

COLLEGE CHOICES AMONG AFRICAN

AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

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Abstract of Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Since the Brown v. Board of education case of 1954, college and university choices for African American students have expanded from just historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to that of predominately white institutions (PWIs). Research indicates that African American students' choice to attend PWI is based on different factors and influences.

This study examined why the academic achievement gap and low graduation rates remain an issue for African American students at both HBCUs and PWIs. In addition, this study examined ways in which low graduation rates among African Americans can be improved. Data was gathered utilizing interviews. The objective of the interviews was to gain the faculty, staff, and students' perspective of UW-Whitewater and ways that low graduation and retention rates can be improved. The participants were chosen by an exclusion criterion for the student interviews based on the specific characteristic that all respondents will be African American students.

The results did not shed light on the core problem as to why the achievement gap remains an issue half a century later among African American students. However, results did highlight financial matters; diversity; and the lack of African American faculty and staff on campus as an underlying factor.

Introduction

More than a half century after the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the academic achievement gap and low graduation rates among African American students continue to remain an issue of concern. These students continue to face limited access to education, resources, and effective training necessary to enhance career choices. It should be noted that this gap in graduation rates continues to be a problem at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as well as UW-System institutions (Durhams, 2010).

There is an achievement gap in retention and graduation for African American students at both HBCUs and predominantly white institutions (PWIs). There is need, therefore, to find out the ways in which low graduation rates among African American students can be improved in PWIs. Recent studies have examined the role played by HBCUs in an era when African American students have more opportunities and choices of institutions to attend.

Fleming's (1984) book *Blacks in College* highlights the challenges African American students face in higher education at both Black and White institutions. Fleming (1984) also provides comparisons regarding what impacts African American and White students. These comparisons examine eleven Black and White colleges in the urban south, southwest, Deep South, and north areas.

However, there has been limited comparison in Fleming's (1984) research that focuses on how African American students develop academically depending on whether they are enrolled in HBCUs or PWIs. Scholars can gain a deeper insight in the ways to

improve low graduation rates among African Americans by examining whether African Americans derive more academic benefits from attending HBCUs. But for the purposes of this study, I will examine the impact of a diverse faculty in PWIs and its role in boosting the graduation rates among African American students. Also, I will examine what influences African American students to choose either HBCUs or PWIs. I hope to provide informed suggestions on how to improve graduation rates among African American students enrolled in PWIs?

It should be noted that there is a difference between access versus achievement in education for African Americans in mainstream America. Specifically, African Americans have historically been denied access in higher education that went beyond learning the three Rs, referred to as Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic. Those who lived in the south and desired education had limited choices, which in turn led to the establishment of HBCUs during the mid-1800s (Byrd and Edwards, 2009). HBCUs have provided educational access to African American students as well as exposure to history and community ties. The very foundation and thrust of HBCUs have been to improve students educationally, politically, and socially (Byrd and Edwards, 2009). Thus, access for African American students at HBCUs has been essential to the overall culture of African American communities.

According to Fitzgerald and Delaney (2002, p.3) “Despite the creation of a series of federal programs designed to address the issue of access, today’s college students, particularly lower-income college students, face enormous challenges in achieving access to higher education.” In terms of access, TRIO programs and conferences such as the

National Black Student Union (NBSU), American Multicultural Student Leadership Conference (AMSLC), and others are examples of providing access and exposure to students.

TRIO programs are federally funded programs that help low-income and first generation students pursue education. Several educational initiatives were developed from the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act by President Lyndon Johnson (McElroy and Armesto, 1998). These initiatives, now called TRIO programs, were developed to address the educational gap of those considered disadvantaged and disenfranchised.

McElroy and Armesto (1998) describe several TRIO programs that over the decades have provided low-income and disadvantaged students a chance to succeed in higher education. For example, the Upward Bound Program provides 9th through 12th grade low-income and first-generation students exposure to the college environment as well as provides them mentoring and advice. The program also prepares students for college by providing summer camps such as the American College Test (ACT) Prep Camp and Upward Bound Math/Science Camps. These initiatives have been influential in producing African American graduates that transition from Upward Bound to a four-year institution (Hexter, 1990). However, McElroy and Armesto (1998) have suggested how TRIO programs alone cannot help close the continuing gap; instead, they suggest why a closer look is needed in examining the current K-12 curriculum system.

On the other hand, HBCUs are facing low graduation rates as well. According to statistics from the Associated Press (2009) about 29 percent of African American males attending HBCUs graduate within six years with a bachelor's degree. Bonner and Bailey

(2006) indicate both K-12 and higher education curriculum system as another obstacle for African American males.

Studies such as (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006) have pointed out, however, that African American females tend to have higher graduation rates than African American males. On gender graduation rates, females have been associated with higher expectations and encouragement which is one explanation for gender differences (Freeman, 2005). This indication that females tend to succeed at a higher rate than males suggests a major issue.

In addition, Gallien Jr. (2005) has identified and categorized various challenges, which he believes are faced by African American students who attend “majority institutions.” These categories included: campus/cultural environment; classroom environment; curricular dissonance; patterns of miscommunication between black students and majority peers and professors; cultural differences and others’ lack of familiarity with black history, tradition, and culture; a lack of deliberate and systematic mentoring that affects overall retention rates and patterns, and the double-edged sword of affirmative action.

This academic achievement gap is important because African American students continue to have low graduation rates which indicate a serious academic problem with political, social, and economic implications, not just among the African American community but to the entire United States. As Sampson (2002, p. 1) argues: “The solutions that have been implemented such as vouchers, charter schools, increased time on task, decreased class size, preschool education have failed to work. The search must

continue to figure out a solution to the problem.”

In a Nation Public Radio (NPR) interview, Allan Golston, president of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s US Program, indicated several things regarding the achievement gap. Golston suggests that education is the civil rights of our time for several reasons.

He said “We’re in a situation where a third of children drop out of high school every year. Two-thirds of our children are not prepared for college and career when they graduate from high school.” He also mentioned that fifty percent of our low-income minority kids drop out of high school. Golston stated that on average, a black student is two to three years behind his white peer in learning area.

During the segment, Golston mentioned this gap represents a permanent recession for African Americans because of the lack of living the American dream. He believes that education is a key to the achievement and attainment for African Americans. For example, he indicated effective teaching and what is taught in the classroom makes a difference in how teachers engage students. Again, this type of research provides the opportunity to examine the types of teaching methods and curriculum that is being taught as well as how useful those methods are in increasing graduation rates.

This study is important and can be beneficial to researchers, educators, and other policy makers who are engaged and involved in finding solutions to closing the achievement gap among African American students. Research has illustrated how financial restrictions, the lack of preparedness for college, and cultural factors among other influences contribute to the achievement gap (Associated Press, 2009). Given these

indications by researchers, the intent of this study is also important because generating new data can help in the understanding of why African American students remain behind their white peers in graduation rates.

The goal of this study is to examine how PWIs could increase graduation and retention rates, specifically among African American students. Studies have supported the notion that environment plays a role Gallien Jr. (2005) as well as supportive staff and services available (Davis, 2004). The second part of this goal is to seek answers from the students' perspective as to what remains the biggest issue in raising graduation rates. Too often the voices of the students are not taken into account when addressing the issues that most impact these same types of students (Freeman, 2005). Thus, inquiring feedback from UW-Whitewater students may provide useable solutions.

Another goal of this study is to explore the agenda items that will be or has already been implemented by faculty, staff, and students at PWIs such as UW-Whitewater. These agenda items may include reconstructing the curriculum, refurbishing mentoring programs, replacement of staff, and other actions that might help increase retention and graduation.

Local universities such as UW-Madison, UW-Milwaukee, and UW-Whitewater remain schools with large gaps in black and white graduation rates. These large achievement gaps within UW-System institutions have prompted programs and other strategic plans in the hope of closing the gap (Durham, 2010).

Utilizing UW-Whitewater for this study will be useful for several reasons. First, a majority of the African American students on campus come from urban cities such as

Milwaukee, Chicago, Beloit, Racine, and other areas. These are the type of students in which this study focuses on in hopes of providing positive findings. Second, UW-Whitewater is a PWI in which African American students started attending around the mid-1960s. The first African American student graduated from UW-Whitewater in 1966 with a degree in Elementary Education. Third, the African American population/community has grown since 1966 both on and off campus, thus this growth in population is important culturally.

The main objectives of this study are to: examine the impact of a diverse faculty in PWIs and its role in boosting the graduation rates among African American students; to examine what influences African American students to choose either HBCUs or PWIs; and to provide informed suggestions on how to improve graduation rates among African American students enrolled in PWIs. Many of the solutions or strategies to close the achievement gap at various colleges and universities have failed. Thus, investigating the overall perspectives may generate new information on how to retain this specific population.

Related Literature

To better understand the role and importance of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) for African American students, it is imperative to investigate brief background history. Davis (1998) indicated that the segregated south, who limited African American students' choice, was influential to the development of HBCUs. HBCUs include approximately 40 public and 49 private four-year institutions as well as

11 public and five private two-year institutions (Byrd and Edwards, 2009). These public and private institutions are located in twenty-one different and, primarily, southern states. For example, there are eight HBCUs located in South Carolina and in Georgia; seven in Mississippi and Texas; nine in Alabama; and 11 in North Carolina, which was noted to have more HBCUs than any other state. In addition, there are six HBCUs located in the Midwest such as Kentucky; Michigan; Missouri; and Ohio.

Overview on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

Roebuck & Murty (1993) defined HBCUs as “black academic institutions established prior to 1964 whose principal mission was, and still is, the education of black Americans” (p.3). It was also pointed out by Roebuck & Murty (1993) that HBCUs must meet certain criteria to be considered. More than 100 colleges and universities were founded for African Americans by the 1920s; with approximately 80 percent founded between the years 1865 and 1899 (Byrd and Edwards, 2009).

In their study “Black Consciousness, Identity, and Achievement”, Gurin and Epps (1975) argued that black colleges have been oases of acceptance, allowing otherwise excluded or disappointed black students the opportunity to learn while achieving positive self-concepts in nonracist settings. Fleming (1984) provides useful information regarding the role of “Black colleges” and “White colleges”. One argument insists that the existence of “Black colleges” remains necessary because of the cultural connection and the ability to provide a nurturing yet uplifting environment for African American students. The other argument suggests that recruitment at “White colleges” has increased enrollment of African American students, however, underrepresentation remains one

issue of focus within these institutions.

