

MOBLEY, MAUDE EMILYE, Ph.D. Character Education at a Historically Black Institution. (2010)  
Directed by Dr. Deborah J. Taub. 217 pp.

As the profiles of colleges and universities have changed due to the influx of adult, international, and part-time students, institutions of higher learning have faced difficulties in developing students' character. With the diverse interests, schedules, needs, and backgrounds of today's students, maintaining personal contact with each student can be difficult. Dalton and Crosby (2006) recommended that institutions provide collegiate experiences that promote the values of honesty, fairness, compassion, and respect for others as a vehicle for teaching character. These scholars espoused that infusing these values in academic and co-curricular programs promotes principled reflection and decision-making.

Employing a constructivist research paradigm, the purpose of this study was to understand how the environment for character education is established at a historically Black institution and how students experience it. This case study also examined the role of the president in establishing this climate and the encounters of a group of students related to character. By considering the perceptions and reflections of these students, educators can better understand how the in-class and out-of-class experiences of students influence their ethical growth and development.

Institutional documents and speeches of the executive officer were analyzed, along with the transcripts of semi-structured and group interviews. There were a total of 20 student participants. Fourteen respondents were interviewed individually and six participated in a focus group. Results indicated that institutional mission and clearly

communicated community standards influenced character development among participants. Courses, convocations, study abroad, and campus leadership were among the character building experiences discussed by informants. Additionally, students cited the president, staff, faculty, and fellow students as contributing to their ethical education. Findings suggest that character is not permanently engaged when students come to campus and that college experiences do influence the development of the value systems of students.

CHARACTER EDUCATION AT A HISTORICALLY  
BLACK INSTITUTION

by

Maude Emilye Mobley

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro  
2010

Approved by

Dr. Deborah Taub  
Committee Chair

© 2010 Maude Emilye Mobley

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, William C. Mobley (1929-2009), a man of great character and a “true character.” Your care, compassion, wisdom, and wit continue to guide me every single day. You earned two degrees from historically Black institutions.

Your commitment to education and your alma maters was evident throughout your life.

Daddy, thank you for always pushing me and encouraging me to be and to do my absolute best. I miss you more than you can imagine, but it is because of you, your unconditional love, and your confidence in me that I was able to complete this journey.

My prayer is that this work is worthy . . . and that its fruit will influence the lives of educators and students as you have mine and countless others. This one is for you with all my love.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of  
The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair Dr. Deborah Taub

Committee Members Dr. David Ayers

Dr. Jewell Cooper

Dr. Cheryl Callahan

November 9, 2010  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

October 28, 2010  
Date of Final Oral Examination

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To God be the Glory for the things He has done. First, I give thanks to God for His goodness, mercy, and grace. Heavenly Father, throughout this project, I have experienced You and Your love in a new and different way. My heart's desire is to exhibit Your character through my life and example. Thank You for all You have taught me through this journey. I am nothing without You.

I want to thank my mother, Lecora L. Mobley, a consummate educator and an extension of God's love for me in the earth. Mama, your love, sacrifices, and support are a constant blessing to me, and I am so grateful that God chose you and Daddy as the vehicle for my entrance into the world. I love you with all my heart, and I could have never completed this degree without your encouragement and example.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Deborah Taub, Dr. David Ayers, Dr. Jewell Cooper, and Dr. Cheryl Callahan. I appreciate your time, commitment, and constant support. Each of you brought your unique perspectives and proficiencies to this process, enhancing and enriching the experience. I give special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Taub. Your guidance, counsel, and wisdom were invaluable and your dedication to your students and transformative learning inspires me. I would be remiss if I did not thank Dr. Heidi Carlone for introducing me to the world of qualitative research and for laboring with me as I struggled to shift my mindset from that of practitioner to researcher. Your course (CUI 730) transformed me.

To my professional mentors, Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole, Dr. Johnnetta Cross Brazzell, and Dr. Claudette Williams, I thank you. You encouraged and pushed me toward this degree when I was not sure it was something I wanted to pursue. Knowing each of you has had a tremendous impact on my life, both personally and professionally. My prayer is that I will sow into the lives of colleagues and students the way that each of you has sown into my life.

For your love and our many years of friendship, I extend gratitude to my dear friends, Pertricia Mattison, Rita Dawkins, and Dr. Darnita Killian. Sisters, we have so much history, and we have experienced the good, the bad, and the ugly together. I could never express what each of you means to me and I am so glad I do not have to put it into words. Thank you all for loving me in spite of me . . . for encouraging me always. Dede, your overwhelming generosity alleviated many a burden during this process. Trish and Rit, we will always have the Montelucia and the Joya Spa. I love you all!

To Tanya Dean, Dr. Tammy Mann, and all of my former students—thank you for all you taught me. Tannie, this degree would not have been possible without the seed you sowed in December 2006. Your generous gifts, love, and support are God’s hand extended. You and Tammy were among the first students I had the privilege to serve. We grew together along with all of the residents of Manley Hall at Spelman in 1983. I am so proud of both of you and I thank you for how you have touched my life. God has knitted us together for always.

I am especially appreciative of my immediate and extended family (my Charlotte, Atlanta, Alabama, Miami, and Winnsboro families) and friends to include Clarence High,

Elijah Freeman, Portia Rutley, Dana Moore, Ardella Malone, Dr. Pauline Drake, Rev. Dr. Natalie McLean, Chloe Jones, Dr. Haywood Parker and Truth Tabernacle Ministries (Rocky Mount, NC), Eileen Blackwell, Vaneisa Benjamin, Samira Rawlings, Dr. Cherrel Miller Dyce, and so many others. All of you contributed to my success and assisted me through your love, prayers, and support.

I thank my former colleagues at Spelman, North Carolina Wesleyan, and Bennett Colleges, and my current colleagues at the South Carolina Governor's School for Science and Mathematics. The character agenda is an important component of our work. Leading by example is not just a buzz phrase, but our responsibility and reasonable service as educators.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my study participants and the colleagues who assisted me at Avante University. My staff liaison and the students with whom I interacted affirmed this work and Avante's president, Dr. Bernard Jamson (pseudonym), is an example to the entire academy. As I observed activity on the campus and as the students shared their stories, I was convicted and inspired. May this work encourage all of us toward good, solid character and better citizenship.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Description of Research Problem .....	1
Significance of Study .....	4
Defining Character .....	6
Statement of Purpose and Research Questions .....	10
Avante University: The Context .....	12
Summary .....	15
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	16
Chickering’s Vectors of Development.....	17
The Teaching of Values and Character in Higher Education .....	21
Creating Learning Environments that Promote Character .....	27
Character Outcomes .....	36
Student Learning Outcomes.....	37
The Assessment of Character Outcomes .....	42
Historically Black Institutions .....	49
Conclusion .....	58
III. METHODOLOGY .....	61
Introduction.....	61
Design of the Study.....	62
Role of the Researcher .....	63
Site Selection .....	66
Participants.....	67
Methods of Data Collection .....	70
Interviews.....	71
Focus Groups .....	72

	Page
Observations .....	73
Documents .....	75
Methods of Data Analysis.....	75
Validity .....	78
Study Limitations.....	80
 IV. RESULTS .....	 82
Avante University .....	83
Research Question 1 .....	84
Institutional Mission .....	84
Institutional Values .....	85
Strategic Goals .....	86
Student Learning Outcomes.....	88
Community Standards and Code of Conduct.....	89
Why Avante? .....	91
Family/Mentor Influence .....	91
Legacy and National Reputation.....	95
Scholarship Support.....	96
Personal Value Systems.....	99
Summary: Research Question 1 .....	102
Research Question 2 .....	103
Biographical Sketch .....	106
President’s Vision Statement .....	109
Avante University Renaissance .....	111
The Five “Wells” .....	116
The Avante Aura and Its Future.....	122
Summary: Research Question 2.....	127
Research Question 3 .....	129
Participants.....	129
The Zenith Revival .....	131
The Impact of Avante’s Mission.....	132
The Communication of Community Standards .....	136
Character Building Experiences .....	143
Classes.....	143

	Page
Convocations.....	144
Study abroad .....	147
Leadership.....	148
Community Influences on Character .....	156
Staff.....	157
Faculty.....	159
Summary: Research Question 3.....	161
 V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....	 163
Introduction.....	163
Summary of Findings.....	164
Research Question 1 .....	165
Research Question 2 .....	166
Research Question 3 .....	168
Discussion.....	172
Implications for Recruitment .....	182
Implications for Practice.....	183
Limitations of Research .....	186
Recommendations for Future Research .....	189
Conclusion .....	190
 REFERENCES .....	 193
 APPENDIX A. REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION .....	 210
 APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT.....	 211
 APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—STUDENT .....	 213
 APPENDIX D. FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL .....	 214
 APPENDIX E. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL.....	 215
 APPENDIX F. DOCUMENT SUMMARY FORM .....	 216

APPENDIX G. CONTACT SUMMARY SHEET .....217

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Participant Demographic Information.....	69
Table 2. The Five Wells Posters, Avante University .....	121

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Description of Research Problem**

The earliest American colleges patterned themselves after the British universities of the Middle Ages. The English viewed a college as a large family where the personal nature of residential campuses required authority and control (Jackson, 1991). During the Middle Ages, institutions were not just a collection of individuals engaged in intellectual endeavors, but they were establishments where specific values were as important to the curriculum as other core requirements. The United States' academic system was also established on the foundation of student learning and character development (Thelin, 2003). Higher education was based on the premise that the character of students needed to be developed along with scholarship.

Students in the United States once went to college to get a solid liberal education designed to prepare them to meet the challenges of adulthood (Nadelson, 2006). However, many students who are currently pursuing college educations state that their primary reason for attending institutions of higher learning is to get a good job and make a lot of money. With this as a major reason for going to college, programs that emphasize practical arts and skill development have increased in number, whereas programs that encourage a deeper understanding of the human condition have dwindled (Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, & Levy, 2005). These changes in students' motivation and in institutional

programs have resulted in graduates with more cognitive training and less development of character (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). To ensure holistic education and transformative learning, the college experience should balance intellectual and ethical development. Baumrind (1998) noted that “it takes virtuous character to will the good, and competence to do good well” (p. 13). Without this balance, students who acquire academic abilities and proficiencies may lack the desire to act appropriately (Park & Peterson, 2009).

“Helping students develop the integrity and strength of character that prepare them for leadership may be one of the most challenging—and important—goals of higher education” (King, 1997, p. 87). Educators debate the issue of how best to influence the ethical development of students (Nadelson, 2006). Some believe that cognitive approaches that center on decision making and moral reasoning are best when considering character, whereas others support character approaches that focus on virtues and values as more effective. Although there are a number of theories regarding the moral development of students, Chickering’s (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) theory of student development “serves as a framework for understanding how students create meaning about character” (Coley, 2003, p. 21). Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) discussed how Chickering’s model is used as a programming strategy in student affairs as well as its proven effectiveness when considering the impact of programs. Chickering’s theoretical model serves as the conceptual framework for this study, and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter II.

Research, teaching, and service are central to the missions of most American colleges and universities, but historically Black colleges in particular have stressed the holistic development of students, intellectually, morally, ethically, and spiritually, since their inception (Copeland, 2006). Based on Copeland's review of the mission statements of a number of historically Black colleges and universities, ethics, character development, social responsibility, leadership, cultural values, and community service remain important to these institutions, regardless of issues of institutional size, institutional control, or selective or open admission. At their founding, these institutions were committed to teaching and modeling these tenets.

Nadelson (2006) raised a concern that colleges and universities may not be focused on developing good citizens with a clear understanding of themselves and their purpose, but instead on producing workers prepared for employment opportunities. Academic, co-curricular, and experiential experiences should promote ethical development, while supporting student learning outcomes (Kuh & Umbach, 2004). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once stated that "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education" (Newman, 2000, p. 124). I contend that the components critical to the exploration of research regarding ethical and character development in higher education include institutional mission and culture, environmental influences, community standards and the communication and enforcement of these codes, academic and co-curricular programs, and the commitment of all members of the campus community to character development. Because character is multi-faceted, each of these factors contributes to the

ethical development of students. In this study, I considered the responsibility of educators in the academy to foster and demonstrate good character and to make it a part of academic, social, and leadership activities as they execute the mission of the selected institution. Specifically, the ways that students experience character education were explored.

### **Significance of Study**

In his revolutionary study, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, Ernest Boyer (1987) stressed the premise that, in addition to the cultivation of skills and the acquiring of knowledge, the formation of good character is at the heart of higher education. He reminded us that education in its truest sense is a moral enterprise. Educators must make a conscious and continuous effort to lead and guide students to know and pursue what is good and worthwhile (Templeton & Schwartz, 1999).

In education today, there is a character education movement in many elementary and secondary schools (Larsen & Martin, 2005), but deliberate efforts to address this agenda have been missing from many college campuses (Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999; Joseph & Efron, 2005). Institutions of higher learning are now placing renewed attention on the ethical lives and the moral development of students (Nesteruk, 2007). This current focus will balance the promotion of self-expression, diversity, and various freedoms, which are so much a part of the collegiate experience and global society. With a greater concentration on character education in higher education, the learning process will be enhanced and undergraduates may be better prepared for the work force and graduate and

professional schools. They will also be more equipped to navigate the complex issues of life (Kuh, 1998).

Aristotle observed that human kind in general, and educators in particular, have the responsibility to develop intellectual virtues by direct instruction and to foster moral virtues by instilling good habits (McKeon, 1941). Whiteley (1982) cited six major obstacles that higher education must confront in order to fulfill this obligation:

1. The lack of definition of higher education's role in meeting this responsibility;
2. The lack of attention by institutions of higher education to establishing effective character development programs;
3. The lack of agreement on what constitutes character, character development, and character education;
4. The absence of controlled studies of long-term psychological interventions designed to promote character;
5. The lack of knowledge concerning which experiences have the greatest impact on promoting individual growth in moral reasoning; and
6. The relative absence of longitudinal studies of character development of college students. (pp. 3-4)

Fortunately, the work of the John Templeton Foundation, the Center for the Study of Values in College Student Development, and other similar organizations, as well as colleagues committed to this important topic, have and continue to address some of the obstacles raised in Whiteley's book, *Character Development in College Students* (1982). Because colleges and universities are designed to be places of exploration and open

inquiry, I argue that the exposure to various topics and schools of thought should be balanced by the study of values and ethics. Through the Sierra Project, conducted at a comprehensive, research oriented public institution in the late 1970s, Whiteley (1982) and his colleagues determined “that it is possible to promote character development within the dual context of formal academia and the out-of-class life of students—sacrificing neither academic progress toward graduation nor the extra-curricular sense of community that is such a revered part of college life” (pp. 4-5).

Although there are studies on assessing character outcomes and the impact of environments on character development (Astin & Antonio, 2004; Dalton; 2006; Eddy; 1959; Kuh, 2002; Kuh & Umbach, 2004), most incorporate a quantitative design and do not focus on historically Black institutions. This qualitative study addressed character education activities at a small, private, historically Black college that has an explicit commitment to emphasizing the character development of its students as part of its institutional mission. More specifically, this study responded to deficiencies in the literature regarding a focus on HBCUs in relation to character development. For institutions that are focusing on this issue, the information garnered will inform their programs and practices as they move to build citizens of character, a traditional goal of higher education (Nadelson, 2006).

### **Defining Character**

Terminology is often troublesome in the study of any subject. Like religion and politics, character means many things to many people. Rooted in the Greek word, *charakter*, character indicates the collection of strengths and weaknesses that form and

reveal who we are. One's character does not constitute a single statement or a random act, but those qualities that we practice consistently (Schwartz, 2000). Berkowitz and Fekula (1999) describe character as "knowing, caring about and acting upon core ethical values" (p. 18). To truly assess character, individuals must inventory their dominant thoughts and actions.

A popular definition of character can be stated as what one may do when others are not looking. Whiteley (1982) defined character as a combination of ability and understanding: "The first part refers to an understanding of what is the right, fair, or good thing to do in a given circumstance. The second part refers to the ability to do those things (the courage to act in accordance with one's understanding of what is right, fair, and good)" (p. 14). Other definitions emphasize character as the capacity to draw the line where no line exists. Whereas people of good character are perceived to have strong principles related to honesty and fairness, one's character is shaped by his choices and the virtues that he chooses to practice. In other words, one's choices develops one's character and one's character determines one's choices (Templeton & Schwartz, 1999). Yoos (2007) stated that character also denotes traits of virtue and that valid character development integrates the cognitive, affective, and mental domains; operates in the context of the real life of the person; and continues over time. In his article, he dispelled the school of thought that suggests that higher education should not prioritize character development, but focus solely on academic skill acquisition.

According to Park and Peterson (2009), character strengths are the aspects of personality that are valued and the processes for displaying virtues (Peterson & Seligman,

2004). Good character is not absent of problems and defects, but a well developed set of positive traits which cause optimal life-long development while aiding in the prevention of undesirable results. Baumrind (1998) defined character as the “ethical estimate of an individual” (p. 3), which indicates an assessment of an individual’s moral worth (Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999). Simply put, character signifies the actions that reflect one’s values—“the values and behavior as reflected in the ways we interact with each other and in the moral choices we make on a daily basis” (Astin & Antonio, 2000, p. 4). For the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted the Greek philosopher, Aristotle’s definition of character as cited in Lickona (1991). “Aristotle defined good character as the life of right conduct – right conduct in relation to other persons and in relation to oneself” (p. 50). This includes the character virtues of wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), which encompass persistence, integrity, citizenship, gratitude, optimism, and spirituality . . . all necessary values for life-long growth and success (Park & Peterson, 2009). Ultimately, character determines destiny (Gough, 1998).

In addition to defining character, it is important to clarify other terms used in this dissertation. Below I offer definitions of pertinent terms used during this study. The terminology provided is for my use as the researcher and is not assumed to be practical or prevalent for the study participants. A number of the definitions are from the Templeton Foundation, a philanthropic organization that promotes character development in higher education through grants and research. The foundation works closely with the Institute of College Student Values hosted at Florida State University annually and has recognized

colleges and universities engaged in efforts to encourage the character development of college students. The definitions that are not cited are my personal descriptions of terms considered in this research project.

*Character development*: “The progression of an individual’s capacity for understanding what is right or good in increasingly complex forms, and the willingness or courage to act on those conceptions” (Whiteley, 1982, p. 14); growth relating to the development of one’s character consciousness.

*Character education*: “The process of promoting coherent values and ethical standards” (Dalton, 1999, p. 47); deliberate efforts to encourage a sense of good character.

*Civility*: “. . . being constantly aware of others and weaving restraint, respect, and consideration into the very fabric of that awareness” (Forni, 2002, p. 9); being mindful of how your actions impact those in your sphere of influence.

*Ethics*: “principles of conduct based on a set of values or morals” (Coley, 2003, p. 10); standards of conduct and behavior that govern one’s life.

*Ethical development*: growth and change relating to processes of reflection and evaluation in determining the difference between right and wrong.

*Ethical education*: deliberate efforts to encourage reflection and the consideration of the implications of one’s actions.

*Morals*: “prescribing how we should act” (Templeton & Schwartz, 1999, p. 385); one’s beliefs about what is good and bad or right and wrong.

*Respect*: “Showing regard for one’s worth and the worth of others. This includes . . . treating others as having dignity and rights equal to our own” (Templeton & Schwartz, 1999, p. 385).

*Responsibility*: acknowledging and being accountable for decisions and actions; fulfilling one’s obligations.

*Values*: “what we judge worth having, worth doing, and worth being” (Templeton & Schwartz, 1999, p. 386); beliefs regarding what is admirable and important.

*Virtue*: “lived moral values; objectively good moral qualities or attributes” (Templeton & Schwartz, 1999, p. 386); characteristics related to values and morals.

### **Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how the environment for character education is established at a historically Black college and how students experience this environment. I was also interested in the how students perceive the infusion of ethical education in their curricular and co-curricular activities. There is literature on character education and ethical development, but most studies have been quantitative in nature and I have been unable to locate any that focus on small, private historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

The mission of a college or university influences every aspect of the daily operation of the institution and its future growth and development (Barr, 2000). In preparation for this research project, I reviewed the mission statements of a number of HBCUs. The institution I selected, a small private college, cites character development as a part of its mission in very specific terms. It states that the college “cultivates the

personal attributes of self-confidence, tolerance, morality, ethical behavior, spiritually, humanity, a global perspective and a commitment to social justice” (College Catalog, p. 10).

Additionally, the college’s current president has expressed a commitment to reinforcing ethics and morals as a part of his presidential agenda. His vision statement, as reflected on the institution’s website, is to “provide intellectual and moral leadership for a 21<sup>st</sup> century global Renaissance of character, civility, and community.” He further states that the institution’s founders envisioned an institution that would serve as a “global resource for ethical and educated leaders.” Lastly, the president’s vision statement indicates that as the college builds leaders with character, it will inspire others to serve the common good in their local communities and the world (paraphrased).

This study centered on exploring how ethical development is part of the fabric of the institution considered and how students reflect on their character building experiences. It addresses character education activities at a small HBCU in the Southeast with a printed commitment to emphasizing the character development of its students as a part of its institutional mission. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. What is the environment for character education at the institution?
2. What is the role of the president in establishing this environment for character education?
3. How do students experience this environment?

### **Avante University: The Context**

Founded in 1867, Avante University (pseudonym) is a liberal arts institution with a national reputation, noted particularly for the development of African American men. “Each year, Avante consistently produces 500 African American male graduates” (Eaves, 2009, p. *xvi*). According to Eaves, this HBCU has a record of producing more Black male doctors, lawyers, judges, engineers, scientists, and theologians than any other American college.

With a current enrollment of 2800 students, Avante, a member of a consortium that includes three other institutions, has a culture of traditions and rituals that distinguishes it from other colleges and universities. Referred to by some as the Avante Aura, this quality is thought to be the mystery behind the college’s success (Eaves, 2009). Noted for producing national and global leaders, their graduates include a civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, a former United States Health and Human Services Secretary, a former Mayor of Atlanta, a former United States Surgeon General, and the current Chairman of the Board of the NAACP. In addition to the legacy produced by the institution’s prominent graduates, former presidents like Dr. Jacob Byers (pseudonym) have also contributed to its reputation of producing ethical and morally conscience citizens and leaders.

Dr. Byers, the sixth president of Avante University, is noted for his commitment to and legacy of character. Though he lived and worked in a time when injustices for people of color were rampant, he remained a man of compassion, character, and civility all his life (Carter, 1998). While he encouraged academic achievement and celebrated

academic accomplishments, he considered them “empty and short-lived” (p. 23) if not balanced with respect and ethical reasoning.

Although other Avante presidents have promoted the tenets of ethical development, the college’s tenth and current president, Dr. Bernard Jamson (pseudonym), has addressed this agenda in a specific and intentional manner. His vision statement, as reflected on the Avante University Website, follows:

My vision is that Avante University will provide intellectual and moral leadership for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century global Renaissance of character, civility, and community. Avante will fulfill the dream of its founders as a global resource of ethical and educated leaders. While developing Avante . . . , Renaissance men [and women] with a social conscience who are committed to champion the causes of equality, justice and peace, the College will guide and inspire others to serve the common good in their communities and throughout the globe.

A 1975 graduate of Avante, Jamson returned to his Alma Mater after an illustrious career in the academy. Prior to assuming the presidency in 2007, he was a Presidential Distinguished Professor of Social Ethics at Emory University and a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at their law school. He has also served on the faculties of the University of Chicago, the Harvard Divinity School, the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, and the Candler School of Theology (*Avante Magazine*, 2008). His administrative appointments include the presidency of the Interdenominational Theological Center, which is the graduate seminary of the Atlanta University Center consortium.

In his inaugural address, “Let Us Make Man,” Jamson discussed the rebirth referenced in his vision statement. He discussed three of the forces designed to unmake

men (and women) and strategies to contest them (Jamson, 2008a). The global crises of relational and familial instability, the rise of violence, and the dehumanizing impact of technology were three of the issues raised in his speech. To counter these predicaments, Jamson indicated that Avante will educate their students to nurture children, families, and communities; to become peace agents and creative conflict resolvers; and to transform technology as a tool to support time management designed to allow time for community building and enjoying the arts and other forms of recreation.

Although Avante has a history of producing ethical leaders, Jamson has indicated concerns regarding the character and compassion of members of the Avante community. In a speech entitled “The Soul of Avante and the Future of the Aura,” given at a called Town Hall Meeting on April 21, 2009, he spoke directly to incidents that were not in keeping with the institution’s goals or his expectations as president. His comments addressed concerns regarding members of the campus community whose conduct and behavior were contrary to the institution’s history, mission, and purpose. While these remarks will be analyzed, along with other speeches, in Chapter IV of this research project, it is Jamson’s acknowledgement of and commitment to the development of students’ character that served as my rationale for selecting Avante for this study. His position on this issue aligns with my observations as a seasoned higher education administrator. I commend Jamson’s deliberate plan and bold stance in addressing these issues in the academy, and hope that this dissertation will inform practices in colleges and universities as they seek to return to higher education’s founding mission . . . to develop students intellectually and ethically.

### Summary

In *Character is Destiny: The Value of Personal Ethics in Everyday Life*, Gough (1998) reminds us that character is central to every aspect of being. He outlines a scheme for examining life, taking responsibility for actions, discarding selfishness to embrace the greater good, becoming better role models, and finding the courage to do the right thing naturally and consistently. Individuals are faced with a myriad of choices daily . . . choices that can enhance or diminish character. For this reason, educating students to be reflective and to consider the immediate and far reaching implications of their actions, behavior, and conduct is vital if we are educating the whole person. It is equally important that higher education consider the meanings that students ascribe to institutional efforts designed to encourage character.

Because character is a complex construct, an investigation into character development raises broad questions regarding the nature of what is good or bad and what is right or wrong. Additionally, determining whose ethics and values should be promoted is also debatable. The purpose of this study was to determine the various ways that administrators and faculty execute the character development component of the institution's mission, which will include some inquiry into how they make meaning of the university's mission. I was also interested in the meanings that students make of their character building experiences. The study was not centered on developing a fixed exposition of what constitutes good character, but an investigation of the means by which college students actualize character related experiences in the academy.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In this chapter, relevant literature related to character development will be discussed. Ethical development among students should be supported at all levels of education (Boyer, 1987; Morrill, 1980). Because students are still defining themselves when they enter institutions of higher learning, it is important that we promote this tenet in the academy. The literature reviewed in this chapter establishes the conceptual framework for this study and centers on the teaching of values and character in college, the creating of learning environments that promote character, and the assessing of character outcomes. There will also be a section on historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) designed to support the rationale for focusing this study on this facet of higher education.

As the profiles of colleges and universities have changed due to the influx of adult, international, and part-time students, campuses have faced difficulties in developing students' character. With the varied interests, schedules, needs, and backgrounds of today's students, maintaining personal contact with each student can be difficult. While this may present challenges for campuses, Dalton and Crosby (2006) recommended that institutions provide collegiate experiences that promote the values of honesty, fairness, compassion, and respect for others as a vehicle for teaching character.

These scholars espouse that infusing these values in the academic and co-curricular enthuse principled reflection and decision-making.

According to Evans et al. (1998), student development theories are classified using four models: psychosocial, cognitive-structural, typology, and person-environment. Their application, like the application of theory in other settings, includes description, explanation, prediction, and control (DiCaprio, 1974). Chickering's theory of student development identifies seven vectors of psychosocial development during the college years ranging from developing competence to developing integrity (Chickering, 1969). The vectors identify a series of developmental tasks related to the encounters that students have during college. I will discuss Chickering's theory in the next section as it serves as the theoretical framework for this study.

### **Chickering's Vectors of Development**

Student development theory must be applicable to current students and future generations (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The seven vectors developed through Chickering's research, first introduced in the first edition of *Education and Identity* (1969), have endured for decades enabling "higher education practitioners to view their students, their courses, and their programs more clearly and to use them as beacons for change" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 44). These vectors, according to Morrill (1980), were translated "within a broad framework of psychosocial development in which the question of identity is the pivotal issue in a person's varied relationships with the wider world" (p. 37). Employing this model supports the implementation of academic, co-

curricular, and experiential activities that impact the lives of students and the culture of campuses.

Chickering's theory suggested seven vectors of development that contribute to the formation of identity: developing competence, managing emotions, autonomy to interdependence, mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. All of the vectors correlate at some level with the seven learning outcomes proposed in *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004), which I will examine later in this chapter.

According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence are developed during the college years. These competencies relate to knowledge and critical thinking, athletic and artistic ability, and communication and leadership respectively. Managing emotions involves the recognition and acceptance of emotions as well as the appropriate expression and control of them. Initially focused on aggression and sexual desire (Chickering, 1969), this vector later included a broad range of emotions including caring, optimism, and inspiration along with anger, depression, anxiety, embarrassment, and guilt (Evans et al., 1998).

During the college years, a major developmental task involves accountability and taking responsibility. Moving from autonomy to interdependence involves emotional independence (liberation from the continued need to be reassured); instrumental independence (self-direction and problem-solving ability); and an appreciation of interdependence with others (awareness of interconnectedness) (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Accomplishing the processes during this vector leads students to the next,

developing mature interpersonal relationships. Tasks associated with this vector include tolerance and an appreciation for differences and the development of healthy and lasting relationships (Evans et al., 1998).

Establishing identity involves reflection and builds on the previous vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 1998). Ethnicity, cultural traditions, self-concept, and faith affiliation are components of this stage. This vector also encompasses the clarification of roles at home, school, and work and “gaining a sense of how one is seen and evaluated by others. It leads to clarity and stability and a feeling of warmth for this core self as capable, familiar, and worthwhile” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 50).

Developing purpose consists of developing vocational goals, commitments to activities and interests, interpersonal commitments, and holding to decisions even when there is opposition (Evans et al., 1998). The final vector, developing integrity involves humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). During this stage, students develop and confirm their value systems balancing self-interest with social responsibility (Evans et al., 1998). Developing integrity for all students, regardless of age, “involves reviewing personal values in an inquiring environment that emphasizes diversity, critical thinking, the use of evidence, and experimentation” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 235). This vector builds on the other vectors and involves a re-evaluation of values to affirm what is most significant. Exploration and reflection also occur as students consider the complexities of life and their responses to them. Students cannot be optimally successful in this quest if the academy does not consider and promote the ethical development of students.

As noted in Evans et al. (1998), “Chickering argued that educational environments exert powerful influences over student development” (p. 40). These environmental factors include institutional objectives, institutional size, student-faculty relationships, teaching, student affairs programs and services, the integration of work and learning, curriculum, respect and recognition of differences, and the acknowledgement of the cyclical nature of learning and development. The literature on character development indicates that these same circumstances also impact character development.

