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The purpose of this case study was to investigate the experiences of first-year African American males who participated in a Living Learning Community (LLC) while attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), to understand how, if at all, the program had any impact on the participants' retention. The conceptual framework for this study was derived from the student integration model (Tinto, 1993).

Research was conducted on the campus of a mid-sized HBCU located in the southeastern region of the United States. Over a period of four weeks, data were collected from students participating in the LLC. Data collection methods included 12 in-depth interviews, 12 residence hall observations, 4 classroom observations, and information from reports obtained from the institution. Themes and subject categories from the interviews and observations were determined using a combination of In Vivo (Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2013) and open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

Findings from the case study showed students in the LLC perceived they experienced and/or received several academic benefits associated with their participation, such as knowledge and use of academic support services including academic advising, tutorial services, and supplemental instruction. The students also perceived they experienced more social connectivity with their fellow LLC members and participated in more social events compared to those not in the LLC. Additionally, the participants commented the program made it easier for them to make friends, which facilitated a

smoother transition to college. Students also directly associated their LLC participation with increasing their likelihood of being retained.

Based on these findings, a foundation for understanding how LLCs on HBCU campuses can positively impact first-year African American males will be established. The conclusions drawn from the study will advise higher education practitioners on methods to enhance outcomes for African American male students on HBCU campuses using LLC programming.

THE EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-YEAR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN A

LIVING LEARNING COMMUNITY ATTENDING A HISTORICALLY

BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY: IMPLICATIONS

FOR RETENTION

by

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Approved by

Charles P. Gause
Committee Chair

To my parents Paul and Chenita Johnson, my grandmother Jacquelyne Barber, and great grandmother Louise Hawkins for providing a loving and caring environment, motivating me to always to strive for greatness.

To my wife Susanna Arnold Johnson: thee has been a constant source of support throughout this entire process. And to my son: I hope thee has a chance to read this and that it inspires thee to reach for great heights in thy own life.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Paul Brandon Johnson, has been approved by
the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the college retention of African American males has been an increasing concern for institutions of higher education (Palmer & Young, 2008). According to the American Council of Education (ACE, 2011), between 1998 and 2008 the number of African Americans in college increased by 55.2%. However, this population's retention and graduation percentages are far lower than their White counterparts (Harper, 2006). African American males in particular have suffered high attrition rates in higher education for myriad reasons (Palmer & Young, 2008; Palmer & Davis, 2011; Purdie & Rosser, 2011; Tinto, 1993). To assuage this growing trend, several colleges and universities have utilized diverse programs which seek to positively influence the student outcomes of first-year African American males on their campuses (Cuyjet, 2006). Research has shown that these programs, which include African American Male Initiatives (AAMI), participation in Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLO), student leadership positions, and religious affiliation, are beneficial in influencing the college experiences of African American males (Flowers, 2004; Harper, 2005; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye; 2007; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995; Watson, 2006).

Similar to these programs, LLCs can be viewed as another tool to impact the retention and first-year experience of African American male college students. Recent

literature has focused on the effect of LLCs on students attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Cambridge-Williams, Winsler, Kitsantas, & Bernard, 2013), and has noted the benefits of these residential programs on the identity development of White male college students (Jessup-Anger, Johnson, & Wawrzynski, 2012), White female college students, and women of color attending college (Inkelas & Associates, 2007). Although LLC research speaks to the impact these programs have on women, White male students, and students attending PWIs, it does not readily address the influence LLCs could have on the retention of African American male college students attending HBCUs. This study seeks to address this gap in literature by investigating the experiences of African American male college students who participate in an LLC program on an HBCU campus. This study also will seek to understand how, if at all, participation in this program has any bearing on their retention.

The chapter continues with the problem statement, which serves to frame the need for this particular study of African American male college students. Following the problem statement is the purpose of the study and its conceptual framework. Additionally, the chapter presents the research questions, definitions of key terms, and concludes with a summary of the organization of this dissertation.

Problem Statement

Two-thirds of African American men who begin their first year of college do not return the following year (Harper & Quaye, 2007). This represents the largest attrition rate among every gender, race, and ethnic group in higher education (Harper, 2006). Past research has focused on several methods for increasing the retention of African American

males (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas, & Thomas, 2004; Echols, 1998; Hood, 1992; Nyirenda & Gong, 2009; Palmer & Young, 2008; Schwartz & Washington, 2002), but not all areas have been fully explored.

First-year African American males in particular enter college with several pre-entry characteristics that put them at risk for attrition. These risk factors include low high school class rank and academic performance (Hood, 1992; Schwartz & Washington, 2002), socioeconomic status (Strayhorn, 2010), being a first-generation student (Strayhorn, 2014). Research has also noted that, once African American males are on campus, their social integration and identity development play a pivotal role in their persistence (Davis et al., 2004; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Palmer & Young, 2008; Tinto, 1993).

According to the student integration model (Tinto, 1975, 1993), which serves as the basis for this study's conceptual framework, academic and social integration are a key influence on a student's decision to stay at or depart from an institution. This, coupled with the attrition variables associated with African American males, could provide a programmatic and policy framework to directly address the retention of this student population. One such programmatic element that has not been fully investigated is the impact of participation in LLCs.

Participation in LLCs immerses students in an environment that can increase their campus engagement and involvement (Inkelas & Associates, 2007; Purdie & Rosser, 2011; R. D. Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006), and further their identity development and construction (Jessup-Anger et al., 2012), all of which have been

attributed with positively impacting student retention (Tinto, 1993). Due to a lack of research, these benefits can only be anecdotally applied toward African American males (Palmer & Young, 2008). Although research on African American males has increased (Davis et al., 2004; Hood, 1992; Nyirenda & Gong, 2009; Schwartz & Washington, 2002), the majority of retention research has been a quantitative account of their experiences at PWIs (Echols, 1998; Guiffrida, 2003; Hood, 1992). However, African American men have also been shown to experience campus disengagement, attrition, and decreased involvement at HBCU campuses (Palmer, Maramba, & Dancy, 2013).

With their ability to affect student experiences in cognitive and non-cognitive areas (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pike, 1999; Pike, Schroeder, & Berry, 1997), LLCs have become a popular addition to college campuses, facilitating increased student engagement, retention, and overall undergraduate experience (Stassen, 2003; Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Although research concerning LLCs has emphasized its ability to positively impact a student's first-year experience (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013; Purdie & Rosser, 2011; R. D. Reason et al., 2006; Tinto, Love, & Russo, 1994), a gap in the LLC and retention literature exists regarding the examination of how, if at all, LLC participation affects the experiences and retention of African American males at an HBCU.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of first-year African American males participating in an LLC on an HBCU campus, to understand how, if at all, the program had any impact on the participants' retention. To this end, this study

utilized the qualitative research method of a case study to investigate the experiences of first-year African American male students who participated in LLC programming at a mid-sized southeastern HBCU.

Conceptual Framework

Previous qualitative studies regarding African American males have focused on their involvement in campus organizations and identity development on PWI campuses (Davis et al., 2004; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007), but there are few studies that place emphasis on the experiences of African American males and their retention on HBCU campuses (Palmer & Young, 2008). The limited exploration of these perspectives creates a gap in the African America male literature, particularly regarding their experiences participating in LLCs. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting an investigation of African American male college student experiences participating in an LLC on an HBCU campus.

The method chosen to understand these experiences is the case study. Because this research places emphasis on the students' experiences in the LLC, it will take place in the students' environment, which Yin (2014) classified as a real-life setting, a significant component in case study research. Case studies also asks 'how' questions that are not easily addressed by quantitative data (Yin, 2014). Meyer (2001) and Yin (2014) noted studies that utilized 'how' questions are best served by the case study method of qualitative research. Case studies are also valuable for discovering behaviors, processes, or anything of which we have little knowledge (Meyer, 2001).

Using a qualitative approach to research African American males is supported by studies conducted by Davis et al. (2004), Guiffrida (2003), Harper and Harris (2006), Harper and Quaye (2007), and Palmer and Young (2008). Current LLC research also supports the use of qualitative methods (Inkelas & Associates, 2012; Jessup-Anger et al., 2012; Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010). Collectively, these qualitative studies produced rich data generated by the students' narrative and provided the 'how' that is often lost in quantitative analysis. Both of these areas of research firmly offer justification for the use of qualitative methods to investigate the experiences of African American males and LLCs. Additional rationale concerning the use of a qualitative approach is discussed in Chapter III.

Concept Map

The following concept map, Figure 1, visually represents the conceptual framework for this study. It presents the major concepts considered when researching LLCs and their potential impact on first-year African American male college student retention. The student integration model (Tinto, 1993) serves as the theoretical foundation for which the conceptual framework is based. Specifically, Tinto (1993) spoke of the need for a student to be integrated into the academic system of campus, the social system, or both. Academic integration can be accomplished by having access to and a relationship with faculty as well as by having knowledge of academic support services and using those services. For social integration, students need to make connections with peers and feel like they have a vested interest in the social realm of the institution. Furthermore, Tinto's (1993) model addresses the interaction between the

academic and social systems, noting that an aspect of one system will undoubtedly have

an effect on the alternative system.
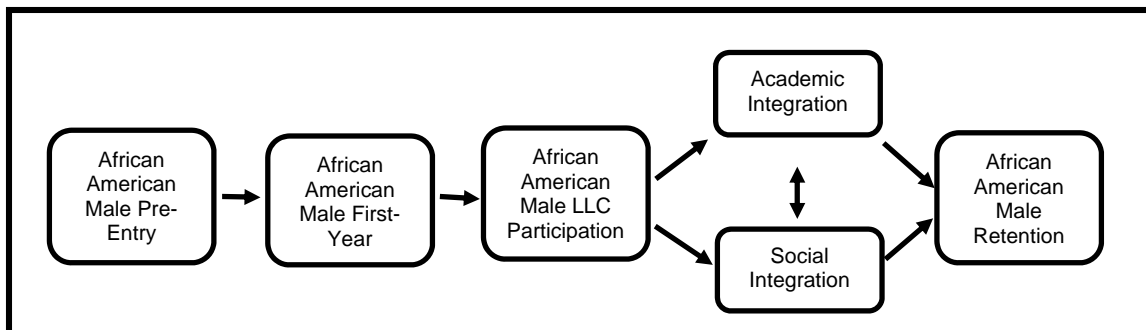
Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework Diagram.* Graphic representation of how an LLC is a
mechanism that facilitates academic and social integration of first-year African American
male college students resulting in retention.

The conceptual framework begins with the students' pre-entry characteristics—

potential risk factors that first-year African American male students bring with them as

they transition into college. These variables can include high school GPA, class rank,

first-generation status, socioeconomic status, and level of academic preparedness. The

second box represents the first academic year for the African American male student. At

this point, pre-entry factors begin to impact the student. In addition, the student is faced

with a host of transitional experiences many new first-year students encounter, such as

adapting to the rigors of college coursework and adjusting to their newfound freedom.

The third box represents the students' participation in the LLC. Here, LLC

participation mitigates pre-entry risk factors associated with student attrition and provides

additional college transition support for non-at-risk students through academic and

socially engaging programming. Because LLC participation engages students

academically and socially, the conceptual framework splits. One box addresses the students' academic integration. The other represents the students' social integration. Students should encounter both academic and social integration opportunities due to the programming offered by the LLC.

Representing the interaction between the academic and social components of the framework is a two-sided arrow. This represents the interaction between the academic and social systems described in the student integration model (Tinto, 1993). For example, an LLC participant befriends his roommate and suitemates. They form social bonds that result in group outings to basketball games and other campus events. A byproduct of the participants' social relationship could be the formation of study groups or attendance at tutoring sessions together, thus affecting both the students' academic and social integration.

Moving to the right of the academic and social integration boxes is the final step in the conceptual framework, student retention. This box represents the participants' successful academic and/or social integration due to the LLC addressing pre-entry factors and transitional experiences associated with the first year of college, resulting in the participants' retention.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

Each question associated with this study has been formulated to address the components of the conceptual framework and serve as a guide toward understanding the experiences of first-year African American males participating in an LLC on an HBCU campus.

1. What are the perceived experiences of first-year African American males who participate in an LLC on an HBCU campus?

2. How, if at all, does a student's pre-entry characteristics impact their perceived experience during the first year of college?

3. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived academic integration?

4. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived social integration?

5. How, if at all, is first-year African American male retention impacted by the students' perceived LLC participation?

Definition of Terms

In an effort to facilitate a common understanding within the confines of this study, the definitions of specific terms used in this study are provided.

African American—Defined as member of an ethnic group that purports to mainly have African ancestry and either are born in the United States of America or are immigrants from African or the Caribbean. (Jackson, 2001). It is a term often used interchangeably with Black, however this study only will utilize the identifying term of African American.

Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO)—Refers to any one of nine historically Black or African American fraternities and sororities on college or university campuses.

Living Learning Community (LLC)—An LLC refers to a program whereby students pursue a curricular or co-curricular theme by attending classes together, and also

live together in a reserved section of a residence hall (Inkelas, Vogt, Longerbeam, Owen, & Johnson, 2006).

Historically Black College or University (HBCU)—As defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965, an HBCU is any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964 whose principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI)—Refers to an institution of higher education in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (M. C. Brown & Dancy, 2010).

Persistence—For this study persistence is described as the successful progression or matriculation of a college student toward graduation from semester to semester.

Retention—For this study, retention is defined as the process by which a student is enrolled in an institution of higher education during the beginning of the fall academic year, persists to the following semester and successfully returns for the successive fall semester. Within the confines of this study, the terms persistence and retention are not used interchangeably; persistence is used for semester to semester progression, and retention from school year to school year.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I is an introduction to the study and provides information regarding the purpose of the study, the study's conceptual framework, research questions, and definition of relevant terms. Chapter II provides a

review of extant literature regarding first-year African American male college students, LLCs, and student retention. Chapter III describes the case study methodology design chosen for this study. Sources of data, methods of data collection and analysis, validity, and researcher subjectivity are covered in this chapter. Chapter IV presents the findings for the study, and is separated into five distinct sections. Each section has findings specific to the five research questions. Chapter V discusses the findings from the study. It also presents the study's implications for practice, implications for higher education research, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a problem statement that framed the need for additional research concerning first-year African American males who attend HBCUs. It posited that despite the increasing research on African American male retention and student success, the bulk of research has been isolated to PWI campuses, omitting the experiences African American males have while attending an HBCU. The chapter also suggested that LLCs could provide a means to positively affect the retention of African American males, but current LLC research is limited with studies involving non-minority males or women, and were conducted on PWI campuses. With an identified gap in the African American male literature and LLC literature, the purpose of the study was offered along with a conceptual framework and method of study. Finally, the five research questions designed to address components of the conceptual framework were given.

Chapter II will provide a review of literature addressing leading theories of college student retention and engagement, African American male college student retention attributors, and LLCs.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the experiences of first-year African American males who participated in an LLC while attending an HBCU, in order to understand potential implications for participant retention. It is important before proceeding further to discuss the existing literature relevant to the components this study addresses. This will be accomplished through the following review of literature, which discusses theories, models, and studies regarding student retention, African American male retention, and LLCs. The review of literature begins with foundational student attrition literature, transitions to literature specific to African American male student success, and concludes with LLC literature.

Foundational Retention and Attrition Theory

Student retention is the measure of an institution's ability to effectively deliver instruction and support services for student success (Nyirenda & Gong, 2009). Given these criteria, several perspectives have been developed which address the many reasons why students do not return the following year (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1980, 1983; Cabrera, Castaneda, & Nora, 1993; Tinto, 1975, 1993). This section discusses prominent theories, models, and frameworks relevant to student retention. The student integration model (Tinto, 1993) will be basis for the conceptual framework of this qualitative study;

therefore, a more in-depth review of literature regarding this particular model will be provided compared to literature on other retention and attrition theories.

Student Integration Model

Vincent Tinto's (1993) student integration model may be one of the most frequently cited theories in student retention literature based on the thousands of studies on the subject it has generated (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Initially based on Durkeim's (1953) suicide model, Tinto's introductory model of integration (Tinto, 1975) posited that attrition was connected to formal and informal student interaction. Specifically, Tinto's (1975) model addressed the degree to which students integrated into a college's social and academic environments. Within this model, social interaction with faculty members and peers contributed to social integration, while grades and intellectual development contributed to academic integration. Successful integration led to further institutional and academic goal commitment, contributing to a student's persistence and retention.

Later, the student integration model was expanded to include a concept map that highlighted causes of student departure (Tinto, 1993). Within the expanded student integration model, Tinto (1993) incorporated aspects of Bean's (1980) synthesis model of attrition, which expounded upon student background characteristics. Tinto (1993) began the model with pre-college factors because these influences from students' pre-college environments have a direct effect on their first-year experience and may also be linked to their departure decision. Furthermore, Tinto (1993) alluded to the importance of the first-

year experience and noted that first-year students are potentially the most at-risk for early departure.

After the pre-entry characteristics, the model transitions to the creation of goals and commitments between the student and the institution. The model separates the student's experience into two distinct areas: the academic system and the social system, both of which divide further into formal and informal structures. Experiences within these two systems advance the student toward academic or social integration or push them away from it. According to the model, these positive or negative experiences contribute directly to the student's decision to persist. In addition to expounding upon the integration process, Tinto (1993) also addressed various student populations such as African Americans, low-income, first generation, adult, and transfer students who might require tailored interventions to assist in their integration.

Over the three decades since the first iteration of the student integration model (Tinto, 1975) was published, there have been additions that note the importance of academic advising during a student's first year (Tinto, 1999), the impact of a student's commitment on their decision to persist or drop out, and the need for students to match their expectations to the institutional mission (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Throughout the model's evolution, scholars have scrutinized its efficacy in articulating the process of student departure, and have questioned its generalizability toward other student groups. To this end, research conducted by such scholars as Brunsden, Davies, Shevlin, and Bracken (2000), Deil-Amen (2011), Duquette (2000), Halpin (1990), Liu and Liu (2000), Nora (1987, 1990), Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2011), Pascarella and

Terenzini (1983), Sweet (1986), and Tierney (1992) sought to test the validity of the student integration model (Tinto, 1993) on its own merit and on various student and institutional types.

   Criticism of the model. Literature concerning the student integration model (Tinto, 1993) has produced several critiques regarding its applicability outside of traditional freshman student populations and its inability to generalize among genders, ethnicities, and institution types (Metz, 2004). Tierney (1992) offered a critique of the student integration model (Tinto, 1993) from an anthropological perspective. Concerned with the model's lack of universality, Tierney (1992) noted that the concepts used to describe the process of departure do not apply to all people in all settings, as was suggested by Tinto. Examining the social and academic components of the model, Tierney (1992) noted that those elements were too broad and did not speak to non-traditional elements in higher education. Tierney's (1992) critique was bolstered by further studies and criticism of the student integration model (Tinto, 1993). These studies commented on the model's lack of functionality, as well as an inability to take into account organizational structure affecting the persistence model, the experiences of minorities in higher education, and the impact of family on student persistence (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Brunsden et al., 2000; Guiffrida, 2005; Palmer et al., 2011).

   A qualitative study conducted by Palmer et al. (2011) of African American males attending an HBCU explored their college experience and how the student integration model (Tinto, 1993) applied to their persistence. Eleven students were interviewed during this study which revealed that family interaction or the connection the student has

with their family played an important role in their persistence. This finding ran contrary

to the student integration model (Tinto, 1993), which called for the separation of the

student from their past community or environment. The study conducted by Palmer et al.

(2011) found its methodological footing in Guiffrida's (2005) investigation of the impact

of families on the persistence and academic success of high- and low-achieving African

American students at a PWI. This study was the first to challenge Tinto's (1993)

separation assertion concerning African American college students, and found that their

connection to family played a significant role in their academic success by contributing to

their emotional, academic, and financial support (Guiffrida, 2005).

Additional empirical criticism of Tinto's (1993) model as a retention predictor is

found in a quantitative study conducted by Brunsden et al. (2000), which focused on

students' decision to drop out. The study of 264 first-year, degree-seeking students

produced data inconsistent with Tinto's (1993) model regarding the connection of

dropout decisions with social and academic integration. Brunsden et al. (2000) noted that

their findings were in direct contrast with the "largely supportive, previous investigations

into Tinto's (1993) model" (p. 305). The authors surmised that the cause of such a

discrepancy resulted from the format of the model "not being rigidly defined, but instead

relies on researchers' subjective conceptualization…findings are likely to differ with each

separate conceptualization of the model" (Brunsden et al., 2000, p. 305).

Brunsden et al. (2000) also discussed differences between their study and others

investigating the student integration model (Tinto, 1993). Specifically, the authors

contended that their study was of the entire model, while others such as Deil-Amen

(2011), Halpin (1990), Liu and Liu (2000), and Nora (1987, 1990) focused on specific parts of the model or student sub-populations. Such a narrow focus would inevitably verify one component but fail to explain the other, such as social integration or background characteristics (Brunsden et al., 2000).

Berger and Braxton's (1998) investigation into the student departure puzzle supported the findings made by Brunsden et al. (2000). Berger and Braxton (1998) noted that due to limitations on the study of the model, and the model itself, that a student's social integration is not explained. The authors offered organizational aspects of the institution, such as "size, selectivity, and control" (p. 105), could provide a reason for social integration. To test this, Berger and Braxton (1998) conducted a study over the course of an academic year on the first-year persistence of 1,343 students at a highly selective, private, Research 1 institution.

Three organizational attributes were used in Berger and Braxton's (2000) study: institutional communication, fairness in policy and rule enforcement, and participation in decision making. The study identified both direct and indirect effects of organizational attributes on students' social integration. According to their findings, each attribute impacted social integration in different ways. For instance, institutional communication had a positive impact on peer relationships. Fairness in enforcing polices and rules had a positive effect on both peer and faculty relations, and participating in decision making positively affected faculty relations. Indirectly, all three organizational attributes had significant effects on students' persistence (Berger & Braxton, 2000). Cumulative

findings from Berger and Braxton's (2000) study indicated a plausible need to revise the student integration model (Tinto, 1993) to include organizational influences.

Support of the model. The previous section discussed research that disproved, identified flaws in, or called for the complete revision of the student integration model (Tinto, 1993). However, other tests of the model (Del-Amen, 2011; Duquette, 2000; Halpin, 1990; Liu & Liu, 2000; Nora, 1987, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Sweet, 1986) have yielded results opposing these detractors. These results affirm the predictive nature of the entire model, or at least part of the model's efficacy, toward different student sub-populations and institution types, contrary to the findings of Brunsden et al. (2000).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) tested the validity of the student integration model (Tinto, 1993) as a whole, and on its intended population of first-year residential students. This quantitative study of 763 residential first-year students utilized a path analysis to test the validity of the model. Results from the study led Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) to validate the model, stating that "it would appear that the constructs outlined in Tinto's model have reasonable predictive power in explaining variance in freshman year persistence/voluntary withdrawal decisions" (p. 224). Furthermore, once the data was disaggregated, males and females differed among the factors responsible for their persistence or dropout. For males, persistence was attributed more to their academic integration than social integration. The opposite was noted for females in the study.

Similar to Pascarella and Terenzini's (1983) study, Liu and Liu (2000) examined the impact of social and academic integration on student retention and satisfaction.

Results from the study of 378 freshmen produced results that supported the academic integration component of Tinto's (1993) model. Furthermore, student satisfaction was positively influenced by academic performance, academic integration, and social integration. Social integration was significantly connected to satisfaction, but not related to academic performance. With the evidence presented, Liu and Liu (2000) concluded that academic integration, not social integration, is a valid predictor of retention.