African American students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI)

There is a plethora of research about African American students attending predominantly white institutions (Allen, 1992; D'Augelli and Hershberger, 1993; Douglas, 1998). For instance, Freeman & Thomas (2002) indicated the G.I. Bill and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as two major events which changed what institutions African Americans could attend. By the 1970s, African American students began selecting PWIs, with 20% attending HBCUs (Wilson, 1994). Eventually, more African American students began attending predominantly white institutions. Allen (1992) highlighted the civil rights movement of the 1960s as the motivation for Blacks increase in higher education and the increase of enrollment in predominantly white institution.

Consequently, Lohfink & Paulsen (2005) examined dependent and independent variables which focused on finding out students' academic, social, and financial motives for choosing an institution. The *academic reasons* included the school and faculty reputation; *social reasons* included parental/outside influences such as friends, counselors, and spouse; and *financial reasons* including enough financial aid, tuition, and other financial considerations. It should be mentioned that the following study entails some of the objectives in which this whole paper focuses on in regards to college choice among students.

Douglas (1998) indicated a majority of African American students were enrolled at predominantly white institutions by the end of the 1960s. Douglas (1998) results indicated that the participants' meanings of specific impressions were individualized and

varied according to each participant. This was the case for factors that influence students' perceptions of Willsfield University, which also varied by participant but included social transition as a main factor.

Similarly, D'Augelli & Hershberger (1993) indicated that African Americans experiences on predominantly White institutions differ due to aspects of personal backgrounds. These personal backgrounds include hometown, environment, and socialization. Willie (2003) points out after the civil war, about 200 blacks graduated from Northern white schools over a thirty year span (p.13).

To explore those differences mentioned by D'Augelli & Hershberger (1993), Douglas (1998) focused on first-year African American students' impressions/perceptions of Willsfield University, a predominantly White university. The study explored African American students' impressions of the campus environment at Willsfield University, the meanings of the students' perceptions, and examined factors that influenced those perceptions.

Six themes developed from D'Augelli & Hershberger's (1993) data about students' impressions of Willsfield University, which included: physical beauty of the campus; size of the campus; consciousness of being Black on campus; influence of Greek-letter organizations; prevalence of voluntary racial/ethnic separation; and preparation for the future.

Focusing on students' perceptions and experiences, Davis (2004) interviewed students at Syracuse University, a private and predominantly White institution which has the reputation of educating a great number of African American students. These students

were interviewed twice, during sophomore and senior year. One of Davis' (2004) main purposes was to gain knowledge as to why African American students have certain experiences at PWIs.

Davis (2004) findings of students' personal accounts and experiences provided the suggestion that educators on all levels should be aware that institutionalized racism exists on PWI campuses. For example, interviewees reported challenges on an everyday basis in the classroom and residence life regarding negative treatment and the sense of belonging. Interviewees also reported having too much responsibility to explain African American culture to White students (i.e., lifestyle, hair, and of cultural aspects). The findings of this study should not be generalized about all PWIs or all African American students that attend them (Davis, 2004).

Characteristics of African American students and College Choice

Characteristics of students who choose HBCUs tend to have different circumstances and contributing factors. For example, according to Gurin & Epps (1975) a family's occupation and financial support is a major contributor where a student attends college. In fact, Freeman & Thomas (2002) found financial aid/support as a major contributing factor for African American students during the 1970s and current students today. Hence, it may be assumed that financial support for African American students is a part of the achievement gap issue.

Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) indicate that there is a three stage process in which students face when making the decision to attend a college or university. These stages include *predisposition* which occurs during 7th through 9th grade; during the 10th through

12th grade the *search* process takes place; and finally 11th through 12th grade is the choice process. During this three stage process, students start to develop ideas about a future occupation, there is parental involvement and encouragement, saving of money, as well as seeking information about institutions.

In addition, Freeman (2005) also focused on the *search* and *choice* stage of the process, reporting that low-income African American students and parents with less education tend to take longer when selecting college or university. The age consideration and stage in which students start to focus on higher education suggested by research indicates that influence starts early. Scholars believe this stage is crucial in building students' confidence and willingness to succeed academically (Freeman, 1997; Freeman, 2005).

While examining African American students' considerations on choosing a college or university, Freeman (2005) noticed a pattern between high school students and the type of institution that was picked. This pattern revealed that African American students who attended predominately White private high schools considered attending a HBCU institution; whereas, high schools with predominately African American students considered attending a PWI. Students in this study also reported considering a HBCU institution because of a connection through family, friends, teachers/counselors, and or through other influences.

In addition, Perna (2000) examined college choice among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites by applying the econometric model. The econometric model can be used to find economic quantities or relationship between variables. In this case, this

model was applied to measure students' college choice decisions based on short-term and long-term costs and benefits. According to scholars (Manski & Wise, 1983; Schwartz, 1985; Fuller, Manski, & Wise, 1982), the short-term benefits include learning, networking, social and cultural enhancement, and extracurricular activities; while the costs include tuition, attendance, less free time, traveling back and forth from home to school, and other time consuming activities. The long-term benefits comprise of steady employment.

While Perna (2000) examined college choice among ethnic/racial groups, Freeman (2005) explored the gender issue between African American males and females and the college choice process. The following supports the notion that financial matters play a role in attending an institution. Responses from interviewees regarding perceptions on the reasons college choice differ illustrate that both males and females share similar feelings. For example, a female interviewee reported that encouragement for males aimed at sports, while females were aimed towards academics. In response, a male interviewee commented that females are awarded more academic scholarships, while males rely upon athletic funding.

Contributing factors that influence African American students' college choice

Three factors identified by students in Freeman's study (2005) which influenced their college choice included: automatic college attendance expectations within the family, influences beyond the family level, and self-motivation and avoidance of negative role model. Students' description of automatic expectations to attend college as not even thinking about it as an option and expected encouragement to go further in education than

other family members. This expectation and influence is also provided by mentors and those beyond the family level. Self-motivation and avoiding negative role models were indicated to include students who did not have encouraging parents or mentors. Instead, these students used the negative as motivation to pursue higher education.

Studies have also indicated that family plays a role in the academic achievement of students and their learning outcomes. Empirical and comprehensive studies have focused on family environment, socio-demographics, household composition, and other characteristics (Clark, 1983; Williams, 1976; Willie, 1981). Sampson's (2002) book, for example, focuses on why and how some minority students in the Chicago School System perform better than other minority students that share similar characteristics. (p. 3) He asserts that poverty, race, and the neighborhood is not the answer. Instead, he insists that family is the answer to the problem. Sampson's study specifically focuses on why some minority students perform better than other minority students and the role family plays. The specific variables of interest were: parents' attitudes and activities related to schooling. (p. 4). Sampson's (2002) study indicated several things about the following families of high, average, and low students.

First, high achiever students illustrated similarities with the average student and findings indicate that structure, order, and quiet are important in students' success. Second, average students' mothers showed concerned about the child's schoolwork and provided appropriate disciplinary actions such as: rules regarding bedtime, no phone, etc. Parent (s) showed love, support, and care in making sure schoolwork was completed. In addition, parents went over homework with student and offered help and encouragement.

Thus, education was held in high regards and was at the center of each family. Third, low achiever group indicated that the students showed a lack of order and discipline- none of them liked schoolwork. There was not enough time devoted to schoolwork by all students observed. Also, education was not seen as a serious matter as students showed a lack of self-fulfillment to succeed and performed just enough to get by. It can be suggested that a lack of parental attention and encouragement is a factor in the non-seriousness of students.

Related to Sampson's (2002) focus on family influences on students' college choice, Clark (1983) disagrees with scholars who suggest that a family's social status and other demographics such as one-parent verses two-parent homes, family size, ethnic backgrounds are causes of students' school behavior and learning outcomes (p.1). Instead, Clark (1983) argues that interpersonal relationships and activities play a part in how students succeed academically. Furthermore, he suggests that parents' beliefs and upbringings are just as important.

The above studies have illustrated the importance and development of HBCUs for African Americans as well as the many facets included in choosing a college or university. The opportunity to attend a college or university whether it's a HBCU or a PWI requires a good deal of planning and considerations which consist of family, finances, preparation, and other vital components.

Theoretical framework

There are two theoretical frameworks that will guide this study and will provide further findings utilizing the two. Spiral of silence theory was chosen to focus on African

American students' willingness to speak up about low graduation and retention rates. This theory provides the opportunity to test if African American students in this study will confirm or refute the main hypothesis *fear of isolation*. Fear of isolation, for example, may involve an African American student in class hesitant to answer a question in fear of being excluded from the majority group.

Therefore, two student interview questions were implemented to test this specific theory. It should be mentioned that the spiral of silence was the main focus of the study because the premise of this theory suggests that individuals who hold a different opinion than the majority group will not speak out in public due to fear of isolation by the majority group (Shoemaker, Breen, and Stamper, 2000). Consequently, the goal of this study is to either confirm or refute this assumption.

Bandura's self-efficacy theory was chosen because persistence and self-motivation is an important component in academic achievement. This theory provides a chance to focus on students' persistence, self-motivation, and performance and how it contributes to academic achievement. This theory will also assist in examining if the chosen UW-Whitewater students' use of resources, time, and planning will have a positive impact on how to improve low graduation and retention rates. Thus, two student interview questions address this specific theory.

Spiral of Silence Theory

Spiral of silence theory was introduced in 1973 by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann which focused on public opinion and the political setting. Noelle-Neumann proclaims the spiral of silence was developed from personal observations and election research that

focused on the election between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrat (Noelle-Neumann, 1984, 1991). It was noted that supporting a political party or candidate by wearing a button or any other item(s) is one way of speaking out or keeping quiet (Noelle-Neumann, 1984).

The premise of this theory suggests that individuals who hold a different opinion than the majority group will not speak out in public due to fear of isolation by the majority group (Shoemaker, Breen, and Stamper, 2000). As part of her research, Noelle-Neumann (1991) observed the voting trends by the public over a course of eight months during the election and developed some questions that she hoped would measure or explain what makes people vote for one political party over another. In other words, she examined voting intentions and expectations of who the winning political party would be.

