. Particularistic means that it focuses on the specific. It is especially good for investigating situations and puzzling occurrences. Case study's descriptive nature means that the end product should be full of thick description. This is one reason why it is necessary for the study to be bound. There must be identifiable limits in order to accomplish this goal. Heuristic means that case studies aids in clarifying or understanding.

The following statements on the ability of case study were believed to be extremely important for this study.

- It can examine a specific instance but illuminate a general problem.
- It can illustrate the complexities of a situation.
- It can have the advantage of hindsight, but be relevant in the present.
- It can obtain information from wide variety of sources.
- It can present information from the viewpoints of different groups.
- It can explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened, and why (Merriam, p.30-31, 1998).

Yin (1998) believes that determining when case study should be used depends on what the researcher would like to know. He states that:

In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context. Such “explanatory” case studies can be complimented by two other types – “exploratory” and “descriptive” case studies. (p.13)



“How and “why” questions are likely appropriate for case study because they usually deal with relationships or process. However when Yin states that case studies can also be “exploratory” and “descriptive”, he leaves the option open for another category of question to be addressed by case study (the “what” question). “What” questions may be exploratory (seek out relationships) or descriptive in nature. The guiding questions for this study are explanatory and exploratory in nature. They seek to examine what it is like to be a student within this bound system and to explore the relationship between identified factors and persistence. Other methods may also be appropriate for exploratory research, but since this study will be based on questions serving dual purposes case study is appropriate (Yin, 1989). The exploratory nature of case study may also address embedded variables within the phenomena that are not possible to identify ahead of time (Merriam, 1998).

### **Site Selection**

Tougaloo College is a Private Historically Black College located on the northern edge of Jackson, Mississippi. It has a population of approximately 1000 students. Nearly all of them are African American. Fifty-five percent of the students live on campus. The other forty-five percent commute. The student to faculty ratio within Tougaloo College is 12 to 1. Sixty-two percent of their classes have 20 students or less. It has a seventy-eight percent freshman retention rate and a sixty-six percent five-year graduation rate. Approximately seventy percent of Tougaloo College’s graduates pursue further study in

graduate or professional schools within one year of attaining their undergraduate degrees (US News.com, 2002).

Tougaloo College was selected as the site for this study for a variety of reasons. Foremost is its designation as a Private Black College. An above average rate of African American student retention and graduation, its small campus size, and small student enrollment also contributed to its selection. Retention literature (Astin, 1982; Tinto, 1987) states that small, private colleges tend to maintain higher rates of retention among the campuses' majority race population. Tougaloo College was chosen because it meets each of the aforementioned qualifications.

### **Sample Selection**

The participants in this study were identified by recommendations from faculty/administration and from student observations. Four persons were selected to participate in this study. There were three African American males and one African American female. Of the three male participants two were graduating seniors and one was a sophomore. The female student was also a sophomore.

I used a network sampling technique in this study. I selected my first subject based on recommendations from an administrator at Tougaloo College. The administrator was asked to recommend some highly involved students who were academically successful for inclusion in this study. The administrator was not informed which student was selected to participate. The remaining three subjects were selected based on observations and conversations with students in various campus settings such as

the cafeteria, library, dorms, student union, and the campus grounds. The subjects were chosen because of their diversity of experiences. My use of network sampling was designed to maximize discovery by identifying participants with differences in their backgrounds, interests, and involvement in campus life.

### **Data Collection & Analysis**

Entry into Tougaloo College was gained by telephone contact with Dr. Artee Young, Vice-President of Academic Affairs. Once contact was made, I personally met with Dr. Young to discuss the feasibility of conducting a study at Tougaloo College. Participants were solicited on an individual basis in a manner that would ensure anonymity.

I met with each of the participants prior to the start of data collection to discuss the study. I explained the study and provided the students with a solicitation script (APPENDIX A) for further clarification of my explanation. Each of the four signed a consent form (APPENDIX B). This form ensured students of confidentiality. Their real names and other identifying characteristics were not made known. The data was stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. I was the only individual with access.

The study consisted of formal and informal interviews/observations with the four participants. The observations involved my observing campus activities and participants in agreed upon settings. The observations were accompanied by informal interviews for further clarification. All of the informal interviews were open-ended and unstructured.

There were six formal qualitative interviews in all. Each subject participated in at least one formal interview. Two of the participants were formally interviewed a second time. The formal qualitative interviews took place at different locations as agreed upon by the participants prior to the meeting. The interviews involved face-to-face interviews, audiotaping, and extensive note taking. They were open-ended and in-depth interviews that allowed for greater understanding of African American student persistence within Tougaloo College.

Interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed using a constant comparative method of coding as defined by Miles & Huberman (1994). This form of analysis required developing an open coding system that could be allocated to words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs to aid in data analysis. Miles & Huberman (1994) define codes in this manner, "Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study." (p.56) This form of analysis required developing an open system of "labeling the phenomenon", "discovering/developing categories", and "developing categories in terms of their properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data collection and analysis took place simultaneously. Writing memos, coding, and creating displays all helped to sharpen and focus the understanding of the researcher. Transcribing five audiotapes of the interviews also served as a means for remaining familiar with the content as well as the context of the interviews.

### **Role of the Researcher**

People who are insiders to a setting being studied often have a view of the setting and findings about it quite different from that of the outside researchers who are conducting the study. These differences, we believe, have significant implication for the quality of knowledge that will be gained from the research, its potential to enhance insider's practice, and the relationship insiders and outsiders have with each other. (Bartunek & Louis, 1996, p.1)

I chose to study my undergraduate alma mater. I consider myself as an insider to its culture, thus occupying a dual role. As a researcher I am ethically responsible for presenting a picture of the perspectives of my subjects. Still, my relationship to the setting and actors should not be discounted. I am in part a product of this environment. My familiarity with Tougaloo College proved to be both a strength and a limitation. Being viewed as an insider by the subjects aided me in gaining their trust. It also provided me with some insights that may have gone unnoticed by a researcher unfamiliar with a PBC environment. On the other hand, my cultural reference may have affected the meanings I gathered or caused me to overlook some information due to a shared familiarity of the environment with the subjects.

### **Trustworthiness**

The investigator and the investigated object are assumed to be interactively linked with the values of the investigator and of (situated "others") inevitably influencing the inquiry. Findings are therefore value mediated...what can be known is inextricably intertwined with the interaction between a particular investigator and a particular object or group (Lincoln & Guba, 1994, p.206).

I believe that all researchers must make conscious efforts to be concerned about producing research that is ethical and solidly designed. The responsibility ultimately lies within the individual researcher and his decision to conduct quality research. There are means built into qualitative and case study design to address these concerns. Truth-value, transferability, and consistency are three of them. They are sometimes referred to using quantitative terminology such as internal validity (truth value), external validity (transferability), and reliability (consistency) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Truth-value deals with whether or not research findings match reality. This is important in qualitative case study because an underlying assumption is that we are viewing individuals' constructions of reality. In this type of research it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved and not the researchers view of what it should be. Merriam (1998) identifies five basic strategies to enhance truth value (she refers to it as internal validity) that were used in this study:

- Triangulation – using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings.
- Member checks – taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible.
- Long-term observation at the research site or repeated observations of the same phenomenon.
- Peer examination – asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge.
- Researcher biases – clarifying the researcher's assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study (p.204)

Transferability seeks to determine the degree to which the findings of one study may be applicable to another. Qualitative research selects a sample because it meets

certain criteria (purposive sampling), not because the sample necessarily represents a population in general. It is my belief that the reader should decide how applicable or transferable this research will be. Transferability was enhanced by using the following strategies to aid the reader in understanding:

- Rich, thick description – providing enough description so the readers will be able to determine how closely their situations fit the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred.
- Multisite designs – using several sites, cases, situations especially those that maximize diversity in the phenomena of interest; this will allow the results to be applied by readers to a greater range of other situation. (Merriam, p.211-212)

Consistency refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research the notion of consistency fits well with the methods moreso than the phenomena being examined. Since qualitative research deals with interpretation and the researcher is the major tool it is subjective. Merriam (1998) states, “it is not whether the results will be found again but whether the results are consistent with data collected” (p.206). This study used several techniques to ensure that the results were trustworthy.

- The investigator’s position. The investigator should explain the assumptions and theory behind the study his or her position vis-à-vis the group being studied, the basis for selecting informants and a description of them, and the social context from which data were collected.
- Triangulation. Especially in terms of using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity.
- Audit trail...the investigator must describe in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout inquiry (Merriam, p.206-207, 1998)

## **Limitations**

This study is subject to the following limitations:

- This study investigated factors within the college environment that affect African American students' voluntary decision to persist in a Private Black College. Factors outside of the Private Black College environment and involuntary factors such as finance were not examined.
- The findings of this study may be subject to other interpretations.
- The results may not be generalizable to the larger population.

## **Summary**

This was a case study. It used methods such as document analysis, informal interviews, formal interviews, and observation to investigate the perspectives of African American students concerning African American student persistence in a Private Black College. My sampling technique was purposeful and based on aforementioned criteria. Triangulation, member checks, and an audit trail were used in order to ensure validity and reliability. All participants were assigned pseudonyms that were used in any field notes, transcriptions, or reports to protect their confidentiality.



## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

The findings used the experiences and stories of four Tougaloo College students Dave, Kurt, Corey, and Renee to address the three following questions:

1. What are the major factors that have assisted/hindered African American student persistence within Tougaloo College?
2. How do these factors influence African American college students to remain at this college?
3. How do students perceive the institutional climate and culture of a Private Black College as helping or hindering their persistence?

Six major factors in Tougaloo College students' persistence were identified and examined in detail. They were the physical appearance of the campus, living conditions, student/faculty relationships, school influence/culture, student involvement, and the impracticality of transferring. The relationships between them as well as their affect on Tougaloo College students' persistence were also explained. The chapter concludes with

a model of African American Student Persistence based upon a synthesis of the data gathered from the four subjects and a summary.

### **Physical Appearance / Facilities**

For most Tougaloo College students, the physical appearance of the campus is an obstacle to persistence, at least initially. Once students pass by the newly constructed Health and Wellness Center and through the colleges new security post many are in for a shock. Tougaloo College Sophomore Dave described his first impression of Tougaloo College in this manner, "The first thing that you see is the Health and Wellness Center and you think that this is nice. Then you hit the first speed bump and it is like welcome to Tougaloo."