Several scholars have challenged the appropriateness of Chickering’s theory for students of ethnicities beyond the White, middle-class (Evans et al., 1998). Evans (2003) noted that the ordering and significance of the developmental vectors may vary when applied to different cultural groups. According to Taub and McEwen (1992), the development of racial and ethnic identity in Black students has been noted to delay aspects of psychosocial development. Students who chose to attend HBCUs are considered to be more connected with their heritage (Roebuck & Murty, 1993), but this cannot be assumed. Regardless, for the purpose of this study, Chickering’s theory is beneficial in providing a basis for understanding student behavior demonstrating the growth and changes that students experiences as they process developmental issues related to emotions, relationships, and integrity (Coley, 2003). In their critique of his theory, Evans et al. (1998) encouraged future research using qualitative strategies. “Qualitative approaches should also be considered to examine psychological development, particularly as it occurs for members of different multicultural populations”

(p. 52). This current study, focused at a small Black college, responds to these scholars' recommendation.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) viewed students' development as a series of tasks to be completed through engaging in intentional and unintentional activities. These encounters range from planned and structured to unplanned and unstructured. Experiences that promote character fit the same profile. Students learn about values and ethical principles through various experiences (e.g. classes, student government, residential living, internships, orientation, conduct processes, community service, etc.) Applying Chickering's work as the theoretical framework for this study is beneficial in helping educators understand students' growth and maturity. As stated earlier, his theory provides a context for comprehending how students create meaning about character (Coley, 2003). Chickering and Reisser (1993) stressed the holistic development of students, emphasizing the critical nature of understanding their needs and recognizing the importance of involvement and environment.

### **The Teaching of Values and Character in Higher Education**

The need to teach character has been at the heart of educational philosophies for centuries (Salls, 2007). Societies have been concerned with how to educate youth to be good citizens for years and "they have produced many theories of what constitutes good character, of educating for good character and also many moral philosophies that support their views" (p. 1). Philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, among others, have provided their ideas on how best to educate for character, but that is not the focus here. The thrust

of this section will be on the academy and its efforts to foster good character in students during their collegiate experience.

According to Nicgorski (1987), the approach of the early American college to the matter of character can be instructive in education today. The genuine concern of institutions for the moral and ethical dimension of higher education, the conscious and unconscious recognition of the role of community in education, and the close relationship between a liberal arts education emphasizing the humanities and the values-related mission of the schools are still relevant in this generation.

The nation's founders felt that ethical instruction was essential to our social system and our communities (Brooks & Goble, 1997). Some postulated that ethics and values are religious in nature, but according to Brooks and Goble, they include views about education, law, politics, and economics. These disciplines, along with others, make up higher education and are among the foundation of higher learning. These subjects are important and speak to the intellectual development of students, but in isolation, do not provide a holistic education. Balancing the academic curriculum with ethics education is a necessary component of a total collegiate experience.

While some maintain that students' basic value systems are determined before they come to college, character is not permanently engaged at any age. In 1958, Eddy (1959) with others, through the American Council of Education, conducted a study to determine college influence on character. The aim of the study was to explore the relationship between intellectual training and character influence, to examine the methods employed by the colleges in the task of education, and to observe programs in operation

to evaluate their effectiveness. After setting their working definition of character, three assumptions were agreed upon:

1. that among its responsibilities, the American college should include a conscious concern for the character of its students;
2. that it is not desirable to separate the training of the intellect from values which impinge on the life and thought of the student;
3. that basic convictions and values are formed in the early years and primarily in home, but the college can modify convictions and values both for the good and for the ill. (p. 3)

At the end of the study, Eddy and his colleagues determined that there are major forces on every campus. If and when these influences are mobilized properly, they provide for students a unique educational experience. Although their results provided information that was both encouraging and discouraging, the influence of the collegiate experience on character development was confirmed.

In a book review of Warren Bryan Martin's *A College of Character: Renewing the Purpose and Content of a College Education* (1982), Godsey (1984) indicated that the author offers a deeply personal and passionate apology for colleges whose histories were rooted in moral and religious traditions. Further, traditional liberal arts colleges are diminishing in prominence and promise when their distinction is needed in the educational arena and in society at large. Martin describes colleges of character as communities bound by moral and purposeful centers. Without this as the core of education, the collegiate experience reflects the chaos of general society without a

barometer for lifting the spirit or disciplining the passions. Though Martin's book was written over 25 years ago, his proposition is still relevant today, supporting the resurgence of the promotion of character in the academy.

In his discussion of some of the methods used to teach ethics, values, and moral education in academic settings, Morrill (1980) posed a number of fundamental and overlapping questions:

1. How do the proposals to teach values, ethics, and morality square with the prevailing academic temper of neutrality in values and the institutional commitment to serve as a forum for all ideas and values? In a pluralistic society, whose values and which morality and ethics are taught?
2. What specific subjects and pedagogical aims and strategies are involved in teaching values, morality, and ethics? Are these acceptable and realistic possibilities for most colleges and universities and their faculties?
3. What is the relationship between knowledge and action in moral and values education? Are there ways to bridge the well-established gap between knowing and doing good? Can education really affect such things as values? Can and should the study of ethics make one in any sense a better person?
4. What does the basic terminology of a given approach signify? What assumptions do the various alternatives harbor regarding the nature of education, knowledge, and human experience? How do these premises shape an understanding of the purposes and means of ethics, moral education, and values education? (pp. 11-12)

In reference to Chickering's vector of developing integrity, Morrill (1980) related the humanizing of values to codes of conduct and behavioral standards. Rather than viewing them as absolutes and completely inflexible, they are applied relatively, based on their ultimate purpose and the needs of those served. "As students experience the humanizing of values, they typically have to face the anxieties and fears of questioning parental authority, at least as the absolute source of truth" (p. 38).

Personalizing values constitutes taking ownership of individual values. At this developmental stage, values are considered a part of the individual, consciously held and clearly articulated (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). "Congruence occurs to the extent that a person interprets, understands, and acts on the basis of his or her chosen values" (Morrill, 1980, p. 38). This embodies the manifestation of one's character.

According to Bruhn, Zujac, Al-Kazemi, and Prescott (2002), those charged with educating students, which includes faculty and student affairs professionals, have an ethical obligation to provide an integrated learning experience for students. This requires that instructors and administrators develop new parameters to ensure that this agenda is met. In reference to character development and outcomes associated with holistic learning environments, Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (1991) offered the following characteristics of these communities: everyone is held to high, clearly communicated standards; undergraduate learning is valued wherever it occurs; the blending of the curricular and out-of-class experiences is valued; and faculty and staff take time for students. Keeping these concepts in mind, colleges and universities have a responsibility to make students aware of institutional expectations. To foster character development,

administrators, faculty, and staff must stress the importance of integrity and demonstrate it in all areas of college life. “Because an institution’s culture is both cause and effect, a college simultaneously exerts an influence on the behavior of students, faculty, and staff” (Kuh & Hall, 1993, p. 3). Ironically, these same individuals define and influence the culture of colleges and universities.

Winston and Creamer (1997) discussed the role of values in student affairs practice. The profession stands unwaveringly on the beliefs of dignity, equality, and community. To that end, policies and procedures should be put in place to honor and promote these tenets. These qualities should also be a part of collegial interactions and support Forni’s (2002) definition of civility as a form of awareness grounded in ethics. Administrators and faculty lead by example and create the atmosphere for compliance and cooperation, while executing the institution’s mission.

According to Dalton (1999), there are four aspects of student affairs practice that unequivocally involve character development and ethical education. In addition to their correlation with the student learning outcomes that foster transformational learning (Keeling, 2004), they cannot be overlooked in higher education.

1. Respect for Truth: Orienting Students to Academic Integrity Standards and Conduct (p. 48)
2. The Ethical Responsibilities of Community: Teaching Students to Live with Others (p. 49)
3. Commitment to the Common Good: Preparing Students for Lives of Civic Responsibility (p. 50)

4. Ethical Decision Making: Advising and Mentoring Students in Times of Personal Moral Conflict and Crisis (p. 50).

### **Creating Learning Environments that Promote Character**

The early American college was value oriented with the president usually setting the ethical compass for the academy. Unfortunately, not all college presidents give this issue the focus they once did. In some cases, fund raising obligations and other external commitments keep these executives away from their campuses as much as 50% of the time (Bornstein, 2003), but they can still be instrumental in establishing character development as a high priority at their respective institutions. Strategies for doing this can include modeling, through their own actions, the aspects of integrity and credibility that all community members should exhibit; supporting national leadership surrounding character development in higher education; and providing the necessary resources to initiate and support character development activities on their campuses.

Bornstein (2009) postulates that leaders set the tone for the behavior of all members of academic communities. She further states that how college presidents respond to the many ethical dilemmas faced in their positions send messages to the internal and external constituents of their institutions. In her book, *Legitimacy in the Academic Presidency: From Entrance to Exit*, she discusses the negative implications of unethical behavior in the college presidency and the responsibility of chief executive officers to “exemplify the highest standards of ethical behavior in all aspects of life and work, be a role model to constituents, and serve as a good steward of the college or university” (Bornstein, 2003, p. 38). This moral legitimacy is a primary step toward

creating environments that promote character and is of great significance if institutions are to build confident leaders who will contribute to their campuses and the broader community.

It is essential for students to develop attitudes, values, and beliefs that will equip them to live effectively in a changing society. Yet, some faculty members only seem concerned about preparing students for careers. Kuh (2002) studied the impact of college on character and whether or not denominational institutions and small liberal arts college differ from larger universities as they approach instruction and offer various types of experiences to students. Data gathered from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire Research Distribution Program indicates that there has been a decrease in the influence of higher education on value development in recent years across all types of institutions.

The academy is charged with providing programs that train students in a way that prepares them to be not only technically proficient, but intellectually capable and emotionally stable. College graduates need more than specific academic skills. Their collegiate experience should also provide moral, social, and citizenship training (Kuh, 1998). Developmentally sensitive teaching and training should be grounded in theory that engages students in context with an appreciation for the nature of learning in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains (Frieden & Pawelski, 2003). The fact that learning is holistic, contextual, generalizing, and developmental supports their position.

According to Martin (1982) as cited in Godsey (1984), colleges of character provide the best context for the emergence of leadership. With character development as

an integral part of the experiences of students, their education will be “historically connected, contextual, centered; integrative, cross-disciplinary; responsive to moral and ethical issues” (Godsey, 1984, p. 84). Godsey goes on to say that whereas Martin’s work here may not excel in reason, it does excel in wisdom. Wisdom, understanding, and the ability to reason are as important as intellect. Environments influence how students spend their time, their satisfaction with college, and what they gain from the experience (Pascarella & Terenzini 2005).

It is difficult to consider character development without focusing on social responsibility and civility. Scholars have pointed to a lack of an educational agenda directed toward these issues. The incorporation of behavioral expectations on college campuses has been proposed as a means to address the recent trends in the academy. Cejda and Duemer (2002) examined the catalogs of 40 liberal arts schools, checking for behavioral guidelines designed to articulate behavioral standards and expectations. Their study revealed that 34 out of the 40 institutions considered included behavioral guidelines in their catalogs. The community standards encompassed four categories: inclusive versus behavioral expectations, academic versus non academic expectations, codes of conduct, and justification of expectations. While having standards of behavior is the rule at most institutions, the consistent enforcement of these policies must be addressed if the goal of education for the greater good is to be accomplished. Because college catalogs and student handbooks are considered contracts, not communicating and enforcing institutional regulations may call into question institutional integrity. Inconsistency also

has implications for all members of academic communities to include students, educators, and parents.

Bennett (2003) noted that some faculty and staff look after their own interests even though they may talk about collaboration and cooperation. A program based on individualism cannot be successful in training young people to become effective citizens. In environments characterized by insistent competitive singularity, students become adults locked inside themselves . . . self-absorbed, preoccupied, and concerned with their personal agendas, demonstrating little regard for promoting programs that encourage the success of the community as a whole. Based on Bennett's position, the social contracts established on college campuses provide no true motivation for collaboration and cooperation with others. He suggested that educators plan programs that help students see themselves, their institution, and their relationships with each other in terms of covenant rather than contracts. Programs in a covenantal community are based on members' commitments to each other, working for the greater good of the whole. Individual independence is advocated and emphasized in connection with the community rather than in isolation. Covenant thinking has the potential to change life on campuses as it currently exists, encouraging diversity and unity.

Institutions of higher learning have an important responsibility to bridge the gap between the academic and social life on the college campus. College leaders are no longer viewed as *in loco parentis*. They have moral and legal obligations to students and parents that extend beyond the classroom; therefore, administrators, instructors, and staff

must develop new parameters to stress that colleges are learning communities where everyone present has specific privileges and expectations (Nuss, 1998).

Although the study of values in colleges and universities is getting increased attention, Kuh (1998) reported that only around 60% of faculty see the importance of helping students develop their values. All who are charged with working with students, no matter their capacity, should promote good character and demonstrate civil conduct. In a paper presented at a national conference of the Institute of College Student Values, Kuh (2002) indicated that if colleges and universities want to positively impact character development, it must be central to institutional mission. He endorsed a six step agenda that outlines what schools must do to create learning environments that promote character development:

1. Emphasize character development in the institution's mission.
2. Adopt a holistic approach to talent development as the guiding philosophy.
3. Recruit and socialize new faculty, staff, and students with character development in mind.
4. Make certain that institutional policies and practices are consistent with the institution's commitment to character development.
5. Assess the impact of students' experiences and the institutional environment on character development.
6. Recognize the significance of institutional culture on character development.

In this study, I will consider four of Kuh's steps: institutional mission, policies and practices, students' experiences, and institutional culture as I consider the role of the executive officer of the college in promoting character.

Ethics is an important topic and practice in higher education. Bruhn et al. (2002) explored the intersection of ethics and professionalism in academia. These scholars suggested that those serving the academy "should exhibit a higher degree of professionalism and adhere to a more strict code of ethics than other professions" (p. 465). Given the charge of education to teach and instill ethical responsibility, those providing this service must model the same in order to maintain credibility and public trust. To that end, institutional culture and environmental influences are critical to character development. These colleagues reminded faculty and administrators that good citizenship in higher education means more than going to work and routinely fulfilling one's contractual obligations. Educators must be the example they want students to follow.

Berger (2000), in his study of eight private institutions (six PWIs and two HBCUs), explored the relationship between organizational behavior and its impact on the student outcomes of humanistic values and involvement in community service. The student data set was taken from "longitudinal information from the 1992 Student Information Form (SIF) and the 1996 College Student Survey (CSS)" (p. 179). Both of these instruments are administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) and serve as a part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP). His findings indicated a distinction between how HBCUs and PWIs conduct the process of education

and the way it affects student outcomes. The core organizational dimensions suggested in his study were bureaucratic, collegial, political, symbolic, and systemic. He considered them “as building blocks that define the nature of a college or university’s organizational environment” (p. 180). Berger classified organizational environments as competitive, causal, and cohesive for the purposes of his study. The HBCUs in the study had distinct scores on all five of the organizational dimensions considered and the results were consistent between the two Black institutions. Berger also determined that these differences appeared to influence the student outcomes differently between the two types of institutions “even after controlling for differences in the entry characteristics and involvement behaviors” (p. 194). He concluded that HBCUs fostered the accomplishment of humanistic values and community service involvement more than PWIs with students at these institutions showing increased levels of both outcomes.

Understanding one’s values is essential in meeting the challenges associated with the pressing societal problems of crime, race relations, and substance abuse (Kuh, 1998). Addressing such issues entails intellectual and interpersonal skills. This requires a form of awareness based in ethics, defined by Forni (2002) as civility. While civility includes courtesy, respect, and decency, “being civil means being constantly aware of others and weaving restraint, respect, and consideration into the very fabric of that awareness” (p. 9). Lickona (1991) postulated that focusing character education programs on the framework of respect and responsibility will encompass all other core values. Further, effective ethical development programs should focus on three major components: principles, process, and practice (Brooks & Goble, 1997).

As long as academics and administrators have considered the purpose of higher education, character development has been a central theme and a desired companion of intellectual growth (Yanikoski, 2004). The importance of fusing the moral and the intellectual is critical if students are to be prepared to handle transition related to the world of work as well as the pressures of college. These circumstances require a learned ability in problem identification, analysis, and synthesis, as well as integrated characteristics of self-understanding, appreciation of differences, and a prevailing set of ethical, civic, humanitarian, and spiritual values (Kuh, 1998).

“The cocurriculum environment is where issues associated with character formation and developing a sense of purpose beyond that of promoting individual successes are often directly manifested” (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006, p. 145), but that does not mean that faculty and others serving the academy do not have an equally significant influence and responsibility. Even support staff members educate, if only by example.

Hirt (2006) described professionals at HBCUs as guardians. In her study of the practice of student affairs administration at various types of institutions, she discovered that those serving Black colleges “take their roles as guardians quite seriously and attend not only to the academic and social development of their students but to their emotional and spiritual growth as well” (p. 132). Seventy-one student affairs professionals serving Black institutions provided the data for Hirt’s study. These data were collected at a national conference of student affairs professionals employed at HBCUs. The study focused on the nature of work as defined by three dimensions: the pace of work, the work

environment, and the way that work got done. The nature of work for student affairs professionals at HBCUs reflected their commitment to these institutions and their students. This reference in the literature coupled with my professional experiences at historically Black colleges support my selection of this component of higher education as the focus of this study.

Talbert Shaw (2006), president emeritus of Shaw University, wrote about his experiences as he worked with his staff to foster and develop the character of students during his 30 year tenure at the historically Black institution. Whereas the institution's code of conduct was laden with value-related themes, he charged the faculty to infuse ethics and values in the curriculum in 1993. He argued that academic institutions sometimes contribute to moral confusion because they offer no guiding vision or value system beyond self-interest and self-promotion.

Character and ethical development is highly complex and requires a commitment at every level of the campus community (Ray & Montgomery, 2006). Lickona (1991) has focused his research in elementary and public schools, but his work has some applications for post secondary institutions. He recommended that creating caring environments and fostering conflict management skills are ways that educators can foster the character development of students. Institutional influences can be intentional, unintentional, and/or accidental regarding the ethical development of college students (Dalton, 2006). Dalton charged institutions with expanding the ways in which positive influences are intentional and negative, unintentional, and accidental influences are minimized.

In “Educating for Character,” Berkowitz and Fekula (1999) suggested that “the five critical ingredients in effective college-based character education are teaching about character; displaying character; demanding character; apprenticeship, or practicing character; and reflecting on character” (p. 19). These scholars further proposed that there must be obvious institutional character and that compatible behaviors must be practiced by campus community members if students are expected to exhibit good character.

### **Character Outcomes**

According to Dalton and Henck (2004), character, empathy, and citizenship are among the most significant outcomes in higher education, but they are often not included in institutional assessment efforts due the complexity and difficulty associated with measuring them. These constructs are central to the missions of many institutions of higher learning and these scholars cautioned colleagues not to overlook them because assessing them may be inconvenient.

In 2004, the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) launched *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004), an initiative designed to promote a seamless and truly holistic educational experience for all college students. Its purpose statement follows:

*Learning Reconsidered* is an argument for the integrated use of all of higher education’s resources in the education and preparation of the whole student. It is also an introduction to new ways of understanding and supporting learning and development as intertwined, inseparable elements of the student experience. It advocates for transformative education—a holistic process of learning that places the student at the center of the learning experience. (p. 3)

This document and the programs and activities it has inspired have reframed student affairs work and fostered collaborations between faculty and student affairs professionals.

Educators cannot consider character education without giving attention to whether the goal of affecting the ethical development of students is being achieved. To fulfill higher education's responsibility of supporting character development, administrators, faculty, and staff must have a vision of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they hope to develop in their students (King, 1997). This vision ought to drive activities and values-related programming. In addition, King indicates that colleagues must also have an understanding of how students learn the skills and attitudes necessary to live moral lives. Determining how character development corresponds and coincides with the student learning outcomes espoused by colleges and universities is a requirement in accomplishing institutional missions.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Learning in colleges and universities should be a multifaceted and all encompassing endeavor that occurs throughout the college experience (Keeling, 2004). It is defined "as a comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning, and student development, processes that have often been considered separate and even independent of each other" (p. 4). This definition acknowledges the importance of integrating personal and intellectual development and recognizes "the many dimensions by which students are engaged in learning through cognitive understanding and personal development as well as the impact of various educators in their many roles" (Moore & Marsh, 2007, p. 3).

In *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004) and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006), seven student outcomes and their dimensions are suggested and endorsed to support learning: cognitive complexity; knowledge acquisition, integration, and application; humanitarianism; civic engagement; interpersonal and intrapersonal competence; practical competence; and persistence and academic achievement. The construct of character development is tied to each of these outcomes.

The dimension of cognitive complexity includes critical and reflective thinking, effective reasoning, intellectual flexibility, and the integration of emotion cognition and identity cognition (Keeling, 2004). Since character has resurfaced as a priority of higher education, initiatives to influence its development have been added to the activities of colleges and universities throughout the country. Programs and activities include those that emphasize moral reasoning/cognitive development, moral education/virtue, life skills education, service learning, citizenship training/civics education, and conflict resolution/peer mediation (Strange, 2004). Curricula highlighting specific faith and philosophical systems also support this outcome. A specific exercise to demonstrate cognitive complexity would involve students being able to debate the pros and cons of an issue and express their own positions with the ability to substantiate them (Keeling, 2006). As students develop and reinforce their value systems, their ability to consider other schools of thought while holding fast to their beliefs broadens them individually and intellectually.

Knowledge acquisition, integration, and application are also evidenced through the activities listed above. Service learning, which “offers hands-on-experiences of

community service integrated with the curriculum” (Strange, 2004, p. 31), is one example of how students may apply what they are getting through their courses in experiential settings. The dimensions of this learning outcome include understanding knowledge and connecting it to other knowledge, ideas, and experiences (Keeling, 2004). When students have achieved this outcome, they will be able to connect knowledge to their daily lives and the “pursuit of lifelong learning; career decidedness; technological competence” (p. 18). According to Keeling (2006), they “will be able to relate how what they are learning connects to their current and future life experiences” (p. 22).

Character education and some of its components such as empathy, civility, and citizenship (Dalton & Henck, 2004) are overtly connected to the student outcome of humanitarianism. Its dimensions involve comprehension and appreciation for diversity and social responsibility (Keeling, 2004). Diversity is a term that is somewhat overused in society today; but in this sense, it includes understanding and celebrating human and cultural differences. Graduates who have achieved this outcome will be fully aware of their cultural identities and how they impact their interactions in the broader community (Keeling, 2006). Programs that center on citizenship, civic engagement, health education, and conflict mediation support this outcome as they reinforce interventions that impact students as individuals and community members. Ernest Boyer (1990) characterized colleges and universities as purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative communities. His work supported humanitarianism as he reminded the academy that what we know is servant to our beliefs and that knowledge is servant to our values. He posed that if members of academic communities “cannot join together in common cause,

if the university cannot come together in a shared vision central to its mission, how can we hope to sustain community in the society at large?” (p. 3). This affirms the responsibility of faculty and staff to lead by example as they work with students and each other.

The student outcome of civic engagement is closely related to the previous one. Keeling (2004) noted its dimensions to include civic responsibility, effectiveness in leadership, and “commitment to public life through communities of practice” (p. 19). This outcome relates to students’ personal and global decision-making and encompasses solid judgment in making responsible and thoughtful decisions for themselves (e.g. avoiding high risk behaviors and violating conduct codes) and their communities (e.g. voting, community service, participation in student organizations). Students who have embraced this goal of higher education understand the importance of campus engagement beyond the social and fun activities to those that impact the greater good to include proactive thinking toward problem prevention and community building. Resident assistant programs, community standards boards, and leadership curricula are specific manifestations of this outcome. In relation to character development, a commitment to one’s community is a component of strong values and ethical acumen.

Interpersonal and intrapersonal competence is the fifth desired outcome associated with student learning in higher education (Keeling, 2004). The significance of these competencies in college and beyond is unprecedented. Dimensions of this effect, outlined in *Learning Reconsidered*, are pragmatic and reflective self assessment, the development of personal attributes (self-esteem, ethics, integrity, confidence, and

spiritual awareness), meaningful and affirming relationships, personal goal setting, and ability to work with people of varying backgrounds. By citing ethics and integrity as some of the elements associated with the outcome, it speaks directly to character development. Students will successfully demonstrate this outcome through the seeking of healthy relationships and by engaging in them. They will also be initiators in resolving conflicts and in addressing issues that impair their relationships and their communities, while thoughtfully assessing their personal strengths and developmental needs (Keeling, 2006). Additionally, they will recognize the importance of setting realistic and measurable goals and devising strategies to achieve them. Students, through this outcome, “will be able to describe their skills and interests and make appropriate choices of major and early career steps” (p. 24). Internships, mediation programs, and involvement in student organizations through leadership positions and participation foster intrapersonal and interpersonal competence and character building.

Effective communication, the ability to manage one’s life, financial self-sufficiency, and work-related competence are among the dimensions of the practical competence student outcome (Keeling, 2004). Purpose, satisfaction, wellness, and prioritizing are also connected to successful mastery of this outcome. According to Keeling (2006), “students will formulate an intentional curricular and co-curricular plan for their collegiate journey” (p. 25). When this occurs, students will persist and graduate, which is among one of their major reasons for attending institutions of higher learning. Life skill education programs are noted to develop the character of students as they build practical competence (Strange, 2004).

The last student outcome outlined by Keeling (2004) and his colleagues is persistence and academic achievement. Its dimensions include managing the collegiate experience “to achieve academic and personal success” (p. 19), which leads to degree realization and attainment. Students will use campus resources like academic services, student success centers, counseling services, wellness centers, disability services, and other resources within their institutions to support their academic and personal success (Keeling, 2006). Completing an academic program of study indicates strength of character and fortitude.

### **The Assessment of Character Outcomes**

The achievement of outcomes related to character development must be examined to ensure that institutions are meeting their goal of educating the whole student. A number of the outcomes of the college experience are connected to student expectations (Miller, Kuh, Paine, & Associates, 2006). Miller and his colleagues acknowledged that students receive expected and unexpected benefits from their educational experiences. “Students expect to attain worthwhile degrees, they expect to have the opportunity for graduate study, and they expect to be employable” (p. 38). They also expect to develop the interpersonal and leadership skills necessary for their success. In essence, most students come to college with the expectation to learn. Given that the world does not operate in a vacuum, to isolate activities in the collegiate experience is a disservice to all members of the academic community.

Unexpected benefits of higher education, according to Miller et al. (2006) can be perceived as social in nature and include the exercising of one’s civic responsibility to

vote, wellness education, and a sense of community involvement. Although parents may anticipate these rewards, traditional-aged students may not be as aware of them.

Character education has academic and social benefits.

Kuh and Umbach (2004) postulated that “most would agree that character is a window into personality, a constellation of attitudes, values, ethical considerations, and behavior patterns that represent what people believe and value, how they think, and what they do” (p. 37). When character is pondered, these authors indicated that we consider admirable characteristics that individuals display in the intellectual and behavioral and the public and private facets of their lives. This includes acting with integrity and personal responsibility considering not only themselves, but the common good. Their position, like the seven student outcomes admonished in *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004), supports student development theory, in particular, the seven vectors of psychosocial development coined by Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). His vectors are developing competence, managing emotions, autonomy to interdependence, mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

The impact of college on values clarification and development is influenced by peer and mentor interactions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While there is conflict regarding which values should be taught and how aggressively, “stakeholders agree that the development of these attributes is an appropriate role for America’s colleges and universities” (p. 271). The numerous studies focused on institutional effects on student attitudes support the intellectual curiosity in this area.

Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) were used by Kuh and Umbach (2004) to examine conditions that contribute to character development in the collegiate environment. Their study concentrated on the conditions that must be present and the experiences that contribute to character development. NSSE is “an annual survey of college students that focuses on the amount of time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities” (p. 39). It is administered to first-year students and seniors and measures the degree of participation in educational practices that are linked to the espoused outcomes of the college experience.

The NSSE asks students questions in four areas designed to inform the work of participating institutions. According to Kuh and Umbach (2004), the areas include:

1. The amount of time and effort devoted to various in-class and out-of-class activities, including reading and writing, and the frequency with which students participate in class discussions, make class presentations, work with peers on problem solving, and interact with faculty members;
2. Participation in enriching educational activities (study abroad, internships...);
3. Gains in personal and educational development; and
4. Perceptions of the college environment, including overall satisfaction with college and quality academic advising. (p. 39)

The NSSE relies on self-reports from students, which has been documented as “particularly relevant for measuring aspects of the college experience, such as character development, that cannot be easily assessed through other means” (p. 40). Without

incorporating student self-reports, educators would have significant challenges in determining the institutional impact on character development.

In their study, which was composed of a sample including 49,692 seniors who completed the NSSE survey in 2002 and 2003 from 568 four-year colleges and universities, Kuh and Umbach (2004) extracted 12 items from the self-reported gains section of the NSSE to mirror four constructs of character development: knowledge of self, ethical development and problem solving, civic responsibility, and general knowledge. Some of these categories included understanding of self and others, communication, civic responsibility, critical thinking, contributing to community, and developing personal value systems, which all correspond with the seven student learning outcomes presented in *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004).

“Students at baccalaureate liberal arts colleges report making greater gains in character development, followed by their peers at baccalaureate general colleges” (Kuh & Umbach, 2004, p. 45) compared to institutions classified as master’s granting and doctoral/research. However, the variance within a particular institution on the given measures was greater than the variance between institutions by types. Although the average character development scores were higher at baccalaureate liberal arts colleges, a substantial number of students at these institutions scored below their peers at research institutions, suggesting that character development is not an exclusive function of small institutions. This supports the premise that all of higher education should prioritize ethical education.

As institutions of higher learning prepare students to conduct their lives ethically in a global world, Kuh and Umbach (2004) recommended that schools infuse their policies, practices, and procedures with opportunities “that give students firsthand experiences with issues that the larger society is grappling with through community involvement, service learning, and other assignments” (p. 52). Opportunities to network across cultural, racial, religious, and class boundaries, along with curricular, co-curricular, and experiential activities that emphasize values and ethics were also encouraged.

Astin and Antonio (2004) conducted a study using a database that contained information on students who attended institutions that the John Templeton Foundation classified as character building colleges. Their study compared female students to male students. They also compared the Templeton-recognized schools with those that were not a part of the Foundation’s honor roll. Data were provided by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). The national sample was administered the Student Information Form (SIF) as freshmen. The SIF is used to measure pre-college characteristics of students. A subset of these students was administered the College Student Survey (CSS) four years later.

The CSS, the follow-up survey, includes measures of student involvement and behavior and characteristics identical to those in the SIF. The final sample included 9,792 students who responded to both instruments allowing Astin and Antonio to assess change over the four year period. Demographic data on the participants was not provided.

Astin and Antonio (2004) discovered that after four years of college, “women exhibited a higher level of civic and social values, had done more volunteer work, and indicated a greater ability to understand others” (p. 59). Women also had a significant increase over men in the development of their religious convictions and cultural awareness, demonstrating higher measures in all measures of character development. In considering the Templeton versus non-Templeton institutions, students who attended the schools on the Templeton honor roll measured higher on four of the six character development measures: the importance of raising a family, volunteerism, religious beliefs, and civic and social values.