Spiral of silence theory is comprised of several assumptions also known as the five hypotheses on which this theory was built (Noelle-Neumann, 1991). These five hypotheses were developed from observing and examining the election between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats. Scheufele and Moy (2000) described each based on the work of Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1977, 1984, and 1991).

The first assumption *threat of isolation*, according to Noelle-Neumann (1991) suggests that society poses a threat of isolation on individuals who defy the consensus. This suggestion implies in other words, individuals who do not conform to the majority opinions will face isolation from the majority group. Threat of isolation has also been labeled a key element of this theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1991).

To test threat of isolation, Noelle-Neumann (1984) conducted a two-part field

experiment that examined smoking in the presence of nonsmokers. Participants were separated into two groups which were the experimental group and the control group. The goal of this experiment was to explore exactly what stimuli makes individuals succumb to social isolation and to monitor who was willing to speak out and who was not. To do this, a sentence completion task was done. A picture of two individuals in conversation was shown to all participants regarding smoking or not smoking in public. Individuals were asked to read aloud and complete sentences as if it was a real life situation; Noelle-Neumann (1984) was able to understand verbal expression and the role it plays in fear of isolation.

Following the sentence completion, the threat test consisted of a train test in which subjects were given a hypothetical situation of being on a train ride with an individual who brings up smoking as a topic of conversation. The subjects were asked about their willingness to participate in conversation while determining if that person is a smoker or not. Findings Noelle-Neumann (1984) suggests confirmed her expectations. First, smokers who felt threatened verbally by nonsmokers refrained from discussion regarding the topic of smoking. Second, 23% of smokers reported willing to partake in conversation in the presence of nonsmokers. Third, 45% of those opposed to smoking in the presence of nonsmokers and 43% of those who support smokers indicated willingness to participate in discussion if faced with hypothetical train situation.

This leads to *fear of isolation*; the second assumption which Noelle-Neumann suggests is the root of spiral of silence. In an attempt to explain what drives fear of isolation in individuals, Noelle-Neumann (1984) focused specifically on the work of

Solomon Asch and Stanley Milgram, both psychologists. For instance, Noelle-Neumann (1991) credits Milgram (1961) methods for helping her develop a way to measure and design the threat test.

Although criticized for their work, Asch (1955) and Milgram (1961) conducted experiments that examined group conformity and social pressure which helped explain the fear of isolation process. Asch's (1955) line experiment consisted of seven male participants who were asked to compare the length of lines. Six of the participants were instructed to provide wrong answers as a group. The focus of this experiment was on the individual that was not instructed to provide wrong answers and if he would conform to the majority. Asch (1955) was concerned with the participants' behavior in publicly revealing his answers to the majority.

This situation is an example of how testing certain aspects of group dynamics and conformity can provide beneficial information that helps explain what causes the spiral of silence. From this experiment, social pressure was illustrated as participants decided to go along with the group instead of shying away to an independent stance (Asch, 1955).

Milgram (1961) on the other hand also conducted two conformity experiments that required participants to differentiate tones heard through headphones. They were then asked to say aloud which tone is longer. The objective of this experiment was to note if the sixth participant would conform to social pressure as the other five participants reported their answer of which tone was longer. In the second experiment, subjects were able to write down their answer rather than announce it aloud. The goal of this experiment was to examine if subjects would conform or remain independent due to the

written versus verbal announcement of answers. The conformity and social pressure declined because there was not a public announcement (Milgram, 1961).

In both experiments, subjects were probed to illustrate their willingness or not to conform to the consensus or remain independent. The experimentation conducted by Asch (1955) and Milgram (1961) provided Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1977, 1984, and 1991) and other scholars the opportunity to research and conduct their own studies.

Other attempts to test fear of isolation include the work Shoemaker, Breen, and Stamper (2000) who tested fear of *social isolation* as a variable rather than an assumption. Specifically, this test looked at individual's opinion and the perception of the predominant opinion. This test utilized opinion, fear of negative evaluation, and media use variables. The findings indicate that fear of social isolation can be considered a variable that can be operationalized.

Quasi-statistical sense has been labeled as one of the misinterpreted third concepts regarding spiral of silence (Scheufele and Moy, 2000). Quasi-statistical sense is also called climate of opinion and derives from two sources: (1) immediate observation and (2) indirect observation (Nuemann, 1991). This hypothesis suggests that the environment of individuals is constantly monitored for opinions via media, discussion, or interpersonal discussion. To support this suggestion, Noelle-Neumann (1984) described an encounter she had with a student who was wearing a button that represented the Christian Democrats. According to Noelle-Neumann (1984), the student wearing the button was on the opposite side, in support of the Social Democrats. The student's reason for wearing the opponent's button was to experience what it was like on the other side.

The fourth assumption *willingness to speak out or remain silent* suggests that the climate of opinion also plays a role in whether an individual speaks out or not (Noelle-Neumann, 1991). However, willingness to speak out is determined first by the individual, then by the topic or the possible controversy of the topic, and how important the media outlets believe it is. This assumption, for example, implies that someone wearing a button or publicly displaying support for a specific political candidate will monitor his or her environment.

The fifth assumption, spiral of silence interacts with all of the other assumptions and relies on each other. The spiral process of spiral of silence is formed based on those who speak up and those who remain silent. Assertions that public opinion and the climate over a given time changes individual's perceptions plays a role in the spiral process as well. For example, the conformity experiments have led researchers to explore what other hypothetical situations can be tested to examine the influencing stimuli that makes individuals willing to speak up or not.

According to this theory the media also plays a role in the fear of isolation aspect of spiral of silence. The influence of the media depends on the importance of the topic and what group is being silenced whether it is the majority or the minority. Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1991) asserts that the media has the power to present a single point of view that in return repeats a mixed message. These mixed messages according to Noelle-Neumann claim (1991, p.276) "the tenor of the media is essential to an assessment of the climate of opinion, and the media enables people to express themselves by providing words and arguments to articulate the views of the side they support."

In an attempt to explain what drives fear of isolation in individuals, Neuwirth, Frederick, & Mayo (2007) explored the communication apprehension concept and trait with fear of isolation. Neuwirth et al. (2007) suggests that fear of isolation does not apply to all situations or is limited to specific situations. To further explain, it has been implied there are three potential sources of fear of isolation when expressing opinion. These three sources include: past history of interactions, fear created by the controversy surrounding issue itself, and immediate situational factors associated with speaking.

There have been a few criticisms pointed out by scholars while researching this specific theory. According to Scheufele & Moy (as cited in Donsbach and Stevenson, 1986), Donsbach & Stevenson suggests fear of isolation does not provide enough evidence explaining a person's willingness to speak out within the experiments and other studies conducted. Scheufele & Moy (2000) also pointed out that this theory needs to focus on reconceptualizing and defining concepts due changes over the years in which spiral of silence was developed. Other criticisms insist that fear of isolation is not the only or main contributor that explains why people speak out or not. This specific criticism can be linked to Asch's (1955) and Milgram's (1961) conformity tests that did not provide enough concrete evidence. All of the criticisms mentioned

The premise of this theory suggests that individuals who hold a different opinion than the majority group will not speak out in public due to fear of isolation by the majority group. But according to a related concept "hard core" there are individuals who are willing to speak out no matter the cost and do not worry about fear of isolation.

Bandura's self-efficacy

Self-efficacy can best be described according to Bandura (1997), (p.3) as “the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments”. The notion that an individual’s beliefs and behaviors influence the actions taken has been confirmed through a variety of studies. For instance, self-efficacy research has focused on students’ academic learning and performance as insight on career and academic outcomes.

Multon, Brown, & Lent (1991) meta-analyses reported on the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance. There was a positive relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance. Similarly, Lane & Lane (2001) focused on a self-efficacy measure and the behaviors that influence academic performance. They found that within the academic setting self-efficacy played a role in student’s performance to complete a task.

To better understand how self-efficacy works, Chemers, Hu, & Garcia (2001) have identified different processes self-efficacy is comprised of which include cognitive, motivational, and affective. The *cognitive process* focuses on the planning, confidence, and strategies used by students to complete a task or solve a problem. The *motivational process* focuses on the goal aspect of self-efficacy and its relation to performance. Bandura’s work suggests that the higher the goal is set, the better the chance for positive effects. The affective process asserts that self-efficacy is impacted by emotional behaviors as well as the environment which predicts whether the individual will act or not to achieve academic attainment or achievement. This process also mentioned attention

and the ability to control emotions. Moreover, each process together explains important components of this theory.

Scholars have also examined self-efficacy in connection with performance, self-motivation, persistence and personal goal setting (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991). For example, Zimmerman, Bandura & Pons (1992) found a relationship between perceived efficacy to achieve, academic attainment, and goal setting among ninth and tenth grade social studies students.

Chemers, Hu, & Garcia (2001) also examined self-efficacy and optimism on first-year students' academic performance. Results point toward a positive relationship between self-efficacy, academic performance, and adjustment among first-year students. Chemers et al. (2001) findings also suggest that academic self-efficacy was related to students' confidence in performing academic tasks (i.e. assignments/grades).

Studies have illustrated that there are countless influences and contributing factors which determine students' college choice (Davis, 2004; Freeman, 2005; Sampson, 2002). These influences and contributing factors also impact graduation and retention rates in which faculty and staff plays an important role. However, there are not enough significant studies that focus on the messages between faculty, staff, and students.

Therefore, the following research questions have been proposed:

RQ1: What verbal and nonverbal messages are faculty and staff sending to students that suggest approachability?

The verbal and nonverbal messages can consist of classroom behavior and teaching style such as being hesitant to call a student out, excluding or dismissing answers and comments of certain students, a lack of encouragement, and verbally

indicating to student's approachability. Therefore, to address this question student interviews will be implemented and tied into social isolation of spiral of silence.

RQ2: What actions are students taking to help faculty and staff become approachable?