In order to truly understand this student's statement one must have a visual image of the campus. Tougaloo has one paved road that circles the campus. After entering through the gate the campus road initially passes by Donald Park (a small park containing trees, a fountain in a pond, benches, and a gazebo) to the left. On the other side of it is an average size home with a well-maintained yard. Just past this house is a small eerie looking graveyard surrounded by a metal fence. The old drab looking tombstones can be clearly seen from the road. It is sometimes referred to as the slave graveyard by the students even though few know or have checked to see how old the graves actually are. In between the graveyard and the one-way road is a large fund raising thermometer painted in the colors red, white, and blue. It is nearly half full and the red and blue paint has begun to fade. As the road approaches the heart of the campus it winds past Brown Lee Hall (a small recently closed gym with locks and chains on the doors that was

constructed in 1947) and Warren Hall (a building that houses the one and only cafeteria, bookstore, and SGA offices). At the center of the campus the road is lined on both sides with large trees covered with moss. Corey (a Tougaloo College senior) described the influence that these trees had on his perception of the campus in this manner, "What really caught me when I got here was the trees, the moss trees. All the moss was hanging from the trees. That's what really got me weary about the school." These trees line the road until it reaches a large white antebellum plantation house. From this vantage point at least half of the campus can be seen. There is an old brick chapel that is being renovated next to the gym. There are several paved walkways cutting through the grass which lead to Warren Hall, the old gym, the chapel, and past the chapel down a hill toward some newly constructed female dorms and classroom buildings. The narrow one-way road continues past the large white house and other buildings. It then curves around a large gravel parking lot. The road now has trees, a small tool shack to the right and a gravel parking lot to the left. Next to this parking lot is another large white house used for classes and a large gray concrete building. Students say that the large gray concrete building looks like a "train on stilts." It is a long awkward looking building that is raised off of the ground by large cement pillars. Entrance to the front of it can be gained by climbing up concrete steps. The rest of the rectangular shaped building extends over the road, as it circles around the parking lot past an area with outside basketball and tennis courts, and between the columns that support the building. The remainder of the building disappears into the trees at the back end of the campus. One of the largest buildings on the campus (the library) is located next to the "train on stilts." It is also gray and made from the same material. It is three and a half stories high with large windows, glass

doors, and massive concrete columns. The road continues behind this building and becomes extremely bumpy. *Harambee* (Tougaloo College Newspaper) columnist, Lori Lindsey, rhetorically asked this question in order to express her disdain for the condition of the road in her opinions column, “Are those potholes on the campus or did Tougaloo get hit by a meteor shower?” (Lindsey, 2002, p.3). The road then passes in front of a building that is half-new and half old in its construction (part of this building was destroyed in a fire in the late 1990s). The last gray cement structure that can be seen on the campus is another rectangular building sitting on columns. It is identical to the “train on stilts.” The road also passes between the columns that support this building. It then passes a large white two-story dorm with a large porch and antebellum supports, a series of small classroom buildings (most wooden and painted white and maroon), and faculty housing (small brick condos). The last stretch of the road completes the circle. It passes by the Health and Wellness Center and the park to join the beginning of the road just yards away from the entrance.

The way that students initially feel about the campus is influenced by several factors. One of them is the amount of exposure that they have had to this particular college campus and other campuses. Corey stated, “I am kind of glad that I didn’t (see the campus) because if I would have I probably would not have come.” This negative first impression that many students often get is reinforced when they see or visit other colleges and universities with a more developed physical plant. Corey further stated, “Because I had already visited JSU and Alcorn (HBCUs in Mississippi) and other colleges out of state their college campuses made Tougaloo look more like a high school than a college campus. So, it really didn’t look like a college campus to me when I first

got here.” Dave described his visit to a nearby Private White College in this way, “When I took a trip over to Milsaps to visit one of my former classmates and saw how that campus was looking I was like I know Tougaloo has to do better than this.”

Another factor is the age and look of the buildings as well as the campus as a whole. Tougaloo has a number of buildings that are still in use that were constructed in the 1800’s or the early 1900’s. They are mixed in with more modern buildings. One student described his impression of it as being a mixture between some backwoods type place and a campus beginning to look like a Milsaps.

Exposure to Tougaloo and other college campuses, however, does not affect all students negatively or in the same manner. Renee (sophomore) grew up in Jackson near the college and had seen the campus many times. When I asked for her opinion on the campus she responded in this manner, “(Laughs) OK, when I first got to Tougaloo I had to look at it from the artist point of view. OK, it has a nice atmosphere with the trees and the moss. It has a nice homey feeling because it is so small and all this other stuff.” Renee was able to view this campus in a different light than the other subjects that were interviewed. Perhaps this is because of her prior exposure to the campus which would eliminate the initial shock of the experience or because of an internal appreciation of the historic look of the campus. When I asked her if the physical appearance had any adverse affect on her she smiled and responded, “It didn’t make me go oh God! Why am I here? No, I must go home.”

Learning the history of the college and time seem to be the two most significant factors in changing students’ impression of the campus appearance. It seems that over time students begin to learn more about the history of their college and its various

buildings. This helps them to develop an appreciation and understanding for the look of the campus. Students become able to understand why the motto of the school is “Where History Meets the Future” and see a campus that reflects that motto.

### Where History Meets the Future

The story of Tougaloo College begins long before 1869 when the American Missionary Association (AMA) initially purchased a plot of 500 acres of land near Jackson, Mississippi for the education of people between the ages of five and twenty-one. Ironically, the land that was purchased was once filled with overseers, African American slaves, and all of the usual markings of a southern plantation. This plantation was owned by a man named John Boddie.

John Boddie built an antebellum mansion complete with a cupola to view the city of Jackson on his two thousand-acre plantation for his fiancée. Before the mansion was completed his fiancée left him and married another man. It is rumored that she was offended by the harsh manner in which he treated his slaves. Rather than completely finishing the mansion Boddie used it to store cotton and observe the progress of his field hands working his many acres of land.

After the Civil War plantation life became unprofitable for Boddie and he sold the place to pay off his debts. A former Union officer, George McKee, purchased the land and sold the AMA five hundred acres of it including the mansion. The AMA used this land, which had been sustained by African American slave labor only a few years earlier and still housed many remnants of slavery, to establish a school that would primarily

serve African Americans. This school evolved into what is now known as Tougaloo College (Campbell, 1979).

Remnants of the past continue to have a place on the campus today. The old Boddie Mansion built in 1848 not only exists but houses administrative offices, the office of the President, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and the Vice President of Fiscal Affairs. It still has dark stained hardwood floors and a tall winding staircase that creaks with nearly every step taken. If it were not for all of the African American faces and relatively new furnishings of the buildings one might be inclined to think that he or she had stepped into some bygone era. The large whitewashed antebellum mansion might sound out of place on a college campus, but not at Tougaloo. The single road that runs through the campus passes right by its front porch (where students sometimes sit on the benches, stairs, or lean against the massive columns while talking to one another) so that all that pass through the campus may see it. Today it does not overlook fields of cotton or run down shanties for African Americans, but a small college campus composed of a variety of architectural styles that reflect its unique history.

Learning the history of the college enables students to notice more and put what they see into context. Once students learn the history they are able to recognize the significance of the old iron archway painted white with the capital letters, AMA, on it that sits on two brick platforms next to the new security gates. Students can affectionately refer to the large white house as “The Mansion.” The moss-covered trees no longer make students weary or apprehensive of the campus, but they provide a connection to the past. The moss is now known to be Spanish moss. The Spanish moss no longer simply covers the trees. It adorns the large oak and cedar trees that line the road

and are sprinkled throughout the campus giving it a unique look. Students become better able to appreciate the campus because they realize that it was once a hot bed of Civil Rights activity, so much so that the state of Mississippi attempted to revoke the school's charter and cut off all funding in an effort to shut it down (Peterson, 2002). Students can now look at the chapel (which is presently being restored) and see more than an old building in need of repair but a site that was the religious center for the community and a primary meeting place in Mississippi for top Civil Rights leaders to speak. This makes it more evident why so many sidewalks lead to the chapel.

Corey describes the transformation that students go through in this manner, "Once you learn the history of Tougaloo you basically understand why the buildings are still up such as the Mansion and the significance of the chapel. So, once you learn the history of the college you kind of look over the physical appearance." In many cases students develop such a sense of pride and connection for the historic buildings of the campus that they become somewhat bothered by change to them in the name of progress. This is especially true among those students that have persisted the longest.

The demolition of Beard Hall is an example of this. Beard Hall was built in 1898 and remodeled in 1948. Its last official use was as an office building, but that was more than a decade ago. Even though it was closed students became used to this building being a part of the campus and adopted its front porch as a "hang out" spot. For those who had persisted the longest, its demolition was not viewed as progress but as a loss of a piece of the campus's historic look and their social lives.

Time affects students' appreciation of the physical appearance of the campus in more ways than just providing students with opportunities to learn about the college's



history. Time affords students with the opportunity to develop a routine and be influenced by a number of the factors within the college setting. Dave describes the process in this manner, “I’m not going to lie, when I first came here I was like I don’t want to go here. I am going to transfer! It kind of grows on you. You get used to it. You start getting used to walking down Renner (male dorm described as a “train on stilts”), getting used to all of this stuff. It’s like a fungus, you can’t get rid of it!”

### **Living Conditions**

Even with the appreciation of the physical appearance of the campus, which may either be there initially or developed over time, there is another closely related factor in the persistence puzzle. This factor is the living conditions. Like the physical appearance, many students may initially frown upon the living conditions. When asked what if anything has made you think about leaving this college, Kurt (Tougaloo College senior) responded, “Basically the living conditions and the food in the cafeteria. Those were the main two reasons.”

Kurt lived in Renner Hall, the only male dorm on campus, his first four years in college. His sentiment about the living conditions were shared by all of the males in the study. Dave made this statement, “When I walked into Renner Hall and I saw my room and realized that I have to live here with another fella, I was like I can’t live like this.” Renner Hall was built in 1972 and is a two story, 200 capacity structure which has five “houses.” Each of these houses consists of twenty student rooms, a counselor’s apartment, two lounges, and two baths. The major problem that students have with this

structure is the incredibly small size of the rooms. The rooms are just long enough to fit two undersized twin beds together and wide enough for 1 twin sized bed and a small trunk. Male students complain that once the two portable closets and small desk are added (standard with the rooms) there is barely room for two people to get in and out of their rooms.

Living conditions, however, do not appear to be a negative factor for female students. When Renee was asked about her living conditions she quickly and excitedly responded, "I stay in a brand spankin' new dorm!" A male student, Corey, had this to say about the dorm situation, "With the dorm situation you have three female dorms and one male dorm. We just got a brand new female dorm, three stories! Then we have another female (dorm) which is pretty nice, but with the male dorm it is horrible. You know we have ceilings leaking, you have doors messed up and it is just the fact that no one seems to care about the guys (living conditions) at times." On March 4, 2002, on the way to my second interview with Corey I noticed that there was a huge puddle of water on the bathroom floor of House 4 in Renner Hall. It was extremely difficult to get around. The following week I interviewed Dave for the second time. He mentioned that same puddle of water when describing the living conditions. He said, "There is a puddle of leaking water that has been in Renner Hall for at least a week that you have to high jump to get across."

Corey's and Dave's statements allude to the fact the facilities and living conditions send messages to the students, in this case the male students. When they perceive discrepancies, such as the females living in much larger, newer, and better-equipped facilities than themselves, they may feel less valued by their institution. When

these feelings are combined with their living conditions it negatively compounds the effect that the living conditions have on male students' desire to persist or remain on campus. Corey stated, "I think that the facilities won't make me leave, but it keeps a lot of students from wanting to be here." Kurt stated that the living conditions did not make him want to leave college but that they were the primary reason that he moved off of campus his senior year.

### **School Influence/Culture**

The influence of Tougaloo College on its students' persistence can be attributed to more than the physical attributes of the campus. Tougaloo's influence is largely mediated by the culture of the institution. Tougaloo is oriented around African American traditions and norms, but its culture goes beyond that. Tougaloo has developed its own influences and terminology for enculturating its students based on its unique history, the influence of its people, and its location. The two that have been identified as having the most profound effect upon the persistence of its students are cultural relevance and the phenomenon within Tougaloo College known simply as "giving back."

#### **Cultural Relevance to Students**

Students view Tougaloo as being culturally relevant because much of what goes on within its gates is centered around African American interest and issues. The subjects of this study and other students reported that the campus environment is largely centered

around their interests, making the college experience feel more positive. Dave stated, "I think that I have a better chance of getting in touch with myself. Being around people who are more like you, from the same background as you kind of really gets you to see yourself in a way. You feel more comfortable when you are around people who are more like you." Renee said,

Yes, it's a lot of diverse people here even though it is an HBCU. It is a lot of people from a lot of different places. We have a lot of people from Chicago, got some people from New York, got some people Arizona, California, Morocco, Bahamas, Wisconsin a lot of people with a lot of different cultures in itself. It teaches you a lot like if I had not met a whole bunch of my friends from Chicago I probably would get really beaten up going up North or somewhere cause like I said I'm from down South and down here it is like you see somebody walking by hey, how you doing hey how you doing, but up North they are like don't do that when you go up there. You will get shot. Don't speak to everybody, don't make eye contact.