Astin and Antonio (2004) concluded that the kinds of curricular and co-curricular encounters experienced during college make the greatest difference in the character development of students. Specifically, exposure to interdisciplinary courses, global and women’s studies, diversity programs, and spiritual services and activities proved significant to ethical education. “Performing volunteer work while in college and having faculty who provide emotional support to students were also predictive of character development in students” (p. 61). Leadership development and involvement in clubs and organizations also encouraged character development.

Institutional mission has also been noted to impact character development in the academy. A self-report instrument, developed and validated at DePaul University, the DePaul Values Inventory (DeVI), was administered to a random sample of undergraduate, graduate, and law students to assess the relationship between the institution’s mission and its effect on student values (Filkins & Ferrari, 2004). Filkins and

Ferrari used the 24-item scale to determine students' perceptions of the private university's mission and values. The subscales include institutional values education, emphasis on employing diversity, prosocial institutional atmosphere, and lifelong commitment to values. Initially, Filkins and Ferrari gauged the level of the students' exposure to DePaul's mission-related experiences along with the perceived benefits of the experiences. These scholars acknowledged that students who value such encounters would be more likely to seek them out so the researchers supplemented the original inventory to include a special section on university values in an effort to gather the specific data.

The survey with the supplement, which is administered by DePaul annually, was sent to a random sample of 5000 students to include the populations represented on the campus (Filkins & Ferrari, 2004). The initial sample had the option of completing the paper or online version of the instrument. After the first month, the electronic version was sent to all students and open to any student interested in participating. The final "dataset comprised 3,409 records: 1,773 undergraduates, 1,476 graduate students, 133 law students, and 27 students of undeterminable level" (p. 83). The demographics indicated that respondents represented the DePaul population well with 56.1% female participants and 64.8% identifying as White compared to the institution's population which was 54.7% female and 59.7% White at the time of the study.

The following conclusions were drawn as a result of Filkins and Ferrari's (2004) research: students who value working toward mission-related goals were more likely to engage in related activities and see the benefit in them; students who view mission-

related goals as important scored higher on the DeVI; and there was a positive relationship between involvement in mission-related activities and DeVI scores. This study is a part of the ongoing assessment practices of DePaul and indicates a commitment to evaluating the impact of institutional mission on student culture.

### **Historically Black Institutions**

Higher education was virtually nonexistent for African Americans prior to the Civil War. Blacks who had the opportunity to participate in educational activities had to study in informal and sometimes hostile settings, whereas others had to teach themselves or be taught by those who had beaten the odds by learning despite opposition. While there were some elementary and secondary schools open and available to Blacks, Oberlin College in Ohio and Berea College in Kentucky were among the few colleges that offered academic opportunities to people of color during that period.

Within the academy, the history and impact of Black colleges and universities has been frequently ignored and eliminated from the forums of educational consideration (Hale, 2006). Because students of color have been accepted into the mainstream of the higher education, some have challenged the need for the existence of these institutions. Since the Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, some educators and policy makers assert that the original mission of these institutions, which was to provide higher education for Blacks who by law and/or tradition were banned from matriculating at White schools, has been accomplished (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Some believe that these schools perpetuate segregation and have suggested that

they merge with historically White institutions within their proximity (Gasman & Tudico, 2008).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were an outgrowth of racial discrimination in the United States. Evans, Evans, and Evans (2002) defined this as “that evil human frailty, which says that one race of people is superior to another because of the race of the supposedly superior group” (p. 3). Though they were founded out of a need to serve African Americans, there should be no doubt in the mind of observers that these schools were instrumental in helping to reverse the spiral of exclusion that was common practice in White southern colleges and universities before the Civil War (Holbrook, 2006). One could argue that the scholars of that day did not anticipate their success; nonetheless, HBCUs have served as the educational, intellectual, political, cultural, and social centers for Black communities in the United States for over 160 years (Jackson & Nunn, 2003). These institutions have also been the avenue of educational access and social and economic advancement for people of African descent.

Most HBCUs were established in the 1800s, with 75% opening between 1865 and 1899 following the Civil War during Reconstruction. Created out of necessity, the majority of these schools are located in the southern states. In the South and other parts of the United States, state laws prohibited Blacks from attending historically White institutions. In the Northern region where laws did not prohibit their admission, Blacks were still denied acceptance to White colleges and universities because of the customs, practices, and traditions of the times.

When Black institutions opened in this country, they actually continued a tradition of scholarship and higher education that began in Africa (Williams & Ashley, 2004). This was completely contrary to what many of the slaveholders and abolitionists perceived to be the capacity of African Americans to learn. After slavery was abolished, champions of African American education felt that an “education that included mathematics, writing, geography, and history was important for African Americans” (p. 10).

Founded in 1837, Cheyney State University, currently a part of the State System of Higher Education in Pennsylvania, was the first institution of higher learning for Blacks in the United States. Its founder, Richard Humphrey, a Quaker philanthropist, observed the indignity afforded Blacks and endowed, through his will, a school for descendants of Africa (Williams & Ashley, 2004). Black institutions increased from one in 1837 to over 100 by the mid-1900s. Christian denominations and Northern philanthropists were instrumental in the establishment of HBCUs. These wealthy humanitarians recognized the importance of a literate society and the essential need to educate all citizens (Copeland, 2006). Lincoln University, also located in Pennsylvania, was the first private HBCU. It was founded in 1854.

Senator Justin Morrill led a movement in 1862 emphasizing a need for institutions designed to train Americans in the applied sciences, agriculture, and engineering. “Some historians have hailed this legislation as the genesis of ‘democracy’s colleges’ – sources of affordable, practical higher education offered by state colleges and universities” (Thelin, 2004, p. 75). The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 supported the creation of

institutions to address the Senator's agenda providing access to useful public higher education, but few were open to African Americans.

According to Thelin (2004), by the 1880s, institutions that were designated as land grant institutions as a part of the 1862 Morrill Act were demonstrating symptoms of stagnation, due to funding issues. George Atherton, a political economist and college president, was instrumental in liberating these colleges from apathy to inspired missions, by rallying his fellow presidents to lobby in Washington, DC (Thelin, 2004). Twenty-eight years after the original legislation, the Morrill Act of 1890 was passed. This legislation "replenished federal funding for land-grant programs and authorized the founding of additional land-grant colleges" (p. 135). With the passing of the second Morrill Act, schools were established for Blacks to educate them in the same areas of study noted in the original legislation. In addition to schools funded by this act, additional public and private institutions, both two-year and four-year, were started to educate teachers and preachers. These colleges provided a foundation for African American students who would eventually attend graduate and professional schools.

The missions of HBCUs are a tremendous draw for prospective college students and their families. Ponder (2006) indicated that the printed mission statements of HBCUs may differ in terminology, but they all have the following themes: "fostering leadership; education of the whole person; communication-oral and written; value of a liberal education; knowledge and appreciation of different cultures; service to community; and moral and spiritual values" (p. 120).

Jackson and Nunn (2003) asked that if Black colleges cease to exist, what educational system will meet their mission. These scholars included educational access and opportunity, perpetuation of Black culture, and interdisciplinary intellectual and skill development for future employment and race advancement as a part of the function of HBCUs. Whereas other institutions may encourage diversity and buttress the tenets noted by Jackson and Nunn, HBCUs were created for this purpose and most still seek to promote and instill these values. According to Roebuck and Murty (1993), HBCUs support the development of Black identity and consciousness and racial pride. “They provide an African-American culture and ambiance that many students find essential to their social functioning and mental health” (p. 17).

In the higher education landscape, Black colleges and universities have been neglected. This is evident in relation to their funding and the way they are represented in the literature. The history and impact of Black postsecondary institutions have been overlooked and eliminated from educational consideration until recently (Hale, 2006). They continue to function with wide disparities compared to predominantly White institutions (PWIs). One of the principle distinguishing characteristics of HBCUs is their source of funding. Unable to draw the resources of their majority counterparts, many have to delay capital improvements and restrict scholarships. Additionally, salaries are often low and human resources limited. In spite of social and racial mistreatment, these schools have emerged as highly respected educational centers (Thomas & Green, 2001).

Historically Black colleges and universities continue to build a strong legacy of educational achievement, but often in the face of financial trials and burdens. With

meager endowments and low alumni giving, many private schools are struggling financially. The total endowment for all historically Black institutions including 41 public schools is about \$1.6 billion, according to William Gray, former president of the United Negro College Fund, according to Cook (2006). Of that amount, Atlanta's Morehouse and Spelman Colleges, Virginia's Hampton University, and Washington, DC's Howard University account for 45%. Because endowments are critical to the financial health, confidence, and future of institutions of higher learning, the consequences of these figures are disconcerting (Cook, 2006). Although there is federal and state support of higher education in American society, private institutions rely considerably on the support of corporations, foundations, and other philanthropic entities. The current economy makes fund raising efforts particularly difficult (Matthews & Hawkins, 2006).

In addition to the financial challenges that many HBCUs face, the media has also contributed to society's impression of Black institutions. The generalization of the experiences of some institutions and applying them to all HBCUs has impacted enrollment and fundraising. An article published in the *Harvard Educational Review* in 1967 by Christopher Jencks and David Riesman presented challenges for HBCUs. Jencks and Riesman's (1967a, 1967b) study was designed to assess the quality of education at HBCUs, but their unsubstantiated account characterized these institutions "academic disaster areas" (Gasman, 2006). Their publication received broad media attention and impacted the fundraising effort of the United Negro College Fund, first negatively, then positively. Based on Gasman's (2007) assessment, this publication served as "a turning

point in the UNCF's evolution from a corporate fundraising wing of industrial philanthropy to a spokesperson and promoter of black college interest" (p. 138).

The place of historically Black institutions in the fabric of higher education remains significant despite their internal and external challenges. Talbert Shaw (2006), former president of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, maintains that "graduation rates provide an accurate barometer for the vitality and indispensability of HBCUs" (p. 91). Whereas only 17% of all African American students enroll in Black colleges, these schools are responsible for around 54% of those completing baccalaureate degrees. Furthermore, Black schools graduate 79% of those who earn doctorates; 46% of African American business executives, 50% of African American engineers; 80% of African American federal judges; 85% of African American physicians; 50% of African American attorneys; and 75% of African American military officers (Shaw, 2006).

During the last decade, "historically black institutions have strengthened their position in terms of attaining a stable and increasing student enrollment" (Dey & Hurtado, 2005, pp. 321-322).. The fundraising efforts of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), along with the support the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO), the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund (TMSF), federal and state government, and philanthropic organizations, are instrumental in assisting Black students in realizing their educational dreams and stabilizing the enrollment at HBCUs.

Although HBCUs are perceived by some to be substandard to their historically White counterparts, they remain the top choice of many students. These institutions affirm the identity of African American college students, while promoting diversity. Until

the mid-1960s, HBCUs were the education venue for 90% of the Black students enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States. Although most historically Black institutions have limited resources, these schools seem to make up for what they lack in amenities and assets by providing more supportive learning environments. The associations between students and faculty foster academic success. Kim and Conrad (2006) indicated that Black students have more frequent and meaningful interactions with both Black and White faculty at HBCUs compared to PWIs.

Student success is influenced by institutional fit. Students have different needs and they must determine what's most important to them when selecting a college or university. Zamani (2004) noted that "culturally based educational efforts that promote their missions" (p. 14) are among the strengths of historically Black and single-sex institutions. These activities support academic and social growth, leadership development, and degree completion.

Success in colleges and universities, as in life, reflects individual choices and the way individuals respond to their environments. African American students have options today. They can elect to attend HBCUs or PWIs. Profiles are available for successful Blacks who attended majority institutions, but equally, if not more impressive, are the profiles of Blacks who attended Black institutions (Craig, 2006), supporting the decisions of students to attend HBCUs.

Despite the successes of HBCUs and their graduates, many attempts are made to discredit these institutions by suggesting that students who attend them are ill-prepared to function effectively in the "real world" (Stewart, 2001). Research indicates that these

schools enhance the self-concepts of African American students, promoting a sense of identity that causes success (Kim & Conrad, 2006; Roebuck & Murty, 1993; Craig, 2006). Wingate (2006) indicated that family tradition and the presence of a significant number of faculty and staff who serve as surrogate parents, mentors, and supports influence the decision of students to attend Black colleges. These schools also have a reputation of working with students with varying degrees of intellectual ability and levels of college preparedness.

Some students choose HBCUs because they offer an exclusive educational experience that is only available at this type of institution. This includes homecoming events that are unique to Black colleges. Though these events are an important part of African American culture, Stewart (2001) encouraged HBCUs to use the media to their advantage to promote their academic, operational, and competitive standings. This will ensure that the complete stories of these institutions are told, balancing the media coverage that Black colleges get highlighting Greek step shows, battles of the bands, and football and basketball classics. While these events and activities are a draw for many students, they should not be spotlighted above the priority of higher education. "It is imperative that these institutions develop and use public relations as a proactive process of planning and evaluating the identity factors that influence critical images of the HBCUs" (p. 31).

Created to provide opportunities for African Americans who had no other means to a better life and future, many HBCUs still provide the only option for some individuals who aspire toward improving their quality of life. The literature reflects that their

endowments are considerably less and capital improvements are often delayed due to financial constraints. While these institutions sometimes lack scholarships, state of the art classrooms, laboratories, and residence halls, and the ability to offer celebrity speakers, the sense of self, empowerment, and history that their graduates describe appear to be well worth the modern advances they sacrifice.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities still have a significant place in the educational fabric of the United States and in the hearts of prospective college students. They continue to serve as a means to connect this country with its heritage and its communities and to provide opportunities for students with varying levels of academic prowess. Founded out of a need and commitment to educate members of society that were excluded from the mainstream of higher education, these schools continue to build leaders. While students of color have more choices compared to their forefathers, there are experiences and opportunities that only exist at Black institutions, regardless of ethnicity. The sense of belonging that African Americans feel at these schools and their ability to connect are unparalleled and members of other ethnic groups that attend them have similar testimonies.

### **Conclusion**

As referenced throughout this chapter, the importance of the purposeful promotion of character development is not only a goal of higher education, but a responsibility (Boyer, 1987). This requires explicitly defining character in the academy and determining the values that are important to campus communities. The ways that institutions employ character education will depend significantly on their institutional

missions. Religious-based colleges and universities may conceptualize character based on faith traditions, while public institutions may highlight character in ways that promote democracy and citizenship (Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999). Considering methods to incorporate character development into the student learning outcomes of knowledge acquisition and application, personal and practical competencies, and humanitarianism and civic responsibility (Keeling, 2004), support a seamless educational experience by balancing intellectual pursuits with value-related activities that foster reflection and a deeper understanding of themselves and their surroundings.

Berger (2000) found, in his study of the relationship between organizational behavior and the student outcome of humanistic values, that historically Black institutions foster the development of these values more than their majority counterparts. This discovery contributed to my interest in conducting this study at a HBCU. It is designed to relay the mechanisms used to encourage character and the way students process these experiences. Frameworks for designing character education programs to include the recommended components (Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999; Kuh, 2002) were discussed. These initiatives should include institutional buy-in at every level (Ray & Montgomery, 2006) beginning with the president and also require modeling integrity across the curricula, co-curricula, and experiential. Prince (1997) posits that “academic institutions provide the means and the forums for students to explore the complexities of the positive and negative meanings of citizenship” (p. 36). Delving into complicated matters and societal issues without providing the necessary tools to understand their implications and impacts indicates a partial education void of the character strengths that

serve as the foundation necessary to achieve success. Park and Peterson (2009) classify the virtues that constitute character strengths as wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. These scholars, through this study based on the Values in Action project, affirm that character development programs should educate students regarding these strengths and provide them with opportunities to use these virtues on a daily basis.

In summary, this literature review provided research to support the teaching of values and character, the creation of learning environments that promote character, and the importance of assessing character outcomes to ensure that the goals of fostering character are met. Character development as a goal of higher education is well established, but deliberate activities designed specifically to promote character are no longer a primary focus on campuses. Given that the mission statements of many colleges and universities espouse a commitment to build the character of students, not making this a priority on campuses may potentially call into question the integrity of academic institutions. Studies that focus on this subject are largely quantitative, but this qualitative project addresses gaps in the literature regarding historically Black institutions and the methods of investigating the impact of character building experiences along with environmental influences on the actions and behaviors of the participants.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how the environment for character education is established at a historically Black college and the ways students experience it. Additionally, I sought to consider the role of the executive officer (the college president) in establishing a character building environment and how he exercises this role in keeping with his other duties and responsibilities. The ways that faculty and staff teach for character based on the students' perspectives were also explored. Although supporting the moral development of students is getting increased attention in higher education today (Nesteruk, 2007), qualitative investigations into character development are not well represented in the literature.

I selected a qualitative approach because “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). The design of the study was informed by a constructivist paradigm, which seeks to produce a depth of understanding about a specific subject or experience and is complementary to knowledge discovery regarding campus life (Manning, 1999). It encourages an open and trusting relationship between the researcher and participants and its value driven nature parallels my personal philosophy related to the work of student affairs. Maxwell (2005) supports qualitative approaches

when seeking to understand the context in which participants act and the way the context influences their actions.

Within the qualitative tradition, this study employed case study design through a constructivist lens. This chapter describes the study design, the role of the researcher, the site and selection of participants, and the methods of data collection and analysis. Ethical concerns and study limitations will also be discussed. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the environment for character education at the institution?
2. What is the role of the president in establishing this environment for character education?
3. How do students experience this environment?

### **Design of the Study**

In considering the topic of character development at historically Black institutions, I reviewed the mission statements of a number of HBCUs. I selected a college with a long history of producing graduates who have gone on to become local, national, and global leaders. Avante University “realizes its mission by emphasizing the intellectual and character development of its students” (*Course Bulletin*, 2008-2009). Thus, the research design employed in this project was case study. Creswell (2007) posits that case study is an exploration of an issue within a bounded setting or context, which in this study, is the college. According to Yin (2003), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly

evident” (p. 13). Schramm (1971) as cited in Yin (2003) indicates that case study research strives to clarify a decision or set of decisions to determine why they were taken, how they were employed, and the results of their implementation.

Yin (2003) encourages the use of the case study method when the researcher intentionally desires to consider contextual conditions believing that they might be highly pertinent to the phenomenon being studied. This research strategy is all encompassing in that it covers design, techniques for data collection, and approaches to analysis. This is a single instrumental case study in that it focused on an issue or concern through a bounded case (Creswell, 2007), Avante University. Stake (2005) indicates that an instrumental case study is appropriate “if a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (p. 445) such as character development at a historically Black college. Given the history of the institution and its printed commitment to character development, the ways that character is promoted throughout the campus as well as the various ways students process and apply these experiences were examined. Like other forms of qualitative research, case studies search for meaning and understanding. In this case, I inquired to understand how students are educated for character and their growth through these encounters.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Glesne (2006) admonishes researchers to clearly define their roles. She further states that the definition of researcher roles is determined and dependent on the context and the identities of the informants along with the values and personality of the researcher. While the primary function of qualitative researchers is that of the key

research instrument (Creswell, 2009), the researcher is also a learner (Glesne, 2006). It is important that the researcher not present as an expert or authority. “The learner’s perspective will lead you to reflect on all aspects of the research procedures and findings. It also will set you up for a particular type of interaction” (p. 46). As the researcher, I learned from and with the study participants.

Constructivism impacts the role of the researcher. According to Schwandt (1994), the constructivist framework dictates that the researcher enters the world of the participants to observe and interpret the context and behavior of informants. When employing this framework, the researcher is actively engaged as he/she participates in his/her personal construction and that of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To this end, data were collected on the Avante University campus.

I am a seasoned student affairs professional with over 25 years of experience in higher education, seven as a senior student affairs officer. For 23 years, I served HBCUs directly, and I have also provided consulting services to Black colleges. Administering the code of conduct has been a part of my professional portfolio throughout my career, and I have become increasingly concerned about what I perceive to be a lack of emphasis on character and ethics in the academy. This not only includes the conduct and decisions of students, but collegial relations between faculty and staff as well. Educators are charged with developing the whole student, which includes ensuring that they are equipped to handle the complexities of life while they matriculate on campuses and once they graduate. I argue that an educational agenda that includes character, civility, and the

developing of integrity must be a priority if this goal of holistic education is to be accomplished.

Schram (2006) admonishes researchers to consider the impact of their subjectivity in their research activities. I am extremely passionate about character development and the responsibility of educators to support and promote initiatives around this concept. To this end, triangulation was used to control biases and to address potential validity threats. Triangulation is the “use of multiple data-collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives” (Glesne, 2006, p. 37). I will discuss the data collection methods in detail later in the chapter; however, individual and group interviews, document review, and participant observation were utilized in the study. Member checking (Glesne, 2006) or respondent validation (Maxwell, 2005) was anticipated, but because of the time of year that data were collected, having participants respond after commencement posed a challenge. Although contacting participants after the interviews was difficult, I followed up during the interview process with each respondent to clarify comments and probed as appropriate to ensure my understanding of their statements. Peer review (Merriam, 2002) was also used as a part of the triangulation process. Several colleagues who have a more balanced perspective on the charge to educate for character reviewed the data as it was analyzed.

“Reciprocity is an ethical issue in any research effort, but it is especially important when participants invest themselves in close relationships with researchers and trust them with sensitive information” (Hatch, 2002, p. 66). Because of the nature of the contact I had with research participants, I made every effort to make certain that the

relationship between the informants and me as the researcher was not one-sided. I offered the student participants a \$20.00 gift card for their time, though some tried not to take it. This was not deemed a benefit, but an expression of gratitude for their time and willingness to support the project.

Issues of confidentiality did arise during the research process, but nothing surfaced that suggested violations of Avante's policies. Participants did not share any incriminating information or information that indicated a threat to themselves or the campus community. In fact, as I consented participants, several of them shared that they would have no problem with me using their actual names. They proudly owned their thoughts and opinions as they shared their experiences, welcoming the opportunity to be a part of a research study addressing character development at their institution.

### **Site Selection**

I have spent most of my career at small HBCUs, having served the only two historically Black colleges for women in the U.S., Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina and Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Hirt (2006) describes professionals at HBCUs as guardians. In her study of the practice of student affairs administration at various types of institutions, she discovered that "they take their roles as guardians quite seriously and attend not only to the academic and social development of their students but to their emotional and spiritual growth as well" (p. 132). Her finding supported my rationale for choosing to conduct this study at a Black college. Colleagues who view themselves as guardians should recognize their influence and embrace the responsibility to foster character.

During the summer of 2009 (June 22, 2009), I wrote the president of Avante University, Dr. Bernard Jamson, requesting permission to conduct my study at the institution. Given his vision and call for “a 21<sup>st</sup> Century global Renaissance of character, civility, and community,” I decided to contact him directly. As I have followed his presidency since 2007 and reviewed his speeches, our philosophical viewpoints regarding the constructs of character, civility, and community parallel.

### **Participants**

A purposeful sampling strategy is generally used in qualitative research. “This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Maxwell (2005) supports this strategy indicating that settings, activities, and persons are intentionally chosen because they can provide information that may not be as prevalent if other sites and informants were chosen. Exercising an approach outlined by Merriam (2002), I determined the essential criteria as I selected the institution and the community members I interviewed, the events observed, and the documents reviewed.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I contacted the president of the college in June 2009 regarding access. The importance of executive leadership supporting and promoting character development is discussed in detail in the literature review, and Dr. Jamson has been very vocal in his concern regarding its significance. Although I was initially approved to interview the president, the chair of Avante’s Institutional Review Board amended my IRB application one month into data collection. Although the

appointment with the president was already scheduled, the amendment rescinded my approval to interact with the president as a part of the study. Fortunately, the data gleaned from the analyses of his speeches and other institutional documents provided a thick description regarding the president's role in encouraging and sustaining character education for students and allowed me to answer the second research question.

Regarding the research question focusing on campus climate and students' experiences, I interviewed 14 students including some of the sophomore and senior class officers and leaders representing residence life, student organizations, and athletics. Additionally, a focus group was conducted with seven students representing a student movement committed to character education at the school. The individual and group interviews totaled 20 informants because one of the focus group members arrived late and his comments were inaudible on the transcript. I selected students at different statuses in their matriculation to determine the differences, if any, in the way the seniors and juniors were enculturated into the idea of character compared to their sophomore counterparts. Demographic information on participants is discussed in more detail in Chapter IV and outlined in Table 1.

After being granted approval from the Institutional Review Boards at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Avante University, I contacted the Director of Student Activities and the senior class advisor to get the names of the sophomore and senior class officers. Once the names were obtained, I contacted the students via email requesting their participation (see Appendix A).

**Table 1*****Participant Demographic Information***

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Area of Campus Involvement</b>
1	Chad	Sophomore	Northeast	Business	Case Competition
2	Keith	Senior	Southeast	Biology	Greek Life
3	Jackson	Sophomore	Midwest	Political Science	Residence Life/Student Government
4	William	Sophomore/Transfer	West	Business	None—Exploring
5	Wayne	Senior	Northeast	Psychology	Dance Club
6	Lucas	Senior/Transfer	West	African American Studies	Environmental Initiatives Studies
7	Gerald	Senior	Southeast	Political Science	Student Government
8	Eli	Senior	Midwest	Political Science	Chapel Assistant/Student Justice
9	Nathan	Senior	Northeast	Business	Study Abroad/Student Government
10	Ronald	Senior/Transfer	West	Political Science	The Zenith Revival (pseudonym)
11	Chris	Senior	Midwest	Sociology	Campus Activities Board
12	Russell	Sophomore	Southwest	Business	Athletics/Student Government
13	Patrick	Senior	Southeast	Economics	Environment Initiatives
14	Aaron	Sophomore	Southeast	Economics	Student Government
<b>Focus Group: The Zenith Revival (pseudonym)</b>					
	Noah	Junior	Northeast	Business	
	Steve	Sophomore	West	Physics/Engineering	
	Tony	Sophomore	West	Political Science	
	Cameron	Sophomore	Midwest	Business	
	Ben	Junior	West	Sociology	
	Kevin	Junior	Southwest	Sociology	

Note: The focus group actually included another participant, Ray, but his comments were inaudible when reviewing the tapes.

Because it was difficult to get some of them to respond initially, I had the willing respondents recommend and refer other students, suggesting snowball sampling (Creswell, 2007). The emails were followed up with phone calls. I explained the purpose of the study, the rationale for selecting Avante, and my appreciation for their participation. As a student affairs administrator and a proponent of HBCUs with no direct affiliation with the college, rapport was easily established.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

This study employed methodological approaches relevant to answering the research questions and designed to be flexible, evolving, and responsive to the data (Coley, 2003). According to Patton (1990), qualitative strategies often continue to emerge after the data collection process has begun. Interviews (individual and group), observations, and documents were the major sources of data. All three were used in this study as I answered the research questions regarding character education at Avante University. Stake (1995) indicates that the interview is a map to multiple realities. At its core, interviewing “is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Based on Creswell (2005), interviews provide valuable information that cannot be readily observed. They also give participants the opportunity to provide detail. Observation and documents were also be used as data gathering techniques to complement the interviews. Each of these strategies will be discussed below, along with details regarding their use in this study.

## **Interviews**

Seidman (2006) states that an interest in the stories of informants is at the heart of interviewing research. With the students, semi-structured interview protocols were used. “Semi-structured interviews combine the flexibility of the unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of a survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data at the factor level” (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 149). The presidential interview protocol consisted of questions regarding his vision statement, his declaration regarding the school’s mission, and his role in setting the ethical compass for the campus. Although I was not allowed to meet with President Jamson, his strong statements regarding the college’s resurgence toward ethics, dignity, and decorum, and biographical information regarding the executive officer’s experiences as a student, alumnus, and the tenth president, as reflected in the documents, laid the foundation for my work with the student participants. His speeches and other institutional documents served as sources allowing me to answer the research question pertaining to his role in establishing a climate for character education.

Yin (2003) argues that case study interviews are generally of an open-ended nature. These interviews require the researcher “to operate on two levels at the same time: satisfying the needs of your line of inquiry while simultaneously putting forth ‘friendly’ and nonthreatening questioning” (p. 90). The 20 student participants were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. “Questions on a semi-structured interview guide are preformulated, but the answers to those questions are open-ended, they can be fully expanded at the discretion of the interviewer and the interviewee, and can be

enhanced by probes” (Schensul et al., 1999, p. 149). Merriam (1988) reviewed several assumptions for more standardized interviews, but this counsel also has implications for less structured interviews. Her recommendations include ensuring that the vocabulary used is appropriate and clear to participants and that interview questions have common meaning and context.

I traveled to the Avante campus to conduct the interviews. I met with the students in the Chapel Assistant’s office between March 22, 2010, and April 21, 2010, traveling to the research site three times within that period. The first individual interview was held on Monday, March 22, 2010. The next two students were interviewed on Tuesday, March 23. During the week of April 5, 2010, I conducted four interviews, one on April 7 and three on April 8. The last seven interviews were held on April 19 (two participants), April 20 (four participants), and April 21 (one participant). Each of the 14 interviews was scheduled for one hour and all lasted for 50 minutes to an hour. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. I also took written notes during each interview. Before each participant left the interview, I checked the tape to ensure the equipment had functioned properly and reviewed my written notes in case I needed further clarification on any of their statements.

### **Focus Groups**

In addition to the individual interviews, a focus group was held with seven students. Data gathered from the focus group were used to triangulate data gathered through the interviews. Focus group interviews have five basic distinctions and include individuals who possess certain characteristics engaged in a focused discussion to help

understand a particular topic of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2000). According to Morgan (1997), a “broad source of strength for focus groups is their reliance on interaction in the group to produce the data” (p. 15). He also cautions researchers about the challenges associated with having participants who may not be connected with the topic of the group. For this study, the focus group was conducted with a group of Avante students who formed around an ethical agenda. My Avante staff liaison provided me with the contact information for the group’s coordinators and one of them assisted me in contacting other members. The focus group session, which was the first point of data collection, was also audiotaped and transcribed. It was conducted in the conference room of the Chapel, held on March 22, 2010, and lasted for one hour and 35 minutes.

### **Observations**

In an effort to triangulate the data, I observed several activities on the campus to include programs and routine interactions (e.g. Chapel, Student Center, convocations) as a part of data collection. The observation protocol focused on civility, which is grounded in ethics (Forni, 2002). Because this study is about character education, observing interactions indicated how the institutional mission and values played out in the day-to-day interactions of the campus community. Merriam (2002) postulates that “observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account obtained through an interview” (p. 15). She suggests the benefits of combining it with interviews and recommends its use when a fresh viewpoint is wanted regarding the phenomenon being studied. “Collecting data primarily through participant observation and interviewing, the researcher develops the ‘thick

description‘ needed for getting at how people within a cultural group construct and share meaning” (Glesne, 2006, p. 9).