The actions performed by students are based on experiences, perceptions, and other aspects. Thus, students' actions can range from speaking up about issues in the classroom or on campus, by participating or not participating in events and student organizations, by reaching out to faculty and staff, personally asking for help, and becoming a leader on campus and a voice for students. To address this question faculty, staff, and student interviews will be used and tied to the social isolation of spiral of silence theory.

RQ3: What is the link between perceptions of graduation and retention rates and college choice?

Perceptions are formed based on the lack of knowledge about something or someone and are sometimes the only way of figuring out information. Hence, the link between perceptions of graduation and retention rates and college choice is based upon programming, support, and marketing. Faculty, staff, and student interviews along with the surveys will be used to address this question. This specific question will be tied into both self-efficacy and social isolation.

RQ4: What is the link between the perceptions of campus climate and college choice?

The link between perceptions of campus climate and college choice again

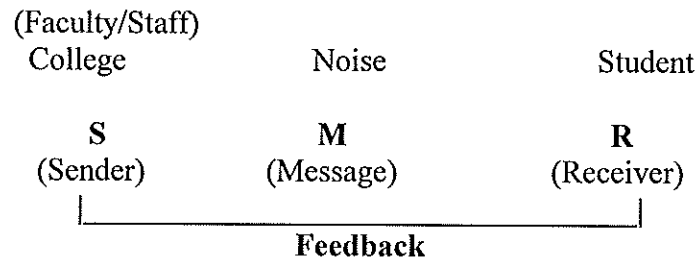
deals with the fact that perceptions are formed based on the absence of knowledge. The link is also between diversity and the campus environment. Hence, programming, support, and marketing are factors that tie into both self-efficacy and social isolation. Faculty and staff interviews were selected to address this question.

The use of the communication process model (Fig. 1) will guide the exploration of students' thoughts and perceptions about faculty and staff at UW-Whitewater and the possible interferences when messages are sent and received. Thus, it is fair to suggest that the spiral of silence can form from the communication model in several ways.

First, before the sender in this case, faculty and staff can send a message to the receiver (students), faculty and staff must keep in mind how to approach the student based on: language, gender, culture, perceptions and experiences. Second, because of experiences, gender, language and other aspects that help form meaning, spiral of silence may or may not occur. For example, in order to have a one-on-one conversation with someone both parties have to think about what to say, how to say it, and wonder if the message they sent was received the way it was intended to be sent. Thus, the way the message is received depends on the type of feedback that will occur between the sender (faculty and staff) and the receiver (students). Third, all of these things contribute to the different levels of noise which affects how the message is or will be received. For instance, language or cultural differences are considered types of noise because it affects how the message is received as well as how feedback will occur.

Figure 1

Communication model



Methodology

The establishment of HBCUs is responsible for an era where African American students now have more opportunities and choices of institutions to attend (Fleming, 1984; Davie, 1998; Roebuck & Murty, 1993). For example, at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, the African American population and community have grown since 1966 both on and off campus. Thus this growth in population is important culturally. So there is need to understand if that diversity has an impact academically at UW-Whitewater.

A portion of African Americans students that attend predominantly White institutions fall into the academic achievement gap. Institutions such as UW-Whitewater represent a twenty-three percent achievement gap in graduation and retention rates between African American and Caucasian students (Durham, 2010). Therefore, the decision to use the qualitative approach to collect data for this study was made.

Collection of data

The data collection included qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are based

on observations via interviews, pictures, or objects to describe something in detail (Lindlof, & Taylor, 2002). In this case, the qualitative aspect consisted of interviews from African American faculty staff, and students. Interviews were chosen because of the in-depth perspective provided from the students, faculty, and staff on what contributes to low graduation rates. According to Fontana & Frey (1994) face-to-face interviewing is one of the most used and common methods of interviewing. It has also been indicated that interviewing traditionally, focused on counseling and opinion polls which provided feedback on the quality of and the psychological aspect of responses (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

This method of interviewing was decided upon because of the one-on-one interaction and nonverbal behavior that occurs in the process. Interviewing individuals in a setting that is comfortable and allows them to express their feeling freely provides the researcher beneficial feedback. Thus, observing facial reactions, laughs, and other behavioral actions of the participants through interviews felt like the best option for this study.

Interviewees consisted of six faculty and staff members and eight students. Faculty and staff chosen reside on certain committees and are active in helping students academically. The eight students chosen represented different backgrounds and experiences within the minority group represented on the UW-Whitewater campus. Each participant was sent an electronic script that explained who was conducting the study and what the interviews would consist of. Faculty and staff interviews were conducted in their offices for schedule purposes.

Materials and Procedure

For this study, consent forms were distributed to all interviewees that explained their rights as a participant. The consent forms also described why the interviews were being conducted. The student interviewees were interviewed in a conference room that guaranteed privacy of answers and allowed students to be comfortable. Faculty and staff were selected based on their representation of the four colleges (i.e. College of Arts & Communication). All participants for the interviews were recruited via an electronic script (appendix D and F). The faculty and staff interviews were held in their campus offices, while student interviews were held in a meeting room located on campus in 220 McCutchan Hall. The time of each interview varied because some interviewees had more to say than others. For example, the shortest interview was 7 minutes and 58 seconds, while the longest interview was 31 minutes. All of the other interviews ranged from 12-26 minutes.

Limitations of methodology

The first limitation included the fact that only African American faculty, staff, and students were selected for the interview portion of the study. There were two motives for only selecting this group of individuals. First, this group is underrepresented on campus and their voices deserve to be heard. Second, scholars such as D'Augelli & Hershberger (1993); Davis (2004); and Douglas (1998) have explored the experiences of African American students who attend predominately white institutions through surveys and interviews. Thus, conducting interviews and doing a comparison to their study and the current study at UW-Whitewater will perhaps bring about new themes.

Another limitation comprised of the type of method used to collect data for this study. Utilizing only interviews was a limitation because there are other options to gather data which include surveys, focus groups, and other options. However, using individual face-to-face interviews provides more interaction with each participant while obtaining data compared to other method options.

Findings

This chapter will address the four research questions that focused on messages between faculty, staff, and students. Findings are also based on the interview questions utilized to conduct this study. The information reported in this section also includes thematic analyses that were extracted from all participants' responses.

RQ1 asked what verbal and nonverbal messages are faculty and staff sending to students that suggest approachability. The student interview responses indicate that faculty and staff verbally and nonverbally take interest in students and provide one-on-one time. Take Interviewee L.W. for example who gladly said:

What haven't they done? Uh, really sat me down and put me on the right path because initially I was just here just to get the degree and get up out of here. They really sat me down and told me to think long-term and not just for the right now.

Respondent L.W. is another transfer student from a HBCU to UW-Whitewater and credits the transfer for the opportunity to connect and build relationships with the individuals that have assisted him. The next respondent who is majoring in Chemistry made the following comment:

I couldn't see me finishing my chemistry degree without my professor. He is Caucasian but I can go in there and ask him a random question and he will, we will not leave that room until we figure out the answer to that question. Granted most of the time I go ask about advice about internships, help on homework, and about our research that I do with him but we talk about everything from like specialty chesses to like baseball.

The next respondent talks about how a specific staff member helps him and provides clarity through feedback when needed. Interviewee D.J. proclaims:

Dr. McGregory is huge in helping me through with like some of the tougher economic courses being he was a Ph.D. in econ. Just giving me a better understanding of what I really didn't get in the classroom. And also a lot of the professors were really helpful too. They really took the time to sit down and talk to you about difficult assignments that you might not understand.

Because a majority of the student interviewees were upper class, hearing from a freshman student about messages she receives from faculty and staff. Interviewee K.B. said "One of my professors told me, come to my office hours if you don't understand." "Or one of them gave me a tutorial slip, gave me the hours and which services were available and showed the website."

RQ1 tied into *self-efficacy* because it's the individual's beliefs and behaviors that determine what and how actions will be carried out. For instance, the faculty and staff's verbal and nonverbal messages result in their motivation and self-actions to attempt to be approachable. Each interviewee provided an instance where faculty and staff illustrated

approachability whether it was sitting down to talk about academics or basic interests.

RQ2 investigated what actions students' are taking to help faculty and staff become approachable. To address this question faculty and staff interview responses suggest that students who are involved on campus through student organizations and sports tend to have a higher chance in graduating. For instance interviewee R.P. suggested that students need to be fully involved in all aspects of campus life to receive a well-rounded experience. This in return assists students with their interaction skills with faculty and staff.

While discussing what actions students' are taking to help faculty and staff become approachable, interviewee dean remarked "Students walk behind me on this campus all the time, Black students. And at this point I don't even go out of my way to make the effort anymore because it's just so normative." He then mentioned a way to address this problem by implementing a program that would allow students from HBCUs to visit UW-Whitewater. He believes that this exchange program might broaden student's perspective on cultural unity and promote a more united campus among all faculty, staff, and students.

RQ2 tied into social isolation and *self-efficacy* for two reasons. First, if students are not taking actions and participating with the involvement of helping faculty/staff become more approachable; it's possible for that student to fall into isolation of some kind. Second, motivation and the behaviors of the students depend on their beliefs and their willingness to initiate interactions with faculty/staff.

RQ3 explored what the link is between perceptions of graduation and retention

rates and college choice. Student interviews indicate that programming, support, and marketing are key factors in retaining and graduating students, specifically African American students.

Programming

Pathways for Success and New Student Seminar are programs designed to help freshman student's transition into college, network, and enhance the skills necessary to academically perform. These two programs also help with the social aspect of college life that students engage in. In addition, the King/Chavez Scholars program serves underrepresented and first generation students. These students are introduced to undergraduate research on any topic of interest, develop skills, and study abroad.

The McNair Scholars Program helps to prepare students for graduate school and applying for Ph.D. programs. This particular program affords students the opportunity to present research at different conferences, preparation for tests such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), and other resources. All of these programs assist students in developing as a student and person. Participant M.S. said "Programming is great, it's wonderful and we have data to show that students are doing well in those programs." She insists however that programming is not the complete solution.

Support

The link between graduation and retention rates and college choice revolve around support. This support can be in the form of mentors, such as faculty and staff, through networking, and building relationships and connections. Most faculty, staff, and students indicated support and building relationships help retain and graduate students.