Dave and Renee express two different reasons for valuing this experience. Dave alludes to a sense of freedom and comfort that is afforded to him because he is around people of similar backgrounds in an environment where their culture is valued. Renee feels that she is being exposed to diversity within her own culture allowing her to learn and grow.

### Cultural Relevance of Campus

The L. Zenobia Coleman Library is one setting that epitomizes the campus environment. Here, students are surrounded by representations of themselves from their African Heritage to the Civil Rights Movement. L. Zenobia Coleman Library is located at the center of campus directly behind the Mansion. It is a three and a half story gray structure, one the largest buildings on campus. From the outside its dull and drab

appearance can be misleading. Once inside it appears totally different. The inside walls are gray concrete ones identical to the outside but the library is filled with art that reflects African American and African culture. As one enters the glass doors leading to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, cases of African Art immediately can be seen. As many as twelve cases are on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor alone. They vary in size and shape. Some of them contain as many as seven artifacts others one large statue. They each have writing in them telling what African tribe these original artifacts came from and background information. Computers, a media center, seats, chairs, and tables are all situated between the art. A classic card catalog is also located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. Hanging from the ceiling of the first floor is a large banner saying, "Where History Meets the Future." Pictured beneath it on a large partition are an African American male and a female graduating, a picture of the outside of the library, an African American scientist, the chapel, and the Tougaloo College choir. An Ethiopian rug hangs from the wall of the stairwell leading to the second floor that tells a story [I recognize it because an Ethiopian friend of mine had one like it in his dorm room at Oklahoma State University].

There is usually an art exhibit in the center of the second floor. It changes periodically. One of the more moving exhibits was entitled *Bonzeville to Harlem*. It was a huge display of African American figurines in different settings depicting important parts of African American life and history. It was made up of many different scenes that represent parts of African American culture. Some of the scenes were lounges, hotels, barber and hair shops, bbq places, the Savoy and Cotton Clubs, African American Churches, corner grocery stores, railroad cars and train depots. The figurines in the exhibit represented African Americans from all walks of life. Musicians, sailors,

gamblers, families, dancers, topless dancers, businessmen, baseball players, hotel bellhops, mailmen, and a pregnant woman with rollers in her hair were just a few of the people represented. Nearly all of these people were in action. They were talking, dancing, drinking, smoking, or working in different settings.

The second floor also contains a wall with drawings of the past presidents of Tougaloo College both African American and Caucasian. Students' art depicting African American musicians, ancient Egyptians, African American sororities and fraternities, and African American hands holding the world also adorn the walls. The second floor also contained another very interesting room. It is the Civil Rights Documents room. During the Civil Rights movement Tougaloo served as a meeting place and control center for much of the movement. This room contains original documents and files from that era.

The third floor is filled with more art and artifacts. There is an Ethiopian Christian art display dated to 375 AD, East African jewelry, Genufu mask and figurines, mask and traditional garb from Liberia, Kikango sticks, a copy of Rosetta stone, and an Igbo mask among other things. It is enough to fill 18 more large glass cases.

Assemblies such as Chapel and classes like Mission Involvement are also responsible for immersing students within the African American culture. Chapel is an assembly that is held weekly at 10:00 A.M. All campus offices close from 10 A.M. to 11 A.M. each time Chapel is held. Faculty/staff, administration, students, and sometimes guest speakers or community members gather for ceremonies or to discuss certain issues. Renee describes it in this way, "It is not chapel like you are going to church. They have a speaker come in with a different message every week." Although Renee stated that it is not like church, chapel does tend to have both a cultural and religious overtone to it. On

Wednesday, October 17, 2001, I observed a chapel that displayed this. I observed the usual lines of students headed towards the Health and Wellness Center for Chapel. Upon entering the Health and Wellness Center I was greeted by students handing out the programs for this Chapel. I also heard an unusual sound coming from within the gym. It was the rhythmic sound of an African drum. There was a man next to the stage dressed in African garb beating them. He continued to do so until the majority of the students entered and were seated. That week's Chapel was the installation ceremony for members of the Student Government Association (SGA) and Miss Tougaloo College. The drummer resumed with the same rhythmic beats as Miss Tougaloo College, faculty, and a line of SGA members entered the room during the processional.

Chapel was opened in this manner: all men are asked to remove their hats [Tougaloo practice that men do not wear hats in buildings *possibly as a sign of respect or tradition*]. I only noticed one student that did continue to wear his. John 5: 19, *Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise*, was read from the Bible. Then an opening prayer was given. It was followed by the school choir singing *Elijah Rock*.

The president of the SGA spoke of the legacy of Tougaloo College and the accomplishments of past students. Tradition, a history of involvement by the students in campus and in the community, and the sacrifices made by past generations for the advancement of African Americans were major themes in her speech. After the introduction of new SGA officers this chapel concluded with the singing of the school alma mater, *Tougaloo Eagle Queen*.

Three things stood out to me during Chapel. First was an emphasis on religion with the inclusion of prayer and gospel songs. Second and seemingly the most stressed was pride in the history and accomplishments of the school and its graduates. The third was that an emphasis was placed on African American culture. African drums were used during the ceremony, students spoke of the successes of their people, and participants quoted famous African Americans such as George Washington Carver in their speeches.

Students also report that their classes are often centered around issues that affect the African American community. This has especially been true for Mission Involvement.

Mission Involvement is a freshmen orientation class. It is different from most orientation classes because of the length of time that students have to take it and the content of the course. Renee said this about Mission Involvement,

Mission Involvement is like a year long class that is supposed to get Freshmen oriented with Tougaloo and teach you different skills that you are going to need to get through college. It is a yearlong orientation where most schools give you a week of orientation and that is it...no, Tougaloo gives you a year and gives you a grade for it.

She continued to say, "We got to do so much fun stuff (sarcastically). It was horrible, horrible cause you had to memorize. They would test you on Who's Who at Tougaloo like who is your administrator, who is the dean of this, and who is the dean of that."

Noticeably absent from her description of the course content is a focus on issues affecting the African American community. Corey (senior) attributes this to changing times within the college. He describes his current feelings about Mission involvement in this manner,

It is not beneficial because it is changing. When I first got here they taught about the history of the school and black people. Now the content is changing and moving away from black culture more towards stuff that



should be covered in other classes. Also it is not taken as seriously by faculty or students. Students don't know what they used to.

The attitudes of both Renee and Corey show the value that students place on cultural relevance. Moving away from it within classrooms may alienate students.

### Cultural Relevance of Activities

Cultural relevance is also shown through the activities carried out on campus.

Dave described some of the activities with this statement,

Like this morning we had a reading where it's a national thing. On the first Monday in February students in high schools and college read something poetry, prose, or whatever by an African American writer. I think that this is the 13<sup>th</sup> year we've done this. Then we have the humanities festival where they bring in all kinds of things. Like last year we had Nikki Giovanni come in and speak to us. Stuff like that. Encourage forums where we discuss things that affect Black people like affirmative action, civil liberties, and things of that nature.

Corey continued to state that, "There was always something to do like our Fall Fest and our Spring Fest. It was fun. Coronation Week and Founder's Week that was great because we had like parties and then we had the comedians come down from BET and they did their little skits and all this other stuff."

### Giving Back

Proponents of black colleges state that black colleges have traditionally shouldered much of the responsibility of uplifting the African American race, causing a sense of duty to become ingrained within the very culture of these institutions (Gray,

1997). These colleges teach their students that they also have a responsibility to uplift African Americans. This responsibility is based upon the same basic premise as Dubois' Talented Tenth. Educated African Americans should work to improve the condition of their people. These beliefs are then passed on to the students through example and exposure. This phenomenon is clearly evident at Tougaloo College. Those involved with this college have created their own label for their responsibility and perhaps may have taken it a step further. At Tougaloo College this responsibility is simply known as "giving back."

When Dave was asked if there was anything that this college really stressed to its students he immediately responded in this manner,

Giving back...from the time that I came to Tougaloo College the whole thing was that you get your education from Tougaloo College so that you can give back. If not to Tougaloo College then to your community. It was like even from the financial point of view. You go out, get your career and make money so that you can give back to Tougaloo College. If you are in education you go out and get your degree and get your experience so that you can come back and teach at Tougaloo College. And go out and get community service. Sixty hours of community service giving back to the community. Its all about...that's what I get from it.

Just as Dave describes, "giving back" is a theme that permeates throughout the entire institution. Students are taught both overtly and covertly that they have a responsibility to Tougaloo College, the community, and to their fellow students.

Giving Back to Tougaloo College

**“Tougaloo, Eagle Queen”**

Hail to thee, our Alma Mater  
 Dear to us thou art;  
 Sun and moon and stars beloved  
 Bless thy loving heart.

Tougaloo, Eagle Queen, we love thee  
 Mother Eagle, stir thy nest,  
 Rout thine eaglets to the breezes  
 They enjoy the test.

Hero cannot love his country  
 More than we love thee;  
 Though he died upon the altar,  
 We would die for thee.

For thine inspiration, Mother  
 Though thy sons depart  
 For the rainbow's end, forever  
 We will bless thy heart

By Jonathan Henderson Brooks

Giving back to Tougaloo is also stressed throughout the institution. It is one theme that can be seen in the Alma Mater in the lines Bless thy loving heart, We would die for the, We will bless thy heart. They all speak of a student's responsibility to the school. Teachers tell students the importance of giving back to Tougaloo. They hear it in assemblies and there are subtle signs on campus such as the thermometer. Dave describes how his thoughts changed while he attended Tougaloo College in this manner, “I would have never thought that I had a responsibility to my institution. They say that Tougaloo's reputation reflects on me because I'll probably get my degree from here and Tougaloo's reputation is going to dictate the worth of my degree.”

### Faculty Giving Back

Faculty within Tougaloo College encourage the students giving back in a variety of ways. One of the more powerful and more respected ways by students is through modeling. A careful examination of Tougaloo College's faculty shows that nearly 30% of them received their undergraduate education at Tougaloo College. These faculty members make their undergraduate ties to Tougaloo College known to students allowing them to see that they are giving back to their college. For students, being able to see actual behaviors and examples of people that they know further reinforces the notion that they have a responsibility to their college.

Those faculty that have given back to Tougaloo College by teaching there are seen as noble by many of their students because students believe that they have made a sacrifice for the college and for them. Corey described the faculty in this manner, "One thing that I can say about the professors here is that they are very dedicated because I know that they don't make as much money as some of them could. If they would go to other colleges they would probably make 30 or 40 thousand dollars more...so a lot of them are dedicated to this college and also the students." Kurt described his feeling about his computer science professor in the following statement, "She saw fit to come back and help out the students, so I admired that in her. So, in one sense it showed me that it is cool to make the money, but sometimes you have to give back cause somebody has to make that sacrifice." In this statement Kurt tells us that he saw that his professor (who is a Tougaloo College alumnus) was willing to make a financial sacrifice to come back and teach. This further helped him to appreciate what it means to give back.

Another way that faculty model giving back is through the usage of their time. They stress that they are accessible both in and out of class. They participate in campus forums and discussions with students. Most importantly they encourage students to use their own time in the same manner.

### Giving Back to the Community

Tougaloo College's commitment to giving back to the community is most clearly evident in their community service requirement. All Tougaloo College graduates must clock a minimum of 60 hours of community service in order to graduate. The handbook outlines the rules of the service in this manner.