Additional retention studies have developed outside of the traditional four-year college and university environment to test Tinto's (1993) model on a variety of students and institutional types. Studies conducted by Del-Amen (2011), Halpin (1990), and Nora (1987, 1990) spoke to the student integration model's (Tinto, 1993) application to students attending community college. Halpin's (1990) study of 227 community college students showed that the student integration model (Tinto, 1993), specifically the academic integration component, accurately predicted persistence and exit outcomes. Nora's (1987, 1990) empirical research echoed the validity of Tinto's (1993) model for community college students and furthered its generalizability to students of color and non-four-year institutions of higher education, due to the study's emphasis on Latino students.

Results from Nora's (1987) study of 227 two-year Chicano college students showed that academic and social integration were connected to persistence only when influenced by institutional goals and commitments. This study supports the student integration model (Tinto, 1993) and provides further evidence of the importance of academic and social integration in a student's decision to leave as well as suggests that

the model could be generalized to other ethnicities and institutional types. A follow-up

study (Nora, 1990) revealed an additional predictor in the dropout equation: the

availability of financial aid. Results from the study found that campus-based financial

aid programs had a significant impact on community college student retention. For

Hispanic students, it was noted that all types of aid were an important determinant to their

persistence (Nora, 1990).

In a more recent study of community college students, Del-Amen (2011)

proposed a revival of social and academic integration thinking concerning the use of the

student integration model (Tinto, 1993) on this student population. Del-Amen (2011)

noted that among the prominent retention and persistence models, the student integration

model (Tinto, 1993) is the most flexible, as it is not solely dependent on the traditional

residential college student. Through a multi-campus qualitative study of 238 community

college students, staff, and faculty, Del-Amen (2011) sought to understand the

experiences of the students in this setting with regard to their social and academic

integration. The campus types included small urban, large downtown, non-profit, and

for-profit community colleges. Results from the qualitative study supported findings

from Halpin (1990) and Nora (1987, 1990) concerning the importance of academic

integration in the persistence process. It also indicated that traditional methods of social

integration were unrelated to the persistence of community college students. Although

the findings from Del-Amen (2011) found academic integration to be more prominent in

this setting, there was also a blending of the academic and social aspects into what Del-

Amen (2011) characterized as "socio-academic moments" (p. 82). In a community

college setting offering limited student-to-student interaction and student-to-faculty and -

staff interaction, students from all 14 of the institutions in the study cited these socio-

academic integration moments as a precursor to their persistence. Respondents

commented on their use of class time to engage in social activities with classmates and

instructors to counteract the lack of social integration opportunities offered in a

community college setting (Del-Amen, 2011).

Sweet's (1986) study of 356 adult students enrolled in online courses sought to

validate the student integration model's (Tinto, 1993) usefulness in predicting the

retention of distance education students. Using discriminant analysis, the study showed

that the model was responsible for predicting 32% of persistence and withdrawal

decisions by the students. The greatest contributor to the model's predictive ability was

the students' academic and social integration, which represented 18% of the variance

explained in the study. Furthermore, the discriminant analysis identified students'

background characteristics as the second largest contributor to the model's predictive

ability, explaining 11% of the variance. In addition to the discriminant analysis, a path

analysis was conducted to examine variable relationships. For the distance education

students in this study, goal satisfaction was one of the strongest influences on persistence.

Moreover, the students' academic and social integration contributed strongly to goal

satisfaction. Subsequent social and academic relationships were also found to contribute

to the students' institutional commitment. As evidenced by this study, the student

integration model (Tinto, 1993) was only partially able to account for reasons pertaining

to student dropout. Despite this, Sweet (1986) still deemed the student integration model

(Tinto, 1993) "an appropriate framework for further research on student dropout from non-traditional educational institutions" (p. 210).

Duquette (2000) studied the applicability of the student integration model (Tinto, 1993) to students with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to investigate three variables: academic integration, social integration, and individual (background) characteristics that could account for the retention or attrition of disabled students. Thirty-six students were given a questionnaire. Of the 36, 17 participated in additional audio-recorded in-depth interviews, and 6 participated in a focus group. Results from the study showed the students' academic and social integration were important predictors of their retention. Regarding academic integration, the students reported they felt comfortable with the difficulty and expectations of college coursework and were aware of the academic support programs on their campus. Their social integration took the form of shared coffee time in the morning or weekend social activities together. Other students found support from faculty during times of discouragement. Concerning departure, only 4 of the 17 interviewed students had considered leaving the institution. Two students did leave but later returned. According to Duquette (2000), this related to their goal commitment in completing their education and represented an additional component of the student integration model (Tinto, 1993).

Despite the varying perspectives regarding the efficacy of Tinto's (1993) student integration model, it is still one of the most recognizable retention models in higher education (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Palmer et al., 2011). The literature concerning Tinto's seminal work has yielded conflicting findings. Because of this

variability in the literature regarding the student integration model (Tinto, 1993), it is important for higher education researchers to continue testing and applying this model to multiple cases in order to fully understand how it may or may not be beneficial to the body of knowledge concerning student retention.

Causal and Industrial Models of Student Attrition

Although the publication of the student integration model (Tinto, 1975) served as a catalyst for a national emphasis on student retention, it also served as a framework for the construction of subsequent theories and models (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). One such example was created by synthesizing multiple attrition theories and was based on an employee turnover model (Price, 1977). From this, Bean (1980) sought to create a causal model for why students leave college. The resulting synthesized model of attrition (Bean, 1980) incorporated four variables: "the dependent variable, drop-out; the intervening variables, satisfaction and institutional commitment; the organizational determinants; and the background variables" (p. 157).

Each subsequent variable was accompanied by several sub-topics or categories. Background variables consisted of: socioeconomic status, residence (in state vs. out of state), size of students' home town, and the distance from the institution to the students' hometown. Organizational determinants consisted of: routinization, development, practical value, institutional quality, integration, university GPA, goal commitment, communication, distributive justice, centralization, advisor, staff/faculty relationship, campus job, major area, major certainty, housing, campus organizations, and opportunity.

The indicated intervening variables were satisfaction and institutional commitment (Bean, 1980).

To determine the efficacy of this causal model, Bean (1980) analyzed survey responses from 1,111 first-year males and females. Results from the multiple regression and path analysis showed that the most important variable related to dropout for women was institutional commitment, followed by performance and loyalty toward membership in a campus organization. For men, institutional commitment was also the primary variable related to dropout, followed by university GPA and satisfaction. Bean (1980) noted that satisfaction ran contrary to traditional notions of persistence but could refer to a student being so satisfied with the institution that his academic pursuits decrease, leading to dropout. Overall, findings from Bean's (1980) study validated his earlier critiques of previous attrition theory, particularly the student integration model (Tinto, 1975); he had stated that the previous theories did not provide a process for causal linkages. Bean's (1980) attrition model successfully synthesized attrition theory and an employee turnover model to produce a causal framework to explain student dropout.

Integrating the disparate fields of higher education and business once again, Bean (1983) adapted a more updated employee turnover model (Price & Mueller, 1981) to create an industrial model of student attrition. This model offered 14 variables impacting a student's level of satisfaction, which according to Bean (1983), has a direct correlation to their intent to leave.

To test this newly developed model, Bean conducted a quantitative study of 820 female college first-year student during their spring semester using a 98-item survey

instrument. Females were used for this study because the prior Price and Mueller (1981) model was based on turnover in a nursing program, which at that time was female-only. Results from this study show that 48% of the reason why a student would drop out is connected to their level of satisfaction and intent to leave. One missing component from this industrial model of student attrition was background characteristics. This was originally presented with Bean's (1980) causal model of student attrition, and was re-introduced in later models (Bean, 1990; Eaton & Bean, 1995).

Integrative Model of Attrition

Taking aspects of both Bean's (1980) student attrition model and the student integration model (Tinto, 1975), Cabrera et al. (1993) proposed an integrative model of student attrition. The authors noted that both the student integration model (Tinto, 1975) and the student attrition model (Bean, 1980) referred to a causal relationship between persistence and interactions. Their model utilized components from both models and consolidated them into two environmental variables and four endogenous variables. Environmental variables included: encouragement from friends and family and finance attitudes. Endogenous variables consisted of: academic integration, social integration, institutional commitment, and goal commitment. Persistence was also separated into two dichotomous variables of intent to persist and persistence.

Three models were tested in order to filter unrelated persistence components from the finalized model. To do this, Cabrera et al. (1993) conducted surveys of 466 first-time first-year students at two points in the academic year, during the fall and spring semesters, and analyzed their academic transcripts. Findings from the finalized model

indicated that 48% of persistence was attributed to students' intent to persist with 46% being attributed to their GPA. Students' intent to persist was attributed to their institutional commitment (52%) followed by encouragement from family and friends (44%). Academic and social integration were not significant contributors to persistence or intent to persist.

Student Involvement Theory

Both Bean (1980, 1983) and Tinto (1975, 1993) argued that student persistence is a compilation of social, environmental, and academic interactions (Cabrera et al., 1993). Astin's (1984) student involvement theory takes a slightly different approach to addressing student retention and persistence. His theory draws from over 20 years of student development research and similarly alludes to the decision-making power demonstrated by a student's involvement or lack of involvement in the college environment.

Astin's (1984) theory defines involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). From this perspective, a highly involved student will have more connections on campus due to their increased level of involvement. Conversely, less involved students are more withdrawn from campus and do not benefit from the development of student and faculty relationships formed through interaction.

Several studies have built upon Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and have documented the positive effects of increased student involvement on African American student retention (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Flowers, 2004;

Harper, 2004; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007). The foundational models of Astin (1984), Bean (1980, 1983), and Tinto (1975, 1993), and literature utilizing these models (Cabrera et al., 1993; Deil-Amen, 2011, Duquette, 2000; Eaton & Bean, 1995; Halpin, 1990; Liu & Liu, 2000; Nora, 1987, 1990; Palmer et al., 2011, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Sweet, 1986) have provided empirical evidence for student departure. Furthermore, their findings offer numerous practical applications proven to affect student retention. The following section presents literature pertaining to characteristics that specifically influence the retention of African American males.

African American Male College Student Retention

The collegiate success of African American male students is not just a concern at majority institutions (Davis et al., 2004; Echols, 1998; Hood, 1992; Nyirenda & Gong, 2009; Palmer & Young, 2008; Schwartz & Washington, 2002). The attention paid to their success and retention issues at PWIs is warranted, as 70% of African American students attending PWIs do not complete their undergraduate education. It does, however, shroud the growing concern at other institutions such as HBCUs where 20% of African American males also fail to complete their undergraduate education (Davis et al., 2004). Despite, or perhaps due to these disappointing statistics, research has been conducted to identify retention predictors and attributes associated with increasing the student retention outcomes for African American males. The following section presents an overview of literature that has identified such characteristics and trends at both PWIs and HBCUs.

Pre-Entry Characteristics

After reviewing first-year student persistence and retention literature, Ishler and Upcraft (2005) determined the most salient pre-entry student characteristics to be: prior academic achievement, sex, age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, familial support, and initial commitment to obtaining a degree. The characteristic with the most influence on retention was prior academic achievement (Ishler & Upcraft, 2005). Results from Astin's (1997) study of national longitudinal data concluded "student's high school grades, admissions test scores, sex, and race" (p. 649) accounted for the bulk of the variance in retention that can be predicted from entering freshmen characteristics. Tools used to measure or determine prior academic achievement were standardized tests and high school GPA (Astin 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Astin (1997) suggested that of all the metrics available, high school GPA was the most useful in predicting retention. A meta-analysis conducted by Robbins et al. (2004) of 109 studies confirmed Astin's (1997) results, finding high school GPA as a better predictor of persistence and retention than standardized test scores. Literature concerning African American male retention has also identified pre-college factors as a prominent predictor of transition and success (Hood, 1992; Nyirenda & Gong, 2009; Palmer & Davis, 2011; Palmer & Young, 2008; Schwartz & Washington, 2002).

Hood (1992) investigated the predictive ability of pre-college variables, such as class rank and standardized test scores, on GPA and enrollment status of African American males at PWIs. Findings from Hood (1992) indicated that high school class rank was significant in predicting semester GPA levels and the subsequent enrollment

status for African American males. The author did caution that because of the institution's student classification methods, these results, while statistically significant, were insufficient in their ability to distinguish persisting students from those who were dismissed for academic reasons or dropped out.

Schwartz and Washington's (2002) quantitative study shifted the retention focus from PWI campuses to HBCUs. Findings from their study of 229 African American male first-year students attending an HBCU showed significant relationships between their high school grades, class rank, academic performance, and first-year college retention. For Schwartz and Washington (2002), the most significant cognitive predictor of African American male retention was their high school class rank, confirming findings from Hood (1992). Similarly, Nyirenda and Gong (2009) studied pre-entry cognitive factors of first-year African American students attending a mid-Atlantic HBCU. Results from the logistic regression and use of Swail, Redd, and Perna's (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement revealed that the cognitive factor of spring semester GPA was a strong predictor of student retention for students on that campus.

Family influence and pre-college programs also have been associated with the college success of African American males. Harper (2012) found this to the true in a study of 219 African American male college students. The participants attributed strong parental involvement as the reason they attended college and were so successful. When comparing themselves to friends who were not enrolled in college, the students spoke of a lack of high expectations set by parents. Even parents who had not obtained a college education had high collegiate expectations of their children and sought out summer

support programs and academic resources to ensure they met those expectations. These and other findings were the product of the National Study of Black Male College Achievement (Harper, 2012) which spanned 40 colleges and universities and included representation from 12 HBCUs. This study sought to shift the paradigm of African American male literature from a deficit perspective to success-driven research. All of the participants earned cumulative GPAs of 3.0 or higher and were recommended by campus administrators or campus organizational leaders.

Strayhorn (2010) also found parental involvement to be a strong predictor of African American male student success and that the level of involvement was connected to an increase or decrease in their GPAs. In a multivariate analysis of the influence of background traits on the academic achievement of African American and Latino males, Strayhorn (2010) found that not only socioeconomic status (a component of social capital) but also the mother's expectation had a greater effect on African American male undergraduate academic performance when compared to Latino males. Findings also indicated that African American males benefited from their participation in pre-college transition programs such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and GEAR Up. However, the author did express caution and issued a call for further research, as many pre-college programs offer varied services such as supplemental instruction, college planning, and mentorship. Each of these areas could benefit the student equally in varied ways, making it difficult to generalize that all pre-college programs have a positive effect on African American male college success.

However, Palmer and Young (2008) did conduct a study of a specific type of pre-college program and whether participation affected African American male retention. Their study focused on the factors that contributed to college success for African American males who enter college academically underprepared. Eleven college juniors and seniors attending a public HBCU were interviewed after taking part in a pre-college program for academically underprepared students. Results showed that increased involvement, social and academic integration, and development of strong relationships with faculty and staff were associated with the students' persistence. The pre-college program was created to improve academic deficiencies but it also had an additional effect of addressing the students' social and campus integration (Palmer & Young, 2008). Although literature (Hood, 1992; Nyirenda & Gong, 2009; Palmer & Davis, 2011; Schwartz & Washington, 2002) points to strong academic pre-entry characteristics being essential to retention, data from Harper (2012), Palmer and Young (2008), and Strayhorn (2010) suggest that pre-college academic variables are not solely responsible for African American male retention (Echols, 1998).

Student Involvement and Engagement

Alexander Astin (1984) posited the outcomes of his theory of student involvement as being directly proportional to the quantity and quality of the physical and psychological investment the student has in that particular activity. Therefore, increasing the quantity of involvement would increase the quality of a student's college experience. Engagement was described by Kuh (2009) as the time and effort students devote to activities linked to their desired outcomes. Engagement typically consists of experiences

such as student-faculty interactions, discussions in a particular course, peer interactions, and deep active learning (Strayhorn & DeVita, 2010). Several authors have researched student involvement and engagement with particular attention paid to its effect on student outcomes of African American students in higher education (C. Brown, 2006; Flowers, 2004; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Outside of the classroom. Flowers (2004), for instance, sought to understand the effects of involvement on African American student development outcomes. Data was analyzed from 7,923 African American students between 1990 and 2000 attending institutions that participated in the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ). Eighty-two percent of the institutions sampled were PWIs. Data showed that out-of-class as well as in-class experiences had a positive impact on African American college student development. Some experiences produced greater impacts on development (e.g. library experiences, course learning experiences, personal experiences) while others (e.g. student union experiences, athletic and recreation experiences, club and organization student experiences) did not.

Regarding African American males, Harper (2006) reported that undergraduate African American males who were more active in campus activities and organizations expressed higher gains from their college experiences. The students also demonstrated six practical competencies that, according to Kuh, Palmer, and Kish (2003), were considered "critical to success during and after college" (p. 19). These competencies included: "working with people from different backgrounds, time management,

teamwork, communicating in small groups, delegating responsibility, and navigating political environments" (Harper, 2006, p. 77).

Similar non-cognitive findings were found in a qualitative study of 25 African American men attending a PWI. Results from C. Brown (2006) indicated the participants perceived their involvement in activities or particular relationships as beneficial, which facilitated their "survival" (p. 62) on campus. The relationships and activities mentioned by the participants included the student government association, intramural athletics, use of the student union, mentoring, and peer relationships. C. Brown (2006) also offered the following suggestions as to how student affairs practitioners and campus leaders could create environments that would foster increased African American male student involvement:

- Organize programs for African American male college students designed to introduce them to campus organizations, membership and leadership opportunities.

- Provide opportunities for African American males to become involved in campus organizations and to assume leadership roles by educating majority students about the plight of these students and the stereotypes they encounter on a daily basis.

- Establish a mentoring program during new student orientation, encouraging African American faculty and staff to mentor African American male students.

- Create opportunities for African American males to build a sense of community.

- Provide opportunities for African American males to develop meaningful peer relationships. (p. 64)

Fraternity membership. Extant studies conducted at both PWI and HBCU campuses have narrowed involvement and engagement research solely to investigate the effects of organizational participation on African American students. These authors have attributed organizational involvement with success outcomes for African American male and female students (Guffrida, 2003; Harper & Harris, 2006; Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011).

Harper and Harris (2006) reported that participation in BGLOs created valuable sources for African American male social support, especially at PWIs. In addition, students benefitted from leadership and cognitive development, which has been associated with certain levels of academic achievement. Guffrida's (2003) previous study found similar results, in that Greek Letter participation aided in the social integration of African American students who attended PWIs. McClure (2006) went further, noting that BGLO affiliation was central in helping African American males succeed in college.

Engagement levels of Greek-affiliated African American students attending both HBCUs and PWIs were studied by Patton et al. (2011). Their analysis of data from the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) of 9,539 African American students indicated that organizational involvement was associated with social connectivity and the

development of leadership skills. These results paralleled findings from Harper and

Harris (2006) and Guffrida (2003). Further findings showed the level of engagement of

Greek-affiliated African American students at HBCUs exceeded that of their peers at

majority institutions. The authors hypothesized that African American students might

somehow be experiencing issues at a PWI such as a 'chilly' campus racial climate

(Palmer & Gasman, 2008) that prompted feelings of isolation, marginalization, and

exclusion (Patton et al., 2011) which are not prevalent on HBCU campuses. These

experiences could account for the disparity in engagement levels.

African American Male Initiatives

AAMIs or BMIs (Black Male Initiatives) have been documented as programs that

have facilitated the engagement and involvement of African American males both at

PWIs and HBCUs (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006; Bailey, 2006; Palmer et al., 2013). The

design and structure of these programs vary from single-institution programs such as the

Black Men's Collective (Catching, 2006) at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey,

the Black Male Rap Session (Laster, 2006) at the University of Louisville, Project

M.A.R.C.H. at North Carolina A&T State University (Johnson & Moore, 2011), and the

Centennial Scholars Program at North Carolina Central University ("Centennial

Scholars," n.d.). Programs can also be statewide initiatives such as the African American

Male Initiative within the University System of Georgia or campus chapters of a larger

organizational umbrella such as the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB)

(Bledsoe & Rome, 2006).

Regardless of their design, these programs have some overarching commonalities. AAMIs foster academic and social integration of the participating students, provide a formal or informal mentorship model facilitating engagement with faculty and peers, and provide a venue for critical reflection of the student's personal and career goals (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). They have also been found to address academic and social factors related to African American male persistence and retention. The Male Initiative of Leadership and Excellence (MILE) is one such example. Palmer et al. (2013) investigated this program, which is located on the campus of a mid-Atlantic HBCU, and found attributes that included a shared book reading experience, alternative spring break volunteering opportunities, and outdoor retreats which serve as out-of-class activities. Qualitative findings from this study revealed the program participants felt the MILE had a positive influence on how they approached their academics. Students mentioned they were able to transfer the peer support and success they experienced during outdoor retreats into the classroom to overcome difficult assignments. In addition, participants commented that the program facilitated male bonding and encouraged them to seek support for academic and social needs. Quantitatively, Palmer et al. (2013) noted gradual increases in the cumulative GPAs of the participants over the course of two years.

Identity Development

Whereas multiple retention and success contributors are mentioned in the previous literature, authors Evans et al. (1998) recognized identity as an additional component. With regard to African American males, Cuyjet (2006) and Harper (2004)

attributed identity development as an integral component of retention, and that exhibiting little or no development resulted in their low persistence in college. Literature specific to this student population has emphasized their involvement in out-of-class activities that can help to foster identity development through increased engagement in co-curricular activities (Evans et al., 1998; Flowers, 2004; Harper, 2004; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper et al., 2005; McEwen, Roper, Bryant, & Langa, 1990; Mitchell & Dell, 1992; Pope, 2000; Stewart, 2009; Taylor & Howard-Hamilton, 1995; Watson, 2006). Examples of these activities are fraternal organizations, student government or leadership organizations, religious groups, and peer mentoring.

Student organizations. According to Harper and Quaye (2007), participating in student organizations can also contribute to identity development. These organizations vary in type from structured and administration-related student government associations to special interest clubs such as chess or paintball. Focusing on what role student organizations play in African American male identity development, Harper and Quaye (2007) conducted a phenomenological study of 32 African American male leaders of student organizations at PWIs. Using Cross's (1971) Nigrescence model, findings indicated that membership in student organizations enhanced identity development and placed the majority of participants in the internalization stage of Nigrescence.

Another opportunity shown to affect the identity development of African American male college students as evidenced by Harper (2005), Harper and Harris (2006), Harper and Quaye (2007), Taylor and Howard-Hamilton (1995) are BGLOs. These organizations assemble peer groups of like-minded African American students

that, according to Harper and Quaye (2007), resulted in high levels of identity

achievement. Taylor and Howard-Hamilton's (1995) study also included members of

BGLOs and when compared to the non-members in their study noted:

> Regarding fraternity involvement, these findings suggest that African
> American males who participate in Greek-letter organizations tend to
> embrace a stronger, more positive self-esteem and racial identity than their
> non-Greek counterparts. (p. 334)

In a similar study, Guiffrida (2003) studied 88 African American students

attending a PWI to determine if their organizational membership assisted with social

integration. Findings from the qualitative study revealed that the students found value in

their organizational participation because it facilitated out-of-class connections with peers

and faculty, which Astin (1984, 1993), Bean (1980), and Tinto (1993) noted as being

associated with student retention.

Religion and spirituality. Little is known about African American males and

how religion and spirituality affect their identity (Watson, 2006). Erickson (1964)

identified religion and spirituality as an important component of identity in the self-

discovery process. Building on this concept, Watson (2006) investigated the impact of

religion and spirituality on the lives of first- and second-year African American males

from three different private HBCUs. According to his findings, the survey respondents

placed a high value on being involved in religious activities, and this involvement was

strongly connected to their identity as African American males (Watson, 2006).