The Avante bookstore, a convenience store, and several offices are located in the parking deck that I used on several of my visits to the campus. On each of the days that I conducted interviews, I had the opportunity to observe students going to their classes and relaxing between classes. There is a patio area in the vicinity of the lot that I used, and I observed students interacting with each other in typical collegiate fashion. On each of my visits to the campus, I observed interactions as I walked to the Chapel. Given the time of year of data collection, I also saw student ambassadors conducting campus tours for prospective students and other tour groups. These ambassadors were dressed in the school’s signature blazers and were articulate as they shared Avante’s rich legacy with the visitors. Because I was positioned in the Chapel, I listened and watched as they pointed out quotations from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and shared the contributions of other famous world changers like Ghandi and former Avante presidents. (Quotations and pictures grace the walls of the Chapel lobby.) Although the adult visitors sometimes seemed more interested than the children, I was impressed by these campus emissaries. I spent about two and a half hours observing activity during each of my visits as I walked to and from my car and while posted in the Chapel. I also attended Avante’s Senior Day Convocation (April, 22, 2010), Baccalaureate (May 15, 2010), and Commencement (May 16, 2010). The convocation lasted for one hour and the baccalaureate service was one hour and 40 minutes. The commencement convocation, which occurred outside, lasted

for four hours. During data collection, I spent eight hours observing activity and attending programs at the research site.

### **Documents**

The review of some of the president's speeches and other institutional documents was an important part of the initial phase of the study. According to Merriam (2002), the strength of document review as a source of data lies in the fact that documents already exist and they do not alter the setting like the forms of data collection discussed earlier. Miles and Huberman (1994) indicate the importance of knowing the significance of the documents and the insight they provide regarding the site and the phenomenon studied. Dr. Jamson's speeches, along with my review of HBCU mission statements, were instrumental in my selection of Avante for this research project. These documents, unlike the interviews, could not be influenced by the researcher. The institutional publications analyzed included Avante's course bulletin, student handbook, strategic plan, and a recruitment pamphlet. Eight of President's Jamson speeches were accessed through Avante's website and analyzed. Two were new student orientation speeches and three were opening convocation addresses. His inaugural address, remarks made at a campus town hall meeting, and comments made when he accepted an honorary degree at a college in the Northeast were also reviewed.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

Analysis in case study research includes making a rich description of the case and the context. In qualitative data analysis, "the researcher seeks a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge" (Creswell, 2007, p. 163).

Creswell calls this categorical aggregation. He states that the case study researcher considers an individual encounter and draws meaning from it independent from numerous encounters. This involves scrutinizing data and recomposing it in more meaningful ways.

As I considered the data gathered in this study, I used Miles and Huberman's (1994) scheme for data analysis. Contact summary sheets were completed within several days after each contact to include interview participants, focus group participants, and observations. "A contact summary is a single sheet with some focusing or summarizing questions about the field contact" (p. 51) and may or may not include codes. Questions focused on the people, events, and/or situation; the main themes or issues in the contact; and to which research question(s) the contact related. The form also recorded what was not gleaned from the contact that may have been anticipated. A copy of the contact summary sheet can be found in Appendix G. Miles and Huberman recommend that these sheets be completed within several days of the contact. After the interviews were transcribed, the transcripts were reviewed along with the notes made on the contact summary sheets and my field notes, which were taken during the actual individual and group interviews.

Document summary forms (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were created and completed as institutional publications and the president's speeches were analyzed. The form included sections for document description, importance of document, and a summary. The documents were coded based on their relationship to the phenomenon of character development and education. Data from institutional publications centered on

values and expectations in response to determining the environment for character education at Avante. Details from the speeches pertinent to the research also were recorded on summary sheets. A copy of the document summary form can be found in Appendix F.

The data gleaned from the interviews and focus group were coded based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach. "Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study. Codes usually are attached to "chunks" of varying size—words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs . . ." (p. 56). In qualitative research, it is not the words themselves that matter, but their meanings. The codes discussed by Miles and Huberman include descriptive, interpretive, or pattern.

Descriptive codes require little interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994), in that you are assigning a class of phenomena to a portion of text. This same data could be coded interpretively if the researcher is more knowledgeable about the phenomena. Pattern codes are considered more explanatory. In using this coding classification, data were categorized by emergent themes that were discerned through each field contact. In this study, pattern coding was employed. Codes did change and some developed during the data collection process. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue the importance of defining codes prior to beginning the data collection process, but I elected not to do so due to the emergent nature of the data. Pattern codes based on themes were established during data analysis and assigned based on the concepts they described. The codes reflected the themes that emerged through the interviews and were noted on the actual transcripts

initially. They were later copied from the transcripts and the data consistent with each theme were aggregated.

Glesne (2006) describes coding as “a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data (i.e. observation notes, interviews transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature) that are applicable to your research purpose” (p. 152). This allows the researcher to develop an organized framework for analysis. Reflecting on interactions with contacts is equally important. When the interview and focus group transcripts were prepared, the transcriptionist left room for reflective remarks which were written on the actual transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994) along with the appropriate theme. My reflections included any or all of the following: feelings related to the participants once I left the site; second thoughts regarding the significance of data gathered during that encounter; and my reaction to participant’s remarks and other field interactions. I also maintained a journal throughout the data collection process in which reflective thoughts about interview interactions and other encounters and observations on campus were noted. Feelings experienced during the document and interview data analyses processes were included.

### **Validity**

Merriam (2009) asserts that research must be conducted rigorously if it is to affect the practice or the theory of a discipline or policies that impact a particular field. She further states that in qualitative and quantitative research, “validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in

which the findings are presented” (p. 210). In qualitative research, understanding is the principal rationale for investigation. According to Eisenhart and Howe (1992), validity is defined as “the trustworthiness of inferences drawn from data” (p. 644).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline four factors that assist in establishing validity in a qualitative study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. As discussed earlier in this chapter, credibility of the data is supported by triangulation, peer review, and member checking. Transferability was achieved by providing a thick description, which included the factors significant to character development, the senior executive officer’s responsibility to promote character, and the students’ behavior with respect to character and civility. This triangulation of data collection methods (documents, interviews, and observations) verifies dependability. Additionally, the researcher maintained a reflective journal during the research process as a diary to record reflections, decisions, and biases. Confirmability was enhanced through this auditing process (Coley, 2003). According to Milinki (1999), reflexivity (the researcher’s engagement in critical self-reflection) is a key strategy in understanding researcher bias.

Maxwell (2005) states that validity in qualitative research is not guaranteed by a prescribed blueprint, but contingent on the relationship of the researcher’s findings to reality. He further asserts that it is a goal to which all researchers should ascribe. Validity must be “assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context- independent property or methods or conclusions” (p. 105). As one who has adopted the qualitative research paradigm, I fully support the necessity of ensuring rigor in this case study. Because case study is perceived to be limited for its

lack of representativeness, the strength of qualitative approaches is that they account for and include difference (Merriam, 2009). Shields (2007), as cited in Merriam (2009), indicates that these approaches acknowledge these limitations and do not attempt to discount or simplify what cannot be discounted or simplified. It is my hope that the findings of this study will provide a strategy that other small colleges, particularly HBCUs, can employ to make the promotion of character and values education a priority on their campuses.

### **Study Limitations**

Glesne (2006) argues that “limitations are consistent with the always partial state of knowing in social research” (p. 169). Acknowledging them in research projects supports the trustworthiness of studies and assists readers in how to interpret results. Given that this research project employed a case study design considering only one historically Black institution, this may be perceived as a limitation. Although there are over 100 HBCUs, this institution’s national reputation supports its selection. As I shared my research interest with family and friends, some suggested that many of the students who attend the selected college begin their collegiate careers with solid values and good character already instilled. Although this was true to some level as is discussed in Chapter IV, the president’s rationale for emphasizing and calling for a resurgence of a character and civility focused agenda in his vision statement became evident.

In qualitative research, researchers generally employ a purposeful sample. This could be perceived as a limitation, but interviewing participants who were engaged in the life of the college through leadership ensured their involvement in campus life and

indicated a perceived commitment to institutional mission and community. Study limitations will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter V of this dissertation.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to understand how the environment for character education is established at a historically Black college and the role of the president in establishing this climate. In addition to expressing a commitment to foster ethical awareness in the academy, the creation of learning environments that promote character and determining the impact of these learning experiences in the lives of students is equally important. This case study also examined the way a group of sophomores, juniors, and seniors experienced the character education environment at the college. By considering the perceptions and reflections of these students, educators can understand how the in-class and out-of-class experiences of students influence their principled growth and development.

In this chapter, I will provide a descriptive context of the research site, Avante University, through an examination of documents outlining the values espoused by the institution. This overview will include a brief history of Avante, a general profile of its students, and a discussion of its core values and strategic goals. The review of these materials, to include the college catalog, student handbook, strategic plan, and other institutional documents buttresses the selection of Avante as the focus of this case study and describes the environment of the institution. This background also is relevant to the interpreting of the information derived from the analysis of speeches, observations, and

interviews used to answer the research questions that guided this study. After discussing the research context, the findings will be presented by answering each research question directly. The research questions are:

1. What is the environment for character education at the institution?
2. What is the role of the president in establishing this environment for character education?
3. How do students experience this environment?

### **Avante University**

Avante University is a four-year, private, liberal arts institution with an enrollment of approximately 2,800 students, representing 40 states and over 12 foreign countries. Founded in 1867, two years after the Civil War, the school was initially established, as is the case with most historically Black colleges, to prepare its students for teaching and ministry. Avante offers Bachelors of Arts and Bachelors of Science degrees in 26 majors and 21 minor concentrations through three academic divisions: Business Administration and Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science and Mathematics. Operating on a semester system, the institution also offers a dual-degree engineering program, which provides an opportunity for the students in this major to obtain a liberal arts and professional engineering education. While the college is located in the Southeast, this program is conducted in conjunction with a number of outstanding engineering universities throughout the United States.

### **Research Question 1**

*What is the environment for character education at the institution?*

In considering the campus environment for character education at Avante University, the institution's mission, values, strategic goals, and community standards are components that establish the setting for teaching about character. Although members of the faculty, staff, and administration play a significant role in educating for character, the students and their backgrounds also impact the campus culture. During my interactions with student participants, the reasons they elected to enroll at Avante and their personal value systems were noted to have inferences for the character climate at this HBCU; thus, contributing to the environment for character education.

#### **Institutional Mission**

As noted in the *Avante University Course Bulletin*, the mission statement outlines the college's commitment to develop students with "disciplined minds who will lead lives of leadership and service" (p. 8). As a historically Black liberal arts college, Avante accomplishes this mission by stressing the intellectual and character development of its students. Its mission also acknowledges a responsibility to teach the history and culture of African American people.

As a academic community committed to teaching, service, and an understanding of the liberating force of truth, Avante University provides academic and co-curricular programs that

1. Develop skills in oral and written communications, analytical and critical thinking, and interpersonal relationships;

2. Foster an understanding and appreciation of world cultures, artistic and creative expression, and the nature of the physical universe;
3. Promote understanding and appreciation of the specific knowledge and skills needed for the pursuit of professional careers and/or graduate study, and;
4. Cultivate the personal attributes of self-confidence, tolerance, morality, ethical behavior, spirituality, humility, a global perspective, and a commitment to social justice. (*Avante University Course Bulletin*, p. 8)

### **Institutional Values**

According to the *Avante University Student Handbook*, the mission of the Division of Student Services is to deliberately support “the development of ethically engaged students as contributing citizens of a global society” (p. 27), while supporting the overall mission of the institution. The departments that comprise the division include athletics, career planning and placement, conduct and campus life, counseling, health services, housing and residential life, intramurals and fitness, leadership development, and student activities. Student Services also provides oversight for commuter and international student services, Greek life, and student publications.

As a part of the division’s mission statement, Avante’s institutional values are discussed. The university is committed to the values of “accountability, civility, community, compassion, honesty, integrity, respect, spirituality, and trust” (*Avante University Student Handbook*, p. 27). The division also promotes the core values of excellence, innovation, leadership, and social justice, which drive their programs and services.

## **Strategic Goals**

Avante University's Strategic Plan, "People, Practices and Perspectives: Mining our Core in Pursuit of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership Development," is divided into four themes with 12 goals and accompanying strategies toward the achievement of these goals. The themes center on fostering learning throughout the institution; nurturing discovery and active learning; impacting the local and global community; and strengthening their [Avante's] position in the educational arena through internal and external initiatives.

In reviewing the institutional and student services mission statements and the strategic plan, the goals support the missions. Theme one, "Foster Learning Everywhere," focuses on the students' development of "intellectual capacity, critical thinking and reasoning skills, oratorical competencies and a sense of moral and ethical responsibility" (Avante University Strategic Plan, p. 3). Avante commits to fostering an omnipresent learning environment where learning occurs "in the classroom, through robust and relevant curricula; through extra and co-curricular activities linked to the classroom; and through mentoring relationships and peer-to-peer learning among faculty, students, and staff" (p. 3).

The second theme, "Nurture Discovery and Active Learning," includes promoting faculty research and the supporting of the undergraduate research program. "Impact Communities Near and Far," theme three, discusses Avante's commitment to stretch beyond the communities of their "historical traditions to engage and learn from other communities throughout the world," (Avante University Strategic Plan, p. 7). The goals surrounding this theme include promoting community service, environmental initiatives,

and global connections. Customer service and positive interactions are also encompassed in this third strategic direction. Theme four of the Avante University Strategic Plan, “Strengthen Our Positions within the Educational Pipeline through Pre-College *Preparation*, Admissions’ *Productivity*, Enhanced *Persistence* and Increased Advance-Degree *Placements*” involves the developing of a strategic enrollment management plan.

Through an analysis of the institution’s strategic plan, I determined that goals one, six, seven, eight, eleven, and twelve have specific implications for character development initiatives at Avante University because they support Avante’s Renaissance, which is discussed later in this chapter. These goals, listed below, are directly related to ethical development as they sustain Avante’s mission, involve the curricular and co-curricular experiences of students, and support the learning outcomes discussed in the section that follows.

1. Foster student development for 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership through a robust and relevant curricular enhanced by co-and extra-curricular activities. (GOAL 1)
2. Strengthen the Avante Community. (GOAL 6)
3. Engage communities for impact near and far. (GOAL 7)
4. Enhance global connections. (GOAL 8)
5. Improve student persistence to degree. (GOAL 11)
6. Intensify mentoring to increase placement in graduate and professional school. (GOAL 12)

## **Student Learning Outcomes**

The typical program of study at Avante University consists of three components: the core curriculum, the major sequence, and free electives. According to the *Course Bulletin*, the core curriculum and major sequence is set, but there are options related to the elective courses. In satisfying this component, “the student has the option of pursuing a minor concentration or taking an unstructured aggregation of courses” (p. 41).

The core curriculum is designed to produce learning outcomes in analytical abilities and problem solving, citizenship, communication, critical thinking, ethical judgment and behavior, and leadership. In addition, students, at the end of their Avante education, also will exhibit knowledge of the African American experience, an understanding of social institutions, philosophy, and religion, and the interdependence of nations and cultures.

In 2006, Avante piloted a core curriculum program that more explicitly focused on educational goals, specific student learning outcomes, outcome indicators, and co-curricular experiences. This adjusted core required 48 hours of coursework in the humanities, mathematics, and the natural and social sciences; labs that accompany the foundational courses; and co-curricular activities. The courses, labs, and co-curricular experiences are intended to produce the following student learning outcomes:

1. Strong critical problem-solving, quantitative, communication, information literacy, and general life skills;
2. Understanding of fundamental principles and processes of the natural world and of social institutions;

3. An appreciation of the interdependence of nations and cultures;
4. Citizenship;
5. Self reflection and self understanding;
6. Ethical behavior, civic engagement, and leadership;
7. An appreciation of diversity (i.e. ethnicity, religions, sexuality, systems of thinking, values, etc.);
8. Integrative thinking and various ways of knowing (from one setting to another); and
9. Lifelong learning. (*Avante University Course Bulletin*, pp. 43-44)

In addition to the courses required as a part of the core curriculum, Avante students must participate in the institution's convocation series, Zenith Forum (pseudonym). Zenith Forum is a series of special presentations and events that celebrate the heritage and traditions of Avante. These activities also "bond students to each other and to a common humanity; heighten sensibility to students' spiritual and inner selves; increase appreciation of the aesthetic; and sharpen intellectual and critical faculties" (*Avante University Course Bulletin*, p. 45). Zenith Forum is a requirement for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. Students must attend a minimum of six events to receive a passing grade.

### **Community Standards and Code of Conduct**

Avante University makes the assumption that, because its students have voluntarily become members of the campus community, they agree with the school's values and will abide by its general practices (*Avante University Course Bulletin*). "The

basic philosophy governing conduct is that each student shares responsibility with fellow students, faculty, and administrators for the development and maintenance of standards that contribute positively to the welfare of the entire Avante University community” (p. 214). The wellbeing of the institution is dependent on the willingness of community members to defend and protect the rights of individuals within the community, to promote and support programs in keeping with Avante’s educational goals, and to form and foster relationships of mutual respect. The University expects community members to assume responsibility for their conduct on and off the campus, exercising personal responsibility for campus policies and local, state, and federal laws. It is also the expectation that students will govern their behavior with concern for the entire community.

According to the *Avante University Student Handbook*, the purpose of the conduct and discipline system is to maintain the integrity of the institution and members of the campus community and to encourage and maintain an orderly environment. Whereas the Student Code of Conduct outlines prohibited conduct and the potential consequences for these behaviors when students are found responsible for alleged violations of the Code, the two primary goals of the system are “to provide a safe, secure and hospitable environment for all students and visitors” (p. 40) and “to assist students in developing a high degree of integrity and moral character by encouraging acceptance of personal behavior” (p. 40). The conduct and discipline system also attempts to modify behaviors that conflict with Avante’s community standards. As a private institution, Avante

commits to a fair hearing process for students who have been accused of violating the school's standards of conduct.

### **Why Avante?**

A desired outcome of this study was to determine and understand how students experience character education at Avante University. Meaning, according to Maxwell (2005), is used in a broad sense to determine the participants' perspective and includes affect, cognition, and intentions. Because of Avante's national reputation, I was interested in the paths that led the participants to attend this historically Black institution. As the students interviewed responded to this question, their reasons for selecting Avante were family/mentor influence, the legacy of the school, and scholarship support. These themes were not mutually exclusive and in some cases, more than one contributed to the participants' decisions to attend Avante.

### **Family/Mentor Influence**

Family/mentor influence was the primary reason for 11 informants (55%). Keith indicated that he did not choose Avante. It was his father's decision.

**Keith:** Well, I didn't choose Avante, my father did . . . he felt and I feel the same way now, that I would be able to, I guess thrive more here in a smaller setting, trying to be a big fish in a small pond.

**Interviewer:** How did you feel about that initially?

**Keith:** I was upset initially . . . I really wanted to go to a big PWI, like Duke or somewhere in state, but you know, come to think of his reasons, I agree with him now.

Steve's father insisted that he apply to Avante and his cousin was instrumental in his decision to attend.

My biggest reason for choosing this school was because my cousin actually graduated from here in 2008. I still wasn't sure what school I wanted to go to towards the end of senior year. I knew I had applied. At first, I was really against even applying here. But my Dad was like no, you're going to apply here. And then, you know, you actually have a cousin that goes there right now. After talking to him, he was a large impact on why I chose Avante.

Family tradition led Chad to Avante, along with the school's focus on African American culture and its focus on African American males.

A lot of people in my family went to Avante . . . They were influencing me more rather than going to a bigger institution with a diverse culture and people.

Eli stated that his grandfather often spoke of great men who he found out later, attended Avante. This influence, along with the media made him consider this institution.

I guess I was always kind of attracted to historically Black colleges . . . growing up at five or six, watching the "Cosby Show" and "A Different World," and just seeing Black people doing great things, young Black people succeeding in life, and their relationships and the great impact that they had on the world . . . and just seeing their College experience . . . and my grandfather who never when to college or anything, he would mention great men . . . and these men happened to go to Avante . . . and so after learning more about it as I got older and doing my own research, it was just like a, I guess, a natural process. I was kinda destined to be here . . . this is the only place I applied to and I got accepted.

Chris, the only participant who was not African American, indicated that his brother, who attends an Ivy League University, encouraged him to attend Avante.

I came to Avante in the sense of trying to discover a new school . . . but Avante kinda fell into my lap through my brother. My brother kinda passed the school down to me. He's been a huge fanatic about the school and he's been a big supporter of Avante for years.

In addition to that, I also wanted to go to a school where I would have a new cultural experience. I went to a predominantly Hispanic elementary and middle school and then I went to a predominantly African American high school for a little while and I transferred to a predominantly White institution after that . . . so for my college experience, being South Indian, I wanted to kinda grab a new realm of . . . a taste of life, taste of leadership, taste of education . . . and so Avante was something that I felt like that would give me all those elements.

Several of the participants indicated that community leaders and members of their churches directed them toward Avante University. Wayne and Tony were first exposed to historically Black colleges through Black college tours during their junior and senior years in high school respectively.

Well in all honesty, it was, I believe my sophomore year in high school, when an English professor explained to a group before the class that there were HBCUs . . . She was friends with a gentleman who does college tours . . . We went at the beginning of my junior year . . . and they sponsored me so I didn't have to pay . . . We went up and down the East Coast. I picked Avante in particular because my cousin was actually going to Avante. **(Wayne)**

The reason why I came to Avante is I went on my school's Black College tour during my senior year and when I came and just saw the Avante environment and how everyone presented themselves, I just . . . you know I told myself that I have to come here. **(Tony)**

William visited his cousin at Avante during spring break of his junior year. Although he applied and was accepted, he wasn't comfortable moving so far away from home so he decided to stay on the west coast for his freshman year and transferred to Avante his sophomore year.

I had heard a lot about Avante and I know some people that went . . . I have a stepbrother who went there so I started talking to him and got more interested in the school . . . I think I had in the back of my mind that eventually I was going to transfer to Avante . . . I just had like a kinda yearning that like Avante was a better educational institution . . . I guess I could better reach my potential at Avante knowing about the school what I knew.

Gerald and Kevin stated that alumni were instrumental in their decisions to attend Avante.

Actually, there is one guy that actually influenced me the most . . . his name is . . . He came to my church and spoke to me while I was applying . . . I talked to him after church . . . I liked the way he carried himself . . . During his sermon, he told about his experience at Avante and everything. **(Gerald)**

Avante was the furthest from Kevin's home and although he did research, he was not as familiar with the institution's history and legacy prior to enrolling. He stated that he learned more about the school's heritage his freshman year.

A deacon in my church actually graduated from Avante and he kinda . . . that is when I first learned about Avante. It wasn't my first choice at all. I had never . . . I mean I had known about Avante and I did my research about it. I went to a predominantly White high school, so the other two schools that I applied to were also predominantly White. **(Kevin)**

Ben discussed the influence of his high school mentor. He was not able to visit any of the schools to which he applied.

My mentor in high school helped me pick schools to apply to and which one to go to . . . When I did the research on Avante, that's what swayed my decision. I wasn't able to do any college tours and actually travel to any of the schools that I applied to; so I really had to do my research in the absence of vision . . . of being at the actual institution. So I kind took a blind leap coming to Avante.

### **Legacy and National Reputation**

Avante's rich legacy and national reputation also emerged as a theme when respondents discussed their reasons for attending Avante. Noah, Cameron, and Aaron offered the following:

I came because of the legacy of the school quite simply. I knew it was a place that kinda focused on leadership development and service for fellow humans, your brothers in humanity. So I really came here just because I wanted my skills to be sharpened . . . it was positive to be in an all Black institution where the development was focused on African Americans . . . **(Noah)**

I definitely came to Avante because of the history and because I wanted an education . . . I wanted to be educated outside of academics and that's one thing that Avante is known for . . . educating the whole . . . not just academically . . . I thought that by coming here to an institution with such a rich history . . . I would definitely get that experience. **(Cameron)**

Aaron discussed Avante's commitment to build Renaissance men and women. He stated that he noticed a big difference between Avante and one of the other HBCUs he visited.

I felt that I would be better off at Avante . . . not just for matriculation purposes or anything, but just because I know I will have basically personal skills that I wouldn't develop as well at another college . . . You really don't think about the skills that Avante really places in you until you actually step off the campus and you are really out there on your own . . . it's the way you conduct yourself . . . You are on your Ps and Qs basically. **(Aaron)**

Nathan indicated that he knew gentlemen from his high school and from his church that were affiliated with Avante as currently enrolled students and alumni. His parents were steering him to maintain family tradition and attend a historically Black university in the Carolinas, but he rebelled.

And so it was just like I knew when . . . when you're at that age, you're in high school, whatever your parents are telling you, you always want to do the opposite . . . I'm contrary just because that's just my human nature . . . My dad was like, oh no . . . I remember the scholarship banquet for those in the area that received scholarships from Avante . . . He was trying to get guys to go to . . . but coming down to NSO and after NSO, which is New Student Orientation . . . they had the Welcome to Avante program and after that . . . he came up with crocodile tears, and he was like, you know son, you made a good choice. (Nathan)

In Nathan's case, the scholarship support, along with his interactions with Avante students and alumni influenced his decision to attend this historically Black institution.

As Jackson said:

It [Avante] wasn't on my list until some old ladies at my church told me to look into this college . . . once my list was narrowed down to the final two, I took time to really research the school . . . I discovered that some Avante alumni had considerable ways when it came to social movements in the United States . . . that definitely impressed me about the institution. (**Jackson**)

### **Scholarship Support**

Although other factors contributed, tuition scholarships were the driving factor for Patrick's, Jackson's, and Russell's (15% of the total participants) decisions to attend Avante.

Honestly, what really lead me to Avante is, you know, they gave me pretty much a full ride . . . I went to a pretty diverse high school, middle school, and elementary school. So honestly coming to Avante besides being around my family was the first time I had been around all Black people all the time. So the experience has been good for me . . . I wanted to get away from home . . . I didn't want to be the kid driving home every weekend and things of that nature. You know, I wanted to get away. (**Patrick**)

I chose Avante . . . well actually I didn't know I was going to come to Avante until about two months before I came. I knew I didn't want to go to a huge school . . . I had always heard of Avante and when they offered me a scholarship, a

tuition scholarship . . . I read up on it and I just felt led to be here . . . I know I made the right decision . . . it felt like I was being led here even before I got the scholarship letter. Things started falling into place . . . I received a one-year full ride . . . **(Russell)**

Two of the participants were older students. Lucas was 25 at the time of the interview and Ronald was 26. Ronald indicated that Avante's mission statement, which talks about developing African American leaders, sparked his interest in the school. His financial situation precluded him from coming directly from high school so he went to a community college first. He transferred to Avante after receiving two associate degrees and working full-time for his home state.

Lucas also transferred to Avante and, of all of the study participants, he had the most unique and unconventional route to this HBCU. He said that Avante saved his life.

I guess to explain how I got to Avante, I would have start with my background . . . My mother was a beautiful woman who, due to the violence in our community . . . like joblessness and a lot of other different things, succumbed to being a drug addict, and I lost my mother when I was five years old, unfortunately. But that is really the source of my inspiration . . . A lot of people take things differently. I really hold my mother at the highest regard, and really she's the driving source behind everything I do. My father . . . my father actually dropped out of high school in the eighth grade, so he succumbed to being a drug dealer . . . I was raised by my grandmother who was a very religious . . . a God-fearing woman. She was a practicing Christian and she instilled these Christian values into us as kids, although I didn't exemplify them . . . I never really had any aspirations to go to college. I wasn't a bad child, I was very talkative . . . I decided I wasn't going to college because I felt like, you know, I'm about the rap. What do I need to go to college for? So after high school, my rap career didn't take off as fast as I thought it would so that led me actually having to deal with the reality . . . of needing to get a job. I needed to provide for myself so I got a job. The job really wasn't paying me enough. I really wasn't paying me much. And my situation was that, you know, I was surrounded by so much . . . just so much, that I kinda got caught up into the streets. So I spent four years in the streets, basically really working dead-end jobs . . . I got into selling drugs . . . I didn't plan it . . . It was really kinda like I turned around one day and I'm selling drugs. Like, okay, how

did this happen?...In 2005, I was arrested for selling drugs . . . All of my friends were out there, so that's how I guess I ended up there . . . With my arrest, I was placed in a program called Mentor Diversion. The Mentor Diversion program is a program for first time drug offenders and the requirements are to go to school, get your GED if you don't have it, and test clean. Every week you have to take a drug test, you know to make sure you're not smoking marijuana or doing anything like that. Uh, and the other one is to get a job . . . I was testing clean. As far as getting back into school, that's where my reentry in the academic world happened . . . But the one thing I was having a problem with was getting a job . . . cause of these pending felonies. So I would get a job, but they would do a background check, and I don't get a job. (**Lucas**)

Because Lucas was having so much trouble getting a job, he decided that he wanted to go to college. He enrolled in college to fulfill the terms of his probation and registered for courses that he did not perceive as serious. One of courses was the African American Experience through Film. This course wet his appetite for the study of Black culture. He expressed to the judge that he wanted to go to college so he applied to Avante, but his first choice was another institution.

**Lucas:** As far as the Avante thing, that really came about 'cause the judge, when I told her I wanted to go to college, she actually told me about some Avante seminar down the street from my home . . . 'cause I wasn't meeting the requirements of my probation, she told me that if I did not go to the Avante seminar, then I would go to jail for the weekend.

**Interviewer:** So you weren't meeting your requirements because you weren't working?

**Lucas:** Exactly

**Interviewer:** So that was your option?

**Lucas:** Yes . . . was to go there. So I went there. I heard the man speak. He was a very articulate gentleman. He was well dressed, and at the time, I was actually intimidated. I just felt like, oh, this is not the school for me. So the gentleman actually gave me an application and waived the application fee.

Lucas was accepted, enrolled at Avante, and became a role model for the Mentor Diversion program in his home town.

### **Personal Value Systems**

Given that the focus of this research was character education, considering the personal values systems of participants and Avante's impact on their value systems was an important aspect of the data collection. All respondents indicated that they had personal value systems and that these values impact how they treat other people. The data suggests that these values have been further enhanced by Avante's climate. The students also stated that positive and negative life experiences contributed to the establishment of their values. Participants' values systems, prior to coming to Avante, were grounded in their Christian faith, their upbringing, and/or based on the Golden Rule.

With respect to upbringing, Wayne and Aaron made the following statements when asked about their values:

I feel that loyalty is a big thing. I didn't necessarily come from the best places, so loyalty is a big thing as far as when it comes to evaluating friends . . . and even family. I don't necessarily feel as though because of one's age or position, they have authority over another individual. I feel as though some people . . . forget that you're a human being and they overstep their boundaries because of their position. Respecting people . . . I try to live by that. (**Wayne**)

Yeah, my mom raised me to become a good man . . . but I learned basically what not to do from my father and stepfather. I came from a home where it was just a lot of fighting, a lot of, yeah, just a lot of violence at times. I just learned that you shouldn't treat anybody, regardless of their . . . their significant other, your friend or just a person in general . . . you shouldn't treat anybody rude or wrong . . . We all get upset at times, but that's no reason to take it out on people. And constantly witnessing that over years, I've . . . I've basically vowed to myself to never place myself into any type situation to where that could even be an option. (**Aaron**)

Chad and Patrick indicated that they live their lives by the Golden Rule, making every effort to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Patrick made this statement:

In my personal opinion . . . the first thing is to respect everyone . . . The Golden Rule, I guess you could say treat others as you want to be treated. Respecting everyone starts with respecting yourself. For me, that's a huge part of good character.