Such services shall be rendered after the sophomore year and may be in any social agency or organization which seeks to serve the social needs of the community and which have been approved by the College. Projects may be done at any point in the school year or summer but must be done under the mentorship of an approved person who will certify and evaluate the service. Service shall not be done for pay; although some social agencies might assist students with the cost of transportation and other expenses associated with the task. (p.56)

Students must also write an essay about their experiences and its benefits. They do not receive a grade or any credit hours for their service, but their completion of the project is recorded on the transcript. Not receiving a grade, credit, or monetary compensation sends the message to students that giving back is done without expecting anything in return. Charles Willie (1983) best described this act when he stated that black colleges have traditionally taught African American students that "the greatest of all is first a servant of all."

Some typical examples of community service given by the handbook are tutoring pre-college children and youth, working in day care, voter registration, and working with a church youth group. Each of the four participants had taken part in some form of community service even though two of them had not completed their sophomore year. This means that they did community service even though they would not receive credit for it.

The faculty also influenced students to give back to the community by telling them that it was important and encouraging them to give back. Typical ways were by telling students in class that certain opportunities were open, sometimes offering extra credit, and even insisting that they participate. Corey reported that his first experience with community service came after prodding by Dr. Andrews.

### Students Giving Back

The students appreciate the philosophy of the school and the influence of the faculty. Corey describes his appreciation of Tougaloo College's influence in this way, "I think that the main thing that they stress is that regardless of how much money you have the most important thing is to give back. I appreciate that because a lot of us would not be here if no one gave us the opportunity...gave back to us." Dave reported that before he came to Tougaloo College he did not do a lot of community work, but once he got there and saw those around him stressing community service he was influenced to do the same.

Students are not only affected by giving back, but they are active participants in it. They give back to each other through tutoring, fighting for campus improvements, and by other means. Dave stated that before he came to Tougaloo College he never thought that he had a responsibility to his institution and would have charged fellow students for tutoring rather than doing it for free. Kurt also tutored. Renee stated that the campus females argued for the males being moved into a newer and better dorm. Corey worked with one mentoring program and then established his own.

Each of the participants in the study felt that they had been influenced by giving back and were attempting to make their own contributions to their community, school, and fellow students. One of the more interesting examples of students giving back to each other developed out of a conversation that I had with Renee on 2/27/02. She was telling me about some of the different activities and organizations that she participated in on campus. While doing so she mentioned that she also was a member of the book club. When she said book club I immediately thought that she was referring to a typical book club where people get together to read and discuss books. I asked her to describe it thinking that she would describe a social setting where she and friends gathered to discuss books relating to African American culture. To my surprise she described the book club in this manner, "That's like an organization that raises funds for people who can't afford their books. We try to help out just a little bit, you know defer some of that cost." So for Renee the book club was not a social outlet, but another means of giving back to her fellow students.

### **Faculty and Staff / Student Relationships**

When asked what factors have been most influential in your decision to remain in this college half of the subjects immediately responded that was their relationship with members of the faculty and staff. The ones that did not mention it as being most influential still spoke repeatedly about their relationships with professors throughout their interviews. They even provided some of the more powerful examples of faculty influence on their college experience. It was found that faculty fill one or a combination of three fundamental roles in their relationships with students that influence their persistence. The roles were teacher (in-class), mother/father figure (out of class), and mentor/advisor (out of class).

Teachers at Tougaloo influence persistence by creating an in-class learning environment that is relevant to the needs of the student. James Banks (1993) states that the most productive environment for learning is one that is consistent with the student's culture and experiences. Teachers within Tougaloo provide this type of environment by orienting their classes toward African American history and culture. Renee said this about her teachers at Tougaloo, "I can say for my teachers, whatever we are learning about there is going to be something in there based on some part of African history or African American Culture."

Students appreciate teachers incorporating African American history and culture into their classes because for many it is the first time that they have been exposed to this type of learning environment. Teachers help to make a classroom environment that is in stark contrast to the ones that they were exposed to in their high schools. Corey's



description of the cultural relevance of the curriculum within his predominantly African American high school in the Mississippi Delta was representative of the sentiments of many African American students. He said, "Coming from a high school that was 60% African American and 40% White, but 95% white faculty made it kind of hard for me to stress the things that I was looking for in history class and things like that. I didn't get that and the things that I wanted to learn about my people." In his statement Corey made the point that he did not feel free to discuss certain things in his high school educational environment. His teachers at Tougaloo, however, encourage him to discuss issues that were relevant to African Americans regardless of the race of the teacher. By orienting the class more toward the needs and interest of the students, the student/ teacher relationship can be strengthened, thus creating a more open learning environment.

The sharing of personal experiences by the teachers in the classroom is also highly valued by the students. It provides a level of concreteness for the students and helps them to see commonalities between themselves and the teachers. This further increases the teacher's credibility by helping students see that their teachers are not out of touch with real life experiences. Kurt states that, "If you go through something and can tell me about it then I will listen...If you are from the outside looking in it's like a whole different outlook. One, I may not respect everything that you are saying. Two, I may feel that you really don't understand what it was, the struggle, that we had to go through as a people." Kurt further goes on to say that students can identify when teachers are out of touch with real-life issues especially those relating to African American culture by the way that they describe it.

Another trait shared among teachers that students valued was that they stressed that they were accessible to students. According to students those teachers that they were closest to made it known that they were available in class, during office hours, or even walking across the yard. Renee says, "Yea, I feel free to talk to my professors. If I see them out walking across the yard, If I just feel like dropping by their offices and hugging them just because I can."

Even though what occurs between faculty and students within class is significant, students are most heavily influenced by contact with faculty outside of class. When asked to describe their relationship with faculty each of the participants described their relationship with at least one professor as being atypical of the average student/teacher relationship because of the degree of closeness in their relationships. Corey described two members of the faculty as mother and father figures for him.

Corey stated that he had a good relationship with Dr. Andrews, who was the Dean of the Education Department but is now the acting Provost of the college. He highly respects this professor and describes their relationship in this manner,

I can describe it as "tough love" because if we see each other on the street it is like 'how are you doing Dr. Andrews and you know we give each other a hug or whatever, but when it comes down to a professional level or I have to go to her she is going to tell me what I have to do. It is not sugar coating or anything. Basically it is like your mother. Your mother is not going to tell you what you want to hear. She is going to tell you the truth and that is how Dr. Andrews is towards me.

This relationship has helped Corey get more involved in campus life and the surrounding community. Corey became involved with several mentoring programs while attending Tougaloo College. He got started with this type of community service because of the influence of Dr. Andrews. The first organization that he worked with was called Project

Mentor Education Network. Corey described his involvement with the program this way, "Dr. Andrews made me work with the program, but once I started out with that it came easy. I saw how important that mentorship was. I decided to take it and work with it even more."

This relationship was not the only example of professors exhibiting tough love. February 4, 2002 at 5:45 P.M. a female student entered the SGA office where an interview with Dave had just ended. She excitedly entered the room (virtually ignoring my presence) and began to tell Dave about a conversation between her and one of her professors. Apparently she turned in some work that her professor felt was sub par and he asked her to meet him for a conference. She described what occurred during the conference in this manner, "He cussed me out. I mean my momma is the only person that has talked to me like that!" To my surprise she was not upset. She did not want to report him or anything. Once she finished telling her story she said that she had to go and work on her next assignment for him. This occurrence puzzled me for a while. I thought perhaps the student understood that the professor had her best interest in mind, perhaps that type of language was commonly used by or around the student and did not offend her, perhaps she knew her work was sub par and felt that she deserved it, or maybe she was glad that a professor took enough interest in her and her work to talk to her in that manner. The conclusion that I came to was that it does not matter which of the aforementioned explanations or combination of explanations was responsible for her response. What I found most striking was that the professor cared enough to be upset by her performance and knew her well enough to elicit a positive response out of that student by using such an unorthodox means. Kurt also fondly recalled a moment of tough

love shared between himself, classmates, and a professor. Kurt said, “I remember one time we (he and classmates) stayed up all night trying to work on a program. It was like seven in the morning when we finally got it right and the teacher was like OK, ya’ll are finally showing me some effort. But that feeling that I got from writing that program and getting it up and running...it was indescribable.”

Each relationship between a student and faculty/staff is unique. It would be highly inaccurate to say that “tough love” is the only method of nurturance exchanged between students and faculty/staff that they see as parental figures. Corey describes a relationship with a male staff member that was similar to his with Dr. Andrews but on a more personal level,

One particular staff member is Mr. Sanders. He is over the intramural facilities and intramural program. With him and I ...I look at him as a father figure to me because if I need any advice I can go to him and he is not one of those people who is going to tell you what you want to hear. He is basically going to tell you the truth, you know. By me not having a father figure growing up in my home, you know, once I got here I appreciated that.

It was not “tough love” that made Corey see Mr. Sanders as a father figure, but that Mr. Sanders displayed an interest in him personally. He provided a listening ear for Corey as well as a source for advice. This enabled Mr. Sanders to fill a role for Corey that had previously been left void.

Faculty/staff may also fill the role of advisor/mentor to students. This role can be official or unofficial. This means that the faculty/staff member filling this role can be either school appointed (a major advisor), someone that has agreed to serve as an advisor/mentor on certain projects, or the relationship may simply evolve in this manner from encounters between faculty/staff and students on campus.

Dave saw his major advisor as someone who looked out for his best interest both academically and personally. He described him as someone that was easily accessible and their relationship is not bound to office hours or formal visits. Dave said, "I wasn't even in his class last semester but he had me reading stuff and he would catch me on the yard or something and tell me about a conference, reading, or something." Dave appreciated that his advisor actively sought to ensure that he remained involved and prepared himself for the future both inside and outside of the classroom. Renee also described her relationship with her advisor as above average. She felt that her advisor went well above and beyond her official duties. Renee described her advisor as someone that always pushed her to excel, aided her in obtaining scholarships, and someone that she could easily talk to about things. She gave one example in particular that truly emphasized the effort her advisor was willing to put forth to ensure her best interest. Renee said,

I was trying out for the Melon-Fellows Scholarship and I couldn't do it...well I found out something was happening with my application where I wouldn't qualify or something. Anyway she (her advisor) was working so hard that I had to go to her house like at 8 o'clock at night so we could fill out this scholarship pack that was due the next day. She was like Renee we need to fill this out. Renee, we need to fill this out, Renee!! We need to fill this out and I don't know too many professors (that would make their own house accessible to students) whose house...we just click on a lot of levels

Not all advisors take the same approach when dealing with students. Dave and several other students recently started a school band. They asked one faculty member (Dr. Catchings) and one staff member (Ms. Daniel) to serve as advisors for the band. Both agreed, but they used different philosophies in dealing with the students. Dave described the relationship between himself (president of the band) and Dr. Catchings in

this manner, “If I have a problem I know that I can go to him, but I think what he is trying to do intentionally or non-intentionally is that by putting it all on us we are actually learning how to do something instead of having someone do it for us.” In this statement Dave states that he knows that he can go to his advisor but it differs because the advisor is not taking a hands on approach in dealing with the student. In that instance Dave felt that this lack of involvement was actually a positive and that his advisor may have done it intentionally to benefit him. Dave continued his statement by describing the more active approach of Ms. Daniels, “but when I have a problem I can always go, especially to Ms. Davis, I can go talk to her. She will give advise on how to get people to come to practice or how to talk Dean Alexander into giving us some money, buying music for a program, or something.”