The previous section presented literature regarding attributes associated with the

successful persistence and retention of African American male college students such as

the influence of pre-entry characteristics (Harper, 2012; Hood, 1992; Palmer & Young, 2008; Schwartz & Washington, 2002; Strayhorn, 2010), involvement and engagement (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006; C. Brown 2006; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Palmer et al., 2013; Patton et al., 2011; and identity development (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2004; Watson, 2006). The literature speaks to several types of programs and campus initiatives that can be utilized to directly address first-year retention of African American males. However, one such programmatic element that has not fully been fully investigated is the LLC.

The following section presents literature relevant to LLCs and their association with retention and other student success outcomes.

Living Learning Communities

LLCs have become a popular addition to college campuses as a tool for increasing student engagement, retention, and the overall undergraduate experience (Inkelas & Associates, 2007; Stassen, 2003; Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Research on LLCs has produced outcome-based results (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Stassen, 2003); however, it is still difficult to determine if LLC results stem directly from the benefits of participation itself or from external factors such as the qualities and personalities of the participating students (Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger, 2010). With their ability to more positively address both the cognitive and non-cognitive areas of a student's life compared to non-LLC participants (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Inkelas & Associates, 2007; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Pike, 1999; Pike et

al., 1997), LLCs could serve as a plausible vehicle to address the retention of first-year African American males attending an HBCU.

Student Outcomes

Researchers have studied LLCs to understand the impact they have on college students' transition and social and academic outcomes (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Inkelas & Associates, 2007; Inkelas et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Stassen, 2003). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) looked specifically at the role of LLCs in a range of student outcomes and found "significantly larger gains in intellectual orientation than students in traditional curricular programs" (p. 245). Although Pascarella and Terenzini acknowledged the number of studies were relatively few, their findings showed LLCs contributed to a large number of positive student outcomes including autonomy, independence, intellectual dispositions and orientations, and generalized personal development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, additional findings showed a decrease in the positive effects of LLCs once peers and faculty were controlled. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggested that LLCs "exert their positive effects through the interpersonal relationship they help to create between major socializing agents—other students [and] faculty members" (p. 262).

Furthering the LLC literature, a quantitative study by Inkelas and Weisman (2003) examined student transition outcomes associated with LLCs and surveyed 2,833 student residents from 3 different LLCs. The three programs consisted of a first-year student transition LLC, an honors student LLC, and a curriculum-based LLC. Each of the program results were compared to a sample group of non-LLC students. Findings

from their study showed students in all three LLCs were more engaged and thought of their environments more positively than those not participating in LLCs. Additional findings showed the LLC students experienced a smoother transition, were engaged in more challenging academic pursuits, and developed new perspectives compared to their non-LLC counterpart (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003).

In a similar study, Stassen (2003) also investigated outcomes of multiple LLCs on a single campus. The LLC programs consisted of a: Talent Advancement Program (TAP), Honors College (HC), and a Residential Academic Program (RAP). The study focused on whether LLCs were successful in impacting student success while controlling for students' entry characteristics. LLCs were shown to have a greater influence on student outcomes such as social and academic integration when compared to those students who lived in the residence halls and were not a part of the LLCs.

Following the trend of single-campus studies, Wawrzynski and Jessup-Anger (2010) conducted a quantitative study to determine the extent to which non-cognitive variables (student expectations) and academically based LLCs have on the college experience. Data were collected from 95 students who participated in 9 residential learning communities at a Midwest university campus and completed both a First-time Freshman (FTF) survey and a Residence Hall Environment Survey (RHES). A typology model was used to classify the programs as collaborative or combined. Collaborative LLCs were programs with a large number of resources and the result of a collaborative effort between student and academic affairs. Combined LLCs represented a smaller group of residential programs that are more academically focused. No statistically significant

difference in college expectation was found between the two types of programs, meaning students in both groups entered college with similar expectations. Further analysis did show that the students in the collaborative program perceived their environments as "more enriching and educational . . ." (p. 209), than the students in the combined program.

Many studies concerning LLCs have focused on single institutions, comparing students in multiple LLC programs to non-LLC students (Inkelas & Associates, 2007). A comprehensive multi-institutional national study coupled with a longitudinal component changed this research paradigm. The National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP) (Inkelas & Associates, 2007) studied the impact of LLCs on various student outcomes. The massive 49-campus study surveyed LLC and non-LLC students (those living in traditional residence hall setting). Key findings from the NSLLP showed the LLCs ability to address student outcomes such as college transition, and student learning outcomes such as intellectual growth, civic engagement, and sense of belonging. It also showed secondary benefits for those students living in a residence hall with an LLC. A follow-up longitudinal study of 16 institutions indicated there were statistically significant increases in several student outcome areas. Specifically, data indicated an increase in student faculty interaction, students' experiencing positive peer diversity interactions, increased intellectual growth and abilities, greater confidence in skills and abilities such as math, working independently, problem solving, team work and increase in GPA as a result of their participation in LLCs (Inkelas & Associates, 2007).

A third component of the NSLLP focused on addressing undergraduate women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines and how LLCs could affect participation and success. Disaggregated data from the 2007 NSLLP were used to study women in STEM majors, 59%–76% of which were first-year students (Inkelas & Associates, 2007). The analysis used four different program categories consisting of women-only STEM LLCs, co-educational STEM LLCs, non-STEM LLCs, and traditional residence hall settings (non-LLCs) (Inkelas & Associates, 2007). Data showed women participating in women-only and co-educational STEM LLC programs displayed higher use of residence hall resources while women participating only in co-educational STEM LLC programs indicated more frequent use of academic advisors and faculty interaction in the residence hall compared to non-STEM LLCs and traditional residence hall students (Inkelas & Associates, 2007). Furthermore, women in both types of STEM LLC programs experienced greater ease in their social transition to college compared to the remaining two program types. Academic transition was found to be significantly easier for women participating in the co-educational STEM LLC compared to the non-STEM and traditional residence hall settings. The women-only STEM LLC showed no statistically significant difference in academic transition compared to the co-educational program (Inkelas & Associates, 2007). The 2007 NSLLP revealed positive student outcomes and areas for further investigation regarding gender-specific and co-educational LLC participation that could be used in future practices to enhance the success of women in STEM disciplines.

Continuing the study of women in STEM, researchers from the 2007 NSLLP conducted a case study of exemplary programs: four institutions with the strongest averages among several student outcomes such as transition, sense of belonging, and cognitive development. Focus groups, interviews, and observations were used to collect data from the four campus programs. Coding and grouping of the data produced 14 themes consistent among the four institutions. The 14 themes included: academic affairs-student affairs partnerships, champions (campus advocates), resources (financial, space, staff), structure, faculty involvement and faculty-peer interaction, common interests, learning outcomes and assessment, academic support/social support/peer interaction, curricular programming, co-curricular programming, living-learning fads, parallel partnerships, hyperbonding, resident and peer advisors. The researchers used these 14 themes to construct a 'best practices building blocks' model for women in STEM LLCs (Inkelas & Associates, 2012).

Data from the NSLLP was again used to investigate the impact of LLCs on a specific student population. Using data from the 2004 NSLLP, Inkelas et al. (2007) investigated LLCs and how they might influence the social and academic transition of first-generation students. The study used a sample of 1,335 first-generation students from 33 four-year institutions that participated in the 2004 NSLLP. Findings from an analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) showed first-generation students' participation in LLCs had a statistically significant effect on their academic and social transition compared with non-LLC first-generation students. The study indicated that background characteristics, social/co-curricular environments, and the students' perception of campus and residence

hall climates were strong predictors of their perceived ease of academic transition. For

perceived social transition, social/co-curricular environments, faculty and peer

interactions, and perceptions of campus and residence hall climates were strong

predictors. Given first-generation students' high propensity for attrition, lack of social

integration, and academic preparation (Pike & Kuh, 2005), findings from Inkelas et al.

(2007) showed LLC participation can positively impact student outcomes of first-

generation college students in spite of the many risk factors associated with this student

population.

First-year Students

LLC research has been narrowed to address the potential impact on specific

student populations, notably first-year students (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013; Pike et

al., 1997; Purdie & Rosser, 2011; R. D. Reason et al., 2006; Tinto et al., 1994). Tinto

(1993) noted the importance of the first year in his integration model, labeling first-year

students as an at-risk student population for attrition.

R. D. Reason et al. (2006) agreed with Tinto's (1993) emphasis on the importance

of the first year and conducted a nationwide study of over 6,000 students and 5,000

faculty members to identify factors which help shape the development and academic

competence of first-year students. Seven principles were found within institutions that

had successful first-year programs:

- Develop organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year.
- Facilitate appropriate recruitment, admissions, and student transition through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with the institutional mission.

- Assign the first college year a high priority for the faculty.
- Serve all first-year students according to their varied needs.
- Engage students both in and out of the classroom in order to develop attitudes, behaviors, and skills consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution's philosophy and mission.
- Ensure that all first-year students encounter diverse ideas, world-views, and people as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities.
- Conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to achieve ongoing first-year improvement. (R. D. Reason et al., 2006, pp. 151–152)

Indirectly related to LLCs, Tinto et al.'s (1994) mixed methods study of first-year student experiences in learning communities investigated three public higher education institutions, two community colleges, and one four-year university. Findings revealed that learning communities helped students to develop a "supportive community of peers" (Tinto et al., 1994, p. 17). This community helped students successfully bridge their social and academic needs. In addition, students in learning communities were more socially and academically engaged, felt they had a more positive learning experience, and exhibited greater persistence rates (Tinto et al., 1994). These results were true for both remedial and non-remedial students. Outcomes from this study can relate to LLCs in that learning communities can be represented within LLCs as the in-class or linked component.

A larger and more comprehensive study conducted by Zhao and Kuh (2004) sought to determine if there was a connection between learning community participation and student success. Findings from their study of over 80,000 first-year and senior students from 365 institutions again showed positive connections for those students in learning communities (residential or not). Specifically, Zhao and Kuh (2004) stated

"participating in learning communities is uniformly and positively linked with student academic performance, engagement . . ." (p. 124). These findings held true for both first-year students and seniors.

The study of learning communities and persistence was furthered by a combined LLC and learning community study conducted by Purdie and Rosser (2011). This study investigated the academic performance of first-year students in two types of LLCs (Academic Theme Floor (ATF), Freshman Interest Group (FIG), and a non-residential First-year experience (FYE) course learning community. Results regarding freshman academic performance showed that students in the FIG earned higher semester GPAs compared to those in the ATF and FYE course (Purdie & Rosser, 2011). Furthermore, the study found a negative correlation between high school GPA and retention, which contrasts with studies by Astin (1997) and Ishler and Upcraft (2005) who cite pre-college academic performance as a main contributor to first-year student persistence. Only the FIG had a positive effect on student retention. According to Purdie and Rosser (2011) not even dual participation in the ATF and FYE courses affected the retention of the students in the study. These additional findings were incongruent with the association of learning communities and increased retention emphasized by Tinto et al. (1994).

Pike et al. (1997) studied the relationship between LLCs and first-year college experience, specifically looking at the impact of LLC participation on persistence. Findings from the study showed residential learning communities did not directly or indirectly enhance academic achievement. Further, it found that institutional commitment was not a factor in the persistence of those LLC students, nor did LLC

students show higher levels of social integration. The authors did caution readers concerning the interpretation of the data, stating that the use of different measures could produce more accurate results.

A multi-year study conducted by Cambridge-Williams et al. (2013) re-associated LLCs with positive student outcomes. Their seven-year study investigated first-year students enrolled in George Mason's University 100 course and those sections with an LLC component. A comparative analysis was conducted between students enrolled and not enrolled in the orientation course. Ninety percent of students who participated in University 100 courses returned the following academic year compared to 78% for those who did not (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013). Further analysis was conducted to compare the LLC sections with the non-LLC sections. Although initial results did not show significant differences, progressive years indicated greater retention and seven-year graduation rates for the LLC sections of University 100 (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013).

Student Involvement

LLCs relate to involvement by impacting how students experience the campus environment. As identified by Davis et al. (2004), Echols (1998), and Palmer and Young (2008), the campus environment and experiences students have can significantly affect retention. Astin's (1975) involvement research identified a positive correlation between on-campus housing and satisfaction with faculty, attainment of degree, and willingness to re-enroll in the same institution. Astin's previous research led to the development of the

theory of student involvement (Astin, 1984), which identified place of residence as a factor that significantly impacted student persistence in college.

Pike (1999) explored place of residence and its association with educational gains with first-year students and LLCs. Findings from a study of 626 students who completed the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) indicated that students in LLCs were significantly more likely than students in traditional residence halls to be more involved with campus activities, interact with instructors and peers, and show greater gains in or higher levels of intellectual development. These results were similar to those of Stassen (2003), who also noted that all three of the LLCs studied produced positive academic performance for students in their first semester. Inkelas and Weisman (2003) also found that LLC participation was connected to higher levels of involvement and campus connectivity. Their study of three different LLCs showed statistically significant results that LLC students experienced not only higher campus involvement, but perceived their residential environments as being more supportive, experienced a smoother transition to college, and reported several other benefits when compared to non-LLC participants.

Identity Development

LLC literature has emphasized this program's ability to increase student involvement (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pike, 1999) as well as student retention and persistence (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013). A more recent study of LLCs and male identity construction has potentially added another outcome of LLC participation.

Jessup-Anger et al. (2012) conducted a phenomenological study using a convenience sample consisting of a majority of White male students to investigate what part the LLC played in their male identity construction. Although the sample size was only 12 students, the findings showed LLC participation provided the students with a support system that enabled them to reject negative gender expectations and develop healthy identities. This study echoed the positive benefits of LLC participation for a single gender as noted in Inkelas and Associates' (2007) study of women in STEM disciplines. Further research is needed to determine if this relationship holds true for additional student gender and ethnic groups such as African American males.

Chapter Summary

Literature regarding student retention and involvement theories, variables that influence African American male retention, and the impact of LLCs were presented in this chapter. Although the dominant retention and involvement theories use different language, in summary they have identified that a student must find success in the academic and social structures of campus in order have the highest chances of returning.

For African American males, participation in campus organizations such as BGLOs (Harper, 2006, 2012; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007), or AAMIs (Bledsoe & Rome, 2006; Catching, 2006; Laster, 2006) greatly increases their likelihood of successfully addressing a number of student success outcomes, including retention. Additionally, having a foundation of strong family support as well as obtaining a strong high school GPA have been attributed to the college success of African American males (Harper, 2012, Strayhorn, 2010).

LLC research presented in this chapter has shown this program's ability to engage students in both the academic and social arenas of a college campus. It has illuminated the program's ability to positively impact the first-year experience (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013; Pike, 1999; Pike et al., 1997; Purdie & Rosser, 2011), student involvement (Inkelas & Weisman, 2003, Pike, 1999), retention (Cambridge-Williams et al., 2013), male identity development (Jessup-Anger et al., 2012), and women's success in STEM programs (Inkelas & Associates, 2007) by creating relationships with a group of like-minded students.

Because of the implications of LLCs discussed in this chapter, the use of this program has increased at many institutions in order to improve undergraduate education and the student experience (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). However, according to the literature, the same benefits that LLCs tout have yet to be investigated for African American male college students, specifically on an HBCU campus. Chapter III will provide an explanation of the qualitative methods used for this study to investigate African American male college students participating in a LLC on an HBCU campus.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A case study was undertaken as the methodological approach to best answer the five research questions for this study and understand the experiences of first-year African American males participating in an LLC on an HBCU campus. This chapter presents the rationale for using this particular qualitative research method, as well as information regarding the LLC program, site location, and research participants. Additional information regarding data sources, collection, and analysis are included. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's validity and the researcher's subjectivity.

Research Design

Case Study

The method selected to understand the experiences of first-year African American males participating in an LLC on the campus of an HBCU was a case study. Stake (2005) noted that case studies are a choice of what to study, or a bounded system, enclosed by time and place. Creswell (2007) presented a definition of a case study that emphasized its components when he described it as:

> A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case), or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports of a case description and case-based themes. (p. 73)

Yin (2014) presented a binary perspective concerning the scope of the case study and the features of a case study. He describes the scope of a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). From this perspective, a case study is undertaken to understand some type of real-world case and assumes that investigating this case will potentially involve contextual conditions that are important and pertinent to that which is being studied. This first component of the definition also distinguishes case studies from other types of research method such as experiments, histories, and surveys. Yin (2014) noted that experiments separate phenomenon from its context, viewing only the phenomenon of interest and being represented by only a few variables. Histories do not deal with the situation between phenomenon and context, while surveys try to investigate phenomenon and context but their ability to investigate context is very limited (Yin, 2014).

The second part of Yin's (2014) case study definition describes the features of the study:

> A case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needed to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 14).

Case studies also provide a clear methodology when investigating a particular topic, prioritizing until a depth of understanding is achieved (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014).

This understanding can be achieved through multiple sources of data or triangulation as mentioned by Creswell (2007, 2013), Stake (1995), and Yin (2014). Data triangulation creates an in-depth picture of the environment being studied and also ensures that evidence of a phenomenon is supported by other sources within the study (Creswell, 2007, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). For this case study, 12 students participating in an LLC were interviewed. In addition, 12 residence hall observations and four class observations were conducted. Institutional artifacts or reports were obtained from program staff as an additional layer of data concerning the students' academic experiences. These data sources represented the triangulation for this case study to reach the depth of understanding Creswell (2013), Merriam (2009), and Yin (2014) described.

Case study research is valuable for discovering behaviors, processes, or anything of which you have little knowledge (Meyer, 2001). Thus, the case study approach to research is, as Meyer (2001) explained it, "particularly useful in responding to 'how' and 'why' questions about a set of contemporary events" (p. 330). Yin (2014) agreed with Meyer (2001) in that case studies would be the preferred research method in studies "where the main research questions are 'how' and 'why' questions, where the research has little control over behavior and events, and the focus of the study is contemporary (as opposed to historical) phenomenon" (p. 2).

Heretofore, there has been little knowledge of the impact of first-year African American male LLC participation on an HBCU campus. Furthermore, this research took place in a bounded system (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014) bracketed by the research time frame, location, and specific student population. Finally, the research

questions used to investigate this particular phenomenon consisted of 'how' questions. As such, this study fulfilled the criteria necessary to justify the use of the case study research method to investigate the experiences of first-year African American male college students participating in an LLC on an HBCU campus.

African American Male LLC

A fundamental understanding of the LLC is essential to make sense of this case study. Stake (1995) advocated for a rich description of the context of a case study so that readers have the opportunity to "develop vicarious experiences" (p. 63). The study was conducted on the campus of a mid-sized HBCU in the southeastern part of the United States. This institution from here on shall be referred to by the pseudonym of Southeast State University. The LLC was housed in a full-service academic support unit on the campus of Southeast State University. This department was charged with providing academic advising to first-year undeclared students and academic support in the form of tutorial services and supplemental instruction. This unit also offered academic support for student athletes and provided instruction of the campus first-year experience course and developmental math course.

The LLC in question was created in 2010 in response to a report that emphasized the need to increase the educational attainment of African American males. The LLC sought to assist African American male students in successfully transitioning from high school to college through the integration of academic advising and monitoring services, the use of academic support programs, and dissemination of information regarding campus services and facilities. Students were involved in out-of-class activities such as

service learning and trips to museums associated with the Civil Rights movement. Students also participated in peer interaction in the residence hall and at other programmatic activities to encourage social development, which was intended to provide a balance with the academic components of the program. The program was coordinated by two academic advisors who also served as instructors of the first-year experience course. Due to increased demand but limited space in the residence hall, additional students were granted permission to participate in certain aspects of the program without living in the LLC residence hall. Because of this, each coordinator had an advising case load of LLC and non-LLC students.

Recruitment for the program was facilitated by the coordinators and began after mid-term of the spring semester for each following academic year. Prospective students were selected based on their high school GPA, SAT, and ACT scores. A list of newly admitted students was obtained from the admissions office and separated into three GPA categories. These categories consisted of high performing students (GPA of 4.0-3.5), mid-range performing students (GPA of 3.49-3.0), and average performing students (GPA of 2.99-2.25). From this, 30 to 40 students were randomly selected from each GPA category and sent an invitation letter to join the program. In the letter, students were informed of the limited space availability and encouraged to RSVP prior to the indicated deadline. Coordinators also recruited students during new student orientation activities such as parent presentations and student information sessions. The goal of this selection process was to make the program accessible to students across all levels of pre-college preparedness.

Once students agreed to participate in the program, the coordinators communicated with the students over the summer months. The coordinators also began roommate pairing according to major and academic interests in order to increase the level of student engagement by having peers in the same classes and with similar academic interests living together. For example, if eight students were interested in engineering, the coordinators would place all of those students into one suite. This arrangement would create the opportunity for a ready-made study group due to their enrollment in the same freshman engineering course, as well as other similar freshman general education courses.

As official members of the LLC program, students were invited to participate in an early arrival orientation that allowed them to move into their residence hall two days prior to the rest of the new students. Over the two days, the students engaged in team-building activities such as skits, problem-solving games, academic workshops, and participation in a community service activity. LLC students also received software training for student accounts, the campus learning management system, and university email accounts. They also were given the opportunity to make any additional schedule changes with their academic advisor and become more familiar with campus through group and individual tours. As an additional program benefit, LLC students would be able to benefit from early course registration in subsequent semesters if they participated in at least five hours of tutoring assistance each semester.

During the academic year, students participated in regularly scheduled evening workshops covering topics such as study skills, navigating college as a first-year students,

and "real-talk sessions." In the "real-talk" sessions, upper-class students who had previously participated in this program spoke to the new first-year students about their experiences and offered advice about how to excel during their first year of college. LLC students were also assigned peer mentors from the academic unit's peer mentoring program, some of whom were previous participants and upper-class students.

Freshman Experience Course

All new Southeast State University first-year students are required to enroll in two, one-credit first-year experience courses. The first course, FYE 100, is offered in the fall semester with the second course, FYE 101, being offered during the spring semester. Due to the time frame in which this study was conducted, the second course, FYE 101 was used for this research. Students who participated in the program had the ability to register for reserved cohort sections of each of these courses based on their academic advisor, and each of the cohort sections were taught by the program coordinators.

The University intends for the course to provide academic and personal skills as well as introduce the student to campus resources essential for success in college. Students also gain knowledge and experiences intended to guide them through the academic major and career decision-making process. Additionally, students obtain pertinent information regarding financial aid, financial literacy, and receive tools for financial and debt management. Health and wellness topics are also addressed throughout the semester to promote safe and healthy lifestyles on campus. As a result of participating in FYE 101, students become able to:

- Develop and apply academic skills that promote academic, major, and career success.

- Identify or confirm a choice of college major or career consistent with personality, values, and aptitudes.

- Develop an intellectual understanding of financial aid and financial literacy and its relationship to student success.

- Discuss the connection between health and wellness and success in college and in life.

- Explain university academic policies and procedures.

- Create a current resume and cover letter.

- Develop and define personal and professional goals.

  (Student learning objective as found on the FYE 101 course syllabus in Appendix B)

A course coordinator and curriculum committee are responsible for the planning and administration of this course, which includes training advisors for instruction. The course meets once per week for 50 minutes and has a required textbook. A points-based grading system is used to assess students' work and performance. Assignments are given a predetermined point value for a cumulative value of 1000 points. At the end of the semester, the student's point value is compared to a 10-point grading scale to determine their final grade. For instance, if the student concluded the semester earning 800 of the 1000 points, that would be equal to an 80 on the 10-point grading scale. With this score, the student would have earned a B- for the course. The course also includes pre- and

posttests to assess the students' level of knowledge acquired from the course. FYE 101 is part of the University's general education curriculum.