Note the following exchange between Chad and the interviewer:

**Interviewer:** Do you have a system of core values that you try to live by?

**Chad:** Every day?

**Interviewer:** Yes

**Chad:** Yes, I mean I believe you shouldn't do anything that you don't want anybody else to do to you.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So you believe in the Golden Rule?

**Chad:** Yeah, yeah.

Keith did not reference the Golden Rule, but shared a quote he lives by that has parallels to it.

Well, I live by, I forget where I read it, but it was . . . it's a quote that I have on my wall. I live my life so that every life I touch will be made better. So in whatever way, it may be just smiling at somebody or saying good morning. I'm always walking by strangers in the morning, "How you doing?" just to make their day. You know, and in life, all I want to do is help people.

Keith, after a trip to South Africa, changed his plans from attending medical school after graduation to pursuing a degree and career in public health.

Helping people was also prevalent in Ben's value system. He suggested that helping others should be the motive in leadership and community service.

As far as my value system goes, I believe that any environment you're in, you should try to contribute in a positive way. Say for instance, while I'm here at Avante, like whether it's getting involved in leadership roles or doing community service, I feel that an individual should . . . have the principle, I'm gonna do something for humanity.

Religion and the Christian faith was the most prevailing theme in regard to the foundation of the personal value systems of participants with 10 out of 20 citing it. In some cases, religion was coupled with family influence and upbringing. Such was the case with Gerald.

My personal value system stems from my relationship with Christ . . . that's first and foremost. My dad's a preacher and my mom's a deaconess. They've raised me in the church since I was five so everything I've ever known education wise, like starting in kindergarten . . . I had kindergarten from Monday through Friday, but on Sunday, Sunday school. My values pretty much were in line with that . . . what I learned from church.

Eli also talked about his Christian inspired values.

. . . I operate from . . . basic Christian fundamental morals. You know, my favorite scripture is Micah 6:9...love, mercy, and walk humbly with your God. These are three things . . . three key thing I think everybody can identify with and everybody can do. That's what I try to do . . . it's my basis for operating . . . what I try to do in the world.

Russell noted the 10 Commandments as the foundation for his value system, while Ronald and Noah, who led the student movement, the Zenith Revival, discussed love as the impetus for their value systems. (Dr. Jamson also noted Jesus and His ministry of love as one of the influences for his vision statement). Nathan attributed his parents and the church to the development of his value system, suggesting that his family was deeply spiritual, but not necessarily religious.

### **Summary: Research Question 1**

In a review of the Avante University course catalog, student handbook, strategic plan, website, and marking materials, its commitment to character education and the ethical development of its students is evident. These publications clearly and consistently communicate institutional goals and expectations. As I answer the next two research questions, the atmosphere on the campus and the data gleaned through the interviews and focus group confirm that institutional policies support Avante's focus on character education, which Kuh (2002) notes as an important factor in building learning environments that promote character development.

The climate and culture of institutions are impacted by their members. Avante University "assumes that its students, having voluntarily become members of the College, are in agreement with its philosophy" (*Avante University Course Bulletin*, p. 214). Although this may be assumed, it is also unrealistic. For this reason, educating for character must be deliberate if it is an institutional priority. The data from documents support the importance of character education at this HBCU, but Avante must also consider the diverse backgrounds of their students and their reasons for attending the

school. Based on an examination of the data, the students revealed that family/mentor influence, the legacy of the school, and scholarship support led them to pursue their higher education goals at Avante. These respondents also indicated that they have personal value systems that guide their lives, which were influenced by their Christian faith, their upbringing, and the Golden Rule. These values appear to correspond with Avante's philosophy, but given the developmental stages that college students experience, character and value systems are influenced by the college experience (Morrill, 1980; Whiteley, 1982). All participants stated Avante's environment had impacted their value systems.

### **Research Question 2**

*What is the role of the president in establishing this environment for character education?*

Although Avante, like most historically Black colleges and universities, made character development a primary focus in its early years, the institution's sixth president, Dr. Jacob Byers (pseudonym), is credited as the holistic developer of Avante University (Rovaris, 2005), due to his leadership and commitment to excellence. Avante's seventh president considered Byers the best and greatest role model he had ever known. An educator and theologian, Dr. Byers' successes during his 27 year tenure as the president of Avante are attributed to his administrative style and personal character, which were grounded in his strong Christian beliefs. "He was quite successful in developing Avante, its faculty, and students, that led to success in his efforts for human betterment" (p. 135).

A fundamental part of Byers' leadership style was his high expectations. "He expected great things of himself and he expected great things of others" (Rovaris, 2005). Kimbrough (2009) in an article in the on-line publication, *Inside Higher Ed*, discussed the Byers Model for presidential leadership and suggests that higher education leaders, particularly college presidents, consider its implementation.

The first component of Kimbrough's model, based on Byers' work at Avante, suggests that presidents should be advocates. He expressed concern that many college presidents are afraid to take stands on certain issues for fear of risking their jobs or offending potential donors. Byers, through a number of essays, speeches, and activities, spoke out against injustices, regardless of the political implications.

The Byers model requires that the president of a college or university be the senior ethical officer of the institution (Kimbrough, 2009). The values of any organization should be demonstrated and reinforced by the senior executive officer. This concept also is supported by the work of Bornstein (2003, 2009) and Kuh (2002) as discussed in the literature review. The third and final element of the Byers model, espoused by Kimbrough, is the development of meaningful relationships with students. This requires a concerted effort given the demands of today's presidents, but according to Kimbrough, should be made priority if institutions expect to impact the character of their charges.

Although other Avante presidents have endorsed the principles of character development, the university's current president, Dr. Bernard Jamson (pseudonym), has addressed this agenda in an explicit and methodical manner. In this section, I will answer

the second research question, which pertains to the role of the college president in establishing a character education climate at the institution.

Dr. Bernard Jamson assumed the presidency of Avante University on July 1, 2007. A 1975 graduate of Avante, Jamson returned to his alma mater after an impressive and inspiring career in education that included faculty and administrative appointments at Emory University, the University of Chicago, the Harvard Divinity School, the Ford Foundation, and the Interdenominational Theological Seminary. In addition to his academic accomplishments, he is a family man who values and celebrates his role as mentor, husband, and father. A part of the first two goals in his Avante action agenda was projecting Avante's graduates as symbols of hope. This includes developing responsible parents, leading citizens, and role models; considering a Biblical model in renewing community; and expelling the imps of self-hate, violence, materialism, misogyny, and homophobia (Seymour, 2008).

In the Seymour article (2008), Jamson expressed his desire to walk with, talk, and listen to students, while leading and mentoring them. Jamson stated in the article that he is the first minister/educator to occupy the presidency of Avante since Dr. Byers left the office in 1967. He views his appointment as "an opportunity to use the power of the pulpit both on campus speaking to the issues of character and values, but also in the public domain, in the streets and in religious houses of worship" (p. 55) lifting Avante as a symbol of excellence. As a beacon for and in the African American community, he committed to carry on the traditions of Avante's previous presidents by showing young men and women that they can become models of service, leadership, and character, no

matter their circumstances or experiences. As I share the findings from the interviews and focus group, the diversity of the participants' backgrounds will support this position.

Although I was unable to conduct an interview with the president of Avante University, I was able to determine his role in establishing a character education environment at the school through articles and his speeches. The findings from those documents will answer questions regarding the development of Dr. Jamson's vision statement, the ways he envisioned faculty, staff, and students incorporating this vision, community expectations, and his understanding of his role in encouraging and promoting character development at the institution. I will also provide a brief biographical sketch as to how he began his Avante journey.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Born in 1954, Jamson grew up on the South Side of Chicago. He is a 1975 Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Avante with a Bachelor of Arts in political science and religion. He earned a Master of Divinity from the Harvard Divinity School in Christian social ethics and pastoral care in 1978, and received his doctorate in ethics and society, religion, and the social sciences in 1985 from the University of Chicago. His major fields of study included social ethics, psychology, and African American religion.

In an article entitled "Vision of a Renaissance," Jamson shared a story about his grandmother and an incident when a few gang-bangers congregated in front of her home (Seymour, 2008). Jamson, a young boy at the time, was afraid and a little embarrassed as she approached these locals as they were about to brawl. She talked to them as if they were her own sons and admonished them to back off if they could not settle their

differences in a civilized manner. To Jamson's surprise, these thugs listened to her. "She spoke with moral authority. She took a risk and put her life on the line and it had an impact" (p. 51). Avante's 10<sup>th</sup> president credits his grandmother and places her at the top of his list of people who have influenced his life related to leadership, consensus-building, and conflict resolution. He also acknowledged her love of people and her willingness to take risks for the common good. During a keynote address at a conference on "Building Civil Communities of Change," Jamson (2010b) indicated that his grandmother taught him how to relate to people and that she was his greatest "moral exemplar." He stated that he anticipates putting the consensus-building skills he acquired through his grandmother's example as he leads the Renaissance movement at Avante (Seymour, 2008).

As a young boy growing up during the unrest categorized by the Black Power generation, the Vietnam War, and gang violence, Jamson attributes his foundation to a strong family unit and the Church (Seymour, 2008). In the article, Jamson spoke of the influence of his grandmother: "Taken together, her home visits to the infirm, her street courage with the homeboys and her hospitality to the saints and sinners alike demonstrated to me, a little kid, the power and the surprising possibilities that lurked within the religion of Jesus" (p. 52).

His interest in Avante was piqued when he read an article in *Ebony* magazine about an Avante alumnus who was interested in running for vice president of the United States. Jamson said he was intrigued by politics, law, and Avante's incubation of dynamic and sophisticated leadership in society. His newly discovered interest in Avante

was augmented when his father asked him to watch the funeral of one of Avante's famous and most revered alumni. At that time, Jamson's father said that he wanted him to go to college at Avante.

Jamson's mother accompanied him to Avante University in August 1971 (Seymour, 2008). He was excited and committed to maximizing his college experience. He was a first generation college student and felt the pride of his family as he went off to pursue higher education. He also felt internal and external pressure as "his family and friends looked to him to be the immediate family's first college graduate" (p. 52).

As he completed his undergraduate education, it seemed as if he would pursue a law degree, but after studying in England at the University of Durham, he decided to broaden his horizons. In the Seymour (2008) article, Jamson stated that "the perceptions of political science and law were much more parochial than those of theology and religion" (p. 52). Jamson further stated that religion and theology meshed with who he was becoming and directed him toward philosophical and religious quests.

When Jamson began his term as president of Avante, he started a Renaissance. At an alumni event just days before his inauguration as the 10<sup>th</sup> president of the university, he attended an annual scholarship gala where the Avante graduates present expressed their excitement about Jamson's appointment (Seymour, 2008). The president of the alumni chapter stated that alumni have become increasingly concerned about the moral center of the institution in recent years. He went on to say that the culture of the student body, which reflected the times, needed to be addressed. Jamson's call for a Renaissance and his vision for Avante's future were a welcomed response to this issue.

In reflecting on his first 100 days as the president of Avante University, Jamson was asked how he would like for historians to describe his presidential legacy. He said, “I’d like to be known as the ‘student’ president, that is, a president who sought to prioritize the holistic development of his students—mind, body, and soul—and who succeeded in building a first-class student center, the symbol for our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Renaissance” (Avante University Campus News, 2007). To undergird his presidential journey, he will continue to draw from his well of faith, hope, and love integrating his diverse identities to fit the appropriate mode of being for the unique moments of this calling.

### **President’s Vision Statement**

My vision is that Avante University will provide intellectual and moral leadership for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century global Renaissance of character, civility, and community. Avante will fulfill the dream of its founders as a global resource of ethical and educated leaders. While developing Avante citizens, Renaissance citizens with a social conscience who are committed to champion the causes of equality, justice and peace, the University will guide and inspire others to serve the common good in their communities and throughout the globe.

This Renaissance movement is not limited to students, but encases the entire campus community. “Four priorities make up his idea of the Renaissance: academic excellence, leadership development, character development, and community service” (Seymour, 2008, p. 55). Jamson takes every opportunity to advance this agenda throughout the institution and the African American community. Jamson indicated that the 27 year administration of Dr. Jacob Byers helped to inspire the renaissance metaphor as an opportunity to take the institution to a new level of influence. The marketing piece,

“Avante University Renaissance,” explains that this advance harkens to that air of expectancy, decorum, and success that has always been associated with Avante. His vision is to retrieve the best values of Avante—the best of the Avante traditions (Jamson, 2010b). He stated that the vision for a Renaissance is a result of listening to and feeling Avante and “walking her sacred ground for more than 35 years and more intensively during the past eight months” (Jamson, 2008a).

I was interested in how Dr. Jamson derived his presidential vision statement. During his remarks at a conference I attended in May 2010, he outlined what influenced his vision for Avante. As a political science major, the works of Machiavelli, who is considered one of the founders of political science, was one of his influences. The Machiavellian approach relates to using power and force to impose one’s values on another. It suggests the use of manipulation for gain. Though a student of Machiavelli’s work, this is not Jamson’s personal philosophy; but in his role as president, he recognizes his influence in communicating and promoting the values that serve as the foundation of Avante’s Renaissance.

Aristotle also influenced Jamson’s presidential vision. When Jamson spoke of Aristotle, his comments centered around knowledge of the good and the desire to do good. He stated that leaders must urge campus community members to do good by providing incentives and affirmation. Community service and leadership are examples of instilling these habits in students and colleagues with the strongest among us helping the least. Jamson also suggested the importance of stigmatizing inappropriate behavior and conduct that conflict with community standards.

The third and final influential figure in the development of his vision statement is Jesus. In Jesus' ministry, love is a powerful motivator. Love empowers others rather than self and addresses the social conscience component of Jamson's vision. A part of his vision is to produce citizens "with a social conscience who are leaders of integrity, committed to serving the larger good at home and abroad" (Avante University Renaissance).

During his remarks during his May 12, 2010 keynote address, he referenced the five pillars of this Renaissance, which are hallmarks of the demonstration of his vision. Those students who embrace this movement will be well read, well traveled, well spoken, well dressed, and well balanced. I will discuss these five wells later in this chapter.

### **Avante University Renaissance**

Beginning with his initial address to students, which occurred during new student orientation on August 15, 2007, Dr. Bernard Jamson introduced the Avante University Renaissance. Defining the term renaissance as rebirth, he described a renaissance citizen. The "five wells," although not in those words, can be seen in this description.

A Renaissance man or woman is one who is a citizen of the world; acquainted with the great conversations in science and the humanities; acquainted with the languages and cultures of the world; at home in every culture, widely read and widely traveled, capable of adapting to every environment, and always raises the level of class and sophistication of the company he keeps. (Jamson, 2007a)

To put his remarks in context, Jamson referenced the Harlem Renaissance, which documented and celebrated the beauty, intelligence, and strengths of African American people during the challenging days of racial injustice during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century. He also discussed the European Renaissance, which occurred during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This movement represented cultural renewal and supported the rise of artists and inventors “who emphasized the intricacies of human character” (Jamson, 2007a). After this brief history lesson, Jamson stated the Avante Renaissance relates to uplift and service to others. The construct of social conscience relates to the inner self and the moral compass. It is different from, but incorporates, the personal and private conscience. “The personal conscience is the voice of morality and right reason that informs us of what is right and good, true and praiseworthy for individuals” (Jamson, 2008a). This includes one’s personal value system and a conviction to relieve the suffering of others. Jamson defined social consciousness as “the living voice of social justice that informs us of what is right and good and true for society, not simply individuals.” Avante, in its mission, programs, and activities, strives to foster the personal and social consciousness of its citizens.

In this speech to new students and their families, Jamson shared his personal experience when he entered Avante in 1971, welcomed them, and celebrated their accomplishments and their challenges and victories in getting to college. He also acknowledged their patience as they navigated registration lines and other administrative processes. Community standards and institutional expectations were also discussed. Jamson made the following statements: “I will be most disappointed if I hear of a single instance of violence on this campus. I will be disappointed if I learn of a single instance of disrespect toward a woman in our community” (Jamson, 2007a). These expectations have been reiterated throughout his presidency. Jamson further stated: “We will not

tolerate sagging pants that gravitate far below your waistline. No do-rags; no baseball caps inside buildings. No pajamas in the classroom.” In 2008, Jamson also added the expectation that discriminating or mocking any member of the community who is different in race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or national origin would not be tolerated and that Avante is committed to a drug free and weapon free environment.

On September 20, 2007 when he opened the academic year at the Opening Convocation, Jamson greeted the entire Avante community for the first time under the presidential mantle. He outlined Avante’s historical mission of providing an excellent liberal arts education to African Americans, achieving Ivy League results with HBCU resources. Jamson based Avante’s accomplishments and years of success on four key practices:

1. Projecting high expectations
2. Supporting those expectations through group mentoring that includes faculty, staff, alums, chaplains and community leaders
3. Focusing on the comprehensive development of the student, cognitive, character and physical development, and,
4. Exposing our students to inspiring role models, most of them our alumni.

In his presentation, he described this as the Avante way and shared that these expectations would remain the institution’s core charge and strategy during the Renaissance.

During this address, entitled “Facing the Rising Sun: A New Day Begun,” Jamson clarified that the Avante University Renaissance was for the entire institution. Jamson

was clear in his speech that he could not call for a Renaissance for students without beginning with the administration, faculty, and staff. In the call to excellence and greatness, “Renaissance and renewal must occur across the board in order for us to achieve our ultimate mission of having a real impact, through education and service, on the multidimensional quality of life issues on the planet” (Jamson, 2007b). This call to renaissance included the trustees, alumni, faculty, staff, and students.

For the board of trustees, Jamson admonished them to shore up their efforts to provide greater resources and guidance for the Renaissance. His charge to the alumni was similar as he encouraged them to give beyond their imaginations in money and mentorship. In regard to the Avante faculty, Jamson celebrated their strength while calling them to grow stronger. He shared information about partnerships that were currently in the negotiation phase and discussed a greater emphasis on writing, speaking, and research throughout a student’s academic career, regardless of major. His charge to staff focused on professional development and improved customer service. Toward the end of his remarks at this opening convocation, he asked that the entire Avante community rededicate themselves to a new and greater level of excellence and ethics.

In addition to a Renaissance of excellence and service, Jamson’s call to Renaissance also involves a call to dignity, decorum, and character. This includes “saying ‘yes’ to personal class and community service. And saying ‘no’ to plagiarism, ‘no’ to petty theft, ‘no’ to profanity in public spaces, ‘no’ to disrespecting and abusing women, and ‘no’ to the kind of personal dress that is inappropriate for an adult learning community” (Jamson, 2007b). He concluded his oration with the Avante’s motto, “*Et*

*Facta Est Lux,*” which means “and then, there was light.” This Renaissance represents renewed light and Jamson’s vision is designed to ensure that Avante’s light will continue to illuminate on the campus, the local community, and the world. His hope is that Avante’s citizens and graduates will leave their communities and take the Renaissance values of justice, peace, community, and service to the outermost edges of the world (Jamson, 2008a).

On February 15, 2008, President Jamson was officially installed as the 10<sup>th</sup> president of Avante University. In his inaugural address, he stated that the ceremony and the activities associated with the inauguration were not about him, but an academic and moral diagnosis. From his perspective, an inauguration should be a moral checkpoint where institutions consider whether they remain committed to their founding missions. The questions of the day should be are we “making good on the ancestors’ investments of prayer, money, and hope” (Jamson, 2008a). His position reiterates his commitment to ethics and character, keeping the moral compass at the forefront of institutional thinking and community.

During his inaugural speech, as in his speeches during new student orientation and the opening convocation, Jamson also discussed his vision of Avante being a “global resource for educated and ethical leaders.” He described the matter of engaging the world with intelligence and integrity as the ultimate ethical challenge and opportunity. Internationalizing the campus is one of Avante’s strategic initiatives and he discussed that working in tandem throughout the school would be necessary to achieve this goal. “Working together requires that we communicate effectively across institutional

boundaries. We cannot seize the future working in separate silos with little curiosity or openness to learning from our colleagues or to sharing ideas and information with them” (Jamson, 2007b). His comments were supported by the legacies of past presidents and noted alumni. As Avante moves to actualize this vision of internationalization, the world will recognize that Avante does not limit itself to domestic concerns, but to global politics, academic advancements, ecological issues, and cultural trends causing graduates to be ambassadors throughout greater society.

### **The Five “Wells”**

Jamson started the second academic year of his tenure as president outlining the five pillars of the Avante Renaissance. These characteristics were alluded to during his first year, but Jamson articulated its explicit language during the 2008-09 school year. During his new student orientation address, Jamson encouraged Avante students to memorize the five tenets of the renaissance: well read, well traveled, well spoken, well dressed, and well balanced. There are posters throughout the campus reminding the students of these “wells” with quotes from President Jamson designed to keep these concepts at the forefront of their thinking and actions. Focusing on the themes of clearly communicated expectations and accountability, Jamson consistently supports the development of Avante students’ character.

#### *Well Read*

Well read students possess a breadth of knowledge and sophistication in contrast to the parochialism of those who specialize too soon in their intellectual careers. Well read men (and women) should be acquainted with the classic texts, issues, and questions within both sciences and humanities. I want your bookshelves to reflect your diversity of interest. For there we should find physics and philosophy

next to finance and poetry. When you are well read, you will have something valuable to contribute to any conversation. (Jamson, 2008c)

In his 2008 Opening Convocation address, “Masters of the Game,” Jamson further stated that students should be acquainted with the classic texts, issues, and questions within all of Avante’s three academic divisions: Business Administration and Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science and Mathematics. He also indicated that the faculty could provide lists of the “must read” texts that he challenged each student to read in their quest toward the Renaissance. This indicates Jamson’s expectation that members of the faculty will promote this pillar.

#### *Well Traveled*

Avante students are encouraged to travel and carry the Avante banner with them. They are also urged to use the resources of Avante’s international students, faculty, and staff to assist them in acquiring global insights.

Well read and well traveled students who have been reared in the United States must travel to other countries in North America and beyond in order to experience the essential “de-centering” that comes from leaving home and looking back to assess and understand one’s origins. Specifically, I encourage you to begin with the following 10 places where movements, events, leaders, and land came together to change the world game: Cairo, Beijing, Jerusalem, Rome, London, New York, Ghana, Paris, Delhi and Berlin. (Jamson, 2008b)

#### *Well Spoken*

Well spoken is the third pillar of the Avante Renaissance movement. According to Jamson (2008b, 2008c), well read, well traveled, and well spoken citizens always have something valuable to say. In supporting their capacity to contribute to significant

conversations, Jamson also indicates his desire to have products of the movement speak well.

You will develop the capacity to express yourselves with precision, grace, and style, both verbally and in writing. . . . you've come here to learn to put those complex emotions and ideas into elegant words. And when you become good . . . you'll be able to talk the sugar out of a sweet roll without touching the crust. Aristotle called that "the art of rhetoric." (Jamson, 2008c)

During the opening convocation in 2008, he also suggested that the students research, become familiar with, and memorize some of the great orations of our times including Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream"; Frederick Douglass' "July Fourth Address"; C. L. Franklin's "The Eagle Stirs Her Nest"; and Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet." Jamson considers these among the great proclamations.

### *Well Dressed*

Renaissance men and women are also well dressed.

As a prestigious college that produces leaders, we have an obligation to inform and guide you regarding how to best present yourselves in public. We want you to make the right first impression. And, whether you like it or not, people see you coming down the street or corridor before they meet you and hear your brilliant and charming conversation . . . When you enter the public to represent Avante, please look like the future decision makers, servant leaders and power brokers that you are. (Jamson, 2008c)

Jamson went on to reiterate institutional expectations regarding proper dress in classes, offices, the dining hall, and other indoor and public venues. These practices were presented and published in October 2009, as Avante's Appropriate Attire Policy.

*Well Balanced*

The last of Jamson's "wells" is well balanced. Avante "teaches us to possess healthy minds that reside within healthy bodies governed by healthy values" (Jamson, 2008c). Students are encouraged to explore traditions that are unfamiliar to them and to allot time for rest and relaxation.

This affirms the importance of a well-rounded existence built upon the wise allocation of time and effort. There is a time for relaxation and a time for study; a time for sports and recreation and a time for worship and spiritual nourishment. This semester, pursue a new recreational interest—golf or chess. Visit a new church or explore a religious tradition that is unfamiliar to you. You'll find your horizons permanently broadened. (Jamson, 2008b)

Posters reminding students of the five pillars of the Avante Renaissance are visible throughout the campus. I observed them as I entered the administrative office of the Chapel, in the Student Union, and in the Leadership Center, which also serves as an academic building. I understand from the student participants that the campus is saturated with them, including the academic buildings, the residence halls, and other locations throughout the institution. These color posters state that "Renaissance...are well..." and include pictures of Avante students reflective of the "well" signified on that particular poster with the Avante logo at the bottom. The well read poster has a picture of a student removing a book from a shelf in the library. There are also pictures of students speaking at what appears to be a book signing and two students reading; one outside sitting on a bench on the campus and the other inside. Well traveled has students standing on what seems to be a bridge with mountains in the background. It also includes pictures of students in international locations. On the well spoken poster, there is a picture of a panel

of students who appear to be presenting to an audience. There are also students talking in a group and students posing with the president and other administrators who are in academic regalia. The students are holding plaques as if they just received awards. The well dressed poster has pictures of students dressed casually and professionally. The poster representing well balanced has students engaged in recreational activities and tutoring young children. The “Wells” are sometimes streamed on the Avante website, but the pictures there do not necessarily correspond with those observed on the actual posters. Table 2 outlines the Five Wells posters and the text, which are quotations from President Jamson, observed during my time at Avante.

At the beginning of the 2008-09 academic year, each student received a token of their participation in the game of enlightenment toward the Renaissance . . . a glass bead. As they grow to become masters of the game of life, the bead, which they were encouraged to put in a safe and obvious place, was to serve as a reminder to assess their progress as intellectual and moral players at Avante. Jamson reminded the students that they came to Avante with basic moves for the game, but their college careers are designed to prepare them to be masters of the game.

Whereas Jamson has been clear regarding the Avante University Renaissance, he carries the message as he speaks throughout the country. On May 30, 2010, Jamson received an honorary degree from a college in the Northeast. In his brief remarks, he encouraged the students to become, beware, and be. He told the men and women to become Renaissance citizens and to carry with them the tradition of broad learning.

Jamson challenged them to be well read, well traveled, well spoken, well dressed and well balanced.

**Table 2**

***The Five Wells Posters, Avante University***

The “Well”	Jamson Quotation
Well Read	“Well read men [and women] possess a <i>breath of knowledge</i> and sophistication and are acquainted with the classic texts, issues, and questions within both the sciences and humanities. Your bookshelves should reflect your <i>diversity of interest</i> —physics and philosophy, next to finance and poetry. When you are well read, you will have <i>something valuable</i> to contribute to any conversation.”
Well Spoken	“Focus on developing the <i>capacity to express</i> yourself with precision, grace, and style—both verbally and in writing. Put complex emotions and ideas into <i>elegant words</i> . Always have something valuable to say, and then say it well. One effective way to begin is to become familiar with and memorize excerpts of some <i>well-crafted, well-delivered</i> orations. Find great proclamations and become familiar with them.”
Well Traveled	“Students who have been reared in the United States must travel to other countries in order to <i>experience</i> the essential ‘decentering’ that comes from leaving home and looking back to assess and <i>understand</i> one’s origin. As the planet ‘grows smaller’ and its citizens become more <i>interdependent</i> , it is more important than ever for each of us to develop broad <i>perspectives</i> , skills, and <i>leadership</i> that consider the population of the entire globe; this is the making of the global citizen.”
Well Dressed	“We want you to make the right <i>first impression</i> . There is a time and place for every cultural costume; some of them—such as pants sagging below your waistline—have no place in the classroom or the workplace. Do not self-penalize by entering the public square in the equivalent of a black tuxedo with brown shoes. Whether you like it or not, people see you approaching before they experience your <i>brilliant and charming</i> conversation.”
Well Balanced	“There is a time for relaxation and a time for <i>study</i> , a time for sports and <i>recreation</i> , and a time for <i>worship</i> and spiritual nourishment. This semester, <i>pursue</i> a new recreational interest—golf or chess. Visit a new worship center and explore a religious tradition that is unfamiliar to you. You’ll find your <i>horizons</i> permanently broadened.”

Jamson also told the graduates and others present to beware of the diversions that may cause them to abort their goals and dreams. He warned them to beware of the seven deadly sins espoused by Mahatma Ghandi: politics without principle; wealth without work; commerce without morality; science without humanity; education without culture and character; pleasure without conscience; and worship without sacrifice. Lastly, he charged them, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to be transformed nonconformists, which encourages acting with personal and social conscience. His speech at this Northeastern institution is an example of Jamson's taking the message of educated and ethical leadership wherever he has audience.

### **The Avante Aura and Its Future**

As Jamson was nearing the end of his second year as president of Avante University, he called the campus community together to address the soul of Avante and the future of the Aura. The call to Renaissance is directed related to the Avante Aura, which according to Eaves (2009) is the secret to the school's success. At his town hall meeting on April 9, 2009, Jamson defined the Avante Aura as an inexplicable connection between good citizens "that strengthens us when we're together and sustains us when we're apart until we meet again." He suggested that this connection radiates within and beyond its members and cannot be captured or quantified.

Jamson went on to share a crucial ingredient of the Avante Aura: "a fundamental sense of discontent with mediocrity and nonsense," suggesting that those who have embraced the Renaissance movement must be concerned about the human condition. His expectation is that citizens in their community would be impatient with the status quo.

Because of the wonderful opportunities they have as Avante students, Jamson reminded them that to whom much is given, much is required.

In considering the soul of the institution, Jamson acknowledged that there are discrepancies and gaps in quality and effectiveness, but that his administration remains committed to eliminating and alleviating these discrepancies. After this statement, Jamson went on to say that there were some internal and external community members and constituencies “who are spiritually ill and disoriented.” He also made a statement to those who had not yet committed to the renaissance and rebirth at Avante.

I want you to listen and make a decision about whether you should remain at Avante. I know that a few of you are enrolled because it was your mama’s or daddy’s dream. But, if it isn’t your dream, you should exercise the discernment and the courage to transfer to a more suitable environment. There are a lot of schools out there that would love to have a young person who is qualified for admission to Avante. (Jamson, 2009b)

This statement indicates Jamson dedication to his the vision of character, civility, and community. It is not often that a college president makes such a bold statement and encourages those present to assist him in disseminating it to the entire community. During this town hall meeting, he spoke again about the five wells. In his discussion of the “wells,” Jamson referenced Avante’s current graduation rate of 67%, but suggested that, although this was exceptional by some standards, it was not good enough for Avante. He also encouraged students to aim for the Dean’s List and to seek assistance when they need academic and/or other forms of support.