Even though the subjects overwhelmingly described their relationships with faculty/staff as positive, some of the subjects did make contradictory statements. Corey (the student that stated he viewed a professor and staff member as mother/father figures and that professors make themselves available in or out of class) also had this to say about faculty/staff, “You have a lot of faculty that do have attitudes. You know, there are times when you really want things or really have to get things done. They are either on break for like two or three hours. They take a lunch break at eleven and don’t come back to one.” Kurt stated that he had a disagreement with a coach that supervised his work-study and the disagreement contributed to his decision to find another work-study job. Renee also had a conversation with a professor that suggests that not all interactions with faculty positively reinforce students to persist. Renee stated, “My teacher told me that she could have seen me at Spellman before she saw me at Tougaloo. I was like great,

thanks after I am here, stuck here. You are telling me this. Thanks a lot.” This statement stuck with Renee not because she felt that she was stuck at Tougaloo, but because her professor’s statement surprised her. She felt that it implied that Tougaloo was in some way inferior and that was not a typical message exchanged between professors and students at Tougaloo. The statements of the subjects show that there are some negative interactions between faculty/staff and students and that faculty/staff may not always share the same traits in their interactions with students.

#### Student/Faculty Relationships Affected by

Beyond individual personalities the relationships between students and faculty/staff are most heavily affected by the following factors: the frequency of out-of-class contact, the major of the student, the length of time that the student has attended college, and the student’s involvement in campus activities/organizations. Each of these factors work together to have a cumulative affect on the relationship. Generally, the greater the amount of each factor the more positively the student views the relationship.

Conversations between faculty/staff and students outside of the classroom are typically brief (not including conferences). They may be initiated by either party and the topic of discussion may vary. Topics may range from a student explaining why he missed class or a professor inquiring about a student’s absence to the discussion of educational opportunities or the campus life of the student. Those interactions that are initiated by faculty appear to be appreciated the most by students because their reactions are overwhelmingly positive. An example of typical student reaction was observed on

September 10, 2001, in the hallway of Warren Hall. Class officer elections were going on at this time and several students had booths set up outside of Warren Hall. A female student entered the doorway and walked down the hall with a blank expression on her face. She passed by a professor that was having a conversation with a male student. The professor stopped her and asked how her campaign was coming. She smiled and responded that she was no longer in it, but that she was now supporting one of her friends. She continued down the hallway, only now she was smiling.

Even though the most frequently occurring interaction between faculty and students outside of the classroom are short, there are still a significant amount of longer ones. Dave stated that one of his professors often comes into the lunchroom and eats with the students rather than going into the faculty lunchroom. Students and faculty also often walk across the campus together or talk in front of buildings. September 12, 2001, at 9:48 I observed a professor and student having an animated conversation where the professor used hand gestures and the student was nodding for well over ten minutes by the steps of the library. The conversation ended with the professor placing his hand on the shoulder of the student (in a reassuring manner) and leaving.

Conferences between faculty and students are by far the most time consuming as a whole. They usually occur in a professor's office or in a classroom immediately following a class. In these meetings students and faculty usually discuss poor performance by the student, missing class, or an opportunity for the student to become involved in some type of campus or community activity/organization. Each of the subjects had participated in at least one of these conferences.



The major of a student is closely related to the frequency of contact between the student and professors. Students that major in areas with small departments at Tougaloo College such as art naturally have more opportunities for contact. Renee says that she has a close-knit relationship with her art teachers largely because of the small number of art majors and because there are only three art teachers. This allows for frequent contact with those professors both in and out of class.

The length of time that a student has attended the college also has a great affect on the relationship because it evolves over time. Initially a student may dislike or not appreciate a professor because of a negative experience, but prolonged contact between the two may alter these feelings. Kurt illustrated this point well when he described his relationship with his favorite teacher,

At first it was kind of hard to like her because she flunked me and that was the first class that I ever failed, but after that she sat down and talked to me saying how she saw something great in me. I just have to continue to work hard and I gave her the yes ma'am, un-huh and ok shuffle. Then she inspired me, and she challenged me. From that moment on I never made lower than a B in her class. So, I guess my relationship with her is good because she challenged me for a long time and made me become a better man.

Corey also shared a similar experience with one of his professors. He says, "When I first got to Tougaloo College I didn't like her. I really didn't like her, but once I realized that the things that she was telling me and the things that she was doing for me and towards me was only for my benefit then I realized that she was a good person."

Relationships not only change from the students' perspective over time but from the professors also. It seems that students feel that the longer that they persist the more respect that is afforded to them by their professors. Kurt described the change in this manner, "I have found that as you grow and maybe your sophomore or junior year they

(professors) don't look at you any longer as a student, but more as a friend and their conversation begins to change. It is no longer like they are talking down to you, but it is more like on the same level because you acquire the knowledge that they are trying to teach you."

Student involvement in campus activities/organizations is the final major factor that affects the relationship. This factor may affect the relationship in several ways. It may increase contact if students become involved in an activity or organization that a faculty member has encouraged them to join, or it may decrease the frequency of contact by absorbing the time and energy of the student. It may also improve the reputation of a student among faculty. Students feel that getting positively noticed by faculty changes the way that they are viewed similarly to the way that time does.

A combination of the student's involvement, length of time in school, frequency of contact with professors, and major give students more power in their relationships with faculty. Students often use teacher conferences, personal reputations, or involvement in campus activities/organizations in order to manipulate the relationship or "make life easier." Corey states that, "I have learned that once you get the faculty and staff on your side a lot of your problems will be easy to solve." Renee best illustrates this point with the following statements, "Teachers here demand their work, but they are lenient to an extent. They know that if they have a student that doesn't usually miss an assignment here or an assignment there they will work with you." She goes on to say, "Me personally, I talk to all of my teachers because I need them to know how I am so that they can understand if I don't turn in an assignment. This is why, not because I am not doing the work but because I have a whole bunch of other stuff going on at the same time. I'm

doing it and you'll get it, but you won't get it right that second. You might get it at the end of the day verses in class turned in ready for you." She gives this example to further illustrate her point.

It just depends on how you talk to the teachers like I know last semester me and Dr. Warren are real cool because I would go in and talk to him because his classes are really early in the morning. I was sleepy so I came in every so often maybe once a week. He was like oh, hi. You finally came back. Yeah I'm back and he would talk silly and then you would have to go to the office and have one of those conferences. That is when you get to know your professor and they get to know you. Then they will let you slide with a couple of things.

Renee found that this worked for her because she had a good reputation as a student, was highly involved in campus activities/organizations and maintained frequent and extended contact with her professors.

### **Student Involvement**

Student involvement proved to be one of the more interesting factors involved in the persistence of the subjects. Student involvement at Tougaloo College was divided into the following six categories: student initiated organizations, campus organizations, community, work/work study, academics and social. The researcher found that each of the subjects' involvement in the aforementioned categories varied according to the interests and needs of the individual subject. Each student found value in and invested a great deal of their time contributing to one or more of the six categories. Each of these students was able to find a combination of activities from the categories which fit his or her personalities and needs and enabled him or her to persist.

Dave

Dave was a sophomore English major who lived in Renner Hall. He was originally from Yazoo County, but his family moved to Jackson where he attended an inner city high school. Dave was an only child. He was raised by a single mother that taught school for a living. His mother's motto for his education was, "Go to school or get out!" Dave was a good student in both high school and college. He was influenced to attend Tougaloo by teachers in his high school who attended Tougaloo College or another HBCU. He was also influenced to attend by Dr. Catchings, a friend of the family. Dave was a soft-spoken young man that deeply desired to be a part of something.

Dave described himself in this manner, "I'm suppose...you say pretty active in school. I'm a member at large of the SGA (Student Government Association), part of the band, I tutor, and am part of the Jackson Heart Study. In between those I stay pretty busy. Every now and then I go out or something." For Dave his involvement in campus organizations such as the SGA and student initiated organizations (band) proved to be the most valuable in enriching his college experience.

Student Initiated

As a freshmen Dave was interested in playing in the band. He found that Tougaloo College did not have one. After being told by a faculty/staff member that if he was truly interested in playing in a band then he should start one, he decided to do so. Dave described his experience and what he gained from it in the following passage,

So I learned a lot in trying to start a band and in being able to become an SGA member than I would have in going to a larger school where I would have just been a number. The first thing that I had to do was to find an advisor and my advisor was Dr. Catchings because he was the only faculty member that I knew coming in as a freshman. And the next thing that I had to do was to recruit people which I thought was just call a lot of people together and we just play an instrument and that would be nice, but I found out that there is a thing called money and you have to pay for things like music and things like that. So I ended up having to fund raise and having to talk teachers into writing grants and having to learn how to write a proposal in such a way that it would fit under a grant that they have. And then this semester I had to write a proposal myself. I had to actually go out to the music stores and actually purchase the stands. I had to actually go out and purchase the music, so I'm learning a lot of business like things that I didn't even know was part of the whole thing. All I knew was that the band director passed out the music. We already had the stands and all that stuff so we just played.

Dave felt that starting the school band was good for him because it helped expose him to new experiences and helped him to garner new skills. Dave acknowledged that this experience helped him in another way also. It empowered him by making him feel that this was his campus, that he was valued, and that he had the power to change things. Dave described the possibilities for himself in this manner, "Here I can do things. I can explore things and develop things on my own."

### Campus organizations

Campus organizations were also important in student involvement. In the following statement Dave explained that his involvement with and opportunity for involvement was a major reason why he remained at Tougaloo College, "I see that there is a lot to be done here. A lot that can be done here. It's allowed me to grow in the process like for instance the SGA, we just voted on a new constitution. That whole

process helped me to learn how to first develop a constitution and then to persuade people.”

### Kurt

Kurt was a fifth year senior that graduated in May of 2002. His major was computer science. At the time of this study, Kurt had finished all of his coursework requirements and was working on his senior paper (a graduation requirement at Tougaloo College) while holding a full-time job at Tougaloo’s academic computing center. He lived in Renner Hall his first four years on campus and moved off of campus for his final year citing the living conditions as the primary reason.

Kurt was from a small town on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. He came from a middle-class family where his mother was a teacher and his father worked on an airforce base. Education was stressed by both of his parents, but he was an average student in high school. He was a C student and stated that he did just enough to get by. Once Kurt finished high school he felt unprepared for college and was torn between attending Tougaloo College and Mississippi State University. The influence of his older sister (a Tougaloo College graduate) and the allure of attending a Predominantly Black College caused him to choose Tougaloo.

Kurt is a goal-oriented person who is driven by the desire to succeed and make money. Kurt’s statements describing staying in college and his decision not to be a coach best illustrate this point. He stated this about staying in college, “The more time that I spend in college the more time that it would take for me to get started making my money.

I want to retire by 40, 35 at the earliest. So, it would take longer for me to reach that goal (if I did not graduate).” He said this about being a coach, “There was money in it, but I knew that it was kind of hard to really get your feet wet.” Involvement in campus organizations, with the exception of a Greek Fraternity, held little value for him. Work/work-study and social aspects of campus life were the most significant to him even though he did not consider himself highly socially involved.

### Work/Work Study

Kurt described a typical day for him at Tougaloo before he finished taking classes and started working for Tougaloo in this manner,

Most of my classes would be on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, so the average day on those days would be get up and go to class. In between classes I would stop by the office and see if there was anything that they needed me to do that day and I would try to knock that out by the end of the day. So, basically I would just go in and get an assignment and after that I would go to classes and in between classes I would go and do the assignments. That way I could meet my agenda for that day.

Much of Kurt’s time was devoted to work and work-study largely because he viewed it as a means to network and prepare himself for the future. Kurt initially served as the manager for the basketball team. He became involved in this because at one time he wanted to be a coach. His next work-study position was in the library, but he found that uninteresting. Through connections with a faculty member (his favorite professor) he was able to work with Tougaloo’s academic computing center where he was able to apply some of what he was learning in his major (computer science).

Now that Kurt has finished his coursework (but not yet graduated) his days have changed little. They still revolve mostly around work. Kurt states, "Most of the time I get up and go to work from eight to five. After work I sometimes tutor students that may need help in C++ or any classes that's in my major or things that I can help them with."