Research Questions

The five research questions developed for this study were products of an initial inquiry: what are the experiences of first-year African American males participating in an LLC on an HBCU campus? From this, subsequent questions were created to address components of the conceptual framework and to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the students participating in this program. Research questions also consisted of 'how' questions (Meyer, 2001; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014), which are indicative of case study research. The following are the research questions used for this study:

1. What are the perceived experiences of first-year African American males who participate in an LLC on an HBCU campus?

2. How, if at all, does a student's pre-entry characteristics impact their perceived experience during the first year of college?

3. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived academic integration?

4. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived social integration?

5. How, if at all, is first-year African American male retention impacted by the students' perceived LLC participation?

Because the first research question begins with 'what' and is typically used in survey research, it is permitted to be used as a type of exploratory question (Yin, 2014), which is flexible enough to be used across all research methodological disciplines.

IRB Approval and Consent

As a current University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) student, I was required to obtain IRB approval from UNCG and site approval from the research location prior to beginning the study. Site permission from Southeast State University's IRB office and two letters of support from the assistant vice provost for academic affairs and the vice chancellor for student affairs were obtained and submitted with a complete UNCG IRB application. In addition to submitting the application, I was required to wear a nametag that identified me as a researcher from another institution any time I was on Southeast State University's campus and carry paper copies of the IRB approval documents during any and all data collection.

After IRB approval was granted, I contacted the program coordinators to schedule a time to speak with the members of the LLC for the purposes of distributing consent forms. The coordinators held a gathering for all of the LLC participants that enabled me to discuss this study and allowed the students to ask questions. Consent forms were distributed to all LLC students at the conclusion of my presentation on this study. Once each of the students had received a form, I read out loud each of the items, explaining what informed consent was and their rights as participants in this study. It was also emphasized that they were not required to participate in this research. After the information on the consent form was discussed, those students who were willing to

participate in the study agreed by signing and returning the form. Consent was also

obtained from those students who were enrolled in the program's FYE 101 course but did

not live within the LLC.

Research Locations

The study was conducted on the campus of a mid-sized HBCU in the southeastern

part of the United States, referred to by the pseudonym Southeast State University. It is a

doctoral research university that offers 55 undergraduate and 40 graduate degree

programs in areas such as agriculture, social sciences, humanities, business, and STEM

(Science Technology Engineering Math) disciplines. Southeast State University has an

undergraduate enrollment of over 10,000 students, making it one of the nation's largest

HBCUs.

Southeast State University was selected due to its large undergraduate enrollment

and because it currently offers an LLC for first-year African American males. This

institution also was selected because I have familiarity with this university and the LLC

program as a former coordinator. Upon hearing my research plans, my former colleagues

were eager to assist and support the project in any way possible.

Residence Hall

Located on the south region of campus is the residence hall that was designated

for the first-year African American male LLC. The six-floor building has the capacity to

house 388 students. It is a co-educational, double occupancy, suite-style residence hall

that houses students from all classifications. The suites for the LLC students were all

located on the same floor. A complete diagram of the LLC suite is provided in Figure 2.

Each suite contains four rooms, a common area, and a bathroom. Some suites have a

water fountain in the common area. The individual rooms contain two of the following:

beds, desks, clothing drawers, and closets. Each room also has a sink and a micro-fridge,

which is a small refrigerator with a microwave attached at the top.

Additionally, the residence hall features a student lounge area for residence hall

events and general television watching, a computer lab with a printer, washing machines,

vending machines, and an atrium with two picnic tables. There are also several offices

and conference rooms available for use.
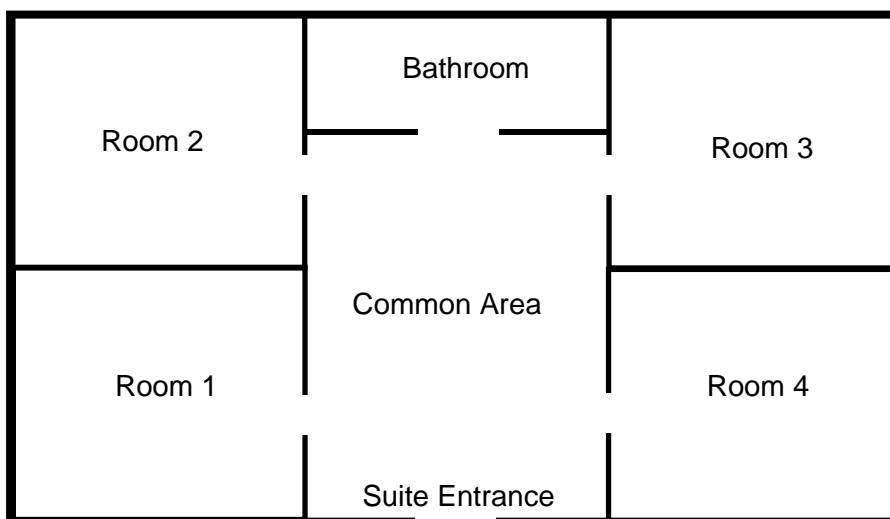
Figure 2. LLC Suite Floorplan. Diagram of the four-room suite in which the first-year
African American male LLC students resided.

Classrooms

Two classrooms for the LLC cohort sections of FYE 101 served as additional

research locations. The classrooms were located in a recently constructed academic

classroom building that is centrally located on the campus of Southeast State University.

Each classroom was equipped with two ceiling-mounted projectors, two projector screens, and two white boards. Additionally, a lectern housed a desktop computer, document camera, and a control panel that operates the lights, window shades, projector screens, microphone, and serves as a telephone.

Seating for the two classrooms was different. The first classroom will be referred to as classroom A through the duration of this dissertation. It contained six circular tables made from four movable desks pushed together. Each of the tables had built-in electrical outlets for laptops and other mobile devices. The six tables were arranged in two horizontal rows of three, and there was space for eight chairs at each of the tables. Instead of movable tables, the second classroom, or classroom B, had four long rows of fixed tables that spanned the width of the classroom. See Figures 3 and 4 for diagrams of classrooms A and B.
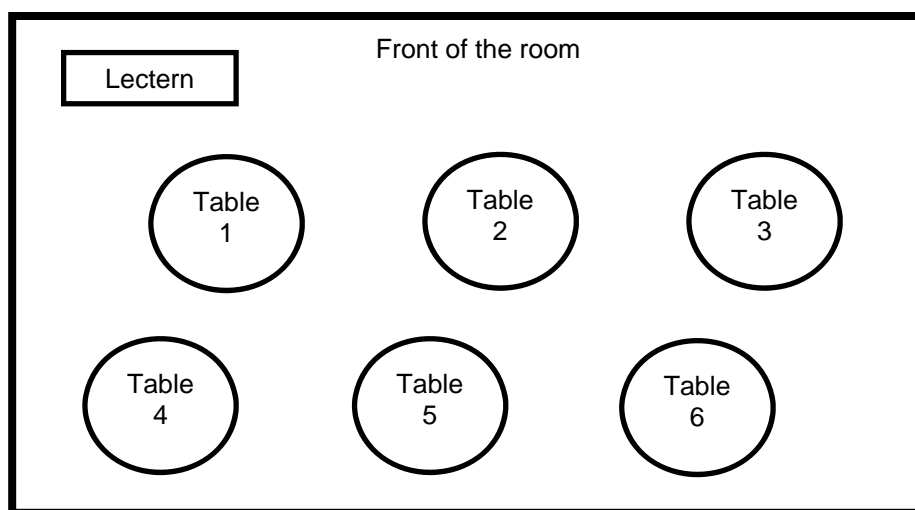
Figure 3. FYE 101 Classroom A. Diagram of one of the cohort sections of the FYE 101 course classroom for the first-year African American male students in the LLC.

Front of the room

Lectern

Row 1

Row 2

Row 3

Row 4
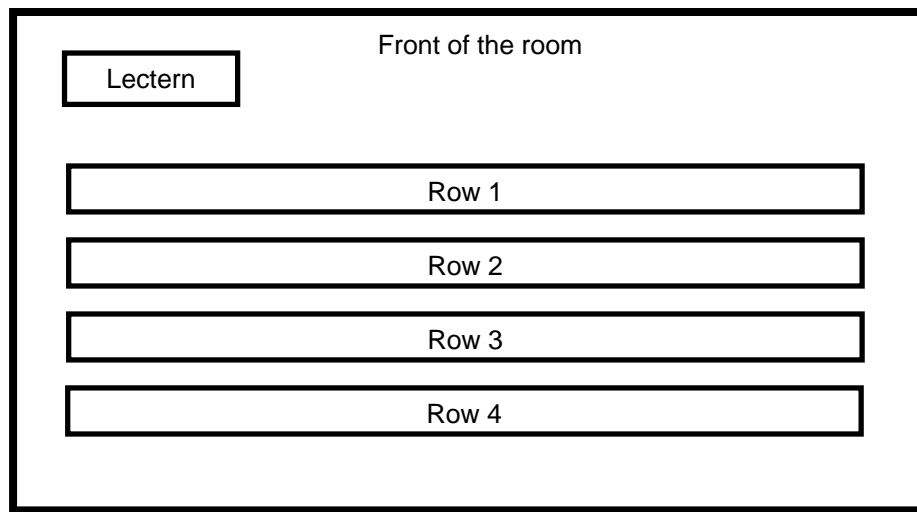
Figure 4. *FYE 101 Classroom B*. Diagram of one of the cohort sections of the FYE 101 course classroom for the first-year African American male students in the LLC.

Data Sources and Collection

Data were collected over a four-week period during the spring 2015 semester and began after students returned from spring break. This time frame was selected to ensure that the students had accumulated enough experience in and knowledge of the program to provide cogent responses during interviews. Within this bounded system, data was obtained through 12 semi-structured interviews (Shank, 2006), 12 passive participant observations (Spradley, 1980) in the LLC residence hall, and four observations in the FYE 101 classroom. Research conducted by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) on reaching data saturation in qualitative research informed the frequency of interviews and residence hall observations used for this study. Data saturation is the "point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook" (p. 65). Results from their study encouraged them to posit data saturation had occurred at 12 interviews, and that their coding categories remained consistent.

Four was the maximum number of classroom observations available during the defined research period, as the FYE 101 course met only once per week. Additionally, institutional artifacts or reports were obtained to provide information on the students' high school GPA, SAT and ACT scores, and their fall-to-fall retention rate.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as one of several data collection methods for this study. Stake (1995) underscored the importance and relationship between case studies and using interviews when he said:

> Two principal uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others. The case will not be seen the same by everyone. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities. (p. 64)

Hays (2004) further emphasized the importance of the interview in case study research, adding that, "Interviews are of the richest sources of data in a case study and usually the most important type of data to be collected. Interviews provide the researcher with information from a variety of perspectives" (p. 229). Additionally, Nieto (2000) concluded that through interviews, it is possible to learn something from students about their culture and languages, and that dialogue of this type can be a useful pedagogical strategy in itself.

Semi-structured interviews are described by Shank (2006) as a process that allows the interviewer some latitude in how the questions are asked and in what order, but there still is some standardization so that the researcher preserves a degree of comparability across interviews. For this study, the interview questions were pre-determined and were

pilot tested according to recommendations by Yin (2014) concerning interview questions.

An interview protocol (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) was created to provide consistency

and additional space to document notes during each interview. The interview protocol

consisted of an introduction, which described the purpose of the study and which was

read aloud prior to the beginning of the interview. It also contained researcher contact

information, and the anticipated duration of the interview. The protocol also contained

the 20 pre-determined questions created to investigate the overall, academic, and social

experiences of first-year African American males in an LLC on an HBCU campus. The

interview protocol and questions can be found in Appendix A.

Interview questions were intentionally designed to be broad and open-ended to

become what Nieto (2000) referred to as sources for dialogue. Lancy (2001) viewed the

dialogue created by open-ended questions a methodological strength as she noted "the

subject's possible responses are relatively unconstrained compared to more formally

structured data-gathering methods" (p. 7). The question portion of the protocol begins

with demographic questions to obtain student background characteristics such as socio-

economic status, if the student is a first generation student, and if they come from a

single- or two-parent household. From this, the questions transition to those specific to

the student's experiences during their first year of college and experiences in the LLC

program. Further questions regarding their academic and social experience round out this

section of the interview protocol. Follow-up questions or probing was used as needed to

generate further dialogue. "Probes are questions or comments that follow-up something

already asked" (Merriam, 1998, p.80). Probes are not predetermined, and are dependent

on the response or lack of response from the student being interviewed. Stake (1995) explained "the purpose for the most part is not to get simple yes and no answers but description of an episode, a linkage, an explanation" (p. 65).

   Interview participants. A random sample (Creswell, 2013) of 12 students was taken from the population of 37 LLC students for the purpose of conducting in-depth interviews. The group of 12 students consisted of 4 students from each of the 3 high school GPA categories of high performing students (GPA of 4.0-3.5), mid-range performing students (GPA of 3.49-3.0) and average performing students (GPA of 2.9-2.5). The program coordinators provided a list of LLC students that I arranged into the three GPA groups on an excel spreadsheet. Each student in each group was assigned a number by the randomization function in excel. Four students from each group with numbers closest to the number one were selected to be interviewed.

   The 12 predetermined LLC students were emailed a recruitment document for them to schedule a date and time for the interview. In the event that a selected student was unable or unwilling to participate, the student with the next closest number on the list would have been selected as a replacement. This measure was not required, as none of the originally selected students declined to participate in the interviews. Interviews were scheduled according to the students' availability. Each interview was conducted in one of two approved locations. The first location was in an office in the academic classroom building. The second was a conference room in the residence hall. Interview locations were selected based on recommendations made by Creswell (2013) that each location be quiet and free from distractions. For interviews which took place before or directly after

the FYE 101 class, the office in the academic classroom building was used. Interviews

scheduled during the evening before or after residence hall observations were conducted

in the conference room of the residence hall. Both locations were isolated in such a way

that other students, staff, or faculty walking by would not be able to hear the voice of the

person being interviewed. Each interview lasted no longer than one hour and was audio

recorded using a digital audio recorder. A backup recorder was used in the event the

primary recorder failed during the interview.

Observations

Additional data on the experiences of first-year African American males in an

LLC on an HBCU campus were collected through what Spradley (1980) called passive

participation observations. These were conducted in the FYE 101 classrooms and in the

LLC residence hall. Spradley (1980) described that a researcher engaging in this type of

observation is "present at the scene of action but does not participate or interact with

other people to any great extent" (p. 59). He further noted that, "If the passive participant

occupies any role in the social situation, it will only be that of 'bystander,' 'spectator,' or

'loiterer'" (p. 59).

Observation data were recorded through the use of handwritten field notes in a

dedicated notebook for both in-class and residence hall observations. These field notes

used an observation protocol (Angrosino, 2007) which included the date, location, and

time of each data collection occurrence, as recommended. The field notes used a

combination of descriptive and reflective notes that recorded my experiences, hunches,

and things learned from the observation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). They also included

specific aspects of information such as the physical setting, events, and activities (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). At the conclusion of the observations, all notes were transcribed for coding and analysis.

     In-class observations. Both cohort sections of FYE 101 were observed during the data collection period. Each class met on Tuesday from 11:00 a.m. to 11:50 a.m. Observer attendance alternated each week between classroom A and classroom B, thus yielding four total observations, two per section. Classroom A had a total of 31 students, 21 of whom were in the LLC. Class B had a total of 27 students, 14 of whom were LLC participants. Two students were not able to participate in either cohort section of the FYE 101 course due to specific curriculum requirements for their respective majors. Because of the high number of students wanting to participate in the program, each of the cohort sections did contain students who did not live in the residence halls as part of the LLC. Although these students were not part of the study, their consent was obtained, which allowed for the documentation of any observable phenomena.

     During the observation times, it was important to try and remain as unobtrusive as possible and sit in a location of the classroom that would not influence the behavior of those being observed, as recommended by Stake (1995). The back left corner of Classroom A and the back right corner of Classroom B were ideal for this purpose and provided an adequate vantage to observe all of the students and their actions. For each of the observation sessions, I arrived 10 minutes prior to the beginning of each class to capture observations as the students entered and did not leave until every student left the class. At the end of each class observation I met with the instructors to debrief with them

in order to ascertain if what had been observed was a typical class meeting and true to what they had experienced prior to my arrival.

Residence hall observations. Thirty-seven students were approved to participate in the LLC and were assigned rooms in six residence hall suites. A purposeful sample (Creswell, 2013) was taken from the number of suites in the residence hall. Four of the 6 LLC suites, totaling 30 students, were selected to be used as observation locations. The four suites were chosen according to which of the suites housed the largest number of LLC students. Due to the odd number of participants, 37, and late additions, there were some suites which were not completely LLC suites. A letter was assigned to each suite (suite A, suite B, suite C, suite D) to replace the actual suite numbers used in the residence hall.

Each of the four suites was observed for three days for the duration of one hour, resulting in 12 residence hall observations. For example, week one consisted of the three, one-hour observations of suite A. Three one-hour observations of suite B were conducted the following week and so on until all the suites were observed. Research conducted by Guest et al. (2006) again provided guidance as to the number of observations to be used in order to reach saturation. Suites and days of observations were randomly selected to provide the best variability of observable data. The resulting randomized observation dates included at least two data collection times for each of the five days of the week.

Housing and residence life staff were consulted regarding the best time to conduct the observations. The initial observation time was 6:00 p.m. but the staff members

advised against it, noting that was in the middle of when students left to eat dinner in the

cafeteria. In addition, students could be attending evening classes, a workshop, or

another campus event and there would be very few students to observe. Their

recommendation was to conduct observations at 8:00 p.m., which is after the dinner

period and when they had witnessed the most number of students in the residence hall.

Based on their recommendations, the residence hall observations took place at 8:00 p.m.

throughout the duration of the study.

As part of the agreement with housing and residence life I announced my

presence upon entering the suite and prior to any data collection. Additionally, any

activity that violated the rules and regulations set forth by the division of housing and

residence life was required to be reported. The location selected to observe student

behavior was the corner of the common area closest to the main door of the suite. This

vantage was the most unobtrusive and did not interfere with the students being observed

(Stake, 1995). It also allowed a view of foot-traffic in the suite and the ability to listen to

sounds emanating from all rooms. On very few occasions, walking around in the

common area was required to observe behavior in the rooms as the vantage prevented

observing what was happening in all of the rooms. This was done only if the doors were

open or the student gave permission for me to enter.

During the observations there were several instances where all of the suite doors

were closed or locked and no visual observations could be made. However, listening to

the conversations and sounds from inside of the rooms served as an alternative source of

data. There were also times when my role as a passive observer was broken as there was

a need to clarify observed actions such as an elaborate handshake or other observed phenomena.

     Residence hall check-in protocol. Check-in protocols with housing and residence life staff were created as a means of monitoring my presence in the residence hall and ensuring the safety of the research participants as well as the other students living in the residence hall. As part of the protocol and prior to any observations being conducted, the entire observation schedule, including locations was provided to the hall director of the LLC residence hall. Permission had to be obtained and the door unlocked by the on-duty residence life staff member before using the conference room for interviews that took place before or after observations. Furthermore, I was required to check-in or sign-in (if available) with the graduate residence hall director or resident assistant on duty to gain entrance into the residence hall, and speak with them again prior to exiting the building.

Institutional Artifacts

     Four individual reports were obtained from the program coordinators during this study which included an end-of-year report, a program academic progress tracking report, a student pre-entry information list, and a retention report. The student pre-entry list contained their high school GPA, class rank, class size, and SAT/ACT scores. Data such as these have been used to predict student persistence and retention (Astin 1993; Echols, 1998; Hood, 1992; Ishler & Upcraft, 2005; Palmer & Young, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Robbins et al., 2004; Schwartz & Washington; 2002). Students' intended or declared major, fall, spring, and cumulative GPA, and academic standing

were obtained from the academic progress tracking report. A nine-page end-of-year

report summarized the number and types of workshops, advising visits, percentage of

students in particular majors, fall to spring persistence, student accomplishments, and

program assessment for the academic year. The final report, which was a retention

report, was obtained at the beginning of the fall 2015 academic year and showed which of

the LLC students returned after their first year of college.

Data Source Matrix

The integration of student interviews, the frequency and diversity of observations,

and use of institutional reports and documents were all done in an attempt to provide an

"in-depth understanding" (Creswell, 2013, p. 98) of this case, which is an important

feature of case study inquiry (Creswell, 2013). An additional methodological element for

this case study can be seen below in Table 1. It displays each of the data sources and

interview questions that address each of the five research questions.

Table 1

Data Source Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source	
1. What are the perceived experiences of first-year African American males who participate in an LLC on an HBCU campus?	• Interviews • Classroom observations • Residence Hall observations	• Please describe your experiences in the LLC thus far. • How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted your first year of college? • Describe your academic experience during your first year.

Table 1

(Cont.)

Research Questions	Data Source	
1. What are the perceived experiences of first-year African American males who participate in an LLC on an HBCU campus?	• Interviews • Classroom observations • Residence Hall observations	• In what way, if any, has your participation in the LLC effected your academic experience at this institution? • How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted your study habits? • Have you had any academic difficulty during your first year, and if so how have you resolved it? • Please describe your social experience during your first year. • In what way, if any, has your participation in the LLC effected your social experience on this campus? • Did you attend any campus or social events this year? If so what are they? • In what way, if any, has your participation in the LLC contributed to your attendance of social or campus events? • How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted making friends?

Table 1

(Cont.)

Research Questions	Data Source	
1. What are the perceived experiences of first-year African American males who participate in an LLC on an HBCU campus?	• Interviews • Classroom observations • Residence Hall observations	• How would you compare your college experience in the LLC with students you know who are not in the LLC? • How do you feel your experiences during your first year would be if you were not in the LLC? • How do you feel about your prospects for returning for your second year? • Would you recommend this program to another incoming freshmen? If so, why? • Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in the LLC? If so, please do so.
2. How, if at all, does a student's pre-entry characteristics impact their perceived experience during the first year of college?	• Interviews • SAT/ACT scores • High school GPA • Fall GPA • Spring GPA • Cumulative GPA • Academic standing	• How would you describe your family's economic status: Low, Middle, High? • Do you come from a single or two-parent household? • Are you a first generation student, having no parent that has graduated from college? • What led you to make your decision to join the LLC?

Table 1

(Cont.)

Research Questions	Data Source	
3. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived academic integration?	• Interviews • Classroom observations • Residence Hall observations • Fall GPA • Spring GPA • Cumulative GPA • Academic standing	• Please describe your experiences in the LLC thus far. • How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted your first year of college? • Describe your academic experience during your first year. • In what way, if any, has your participation in the LLC affected your academic experience at the university? • How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted your study habits? • Have you had any academic difficulty during your first year, and if so how have you resolved it? • How would you compare your college experience in the LLC with those not in the LLC? • How do you feel about your prospects for returning for your second year?

Table 1

(Cont.)

Research Questions	Data Source	
4. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived social integration?	• Interviews • Residence hall observations • Classroom observations	• How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted your first year of college? • Please describe your social experience during your first year. • In what way, if any, has your participation in the LLC affected your social experience on this campus? • Did you attend any campus or social events this year? If so what are they? • In what way, if any, has your participation in the LLC contributed to your attendance of social or campus events? • How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted making friends? • How do you feel your experiences during your first year would have been if you were not in the LLC? • How would you compare your college experience in the LLC with those not in the LLC?

Table 1

(Cont.)