This was illustrated in the interviewee responses when asked certain questions. For instance, respondent E.O. highlights her opinion saying:

I think it's just wonderful when you have the undergraduate research because again when you match one-on-one with a faculty or a staff person, you're getting that attention, you're learning, you getting a real feel of how it is to be successful, and you're not isolated.

Undergraduate research is one option students have to be involved academically on campus and to interact with faculty and staff. Another staff member commented indicating that support is crucial in graduating students. She said:

If a student does not feel that they have that support, they don't feel someone is pulling for them, they're not receiving the assistance that they need in the classroom, they're not feeling like they're being made a part of the UW-Whitewater family, that is going to help a student shall I say out the door.

The above statement insists that students tend to drop out or take a long period of time to complete a college degree because of the lack of support or feeling of belonging at the institution. Support is just as important as any other component in academic success.

Marketing

UW-Whitewater does marketing via websites, recruitment, and community outreach. However, one particular interviewee said:

But I love how this university exemplifies their greatness through they're works: programs, graduation, football and other sports. We don't have to go through all of this to sell our school. A lot of people know about Whitewater like you said

through word of mouth, maybe their parents went here; their older siblings, maybe they did run into that admission rep that was so graceful and not pushing the school on them- but just simply said this is what we have to offer and if you meet these requirements you're more than welcomed to come here sort of attitude.

Respondent dean indicated that one of his reasons for wanting to work at UW-

Whitewater was through marketing. He said:

One of the reasons I came here is when I checked the website, diversity was prominently featured on the website. So that I thought was a good thing. After meeting with the chancellor and the provost, I felt that they were folks who were sincere in their commitment to diversity. So, I was impressed by that.

Programming, support, and marketing are all partial links to whether or not a student decides to attend UW-Whitewater. Attending a college or university depends on the environment and the individuals that make up the campus. It has been stated that UW-Whitewater has a good reputation and does remarkably marketing.

RQ3 tied into *self-efficacy* because it's the student's responsibility to be engaged and to be motivated to succeed. The student is expected to manage time, attend classes, attend office hours, seek help, and utilize the resources provided to them. However, not all students know how to manage time and perform other actions expected of them. These reasons include the lack of mentors, hometown environment, and other contributing factors mentioned in research. Furthermore, RQ 3 also tied into *social isolation*. Students seem to become isolated when they don't feel a part of the campus community, can't identify with others that share similar experiences/ characteristics, etc. This statement

was supported by participant E.O. responses.

RQ4: focused on the link between the perceptions of campus climate and college choice. To approach this question gaining feedback from faculty and staff was essential. To start, respondent dean said “I think my experience so far is that we can be better in terms of our numbers of faculty. I don’t see much representation among staff and people of color.”

These two particular interviewees hold positions on several committees that are aiming towards the same goal of improvement in certain areas. In this occurrence, Interviewee dean had this to say about campus climate and college choice:

In terms of expectations, in terms of demand, in terms of how to help people focus, we have some good programs to help people when they’re here. But I think certainly the New Student Seminar is that—the data that we have on New Student Seminar indicate that while it improves retention rates for White students, it does not do the same thing for students of color.

Interviewee E.O. also added:

As we look at leadership here with the students, as we look at student organizations, are they really understand that diversity is a part of our way of life right now. So, yes this is a problem and again I think eventually as everyone feels included, everyone becomes more focused, everyone, you know people will focus more and have a goal in mind because they had a great experience.

Both interviewees highlight what they believe are key items that need to be focused on in order to continue to make progress here at this institution. Furthermore, faculty and staff

such as those interviewed for this study have a great foundation to work on, but the actions of more faculty and staff are needed in order to turn the perceptions of low graduation and retention rates into a reality of increasing graduation and retention rates among African American students.

RQ4 tied into *self-efficacy* because it's the student's responsibility to be engaged and to be motivated to succeed. The student is expected to manage time, attend classes, attend office hours, seek help, and utilize the resources provided to them. However, not all students know how to manage time and perform other actions expected of them. These reasons include the lack of mentors, hometown environment, and other contributing factors mentioned in research.

Interview results

In Lights (2001) book "*Making the most of college*," students provided in depth interviews about their college experiences. Although the book focuses on Harvard University students, the suggestions and advice by Light can be beneficial to other colleges and universities. Thus, the goal with conducting interviews for this study was to hear from African American faculty, staff, and students. The following are responses from participants who provided comments and quotes based on a series of questions.

Student interviews

Most of the participants selected for this portion of the study were selected for two specific reasons. First, as the researcher, these students were known through work and school functions but wanted to learn a little more about them. Second, all of the participants are individuals who are successfully achieving academically. For instance,

two students recently earned their Master's degree; three are current graduate students; and the other three students are making progress towards a degree.

The student interviewees revealed some interesting and useful information regarding perceptions, the importance of motivation and persistence, feeling excluded on campus and other components related to improving graduation and retention rates. For example, when asked about their perceptions of UW-Whitewater upon arrival on the campus, the first initial reaction from respondent R.U. was that the college was small. This is what she had to say:

Being that I came from California, it was really small. It was secluded; it was limited so there was a lot of just need to have some space other than UW-Whitewater confinement. So that was my first ultimate perception that I'm in the middle of nowhere.

This interviewee talks about coming from a big city like California to a small town such as Whitewater. There was other participant that shared similar perceptions of UW-Whitewater. For instance, interviewee S.N. said "I liked the size of the building and the size of the campus." "It was a small community type atmosphere." Freshman K.B. stated "That there were a lot of White people and it was in the middle of nowhere." Sharing similar words the last respondent X.H. commented "I thought it would be in the middle of nowhere."

It is fair to assume that all of the interviewees had similar thoughts about the campus before attending. Given the respondents comments it can be interpreted that UW-Whitewater is a small campus with an awkward location.

When asked about self-motivation respondents insisted that persistence and motivation can help improve graduation and retention rates. The following is what one interviewee said when asked this question:

Definitely, student's motivation is what can drive you to graduate. I mean if you're at an institution that's not designed for you to fail but it's kind of expecting it or expecting you to be on academic probation; or expecting you not to come back; that should be motivation enough for you to do well. That's my biggest stressor you know motivation and doing what you're supposed to be doing.

So from a student's perspective, this interviewee is in agreement that student's motivation is a vital part of graduating. He also suggests that doing well academically is something that is expected. Another respondent elaborated on his thoughts about self-motivation and persistence signifying:

I think that's actually a contributing factor to why a lot of us don't make it back the following semester. It's just those expectations for ourselves; just lowering them for ourselves thinking that if we get just a C or D just to pass we'll be alright and not really thinking what that means for us.

As indicated by the two interviewees above, self-motivation and persistence, is a piece to the puzzle when it comes to students' performance academically. More needs to be done on the student's behalf to increase graduation and retention rates. Research confirmed the significance of motivation and persistence in relation to academic success through interviewees' comments.

Other interviewees shared similar responses to another question that asked what

challenges students face at UW-Whitewater. All male participants said performing well academically and being successful were the challenges they face as African American students. To illustrate participant L.W. said:

I think overall it's a challenge to just perform well because the expectation and in terms of statistics and things like that are all stacked against you. So I think the overall challenge is to perform and perform well. It's not enough to get a 3.0 anymore I have to strive to get that 4.0 or as close as I can get to it.

This interviewee's main concern is performing well and maintaining an appropriate GPA and not falling into that category of students that are expected to fail or not perform well academically. This particular respondent is well-known and participates on campus through students organizations such as Black Student Union (BSU).

In addition, Interviewee D.G. had similar feelings saying "Being successful. I feel like sometimes with some of these classes being the only African American in the class you might feel like you are like one step behind everybody and you just got to get over that mindset." He then added:

My thing is failure and I don't want to fail here. So just trying to be successful I guess would be like not necessarily a struggle or anything like that but something that holds fear to a lot of African Americans at a predominantly White school.

Both of these individuals have had different experiences throughout their attending UW-Whitewater but each of them believes that being successful and not failing is a challenge they face as African American students.

In addition to examining the challenges student participants faced, applying spiral

of silence, one of two specific questions investigated whether or not these African American students ever experienced a time when they were excluded from an event or group. This exclusion can happen within the majority or the minority group. Interviewee L.W was happy to share his two experiences saying:

Yeah actually twice. First, I felt excluded within my dorm because when they did like uh floor events and things like that- although I was invited, I didn't feel I belonged because again, outside of my roommate who was White, no one really talked to me. Uh, it wasn't until later that students started to talk to me and try to get to know me. And I guess it's kind of my fault because I didn't try either.

Within my own uh group, my first BSU meeting, I felt like the minority in there although I was among a lot of black people. We had a topic discussion umm in which I had a different stance from the general population. So everyone looked at me as if I didn't belong.

This interviewee talked about a situation in which he experienced exclusion from the majority and the minority group. Transferring from a HBCU to a PWI has its implications such as those mentioned above however; this individual has become a great leader on UW-Whitewater's campus and does don't encounter these situations anymore.

Sharing a similar situation of exclusion, a female participant talked about exclusion among her friends. Respondent K.B. said:

Sometimes I feel excluded from my African American friends when they're talking about how in class they feel like they just stick out like a sore thumb. I tell them like oh, I feel like I stick out too and I'm kind of on the brighter side. So

they be like “no we stick out you don’t stick out.” So I’m like in my head I am a African American female regardless of my skin complexion, so I feel like I stick out just like you stick out, but they don’t understand that.

This student’s situation dealt more with her interactions with friends and how each feels excluded based on skin color. It was surprising to hear her story about her friends having a difference of opinion regarding skin color. This is an example of a possible situation student’s face at institutions such as UW-Whitewater.

Faculty/staff interviews

Faculty and staff shared similar responses about their perceptions of UW-Whitewater and indicated their satisfaction in working at this specific institution.

When asked about the campus climate results and the progress UW-Whitewater is making to address low graduation and retention rates; faculty and staff interviewees agreed a great deal of work still needs to be done. The following excerpt is what one staff member had to say:

Participant J.A.: Um, again, we still have a long way to go. I think that more needs to be done to identify those issues that were presented in the climate results. Obviously we have a large number of students who feel isolated, we have students who are not graduating, we have students who are able to identify whether it’s with their department or an instructor which will lead to isolation and eventually to them dropping out or transferring to another university. I don’t know and have not known any initiative programs on campus to tackle those issues. Maybe I could have missed them as a student, maybe I’m missing them as a staff but I

don't know of anything that has been identified for us as staff to work with those students who are experiencing those issues.