### Social

Kurt described his social life as consisting primarily of playing basketball, chess, and just hanging out/kicking it at different locations on campus. He fondly recalled playing basketball at Brown Lee Gymnasium from 12 at night to 3 or 4 in the morning (a Tougaloo tradition started in the early 1990's called the midnight leagues), hanging-out at Beard Hall, and the lunchroom. Kurt described the lunchroom like this, "You know just students hanging out, taking a break. I guess it is a place just to relax and be free from everything not worry about classes even though you know you have a short period of time to eat and then you may have a class. It is just time not to worry about anything, just hang out with your friends, the good life." Although he described it as the good life Kurt admitted that he did not regularly go to the cafeteria. Most of his contact with other students occurred in a different manner. Kurt states, "I went to the lunchroom every now and then but I knew most of the students or talked to most of them just passing by."



Corey

Corey was a senior Child Development major from a small town in the Mississippi Delta. He was raised by his mother. Corey, his mother, two sisters, one brother, and his grandparents all lived together in one house. His mother worked two jobs and was only able to spend a considerable amount of time with the family on the weekends. Corey had little contact with his father while growing up. Corey had this to say about the importance of education in his household, "Education was not really stressed in our household even though we were given the opportunity to learn. Mom provided us with three choices: work, school, or join the military. I chose to go to school."

Corey attended a majority African American high school with few African American teachers. He was a C student that was into sports. Corey stated that he did just enough to stay eligible for sports in high school. He first heard of Tougaloo College his senior year of high school. A classmate of his visited the campus and spoke highly of it. He decided to attend, but his classmate went to the University of Mississippi. Once at Tougaloo, Corey improved to a B student and attributed his improvement to the influence of the faculty and staff. Corey was an outgoing person that needed positive role models and also desired to be one.

### Community & Campus

Corey was most heavily affected through involvement in the community and campus organizations. Corey also took the initiative to start his own organization. Corey's involvement differed from Dave's in that it was community oriented rather than campus. Corey describes his like this,

The organization that a friend and I established was Mentor Impact. It is basically ...Big Brothers and Big Sisters of MS is more centered around elementary kids, but Mentor Impact...we set or goals to mentor high school students, so they can go mentor Jr. high students and the Jr. high can go mentor elementary. So it is sort of like...I guess you can say a chain reaction.

Starting a mentoring program was the next logical step for Corey after his involvement with two other mentoring programs. He stated, "Once I saw how important that mentorship was, I decided to take it and work with it even more."

Corey gained a great deal from being involved in both campus and community organizations. He believes that his involvement with different organizations has provided him with opportunities that he might have otherwise been denied. Corey stated that, "A lot of things that I experienced while at Tougaloo I don't think I would have ever experienced before because I've gotten to travel so many places since I have been here such as I've flown to San Francisco, I've flown to Atlanta. Basically I've done so many things like travel and different things like that." He continues to explain his involvement and opportunities in this manner,

Well the one that I took to San Francisco, when I flew to San Francisco was with the National Educational Association. I served as the MS Educational Association Student Program. I served as the Parliamentarian. So I got the opportunity to fly to San Francisco free of charge. It was a week conference where I just basically walked around. I really didn't do anything. I just walked around. I got the opportunity to

do a little networking and things like that. That was one...actually that was my first time ever flying, so that was a neat experience. Another opportunity was with the Student Support Services. It is basically an organization for students coming in from low-income families or whatever. We get the opportunity to travel to different grad schools, visit different colleges, and do different cultural activities. So with that organization I have been to Atlanta, I have been to St. Louis, New Orleans, Alabama numerous times. Well also with Pre-Alumni Organization I went to a conference in Houston TX last year. The National UNCF conference and this year it is in North Carolina. During that time I got the opportunity to network with a lot of students and also a lot of administrators from a lot of schools.

Involvement in various organizations opened doors for Corey that provided him with new experiences and opportunities such as traveling and networking.

### Renee

Renee was a sophomore Art and Psychology major from Jackson, Mississippi. Renee chose to live on campus despite the fact that she could have easily commuted to the college. She was raised in a middle class, two-parent household. Renee went to a predominantly African American high school in an affluent African American community. She was an excellent high school student. Renee received a full scholarship to attend Tougaloo College. She cited her scholarship, being close to home, and family influence as her reasons for choosing to attend Tougaloo College. Renee has an outgoing personality and enjoyed being the center of attention.

Academic, social, and campus organizations (choir) were instrumental in Renee's involvement. She stated that her main reason for attending Tougaloo was for academic reasons and not social ones. She also stated that she felt that it was all right to be lacking in the social area as long as academic involvement was strong. She attributed her attitude

on academics to the influence of her mother, “That is how my mom raised me because she is a teacher. So... that is how she raised me. Academics first and all that other little stuff you don’t need it, get rid of it, da dit da dit. You don’t need all this other little stuff.” Even though Renee was raised this way and claimed to hold these values, her actions reflected that academics was not the sole focus of her involvement.

### Campus Organizations

One campus organization was of great importance to Renee. That organization was the choir. I initially met Renee at 12:00 on January 25, 2002, in Warren Hall. She had moved a couch in the Warren Hall lobby to face the door where everyone that entered to go to the bookstore, cafeteria, or game room would have to pass by her. She had placed a clear plastic five-gallon water jug on a small table next to the couch where she was sitting. She excitedly stopped everyone she knew urging them to support their choir. She allowed the individuals that she did not know to pass unless they read a small sign that she was holding which said “Support Our Choir” or looked directly at her. She ended up soliciting nearly everyone. Eager to test what I observed I walked by her without looking directly at her and she allowed me to pass. Several minutes later I walked by and read the sign without stopping. When I looked at the sign she immediately started talking to me excitedly saying, “ Oh, you looked at the sign, now you have to donate!” After I donated she continued soliciting others. She stopped her Greek sorority sisters saying, “I know that you all are going to contribute after all the support that I have given.” She stopped faculty and administration also. Once she saw the

president of Tougaloo and another member of the administration entering Warren Hall she became very excited stating, "Oh my goodness, I'm about to get the president!" She stopped him and he donated twenty dollars into the large jug stating that it was for him and the other administrator. That day it became clearly evident to me that Renee was passionate about the choir. I later asked her what campus organizations she was involved in. The first organization that she mentioned was the choir. She said, "I am in Anointing Voices of Grace Gospel Choir. It started off as the Freshmen Orientation Choir and we wanted to keep it going because the Gospel Choir had fallen off. I guess because their director left and all that, so we started that. Now we are big and bad and tour everywhere. We just came back from the Delta tour. We did five concerts in three days. We are going to Atlanta for the national competition." She devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to the choir but in return she got exposure, a greater sense of belonging, and networking experience. She learned more about networking because she not only raised money by soliciting it from individuals, but worked with other choir members and churches across the state to set up concerts in order to earn money for the trip. She went on to say, "Just a little side note. We did get the money to go to Atlanta after we did the concert tour. Churches gave us offerings so nobody had to pay their second eighty-five. So everybody got to go." She wanted to let me know that her fundraising efforts were successful.

### Student Involvement Affected by

Each of the subject's involvement was in some way affected by two major factors. They were the campus size and Greek life. They most greatly affected students' opportunities for involvement.

#### Campus Size

Tougaloo College currently enrolls less than 1000 students. Its size was described by the subjects in the study using words such as homey, mini-world, close-knit, and family atmosphere. The subjects overwhelmingly viewed the small size as an advantage. They most directly correlated the campus size with the opportunity for involvement and developing relationships. Because of the size students can get involved, be seen, and have close relationships. Dave describes it in this manner, "It is like a mini-world. Especially here you can do almost anything that you want to as far as activities and being active because it is so small." Corey stated, "Because for one by Tougaloo being a small institution you get an opportunity to talk to your administrators as much as you want to. You can talk to your deans and once you do something on campus positive people seem to look out for you." Renee says she enjoys it because, "Me, personally cause I'm such a socialite. I'm glad I came to such a small campus because I'm the type of person who wants to be every organization possible."

The small campus size also makes it easier to get noticed. In this aspect it can be both a positive and a negative. Corey described the benefits in this manner, "By

Tougaloo being a small institution it is not really hard for you to be seen doing positive things and I think...I know if I were at a larger institution it would probably would have been hard for me to get noticed doing positive things.” Kurt stated that he felt this way, “At another school I would have just been a number, but at Tougaloo they actually know my name.” Although small size allows for positive opportunities it can have adverse affects. Dave believes that things getting around really fast can also be a negative attribute of a small campus. Students can just as easily develop a bad reputation as a good one. So, being seen or getting noticed can affect students both ways.

### Greek Life

There are currently five major African American Fraternities (Kappa Alpha Psi, Alpha Phi Alpha, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta) and four major African American sororities (Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta and Sigma Gamma Rho). Six of these organizations are currently active on the Tougaloo College campus. Plots of land for Greek fraternities/sororities can be seen across the campus. Delta Sigma Theta has a sign, a tree, and bench all decorated with crimson and cream stones. Phi Beta Sigma has blue and white stones, and two benches close to Zeta Phi Beta’s blue and white stones, garbage can, and three benches. Alpha Phi Alpha has three benches, a tree, and black and gold garbage can. Alpha Kappa Alpha has three pink and green benches, a tree, and stones. Sigma Gamma Rho and Omega Psi Phi also have plots. Members of these fraternities and sororities can be seen at their plots at different

times throughout the day. Just before and after lunch and dinner were the most popular times. They interacted with other members of their group on their plots.

Greek life plays a large role in student involvement on this college campus. It affects the student body socially regardless of whether or not the student is a member of a Greek organization and it may affect academic involvement as well. Two of the subjects (Kurt and Renee) were members of a Greek organization and two were not. Each of the subjects acknowledged that Greek life affects their involvement in some manner.

Socially. Greek life affects student socially in two major ways. The first is that Greek organizations are responsible for many of the social activities such as parties and forums. The absence of any one of these Greek organizations decreases the opportunities that students have to gather at campus social events. When I asked Dave about the frequency of campus events such as dances he correlated frequency with Greek life. Dave stated, "The Greek life seems to be making a comeback because well our Omega's just got back on the yard and the Alpha's are making a comeback so its (dances) on the rebound and we are starting to put on more forums and what not." Renee stated that "a lot of social activity is centered around Greek organizations especially last year...a Delta party everybody is there, Zeta party everybody is there, Que party everybody is there."

Being involved with a fraternity or a sorority also affects a student's opportunity to hold higher-level positions among the student body. Being a member of a Greek-letter organization gives a student power on campus in much the same way that a political party does. It divides the student body into cliques. There are those that have no desire to be in a Greek organization, members of Greek organizations, and those that want to be a part



of one. Renee responded to the question: how central is Greek life to social life here in your opinion? in this manner,

In my opinion there are a lot of people running around that want to be Greek. They might not say it, but you know if they do or do not want to be Greek and it becomes a miniature war...I guess. Especially when it comes time to like... campaign time. If you have somebody that is already Greek that is running for office then you are going to see all of the people that want to be in that organization behind the person 100% like uh yea vote for them.

Renee illustrates her point with this example describing a campaign between the members of the two largest Greek organizations on campus.

Last year for Ms Tougaloo we had Ms Jane Bates, who is a Delta and Ms. Michelle Davis, who is an AKA, running for Ms. Tougaloo and it was hilarious because the freshmen who like wanted to be AKA's were on Michelle's team and the freshmen who wanted to be Delta's were on Jane's team. Then you had my group of friends who weren't going to say anything just sit back and watch like I'm not going to tell you if I want to be anything. I need to get you all to go somewhere, but it became so funny because you see half of Michelle's posters were on the floor being ripped down in JC (Judson Cross, freshmen girls dorm) and then you see Jane's poster on the floor being ripped down. People blew it up out of proportion like it was AKA vs. Delta for Ms Tougaloo. They blew it up out of proportion, but the candidates themselves were like no it's not that serious.