Jamson also expressed again institutional expectations regarding conduct and behavior. “We will be a community of zero tolerance for sexual abuse, date rape,

prostitution, pimping and other forms of illegal behavior . . .” He expressed a commitment to Avante operating in keeping with best practices in matters of customer service and professionalism. He acknowledged reports that faculty and staff members have also behaved below institutional expectations and standards while reminding students of their responsibility to show respect to faculty, staff, and each other. Jamson’s expectations also included supporting Avante’s efforts toward becoming a greener community by recycling, conserving energy, and keeping the grounds and buildings clean.

In the next section of his remarks, Jamson spoke of Avante’s ethics, declaring his commitment to promote character development at the university. He declared that Avante “will be a safe, respectful campus that balances personal liberty with the responsibility of membership in a moral community.” His thrust in this section of his remarks focused on matters of diversity—in particular, the diversity of sexual orientation of community members. Because of Avante’s explicit mission of educating citizens with disciplined minds, he acknowledged that dealing with these matters have presented some challenges for the institution. Jamson further stated that a part of Avante’s greatness is their ability to accept students who wish to uphold the Avante Aura. He made the following statement: “We do not pry into a person’s private identity; nor do we wish to have identity paraded in an undignified manner. We do demand that everyone aspire to high ethical standards and responsible community behavior. Identity must always square with, and yield to, ethics” (Jamson, 2009b).

Jamson (2009b) outlined three basic principles that would govern life in the moral community that is Avante: the principle of safety and security, the principle of diversity, and the principle of decorum. He indicated that, if students and employees do not feel secure and safe in their environment, the institutional mission will not be achieved. Jamson also celebrated the diversity of culture and orientations at Avante and encouraged them to learn from their uniqueness. Regarding relationships between straight and gay community members, Jamson invited students to seize the opportunity to learn from their environment by reading gay authors and engaging in intellectual dialogue with gay neighbors and classmates. The principle of decorum related to being well dressed in this context requested that male students not wear clothing associated with women's array (dresses, tunics, purses, and pumps) on the Avante campus.

Jamson summed up his April 21, 2009 address by stating that he wanted to establish a culture of high expectations and encouragement, not one of enforcement and harassment. He reminded students, faculty, and staff that they must take responsibility for Avante's excellence. He concluded by saying that if individuals were unwilling to follow these guidelines of a moral community, they could leave. "Change your behavior or separate from this college." He concluded with the following statement ". . . If you want to be part of something rare and noble, something that the world has not often seen—a community of educated, ethical, disciplined Black men (and women) more powerful than a standing army—then you've come to the right place . . ."

In his heartfelt and admonitory presentation toward the end of the 2009 academic year, President Jamson again reiterated the community standards for Avante citizens and

challenged them to use every opportunity to grow from and through each other. He resounded the clarion call for a Renaissance, reinforcing the five wells and their rationale. It was evident through this excerpt that he was concerned about the attitudes and conduct of members of the campus community and that he was committed to the tenets of safety, diversity, and decorum.

Jamson's opening convocation speech, "For What Purpose Have You Been Delivered to this Place," delivered on September 17, 2009, picked up, in some ways, where the April town hall meeting left off. He welcomed the Class of 2013 to the Renaissance at Avante as he highlighted the accomplishments of several members of the campus community. He lifted his vision for Avante to become a global resource for educated and ethical leaders and the institution's commitment to character, civility, and community. He also referenced and explained the five wells noting that true education involves the building of knowledge and character.

The focus of the 2009-10 opening address challenged each student to find his/her purpose and live it. Jamson (2009a) acknowledged the love and sacrifices that made a college education a possibility for them and admonished students to "move forward, being persistent, being unafraid and receptive to the still, small voice that will guide you toward your life's work and passion—your purpose." He also shared that living one's purpose involves taking some risks, much like the risks associated with leaving home and coming to college. In pursuing purpose and getting to know oneself, Jamson charted the following risks:

1. Risk stepping out of your comfort zone to learn the perspectives of others.

2. Risk feeding your intellectual curiosity. Renaissance men (and women) are conversant in the classic texts and pride themselves in having knowledge in a variety of disciplines.
3. Risk expanding your cultural horizons through travel. You will learn more about yourselves and learn that all citizens of the world are more similar than dissimilar.

Jamson reminded the students that their success was in their hands and that our nation and world is waiting on them and what they will contribute. “The success for which you are destined will uplift communities throughout the globe—communities that have been ravaged by time and neglect and bypassed by opportunity” (Jamson, 2009a). He concluded by challenging them to discover their purposes and destinies this academic year.

### **Summary: Research Question 2**

The findings from the eight presidential speeches indicate the importance of the role of the president in establishing an environment for character education. At every opportunity, Dr. Bernard Jamson clearly communicated institutional expectations and the responsibility of community members to embrace and exercise these standards. Jamson builds his role as the senior ethical officer (Kimbrough, 2009) of Avante University through word and deed. In the addresses during new student orientation, Avante’s opening convocations, and his inauguration, Jamson raised his vision and his rationale. His commitment to Avante’s founding tenets as a moral community is consistent and evident to all who hear him speak wherever he is.

In his April 2009 Town Hall Meeting, Jamson discussed Avante's intolerance of discrimination. In October, it was reported that an administrative assistant in the President's Office at Avante had been terminated (Simon, 2009). This former employee, after receiving an email that included pictures from a gay couple's wedding, forwarded it to others making comments that were considered discriminatory. In a statement, Jamson announced that the persons involved in the incident had been reprimanded and that one of them was no longer with the institution. He also stated that the views noted in this email did not in any way reflect the values or policies of Avante University. We have "taken great strides toward building a diverse and tolerant community." This is a clear example of what may happen when members of the campus community do not respect Avante's Renaissance.

Kuh (2002) endorsed a six step agenda suggesting what colleges and universities must do to create learning environments that promote character development. Avante meets Kuh's schema. Character development is explicitly stated in the school's mission statement and the president's vision statement. President Jamson, through the Renaissance movement, pushes this agenda in all aspects of campus life through the five wells. While the scope of this study focuses on the students and their experiences, I suspect that the mission and vision statements are also emphasized in the recruitment and socialization of faculty and staff.

The data found in Avante's course bulletin, student handbook, and strategic plan, indicates that Avante's policies and practices are consistent with the institution's commitment to character education and ethical development. Based on the April 21, 2009

Town Hall meeting, the impact of organizational culture and environment in their moral community was acknowledged and community members were rebuked and charged to get on board if they were not in agreement with the Renaissance. I was not able to access any institutional data on the effectiveness of character education initiatives, but through my qualitative interviews with the student participants, which will be discussed later, I determined that Avante's efforts toward building and developing the character of its student have produced results in these students' lives.

### **Research Question 3**

*How do students experience this environment?*

#### **Participants**

This case study employed a purposeful sampling strategy. The data collection process began by contacting the director of student activities and the senior class advisor to get the names of the class officers. Because it was difficult to get the class officers to respond to email initially, I was given the names of other campus leaders and contacted them. These students also recommended other students signifying snowball or chain sampling (Creswell, 2007). Potential participants were contacted via email. In the email, they were asked to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. After the initial email contact, phone calls and text messaging proved to be the most effective form of communication. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 participants, five sophomores and nine seniors. The focus group involved seven students, three juniors and four sophomores. The total number of participants was 21. Unfortunately, one of the focus group members arrived late and was quiet during the group. It was also

difficult to capture his comments on tape; therefore, the findings presented will reflect 20 respondents. The individual and group interviews were held in the chapel on the Avante campus.

The student respondents, all males, represented the main regions of the continental United States, which include the Northeast, Mid-Atlanta, Southeast, Midwest, West, and Southwest. Since the intention was to engage campus leaders, participants represented athletics, campus activities, Greek life, religious life, residence life, and student government. Some of them served in various leadership capacities throughout campus, and six served as class officers. Although raised in the United States, one of the informants was of international descent and was the only participant who was not African American. Their majors included African American studies, biology, business, economics, electrical engineering, political science, psychology, and sociology, Table 1 provides the demographic information on the participants.

The focus group was conducted with students who serve as the campus coordinators of a movement called the Zenith Revival (pseudonym). This group of students organized because they believed that some members of the campus community were not committed to the ideas and ideals espoused by the institution. Their efforts are designed to ensure that all Avante students are taught these tenets and understand school history, mission, and the responsibility they have for enhancing the world and their communities. I will provide a brief description of this group below.

### **The Zenith Revival**

The Zenith Revival is a student-led movement by Avante students who organized during the 2007-2008 academic year because they were concerned about community and the misunderstanding of the “Avante Aura.” It is a “student designed development curriculum that will attempt to give each student the experience that was promised to them when they choose Avante” (Aziz, 2010). The impetus for the movement was two students’ concern that the institution was not delivering what it promised or what they expected upon enrollment. As a result, they decided to address their concern in a way that would benefit the entire student body. As I read about the efforts of this group of students, this collective emerged as the starting point of the data collection process. The curriculum they presented addresses character development through several aspects of campus life.

The first year of the curriculum is entitled “Learning the Legacy” and proposes implementing the history of Avante University in the first year English classes. Sophomores will be required to complete a minimum of 30 hours of community service. This module, “Building Bridges,” supports the institution’s mission, ensuring that students serve the local community.

During the junior year, members of the junior class will mentor freshmen. Students will be matched based on their majors and hometowns. During the “My Brother’s Keeper” curriculum, alumni also will be engaged to work with the juniors as they prepare to graduate. The curriculum calls this initiative “alumni in training.” The final year of the curriculum is called “Avante International Ambassadors.” “This year

will encourage senior students to assist in the institution's recruitment and fundraising efforts" (Aziz, 2010).

Avante's SGA President, as noted in the article, applauded the work of the Zenith Revival team. "This program offers an opportunity for students to become immersed in our school holistically. It (the curriculum) would make student awareness, institutional ownership and community service a reality for all [students]" (Aziz, 2010). This student movement has also received the support of Avante's president and other faculty and administrators.

### **The Impact of Avante's Mission**

Avante was selected as the site for this research project because of its mission statement. The institution states that it "realizes its mission by emphasizing the intellectual and character development of its students" (Strategic Plan, p. 2). The mission statement also outlines Avante's responsibility to teach the history and culture of Black people, while developing oral and written communication skills, fostering an understanding and appreciation for diversity, and cultivating the personal attributes of confidence, ethics, morality, and social justice. Building and sustaining relationships and becoming critical thinkers are also a part of the school's commitment.

The findings from this study indicated that all participants felt that Avante meets some aspects of its mission. As respondents discussed their experiences related to the mission, different components of the mission resonated with them. For the nine seniors interviewed, Avante had been true to its mission.

I think we've been true to our mission statement. I think that you'd be hard pressed to find another college in American that has a similar mission statement. I mean to cultivate the personal attributes of self-confidence, tolerance, morality, ethical behaviors, spirituality . . . I mean . . . what else is there after you read something like this. **(Eli)**

Gerald suggested that the mission is realized through the Five Wells coined by President Jamson.

And we can look at oral communication . . . that goes down to being well spoken . . . Understanding and appreciating world cultures . . . every time we have something like a religious fair or we have fairs for different outside groups to come to speak to us, we learn of their cultures . . . As a matter of fact, I went to a gay/lesbian/bisexual and transgender meeting. Some guys wouldn't go, but I went to see the other perspective.

Gerald went on to discuss the development of self-confidence.

. . . so the biggest thing is self-confidence. What we have here is the Avante Aura, you know . . . when we go around, everybody can tell that there's something different about you. There's something different about the way you carry yourself . . . and there something special going on at Avante . . . It's a shame that you see a young Black man who has his head down and they can't speak and express themselves in a way without having to use certain words that, a certain slang that . . . that hinders their communication. That's something we get here . . . we learn how to speak to other people . . . we carry ourselves in a way that is uplifting to everyone.

Chris discussed the incorporation of the mission in the curriculum.

I can say that developing skills in oral and written communication, analytical and critical thinking and interpersonal relationships is definitely incorporated with the curriculum. I can say from freshman year . . . from a freshman course to a senior course, all these elements are actually executed and developed along the way. I can definitely see how . . . it works with character development.

Noah considered Avante's mission an inspiration, and Steve indicated that it changed his thinking. When asked how the mission statement and his experiences at Avante have influenced him, Steve offered the following:

I guess for me, the largest thing is responsibility, in all realms of responsibility . . . when I first came out here, I was very high schoolish in my ways, my thinking, my actions. Being around upperclassmen and people older than me who had been here for some time actually helped me realize the error of my ways.

Wayne shared that he almost left Avante his sophomore year when his mother became disabled after being hit by a bus, but the realization of the institution's mission caused him to stay.

. . . but I started to really see what I had . . . what I classify as the true nature of Avante University. I feel as though their mission statement is like a . . . the American dream. In a sense, it's their version of it. I mean it's cool, you know, you want people to aim high and all this other stuff . . .

Avante's mission speaks to teaching the history of Black people. Wayne suggested that Avante may promote the history of African Americans at the expense of other cultures.

I remember in several classes, I would constantly be combative with my professor or students because the high school I went to . . . was very diverse so I had friends of all races so I don't look at things as just being Black or White. I feel as though they sometimes over glorify the history of Black . . . the Black people. I feel as though a more realistic approach should be implemented.

Lucas stated that this aspect of the mission was among the school's most significant impacts on him. He discussed Avante's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and other social justice causes.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel that your experience here has helped to develop your character?

**Lucas:** Um, yes. That's what I meant by Avante saving my life. I can't credit Avante for giving me knowledge of self because . . . the quest started as a young boy . . . but what Avante did was nurture my quest for knowledge . . . if Avante did not accept me, I would not be the young man I am right now. I think my mother would be very happy to know that I made it this far and without Avante, it really wouldn't be possible . . . it helps me in my work, it helps make the connection, that cultural connection.

**Interviewer:** How?

**Lucas:** Through the people . . . everyday people . . . I can't think of names right this second . . . but it's individuals like him that this tradition, this Avante tradition that I'm glad to be a part of because prior to coming to Avante . . . I wasn't a part of a legacy. Um, my family . . . I love my family, but at the same time, you know, it was just a lot of things that went down in the past . . . the crack head epidemic really put my family on a path to destruction . . . it is like now, I feel a part of a legacy that I was not.

Because social justice and being leaders in correcting what is wrong in society is an important aspect in an Avante education, this is expectation of members of the institution's community. Ronald shared his thoughts regarding this component of the mission statement:

Well definitely there are definite expectations to uphold social justice and in a sense attack social issues that we feel, individually and collectively . . . that are not right . . . this school that's based on things like that and with such . . . leaders in a sense, we must consider the community that surrounds us . . . I mean, if we're going to start anywhere, why not start where you are . . . Jamson [Avante's president], which I thought was a good idea, said he wanted to let the people in the community know that we're here. One time . . . means an introduction, but . . . in order to restore the community to really feel the presence of the school, then I mean they need to see the students active in the community . . .

Patrick shared his commitment to the community surrounding Avante through his involvement in a student organization called SEED.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me what the acronym SEED stands for again?

**Patrick:** Students Endeavoring for Environmentally Enlightened Decisions

**Interviewer:** That sounds powerful.

**Patrick:** I wasn't involved at first . . . one of the things we do to get a lot of people involved is we have LRAM—Let's Raise a Million. The goal is to raise a million compact light bulbs and we install them in homes of low income communities because the light bulbs are really expensive to just go to a Target or somewhere and buy them . . . so we give them to people free . . . so they're saving money on their energy as well as being environmentally conscious.

### **The Communication of Community Standards**

Study participants indicated that attending Avante University has contributed to the development of their character and that all aspects of campus life, from their courses, weekly convocations, internships and community service, campus activities, and residence life have impacted their value systems and ethical growth. Students also indicated that the president's focus on renaissance and the Five Wells discussed earlier in this chapter contributed to character education for students. While this was noted by all participants, respondents were careful not to paint an unrealistic picture of the Avante experience, suggesting that all aspects of their matriculation were positive and that all community members were upstanding and consistent in the projection of good character. The findings support that challenges during their enrollment also supported their growth and educated them for character.

The data showed that Avante University clearly communicates its community standards through its publications and programs.

**Aaron:** The school has such high standards . . . we speak of well balanced, well spoken, well traveled, well dressed . . . I think they set the standards extremely high just in case we don't really fulfill or really make it . . . I don't know the word I'm looking for . . .

**Interviewer:** Meet them, maybe?

**Aaron:** Yeah. Exactly . . . meet the standards, then regardless, you're still gonna be up there.

Because I was interested in how values play out in the day-to-day lives of students, I probed further.

**Interviewer:** How do you think people's ethics and their character play out as they walk around the yard every day?

**Aaron:** I've talked about the expectations . . . and how we try our best to attain them. But at the same time, all of us collectively aren't really on the same page, of course. I mean we have people from all different backgrounds; different social backgrounds . . . so everyone's not the same.

The findings indicate that participants appreciate Avante's president, Dr. Jamson's example of communicating standards and demonstrating them. Tony indicated he feels that the president stresses ethical leadership to everyone and referenced the institution's weekly convocations. Nathan, a senior, talked about community expectations:

I think it's well outlined by Dr. Jamson in his five wells . . . well spoken, well dressed, well read, well balanced, and well traveled . . . The expectation here is that after leaving Avante . . . if you have really applied yourself here, you will go

out into the world and no matter if you're in the boardroom or classroom, you'll make an impact and you'll be good at what you do . . . and to be good at what you do, you have to be all five of the wells.

Another senior, Gerald, felt that the character agenda took new focus when Jamson became president.

**Interviewer:** What are the expectations of members of the Avante community?

**Gerald:** Be the five wells of the renaissance, which is being well read, well spoken, etc. These things are expected of everyone since President Jamson came to the school. That was not set for me when I came here as a freshman. But for my sophomore year, I guess I played catch up for that year. I've been trying to implement those things into my life.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by catch up?

**Gerald:** I came from a predominately White school so coming here . . . I always felt like an anomaly. I felt I didn't know my culture as much as I thought . . .

**Interviewer:** So it was a culture shock?

**Gerald:** Yeah, it was definitely was a culture shock. So . . . I started to wear more African paraphernalia . . . more Black identification items . . . that was my assertiveness of being Black. After my freshman year, I realized that there are other ways to assert yourself as a Black man through the Five Wells.

Eli discussed his thoughts regarding the differences between Jamson's administration and the administration of Avante's ninth president when asked about the university's current focus on character, civility, and community.

I think there was kind of a difference, but I only caught the last year of his administration. I still think he was a great president, probably one of our greatest presidents. He did a lot of fund raising and things like that. But he . . . he was not the Byers type of preacher-president tradition. That was not his model to operate, but now we have Dr. Jamson, this Byers-type figure and he's trying to create this, you know, hit at the core, the moral core. I appreciate them both because they

both show the diversity of our graduates. I think Dr. Jamson is doing a great job . . . he has a lot more years to share his vision with us. As a soon to be alumnus, I can't wait to see what great things, other great things he has in store of the school.

Chris stated that there was a turning point when Jamson became president.

The president when I came my freshman year didn't necessarily have a protocol or vision specific to character. I believe he had a component to it, but he as a president didn't focus on that. During his tenure, he looked at more of the finances behind our institution which was of course fund raising and things of that nature. However, on the other hand, our current president definitely does work with the whole character development. It kinda goes with our Wells . . . well spoken, well balance, etc.

Patrick said that President Jamson takes every opportunity to promote character.

He referenced some comments that the president made at convocation the day after the game.

I remember this year we beat . . . , who is our biggest rival. We beat them in the basketball game and we stormed the court afterwards. We were jumping around the court. We were just hyped because we hadn't beat them my entire time here. So I remember the Zenith Forum the next day . . . he kinda scolded us and said that we didn't have to do that . . . I understood what he was saying . . . It's little reminders like that to just make sure that ethics . . . that at all times you hold yourself in esteem with dignity and character.

As a part of Avante's overall student development program, the school developed a dress code, which outlined appropriate and inappropriate attire when students are attending classes and school functions. Russell discussed the town hall meeting that occurred in April 2009, six months before the policy was implemented.

I do remember that I was really appreciative of how candid he [Jamson] was because I think at a lot of institutions and even here sometimes, people don't, when they speak in front of everyone, they may not be honest about the things

that really go on. You know, when people are speaking rhetoric and giving these great speeches, they sometimes tend to forget about the things that actually occur. So I remember being very appreciative of that. And of course whenever you have a movement like this, with 3,000 people here who all have their . . . all have their own backgrounds, and all have their . . . what they've done and things like that, you're gonna have people who are not exactly on board.

Because Avante's president has been so deliberate about his character development agenda, I asked participants to describe a good citizen in the Avante community. Citizenship is an important aspect of educating for character (Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999), which includes displaying and practicing this construct. It also speaks to the way students experience the campus environment through interactions.

In the Avante community, a good citizen is somebody that really does bind to the ideals of brotherhood . . . someone that is helpful, reaches out to others across the campus, regardless of where they are from, what their major is. (**Nathan**)

A good citizen here at Avante University, I believe, is someone who not only respects the institution, respects the values, the values of the institution, but also is not afraid in any form or setting, to give legitimate criticism . . . legitimate criticism of the institution and some of its policies. I think that one of the main priorities, one of the main duties of a citizen is that you provide that check and balance to the administration . . . because brotherhood is a main tenet of Avante and what we believe. So if you are not caring for your fellow brothers [and sisters], if you are not treating them the proper way, if they need assistance and you don't give that assistance, you need to call to question the status of your brotherhood. (**Jackson**)

One of the main things about being a good citizen is just having an awareness of what's going on around you . . . That might be getting involved in something political, or it might simpler than that . . . you know volunteering your time or doing something of that nature . . . You have to know about, empathize, and understand the situations of people that are different from you. (**Patrick**)

Well a good citizen at Avante, I will say is one who first of all has a positive attitude, willing to help out a brother or sister or whoever comes across his path. A scholar in the classroom, active on campus, and just . . . being involved in the campus for the right reasons. (**Aaron**)

All 20 participants indicated that it was their opinion that not all Avante students have embraced the president's vision of renaissance and the Five Wells, indicating that Avante's character education efforts are not reaching or discernable in all community members. Aaron's statement above questioned the motives of some students. Keith discussed doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

I guess the biggest conflict that comes to mind is sometimes, we have community clean up, we have service days here, and I've always been one to question the motives of their service. Sometimes we have organizations who put out these service days. They work the hardest and they show up . . . they're the first people out . . . But sometimes you have the service day in the middle of a campaign and they'll come out and make a big speech and ride around in a van while everybody else is doing the service . . . going door-to-door . . . I guess I question how genuine people are.

Jackson also shared his commitment to display ethics in campus leadership. He felt that character is promoted throughout the campus, but like Keith, he expressed his feelings regarding the motivation of his counterparts.

. . . As a leader, I have tried to make sure everything I do is fair and balanced and open. Because here at Avante, and once again, something that I've not been pleased with is that many people seek to gain power through position . . . you know networking . . . getting in contact with people who can maybe sneak them into an event or get them this . . . They take those connections and then try to build influence over others. They take those connections and use them negatively.

Jackson stated that this occurs with students and administrators. He suggested that students seek favor and control by connecting with administrators. According to him, these individuals are looking for prestige as opposed to trying to benefit the greater Avante community.

Despite Avante's attempt to instill community and civility, Wayne shared his concerns about how some of his male counterparts refer to and think about women.

Another thing is the way they objectify women in this school. That's something that's very key to me. I guess my friends, the friends that I surround myself with don't do it as much . . . I'm not saying it's too extreme . . . but it's just too much to me.

Wayne also referenced how this attitude conflicts with the institution's mission statement.

Nathan stated that he believed that a large number of Avante's 2800 students had embraced the mission of the institution.

I would say the majority . . . not everybody and honestly, not everybody comes from the same background. With that said, there are some individuals that don't understand the importance of a college education . . . they may not drink the kool aid so to speak. I don't hold that against anybody 'cause at the end of the day, your experience here is not going to be my experience. I use to think that Avante isn't for everybody . . . I had friends the first year that came from majority White backgrounds. They were the token Black all their lives and for them, it's a hard adjustment . . . At the end of the experience, I feel that the individuals that say it wasn't for them didn't find the right niche or that group . . .

Nathan felt that not engaging in campus life contributed to some of his fellow students not having a good experience; thus, not reaping the benefits of the Avante experience.

Chris suggested that the personal values students bring to Avante may affect their ability to accept the school's mission.

Some may not think that developing some of these core elements . . . they may not find it important . . . they may not realize that there is a mission behind the institution. I feel that some of them do their 9 to 3 or their 9 to 2 and they decide to go home. Don't get me wrong . . . I don't question their work ethic, but I do say that when it comes down to the institution and passion for the institution, some may have it and some may not.

Chris' comments support the position that becoming a part of the campus community is an important part of the college experience.

### **Character Building Experiences**

This research sought to determine the ways that participants experience the character education environment at Avante University. The findings suggested that a plethora of experiences contributed to the development of character for participants to include classes, convocations, leadership positions, study abroad, internships, and service opportunities. Respondents also shared the impact of their uncivil encounters on the building of character at Avante.

**Classes.** Ben, when asked whether character development was infused in their classes, offered the following:

It depends on the major. Since I'm a sociology major, we address behaviors and mentalities of groups of people as a whole and then evaluating how individuals' actions can be problematic within their actions between those groups. Ethics is implied, but not explicitly . . . when the issue comes up, it comes up in personal conversations with the professors outside of class.

Steve stated that for him, as a second year physics and engineering major, ethics never comes up in his classes.

William discussed the implicit character suggestions presented through his world literature class.

. . . like in my World Lit class . . . it opens us up to different cultures . . . Eastern and Western. To be knowledgeable of the two, and then in a sense find something that fits the person you feel you want to be and so that combination of

different things allows you to pick and choose . . . in order to create a moral correction system for yourself.

William also shared how his English instructor had them analyze and evaluate the ethical dilemmas that some of the characters in the stories they read contributed to his development.

He said that literature is in a sense, man's journey . . . people have written these things down, they have gone through these experiences and now we are able to read them, look back on them, and assess them in our own way . . . In my English class, for example, we read *The Invisible Man* and another story called *The Fall of Rome* and in those stories we considered character development . . . we see how we thought the different characters reacted and why they did so in certain situations . . .

Although character education in the classroom setting may not be unique to Avante, these experiences for building character are supported in the literature (Astin & Antonio, 2004; Berger, 2000; Boyer, 1990; Bruhn et al., 2002; Dalton, 2006; Kuh, 2002; Kuh & Umbach, 2004). Because Avante University is a liberal arts college with a number of small classes, the opportunity to explore character issues and to discuss them was reported, by participants, to support their ethical growth causing them to reflect on character (Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999) and to move through the developmental vectors espoused by Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

**Convocations.** For students who are in majors or courses where ethics and character may not be the focus, Avante's weekly convocations provide this experience for them. Weekly series designed to bring the campus community together are not exclusive to Avante, but this institutional activity, based on the respondents, contributes

to character education in a purposeful way. In his opening convocation address on September 20, 2007, President Jamson defined the term convocation. “At the root of the verb ‘convoke’ in Latin is the word ‘vocare,’ which means ‘to call’ as in vocation or calling” (Jamson, 2007b). In his remarks, he spoke further regarding the need to call together with purpose. This is another example of the way that character is designed to be at the core of an Avante education.

Eli referred to the campus chapel, where these convocations are usually held, as the University’s biggest classroom. Other participants also spoke about this institutional tradition.

I think the benefit of the Avante education is they have certain requirements and they have the ability to require different things being a private institution and also being small. They require this thing called Zenith Forum . . . its intent is to expose different character development topics . . . different speakers really speak on these things. **(Noah)**

. . . that’s where the Zenith Forum piece comes in . . . It’s an assembly that everyone has to attend. You learn the principles of ethical leadership and how to maintain your morals no matter what major you’re in. Our 6<sup>th</sup> president, Dr. Byers, said you can train a man’s mind, but you can’t train his heart. Dr. Jamson kinda keeps that quote alive and in our heads . . . We need to make sure that while we are here trying to get our degrees, we are still trying to become men that go into the world to give back and not forget where we came from. **(Tony)**

Every Thursday, we have a Zenith Forum. Ever since I first came, I realized that Avante is big on more than just academics . . . they are concerned with the people they are producing. **(William)**

Let’s see . . . Zenith Forum. There’s always a member [graduate] of Avante University who holds a high position . . . they talk about their experiences and what they got out of it and what we should be getting out of it [The Avante Experience] . . . They help prepare us. **(Chad)**

I had the opportunity to attend Avante's Senior Day Convocation. Observing this annual forum allowed me to see students in a natural context. The data gathered through this observation supported that premise that not all students have embraced Jamson's renaissance. The program occurred in the tradition of the institution with a prelude, processional, and prayer. All program participants were members of the senior class and the administrators present had direct responsibility for advising seniors. There was a musical selection and a presentation entitled "So a Man Thinketh." The presentation was offered in the spirit of Avante, reminding those present of the impact of their thoughts.

The event was crowded, partially because it celebrated the seniors and partially because students have to attend a certain number of convocations and this was one of the last forums of the semester. Awards were presented to the top ranking seniors in each academic department and major by the various department heads, while President Jamson smiled and affirmed awardees. The senior class president admonished his peers in the Class of 2010 to be supportive alumni lending their financial support and time to Avante's causes and students.

One of the most moving moments in the program was the singing of the Alma Mater. Unfortunately, many of the students left before this tradition, which occurred at the end of the convocation. Like on similar campuses, over half of the students seemed disengaged, suggesting that all students were not demonstrating growth from Avante's character education efforts. (If these students were invested in the Renaissance, it was not evident during this program.) Some were using their laptops, and others were texting and/or talking on their cell phones. Students sitting in my section were slouching in their

seats and talking while the program was going on. There were only a few seated in my area who seemed engaged. What was interesting was that the students who had not left and were disengaged during the hour long program rose to sing the hymn with vigor and conviction. This suggested that the Avante experience had some impact on them, despite their conduct during the convocation.

**Study abroad.** Keith, a biology major and leadership minor, traveled to South Africa and shared the life changing impact of that experience.

**Keith:** They really have shown me I guess the importance of ethics. I was in biology before I was there and I had known something about it, but I really didn't understand the need . . . until I traveled seeing people in high places who really were unethical and how bad it hurt people.

**Interviewer:** Can you talk a little more about that?

**Keith:** Yeah. We would go places in South Africa . . . where they would have money coming down. You know we, the United States, gives millions and millions and millions of dollars to help foreign programs in South Africa for HIV/AIDS and it all looks good on paper until you actually delve into it. You saw when that money got to the clinic, a lot of it seemed wasted. Being unethical . . . it's being inconsiderate of situations . . . of what really needs to be done.