It's obvious from this excerpt that this interviewee is concerned and committed to finding ways to address the campus climate issues talked about. This was illustrated by another staff member that works with multicultural students who had this add:

Respondent T.T.: There's a lot of work to be done but we don't have the money for it. My program, I don't see how it functions the way it does with no money; we don't have any budget. I think about, there is so much we can do; there is so much we can do to retain students from that sophomore to junior year and junior to senior year.

This interviewee is a staff member that works with the King/Chavez Scholars Program which is comprised of first-generation and multicultural students from selected locations. She indicates that the budget is a prime factor of what impacts how faculty and staff are able to reach out to struggling students.

However, they suggest that progress is being made. Reoccurring responses suggest that programming, support, and interaction helps students graduate. Hence, the data is important however, building relationships and receiving feedback from alumni and other individuals provides options for improvement within increasing graduation rates. The information gathered from the interviews was from the voices of faculty, staff, and students which was one of the objectives of this study. .

A specific program known as the Pathways for Success Program was mentioned a few times during interviewee responses when probed about the progress being made to

address diversity and low graduation rates. The first individual has had hands on with this program teaching students that enroll. This is what he had to say:

Interviewee Dean: Well, my understanding of Pathways--I actually worked in the Pathways program. I think it's a good program. I think again, it's really critical that we develop a consciousness around acculturating students not just African American, Asian American, and Native American students, and Hispanic students; but also first-generation students. I don't think we do a really good job cultivating and understanding of what it means to be in an academic environment.

Interviewee M.S. also functions as committee member of the Pathways program which won the Ann Lydecker Educational Diversity Award. She says "The program's success and receiving the Lydecker Award reflect UW-Whitewater's efforts to be inclusive and promote its diversity efforts."

Both of these interviewees provided examples of how the program is progressing and the type of students the program needs to attract. Given, this study focuses on African American students; students of all ethnicities are the concern of the faculty and staff interviewed.

Thematic Analysis

Several themes emerged from the proposed research and interview questions developed in this study. Themes, according to Saldana (2009) are sentences or phrases that describe and provide meaning and identify common responses by respondents. Thus, themes have been identified from the responses given by faculty, staff, and students regarding their thoughts, feelings, and comments related to this study.

Student participants

Three themes occurred from student interviews which revolved around students' actions and behaviors inside and outside of the classroom, diversity on campus, and challenges faced as an African American student. The three themes described below provide a generalized voice of how some African American students deal with certain situations that impacts their academic success at UW-Whitewater. However, not all responses represent every African American student on campus.

Not hesitant

In addition to describing their perceptions of UW-Whitewater, students talked about situations where they were hesitant or not to speak out in class because of being the only African American student. In this case for example, five interviewees reported not being hesitant to speak out. The first responses are from all four male participants who had interesting things to say such as interviewee D.J: who said:

No. I never had one of those situations because I was pretty opinionated being the only Black in all my econ classes. I mean granted we never touched on topics that were really that touchy like far as race or politics. Well we actually have talked about politics and that gets kind of touchy. I was probably the only democrat in my classes really you know. So I mean I was never really afraid to say my thoughts.

This individual is a graduate student that transferred from UW-Parkside, another UW-institution located not far away from UW-Whitewater. He highlighted that he has never encountered situations such as this and is surprised that it has not happened yet given the

lack of African American students present in classes.

The next male participant D.G., who is a junior, said “No because I went to a high school that was predominantly all Caucasian Americans.” “I felt that I didn’t have to feel discouraged to speak my mind.” He asserts that attending an all Caucasian school helped him when he arrived on campus.

Former Black Student Union president, L.W. replied “Not in class. It’s actually kind of weird; the classroom is the one place where I felt safe to actually express whatever it was that I thought.” He also commented that coming from a HBCU where African American students were the majority, was difficult to adjust to but he eventually adjusted to the campus and the people.

The last male participant X.H. talked about a time during his undergraduate career in which a specific professor and classmates in a criminal justice class talked about race, which made some students uncomfortable. He said:

I use to just think, should I let this slide or say something because they were like totally wrong. So that was the only time I was hesitant but ended up speaking out because I felt that I needed to correct their ignorance.

This is an example of an individual weighing his options of whether speaking out is a good or bad decision, therefore, performing the spiral of silence process. In this instance, he decided to speak out because he felt that the Caucasian students needed to hear his voice regarding a topic that offended his race. Furthermore, this is the individual Noelle-Neumann (year) describes as a hardcore nonconformist.

All male participants felt good about their position on speaking out whether it was

in class or not. However, there were two individuals who reported instances where they were hesitant to speak out in class or in a general context. For example, when asked to elaborate on the time she felt hesitant to speak out about something in class, interviewee K.B. said:

I found in high school I was always the person with my hand up answering questions. But now here (UW-W) being like the only minority in my class sometimes, I feel hesitant to raise my hand; because then I start to second guess myself like well what if my answer is wrong? I don't want to be the minority who just gave the wrong answer, so I find myself quieter.

It can be inferred that this participant was more comfortable and confidence during her high school days compared to the college classroom setting. She also made a comment implying that she feared fitting into a certain "stereotype" if she answered a question wrong.

Another female participant shared her opinions about situations when to speak out and when not depending on the topic. She asserts that attending school in California kind of prepared her for situations that may or may not require her to speak out about something important. In this case, interviewee R.U. replied:

Class no. Being the only African American student at times, sometimes I feel like there are things that are said, I have to speak up about. If I don't speak up about it, I'm undermining what it means to me. So, I always do speak out in class if it pertains to me or it's something I dislike. But there are times when I find once again if I'm going to be judged, how people are going to look at me, if they're

going to take what I say construct or offensive because it's about me being the African American or it's pertaining to my race. At times I feel they may take it wrong and it's not intended to be viewed that way. So, I do keep quiet.

This theme "not hesitant" is based on the male interviewees' comments and two things can be assumed or interpreted about students speaking out. First, it is fair to say these particular students did not display fear of isolation as the spiral of silence theory suggested. Second, it can be suggested that willingness to speak out is not a problem for these interviewees because of their involvement on campus.

Role of faculty and staff

Not only are the perceptions of UW-Whitewater important but the environment and the individuals that surround the campus are as well. For example, when asked how important the role of faculty and staff plays in improving graduation and retention rates, the reoccurring describing word was "really important". Interviewee L.W. stated "A very important role. I think the number one in my opinion. At least the number one influence in terms of student achievement and student success is between that professor and student relationship in terms of the classroom." In the same way, another individual said:

I think it's really important. If you have a professor that you're close with or an advisor or a research mentor that you can go in their office and ask them any question at any time of the day...I think that's important. So I appreciate that they're always there when I need help.

Both interviewees are in agreement that having someone whether its faculty, staff, or a mentor to talk to is essential in moving forward and improving graduation and retention

rates. The next interviewee indicated having a special situation in which he transferred to UW-Whitewater. He also agrees that faculty and staff are central in increasing graduation rates stating:

I think it plays a tremendous role because you actually have examples and kind of like mentors and role models to look up to. I never really had anything like this. None of my immediate family or mother or father ever went to college let a long graduate school. It would be good to have someone to look up to that looks like you because it does get very hard at times.

This transfer he indicates from a HBCU to UW-Whitewater was the best move for him because of the opportunities and the people. He indicated that he was fortunate enough to make it outside of his hometown Chicago which made a huge difference in his academic achievement.

The next respondent previously attended school in California and moved to Whitewater for graduate school. When asked about the role of faculty and staff, interviewee R.U. mentioned one professor in particular as someone that is important to her. She said:

Dr. Ocha she's one of our professors. She's Nigerian and that really related to me being Nigerian on campus and she is from my same tribe. She really connected with me on a personal level just by being welcoming, warm, and understanding. As far as what we needed to do academically, like who we needed to see, how we needed to perform, she encouraged us and just made us feel like we can do it--to be another Nigerian to succeed here at Whitewater.

From the above statement ethnicity seems to play a role in the importance of faculty and staff for students. During interviewee R.U.'s initial sit down she mentioned that her cousin who is also Nigerian, came from California with her to attend UW-Whitewater. So she refers to her cousin in the above statement, however just not by name.

This specific question was very important to ask students. Thus, it can further explain why faculty and staff are needed especially those of color. Furthermore, it has been emphasized by students that establishing a relationship or connection with faculty and staff does help students overcome challenges faced at this institution.

Diversity

When I inquired about the diversity among faculty, staff, and students on campus, most of the students provided a smirk after the question was asked. To understand this gesture the interviewees explained their reasoning by asserting:

It depends on what you mean by diversity but I feel like sense its Predominantly White it's probably not that diverse ethnicity wise or ethnic wise I should say. But I think it's doing a better job of trying to become more diverse ethnically.

Another interviewee simply said "This campus is not very diverse. Moving in that direction but not very diverse." While another individual bluntly responded:

Not very, I would say because almost all of the African American students know the other African American students. It feels like high school all over again and I haven't had an African American instructor besides Dr. Mac and Tiffany Tardy.

In another instance, while talking about challenges students face as African American students, respondent X.H. mentioned not having an African American professor during

his graduate program. He then brought up diversity and the fact that there is a difference between African professors and African American professors. He said:

It's a difference between having an African American person who was from Africa and now their American because our backgrounds are still kind of different. You can relate to a certain extent but it's like certain things from them coming from Africa is totally different. I even went to Africa before and you would think that you would have a lot of things in common with them and it's like totally different and it's still like learning about someone from a foreign country.

To further explain his thoughts and feeling about why there is a difference between African and African American professors, respondent X.H. implied:

There is still a difference; we still don't feel like we have that diversity. It's just like having a teacher come over from Germany and teach us, they just don't have the dark skin. Skin color is not the thing; it's the background that makes it diverse and the life experiences and stuff like that. That's going to help us feel comfortable, people with similar environments, and similar neighborhoods that we came from, not a whole different country.