Academically. Greek life also affects the academic involvement of some of its members. Renee acknowledged that it affected her by taking away time and energy especially during the initiation process. In many cases this affects students' grades. In Renee's case, however, it did not significantly affect her grades. She attributed her missing some morning classes to the process, but she was able to overcome that through conferences with her professors. She also stated that another professor understood because that professor was also Greek. Renee had this to say about her Greek professor,

“She was the one that I would talk to about Greek stuff because I was missing class cause I was sleepy (giggles).”

### **Impracticality of Transferring**

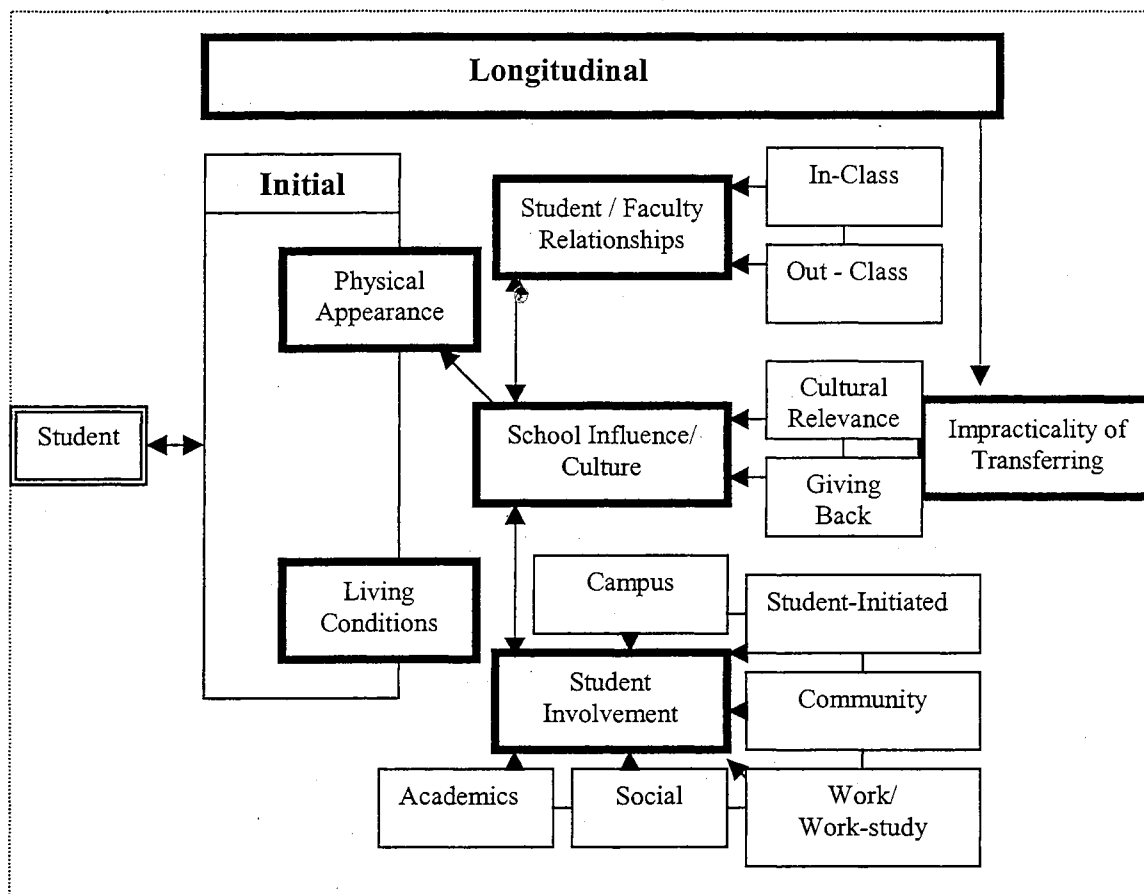
The final major factor affecting the decision of students to remain at Tougaloo College until graduation was the impracticality of transferring. The consensus among the subjects was that even if they desired to leave Tougaloo College for another college it would not be worth the effort. Renee explained this best saying, “Besides the fact that I have based my academic career here and I don’t feel like transferring...going through the hassle of them saying hey, that doesn’t count here, that doesn’t count here, and that doesn’t count here would not be worth it.” Kurt, Corey, Dave, and Renee were each cognizant of the fact that going from a PBC to another college would cause them to lose credits and be further away from their goal of attaining a college degree.

The impracticality of transferring is a longitudinal factor. The longer students attend, the less likely it is that they will transfer. There are several reasons for this other than the students losing credits. The longer students remain, the greater exposure they have to the following factors: student/faculty relationships, school influence/culture, student involvement, physical appearance and living conditions. Positive interaction between the student and the aforementioned factors make the thought of transferring less appealing.

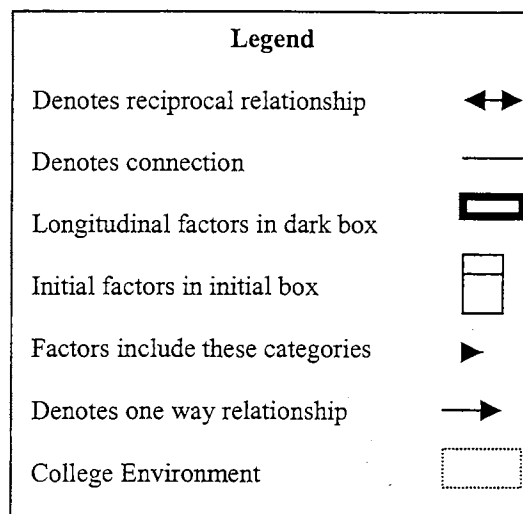
### A Model of African American Student Persistence

This model of African American student persistence within a Private Black College was developed from a synthesis of the information observed and reported on the four subjects of this study. It shows the major factors involved in the students' voluntary decision to persist within their Private Black College and their possible effect on the persistence of a student.

**Figure 1: *Model of African American Student Persistence in a PBC***



**Figure 2: Legend for Model of African American Student Persistence in a PBC**



Once students enter a PBC they face an initial set of factors that may affect their likelihood to persist. They are the physical appearance of the campus and the living conditions. They may affect the student's desire to persist positively or negatively depending on the student's degree of exposure to the PBC and other types of colleges and universities. These are characterized as the initial factors because they involve the senses and have an immediate affect on the student. Upon entering the campus students are immediately able to see the campus and make judgements about its visual appeal to them. The same is true of their living conditions. They can make judgements about the condition of their dorms, rooms, and food in the cafeteria. Within Tougaloo College the first two factors, physical appearance and living conditions are often initially seen as barriers to persistence. However, they may be overcome by exposure to school influence/culture of the campus. Physical appearance and living conditions are considered to be both initial and longitudinal factors because their affect on persistence changes over time.

The longitudinal factors are student/faculty relationships, the culture of the institution, student involvement, and the impracticality of transferring. They are categorized as longitudinal because a student's perception of them develops over time and also changes over time. Each of the longitudinal factors are connected in such a manner that they may have a direct influence upon the other (meaning that student/faculty relationships, culture, and student involvement may all have a reciprocal relationship with each other).

Student/faculty relationships are divided into two categories, in-class and out of class. Faculty occupy the role of teacher while in-class. Out of class they may occupy a mentor/advisor or parental figure role. These roles also maintain a reciprocal relationship. Student/faculty relationships are affected by the frequency of contact, classification of the student, major, and student involvement.

School influence/culture is divided into two categories also. They are cultural relevance and an emphasis on giving back (responsibility of student). The cultural relevance of the institution to the student includes the orientation of the following categories to African American culture and history: classrooms, activities, campus environment, and community involvement. Giving back includes a student's responsibility to the college, community, and other students. It is stressed to the students by faculty, other students, and college requirements.

Student involvement is divided into six categories that students have the opportunity to participate in. They are campus organizations, student initiated organizations, work/work study, academics, social, and community. It is important to remember that each student is different and has different needs as far as involvement is

concerned. Therefore, a student's degree of involvement in each category may vary. A student's degree of involvement in one category may also affect a student's involvement in another. Student involvement in one category may make up for a lack of involvement in another.

The impracticality of transferring is a factor that is directly influenced by time and the other five factors. It, however, does not maintain a reciprocal relationship with the other factors. The impracticality of transferring does not influence student/faculty relationships, school influence/culture, student involvement, physical appearance, or the living conditions. Its relationship with the other factors can best be described in this manner, the longer students persist and the more positive student experiences are the more impractical transferring becomes for students.

### **Summary**

According to the findings of this study African American student persistence in a PBC is largely determined by six factors. They are the physical appearance of the campus, living conditions, student/faculty relationships, school influence/culture, student involvement, and impracticality of transferring. Students are initially affected by the physical appearance and living conditions, but students' views of those may change over time with exposure to school influence/culture. Positive interaction with faculty/staff, appreciation of school influence/culture, and positive student involvement experiences increase the likelihood of persistence, while negative interaction and experiences have adverse affects on students' desire to persist. The longer that students stay the greater the

likelihood is that they will persist to graduation. The influence of the major factors affecting persistence coupled with the impracticality of transferring and a student's internal characteristics work together to influence a student's voluntary persistence.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

The view that campus environments influence the educational experiences of college students is a consistent thread throughout research on African Americans in higher education (Davis, 1994). This, however, has not sparked a substantial amount of research on African American persistence in some areas of higher education. Dave, Kurt, Corey, and Renee were four individuals that chose to be educated in a Private Black College. Their experiences and interactions within this unique environment helped to provide a more complete view of the major factors and their affect on African American student persistence. This chapter begins with a discussion of the factors identified in the Model of African American Student Persistence in a Private Black College developed in this study. It then discusses the study's implications for higher education. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.



## Discussion

A Southern Education Foundation (1986) report explains, “The educational goals and activities of Black students are acted out in specific social environments which affect not only their context, but their possibilities for realization as well. Actors in the setting, indeed the setting itself, can either facilitate or frustrate the efforts of Black students.” (p. 77) The findings from this study suggest that African American student persistence is most greatly affected by student experiences and the interactions that occur within the Private Black College environment or are facilitated by the PBC environment. For this reason, pre-collegiate characteristics such as the academics of the student, demographics, and the financial status of the student’s family were not included in the Model of African American Student Persistence in a PBC. These factors served as the hallmark of persistence research in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but prove to be of little consequence in this study. The four participants in this study had diverse backgrounds. They represented students from both lower and middle classes, from single parent homes as well as two parent families, students educated in rural and urban areas, and students at various levels on the high school academic spectrum; yet they each persisted. None of the participants felt that their background proved to be a hindrance to their persistence, nor did they mention their background as being major factors in their decision to persist. The participants consistently spoke of their experiences after entry into college.

Pre-collegiate characteristics may not be a major factor in the persistence of African American students in PBCs because of the history and orientation of PBCs. Traditionally they have shouldered the responsibility of educating African Americans at

all educational levels (Smith, 1981). They have incorporated methods of counteracting the effects of pre-collegiate characteristics into the very culture of PBCs. Professor George Neely described a similar phenomena at the HBCU, Fisk University, in this manner, "There is virtually no stigma attached to any aspect of your being underprepared, having a lack of knowledge, or poor diction...Fisk is the kind of community that allows you to get large not stay small." (Townsend, 1994, p.86) In keeping with that spirit, most PBCs use open admissions policies, provide remedial courses to a large proportion of students to supplement their high school education, and counteract the effects of background through the culture and influence of the school.