**Interviewer:** Right. A person's character not only causes you to do the right thing, but also causes you to address it when you see the wrong thing being done.

**Keith:** Right.

Keith was so impacted by this experience that he decided to pursue public health rather than medicine after graduation.

Nathan shared character building experiences related to his study abroad experience. He spent the first semester of his junior year in Barcelona, Spain. His

decision to study in Spain was not connected to being well-traveled initially, but he grew from it in ways he did not recognize until he returned home.

I went to study abroad for shallow reasons. My reason for going was foreign women and foreign parties to be honest. But after I came back, I realized how much I got from it. I got to see Alhambra, which is a Muslim palace in Grenada, Spain. When the Moors controlled Spain, that was the capitol. I got to see that. I have a good friend from Bulgaria . . . I met people that I would have never met.

Nathan discussed the impact of the experience and the ways he benefited despite his original motivation. The appreciation for diversity and other cultures, along with the exposure, complemented his overall college experience making him a better person.

Keith and Nathan had the opportunity to travel internationally as Avante students. The impact of these character building activities and the institution's role in their growth as a result of them could be challenged given that they did not occur on the campus, but it was the campus climate that made these opportunities available and encouraged these participants to pursue them (well traveled).

**Leadership.** Eli discussed his experience as a chapel assistant, sharing that the staff member who works with them stresses ethics in all of their meetings. He also discussed how his Avante experiences have helped him when faced with situations that may pose ethical dilemmas for some, even when away from the campus.

**Eli:** I had several internships in some unethical places . . . Washington on Capitol Hill.

**Interviewer:** So you had an internship on Capitol Hill?

**Eli:** Yes, yes. It's hard in those types of places and I see the challenge to not compromise who you are and your morality . . . I think coming to a place like this,

it helps you, it strengthens you so you can hold your own and know what's right from wrong when you get in those settings.

**Interviewer:** . . . people weren't necessarily operating from an ethical place?

**Eli:** Well, yeah. You could easily see the kind of back deal things that were happening when I was there. The big debate was immigration reform. You have a lot of Congressmen and a lot of people who really were just insensitive toward the 12 million people already in America . . . Whether they are here legally or illegally, they are still people. They are still mothers, fathers, brothers, uncles, aunts.

Eli's comments spoke to Avante's focus on issues of social justice and the impact of that institutional tenet.

Russell served as a class officer and participated on the track team. He discussed the infusion of character throughout his experiences in athletics.

**Interviewer:** How has character and ethics been promoted and encouraged through your courses and activities?

**Russell:** I noticed here at Avante that character is always a part of everything. It was almost a kind of culture shock when I got here because when you go through school at home . . . they really focus on passing the test to get out of high school so it's not much character development going on. But when I got here, I especially noticed in running track, everything is about character. We have our two hour long meeting before practice, just talking about character . . . and the teachers stress it . . . It's just evident on campus.

**Interviewer:** What kind of things do you talk about in relation to character?

**Russell:** Well of course, one of the main things they talk about is finishing what you started. When you're running track, you know, not to give up . . . it's not about the actual race, but it's about the things that bring you toward preparation for the race because you can't do well without preparing for it.

**Interviewer:** Okay. I think that's a wonderful philosophy.

**Russell:** It is. I notice in meetings before track practice they talk about even at our age, what being a good father is; what being a real brother is and things like that, every day before practice.

**Interviewer:** What is being a good brother based on some of those conversations?

**Russell:** Based on those conversations . . . being a brother is loving one another enough to be honest with each other . . . always having each other's back.

As we continued to discuss his character related experiences related to his participation on the track team, Russell revealed something surprising.

**Russell:** Well I think one reason why I ran track when I got here was because . . . to be honest with you, I've always hated running with a passion.

**Interviewer:** Really?

**Russell:** Correct. It just happened to be something I was kinda good at during middle and high school. The reason that I (chuckle) ran when I got here was, my philosophy was that if . . . I don't know if you know how track workouts work . . .

**Interviewer:** You can tell I don't do too much working out (laughter), but go ahead. Tell me about them.

**Russell:** Track workouts are, I think they are some of the most brutal workouts in all the sports. Even the football team, even the football players admit that track workouts are tougher than their workouts.

**Interviewer:** Okay

**Russell:** My philosophy was that if I could . . . if I could make it through the track workouts, then that could help me do things that I really don't feel like doing as far as classroom work and stuff like that.

**Interviewer:** So it disciplines you in a way where you would be able to do things that may not be necessarily appealing to you.

**Russell:** Right.

Russell's stance related to athletics was unexpected and supported his convention regarding developing strength of character. The meaning made from his track experiences

was unique and provided a perspective that showed his commitment and conviction related to his ethics.

Jackson, who served as a resident assistant, shared his experience as a campus leader in the residence hall and how it has built his character through influence and modeling.

. . . being a RA is an interesting position because in a freshman dorm, you are literally given the opportunity to craft and mold your residents' perceptions of the school and their first-year experience . . . I go around and talk to everybody . . . but those who are not from the state are looking for people to cling to . . . You go in your room, you want to lay down, and you get a knock on your door . . . they want to be more transparent with you and you have to return that transparency. You have to be as open with them as they've been with you. And it becomes a true brotherhood, which, I think is unique to Avante . . . this whole idea and concept of brotherhood although it is flawed in some . . . in the way that some people try to show it. It is something that is unique because of the dynamics of the school. The school is small and a Black institution, so you literally have people who are like minds, but who can be completely different when interacting. It's the . . . the dichotomy of the school.

The resident assistant position can be among the most challenging because RAs must set boundaries. Jackson discussed the programming requirements and community development requirements of the RA position, along with his role in holding residents to community standards, which required him to lead by example and educate for character.

One thing I did tell them the first day they got here is I love you all dearly . . . I'll be there for you whenever you need to talk, but I'm not afraid to write you up . . . I'm not afraid to discipline you.

Regarding the development of character, Jackson understood his responsibility to enforce and interpret policy without abusing his authority or compromising community standards.

In discussing occasions when he has had to reprimand residents, he described his process. He made it clear that he had to address their conduct, but he would not hold it against them.

I'm never mad or angry. It's like okay, you messed up. They say I'm sorry . . . it's fine, but you know I have to do this. I see them the next day, they're okay . . . No great confrontation . . . I'm not going to deal with that.

Gerald, who served as the student coordinator of a non-profit initiative associated with his major department, had the opportunity to organize internships with the Legislative Black Caucus, the U.S Census, and the American Cancer Society. He also shared how he demonstrates his ethics in his position in student government.

We do a lot of volunteering and a lot of fund raising . . . we've been able to raise about \$1,000.00 through party promotions or . . . selling certain items, like tee shirts, stuff like that or just paraphernalia and during that time, you have a lot of access to money . . . Those opportunities are very tempting, but at the same time, you have to know that with power comes responsibility . . . You see the money right there and you know you don't have a lot of money. I would be cutting hair for \$5.00.

Gerald talked about how his experiences at Avante and his value system would not allow him to yield to the temptation of taking money that was not his—money that was raised to provide scholarships or to help the less fortunate. Using his skill as a barber not only supported him while at Avante, but allowed him to build relationships with other students on campus as he provided hair cutting services to them. His resourcefulness demonstrated his character.

At the time of his interview, Chad has just returned from a case competition. He shared how he became involved in this experiential activity.

You had to write a couple of paragraphs about your biggest weakness and how you plan on overcoming that weakness or improving it and also your biggest strength and that was the basis of selecting . . . I found the event really great. They had different speakers . . . to talk about different topics . . . and the case competition took up most of the night. Every night, we would have corporate representatives work with us . . . Met Life Company was our corporate representative . . . they gave us a \$1.00 and we had to do a community service project.

Chad's group focused their community initiative on financial literacy, educating and encouraging entrepreneurship. When I asked Chad how this experience tied to character building, he offered the following:

It instills a lot of character building. It instills reaching back and helping others with that community service because it had us thinking critically . . . it wasn't just your regular old mentorship program. It was trying to think of different ideas that had not been done before to help other people around us. . . . it got us in the mindset of helping others . . . those not as fortunate as us to be in school.

This supports Avante's mission to reach out to the community and to improve circumstances in the local and global community.

Participants also indicated that navigating processes on campus like registration, financial aid, and residence life also contributed to developing their character as they matriculated at Avante. Although this may not be different from other institutions, participants' attitudes and the life skills that they referenced in relation to these encounters suggested an ethical focus supporting Forni's (2002) definition of civility, which is a form of awareness focused in ethics. President Jamson often spoke of Avante's

commitment to providing good customer service and fostering positive interactions.

Several participants shared concerns in this area, but spoke to their growth through them.

Being able to graduate in four years is a blessing. I mean getting through it with the administrators who are taking care of my records; this isn't the smoothest thing in the world. You know, several times, I've come home cursing because they say they didn't get my paperwork. They didn't pay me one time . . . I wish things were more efficient; however, it has made me more efficient. **(Keith)**

I mean, it's just a kind of runaround, maybe with the staff . . . one person might not know anything, and they might refer you to the next person . . . and the next person to the next person . . . and you end up going to that first person. That's just my experience working at the building [business building]. I have seen that because some people come up there looking for signatures . . . You have to be patient and continually talk to people and remind them. It teaches you to be persistent. If you're not prepared to work for it, you're not going to get it. **(Chad)**

Of all respondents, Wayne shared more difficulties and seemed the most discontented with his Avante experience. He shared encounters with the campus police where he felt disrespected and an example of poor academic advising that kept him from completing his work the previous semester. While he does not regret coming to Avante, his feelings about the experience are contrary to those of other participants.

**Wayne:** Well, I guess or in my opinion and a couple of my friends' opinions, our expectations are fairly low in the sense that we expect everything to be in order . . . like I say by summertime, as far as financial aid or anything like that, you're gonna have to deal with the runaround. Even though it could be easily handled over the phone, it's never gonna happen over the phone.

**Interviewer:** Oh?

**Wayne:** I'll give an example of something I had to deal with. This is probably . . . well, this has left a fairly bad taste in my mouth as far as me dealing with Avante. I was told . . . science majors have to go see your academic advisor. My academic advisor is hardly ever available so from freshman to sophomore year, I always registered for class the day before or the first day of class because I would never

be able to catch this lady. I would have to eventually email her . . . I would never see her . . . pretty much I never had any form of advising . . . So for two years, that was the case. By the time . . . the first time I was able to register for classes earlier, I got to speak with her and she was like, oh, you haven't taken this class . . . You have to take all these classes in this order and pass them all at one time or you're not going to graduate on time.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Wayne:** So I failed one class and that put me back a semester. It was supposed to put me back one semester. After I spoke with her . . . she said you can still do this, that, this, and then you can graduate one semester behind, in the fall of 2009. So I was like okay. So I've been following that same step, that same plan ever since. I had spoken to her time and time again, and then actually at some point, I changed my advisor because she was hardly available.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Wayne:** The next person [new advisor] told me the same thing. So summer 2009 came and I was under the expectation I was going to graduate in the fall. All I had to do was take four classes. Pretty much, they were like oh, they changed the policy, and they're not going to make any changes and bend the rules for me. I'm like okay . . . I'm upset about this. I'm trying to fight this in a very civilized manner. Then I find out that individuals . . . they weren't even passing prerequisite classes ended up graduating . . . walking in the spring and they ended up taking classes in the summer.

**Interviewer:** You mean last spring?

**Wayne:** Un huh. . . . I know how they worked the system, they got their parents to call and cuss and raise hell.

**Interviewer:** . . . and they ended up getting what they wanted?

**Wayne:** Exactly. . . . and I don't feel as though it is necessary. Because from . . . as soon as we stepped on the campus, we were told we were men and they were gonna treat us as such . . .

Wayne's frustration was evident as he recounted the story. He was given poor counsel by two different academic advisors. Based on what he shared, these faculty members were

addressed for communicating misinformation, although this was not the case. The policy had been changed, but Wayne was still penalized.

I feel as though you should at least stick to your word. And then they're telling me that these professors didn't know what they were talking about . . . This wasn't the problem because when they told me these things, that was the case . . . the policy changed. With Avante . . . there's been a lot of professors that have been letting people slide so they changed the policy to make sure that people don't do that anymore . . . I understand what you're trying to say and that you're trying to change the school, but what's fair is fair. You told me one thing, at least stick to your word. I'm not one of those students who's been trying to get one up on you, you know.

Wayne got stuck in the middle of this policy change and this incident caused him to question the integrity of the academics and the academic policies at Avante. Generally, students are bound to the policies outlined in the college catalogs provided at the time of their admissions. At the time of the interview, Wayne stated that he was enrolled in two classes. In addition to the situation, he was angry because he felt that he needed to be at home assisting his family. Both parents and his grandmother were in poor health which contributed to his frustration. This scenario does not support Avante's values or mission and is contrary to Avante's focus on character development. In relation to its ethical impact on Wayne, the fact that he did not give up and worked to manage his emotions around this situation suggests growth. Despite his anger, he stayed committed to completing his degree.

### **Community Influences on Character**

The findings showed that along with their academic and co-curricular experiences, faculty and staff also influenced respondents during their time at Avante

University. Participants identified President Jamson (discussed earlier in this chapter), faculty, staff, and other students in contributing to the development of their ethical intellect.

**Staff.** Participants identified the dean of the chapel, the director of the chapel, the vice president for student services, and the director of student activities as character building influences through interactions and by their example. Eli, who served as a chapel assistant, discussed the emphasis on ethics in their weekly meetings, led by the dean. Lucas and Ronald stated that the director of the chapel was among their character influences. Lucas shared the following in relation to the director of the chapel, who is Caucasian.

... has really inspired me in a lot of ways. He really dispelled a few myths that I internalized in other places as far as the interest of non-Blacks. He also helped me fine tune my organizational skills just by giving me advice. I remember when I first met him ... we had a discussion about the education of Black men ... he talked about the need to access the power of ancient wisdom.

Lucas suggested that his interactions with this administrator changed his thinking about the motivation of non-Blacks regarding matters that impact the African American community.

The director of student activities was also noted by as a character building influence for two participants, Chris and Russell. Chris discussed this professional's humble spirit and commitment to his work, supporting the displaying and practicing of character (Berkowitz & Fekula, 1999).

He was an individual who was very down to earth . . . he was very cool, calm, and collected. He and I share a passion for education. Throughout my endeavors while I was pursuing . . . and interacting with all these student organizations and things of that nature, he kept me balanced in making sure that . . . I know what my pursuit was. He was quick with words of wisdom. He was really a great person to vent to. I think a lot of faculty and staff don't take the time out on you because they figure out that their schedules are 9 to 3 and they're so consumed with their work . . . that they forget about the most important part, the students. It's just being able to and talk . . . say what's on your mind. He's definitely one of those . . . his professionalism was at 100%, but he knows how to balance it and make sure that he came down to the student level to talk to them on a student basis . . . Without a shadow of a doubt, this man . . . that man deserves a medal . . . I bet he would say he doesn't deserve it because he's too humble about it.

Russell also referenced the director of student activities and the vice president for student services.

On the staff side, I'd have to say . . . Those two because they're two people that really try to get into your life and sit down and have talks with you about things.

In discussing the vice president for student services, who joined the Avante staff in summer 2009, Russell shared the following:

**Russell:** He's already doing programs like brother-to-brother talks where he just sits down off the record and talks about things that you dislike and have problems with. I think that's a really effective program.

**Interviewer:** Can you be more specific?

**Russell:** Like in one instance, I remember some freshmen talking to him about how they were having trouble . . . being distracted by women . . . because the ratio is so great here. Of course, it's always a temptation to go after that and to parties and everything.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Russell:** And I just remember him telling them how everybody is going through something and just giving us some of his experiences and stuff like that.

**Interviewer:** So he was willing to self-disclose?

**Russell:** Yes.

Gerald also discussed the warmth of one of the staff members in the Registrar's Office.

**Gerald:** I really worked hand-in-hand with . . . but there's a few people. Our registrar's office and administrative office, it was probably the most dreaded place to walk into on campus.

**Interviewer:** Is it really?

**Gerald:** Yes, and it seems like every time you go there, you have one thing to get accomplished and even though sometimes it doesn't get accomplished, she's always there with a smile . . . It was like she'll sit there and she'll encourage you, but she's always there to correct you at the same time . . . and that's something that you need. She's kinda like a motherly figure.

Keith shared a similar relationship with the office assistants in his scholarship office. He referred to them as his mothers at Avante. This supports the nurturing nature of HBCUs as noted in the literature.

**Keith:** If I ever needed a place to go, they were there. I go up there and they have cookies (laughter), and they still push me to do my best work.

**Interviewer:** So they nurture while pushing you to do your best.

**Keith:** Exactly.

**Faculty.** All participants indicated that members of the faculty had promoted and demonstrated good character in their courses and through their interactions with them. Two of the five political science majors mentioned one of their departmental professors

as infusing character development in his courses. This scholar, according to Eli, was the first African American to earn his terminal degree from Columbia University.

He has an incredible story, being here at Avante early . . . late 1940s, 1950s . . . He was a student, graduated in '54 . . . and just being under him . . . this is my third time taking him . . . this time I'm doing a directed study, my senior seminar with him. We just won first place in a conference . . . We studied the mayor's race. That's kind of his specialty, local municipal elections and local government . . . Black mayors. So just being under him, getting his wisdom. I mean after class, you just sit and talk for a whole hour just about life, about family, about manhood and things like that . . . Those kind of experiences that are invaluable.

Ronald, one of the coordinators of the Zenith Revival, stated that this political scientist represented what he expected from his interactions with faculty at Avante. According to Ronald, he sets very high standards. He laughed as he described being locked out of his class on the first day because he was five minutes late.

Lucas also discussed the influence of one of his major professors and the Director of the African American studies program.

He has challenged me in a number of ways. He really taught me that life is very political. I have learned how to . . . although I don't agree with certain people's stance on certain things, that doesn't give me the right to dismiss them . . . I have to really understand the situation and instead of focusing on them and complaining about what they are not doing, I need to focus on what I can do . . . He's one of my biggest supporters . . . Everyone needs somebody like that in their career.

Gerald credited the chairman of his department's non-profit institute as a character influence at Avante. (Gerald is the student coordinator of the institute.)

I would say the reason why he's been a character influence on my life is because I think the first global science project was in his class . . . and it just opened my

eyes . . . just opened doors for me in so many different directions . . . He was one of the people who actually . . . I had applied for the Congressional Black Caucus internship. It was because of his connections to another person who know somebody else . . . that helped get the internship . . . As the student coordinator [of the institute], I get a lot of changes to start new internships and coordinate internships . . . I would say that he is the single most influence of my life at Avante.

In this case, the influence of this professor assisted Gerald in acquiring an experiential opportunity, taking what he learned through leadership and the classroom into the marketplace, which ties closely with the Five Wells.

### **Summary: Research Question 3**

Clearly, the Avante University character education environment has influenced the character of the study participants. Their ethical growth was evident in their academic, experiential, and extra-curricular experiences. Study abroad, campus leadership, and internships were among the activities referenced by respondents as supporting the development of their character. Course work and interactions with faculty and staff in their classes and outside of organized programs also encouraged their ethical growth. Kuh and Umbach (2004) recommended that colleges and universities infuse their policies, practices, and procedures with opportunities that foster the promotion and exploration of ethics. In their study, they reported that liberal arts schools report making greater gains in character development and these data support these scholars' premise.

All participants indicated that some, if not all, aspects of Avante's mission were accomplished based on the findings. Even in majors where informants indicated that character development was not a focus, the weekly convocation series filled this void for participants. Interactions, both positive and negative, influenced the development of

values among these students. They spoke of how varying experiences encouraged them to be persistent, resourceful, and accountable—all components of good character.

The Five Wells, considered the pillars of the Avante renaissance, were widely publicized throughout the campus, and all but one participant (95%), spoke specifically of these mainstays of the school's mission and vision. Participants reported that these tenets supported their development and helped to prepare them for opportunities that have changed their lives, while positioning them to change the world. Their self-awareness and the awareness of their surroundings suggested their commitment to continue to strive to be well read, well spoken, well traveled, well dressed, and well balanced. They recognize the value of these “wells” as an expression of their manhood, their culture, and their character.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will review the purpose of the study, the methodology employed, and a summary of the findings. The review will be followed by a discussion and interpretation of the findings and implications for recruitment and practice. Finally, I will consider the perceived limitations of this study and make recommendations for future research related to character development at historically Black colleges and universities.

The purpose of this study was to understand how the environment for character education is established at a historically Black institution and how students experience this environment. This study also examined the role of the president in creating this climate. Venues for promoting character included their coursework and their co-curricular and experiential activities. Character outcomes can be difficult to measure due to their complexity (Dalton & Henck, 2004), so this qualitative inquiry was designed to examine Avante University's efforts toward character education and their impact on a group of students.

According to Barr (2000), the mission of a college or university influences all aspects of the daily operations of the institution while driving its future. Before determining the research site, the mission statements of the member institutions of the United Negro College Fund were reviewed. The institution chosen was selected because

it explicitly stated that its mission is realized by focusing on the intellectual and character development of its students. Additionally, its president has focused his administration on a Renaissance of character, civility, and community. Combining intellect and character supports higher education's goal (Thelin, 2003) and its heart (Boyer, 1987).

To answer the research questions, an instrumental case study was conducted. Institutional documents were reviewed and analyzed, including the college catalog, student handbook, strategic plan, and marketing materials. Articles from the school newspaper, school newsletter, and *Avante Magazine* also assisted in determining the climate for character education at the institution. Analyses of eight of the president's speeches also were conducted. To determine the ways students experienced the character education environment, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 students, nine seniors and five sophomores. Data also were collected through a focus group that included three juniors and three sophomores for a total of 20 participants. This purposeful sample represented students from the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, West, and Southeast regions of the United States. Participants' majors included African American studies, biology, business, economics, electrical engineering, political science, psychology, and sociology, and their ages ranged from 19 to 26. These data were transcribed and analyzed. The results are presented in Chapter IV of this dissertation.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study generated three research questions to respond to the research problem and to illuminate the purpose of the study. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I asserted that higher education was based on the premise that the development of students'

character was as important as their intellectual development. Whiteley (1982) supported the possibility of promoting character within the context of the academy and the co-curricular without compromising either. The findings support this case's efforts to support scholarship and ethical education. A summary of these findings follows.

### **Research Question 1**

What is the environment for character education at the institution? In a review of the Avante University course catalog, student handbook, strategic plan, website, and marking materials, its commitment to character education and the ethical development of its students is evident. These publications clearly communicate institutional goals and expectations and Avante's values are consistent in all documents.

In examining the environment for character education at this historically Black institution, considering the diversity of the study body was an important factor. Although there are a number of developmental tasks associated with the college years, students' motivation for attending an institution and the values they bring to campuses also impact student culture. An examination of the data revealed that family/mentor influence, the legacy of the school, and scholarship support led study participants to pursue their educations at Avante. These respondents also indicated that when they enrolled at Avante, they had personal value systems that guided their lives, but the Avante environment positively impacted and/or reinforced their values. The campus environment enhanced their prior value systems, which were reported to be based in the Christian faith, their upbringing, and the Golden Rule.

**Research Question 2**

What is the role of the president in establishing this environment for character education? This research question was concerned with the responsibility that the president has in establishing an environment that promotes and encourages character, especially among the students. The analyses of speeches and observations during campus programs, as well as feedback from the students interviewed, suggest that the president of this institution is committed to building the character of students and to civil and positive interactions. In all of the speeches analyzed, he spoke of character, civility, and community and each member's responsibility to demonstrate and advance these tenets.

Bornstein (2003, 2009) proposed that leaders set the tone for the conduct of all members of academic communities, and Kimbrough (2009) postulated that the chief executive officer of institutions of higher learning should also be the chief ethical officer. Both indicated that presidents should demonstrate the highest ethical standards in all aspect of their work. Bornstein referred to this responsibility as moral legitimacy and suggested that it is an important step in creating learning environments that promote character.

Institutional mission, policies and practices, students' experiences, and institutional culture are among the list of items endorsed by Kuh (2002) in creating learning environments that support character development. Based on the analyses, the president in this study clearly communicates institutional expectations and the responsibility of community members to embrace these constructs. In his speeches to students during new student orientation and convocations, he discussed his vision of

Renaissance and ways that students can become Renaissance men and women through the Five Wells (well read, well traveled, well spoken, well dressed, and well balanced). During data collection, I noticed posters throughout the campus reminding students of these pillars. Of the individual interview participants, 13 out of 14 mentioned the “wells.” The Five Wells also were discussed during the focus group.

The findings presented in response to this research question are supported by the extant literature on the teaching of values and character (Brooks & Goble, 1997; Eddy, 1959; Martin, 1982; Nicgorski, 1987) and the creation of learning environments that promote character (Berger, 2000; Bruhn et al., 2002; Cejda & Duemer, 2002; Godsey, 1984; Kuh, 2002). The critical components necessary for educating for character: teaching about character, displaying character, demanding character, practicing character, and reflecting on character, espoused by Berkowitz and Fekula (1999), were evident through observations on the campus and interactions with student respondents. As discussed in Chapter IV of this dissertation, Dr. Jamson and members of the Avante community teach and demonstrate character through classes, community programs, and activities. The president insists that members of the campus community hold themselves and students to high standards, displaying, demanding, and practicing character through academic, cultural, and social outlets. Members of the Avante community are also expected to reflect on character through convocations and conversations. Student participants talked about philosophical discussions held in their classes, the dining hall, the residence halls, and other venues throughout the campus. President Jamson often engages students in this manner.

### **Research Question 3**

How do students experience this environment? In considering the impact that students believed that their experiences at the institution made on them, Chickering's theory of student development served as the framework for this study. The seven vectors of psychosocial development during the college years (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) were considered focusing on the seventh vector, developing integrity, which builds on the previous six vectors. According to Evans and her colleagues (1998), developing integrity involves reviewing values in a probing environment. Morrill (1980) inferred that this theory provided a context for the question of identity in relation to students' relationships within their communities and globally. Coley (2003) found Chickering's theory to provide a basis for understanding student conduct as they process developmental issues including integrity and values formation.

Qualitative studies focused on character development are limited in the literature, and I was unable to locate any empirical studies focused on small HBCUs. Evans et al. (1998) suggested that qualitative inquiry should be used in considering Chickering's vectors, especially as it occurs for different ethnicities. This study responds to their recommendation. Because Chickering and Reisser (1993) stressed the holistic development of students, considering the importance of environment and campus involvement was critical.

Respondents' reasons for attending Avante University were an important consideration because of the vast educational options available to today's students. Although HBCUs were originally founded to provide educational opportunities for Black

Americans who were unable to attend White schools, their continued existence is questioned by some scholars since their original mission is not longer valid (Gasman & Tudico, 2008; Roebuck & Murty, 1993) in that students of color should not be discriminated against when applying to PWIs. Participants' reasons for attending Avante were discussed in response to the first research question, which described the environment for character education at this HBCU.

Individual values systems often drive behavior and decisions. All participants indicated that they had personal values that guide their lives and shape how they treat others, supporting Forni's (2002) definition of civility, which is awareness grounded in ethics. The data in this study suggested that the value systems of informants were grounded in their Christian faith, their upbringing, and the Golden Rule. President Jamson often discusses his faith and its impact on his leadership style and presidential vision statement. In the Seymour (2008) article, Jamson, as a preacher and educator, referred to using his platform as president to promote character and values at Avante and in the public domain. The findings supported that Dr. Jamson, through his leadership and example, and the informants' experiences in college influenced their personal value systems, supporting the assumptions of Eddy's (1959) work and the fact that character is not permanently engaged at any age maintaining that college positively and negatively affects convictions and values.

The missions of HBCUs support their viability. According to Zamani (2004), "culturally based educational efforts that promote their missions" (p. 14) are among the strengths of historically Black colleges and universities. Based on this premise, the

impact of Avante's mission on study participants was examined. Examination of the data revealed that all participants felt that the institution was accomplishing its mission, but respondents highlighted different portions of it during the interviews. The accomplishment of the following components of the mission emerged through the findings: teaching the history and culture of African Americans, developing communication skills, cultivating self-confidence and ethical behavior, and social justice and activism.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Kuh (2002) endorsed a six step agenda suggesting what colleges and universities should do to create academic environments that promote character. Although the mission statement discusses Avante's commitment to ethical education, the lofty mission statements of institutions of higher learning are not always emphasized throughout the campus culture. Based on the data, the president of Avante takes every opportunity to communicate community standards in formal and informal gatherings. Informants also discussed the ways that expectations are made clear through the actions of most faculty and administrators not only by word, but by example. Characteristics of good citizens in the campus community included incorporating the Five Wells, expressing the ideals of brotherhood, demonstrating awareness, being positive, and displaying ethics. Although participants loved their school, they were honest about their challenges with some community members including members of the faculty, staff, and their peers. In examining the data, participants challenged the motivation of some students and the subpar customer service in some campus offices, which are contrary with the school's Renaissance of character, civility, and community.

According to Kuh et al. (1991), holistic learning environments are communities where everyone is held to high standards, learning is valued in all aspects of campus life, and faculty and staff take time for students. The individual interview and focus group respondents indicated that character development was promoted in their classes, weekly convocations, internships, community service, and campus leadership. The findings suggested that the advancement of an ethics agenda may be implicit or explicit, based on the major and/or instructor, which is consistent throughout the academy. Students majoring in the social sciences (e.g. political science, psychology, and sociology) discussed the promotion of character in their major courses. Business and economics majors also raised the promotion of ethics in their curriculum. The natural science (Keith, biology) and the physical science (Steve, physics/engineering) majors presented different perspectives on the promotion of character in their majors.

I've had a mentor (in my major) who focused on ethics in research. In research, you usually go down the very unethical path in your work . . . or your moral frame is strengthened. . . . My frame has been strengthened . . . In my bioethics class, we went over philosophies of how ethics in classical philosophy could be applied to biomedical research. **(Keith)**

Whereas Steve did not suggest that his major did not support character development, he stated that the demands of his courses did not lend to him becoming involved with clubs and organizations, though he would like to.

I would take a blow in classes and sleep patterns . . . So a lot of times now, my thinking is let me build my resume now and build myself as much as I can without hurting myself in the long run . . . 'cause I know that once my education is done, I can focus on myself 100% after that.

He said that he gets some of the character building through Zenith Forum, but he does not feel that he can engage in evening programs and activities like students in other majors if he is to be successful in his field of study. So, for Steve, his major interferes with the character building activities at Avante.

Interactions with faculty and staff in formal and informal setting were noted as supporting character education on the campus. Moore and Marsh (2007) discussed the impact of the roles of educators in their various functions in the lives of students. Faculty members, staff, alumni, and fellow students were cited as contributing to character building for participants. In her study of student affairs administration by institution type, Hirt (2006) described professionals at HBCUs as guardians who attend to the academic and social development of students while fostering their moral and emotional growth. The data supported this attitude among members of the faculty and staff at Avante University based on students' comments.