It is fair to assume that these specific students' perspective on diversity is based on experiences and how each defines diversity. The diversity question was another important question worth asking students because of the need to identify with individuals who share the same ethnicity and characteristics. Hence, most students indicated that UW-Whitewater is lacking on the diversity of faculty and staff of color. Throughout the interviews it was highly stressed by students that having faculty and staff that look like

you makes a difference.

Thus, the three themes extracted from the student interviews provide feedback for UW-Whitewater in addressing what these particular students think are important items to address. In addition to these particular themes each student stated very directly how they felt regarding having more faculty and staff of color on campus.

Faculty/staff participants

Three themes also emerged from the faculty and staff interview responses regarding their satisfaction in working at UW-Whitewater, the importance of faculty and staff, and programs that have been developed or implemented. The three themes extracted from responses are from those who play an important role in students' academic career. These specific themes are considered significant because each theme provides information about how African American faculty and staff feel about their profession as an educator.

Satisfaction

To find out how satisfied faculty and staff were with their decision to work at UW-Whitewater, I decided to simply ask the question. Immediately, all responses illustrated a positive answer. The first staff member interviewed replied: "I was in a great position in that I was a student here." "So prior to working here I had a great idea of what UW-Whitewater had to offer me as an African American female." This particular staff member was given the opportunity to work at the same institution she attended as a student and has had the option of working with multicultural students that fall into that low graduation and retention rates group. She further stated:

I am very satisfied. I've always wanted to work at UW-Whitewater. I originally got my degree in teaching and because of the minority faculty and staff that worked with me and assisted me through programming, through Academic Support Services, now called Multicultural Affairs & Student Success. Those are the folks that really motivated me and who let me know that there was something else besides classroom teaching. I had no idea that you could work in higher education until I started working with them and that's how I got to where I am. I am very pleased to be back amongst them because many of them are still here.

This interviewee spoke highly of the individuals she praises and insists encouraged her to pursue higher education as an opportunity to give back and help students. For example, the next respondent, R.P. is one of those individuals interviewee M.S. talked about.

When asked the same question regarding satisfaction at UW-Whitewater, he smiled and said "Definitely, definitely. I came here saying that I will stay a couple of years or so and end up being here a life time, the remainder of my career." He has been credited for implementing programs targeted to attract African American and multicultural students to UW-Whitewater.

Interviewee E.O. who has been working at UW-Whitewater for almost twenty-three years indicated that she was pleased with her decision. She said:

Yes I am satisfied. What was very important was to be able to have that contact with students; to have that opportunity to work with people who also were interested in working with students. And it's been a good decision because I came here with the attitude that I would be able to live in Whitewater and kept my car

in shape so that could still continue my life. So, I think it was definitely a good decision.

Similarly, another interviewee stated:

Definitely, as I have learned since I've been here, I see a lot of things here in Whitewater that I didn't see in Madison. So, when I have students who want to transfer to Madison I'm always leery of that because of what I experienced there as opposed to what I have experienced here with working with students. And the resources here are phenomenal yeah I love it here.

Given this interviewee did not attend UW-Whitewater; she has found it really beneficial for students and indicates that the resources are important because not all institutions provide what UW-Whitewater provides to students.

Role of faculty and staff

The environment and the individuals that surround the campus make a difference and those individuals include faculty and staff. For example, when asked how important the role of faculty and staff plays in improving graduation and retention rates, staff member M.S. quickly said:

It is critical. I can't over emphasize how critical that piece is. You have students who yes, they see the other students but the majority of their day is spent in the classroom. And the relationship and support that is felt from a faculty or staff person is what's going to retain that student.

Another interviewee talked about not having that mentor relationship with faculty and staff as she went through her undergraduate years. She insists that having that

relationship makes a difference in students' performance. She said "I didn't have that in my undergraduate years, that real mentor." She says "I had someone interested for my dissertation but his job was to get me through the degree." Furthermore, respondent E.O agrees with her colleagues about the importance of faculty and staff saying:

The role that faculty and staff play is very important. Once you make that connection and once the young person really feels that they are part of and they have some control on what direction they're going on, then they tend to finish. Again, that connection point is so important and the role model.

The above participants have indicated that their position as faculty and staff is essential to graduating and retaining students. This is also true according to interviewee dean who said:

Well, faculty and staff are going to play a critical role. I think my experience so far is that we can be better in terms of our numbers of faculty. I don't see much representation among staff and people of color. I think part of it has to do with our location and I assume that some of it has to do with a lack of real intentional effort on recruiting people of color to the university.

Most of these faculty and staff members have either worked with or have referred students to each other and other individuals for assistance of some kind. Also, most of these faculty and staff sit on a committee that focuses on addressing specific issues such as the lack of people of color as interviewee dean indicated.

Progress

It was mentioned earlier by interviewees about the progress UW-Whitewater is

making through programs and initiatives. Interviewee M.S. asserts:

So even though we don't have huge numbers of ethnic diversity in our faculty and staff, we are getting there, we are trying. I sit on various search and screen committees and that is a push and I know that we are at least acknowledging that is an area for improvement and we are doing what we need to help with that.

Interviewee T.T. agrees with interviewee M.S. and made a similar comment testifying that "Progress is definitely being made when it relates to recruiting students. I feel like the recruitment efforts have improved but there is still work that needs to be done, that's really another story." As two individuals that constantly work with at risk students on a daily basis, they agree progress is being made but room for improvement is needed. To address this topic further interviewee dean feels:

I mean we do have good leadership and all of the research says you have to have good leadership. So I don't think it's an issue of leadership at this institution, I just think it's an issue of how we've done things for so long. We're kind of set in doing things in those ways and we have not been innovative in areas such as diversity in ways that we have been innovative in other areas.

Interviewee E.O. has been a staff member for almost twenty-three years and believes progress has been made over the years. She answered:

I think progress has been made because the programs are still going on. I don't have numbers before me but when I go back and look at the relationship I've had with alumni, and their feedback, I know we've made a difference. So, even though there still may be low graduation retention rates, we have proof that it is

working.

It can be presumed that all of these interviewees have the same goal in mind and believe that pushing forward and making constant progress is vital. Each interviewee works within a unit or department that works with multicultural students.

Thus, the three themes from faculty and staff interviews indicate faculty and staff are satisfied working at UW-Whitewater. The themes also point out there are actions needed to be taken in relationship to increasing graduation and retention rates. In addition to these particular themes, each faculty and staff directly shared similar feelings as the students about how they felt regarding having more faculty and staff of color on campus.

All of the themes identified in the faculty, staff, and student interviews illustrate that all of the participants are satisfied with their decision in attending and working at UW-Whitewater. The themes also illustrate the similarities among faculty, staff, and students of color regarding how each of them answered interview questions. It is evident through all interviewees' responses that UW-Whitewater is a good institution to attend and has a lot to offer those that attend. However, the participants offered feedback on work they believe needs to be improved. Overall, each participant contributed something to this study which was helpful and useful.

Discussion

Several major findings emerged from this study. First, the four research questions developed to explain what influences African American students to choose a HBCU or a PWI; the impact of a diverse faculty in PWIs and increasing graduation rates; and informed suggestions that can help improve graduation and retention rates. These

findings also help explain the theoretical framework of spiral of silence which was applied to guide this study.

For example, RQ1 reported one-on-one sit downs and actually receiving help from faculty and staff as highlights from students that were important in relation to approachability.

RQ2 proposed that students involved in student organizations and other campus activities have a better chance at helping faculty and staff become more approachable. The responses for this research question were answered by faculty, staff, and students. Ironically, all of these individuals hold positions and are active on campus.

RQ3 indicated programming, support, and marketing as the link between perceptions of graduation, retention, and college choice. For example, two of the participants who indicated transferring from a HBCU to UW-Whitewater mentioned marketing and networking as their resource of hearing about UW-Whitewater. Another student participant indicated that she heard about UW-Whitewater in California through network connections. These are examples of how UW-Whitewater's marketing efforts can attract students from different geographical areas.

Lastly, RQ4 also indicated programming, support, and marketing as the link between the perceptions of campus climate and college choice. In addition, staff member M.S. said "pushing our marketing efforts and our own faculty, staff, and students word of mouth; and showing the results and the data that we have and this shows that we're doing is working."

The next finding suggest that faculty and staff have developed and implemented a

selection of programs and other initiatives in hopes of addressing low graduation and retention rates. For example, reoccurring programs mentioned by faculty and staff during the interviews were Pathways for Success, New Student Seminar, King/Chavez Scholars Program, and the McNair Program. All of these programs are designed to enhance student's skills and prepare them for higher education and real world careers and experiences.

Addressing the theoretical framework applied to this study, the spiral of silence theory was tested via two student interview questions which probed students to talk about instances where they felt hesitant to speak out in class because of being the only African American student. The other question explored whether or not any of the students ever felt excluded from a group or event. Interesting enough, Noelle-Neumann (1974, 1991) fear of isolation assumption was refuted in this study because the selected African American students fell into the 'hard core' category in which they did not conform and were not hesitant to speak out. However, this study did not conduct an experiment or a hypothetical situation like Noelle-Neumann's train test. Consequently, fear of isolation was reported by student interviewees as a motivational push for this specific group of students.

Thus, it can be suggested that the criticisms pointed out (Scheufele & Moy, 2000) regarding Noelle-Neumann's assumptions and concepts need to be further addressed with updated studies. Therefore, it is difficult to indicate from these results if fear of isolation was tested properly. Given this study did not perform any experiments, results illustrated that these students made the decision to remain independent rather than conform.

Limitations

The first limitation included the fact that only African American faculty, staff, and students were selected for the interview portion of the study. There were two motives for only selecting this group of individuals. First, this group is underrepresented on campus and their voices deserve to be heard. Second, scholars such as D'Augelli & Hershberger (1993); Davis (2004); and Douglas (1998) have explored the experiences of African American students who attend predominately white institutions through surveys and interviews. Thus, conducting interviews and doing a comparison to their study and the current study at UW-Whitewater will perhaps bring about new themes.

The second limitation dealt with the questionnaire (Appendix B) that was developed and distributed but did not warrant qualitative data. A total of 211 surveys were distributed to seven classes in the College of Arts & Communication. These students were chosen because of access and the time given to complete this study. However, the questionnaire was thrown out and interviews were used as the preferred method.