Research Questions	Data Source	
5. How, if at all, is first-year African American male retention impacted by the students' perceived LLC participation?	• Interviews • Retention report • Cumulative GPA • Academic standing	• How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted your first year of college? • How do you feel about your prospects for returning for your second year?

Confidentiality

To protect the identity of all consenting participants, no names or identifying

information were used in the collection or presentation of data for this study. No names

were included during the recording of interviews or observations. Pseudonyms were

used in place of names of the participants. Furthermore, the name of the residence hall is

not used and is solely referred to as 'the LLC residence hall' in the study. To protect the

identity of those participants occupying the observed suites, the suite numbers were

changed to a lettered identifier (e.g., A, B, C, and D). The room letters were changed to a

numbered identifier (e.g., 1, 2, 3, and 4).

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Coding

Transcriptions were made of all interview audio recordings and observation field

notes. Once the transcriptions were completed, they were reviewed and compared again

with the audio recordings and field notes to ensure accuracy. The reviewed documents

were then imported into a qualitative research analysis program called NVivo to assist

with the coding processes. Coding involves taking source material, in this case interview

and observation transcriptions, and aggregating them into small categories of like

information (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Straus (1987) described coding in

qualitative research as not primarily counting how many times a code appears, but to

"fracture" (p. 29) the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison

between things in the same category towards the development of theoretical concepts.

From these transcriptions, a combination of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007)

and In Vivo Coding (Creswell, 2013; Saldana, 2013) were used to create a detailed

description of the case being studied. Open coding involves reviewing the data and

developing your own coding categories, based on what data is deemed important. Each

code labels the data and allows it to be subsequently grouped into a category. Data is

examined and compared, both within and between categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2007).

In Vivo Coding incorporated the exact words from the students, and was used to capture

specific language used by the students regarding their program experiences. The codes

were grouped into smaller subject categories and then grouped further into larger, more

comprehensive categories that best represented the themes expressed by the data.

The sole use of a priori categories were noted in the original research proposal but

were used more sparingly for this study. These proposed categories included: pre-entry

characteristics, academic integration, social integration, and retention, and were in

accordance with the conceptual framework for this study. Crabtree and Miller (1992)

spoke to the use of a priori categories, especially if they are relevant to a theoretical

framework which relates directly to the themes being used. Because open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) was used, additional themes emerged from the data that expanded beyond *a priori* categories. It was important not to attempt to force codes into the a priori categories, but rather develop additional categories relevant to what the data was showing. The a priori categories of academic integration and social integration were removed to allow for the natural creation of categories that reflected the emerging themes from the data. Thus, only pre-entry characteristics and retention were used as a priori codes.

The interviews, residence hall observations, and classroom observations were coded individually to allow for the analysis of categories within each unique data source. In all, 124 codes were created from the interviews, 13 from the classroom observations, and 23 from the residence hall observations. After the categories were determined for each data source, a secondary, cross-category analysis was conducted to determine overarching categories common between all three data collection methods. The cross-categorical analysis resulted in 13 overarching categories and 3 sub-categories that addressed each of the research questions.

Institutional Artifacts

In addition to the use of interviews and observations, this qualitative study benefitted from the inclusion of four institutional artifacts consisting of an end-of-year report, a program academic progress tracking report, a student pre-entry information list, and a retention report. Information from the various reports were reviewed to create a comprehensive picture of the pre-entry characteristics, academic preparedness, and the

academic progress of the LLC students. Both the pre-entry list and academic progress

tracking report were combined into one excel spreadsheet for easier analysis. Because

this is not a quantitative study, no statistical analyses were conducted on these reports.

However, the information from these reports was used to inform, per the conceptual

framework, students' pre-entry characteristics, which might impact their LLC experience.

These reports could also provide an increase or decrease in the student's semester GPAs,

which could also indicate positive or negative academic integration.

Validity

When conducting the analyses, one must constantly check for threats to the

validity of the study and the data that has been gathered. Before I begin to address the

validity of this study, I must first identify what the threats to validity were.

The first validity threat that might be encountered was my personal bias towards

the program. As a former employee of Southeast State University and former coordinator

of the program being studied, I had intimate knowledge of the benefits it offers. This

could pre-dispose me to only look for positive data trends in the interviews or

observations. Such a limited perspective decreases the study's capacity to reveal

experiences divergent from my biased paradigm. Reactivity could also be a threat to the

validity of this study. My previous involvement with the program might have led to

some unintentional influence of the coordinators communicating my need for

participants. Unbeknownst to me, the coordinators might have provided additional credit

in class for those selected students who agreed to participate, which could yield unusable

or irrelevant content from interviews. Reactivity could also have been an issue when

conducting interviews or observations. Whether being interviewed or observed in the classroom and residence hall, the students might react differently in those environments or give answers in an attempt to knowingly or unknowingly show or tell what they thought I wanted to see and hear from them. Any of these validity threats could have compromised the integrity of the study and it was incumbent on me as the researcher to address these threats.

To mitigate the validity threats, I used a combination of comparison (Miles & Huberman, 1994), triangulation, and numbers (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). The first method, comparison, was used to determine any difference or similarity over time. Miles and Huberman (1994) address this as one of several methods for comparison in qualitative studies. The classroom and residence hall observations being conducted over the period of four weeks provided an opportunity to view the students interacting over time, thus lessening the chance of diluting the validity of the study. Triangulation (Creswell, 2007, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) is another method of validity checking used for this study. Several types of data were used, such as coding from in-depth interviews and observations, and institutional reports detailing student GPAs, overall academic progress, and retention. The use of multiple sources of data "reduces the risk of chance association and of systemic biases due to a specific method." (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128). Quasi-statistical data (Becker, 1970) was incorporated into the study to provide numerical information that could not be determined through interviews and observations; this data included high school GPA, class rank, and college academic information. These numbers could depict a change in a student's performance semester

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to semester and, coupled with their interview responses, could accurately validate the student's positive or negative academic experiences.

Subjectivity

In addition to validity threats in a qualitative study, the subjectivity or bias of the researcher can also have an impact on the collection and interpretation of data. According to Yin (2014), case study researchers are particularly susceptible to the impact of their bias due to their need to have an understanding of the issue prior to the beginning of the study. This prior knowledge could sway a researcher toward positive and supportive evidence rather than negative or contrary evidence. However, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) viewed researcher subjectivity as a valuable tool rather than a detractor and noted,

> The subjectivity that originally I had taken as an affliction, something to bear because it could not be forgone, could to the contrary, be taken as "virtuous." My subjectivity is the basis for the story that I am able to tell. It is a strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a person and as a researcher, equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as a researcher, from the selection of topic clear through to the emphases I make in my writing. Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise. (p. 104)

Similar sentiments are echoed by Strauss (1987), who emphasized the technical knowledge and experience a researcher brings to the research process with their bias and argued that

> These experiential data should not be ignored because of the usual canons governing research (which regard personal experience and data as likely to bias the research), for these canons lead to the squashing of valuable experiential data. We say rather, "mine your experience, there is potential gold there!" (p. 11)

Although Glesne and Peshkin (1992) and Strauss (1987) advocated for the inclusion of the researchers' subjectivity, they cautioned that it is not an excuse to blindly impose individual assumptions and values on the research.

"Critical subjectivity" (P. Reason 1988, 1994) is a methodological compromise between addressing researcher subjectivity and not excluding it from the process. P. Reason (1988) described it as

> A quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary experience; nor do we allow ourselves to be swept away and be overwhelmed by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process. (p. 12)

To further understand any bias or subjectivity associated with the research process, I wrote what Maxwell (2013) called researcher identity memo. The identity memo allows the researcher to reflect on assumptions and experiential knowledge as it relates to this case study topic.

Researcher Identity Memo

As an African American male who will be studying other African American males, I am aware of their ethnicity and what experiences might be related to being an African American male, such as racism, discrimination, or the external perception of this group's inferiority. Because of this potential connection, there might also be an unspoken language or ability to interpret content not commonly understood by members outside of this gender and ethnic group. To facilitate understanding by the readers, certain definitions and explanations of situations might need to be included in the narrative and in a glossary or index as well.

Because of my familiarity with this population, I might be predisposed to think that all experiences of African American males are similar since the participants and I will likely have had similar backgrounds and experiences. By doing this, I would be grouping the experiences of all African American males into one construct and devaluing any divergent experience that is incongruent with what I might think is shared among all African American males. As a researcher, I must be open to the fact that African American males have varied lives and also experience things differently. This notion is furthered by the composition of the LLC itself. Southeast State University recruits students nationally and internationally, which translates into geographic and academic diversity. Trying to homogenize the experiences of African American males from different states and academic levels would severely limit the efficacy of the study.

Having a prior affiliation with the institution and the program being studied provides an additional layer of familiarity, but also could enhance my bias. As a former coordinator and instructor, I have seen positive outcomes from this program and might be predisposed to highlight even the slightest sign of student improvement. To decrease the extent to which my relationship with the program might affect results, I resigned from my position and waited an appropriate interval in order to study a cohort that was solely recruited by the new program coordinators, which ensured that those students had no prior knowledge of me.

Eliminating all bias and researcher subjectivity is not reasonably possible, but through the process of creating this identity memo, I was able to understand the various levels of my subjectivity with regard to this study. Research is meant to investigate and

provide detailed information about the case, letting the data speak for itself. It could be that the students' experience in the program did not impact their social integration, academic integration, or retention at all. If the data had revealed that, then as a researcher I must accept the results and report strictly on what the data yielded.

Chapter Summary

The case study methodological process which governs this study was discussed in this chapter. Specifically, the chapter framed what a case study is and how this study fit with each of its respective components. Detailed information was later provided about the research location and the participants, followed by a justification as to why each was chosen. Methods of data collection and analysis were discussed in detail. Data collection methods included interviews, observations, and institutional reports along with their respective parameters which included the research time frame and IRB approval. The data coding process was outlined in the analysis section of the chapter and included information about managing threats to the validity of this study. The chapter concluded with addressing the subjectivity and identity of the researcher. Chapter IV will present the findings obtained from the case study research.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the experiences of first-year African American males participating in an LLC on the campus of an HBCU. And to understand how, if at all, this program impacts first-year African American male retention. Semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted, and institutional artifacts were collected to address the following five research questions:

1. What are the perceived experiences of first-year African American males who participate in an LLC on an HBCU campus?

2. How, if at all, does a student's pre-entry characteristics impact their perceived experience during the first year of college?

3. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived academic integration?

4. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived social integration?

5. How, if at all, is first-year African American male retention impacted by the students' perceived LLC participation?

To determine the categories that address each of the five research questions, a combination of In Vivo and open coding were used on all interview transcripts and

observation field notes. Based on the data, 124 codes were generated from the interviews, 13 from the classroom observations, and 23 from the residence hall observations. A secondary cross-category analysis was conducted to determine overarching categories common between all three data collection methods. The cross-categorical analysis produced 13 overarching categories and three sub-categories that correspond to each of the five research questions.

This chapter addresses each of the five research questions using the categories that were created during data analysis. An overview of the 12 interview participants is also provided.

Interview Participants

A random sample of 12 students was taken from the LLC population of 37 students. This sample consisted of four students from each of the three high school GPA categories of high performing students (GPA of 4.0-3.5), mid-range performing students (GPA of 3.49-3.0), and average performing students (GPA of 2.9-2.5) to provide a variety of responses regarding the students' experiences in the LLC. Table 2 provides an overview of the pre-entry attributes for all 12 interview participants. The high school GPA for each student is displayed based on the LLC program's assigned categories of high, mid-range, or average, rather than the number itself. The First-generation student status category is represented by the heading, 1st Gen. The category is populated by either Yes or No, corresponding to the students' identified first-generation status. The socioeconomic status category is represented by SES and is populated by low, middle, or

high according to the level each student stated. Student household is populated by either single-parent or two-parent.

Table 2

Interview Participants Pre-entry Attributes

Pseudonym	HS GPA	SAT	ACT	1st Gen.	SES	Household
Christopher	High		18	No	Middle	Single Parent
Herbert	Average	810		No	Middle	Single Parent
Hogan	High	760	18	No	Low	Single Parent
Jamel	High	950		Yes	Middle	Two Parent
John	Mid-Range	930	16	No	High	Single Parent
Kerry	Mid-Range	890		Yes	Middle	Two Parent
Konrad	Average	1050		No	Middle	Two Parent
Marcus	Mid-Range	940		No	Middle	Two Parent
Mathew	Mid-range	910		No	Low	Single Parent
Orlando	Average	890		No	Middle	Single Parent
Ricky	High	910	16	Yes	Low	Single Parent
Timothy	Average	880		Yes	Middle	Two Parent

Findings

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews, classroom and residence hall observations, and information obtained from institutional reports were analyzed and distilled into 13 primary categories and 3x sub-categories. Four of the primary categories addressed the first research question and consisted of behavior change experiences, interpersonal connectivity experiences, LLC privilege experiences, and family affiliation experiences. The two primary categories associated with the second research question were perceived academic performance and the perceived benefits of LLC participation.

The category of academic performance also included three sub-categories which identified students as average performing, mid-range performing, and high performing.

From the data, three categories addressed the third research question and consisted of informing the student, using academic support services, and coordinator access. The fourth research question had two associated categories, creating a social network and event attendance. The categories of life without the LLC and LLC student retention were linked to the fifth and final research question. Table 3 provides a visual display of the relationships between the research questions and the corresponding categorical findings for ease of reference. The remainder of this section provides an explanation of each of the categorical findings as they relate to their associated research questions. Each of the categories is defined and supporting data is provided from interviews and observations, as well as institutional reports. Before proceeding further, it is important to note that some content may be repeated, as the same information might address multiple research questions.

Table 3

Assignment of Categorical Findings to Research Questions

Research Questions	Categorical Findings and Definitions
1. What are the experiences of first-year African American males in an LLC on an HBCU campus?	**Behavior Change Experiences** The perceived positive or negative behavior changes within the academic and social arenas of the student's life.
	Interpersonal connectivity Experiences The perceived experiences from peer-to-peer or group connections formed by the students.

Table 3

(Cont.)

Research Questions	Categorical Findings and Definitions
1. What are the experiences of first-year African American males in an LLC on an HBCU campus?	**LLC Privilege Experiences** The perceived beneficial and unique experiences of the LLC students as derived from their participation compared to those students not in an LLC.
	Family affiliation Experiences The use of family labels by students when describing their perceived LLC experiences.
2. How, if at all, do a student's pre-entry characteristics impact their perceived experience during the first year of college?	**Perceived Academic Performance** This category is defined as the comparison of the students' pre-entry characteristics to the perceived change in academic standing. **Sub-category 1- Average performing students** Having a high school GPA between 2.5 and 2.9 **Sub-category 2 - Mid-range performing students** Having a high school GPA between 3.0 and 3.49 **Sub-category3 - High performing students** Having a high school GPA between 3.5 and 4.0
	Perceived Benefits of LLC Participation What the students perceived they would gain from being a part of the LLC prior to their joining.

Table 3

(Cont.)

Research Questions	Categorical Findings and Definitions
3. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived academic integration?	**Informing the student** The mechanisms by which the LLC students receive information about academic support services.
	Using Academic Support Services The comments and observations relating to the LLC students' use of campus academic support services.
	Coordinator Access The multiple ways in which the LLC students perceive that they have access to the program administrators.
4. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived social integration?	**Creating a Social Network** The ways in which the students perceive that the creation of their interpersonal connections on campus is influenced by the LLC.
	Event Attendance The ways in which the students' perceived LLC participation impacts their event attendance.
5. How, if at all, is first-year African American male retention impacted by the students' perceived LLC participation?	**Life Without the LLC** The imagined first-year college lives of the students if they were not in the LLC program.
	LLC Student Retention The institutional data concerning the first-year retention of the LLC students.

Experiences of First-Year African American Males

The first research question sought to understand the experiences of first-year

African American males who participated in an LLC on the campus of an HBCU. Based

on the data, four categories were created to address this question, and consisted of

behavior change experiences, interpersonal connectivity experiences, LLC privilege

experiences, and family affiliation experiences.

Behavior change experiences. Several of the interview participants expressed

having experienced a change in some aspect of their behavior since joining the LLC.

This category is defined as the perceived positive or negative behavior changes within the

academic and social arenas of the student's life.

Most participants commented on how they perceived a change in behavior from

life before college compared to how they act now in college. This transition seemed to

move from an antisocial or isolated behavior to behavior indicating more social openness.

Hogan said, "I have not been thinking and acting the same way since I came here. I used

to be like 'I'm not going to talk to anyone and keep close' but now I talk and have a

broad circle." Ricky also provided his thoughts on his shift from antisocial to social

behavior when he said:

> Man at first I was like OK so I'm going to be that person that sits in his room all
> day. I mean that was the mentality I had before I got into the LLC. When I get in
> it just opened my mind that I need to go out and join organizations and network. I
> got tired of being antisocial kinda. I mean it's sometimes I like to be by myself
> but it feel good knowing that you got a lot of people who you know. It's weird
> when you're around a lot of people you don't know. Everywhere I go I at least
> know at least one person or see one person. And its weird cus it feel like I'm in
> high school cus I know everybody. I was not expecting to know a lot of people
> on campus. [*sic*]

When asked about some of his experiences in the LLC, Christopher spoke about a

personal reflection he had as a result of being in the program, which caused him to speak

to more people and change his outward appearance to others:

> It [the LLC] kind of made me loosen up and start actually having conversations with people and having a smile on my face at times instead of walking round looking like I'm mad at the world all the time. I'm not, I'm never angry, I'm the funniest person ever, but my facial expression don't always show that and that's just my normal facial expression and I can't help that and people just think 'oh he's mad at something' but I'm not. But it kind of made me think that I might need to start to interact with people and let them know I'm not such a mean person as they think. [*sic*]

Christopher attributed the interaction between himself and his suitemates for this change in his behavior. "We are all close to each other so seeing them and how they interacted with other people kind of made me want to interact with other people and do some of the things they were doing." Hogan made some more personal comments regarding his experiences in the LLC which provided a glimpse into his past. These comments further juxtaposed his pre-college behavior with his current college behavior:

> Before I was in college and I saw someone like my roommate, I would probably not like them, I'd rob them. (laughs) That was the type of environment I had at home. I wasn't attracted to those type of people, but those type of people were attracted to me. They had an influence on me. But now I'm in college… me and my roommate are best friends. My roommate is up there (raises hand to indicate a higher socioeconomic level) and I'm like here (lowers hand to indicate a lower socioeconomic level). We got a lot of things in common. [*sic*]

Hogan attributed the bad decisions he made in his pre-college life to the type of people who he spent time with at home.

Mathew's comments about behavior change seemed to be motivated by trying not to disgrace the program or the coordinators when he said, "I need to watch how I present myself around people in the areas I'm at. I would hate for someone to go back to one of the coordinators and be like . . . he was kinda tripp'n the other day."

The data revealed another change in behavior regarding the participants' approach

to their college academics. Similarities between the academic behavior change and the

social behavior change were noted as the participants often compared their current

behavior to their pre-college life. Participant comments revolved around how they

changed or adapted their study habits to survive in the college environment. Konrad

spoke of how he used to approach studying in high school versus his collegiate approach:

> High school was very last second. It was 'just think of little quick ways to
> remember this or that.' Really just study for the exam and after the exam don't
> worry about it anymore. Now its study a little bit every day and I keep what I've
> studied. Like I'll remember it for longer. I'm not just studying it just to pass the
> exam and move onto the next thing, I'm retaining the knowledge.

For Konrad, it seemed that his change in study behavior was prompted by wanting to

retain the information, to actually learn rather than regurgitate memorized facts. He said

this was facilitated by his involvement in the program:

> I'd say in the LLC we discuss a lot of different study techniques and ways to
> study. And I'd say having that…we've tried, I've personally tried multiple
> techniques and I've found what does and does not work for me. That was a big
> proponent of first semester like learning how, what is most effective when it
> comes to study techniques. I've learned group work, studying in groups and like
> location and things like that make a big difference.

Herbert claimed to not do much studying in high school either, but needed to make a

change in order to succeed:

> In high school I barely studied. I barely did any studying at all but now you have
> to study to get the grades. If you don't, teachers in high school would help you
> but in college it's kinda like you're on your own and if you don't study, the

grades show. Like I was never good at studying but now I think I've gotten better at it.

When asked a follow-up question about his change in study behavior, Herbert attributed it to his interaction with his fellow LLC members stating he changed by, "Learning how other people [LLC suitemates] study and taking good ideas that they have and incorporating that with what I know how to do and what I do." Orlando commented about not studying in high school but also spoke about a tip he learned to improve his studying and retention:

> I never studied. I would just cram. Like even if it was exams I'd cram. I never needed to really. I was always good at retaining information in high school. Now it's more like . . . one of the best tips I got from the program, was when he [LLC coordinator] was teaching in class. Like the day of, when they teach you something when you go to your room just read or go over it. And it's what I've been doing lately because I've been struggling in chemistry, like when we go over a topic I'll go to YouTube and I'll search the topic and watch a video and help me keep it in my memory that way.

Orlando was not alone in attributing program membership with facilitating his change in study behavior. Kerry noted that participation in "the FYE class where we go over topics like that [study habits]" affected his study habits. Course content within the University-mandated FYE 100 and 101 classes covers a variety of study techniques and is further bolstered by evening workshops offered by the LLC program. However, availability of resources does not guarantee student use. Christopher provided such an example when he said, "The program, it affects your study habits but it's all up to the person…it offered me a lot of help but I did not take it at first."

Interpersonal connectivity experiences. The previous section described several

experiences relating to a perceived change in social behavior. All of the participants who

perceived a social behavior change attributed that change to the interaction with their

program peers. Furthermore, some type of peer interaction was mentioned by every one

of the research participants in varying degrees and situations. Interpersonal connectivity

is defined in this study as the perceived experiences from peer-to-peer or group

connections formed by the students.

Early arrival orientation was an event that involved all of the LLC students. The

students were afforded the opportunity to move in two days prior to the rest of the

incoming freshmen. During this time, they participated in activities designed to help

them with college transition and forming peer and institutional connections. Students

participating in any of the LLCs offered by Southeast State University were invited to

this early arrival and orientation. One of the activities during the orientation required

each LLC to create and present a skit that would inform the audience about what their

particular LLC was about. John described his experience with the skit:

> So the LLC got me like the first day, like orientation cus it was just like, they had
> us do a group building exercise. The group building exercise was pretty cool cus
> like we were all like, you know how people are when they all just meet and it's a
> bunch of guys. You know how guys be just standing there seeing that one person
> and talking to them and it was like na we're going to have to work together cus
> we gotta have the best skit! I'd say we had the best skit, it was pretty good. [*sic*]

Ricky emphasized the importance of the skit when he said, "Yea, we probably would

have never clicked like we did if we did not do the skit." The skit Ricky and John are

describing profiled two friends, one who went to college and joined the LLC and the

other who did not go to college at all. Through the skit, the students wanted to show the different paths a person could take, emphasizing the benefits of the LLC-centered college experience versus a life without college. This skit, which involved all of the LLC students, served as the first interpersonal connectivity experience. Ricky's comments also alluded to the formation of a bond between the LLC students as a product of their skit participation. Data gathered from residence hall and classroom observations provided evidence as to how well the LLC students 'clicked' because of the skit.

During residence hall observations, many of the students in the observed suites left their doors open and would freely walk in and out of each other's rooms. This occurrence was mostly observed in suites B and C. Christopher described this as typical for his suite when he said,

> In our suite you would just about find all of our doors open. Cus that's just how we do, you know. We're real close in there you know we just walk in the next room and have a conversation go back to our room and then go to somebody else room . . . like one big happy family. [*sic*]

Similar occurrences were observed in suite A. Although all the room doors were closed in this suite, other LLC members still came to that suite to visit. Further evidence of connectivity was observed in the FYE 101 classroom as well.