Private Black Colleges are unique educational environments largely because of their culture and the influence that they have on students. African American college students are able to see that their culture is valued because of their surroundings, activities, and interactions with others within the PBC environment. Being educated in an environment that is centered around their own culture helps to strengthen feelings of self-worth and the desire to persist. Beverly Tatum (1997) describes environments that do this as healthy for African American students. Not only do PBCs provide cultural environments that are similar to that of the students as suggested by the concept "college fit", but they also perpetuate African American culture. They do so by passing on tradition, teaching about African American history, and by exposing students to the diversity within the African American culture.

One of the major socializing agents on PBC campuses is the faculty/staff. At PBCs African American students often have more of an opportunity to develop relationships with faculty/staff. This size of these institutions is one reason for that. It

allows students to have more access to their professors so that they can feel valued or feel that they are “more than just a number.” Students and professors are able to frequently interact outside of the classroom because they see each other walking across the campus and professors stress that they are accessible to students as long as they are on campus. Interaction between students and faculty outside of the classroom is of the utmost importance because as much as 85% of a student’s waking time is spent outside of the classroom (Patrick and Ernest Pascarella, 1994). Interaction outside of the classroom provides faculty/staff with opportunities to influence students in a variety of ways.

Another thing that PBCs are able to provide is a staff that is largely African American. Kurt spoke about the fact that his computer teacher had credibility with him because she understood what it was like to be an African American in his field. He valued her advice because she knew and understood what he would have to face. This added a dimension to their relationship that probably would not have existed had they not shared a common racial background.

Being involved within campus life is also an integral part of African American student persistence. African American students feel that they have more and better opportunities to get involved on PBCs. One would think that the small size and fewer resources of PBCs would make it more difficult for students to become involved, but this is not the case. Astin (1984) states that, “It is easier to become involved when one can identify with the college environment.” (p.303) However, it goes far beyond just being able to identify with the environment. An environment that encourages the student to become involved is most conducive to African American student persistence. Faculty/staff influence, seeing other African American students actively participating in

activities and organizations, and knowing that the educational institution values participation all work together to increase African American student involvement.

Until now, I have discussed the major factors within a Private Black College that have had the most positive overall effect on African American student persistence. The physical appearance of the campus and the living conditions of the students were the two factors that most negatively impacted persistence. These factors are linked to the financial status of the institution and its ability to afford improvements. Thompson (1973) states that one of the most commonly shared characteristics among PBCs is that they are poorly funded. This is one of the prices that these colleges pay for maintaining their independence. The absence of state funding affects the college's ability to provide some living conditions that larger better-funded institutions provide. One of the reasons that physical appearance and living conditions may not already be prevalent in African American persistence literature is that most studies are conducted at larger institutions with more extensive physical plants. The size, look of the campus, and facilities represent more of what students expect to see.

There is one major difference between physical appearance and living conditions. Students' perceptions of the physical appearance can be altered without an actual change being made to the campus. A process of enculturation (time, history, and school influence/culture) may increase the appeal of the campus's appearance to African American students. Living conditions, however, can only be addressed through some type of physical change to the campus. The participants stated that the living conditions alone were not enough to make them leave, but they acknowledged that it affects students' desire to persist. This issue of living conditions must be addressed in PBCs

because students' receive messages about their value and worth from living conditions just like they do from school influence/culture. It is counterproductive for PBCs to tell students that they are valued and important, while their living conditions reflect something entirely different.

### **Implications for Higher Education**

The very existence of a private college system testifies to the recognition that our society needs a variety of institutions to fulfill the needs of different individuals. The American educational system is not a monolith in which all institutions are invested with a homogenized sameness under centralized direction. It is rather, a mosaic in which public colleges, private colleges and religiously oriented institutions offer different paths and different educational experiences. They rightly reflect the pluralism embedded in the structure of our society. (Jordan, 1975,p.13)

The American system of higher education must address the issue of African American student persistence by examining its greatest strength, its diversity. This study shows that higher education can no longer use a "one size fits all" approach to study student persistence. If we truly desire to know what factors affect African American student persistence and how, then we must investigate African American student experiences in a variety of educational settings.

A Private Black College served as the unique educational setting in this study. The findings indicate that the PBC environment is conducive to African American students persisting largely because of their orientation towards African American culture, the influence of faculty/staff, and their ability to encourage African American students to become involved in the campus and community. This is in direct contrast to the bulk of literature on African American students in college that suggests that African Americans

face culturally alienating environments, subtle as well as overt racism, and a lack of support in our higher educational system. This is why PBCs should be looked to in order to find ways to help increase African American student persistence in all of American higher education.

An important conclusion that I have drawn is that the PBC environment is not easily replicable on a large scale within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Like PBCs, PWIs also have their own unique histories and culture that have developed in response to the needs of the majority of their students. Therefore these institutions are more oriented toward Caucasian students, making the vast majority of the images, activities, and curriculum relevant to their needs and interest. When African Americans attend PWIs they may feel that they are in a hostile environment because they do not receive the message that their history and culture are valued. African American students rarely see reflections of themselves on the walls, in the activities that are provided, or stressed throughout the college's curriculum on a large scale.

Even though the PBC educational environment is not easily replicable for the vast majority of institutions within American higher education, there are some ways to help improve African American student persistence. Colleges and universities can incorporate more images and activities that reflect African American culture into their campuses. This would help African American students feel that they are valued and do share ownership of the campus. Faculty and staff need to become more involved with African American students especially outside of the classroom. This could help strengthen student/faculty relationships by showing African American students that they are valued, providing more opportunities for mentoring, and increasing African American students'

effort in the classroom. Colleges and universities must also find ways of encouraging African American students to become involved in campus life. This would strengthen student ties to the campus, thereby increasing their likelihood to persist.

There are some specific steps that colleges and universities could take to help incorporate African American culture, increase faculty/staff interaction with African American students, and encourage African American student involvement. The following are some suggestions:

- Extend the freshmen orientation process by incorporating a seminar or class where students are taught how to interact with faculty, the benefits of interacting with faculty, the history of the college, and encouraged to join organizations and activities.
- Encourage faculty/staff (regardless of race) to participate in workshops or open discussions with African American students that relate to classes or issues of African American student concern.
- Create cultural centers on campuses with ties to the surrounding community that will provide a reference point for African American student campus involvement and service to the surrounding community.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study examined African American student persistence in a Private Black College from the perspective of the African American student. Research on African American student persistence could be furthered by replicating this study using a

multisite design that examines African American student perspectives in a number of PBCs. This research could also be continued by examining the perspectives of faculty/staff and administration as well as African American students. African American student persistence research could also be extended to compare African American student perspectives in Private Black Colleges and Historically Black Universities.

It is important to note that student persistence is a major concern in all of higher education, regardless of race/ethnicity of the student or the orientation of the college/university. Studies, such as this one, need to be conducted on a variety of racial/ethnic groups and religious affiliated groups in a number of higher educational settings. Hispanic student persistence in Predominantly Hispanic Serving Institutions, Native American student persistence in Tribal Colleges, and the persistence of religious affiliated groups, such as Catholics and Mormons, in institutions oriented around their cultures is also direly needed.



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## APPENDIX A

### STUDENT SOLICITATION SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Tony Latiker, and I am an alumnus of Tougaloo College. Currently, I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University. I am conducting a study on African American student persistence in a Private Black College. You have been recommended by faculty and/or fellow students as someone that could provide key insight for my study.

Should you agree to participate in this study it will involve my accompanying you to certain agreed upon school events or activities throughout the school year. It will also include informal interviews (meaning that I may ask a question to clarify what I have observed) and one or two formal interviews that will take about forty-five minutes to an hour.

Should you agree to participate in this study your name will be changed in any collected data or reports so that your statements and actions cannot be matched to you by anyone other than myself. You will have the right to terminate your participation at any time. Also there is no penalty for not agreeing to participate in this study.

I hope that you agree to be a part of this study. I think that it will help to further clarify the perspectives of African American college students concerning factors and relationships that influence their decision to remain in Private Black Colleges until degree completion.

**APPENDIX B****INFORMED CONSENT**

I \_\_\_\_\_ understand that I have been asked to participate in a study dealing with African American student persistence in a Private Black College.

I understand that the information that I provide will be published. I have been assured by the researcher that my confidentiality will be protected and that my name will not be used.

I understand that by agreeing to participate in this study that I am agreeing to being observed, informally interviewed, and formally (audio-taped) interviewed within the college setting. This study will take place on an ongoing basis with an expected culmination date of May 1, 2002.

I have been informed that I have the right to refuse interviews/observations and/or withdraw from this study at any time without fear of penalty.

*If you have any questions at any time about this study please contact: Tony Latiker (the researcher) at (601) 898-3254 or e-mail at [latiker@hotmail.com](mailto:latiker@hotmail.com) or Dr. William Segall (Dissertation Committee Chair) at (405) 744-8023 or [wes1@okstate.edu](mailto:wes1@okstate.edu). If you would like to obtain further information about your rights as a participant in this research study you may contact Sharon Bacher (Executive Secretary for the Institutional Review Board at Oklahoma State University) at (405) 744-5700. Her campus address is 203 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. She will be able to provide you with any information regarding subject's rights.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### *Personal*

1. Tell me a little about yourself (as it relates to being a college student)
2. Why did you choose to attend this college? How has it met or not met your expectations?

#### *College Involvement*

3. What is it like to be a student at this college? Is there anything that this college really stresses (culturally)? Has this influenced you in any way?
4. Do you feel as if you are a part of campus life? If so, what has made you feel a part? Would you describe yourself as being involved (socially, academically)?

#### *Persistence*

5. What factors have been most important in influencing your decision to remain in college? Are there any specific instances or experiences that have influenced you?
6. Is there anything that has lessened your desire to be here? Have you ever seriously considered leaving this college?

#### *College Environment*

7. Do you feel that this college's environment has contributed to your growth as a person in any way?
8. Do you feel that being educated in a PBC has helped you adjust any more than another type of college would have?

#### *Relationships*

9. Tell me about your relationship with professors. Is this typical? Examples.
10. Describe what social life is like on this campus. Does this affect the way that you feel about school?
11. Describe the academic demands of this college.

*Culture*

12. Do you believe that African American culture is valued by the faculty/administration and your peers? How do they show it?



**APPENDIX D****INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL****Oklahoma State University  
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 8/6/02

Date: Tuesday, August 07, 2001

IRB Application No ED027

Proposal Title: AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT AT A HISTORICALLY  
BLACK COLLEGE: A CASE STUDYPrincipal  
Investigator(s):Tony Latiker  
499 Pear Orchard Rd #18D  
Ridgeland, MO 39157William Segall  
258 Willard  
Stillwater, OK 74078Reviewed and  
Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

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Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 203 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

## VITA 2

Tony Latiker

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: A DIFFERENT WORLD: AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT  
PERSISTENCE IN A PRIVATE BLACK COLLEGE

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Kosciusko, Mississippi, On April 2, 1975, the son of  
James and Bobbie Latiker.

Education: Graduated from Kosciusko High School, Kosciusko, Mississippi in  
May 1993; received Bachelors of Art degree in Psychology from Tougaloo  
College, Jackson, Mississippi in May 1997, and a Master of Science  
degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Oklahoma State University,  
Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 1999. Completed the requirements for the  
Doctor of Education degree with a major in Curriculum and Instruction at  
Oklahoma State University in August 2002.

Experience: Employed by Oklahoma State University, Educational Technology  
Center as a lab monitor from August 1997 to January 1999; employed by  
Oklahoma State University, College of Education as a research assistant,  
Reading and Math Center monitor, and data collector for Oklahoma State  
University's National Council of Accreditation and Teacher Education  
(NCATE) Report from August 1998 to May 2001; employed by Jackson  
State University Continuing Education Learning Center as a Basic  
Skills/Computer instructor from October 2001 to Present.

Professional Memberships: American Educational Research Association  
(AERA), Kappa Delta Pi International Honors Society, and Kappa Alpha  
Psi Fraternity Incorporated.