Conclusion

This study has shown that college choice is equally important to all students not only African Americans. However, African American students face different challenges and experiences as literature has indicated. Therefore, it is fair to say that African American students have begun to make progress academically; however, low graduation and retention rates remain an issue in which institutions such as UW-Whitewater are trying to address.

The study under investigation was partially developed based on four scholars' work (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Freeman, 2005; Douglas, 1998; Davis, 2004) which suggests African American students who attend PWIs and HBCUs have different experiences which may also affect the achievement gap.

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Appendix A

CONSENT FORM

Title: College Choices among African American Students

**Principle Investigator: David Wachanga (wachangd@uww.edu), 262-472-5457
 Communications, 1217J Anderson Library, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater 53190
 Student Investigator: Terri Jones, UW-Whitewater Graduate Student
 Organization: UW-Whitewater**

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to better understand the factors, influences, and perceptions of college and the role it plays in students' college choice. The purpose of this survey is to gain a general understanding as to why students choose a specific college or university and the contributing factors/influences. This survey has 26 items and should take you no longer than 10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions please ask. This means that who you are and your answers will be kept secret, and no answers will be linked back to you.

You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate. You may choose to discontinue participation at any time, without penalty.

Any further questions you have about this study may be answered by the Student Investigator, Terri Jones at 414-419-6225 or Jonestt25@uww.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject will be answered by Denise Ehlen (ehlend@uww.edu) Director of Research and Sponsored Programs, at 262-472-5212 or Barbara Penington, Chair of the Communication Department, at 262-472-1034.

You can also contact the Ambrose University Health & Counseling Services located at 800 W. Main Street at 262-472-1300 to address personal concerns raised from survey questions.

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate. Also, I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, State, or Local laws.

Participant Name (Printed): _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

The purpose of this survey is to gain a general understanding as to why students choose a specific college or university and the contributing factors/influences.

This survey has 26 items and should take you no longer than 10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions please ask.

Thank you for completing this survey!

Part A

The following questions were developed to gain a better understanding of what influences students' college choice.

1. When did you start thinking about attending a university or college?
 - A) Middle school
 - B) High school
 - C) Other: _____

2. Who influenced your reason (s) for wanting to attend a university or college? Select two choices please.
 - A) Parent(s)
 - B) Friends
 - C) Teachers
 - D) Guidance counselor
 - E) Mentor
 - G) Other: _____

3. When you hear the word "university" or "college", what are the first three things you think about?

Response: _____, _____, _____

4. What were your main reasons for wanting to attend a university or college?
 - A.) Potential job opportunities
 - B.) To network
 - C.) Gain more knowledge

D.) All of the above

5. Are you a first generation college student?

A.) Yes

B.) No

6. Have you ever attended a HBCU (Historically Black College and Universities)? If yes, what was your main reason for transferring to UW-Whitewater?

A.) Yes

B.) No

Response: _____

7. Did you ever want to attend a HBCU? If yes, why?

A.) Yes

B.) No

Response: _____

Part B

The following questions provide a basic understanding about students' perceptions of UW-Whitewater and satisfaction about college choice.

8. Why did you choose to attend UW-Whitewater?

Response: _____

9. What were your perceptions of UW-Whitewater when you arrived on the campus?

Response: _____

10. Are you satisfied with your decision in attending UW-Whitewater?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No
- C.) Kind of satisfied

11. What areas are you satisfied, why?

Response: _____

12. Since attending UW-Whitewater, have you been involved in any student organizations?
(i.e., Black Student Union (BSU), American Marketing Association (AMA), Residence Hall Association (RHA), etc.).

- A.) Yes
- B.) No

13. Why did you choose this organization?

Response: _____

14. Do you feel faculty at UW-Whitewater is diverse?

- A.) Strongly disagree
- B.) Somewhat disagree
- C.) Disagree
- D.) Neither agree nor disagree
- E.) Somewhat agree
- F.) Agree
- G.) Strongly agree

15. Do you feel students at UW-Whitewater are diverse?

- A.) Strongly disagree
- B.) Somewhat disagree
- C.) Disagree
- D.) Neither agree nor disagree
- E.) Somewhat agree
- F.) Agree
- G.) Strongly agree

16. Do you feel staff at UW-Whitewater is diverse?

- A.) Strongly disagree
- B.) Somewhat disagree
- C.) Disagree
- D.) Neither agree nor disagree
- E.) Somewhat agree
- F.) Agree
- G.) Strongly agree

17. What changes do you think should be done to improve the diversity of faculty, students, and staff?

Response: _____

18. Have you ever felt excluded from any events or groups on campus?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No

Explain: _____

Part C

The following questions provide insight on how the media influence students' perceptions and decisions to attend college.

19. Did the media shape your perceptions about what to expect from college life?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No
- C.) Neither

Explain. _____

20. What are some elements about college and college life that the media does not portray?

Response: _____

21. Did the media play a negative or positive role in your decision to attend college?

- A.) Negative
- B.) Positive
- C.) Neither

Response: _____

22. Have you viewed any media lately that has illustrated a *positive* aspect about attending college?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No

23. Have you viewed any media lately that has illustrated a *negative* aspect about attending college?

- A.) Yes
- B.) No

Part D

The following questions provide basic demographic information of students.

24. Please indicate your sex:

- A.) Male
- B.) Female

25. What is your current year in school?

- A.) Freshman
- B.) Sophomore
- C.) Junior
- D.) Senior
- E.) Graduate student

26. Please indicate your ethnicity:

- A.) African American
- B.) Asian
- C.) Caucasian
- D.) Hispanic
- E.) Native American
- F.) Other _____

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

Title: College Choices among African American Students

**Principle Investigator: David Wachanga (wachangd@uww.edu), 262-472-5457
Communications, 1217J Anderson Library, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater 53190**

**Student Investigator: Terri Jones, UW-Whitewater Graduate Student
Organization: UW-Whitewater**

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to better understand the factors, influences, and perceptions of college and the role it plays in students' college choice.

The interviews are expected to last no more than 20 minutes and will be tape recorded. Your participation will be anonymous and confidential. This means that who you are and your answers will be kept secret, and no answers will be linked back to you.

You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate. You may choose to discontinue participation at any time, without penalty.

Any further questions you have about this study may be answered by the Student Investigator, Terri Jones at 414-419-6225 or Jonestt25@uww.edu. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject will be answered by Denise Ehlen (ehlend@uww.edu) Director of Research and Sponsored Programs, at 262-472-5212 or Barbara Penington, Chair of the Communication Department, at 262-472-1034.

You can also contact the Ambrose University Health & Counseling Services located at 800 W. Main Street at 262-472-1300 to address personal concerns raised from the open discussions.

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate. Also, I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, State, or Local laws.

Participant Name (Printed): _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Interview Recruitment Script (Students)

Greetings Students:

My name is Terri Jones, and I'm a graduate student working on thesis research. The interview part of the study is where I can use your help. You were all recommended as possible candidates.

The interviews are meant to provide feedback from eight African American students about their experiences at UW-W a predominantly White institution (PWI). The interviews will be held in 222 McCutchan Hall.... Refreshments will also be served!

I would like to get this project started as soon as next week....**but I have to make sure the day/time works** for all participating. **I have Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays open.** *What day/time works for you?* Please feel free to contact me at the office # below, stop by my office, or send an email regarding questions.

Thank You

Have a great day!

Terri Jones
Graduate Assistant, Office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor
Multicultural Affairs for Student Success
800 W. Main Street, 225 McCutchan Hall
Whitewater, WI 53190
Phone: 262-472-5330

Appendix E

Interview Questions

(Students)

1. What were your perceptions of UW-Whitewater when you arrived on the campus?
2. Are you satisfied with your decision in attending UW-Whitewater?
3. Have you ever experienced a time when you felt excluded from an event or group on campus? (Note: this exclusion can be from the majority or minority groups on campus).
4. Have you ever encountered a situation where you were hesitant to speak up about something because you were the only African American student in class?
5. What challenges do you face as an African American student at a predominantly white institution such as UW-Whitewater?
6. How important do you think the role of faculty and staff plays in improving graduation and retention rates among African American students at UW-Whitewater?
7. What have faculty and staff done to help you overcome the academic challenges you face at UW-Whitewater?
8. From a student's perspective, do you believe a students' persistence and motivation can really improve graduation and retention rates among African American students?
9. How diverse do you believe faculty, staff, and students are on this campus?
10. What do you think can be done to help bring the perceptions of UW-Whitewater closer to reality?

Appendix F

Interview Recruitment Script (Faculty and staff)

Greetings Faculty and Staff:

My name is Terri Jones, and I'm a graduate student working on thesis research. The interview part of the study is where I can use your help. You were chosen for the interview because you represent the campus and play a role in students' academic success.

The interviews are meant to provide feedback from faculty and staff about their experiences at UW-W a predominantly White institution (PWI). The interviews will be held in 222 McCutchan Hall. However, interviews can be conducted in your office if this location does not fit into your schedule.

I would like to get the interviews started as soon as next week....**but I have to make sure the day/time works** for all participating. **I have Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays open.** *What day/time works for you?* Please feel free to contact me at the office, stop by my office, or send an email regarding questions.

Thank You

Have a great day!

Terri Jones
Graduate Assistant, Office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor
Multicultural Affairs for Student Success
800 W. Main Street, 225 McCutchan Hall
Whitewater, WI 53190
Phone: 262-472-5330

Appendix G

Interview Questions (Faculty/Staff)

1. What were your perceptions of UW-Whitewater during your first visit or before you started working here?
2. Are you satisfied with your decision to work at UW-Whitewater?
3. How important do you think the role of faculty and staff plays in improving graduation and retention rates among African American students at UW-Whitewater?
4. There have been several programs and initiatives developed to address low graduation and retention rates, specifically for African American students- Has any progress been made? What areas?
5. Given the campus climate survey results, what does this say about the progress UW-Whitewater is making to address issues such as diversity and low graduation and retention rates?
6. What do you think can be done to help bring the perceptions of UW-Whitewater closer to reality?