In both sections of the FYE course, the LLC participants sat together. The LLC students would sit with either their roommate or other students from their suite. If the student's roommate or suitemates were not in that particular FYE 101 section, the students would sit with other LLC students. Konrad said that for his suite, "Yea, we always, [sit at] the same table. You can catch us in the cafeteria together or in the gym

working out together too. We do a lot of things together." For each observation of the FYE 101 section in which Konrad was enrolled (Classroom A), he and his suitemates always sat at the same table, and almost always in the same seats. The same LLC student grouping was also evident in Classroom B.

There was also an observed physical separation between the LLC and non-LLC students in the classes. Not only did the LLC students always sit together, students not participating in the LLC did not sit near them in either of the classes. In classroom A for instance, there are six tables (refer to Figure 2). Three of the tables, numbered two, three, and six were consistently occupied by a suite or a group of LLC students. Non-LLC students sat at tables numbered one and five regardless of how early or late they entered class. Table four was vacant. Similarly, in classroom B (refer to Figure 3), the right half of classroom was consistently occupied by LLC students. Non-LLC students sat on the far left of every row with at least two empty seats between them and the LLC students. Further examples of interpersonal connectivity were found in the students' comments about attending social activities.

When asked if they attended any social or campus events, the participants all replied 'yes' and provided several examples. For instance, Jamel shared that he attended football games, the homecoming concert, step shows, and some workshops. He also mentioned attending a campus talent show just before spring break. Mathew added that he attended a campus beauty pageant and Marcus went to a fashion show. Other events mentioned by the students included both on- and off-campus parties, the University homecoming parade, and a celebratory breakfast honoring the history of the institution.

The LLC students learned about the events from other LLC students and attended the events with them. In most cases they attended with their suitemates. Kerry shared:

> If you hear some of the guys in your same suite or in the same community, you hear them talk about going somewhere you'll be like 'hey where you going" and then we'll all just go as a group. It's happened a few times. I've had some guys from my suite go to a campus event, so I went with them cus they asked me if I wanted to go to just get out of the room, and experience some new stuff.

Christopher echoed Kerry's comments when he said,

> I can say I attend with the LLC students because one of my suite mates and our friend who lives in the suite next to us who is in the LLC. They'll find out about an event and say let's go and I'll go with them.

Residence hall observations provided additional data on the LLC students' group event attendance. Prior to the beginning of an observation of suite C, I saw three students from that suite standing in line waiting to enter the campus auditorium for an event. Toward the end of the observation, those same students returned to the suite, commenting about the event they just attended. Similarly, prior to another observation period, a group of six students from suite B exited the residence hall together as I was entering. However, because that suite was not being observed, their destination could not be confirmed.

LLC privilege experiences. To further understand the students' LLC experiences, they were asked to compare their lives within the LLC with their perception of those not in the LLC. The students expressed a variety of perceived benefits associated with LLC participation and that other students were missing out on a great opportunity. This category is defined as the perceived beneficial and unique experiences

of the LLC students due to their participation compared with those students not in an

LLC.

The LLC program offered several components that could be viewed as perks,

such as the early arrival orientation, workshops, peer mentors, program coordinators

(who serve as academic advisors and teach sections of the FYE courses), and early spring

registration. Early registration was offered to the LLC students for subsequent semesters

if they participated in at least five hours of tutoring assistance during the fall semester.

This enabled them to register for their spring semester classes almost two weeks before

the majority of students on campus. This programmatic benefit gave the LLC students a

choice selection of class times in order to create a tailored class schedule. Christopher

talked about how he used his early registration privileges to create a schedule he knew he

could follow. He also spoke about how non-LLC students were amazed at his schedule:

> So, some people don't benefit from early registration so they end up having those
> early classes that the majority of nobody wants to go to. I have like one class one
> day and people are like 'how did you get that' and I tell them it's the program that
> I'm in. The early registration helped me get the classes at the times I knew I could
> wake up and go to them. Instead of them be computer generated and I be stuck in
> like three 8:00 a.m. classes throughout the whole week and be on the verge of
> dag-gone hurting somebody. [*sic*]

Ricky also commented on how having early registration benefitted him when he said:

> The one thing . . . the early registration. That helped me get a lot of classes on
> time schedules that I can go on. And you know if you got a class at 8:00 a.m. and
> then class at 5:00 p.m. You're not going to go to that 5:00 p.m. class most likely
> because you're going to be tired. The way we get early registration it helps me be
> able to set up my classes on time schedules that I can go and pass them.

Herbert spoke to this concept as he explained what he felt were the perceived differences

between him and someone not in the LLC:

> I'd say I'll have a lot more information about certain stuff that they [non-LLC
> students] don't have just because of the LLC and a lot of advantages such as early
> registration that maybe somebody else who is not in the LLC would not have.

With their comments, Herbert, Christopher, and Ricky along with several other

participants showed that they are acutely aware of a difference between themselves and

students not participating in an LLC. Hogan gave his opinion on the difference between

LLC and non-LLC participants:

> I feel bad for them [non-LLC students]. Cus they don't have the same
> opportunities that I've got (laughs). Like they don't have early registration unless
> they are athletes. Like they don't got, you know, they do nothing, they don't do
> nothing really. They just go to class and chill like that. [*sic*]

The participants acknowledged their differences because of their LLC participation, and a

couple of participants expressed desires to share what benefits they could with other non-

LLC members. Ricky commented,

> I would want everyone to be in a LLC like this cus it's just like, it make this
> college more beneficial than what it is without it, cus its stuff I hear that people
> would never experience without the LLC unless they got like a senior telling them
> everything. [*sic*]

Herbert expressed that he invited non-LLC students to some of the program workshops

and requested that one of the coordinators help his friend who is not in the LLC:

> Yea, I've told some about the LLC events and one of the coordinators has met him before. He [LLC coordinator and academic advisor] actually helped him out the day we had orientation and my friend overslept. He missed when they were registering for classes and I had brought him here and my advisor was in the auditorium downstairs and helped him even though he was not undeclared he still helped him with his schedule.

Additionally, participants commented on their use of the peer mentors and other academic support resources integrated into the program, as well as their participation in special campus events. These and other topics will be discussed in detail in the sections addressing the third and fourth research questions.

Family affiliation experiences. The final category was derived from student comments about how they perceived their relationship with the other members of the LLC as a type of family. Participants used terms such as "family," "brother," "brothers," "brotherhood," or "big brother" when describing their experiences with other LLC members and coordinators. This category is defined as the use of family labels by students when describing their perceived LLC experiences.

When asked about his experiences in the LLC, Mathew described it as, "like a brotherhood really, since everyone stays in the LLC residence hall. The majority of the LLC is basically in the same major." According to institutional reports, more than half of the selected LLC participants were interested in or were pursuing STEM degrees. Christopher commented on how one of the LLC program components has given him a similar brotherhood experience when he said:

> So all the [program] workshops, all the males that are involved with [the LLC program], I've gotten kind of close with them. It's like another brotherhood, a

family-type thing. Um they, all of us, we get along so it helps build you back up if you're down.

Ricky spoke about one of his first experiences with the LLC, which was after performing the skit during early arrival orientation. He recalled:

Well we basically, we first got here we interacted into a skit together, which brought everybody together like an icebreaker. Everybody go to know each other but in the end, we like, we all brothers. Like every time we see any of us we already know oh he is in the LLC, he's in the LLC, and he's in the LLC. So it's like we closer . . .

Konrad likened his experiences to that of having an older brother when he said:

I'm getting advice from mentors that are also in the program that are sophomores, juniors, and seniors that are remembering their freshman year. They can tell me things they messed up or things they could have done or should have done. It's like having an older brother who has experienced it all and can lead you through it and can tell you what to do and what not to do.

Other participants shared similar feelings about their experiences but attributed them to their perceived experiences within individual suites, rather than the program as a whole. Kerry spoke about his particular suite when he said:

Basically it's been a pretty decent brotherhood with those of us that are in the suite and then when we go to events like the program workshops we usually learn a lot about each other's backgrounds and have some pretty deep discussions.

Christopher mentioned that his suite was like "one big happy family" because all of the doors are open and they walk in and out of rooms freely. This particular behavior was observed in the residence hall, specifically in Suite C. During my observation, all of the

doors in that suite were open and students were walking freely in and out of other students' rooms and having conversations. On occasion, some doors would be closed but that would not deter students. During a later observation of Suite C, I observed Christopher knock once on Hogan's door and enter without waiting for permission from Hogan.

Observations of Suite B provided additional support for the familial experiences of LLC students. On a Thursday evening, an LLC student who was not interviewed was preparing to go to an off-campus party but did not have an acceptable shirt to wear. For the next 30 minutes, his fellow suitemates searched through each of their closets attempting to find a shirt for him. The search expanded to the neighboring LLC suites as Marcus suggested they check Suite C and D for a shirt. After he secured an adequate shirt, he asked for the opinion of the entire suite concerning his ensemble.

Pre-entry Characteristics and Perceived First-Year Experiences

The second research question sought to investigate the impact of a student's pre-entry characteristics on their perceived first-year experiences. These characteristics represented the academic and family background components each student brought with them to college.

Concerning academic pre-entry characteristics, this study placed an emphasis on the student's high school GPA because it was the primary measure used to select and recruit students for the LLC. Participants' first-generation college student status, socioeconomic status, and household type were used to establish the family background characteristics.

Perceived academic performance and perceived benefits of LLC participation were the two categories created to address this research question. The category of perceived academic performance is split into three sub-categories of average performing student, mid-range performing student, and high performing student, which was drawn from institutional data revealing the students' high school GPAs. The subsequent perceived benefit category is also defined and includes data from interviews, observations, and institutional reports.

Perceived academic performance. Family background was categorized by the students' perceived high, middle, or low economic status, whether they came from a single- or two-parent household, and if they were a first-generation college student. Data from student comments were also included for additional support. Findings are presented in the three sub-categories of high performing students, mid-range performing students, and average performing students. This category is defined as the comparison of the students' pre-entry characteristics to the perceived change in academic standing.

Average-performing students. The first sub-category discussed is the average performance category, which includes high school GPA's between 2.5 and 2.9. According to their high school GPA, Timothy, Orlando, Herbert, and Konrad were placed in the average performing student category.

Herbert, who identified himself as coming from a middle-class, single-parent household, described his fall semester academic performance:

> Like the first semester I missed like a month or so because of medical issues, I had a liver transplant two years ago and I was having another episode so I was out. And plus before that classes, like I don't think I was in the right classes.

> Like my SAT or ACT scores, that's what put me in calculus and I was going straight from discrete math to calculus and that wasn't … so first semester I did not do too good. And when I got back [the LLC coordinator] helped me register for classes for this semester and classes that I needed to be in and not like last semester.

Once enrolled in the correct levels of classes and healthy again, Herbert was able to improve his class situation in the spring semester. Although his standardized test scores placed him in challenging courses, a pre-existing medical issue was responsible for most of his academic distress and required him to withdraw from all of his fall semester classes. Although Herbert identified as middle-class, he mentioned difficulty in acquiring his course materials in a timely manner for coursework and grading; this may be an example of how pre-entry characteristics affected his first-year experience.

When asked why he joined the LLC, Orlando said: "I knew that coming out of high school I was kinda lazy like with school work and stuff and I figured this would help motive me." Orlando identified himself as coming from a middle-class, single parent household. He was also very critical of himself when speaking about his experiences in the program when he said,

> I've always been kind of a social person. Now that there is a group of people around me I get distracted from my work at times, going to play the game or something stupid like going to the store instead of doing my work or something like that.

A follow up question was asked to clarify if the social nature of the LLC was distracting from Orlando's academics. He continued, "Yea, well no, I mean it's more of my fault though. I can't blame it on the LLC. I'm just a social person." Orlando also related that

he had not studied at all during high school. "To be honest it wasn't as hard as I should have made it. I did not prepare at all. Like I just did not prepare at all. Like I would wait to do assignments late. But I mean, you know it pretty much took me some adjusting to get to because I was not expecting it to be like this."

Timothy identified himself as a first-generation student from a two-parent household and considered his family's socioeconomic status as middle class. Timothy reported studying very little in high school, and a bit more in college.

Similarly, Konrad reported that his high school studying was limited to finding quick ways to remember items prior to exams. Konrad self-identified as coming from a middle-class, two-parent household. About his study habits, he continued: "I was aware of some studying techniques like I knew how to study but not to my maximum potential. And that's like what the LLC has helped me kind of reach that maximum."

Mid-range performing students. This category consisted of earned GPA's between 3.0 and 3.49. John, Mathew, Marcus, and Kerry were the students with mid-range performance.

Mathew came from a single-parent home and was not a first-generation student. But Mathew thought of his family's socioeconomic status as low, "nearly poverty stricken" in his words. Mathew spoke about some of his difficulty and recovery within the first semester:

> First semester was a little rough getting here. I did not think it was going to be true, but got caught up with the females. First semester was kind of tragic. Ended up with a 2 [GPA] flat but now things are better cus I know what I have to do and right now I've got all A's.

Kerry identified as a first-generation student from a middle class, two-parent household. When asked to describe his academic experiences during the first year Kerry shared:

> First semester, well at least the first half of the first semester was like 'wow, this is college. I'm in college, this is the college experience'. Not too much, well no partying at all, just familiarizing myself with campus and how the whole game works. And then right after homecoming, that's when it really settled and it's like 'I'm here and need to make these grades right and stay focused on these academics' and things like that.

Marcus came from a two-parent household, and perceived his family's socioeconomic level as middle class. Marcus shared this about his college academic experience:

> I thought it would be harder. I thought the classes would be harder. I was realizing that it was most of the stuff I already learned in high school. We [he and his roommate] were cruising through the first semester. Now we're doing alright.

John was not a first-generation student but did come from a single-parent home. He perceived his family as having a high socioeconomic status. When asked about his academic experiences during the first year, John responded,

> Taxing, like extremely taxing. Like I was not prepared, especially not first semester. It was not even the difficulty of the work but just the workload itself. And like the perfectionism of the professors like it really really got me down. This semester I was kinda better at it, kinda ready for it sort of. But yeah, it was sort of a rough ride.

Additional inquiry was made regarding the study habits of the participants. Mathew, Kerry, and Marcus all indicated they either had existing study habits or knew how to study prior to attending college. John, however, commented:

> Well, I'm not a big studier. I should probably change that. Naturally I'm not big on studying more. Like if I don't get I'm probably not going to get it. I'm very straight forward with it. [One of the LLC coordinators] has been trying to change that. So he's trying but so far it hasn't really.

When John was asked if he knew how to study in high school or was it more that he did not need to, he said:

> It was more of I did not need to. I mean, I don't know if I know how to study or not. I just assume that you just look over the material again and then you get it, you know.

High-performing students. The third and final category of high performing students included GPAs between 3.5 and 4.0. The four students within this GPA range were Jamel, Hogan, Christopher, and Ricky.

Jamel was a first-generation student from a two-parent household and perceived his family's socioeconomic status as middle class. Concerning additional pre-entry characteristics, Jamel said, "I don't think my high school prepared me for college at all. The only problem I've had with classes is math and that's my biggest weakness." However, Jamel stated that he did know how to study prior to attending college, "I knew how to study I just did not need to…But now I have to study a lot more, I think I could study more and I would do better."

Ricky is another first-generation student but from a single-parent home, and considered his family to be in a low socioeconomic class. Ricky did state that he knew how to study prior to attending college: "Yea, I knew, I just did not think it was required it wasn't that hard. High school was not that hard, but I'm a procrastinator. I do everything at the last minute." Ricky also felt that he was unprepared for his major:

> I say I was ill prepared for my major. Cus I'm a comp sci major so at first it was like it was easy, I was at the top of the class. First person finishing all my assignments. Then the class just… The class took a turn, and this was around mid-term. The work started getting real hard like you need mentors to help you with it. And my grades start falling and I think by mid-term I prolly had a B on midterms but soon after it went to like a D. And it hurt and after that I was basically making up for it.

Both Hogan and Christopher came from single-parent households and are not first-generation students. Although Hogan considered his family to be in a low socioeconomic class, Christopher perceived his family as being middle class. Christopher remarked that he knew how to study prior to entering college. He also commented on the benefits of the program coming in from high school:

> . . . the program offers lots of tutor sessions and like extra help to like help the students with their grades and like fall behind in certain subjects. In a way the program kind of helps establish us like at the beginning. It helps with a starting point.

Hogan did not make any mention of knowing how to study prior to college but did express that he was dyslexic and was taking medication for Attention Deficit Disorder.

Perceived benefits of LLC participation. Previously, several of the interview participants commented that they came to college with certain pre-entry characteristics that might have posed a risk to their academic success. Others possessed the necessary skills to succeed but had not been required to exercise those skills in high school. Students also mentioned not wanting to be like other family members who did not succeed in college. These students felt that this program was going to assist them in overcoming known and unknown obstacles. This section is defined as what the students perceived they would gain from being a part of the LLC prior to their joining.

When asked what led them to join the program, the participants responded with program attributes such as early registration, early campus move-in, and the ability to change their housing assignment to the residence hall in order to participate in the LLC. According to Ricky and Konrad, that ability to change their living environment was a definite plus. Ricky said,

> At first I was like I don't want to be put in [all-male residence hall]. I saw that when I went to the LLC meeting, and I just looked at the list and they said people who are in this LLC stay in [co-ed residence hall]. And my brother goes here, he was telling me you're going to be put in [all-male residence hall] because you're a freshman. I was like I'm not going to do that, I'm going to do [LLC program].

For Konrad, it was the similarities to high school that prompted his interest in a change in residence hall. He said, "I went to and all-boys high school, so I was like all-boys high school, done with all boys dorms, I don't need that."

Other students viewed the program as offering positive assistance for their first year of college. It was mentioned earlier in this section that Orlando felt that he was lazy

in high school and that behavior could be detrimental to his college success. He

perceived the program as helping to motivate him. Herbert joined the LLC after hearing

a presentation from the coordinators during new student orientation. He said, "So I

decided to join because of what [the coordinators] said. That it's a good mentoring

program and helps you get on track." When asked what made him joining the program,

Marcus said, "It seemed like a good idea to be around a supportive group to make the

first year of college easier." Kerry thought that the LLC would help facilitate an easier

transition to college. Whereas Jamel thought that the LLC "seemed like something good

and positive and I wanted to do something else besides sitting in my room all the time."

LLC Participation and Academic Integration

The third research question sought to understand the effects of LLC participation

on a student's perceived academic integration. Based on the data, three categories were

created to address this research question, which included informing the student, using

academic support services, and coordinator access. Each of these categories is defined

and provides data from interviews, observations, and institutional reports.

Informing the student. Within the LLC there were several channels to provide

the students with information about campus academic support services, as well as

program-specific support services. This category involves how the program informed the

students about campus academic support services. It is defined as the mechanisms by

which the LLC students receive information about academic support services.

Students participating in the LLC were first introduced to campus and program

academic support services during the early arrival orientation. During the two-day

period, workshops and presentations were conducted to provide information to the students about the various campus support services. After orientation, the primary method by which the LLC students learned about academic support services was through their FYE 100 and 101 courses. Prior to beginning each weekly lesson, I witnessed the instructor/LLC coordinator reminding the students about all of the services offered such as tutoring, peer mentors, and any group tutorial sessions that were available. On occasion both FYE 101 cohort sections met together to have a presentation about a campus program or services.

Course instructors/LLC coordinators also served as the academic advisors for the LLC students, making advisement sessions an additional venue for sharing information about support services. Finally, the coordinators conducted 'foot campaigns' where they visited the LLC residence hall to remind them about support services and perform an additional check-up on the students. According to the LLC end-of-year report, the coordinators conducted three foot campaigns, making 59 student contacts.

Using academic support services. Interview participants made several comments concerning when and which support services they used. Often reacting to poor test scores or grades, students in academic difficulty made the most use of support services. Some student comments did imply proactive use as well, however. This section is defined as the comments and observations relating to the LLC students' use of campus academic support services.

"I don't think, if I was not in the LLC I would be going to the tutorial lab…I probably would not even know about it or where it was." This was a comment from

Herbert after being asked how the LLC has impacted his study habits. Tutorial services

is an integrated component of the LLC. To obtain early registration for the following

semester, program participants must spend a minimum of five hours in the tutorial lab per

semester. Tutorial hours are documented by the LLC coordinators. When asked about

his academic experiences, Konrad commented about using tutorial services when he said:

> We are require to go to tutorial lab which is basically free tutoring for any subject. Originally I was like I don't really need it, it's a waste of time. I can just study by myself. But the more and more I went I kind of realized that oh, I did not really think of it this way. And I'm kind of getting new perspective on certain classes or certain topics we're studying in the class. So, the program…even thought it was like required it's still like benefited me.

Others attended the tutorial lab as a means of improving from some academic difficulty.

For instance, Jamel used the tutorial services to overcome some math difficulty. Ricky

also had difficulty with math and sought out tutoring to help improve his grade:

> Let's take math for instance. I'm not gonna lie, math I had failed for real. But we had started to do mandatory tutorial labs and going to the tutorial lab and stuff like helped me get my grade back up to a C+. They advise you to do it, you don't want to go cus it's like (sighs) but I learned now you gotta take care of it before it get to bad. Like if you there and it's like I'm not too sure, you gotta go ahead and go. But if you get to the point where you like in the danger zone it's almost too late.

Like Ricky, Christopher's use of tutoring was from a reactive perspective when he

shared:

> The program like I said it offered me a lot of help but I did not take it at first. When I really started focusing on my grades and realizing that I wanted to make better grades. I started going to the tutorial lab and meeting my mentor more and studying on my own and going to the library.

Christopher mentioned some additional services such as mentoring and the library. The

LLC matched students with peer mentors who are upperclassmen, some of whom have

previously been in the LLC. The students meet with their peer mentor at times and

locations they coordinate in order to receive academic assistance or motivation to keep

going. Kerry, for instance was assigned a peer mentor and explained:

> Yea, the mentoring helps a lot. Especially if they're in that program you know it is helping. You know it's good to see someone that is closer to your age and has been there and done that. They got good advice for you because they've just done it…I was assigned to an older student [that had previously participated in the LLC].

Christopher also shared a mentor experience when he said:

> Yeah, the program, they blessed me with a mentor. My mentor he called me one day and asked if we could meet in the library and I was like sure. I meet with him once a week and we go over all the work I have and he helps me out. So the program has helped me…it's making me stay on the right path so it's not letting me fall back at all. It's keeping me where I need to be.

In addition to the peer mentors mentioned, the LLC coordinators are offered as a

mentoring and motivational resources as well. Konrad shared:

> The mentoring and things like that, it helped, so when I did not get the grades I was not to satisfied with or too pleased with, I knew I could talk with [one or both of the LLC coordinators] and they would give me some type of feedback on how to improve or what to do differently.

Each FYE class participated in library orientation and tours, which exposed the

students to another campus service location. The library serves as a place where students

can meet with their mentors, have study groups, or study individually. Christopher

previously mentioned that he met with his mentor at the library. When asked if there were any additional services that helped him deal with academic difficulty, Ricky responded:

> Library, definitely the library. That's probably, for the most part I at least spend nine hours in the library in a week. And I go at night. So, cus it's so full during the day and we [another LLC student] usually get a room like this with a TV so we and relax and do our work instead of just grinding hard but I mean we grinding hard but we are grinding at our own pace.

During residence hall observations in suite D, I heard students discussing going to the library and then observed them putting on their backpacks and exiting the suite. In suite B, a group of three students with backpacks walked into the suite. One of the students having a conversation on his cellular phone mentioned that he and the other students had just returned from the library.

Timothy spoke of another support service when seeking assistance for his Economics course when he said, "Well there was this one time the [LLC coordinator] was telling us to go to the [study kickoff] and I was having trouble with economics and I met with tutor at the [study kickoff]." The study kickoff is a pseudonym for an actual event at Southeastern State University held every semester before finals. For one day, students have access to tutors from all disciplines in one venue.

Finally, the use of an additional campus support service was mentioned when Hogan was asked if how did he resolve any academic difficulty he had when he said, "Yea, [TRiO] helped me out, they hooked me up with services, lab accommodations, supplemental testing, extra time on tests and test correction." Because Hogan has

attention deficit disorder and dyslexia, he qualified to take part in the TRiO Student

Support Services program. This federally funded program provides additional services to

first-generation, disabled and non-traditional students to increase their opportunities for

degree attainment. Due to the location and time frame of the research, I was unable to

observe Hogan making use of these additional academic support services.

Coordinator access. An LLC coordinator is a multi-faceted position, requiring

the individual to serve as the FYE instructor as well as the academic advisor for the LLC

students. These different duties created multiple opportunities for the LLC students to

gain assistance and address any problems that arose during the academic year. This

section is defined as the multiple ways in which the LLC students perceive they have

access to the program administrators.

The first touchpoint between the coordinators and the students was serving as the

academic advisors for the LLC students. Each of the two coordinators advised half of the

LLC students, and in addition, they advised the non-LLC students in the overall program.

As advisors, they met with the students during pre-determined advising sessions to plan

schedules and discuss academic progress. When asked about how the LLC affected his

academic experience, Kerry spoke about his advising sessions:

> If anything it's been the advising periods that we have. They really there to make
> sure you're on track. It's not really to have someone overbearing you, but to have
> someone looking over your shoulder to make sure you're still on track. [*sic*]

The LLC students were not limited to the scheduled advising sessions; they are free to

seek out their advisor when they need them. Herbert's previous story of taking a friend

to his LLC advisor for assistance is one example of having access to the coordinators without making an appointment. Further unscheduled advising sessions were unexpectedly observed during classroom observation debriefing sessions with the coordinators. Each of the debriefing sessions was interrupted by at least two LLC students who did not have appointments and were in need of assistance and advice.

The second touchpoint between student and coordinator was the FYE 100 and 101 courses in which the coordinators served as instructors. Course enrollment was determined by which coordinator served as the student's advisor. If the students attended every session of class, they had contact with their advisor/coordinator 15 times per semester. Classroom observations of the FYE 101 course showed that the instructors used class time to remind students of advising-related material such as registration and financial aid deadlines as well as academic support services. Post-class student and instructor interaction was also noted during the observations of both sections. After class was dismissed, small groups of students approached the instructor for signatures confirming tutorial hours, scheduling of formal advising appointments, or obtaining additional information about upcoming campus events. Kerry also shared his thoughts on having his advisor as an instructor when he said:

> I think it helps because if you go to class you're going to have to see them. It helps, the way he teaches he puts his personal info into so we feel more comfortable with each other. So it's easier going to him for help because you really know them rather than just going to meet someone to just talk about your grades and stuff.

According to Kerry, having the coordinators in this dual role helped him feel more close to his advisor, making him more willing to seek assistance. The third and final touchpoint was through the 'foot campaigns' the coordinators conducted in the residence hall. As mentioned in the previous category of informing the student, 'foot campaigns' were conducted as an additional point of contact and check-in for the students.

LLC Participation and Social Integration

The fourth research question sought to understand the impact of LLC participation on first-year African American male students' perceived social integration. Based on the data, two categories were created to address this research question. One category is creating a social network, and the second category is event attendance. Each category is defined and provides data from interviews, observations, and institutional reports.

Creating a social network. Interview participants expressed that the LLC was instrumental in making friends and facilitating peer connections outside of the LLC. This section is defined as the ways in which the students perceive that the LLC influences the creation of their interpersonal connections on campus.

The creation of these interpersonal connections began prior to the beginning of the semester, during the early arrival orientation, with the skit the students performed. Ricky mentioned that the skit was the reason the students bonded when he said, "The skit really brought us together. That's how I got my nickname up here. A lot of people got their nicknames from the skit." Ricky received his nickname 'Ricky Ross,' a name commonly used to refer to the hip-hop artist Rick Ross. He was given this nickname by

his peers because he imitated the voice of Rick Ross while playing the part of a drug

dealer during the skit. The drug dealer represented a life without college. The skit

created a situation where these students from different parts of the state and country, who

did not know each other, had to work together towards a common goal. Orlando said that

one of the outcomes of the skit was that, "It did get us to kinda know each other and see

how our personalities were."

Several of the interview participants directly credited their involvement in the

LLC with making friends and other peer connections on campus, especially when they

did not know very many people. When describing his social experiences Herbert said:

> It's been good, especially with the help from [the LLC] meeting [LLC] brothers.
> Like I only knew a couple of people from back home that came here and the LLC
> is helping me meet new people cus we stay near each other and see each other
> every day.

Herbert continued to talk about the LLCs effect on his campus social experiences when

he said:

> I'd say it's helped with the social. Meeting new people, finding out where people
> stay. Cus over spring break, when we had a break a while back I went to Andre's
> house and I did not meet Andre until I got here and found out he was in the LLC.
> So I met new people and have gone to somebody's house. So it's helped with
> everything.

From his comments, it would seem the program helped Herbert to be successful in

making interpersonal connections, especially with Andre, another LLC student in the

same suite as Herbert. Konrad spoke specifically about the program's impact on him

making friends when he said,

I'd say it's impacted it pretty . . . it's been a large impact. Without the LLC, I would not have had the core groups of friends I have today. It's kind of weird how we all got paired up, but everything happens for a reason and we are a pretty close-knit group.

Orlando commented, "I met a lot of guys that I prolly see myself staying friends with for a while."

In the process of remarking on their perceptions of how the program impacted making friends, Hogan and Ricky elaborated on what they perceived to be the improved quality of friends they were making. For instance, Hogan spoke about how his friends are positive and push him to do better when he said, "It's like I'm making good friends, like they make me and drive me to do better and become better myself. I'm making friends that are driving me to do better." Ricky shared a similar sentiment when he said:

It actually helped me look for smart friends you know. Not looking for smart friends but like putting myself around ppl that are good for me. Cus like none of my friends partake in alcohol or marijuana. That's just because my family do stuff like that and I already see where we at because of stuff like that. So I don't want to be around that no more that's why I'm here. I did not come here to do what I was doing or around at home so I mean. You see we're squad in [suite D]. You got the circle and then you got the circle (places verbal emphasis). I got my tight circle of about four friends. Any you know there is always that problem child in the circle that you got to help. It's my homeboy, we're trying to get him on the right track.

Other students shared that LLC participation expanded their social network because the program incorporated previous LLC members as peer mentors or in workshops as guest speakers. Christopher noted:

It [LLC program] introduced me to a lot of people and a lot of older people [that were in] the program too that don't live in the residence where I stay. It expands your social life because you see more people. When you see more people, they will probably be with more people and you will get introduced to them and the circle of life continues.

Kerry also spoke about interacting with previous LLC participants when he said:

Like the meetings we have when we hear from the upperclassman or if we go a couple days down the road we see them walk around the campus and we're like 'oh, you were in the LLC' and we might exchange numbers if we ever need help.

Contrarily, two students shared that they did not think the LLC had any impact on making friends or their social interactions. When asked "How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted making friends," Jamel responded:

I don't think it has because I just hang out with people that I meet anywhere. When I'm in my room I hang out with my suitemates, when I'm in class I hang out with my class friends and so on.

When asked the follow-up question of "Do you think you would have made the same type of friends if you were not in the program?" Jamel said, "Na, I probably would have had a more diverse group of friends." Marcus shared a similar comment about the LLC not having an impact on making friends when he said, "I don't think it's impacted me making friends. I think I would have made the same friends no matter."

Event attendance. According to the interview responses, the members of the LLC were very active in attending campus events, even when the attendance for mandatory programs was excluded. This section is defined as the ways in which the students' perceived LLC participation impacted their event attendance.

When asked if they attended any campus or social events during their first year, the respondents produced a long list of programs they attended, many of which were repeated by all of the participants. Football and basketball games were the most referenced, followed by campus parties and homecoming activities (including step shows, concerts, fashion shows, and talent shows). Christopher commented on how the LLC contributed to his event attendance when he said, "A lot of the times I find out about different events from the people that actually live in the residence hall with me." When the students heard about an event, they often chose to attend it together. Konrad added:

> We'll see a flier for a poetry slam but it will also talk about HIV awareness and things like that and it's on a Tuesday night. So we'll get our work done as a group, and as a group we'll also go to that program. Or just lectures, things like that, people speaking about Ferguson, Missouri, or race relation(s). And well go to that too. So it's [the LLC] kinda by requiring us to go it started us down that path were we have to go to this that and this, but then now it's like we don't have to go but its sounds pretty interesting so why not go. So it's opened up some doors.

Regarding the diversity of the programs he was required to attend as part of the LLC, Konrad also shared,

> I realized that if it was not for the program requiring me to go I would not have gone. But I learned a lot of things about myself and how to make myself better as far as health and being fit and things like that. Another thing was the [event celebrating the Civil Rights history of the university]. We were required to go to that. Originally, I had no interest in going. It was early in the morning and I wanted nothing to do with it. After I went to the program with four or five guys from the LLC, we sat there and listened to some of the men speak and it was something else. Just, we weren't part of history but we could hear it. We felt as though we were there with the men that walked and did the sit-in. It was crazy but I enjoyed it. The program has definitely broadened my horizons and opened me for growth.

Herbert felt that the mandatory LLC programs and workshops had a different type of

positive effect on him when he said:

> Yea, like I've been to the workshops and it's helped me with…cus like I never
> liked to dress up at all, or wear collared shirts and to go to the workshops you got
> to dress up. So it's kinda helped there and improved that. [*sic*]

Timothy acknowledged that it was not just LLC members he attended events with when

he said: "I attended with some friends. A couple I attended with my roommate and my

suitemates. And a couple I attended with some friends I made outside of the program."

Jamel and Mathew did not share the same views as the rest of the participants

concerning the LLCs impact on their event attendance. Jamel felt that without the LLC he

still would have sought out and attended similar programming. Mathew expressed a similar

sentiment when he said, "It hasn't affected me going to any, or exposing myself to high

quality programs they offer around campus."

LLC Participation and Retention

The fifth and final research question asked how, if at all, first-year African

American male retention was impacted by the students' perceived LLC participation.

Two categories were created to address this research question and consisted of life

without the LLC and LLC student retention. Each category is defined and provides data

from interviews, observations, and institutional reports.

Life without the LLC. Throughout this chapter, the data presented has shown

that most of the students have placed a large emphasis on their participation in the LLC.

From their comments, they perceived that it helped with making friends, broadening their

social horizons and providing academic support services when needed. When asked how they felt their experiences would be if they were not in the LLC, many of the students commented about the impact it would have on their academic and social lives. This section is defined as the imagined first-year college lives of the students if they were not in the LLC program.

Hogan simply said, "I would probably just, to be honest I'd be out this school by now." Similarly, Orlando expressed concern regarding his ability to stay in school when he said:

> To be honest. I might not have been coming back next semester. It's not even that I did not want to, I just don't think I would have had my head on right at all. Cus I did not really have my head on right like that last semester but I'm trying to attack this semester so I can come back in the fall. I wanna be here. I realized that this is something my future is in I just got tied in too much with the social stuff.

Herbert expressed concern about his grades but also spoke about how not having as much access to his advisors would affect him differently when he said:

> Bad. Probably be on academic probation and some other stuff. Because, I guess I know I haven't met other advisors from different majors but I know that they…I don't think they would be as helpful as [the LLC advisors] with advisement or classes. Cus I hear from other people who have declared majors that it's hard to get in touch with their advisors.

Ricky also felt that his grades would suffer if he were not in the program. He believed that it was the assistance he received through his participation in the program that helped him get past an academic low point when he said,

> If I was not in the [LLC] right now . . . I'm pretty sure my grades would have been worse then what they were last semester. They were bad to me cus I got a 2.6 and I am usually a 3.0 and above type of person. It's just that my major class messed me up last semester. I'm making up for it right now. But the only way I was able to pull up and pull out what I had was cus I had help and guidance. Without that I would have probably been on academic probation. For the first time! That would have destroyed me. I probably would have had no motivation after that.

Although initially Jamel stated he did not think anything would change if he were not in the program, he later mentioned that he thought he would have encountered some difficulty because, "I probably would not know about certain things because they tell us. I probably would still do good but if I needed it, it would be harder because I would not know exactly where to go [for help]."

Participants did not limit their comments about life without the LLC to the impact it has had on their academic life. The students also felt that not being in the LLC would have stifled the amount of information they would have received and limited their social development. Timothy's comments about life without the LLC covered both areas:

> If I was not a part of [the LLC] I wouldn't know important stuff like how to make a better resume and how to get around and scholarships, registration, and basic stuff like that. I probably be in my dorm all day not really doing anything. Like I met my first friends through the program so it would probably be harder finding friends, well not hard but not having as many starting off. So being on my own a lot more I'd say.

Regarding not being in the LLC, Ricky also said, "[I] probably would not have met the people that's in my squad now. Probably would not have met my girlfriend, that's crazy." Konrad reflected on his first-year social experiences when he said,

They would be extremely different. I would be one of those lost freshmen who does not really fit in with a particular group and I'm kinda feeling my way around. I don't know exactly what to get involved with. Unless you're on a sports team or in a LLC, you really don't have that guidance or that sense of where to go. I don't know if I would be struggling academically but definitely socially. [*sic*]

LLC student retention. During the time frame of this study, Southeastern State University measured first-year student retention by the number of students enrolled in fall semester who returned for the successive fall semester. The same measurement was used to determine the retention of the students in the LLC program. This section is defined as the institutional data concerning the first-year retention of the LLC students. When each of the 12 students were asked how they felt about returning the following fall semester, all 12 participants responded with confidence and surety they would return. Table 4 summarizes data gathered from institutional retention reports for the LLC. It provides a comparison of the students' perceived first-year retention with their actual retention.

Table 4

Comparison of Participants' Perceived Retention versus Actual Retention with Academic Standing and Cumulative GPA

Pseudonym	Perceived Retention (Y/N)	Actual Retention (Y/N)	Academic Standing	Cumulative GPA
Christopher	Y	Y	Good Standing	2.30
Herbert	Y	Y	Good Standing	3.08
Hogan	Y	Y	Good Standing	2.93
Jamel	Y	Y	Good Standing	3.17
John	Y	N	Suspended	0.86

Table 4

(Cont.)

Pseudonym	Perceived Retention (Y/N)	Actual Retention (Y/N)	Academic Standing	Cumulative GPA
Kerry	Y	Y	Good Standing	3.07
Konrad	Y	Y	Good Standing	3.58
Marcus	Y	Y	Good Standing	3.13
Mathew	Y	Y	Good Standing	2.70
Orlando	Y	Y	Suspended	1.84
Ricky	Y	Y	Good Standing	3.07
Timothy	Y	Y	Good Standing	3.26

As shown in Table 4, 11 of the 12 students returned for their second academic year of college. Of the 11 retained, 7 of the students earned cumulative GPAs above a 3.0, the highest of which was a 3.58. Hogan, Mathew, and Christopher earned GPAs in the 2.0 to 2.9 range. Orlando earned a GPA below a 2.0 which placed him on academic suspension, but was granted a waiver of suspension by the department allowing him to return for the subsequent fall.

The process to complete a suspension waiver involved Orlando submitting an application to his academic advisor, in this case, one of the LLC program coordinators. The application included a signed academic plan of action agreement stating what the student plans to do in order to improve their grades and a short statement from the advisor articulating why the student should be granted the waiver. After the document was signed by the student and the advisor, it was taken to the department head for

approval or denial. Although Orlando's waiver was granted, his GPA and academic standing made him ineligible to receive federal financial aid. In order to pay for the fall semester, he obtained an additional loan. In his comments, Orlando placed a high personal importance on returning in the fall, which was likely integral in his decision to seek the suspension waiver and obtain outside funding. John was also placed on academic suspension at the end of the spring semester but with a much lower GPA. He did not seek a suspension waiver and did not return for the following fall semester.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings for each of the five research questions used to investigate the experiences of first-year African American males that participated in an LLC on an HBCU campus. Each research question was accompanied by one or more categories which were distilled from the data, and represented common themes relevant to each question. The first research question had four categories associated with it consisting of: behavior change experiences, interpersonal connectivity experiences, LLC privilege experiences and family affiliation experiences. Two categories of perceived academic performance and perceived benefits of LLC participation were associated with the second research question. Informing the student, using academic support services and coordinator access were the three categories for the third research question. There were two themed categories for the fourth research question: creating a social network and event attendance. Similarly, the fifth and final research question also had two categories: life without the LLC and LLC student retention.

Based on the findings, the majority of the interview participants reported that their LLC experiences positively influenced their behavior, interpersonal connectivity, academic performance, and feelings about their retention. Classroom and residence hall observations supported the perceived experiences of those students. Clear examples of interpersonal connectivity and peer bonding were seen in the classroom, as well as the residence hall. From their experiences, the students felt that their first year of college would have been more difficult and they would have been at a social and academic disadvantage without their participation in the LLC. The students also expressed that before beginning school, they believed that being in the LLC would aid in their retention. Chapter V will discuss the findings for each of the five research questions and present the significance and implications of the study as well as its implications for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the experiences of first-year African American males who participated in an LLC on the campus of an HBCU and to understand how, if at all, their participation had any effect on their retention. Five research questions were posed to understand what the students experienced as part of this program, and consisted of:

1. What are the perceived experiences of first-year African American males who participate in an LLC on an HBCU campus?

2. How, if at all, does a student's pre-entry characteristics impact their perceived experience during the first year of college?

3. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived academic integration?

4. How, if at all, does participation in an LLC affect students' perceived social integration?

5. How, if at all, is first-year African American male retention impacted by the students' perceived LLC participation?

Discussion

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Tinto's (1993) model of student integration. Semi-structured interviews, residence hall and classroom observations and institutional reports were the data collection methods used to capture the experiences of first-year African American males participating in an LLC on an HBCU campus. Data were coded into 13 distinct categories and 3 sub-categories to address each of the research questions and were presented as findings in Chapter IV. This chapter discusses the findings for each of the five research questions and presents the significance and implications of the study, as well as implications for future research.

Experiences of First-Year African American Males

The first research question sought to understand the experiences of first-year African American males who participated in an LLC on the campus of an HBCU. Interviews and observations yielded four distinct categories concerning the experiences of first-year African American males participating in this program. The first category was described as a perceived change in how the students behaved in both academic and social settings. The second category dealt with their interpersonal experiences, which was followed by a categorization of how they experienced the perceived benefits of being in the LLC. The final category related to the experience of using family-type terms such as 'brother' or 'family' as an indicator of how close the peer bonds had become.

During this research, it was difficult to identify any relevant literature concerning LLC participation as a causal mechanism for student behavior change; however, research does exist which speaks to the LLCs ability to influence student outcomes (Inkelas &

Associates, 2007; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Inkelas et al., 2006; Inkelas et al., 2007).

Research conducted by Inkelas et al. (2006), for example, indicated that when compared

to non-LLC students, those participating in an LLC were statistically more likely to

discuss academic and socio-cultural issues with their peers, to think critically, and to

advance the engagement with faculty to the level of mentorship. Additionally, the

student integration model (Tinto, 1993) provided an explanation for student behavior

change.

In the second component of his model, Tinto (1993) addressed student intentions

before advancing to the academic and social systems. He described intentions as having

the ability to:

> . . . reflect both aspirations and expectations. Most often stated in terms of goals,
> they mirror both the person's hopes for the future and his/her assessment, based
> upon past experiences, of the likelihood of attaining that future. As such they
> serve as a barometer of the character of individual experiences and their sum
> effect upon individual judgments of future attainment. (p. 110)

From this perspective, the perceived behavior change experienced by the students could

be interpreted as the manifestation of an aspiration to succeed which was made prior to

college entry. Whether the change be academic or social, participant comments suggest

that many of the students wanted to be a different type of person in college than they

were in high school. Although the majority of participants made mention of some

behavior change, Jamel and Marcus did not identify any perceived change due to their

LLC participation, which speaks to the existence of heterogeneous perceived experiences

for this student population.

The reported experiences of peer-to-peer and group interaction by the students show similarity to research from Jessup-Anger et al. (2012). Their qualitative study on LLCs, males, and identity development showed that the participants appreciated surrounding themselves with like-minded peers and that it enabled them to be themselves and identify others with similar interests (Jessup-Anger et al., 2012). During the data collection phase of the research, physical displays of peer and group interactions were observed in the classroom. Students self-grouped by suite or with other LLC students, voluntarily separating themselves from the non-LLC students. Students also noted that the LLC facilitated their bonding with fellow LLC participants, which translated to attending social events together.

Responses from the interviewed participants did not clarify why they referred to each other as "brothers," as a "brotherhood," or as "family." However, Jessup-Anger et al. (2012) encountered similar terminology when their respondents were describing their interactions with peers in an all-male LLC. As a result of this 'family' bonding, the males in their study reported experiencing a sense of community and relationship building, as did those from this study.

Pre-entry Characteristics and Perceived First-Year Experiences

The second research question sought to understand the impact of a student's pre-entry characteristics on their perceived first-year experiences. For African American males, a lack of adequate college preparation has been attributed to their attrition (Hood, 1992; Nyirenda & Gong, 2009; Palmer & Davis, 2011; Palmer & Young, 2008; Schwartz & Washington, 2002). One student, Kerry, mentioned that he did not feel that his high

school experience prepared him for college. Other students commented either on the lack of necessity to study in high school or lack of knowledge of how to study.

A comparison of the participants' pre-entry characteristics (high school GPA, household type, perceived socioeconomic level, and first-generation college student status) indicated that the students' household type could have a positive or negative effect on their first-year academic experiences. Four of the participants earned fall semester GPAs below a 2.0. These students all came from single-parent households; however, they represented each of the three high school GPA categories and each of the economic status categories. Two of the students were able to improve their GPAs significantly in the spring semester, which may be attributable to the LLCs support programming mitigating some of their pre-entry characteristics.

First-generation status was also included as one of the pre-entry characteristics. The four participants who identified as first-generation were from various economic levels and different household types, and all four were academically successful despite risk factors associated with first-generation students. None of the students made comments regarding their first-generation status having a perceived impact on their experiences in college.

Participants also commented on what they perceived were the benefits of participating in an LLC. For instance, Orlando viewed the program as a motivational tool. Kerry joined the program because he perceived that it would assist in college transition while Jamel thought it would be a positive decision and would help keep him from being in his residence hall room all the time. Findings from studies such as Inkelas

and Associates (2007), Jessup-Anger et al. (2012), Stassen (2003), Wawrzynski and Jessup-Anger (2010), and Zhao and Kuh (2004) reflect the academic and social benefits the participants perceived they would gain as part of the LLC.

Based on the data obtained from the interviews and institutional reports, there is evidence that pre-entry characteristics both positively and negatively impacted the experiences of the students in this study.

LLC Participation and Academic Integration

The third research question sought to understand the effects of a student's participation in the LLC on their perceived academic integration. The conceptual framework for this study is an adaptation of the student integration model (Tinto, 1993). Academic integration is understood within the contexts of both formal and informal integration. It can be accomplished by having access to and a relationship with faculty or by having knowledge of academic support services and more importantly by using those services. The formal context of academic integration relates to the formal experiences of the students within classrooms, laboratories, or faculty and staff interactions within those environments. Informal context relates to the faculty and staff interactions that take place outside of the classroom (Tinto, 1993).

Observations, institutional reports, and participant comments from this study produced data that are congruent with aspects of Tinto's (1993) definition of academic integration. Findings from the observations and interviews connote that the LLC merges the formal and informal systems of academic integration. This is done first by having program coordinators serve as the students' academic advisors and course instructors.

Having multiple roles enables the students to connect with staff in both the in-class

(formal system) and out-of-class (informal system) settings. However, for this study,

formal interactions can only be determined based on the data obtained; as such, they must

be limited to the FYE course. No data could be collected to indicate any such formal

interaction for the students in any of their other courses. Therefore, conclusions could

not be drawn from these undocumented interactions. Informal interactions were noted in

institutional reports concerning residence hall 'foot campaigns' by the program

coordinators, unscheduled advising sessions, and monthly workshop attendance.

Student responses also suggest that LLC students received information about

academic programs and services through a variety of channels such as email, text, and

word of mouth. According to participant responses and classroom observations, the

students perceived they obtained much of their information about support services in

class from their instructors. Similar findings regarding the academic benefits of LLCs

have been documented by Inkelas (1999), Inkelas and Weisman (2003), Pike (1999), Pike

et al. (1997), and Stassen (2003) and support the academic integration the students

perceived they experienced.

LLC Participation and Social Integration

The fourth research question sought to understand the impact of LLC

participation on first-year African American male students' perceived social integration.

Similar to academic integration, social integration is comprised of two components:

formal and informal integration. Tinto (1993) described the formal component as student

experiences that take place during extracurricular activities such as clubs and

organizations or other peer-group activities, whereas the informal component addresses experiences that take place in the day-to-day activities of the students. Both can be accomplished through connections made with peers, faculty, and staff outside of the academic arenas of the institution (Tinto, 1993).

This study produced findings that suggest the experiences of the students in the LLC are consistent with Tinto's (1993) definition of social integration. Furthermore, they indicate that the LLC merges the formal and informal systems of social integration. The LLC facilitates this first by the having the students live in the same residence hall, which allows them to see and interact with each other on a daily basis (informal system). Secondly, the students use these informal interactions to build peer connections which result in attending campus events in these peer groups (formal system). Inkelas (1999) and Pike (1999) found similar evidence concerning LLCs and social involvement. Their research reported that students in LLC programs were more likely to be involved with campus activities and interact with instructors and peers (Inkelas, 1999; Pike, 1999), which corresponds with the findings from this study.

In addition, Tinto (1993) noted the interconnectedness of the academic and social systems; he recognized that an event in one system might directly or indirectly impact the other system. Examples of this connection are the in-class seating selections of the LLC students mirroring their suite assignments, suite-mates working on homework and projects together, and attending workshops and other social events together.

LLC Participation and Retention

The fifth and final research question sought to understand how, if at all, first-year African American male retention is impacted by the students' perceived LLC participation. To address this question, the students were asked to imagine what their first year of college would be like if they were not in the LLC. Furthermore, after participating in the program for close to a year they were asked what they believed their prospects would be for returning the subsequent fall. This information was then compared to the participant retention data found in institutional reports.

Findings suggest the majority of the participants believed they would not have been as successful either academically, socially, or both if they had not participated in the LLC. Hogan commented that he did not think he would still be in school if not for the program. Herbert's thoughts centered on his academic performance. Without the program, he perceived that his grades would have been sub-par and that he would have ended up on academic probation. Other participants felt they did not have as much academic difficulty as the others, but if they had run into problems, they would not have known where to go to get help. The comments from the students reflect their perception of the academic benefits of LLC participation, such as knowledge and use of academic support services and an enhanced academic experience. Each of the perceived academic benefits recognized by the participants is reinforced by research conducted by Inkelas (1999) and Pike (1999).

Socially, the students expressed feelings of isolation and being alone if they had not been involved with the LLC. They perceived it would be more difficult to make

friends or develop other types of social connection without the LLC. Konrad, for instance, did not think he would have met his girlfriend if he had not been in the program. Overwhelmingly, the students perceived that the LLC enhanced their social experience and to remove it would greatly hinder their social development. This perception of an enhanced social experience is supported by research conducted by Inkelas et al. (2006), who found that students participating in LLCs were significantly more likely to engage in social interactions and peer related activities than non-LLC students.

All of the participants expressed thoughts and feelings associating their LLC participation with increased chances of retention. All 12 of the participants confidently expressed their ability and desire to return the following academic year. For 11 of the 12 students, this became a reality. However, John was unable to join his fellow LLC participants the following fall semester due to being place on academic suspension. I think it is important to illuminate some contrasting behavior between John and the other 11 LLC students who were retained, which possibly could explain his attrition.

The first area of contrast involves attending social and campus programming. All of the participants mentioned attending required LLC programming such as the mandatory workshops and some sponsored campus events. The other 11 students' behavior differed from John's in that they attended additional campus and social events together as a suite or larger contingent of LLC students. John mentioned attending very few events because, "To be honest, I'm not a very big social event kinda guy because I don't like big crowds." When he did go out, it was either to mandatory events or with his roommate who is his best friend from high school.

Having a high school friend as a roommate insulated John from the rest of the LLC because he began college with a strong pre-existing peer connection, whereas the others students had no prior knowledge of who the rest of the LLC participants would be and made new friends in their new environment. Even though his friend was also a part of the LLC, being roommates created a scenario in which John was not required to make new peer connections, thus limiting bonding with his suitemates and engagement with the overall program. One of the hallmarks of being in an LLC, as reported by Inkelas et al. (2007), was the stronger connections and increased social interaction between participants and faculty. By limiting his contact to just his friend, John was not as socially engaged as the other students who commented on visiting other suites and attending events with several different LLC students.

During residence hall observations, John and his roommate were present for only 10 minutes out of the 3 one-hour observations of his suite, while all of the other students were observed on multiple occasions. John also mentioned that he does not often speak to the other LLC students. "Yeah, we really don't talk about hanging out. It's mostly like, 'Yo, can I borrow this or Yo did you get that test.'" These social contrasts indicate a level of disconnection between how John and the other LLC students experienced the program. Compared to the rest of the LLC students, John did not comment about any of the perceived social benefits of the LLC such as peer bonding, making new friends, or creating a community, all of which were articulated by his program peers. The lack of these important social connections may have potentially led to his attrition, as Tinto (1975, 1993) states that social integration is an important contributor to retention.

In addition, John's approach to his academics played a considerable role in his ability to return. John did express that he did not feel confident about his pre-college academic preparation, or about his ability to study. Similar feelings were expressed by Herbert and Mathew. All three experienced academic difficulties during their first semester, earning low GPAs, but Herbert and Mathew were able to greatly improve their GPAs the following semester, whereas John's GPA stayed below a 1.0. It is possible that John did not take full advantage of the academic support programs being offered through the LLC like his fellow participants. Herbert attributed his success to having knowledge of and using the tutorial lab in addition to leaning on his suitemates as another support system. Similarly, Mathew mentioned the use of the tutorial lab and peer study groups.

John did mention going to the tutorial lab, but only to fulfill the program requirement of five hours per semester, without mention of returning for future use. He also stated that he relied on some students to, as he says, "look out for him" in certain classes. This alludes to the student obtaining assignments from other students he knows in the classes, with the potential of those students signing the attendance for him in his absence. During this study there was no evidence of other students signing the attendance for John in the FYE 101 course, but he was not in class during the two weeks of classroom observations I performed in his section. During a coordinator debriefing session, I was told that his absence was not an uncommon occurrence. If attendance was a problem for his FYE 101 course, it could be possible that this behavior was reflected in other courses as well. Lack of attendance can lead to decreased or failing grades due to the amount of missed content.

Surprisingly, John spoke highly of the LLC experience and strongly
recommended that any incoming student join the program. He seemed to be aware of the
services the program offered and acknowledged that the LLC made his transition to
college smoother. I can only surmise that the combination of the LLC social disconnect,
enhanced by his pre-existing connection with his roommate and ongoing academic
problems, likely led to John's poor performance and subsequent suspension.

In contrast, Orlando identified his over-socialization as being a hindrance to his
success. He experienced similar academic difficulty to John's experience during both
semesters, but he self-attributed those poor results to procrastination and being too social.
He was unable to achieve a good academic standing at the end of the spring semester,
which resulted in his suspension. He did work to obtain a waiver of suspension from the
department, which allowed him special dispensation to return the following semester.

Two common themes were shared among the students who were retained based
on academic standing: buy-in and engagement. Each of those students believed the LLC
program would positively contribute to their success in college, and engaged in the
programming, meetings, and academic support opportunities offered to them.

Without statistically significant evidence, it is impossible to say with certainty
that the students' participation in the LLC increased their chances of retention. What can
be gleaned from this study is that the experiences reported by the students reflect the
documented academic and social benefits of LLC participation (Inkelas & Weisman,
2003; Inkelas & Associates, 2007; Inkelas et. al, 2007; Wawrzynski & Jessup-Anger,
2010). Those studies have connected LLC participation with increased success in

retention, and the findings of this study mirror those success outcomes as much as a qualitative study can.

The students also believed that participating in this program would help them return the following academic year, directly connecting their engagement in the program with retention. In addition to their perception that the program would increase their likelihood of returning, the students also perceived that the program helped to alleviate some of their negative pre-entry characteristics such as inexperience with studying, unpreparedness for the rigors of college schedules, or being socially withdrawn. Each of the study participants believed that participation in the LLC would provide them with the tools to help them overcome challenges during their first year of college.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it addresses previously un-researched subject matter regarding first-year African American males who participated in an LLC while attending an HBCU.

The study directly addresses what Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2010) and Strayhorn (2010) considered a lack of contemporary studies that would provide insight into both the academic and social experiences of African American males at HBCUs. Previous studies on African American males in college have typically focused only on their experiences at PWIs (Harper, 2005, 2008; Harper et al., 2011; Harper & Quaye, 2007), to which Kimbrough and Harper (2006) suggested, "much of the national attention [is] being placed on issues facing Black students at predominantly White institutions . . .

the quality of life at HBCUs for [Black American] students—especially [Black] men—has gone virtually unnoticed" (p. 190).

Furthermore, this research fortifies two anemic categories within LLC literature by focusing specifically on African American males and on HBCUs. First, it addresses what before now has been the underrepresentation of African American males in LLC studies. Secondly, it speaks to the lack of institutional focus on HBCUs within LLC research. The majority of current LLC research has taken place on PWI campuses (Inkelas & Associates, 2007; Inkelas et al., 2007; Jessup-Anger et al., 2012; Soldner, Rowan-Kenyon, Inkelas, Garvey, & Robbins, 2012; Yao & Wawrzynski, 2013), and those studies focusing on males have been limited to small samples of predominantly White male students (Jessup-Anger et al., 2012; Yao & Wawrzynski, 2013).

Implications for Practice

Previous LLC research has only documented the ability of these programs to increase social connectivity, engagement, persistence, and retention of students at PWIs, but this is no longer the case. Data from this study suggest that the benefits of LLC participation can now be extended to first-year African American males and HBCU campuses. Palmer et al. (2013) noted that African American men have been experiencing increased campus disengagement and attrition as well as decreased social involvement on HBCU campuses. Based on the findings from this study, higher education practitioners could benefit from the implementation of LLCs on HBCU campuses with low African American male engagement and retention as targeted programs intended to improve student outcomes.

For HBCUs not experiencing increased student disengagement and high attrition, African American male-focused LLCs can still be beneficial tool. Within this study, there were participants who would not be considered "at risk." They identified their socioeconomic levels to be in the middle to high range, were from two-parent households, and were not first-generation college students. However, they too expressed perceiving a strong positive benefit from participation in the LLC. They related feeling strong peer social connections, making life-long friends, commented that they were exposed to people with whom they would not normally have associated, and benefitted from academic tips that enhanced their skill set. Based on the experiences of the student participants, the program's impact is not limited to affecting students traditionally thought of as being more vulnerable to attrition in their first year of college. Practitioners can use this evidence to diversify the criteria for LLC participation in order to be more inclusive rather than exclusionary, because this program has been shown to benefit underprepared as well as academically prepared African American males.

Implications for Future Research

This study creates a foundation for future research concerning first-year African American males, LLCs and HBCUs. It offers a unique perspective on the experiences of students participating in a residential college program which has previously been the subject of single, multi-institutional, and national studies (Inkelas & Associates, 2007; Inkelas et al., 2007; Jessup-Anger et al., 2012; Soldner et al., 2012; Yao & Wawrzynski, 2013). This study opens the door for further investigation and possible testing of this program's effect on the first-year African American male population.

As mentioned in Chapter I, these three specific components of higher education research had not been previously investigated concurrently. Possibly because it was thought that the effects of LLCs were generalizable across all colleges and universities without needing to consider potential differences based on student or campus type. Similar to national LLC data, the findings from this study indicate that first-year African American males perceived they experienced the social and academic benefits of LLCs while attending an HBCU. Could the same be said if they participated in an LLC on a PWI campus? Future targeted research on first-year African American males and LLC participation should investigate the differences, if any, they may experience at various types of institution. Findings from such a study could alter the way in which campuses structure their respective programs.

Future researchers might also consider investigating the identity development of first-year African American male LLC students who attend HBCUs. Cuyjet (2006), Harper (2004), Harper and Harris (2006), and Harper and Quaye (2007) have established that identity development is one of the outcomes of participation in an organization. Jessup-Anger et al. (2012) noted the effect that LLCs have on male identity construction at a majority institution. Investigations concerning HBCUs, LLCs, and African American males could further advance the knowledge concerning the process by which college-attending African American males develop their identity. Research concerning identity development could also lead to supplementary studies focusing on participation in LLCs enhancing first-year African American male involvement in organizations. Particular attention should be given to understanding if LLC participation motivates

students to participate in organizations they would not previously have considered being of interest.

Another area for future research based on this study concerns a quantitative analysis of the retention of first-year African American male LLC students. Although this study was qualitative, the experiences the students shared positively addressed social and academic integration and retention. Also, the institutional reports obtained showed increases in GPA and over 91 percent of the LLC students returning for their second year. Despite this information, there is not enough statistical data to make any definitive causal determinants between LLC participation and first-year African American male retention on an HBCU campus. A quantitative analysis would provide the means to make these determinations.

Chapter Summary

The findings for each of the five research questions were discussed in this chapter. Responding to question one, data suggests that from their participation in a LLC, first-year African American males perceived themselves as having four distinct experiences: a change in behavior, peer-to-peer connections, privilege from the perceived benefits of the program, and a perceived sense of family. Some of their pre-entry characteristics, such as a lack of study knowledge seemed to have an initial negative effect on some of the students. But through LLC participation they expressed finding solutions to address these incoming inadequacies. Further findings also suggested that the structure and activities of the LLC program facilitated the students' perceived academic and social

integration, and the students attributed their confidence in retention to their participation in the LLC.

Suggestions for additional LLC research with this population were also mentioned in this chapter with regard to further investigation and analysis of outcomes. It was also noted that research should continue to focus on the lives of African American males who attend HBCUs, which contributed to the significance of this study. Additionally, it was expressed that practitioners should use the findings from this study to evaluate the feasibility of using LLCs to address additional success outcomes for African American male students.

Conclusion

This study was purposed with addressing certain unexplored areas in higher education research. Addressing these areas has the potential to expand known information concerning the LLC experience for African American male college students. It also has the supplemental benefit of adding much needed research concerning the academic and social experiences of African American men at HBCUs (Palmer et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2010). LLCs are not a panacea to ensure the success of African American male college students. They do, however, share many components with several other programs linked with the success of this student population such as student government associations and Greek letter organizations.

From this perspective, LLCs have the capacity to serve as an alternative to participation in campus organizations such as BGLO's which have prohibitive membership requirements that exclude mass participation, or student government

associations which require being elected. Not every African American male will have an interest in such organizational participation and should have access to alternative avenues to achieve the success outcomes of involvement, engagement, persistence, and retention.

The experiences detailed in this study put a voice to the lives of the students who participated in this program. They shared their stories of transition, making friends for life, and how they felt the program gave them a sense of family. They spoke of how LLC participation pushed them to interact with other students and do things outside of their comfort zone. The findings from this study do not allow for the statement to be made that the retention of first-year African American males at an HBCU is directly connected with their LLC participation. What can be said is that these students believed fully that participation in the LLC would enhance their first-year experience and ensure their retention. There was a perception of value placed on LLC involvement by each of the students, and for 11 of them, that commitment to involvement resulted in their retention.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The Experiences of First-Year African American Males in a Living Learning Community
at a Historically Black College and University: Implications for Retention

Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to participate in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of first-year African American males that participate in a living learning community on HBCU campuses. The implications of such research could be beneficial for increasing the retention and engagement of African American males in institutions of higher education.

For the purpose of ensuring all words and information are correctly documented, this interview will be recorded. To protect your identity, your name will not be used during this interview and all copies of the recording will be deleted after they have been transcribed.

The interview should not last longer than one hour and will consist of ___ questions which, after asking, you will provide answers to the best of your ability. If you need to get in contact with me after the interview you can reach me via email at pbjohns2@uncg.edu.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Demographic Questions

1. How would you describe your family's economic status: Low, Middle, High?

2. Please describe the type of household you came from: single parent, both parents, other?

3. Are you a first generation student, having no parent that has graduated from college?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your experiences in the LLC thus far?

2. What led you to make your decision to join the LLC?

3. How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted your first year of college?

4. Describe your academic experience during your first year?

5. In what way, if any, has your participation in the LLC effected your academic experience at this institution?

6. How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted your study habits?

7. Have you had any academic difficulty during your first year, and if so how have you resolved it?

8. Please describe your social experience during your first year?

9. In what way, if any, has your participation in the LLC effected your social experience on this campus?

10. Did you attend any campus or social events this year? If so what are they?

11. In what way, if any, has your participation in the LLC contributed to your attendance of social or campus events?

12. How, if at all, has your participation in the LLC impacted making friends?

13. How would you compare your college experience in the LLC with students you know who are not in the LLC?

14. How do you feel your experiences during your first year would be if you were not in the LLC?

15. How do you feel about your prospects for returning for your second year?

16. Would you recommend this program?

17. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in the LLC? If so, please do so.

APPENDIX B

FYE 101 COURSE SYLLABUS

FYE 101

Course Syllabus

Course Description

This course is intended to provide academic and personal skills and resources essential for success in college and in life. Students will gain knowledge and experiences to guide them through the major/career decision-making process based on ability and aptitude. Students will gain necessary information to build financial aid and financial literacy awareness and receive tools for financial and debt management. Additionally, health and wellness topics will be addressed to promote and identify prevention strategies for healthy living and student success.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

As a result of participating in FYE-101: students will be able to:

- Develop and apply academic skills that promote academic, major, and career success.
- Identify or confirm a choice of college major or career consistent with personality, values, and aptitudes.
- Develop an intellectual understanding of financial aid and financial literacy and its relationship to student success.
- Discuss the connection between health and wellness and success in college and in life.
- Explain university academic policies and procedures.
- Create a current resume' and cover letter.
- Develop and define personal and professional goals.

Academic Integrity and Responsibility

Enrollment in the class means that you agree to abide by the expectations of Southeast State University about academic integrity. For specific information, refer to your Student Handbook.

The Southeast State University Academic Honor Code will be enforced. Your responsibilities in the area of honor include, but are not limited to, avoidance of cheating, plagiarism, and improper or illegal use of technology. Your presentations, assignments, and quizzes are expected to be your own work. Any questions about plagiarism should be directed to the professor. It is permissible to request assistance from a librarian when doing database research as long as the selection and organization of the research for the presentation is in your own words.

Attendance

The University is committed to the principle that regular and punctual class attendance is essential to students' optimum scholastic achievement. An absence, excused or unexcused, does not relieve a student of any course requirement. Regular class attendance is a student's obligation, as is taking responsibility for all course assignments, quizzes, and tests.

Late Work

All assignments need to be completed and turned in by the date requested. Further discussion will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Makeup Coursework

The administration, faculty, and staff recognize that there are circumstances and events that require students to miss classes and required course work due on the day of the absence. Also, they recognize that required course work is needed to give each student an adequate performance evaluation. Therefore, whenever reasonable (and more specifically described below), students should be allowed to make up required work. Instructors should schedule make-up work at a time that is convenient to both the instructor and the student.

Policy Regarding Makeup of Required Coursework

- Student may petition an instructor to make up required coursework whenever the student has a permissible reason for requesting make up of required coursework.
- Student will be required to present documentation, which verifies absence constituting permissible reason.
- Whenever possible, a student should consult with the instructor prior to an absence that will involve the failure of submission of coursework. Arrangements for makeup should be discussed and agreed upon at this time.
- A student must petition for makeup of required coursework on the first day that he/she returns to class.

- If permission is granted to make up required coursework, the instructor and the student should agree on an acceptable date for accomplishing the makeup of missed required coursework.

Failure to comply with the above may result in the denial to make up required coursework.

Required Documentation for excused absences and make-up work
- Verification of Illness: Requires signed statement of a physician or a duly authorized staff member of the Sebastian Health Center.
- Verification of Participation in University-Related Activities: Requires signed statement/letter from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs.
- Verification of Other Reasonable Circumstance (e.g., court appearance, family emergency, etc.): Requires a signed statement from an appropriate official (e.g., Court Official, parent or guardian, etc.).

NOTE: Other reasons for class absences are not acceptable.

Blackboard

Our class will use the teaching and learning program called Blackboard. Go to the Southeast State University home page and click on Blackboard Student Orientation Course. Check Blackboard daily for class related updates and announcements. If you have questions, contact the Blackboard Technical Support at (1-866-520-6877).

E-mail Policy

Students must only use Southeast State University e-mail accounts (no Hotmail, Gmail, AOL, etc.). Each e-mail message must include the course number and section (if sent through Blackboard that will be added automatically) as well as a concise and clear statement of purpose in the subject line (i.e., FYE 101:17 – Death in Family). You must include your name, as it appears on the course roster, at the end of your message. All messages must be conveyed using standard English.

Please make sure you consult the course syllabus, other handouts, and the course website **BEFORE** submitting inquiries by e-mail. When a question cannot be easily or briefly answered by e-mail, please visit your instructor during their office hours.

Disability Services

Students with documented learning disabilities should identify themselves to their instructor and present appropriate documentation during the first week of classes. The Office of Disability Support Services is located in _____.

Cell Phone Usage Policy in the Classrooms

Cell phone use inside classrooms during class periods is prohibited. Be advised that placing or receiving calls and/or texts, as well as conversing on cell phones during class, shall be considered as disruptive behavior for students and may be subject to the **Policy on Disruptive Students in the Classroom.**

Grading Scale

Grade	Quality Point	10-point scale
A	4.0	94 - 100
A-	3.7	90 – 93
B+	3.3	87 – 89
B	3.0	83 – 86
B-	2.7	80 – 82
C+	2.3	77 – 79
C	2.0	73 – 76
C-	1.7	70 – 72
D+	1.3	67 – 69
D	1.0	60 – 66
F	0.0	Below 60

Financial Literacy Project – 200 points
Attendance – 100 points
Class Participation – 100 points
Syllabus Quiz – 75 points
Mid-term Exam – 75 points
Workshops – 100 points
Post-Test – 100 points
Career Passport – 100 points
Health & Wellness Plan – 100 points
Pre-Test – 50 points