### **Discussion**

This study sought to understand the environment for character education at Avante University, the role of the president in creating this environment, and the ways students experience the environment. Given the findings presented in Chapter IV along with the summary of findings outlined earlier in this chapter, several elements can be drawn from the data gleaned from the research questions in this study. These factors will be discussed below.

First, **Chickering's theory** of student development (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) was a relevant framework in examining the influence and impact of the

college experience in the ethical development of students. The seven vectors: developing competence, managing emotions, autonomy to interdependence, mature interpersonal relationship, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity were evident in the encounters and interactions of the students and in the vision of the president. The vectors also correlate with the student learning outcomes proposed in *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004) and the outcomes noted in the institution's catalog, student handbook, and strategic plan.

Chickering and Reiser (1993) suggested that intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence are developed during the college years. The Five Wells, espoused by Jamson, foster these competencies. Well read, well spoken, well traveled, well dressed, and well balanced speak directly to intellectual, interpersonal, and physical competence. Students at Avante are encouraged to read the classics and the works of current authors, and to study the speeches of great orators (well read and well spoken), which develop their intellectual competence. They are also encouraged to exercise and to nurture their spiritual selves, not limiting themselves to the familiar. This supports interpersonal and physical competence and encompasses being well balanced. Students' interpersonal development is also enhanced through traveling, domestically and internationally (well traveled) and by learning to present themselves appropriately, which includes being well dressed.

Avante's code of conduct and community standards address the management of emotions. Expectations are clearly expressed along with the responsibilities of community membership. At every opportunity, on and off of the campus, Jamson

reiterates his expectations as president, inviting students to express themselves, but to do so appropriately whether it be in their speech (well spoken) or presentation (well dressed).

During data collection, Avante's Board of Trustees was holding its spring meeting. Campus leaders coordinated a protest to express their concerns, which included improving customer service, enhancing the college infirmary, and addressing other campus services. According to the campus newsletter, approximately 400 students participated in the orderly protest, many wearing the school's signature blazers (Seymour, 2010). The article stated that President Jamson and members of the Board were impressed by the students' organized and respectful expression of their concerns. Seymour quoted Jamson as saying in reference to the students' initiative, "You stepped forward today and gave us confidence that you have moved the movement forward" (p. 4). Jamson's reference was to the Renaissance as he addressed the students at the Executive Conference Center. He assured the students that he and the Board were aware of the issues and that their concerns were being examined. These students demonstrated appropriate expression and control of their emotions as they exercised their constitutional rights.

Several participants discussed their interconnectedness to the campus community and Avante's responsibility to the surrounding community, suggesting the shift from autonomy to interdependence. Avante, like many HBCUs, is located in an impoverished area. Students discussed being accountable to the neighborhood where Avante is located. The importance of being good citizens and helping their neighbors was present in the

data. Kevin shared information about a youth mentoring program he initiated called “My Brother’s Keeper.” Ronald and William communicated their thoughts about helping their neighbors.

We need community organizers . . . and you should have empathy to go back and realize the struggle of the brothers in the surrounding community and lend a hand. Just because you are at Avante doesn’t mean it’s not about you . . . we can’t just worry about ourselves. **(Ronald)**

I heard . . . that some students walked around the community and talked to some of the neighbors. That’s good, but it’s not enough, especially with the emphasis on social justice. I mean, if we’re going to start anywhere, why not start where you are. **(William)**

Jackson and Lucas indicated that they began to consider other faith systems while in college, encouraging broader thinking and a greater appreciation of differences.

I actually give credit to two of my friends . . . They put me on the path to question what I believe . . . When you take religion and put it in an academic ground, you start to question it a little bit. The process by which your faith came to be prominent, how you choose what you hold sacred . . . I still believe, but I am now, I think I want to say, an educated believer. **(Jackson)**

My grandma always told me that Jesus is love . . . I’m a big believer in love . . . As I got deeper into my studies, I started to learn more about Africans’ ethical code . . . I wouldn’t consider myself to be a Christian in the traditional sense . . . I’m in a situation right now where I want to be a student of different schools of thought . . . I lend an ear to other religious faiths . . . **(Lucas)**

The exploration demonstrated by these two participants supports the developmental vectors of developing mature relationships and establishing identity. Both Jackson and Lucas referenced what they were taught as children and their responsibility to investigate beliefs and traditions for themselves. Their exploration also illustrates aspects of

developing integrity (discussed below also) in “humanizing values” (shifting from an automatic and uncompromising application of the values with which one has been raised to a more relative view) and “personalizing values” (the selection of a personally valid set of beliefs).

Developing purpose through campus involvement and interpersonal commitments was evident through the findings. Activities included campus leadership, internships, study abroad, Greek life, athletics, community service, and off-campus employment. The Zenith Revival is a clear example of this vector for the students involved. Because these students were concerned about the Avante Aura, they started this initiative got institutional and alumni buy-in.

The final vector, which was the focus of this study, “involves reviewing personal values in an inquiring environment that emphasizes diversity and critical thinking” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 235). This vector builds on the other vectors and entails reevaluating values to affirm what is most significant. The campus leaders interviewed shared examples of ways that their ethics had been challenged as they carried out their duties. Nathan discussed his work with party promoters as a class officer, suggesting that he had opportunities to make money for his organization under the table without his partners in the event ever finding out. Aaron and Gerald also gave examples of chances to pocket money without their counterparts having knowledge of it. In all cases, the value of personal integrity prevailed and these students attributed their Avante experience toward the development their moral stances and fostering the strength of character that kept them from succumbing to temptation. In these instances, the students were

demonstrating what Chickering calls “congruence,” a match between their stated values and their behavior.

Keith and Nathan reflected on the impact of their international travel experiences on their growth and ethical development. Keith’s time in South Africa caused him to change his career path to public health, and Nathan was forever changed from his study abroad experience despite his initial motive for going, which was parties and women. Reflection, which is indicative of this developmental stage, was evident with these and other participants supporting Coley’s (2003) argument that Chickering’s theory provides a basis for understanding student behavior, demonstrating the growth and changes that occur during the college years.

As cited in Evans et al. (1998), Chickering postulated that academic and educational communities exercise significant influence on students and their development. The literature (Bennett, 2003; Bruhn et al., 2002; Kuh, 2002; Ray & Montgomery, 2006) and the findings in this study support his argument suggesting that character development requires a campus wide commitment beginning with the president of the institution. Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), in his work on environmental factors and their impact on developmental issues, suggested that when the mission is clearly and consistently communicated and promoted throughout an institution, the greater the developmental impact on its students. In a paper presented at the Institute of College Student Values in 2002, Kuh shared requirements for the creation of environments that promote character which include institutional mission, policies and practices, students’ experiences, and institutional culture. Avante University employs

these strategies. Developing of students' character is one of the means by which this institutional achieves its mission and the school's policies and practices are consistent with their commitment to character. Although the institution has always had a history of promoting intellectual and moral development, President Jamson has been deliberate about keeping the character agenda forward, reclaiming what he considers the best of Avante. This includes modeling good citizenship and exhibiting professionalism and a strict code of ethics as surmised by Bruhn and his colleagues (2002) in their study on ethical positions and academic conduct.

Second, in considering the findings holistically, it was evident that those members of the Avante community who were **involved** in campus activities got more out of their experience than those who were not engaged in campus life, reflecting Astin's (1999) theory of involvement. Informants discussed the many opportunities they had to hear and interact with prominent figures. Many of these possibilities are open to all students. Steve shared that, although his major does not allow him the flexibility to attend as many events as he would like, he was fully aware of all of that was available. One of the sophomores interviewed, William, and one of the seniors, Wayne, were not as involved on campus as the other 18 participants, and this was evident through their interviews. William, a transfer student was only in his second semester at Avante. He was focused on his academics and, although happy to be at the college, he was still trying to immerse himself into the Avante Aura. In discussing his decision to transfer to Avante, he offered the following:

**William:** I always knew the reputation of the school . . . but then there was the stereotype . . . that influenced me and deterred me at the same time.

**Interviewer:** That's interesting.

**William:** Well actually, I wasn't quite sure what an Avante citizen was . . . or if it was something I wanted to be . . . I didn't want to be brainwashed . . . force-fed.

Although William was happy that he came to Avante, the "Aura" surrounding the school and its alumni remains somewhat intimidating to him. He has no regrets and plans to become more involved during the 2010-11 school year.

Wayne, a fifth year senior, was disgruntled and the only participant who seemed disconcerted with his Avante experience; however, he did not regret attending the institution. His interactions with faculty and poor academic advising were shared in Chapter IV of this dissertation and his frustration, along with the need to work to support his family stifled his campus involvement. Despite his attitude, he expressed no misgivings about attending Avante and attributed the school's mission and legacy to his decision to stay despite his challenges.

Although not embraced by all community members, the importance of **civility and citizenship** to Avante University and the academy was ubiquitous and the third overarching factor revealed in the findings. In exploring how students experience the character building environment, I determined that students involved in the life of the campus may be more committed to community. Although 18 of the 20 participants were considered campus leaders, the study was not about leadership, but the ways that character played out in the day-to-day activities of participants. This component of character development included civility, which was observed through observations on the

campus. Because the Avante community is composed of individuals of varying socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, observing interactions complemented the data and themes that emerged from the interviews and documents. During my time on the Avante campus, I observed civil and chivalrous behavior. On the first day of data collection, I was walking through the campus on the way to meet the focus group. The campus was active and students were going about their routine activities. As I approached the building where the group interview was to be held, the rolling cart I was pulling with my materials turned over and everything fell to the ground. The students who were passing by literally bomb rushed me to help. Student ambassadors left their tour groups and others hurried to assist me. They moved so quickly that it was almost overwhelming. The data analyzed from all sources clearly suggest that civility is a part of their culture.

Fourth, **institutional culture and influences** (Bruhn et al., 2002; Kuh, 2002) and the clear and regular communication of community standards (Cejda & Duemer, 2002; Kuh et al., 1991) significantly impact the character development of students at Avante University. As discussed previously, President Jamson began his presidency promoting a resurgence of character, civility, and community and this Renaissance has permeated the campus. Signage with photographs of students and quotations from Jamson regarding the Five Wells are posted throughout the campus and students know what they are and how to manifest them during their matriculation and beyond. The seniors interviewed stated that there was a difference in the promotion of character during Jamson's administration than the administration of the previous president.

The Avante Aura is a unique component of the Avante environment. Although the Aura is difficult to characterize, it is defined as the spirit that inspires, sustains, and nurtures Avante citizens “in their pursuit of excellence and their commitment to service” (*Avante University Student Handbook*, p. 9). According to President Jamson (2009b), it is the unexplainable bond that is captured in institutional rituals like the Alma Mater: “Show me one other college that sings its hymn in a manner where the mystical bond seems to radiate above and within the members. This is Avante. It cannot be reduced to words or data.” When I attended Avante’s Senior Day Convocation, Baccalaureate services, and Commencement exercises, I observed Avante students and alumni singing the hymn. The presence Jamson referenced was in the atmosphere.

The students interviewed understand that the Avante Aura is more than an air of mystery. According to Eaves (2009), the Aura is described as the courage and self-confidence instilled in Avante students; the principles of leadership students are expected to follow; and the emphasis on character and cultural education. Avante’s eighth president, as cited in Eaves, depicts the Aura “as a patented mixture of maxims, myths, and images, brewed in a climate of tough love” (p. xix). These are the ways that students experience character education at this historically Black college.

The positive and negative aspects of the campus culture fostered character development. Students cited the inefficiency of some offices as influencing their ethical growth. Long lines during registration and being given the run-around when trying to navigate financial aid and other processes were positively framed as helping respondents become more persistent, patient, and organized. These character traits demonstrate ethical

growth because they demonstrate personal and practical competence (Keeling, 2004).

Study participants also discussed what they learned from their peers in conversations in the dining hall, residence halls, and student union and its impact. In reference to the mission statement, Keith offered the following:

We actually argue about it sometimes. In the cafeteria, we get together and have a lot of wild arguments, discussions, and debates. It may be sports, women, the mission of the school, health care, anything. That's way I love it here.

Small class size and access to faculty and staff beyond class time and regular business hours was also cited as a special part of the Avante experience. Sometimes community members meet on campus in more casual settings.

I met him in the café . . . right across the street from this building. He and I had a great dialogue and I took his class this year. He has really opened the minds of students to social justice, radical reform, and how to challenge the administration on the things that we want. I think he is one of those people who can revive the spirit of Avante . . . he stands outside and debates and talks with students. You know, I use to call him the Philosophy King because he was always walking around engaging in discussions with students trying to educate them and inform them. **(Jackson)**

This example is indicative of Kuh and his colleagues' (1991) characteristics of holistic learning environments. Specifically, the faculty member referenced was taking time for students outside of the class and office setting and this experience was perceived as valuable by all involved.

### **Implications for Recruitment**

According to Kuh (2002), institutions committed to promoting character development should adopt it as a guiding philosophy and infuse it in their recruitment

materials for students and employees. He recommends that new faculty, staff, and students be recruited and socialized with ethical development at the forefront. Whereas findings in this study suggest that not all members of the Avante community have embraced the school's Renaissance, it is not because they are unaware of it. Community members are regularly reminded of President Jamson's vision statement and Avante's mission statement. The data establish that the school is accomplishing its mission and moving toward the Renaissance of character, civility, and community in a direct and deliberate manner.

While the missions of historically Black colleges and universities are among the reasons that students and their families choose these institutions, it is their efforts to fulfill these missions that encourage students to remain enrolled. As reflected in the literature, many HBCUs face fiscal and physical difficulties (Cook, 2006). Customer service and antiquated processes plague many of these schools, and Avante is no exception. The results of this study do not deny Avante's challenges, nor does the study make any excuses for them. Although participants and the president acknowledge these issues, students and employees remain. For small campuses, these difficulties are a part of their charm and working through them was noted by participants as helping them development resourcefulness, which builds character and advances an important life skill.

### **Implications for Practice**

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I discussed the intellectual and character focus originally at the core of higher education (Boyer, 1987; Copeland, 2006; Newman, 2000). Nadelson (2006) raised the concern that producing workers had become

the priority and that developing good citizens had taken a backseat in institutions of higher learning. As a result of case study, the hope was to provide a model that other historically Black and small liberal arts colleges could employ to fulfill their missions and to promote ethical development, implicitly and explicitly. Avante University has made significant strides toward this goal.

The findings indicate that President Jamson promotes character and recognizes his responsibility as the institution's chief ethical officer (Kimbrough, 2009). He leads by example and takes seriously his responsibility to use his influence to lift the character agenda. Bornstein (2003) reminds presidents of the necessity to "exemplify the highest standards of ethical behavior in all aspects of life and work, be a role model to constituents, and serve as a good steward of the college or university" (p. 38). Jamson purposefully encourages this agenda on the Avante campus and as well as locally, nationally, and globally.

The Five Wells espoused by Jamson have become a part of the fabric of Avante University and serve as a workable model for small liberal arts colleges. Clearly communicating expectations and providing a formula for applying them enhances the educational process. In a study where they examined 40 catalogs of liberal arts colleges, Cejda and Duemer (2002) raised the importance of the consistent enforcement of behavioral guidelines. Morrill (1980) suggested that institutions consider how they will teach character and ethics and how these values will align with the academy's commitment to serve as a forum for ideas and free thought. The results are consistent with the recommendations in the literature.

Being well read, well spoken, well traveled, well dressed, and well balanced present a model that is applicable to any college committed to holistic development and the achievement of the student learning outcomes discussed in the literature review and in Avante's college bulletin. The outcomes summarized and endorsed by ACPA and NASPA to support learning include cognitive complexity; knowledge acquisition, integration, and application; humanitarianism; civic engagement; interpersonal and intrapersonal competence; practical competence; and persistence and academic achievement (Keeling, 2004). All or portions of this schema can be replicated, especially with executive support.

The results indicate that Avante University has successfully inculcated character education in their academic and extra-curricular programs. The themes that emerged regarding the places where character is promoted on the campus included the classroom and convocations; student activities and leadership (athletics, student government, residence life, and Greek life; and the experiential (internships and study abroad). Participants viewed their experiences as interrelated and discussed summer work experiences and informal gatherings as influencing their values and morals. These happenings coupled with Avante's community standards sustain their commitment to the character. It is a part of their literature and a focus during new student orientation, but it doesn't stop there. The ethical and moral development of students is a reoccurring theme in most activities and a part of the fabric and legacy of the institution.

### **Limitations of Research**

Although this study provides important information regarding character development for historically Black institutions and liberal arts colleges, it is not without limitations. The fact that this study focused on a single institution may be perceived as a limitation. Yin (2003) suggests the use of case study when the researcher desires to consider a phenomenon within a particular context when that setting may be relevant to that trend. My interest in HBCUs stems from my professional experience and my selection of the research site related to its ethics-focused agenda. Because of Avante's reputation and legacy, some may feel that students that are drawn to such an institution come with values and character already developed. The findings support that study participants had formulated value systems prior to their enrollment at this private college, but all reported that the exposure and experiences that occurred during their matriculation had impacted their character development. President Jamson's call for a Renaissance of civility also indicated that he sensed that the component of character needed to be revitalized at the institution. The student movement, the Zenith Revival, also supports the need for Avante to return to its roots of developing intellect and character.

A major limitation of this study was the inability to interview the president of Avante University. The interview was scheduled for April 20, 2010, but the week prior, I received an email from the chairmen of Avante's institutional review board instructing me that my approval had been amended and that I could have no contact with the chief executive of the college or the chief academic officer. I was given no rationale for this amendment except the fact that the president did not have time to meet with me. I

explained that the interview had been scheduled, but two days after my conversation with the chair, I received an email from Dr. Jamson's scheduler indicating that the appointment had been cancelled and to refer my questions to the chair of the IRB. Providentially, the documents analyzed provided data that allowed me to address his role in establishing the environment for character education at the institution, but they were no substitute for the robustness that an interview with Dr. Jamson would have added.

The sampling strategy and number of participants may also be considered a limitation of this study. The scope of this study was not focused on leadership, though the 18 of the 20 participants were appointed or elected campus leaders. The rationale for selecting student leaders related to their commitment to community rather than their actual leadership roles. I wanted participants who were involved in campus life. The findings support that involvement not only impacted the building of their character, but also their attitudes regarding their positive and negative college interactions and how they grew from them. Additionally, the fact that some of the students interviewed were referred by other informants may call the validity of the research and the transferability of results into question. Triangulation of data sources addresses this potential constraint.

Data collection occurred after spring break during the 2010 spring semester at Avante. The interviews occurred between March 22 and April 21. The semester ended on Thursday, April 29. By the time I got the interviews transcribed and began focused data analysis, the students had left for the summer and nine had graduated. As a result, member checking posed a significant challenge, which is a limitation of this study. At the end of each interview, I reviewed my notes with participants and clarified areas where I

was unclear, but follow up during data analysis was not successful. Because I was instantly able to build rapport with participants, there were no difficulties during the interviews. The students were open and willing to share their experiences in a confident and candid manner. During the focus group and the semi-structured interviews, reflection was used and follow up questions were asked along with probes to ensure that I understood what participants were communicating. Though communication with participants after Avante's commencement on May 16 did not occur, the data accurately captures participants' responses. Because the goal of the study was to discover the stories of participants and their experiences related to character education, I believe that this goal was accomplished. There is no existing literature focused on character education at HBCUs employing qualitative methods.

Finally, researcher bias is a potential limitation of this study. In considering the role of the researcher in Chapter III, my background and years of experience as a seasoned student affairs professional and higher education administrator drew me to this topic. During my career, I have become increasingly concerned about what I perceive to be the lack of emphasis on character and ethics in the academy. This includes the conduct and behavior of students and relationships among colleagues. My premise, like that of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (paraphrased), is that intelligence plus character is the goal of true education (Newman, 2000). I realized this bias prior to undertaking this project and the methodology used allowed me to minimize this bias as much as possible. Reflexivity (Milinki, 1999) through journaling was used during the data collection process to record reflections, decisions, and biases. This auditing also assisted in managing biases.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As stated in the limitations section of this chapter, this study is the first of its type focused on HBCUs. As such, it serves as an initial inquiry into character development at historically Black colleges and universities. In a study conducted by Kuh and Umbach (2004), they discuss the relevance of self-reports from students in measuring character development and other outcomes that are not easily assessed through other means. They go on to say that without self-reports, it is difficult to determine institutional impact on ethical development. While the literature on character development among college students is largely quantitative, self-reports through qualitative approaches may provide a more robust picture of the impact of institutions on developing the character of students. The meanings constructed by students have implications for institutional policy and practice.

Contextual factors and their influence on character education was a major finding in this study, and exploring this subject at other HBCUs and small liberal arts colleges should be considered. With the documented struggles of small colleges (Black and White), sharing the stories of students who choose them, despite the other options available, will not only contribute to the literature, but assist in their promotion and support their viability. Kuh (2002) discovered, based on a study using data from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire Research Distribution Program, that there has been a decrease in the influence of higher education on value development across all institution types. For colleges and universities that seem to be successful in this area,

investigations into their methods will assist schools interested in returning to the foundation of higher education.

Another major finding was the importance of the role of the president in promoting and encouraging character development. The president sets the ethical compass for college campuses, but while the administrations of presidents are chronicled, often after their tenures are over, researching their methods during their terms has relevance. Narratives of their experiences and what brought them to their positions may assist others in their quests to promote character development in their administrations. To this end, other case studies focused on institutions that espouse a character agenda will provide models as Avante's efforts have.

Civility and its impact in the academy is also a recommendation based on this study. The results in this study show that institutional climate and culture affect character development and the overall learning environments on campuses. Future studies on the effect of interactions on morale, employee effectiveness, and workplace productivity at all types of institutions should be explored related to the positive and negative implications of civility and incivility. Because students watch the example of faculty and staff, and colleagues observe the example of senior administration and often pattern their behavior accordingly, this warrants further research. The influence of organizational culture on student behavior should also be investigated.

### **Conclusion**

In applying Chickering's theory of student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) as the conceptual lens and considering Kuh's (2002) agenda for creating learning

environments that promote character, the findings in this study offer a polemic formula for encouraging character development in college. As the results have shown, a college president who makes ethical education a priority in the academy will see positive outcomes. This case study of Avante University and the leadership of their president, Dr. Bernard Jamson, provide a model that small colleges, whether they are historically Black or predominately White can replicate and see similar results.

The data gleaned from the research questions offer significant recommendations for institutional policies and practice. My intention in conducting this study was to address a concern in the academy regarding the neglect of character education in higher education and to offer strategies that may assist institutions that are committed to developing students that are academically astute and ethically aware. The findings show that communicating ethical tenets from the senior executive officer to support staff influence students on their academic and personal quests. President Jamson's commitment and outspokenness regarding his vision is refreshing and an example that I believe would serve other campuses. I have been inspired by his paradigm in my work.

Because character outcomes are difficult to assess, this study provided an opportunity to share the stories of 20 college students who joined a community where they grew during their college years in ways that surprised and affirmed them. I trust that their experiences will inspire colleagues and students as they have me. Their candor and willingness to participate in this study clearly show that there are young adults concerned about their holistic growth, which includes training their hearts and their minds. The

findings support continued pursuit of this research agenda and a return to higher education's original mission, developing scholarship and character.

## REFERENCES

- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development, 40*(5), 518-529.
- Astin, H. S., & Antonio, A. L. (2000, November/December). Building character in college [Electronic version], *About Campus, 5*(5), 3-7.
- Astin, H. S., & Antonio, A. L. (2004). The impact of college on character development. In J. C. Dalton, T. R. Russell, & S. Kline (Eds.), *Assessing character outcomes in college* (pp. 55- 64). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Avante University, <http://www.avante.edu>.
- Avante University Course Bulletin, 2008-2009.*
- Avante University Renaissance* (pamphlet).
- Avante University Strategic Plan, 2008-2013.*
- Avante University Student Handbook, 2009-2010.*
- Aziz, N. (2010, March 5). The Zenith Revival. *The maroon tiger*. Retrieved from <http://www.themaroontiger.com/?p=344>.
- Barr, M. J. (2000). The importance of the institutional mission. In M. J. Barr, M. K. Desler, & Associates, *The handbook of student affairs administration* (2nd ed.) (pp. 25-36). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Baumrind, D. (1998). Reflections on character and competence. In A. Colby, J. James, & D. Hart (Eds.), *Competence and character through life* (pp. 1-28). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bennett, J. B. (2003). Replacing the social contract with the covenant. *Journal of College & Character*, 2, Article 710a. Retrieved October 2, 2005 from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>
- Berger, J. B. (2000). Organizational behavior at colleges and student outcomes: A new perspective on college impact. *The Review of Higher Education*, 23(2), 177-198.
- Berkowitz, M. W., & Fekula, M. J. (1999, November/December). Educating for character [Electronic version] *About Campus*, 4(5), 17-22.
- Bornstein, R. (2009). Ethics and leadership: A former president reflects on the pivotal role of character in the college presidency. *Journal of College & Character*, 10(3). Retrieved January 31, 2009 from <http://www.collegevalues.org/pdfs/Bornstein.pdf>.
- Bornstein, R. (2003). *Legitimacy in the academic presidency: From entrance to exit*. Westport, CT: ACE/Praeger.
- Boyer, E. L. (1987). *College: The undergraduate experience in America*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Campus life: In search of community*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advance of Teaching.
- Braskamp, L. A., Trautvetter, L. C., & Ward, K. (2006). *Putting students first: How colleges develop students purposefully*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Brint, S., Riddle, M., Turk-Bicakci, L., & Levy, C. (2005). From the liberal to the practical arts in American colleges and universities: Organizational analysis and curricular change. *The Journal of Higher Education* [Electronic version], 76(2), 152-180.
- Brooks, B. D., & Goble, F. G. (1997). *The case for character education: The role of the school in teaching values and virtue*. Northridge, CA: Studio 4 Productions.
- Bruhn, J. G., Zajac, G., Al-Kazemi, A. A., & Prescott, L. D. (2002). Moral positions and academic conduct: Parameters of tolerance for ethics failure [Electronic version]. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(4), 461-493.
- Carter, L. E., Sr. (1998). The life of Benjamin Elijah Mays. In L. E. Carter (Ed.) *Walking integrity: Benjamin Elijah Mays, mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr.* (pp. 1-31). Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.
- Cejda, B. D., & Duemer, L. S. (2002). Fusing the moral and intellectual: Behavior guidelines at regional liberal arts colleges. *Journal of College & Character*, 2, Article 995a. Retrieved October 30, 2005, from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>.
- Chickering, A. (1969). *Education and identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Coley, T. A. (2003). *Student affairs' efforts to promote character among college students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA.

- Cook, S. D. (2006). Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the old South and the new South: Change and continuity. In F. W. Hale (Ed.), *How Black colleges empower Black students: Lessons for higher education* (pp. 1-32). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Copeland, E. J. (2006). Creating a pathway: The role of historically Black institutions in enhancing access, retention, and graduation. In F. W. Hale (Ed.), *How Black colleges empower black students: Lessons for higher education* (pp. 51-61). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Craig, Q. (2006). Factors that influence success for African American students. In F. W. Hale (Ed.), *How Black colleges empower Black students: Lessons for higher education* (pp. 101-108). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Dalton, J. C. (1999). Helping students develop coherent values and ethical standards. In G. S. Blimling, E. J. Whitt, & Associates (Eds.), *Good practice in student affairs: Principles to foster student learning* (pp. 45-66). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Dalton, J. C. (2006). Ethical issues on campus: Intentional, unintentional, and accidental college influences on student moral development. *Journal of College & Character, 6*(4). Retrieved from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>
- Dalton, J., & Crosby, P. (2006). Ten ways to encourage ethical values in beginning college students. *Journal of College & Character, 7*(7). Retrieved from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>.
- Dalton, J. C., & Henck, A. F. (2004). Introduction. In J. C. Dalton, T. R. Russell, & S. Kline (Eds.), *Assessing character outcomes in college* (pp. 3-6). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Dey, E. L., & Hurtado, S. (2005). College students in changing contexts. In P. G. Altbach, R. O. Berdahl, & P. J. Gumpert (Eds.), *American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic challenges* (pp. 315-339). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- DiCaprio, N. S. (1974). *Personality theories: Guides to living*. Philadelphia, PA: Saunders.
- Eaves, J. H. (2009). *The Morehouse mystique: Lessons to develop Black men*. Chicago, IL: African American Images.
- Eddy, E. D. (1959). *The college influence on student character*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Eisenhart, M. A., & Rowe, K. H. (1992). Validity in educational research. In M. D. Lecompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research in education* (pp. 643-680). New York: Academic Press.

- Evans, N. J. (2003). Psychosocial, cognitive, and typological perspectives on student Development. In S. R Komives, D. B. Woodard, Jr., & Associates, *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed.) (pp. 179-202). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Evans, A. L., Evans, V., & Evans, A. M. (2002). Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) [Electronic version]. *Education*, 123, 3-16.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Filkins, J. W. & Ferrari, J. R. (2004). The DePaul values project: An ongoing assessment of students' perceptions of a private university's core mission and values. In J. C. Dalton, T. R. Russell, & S. Kline (Eds.), *Assessing character outcomes in college* (pp. 81-91). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Forni, P. M. (2002). *Choosing civility: The twenty-five rules of considerate conduct*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Franklin, J. H., & Moss, A. A. (2005). *From slavery to freedom: A history of African Americans* (8th ed.). New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Frieden, G. L., & Pawelski, J. (2003). Affective development in college students: Strategies that promote ethical decision-making and compassionate choice. *Journal of College & Character*, 2. Article 107a. Retrieved October 30, 2005 from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>
- Gasman, M. (2007). *Envisioning Black colleges: A history of the United Negro College Fund*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Gasman, M. (2006). Salvaging “academic disaster areas”: The Black college response to Christopher Jencks and David Riesman’s 1967 Harvard Educational Review article. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77(2), 317-352.
- Gasman, M. & Tudico, C. L. (Eds.) (2008). *Historically Black colleges and universities: Triumphs, troubles, and taboos*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researcher: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Godsey, R. K. (1984). Book review of *College of Character: Renewing the purpose and content of college* [Electronic version]. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 55(1), 83-85.
- Gough, R. W. (1998). *Character is destiny: The value of personal ethics in everyday life*. New York: Crown Forum.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hale, F. W. (Ed.). (2006). *How Black colleges empower Black students: Lessons for higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in educational settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Hirt, J. B. (2006). *Where you work matters: Student affairs administration at different types of institutions*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

- Holbrook, K. A. (2006). Forward. In F. W. Hale (Ed.), *How Black colleges empower Black students: Lessons in higher education* (pp. xv-xvi). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Jackson, B. (1991). The lingering legacy of in loco parentis: A historical survey and proposal for reform. *Vanderbilt Law Review*, *44*, 1135-1164. Retrieved February 14, 2008, from LexisNexis Academic.
- Jackson, C. L., & Nunn, E. F. (2003). *Historically Black colleges and universities: A reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Jamson, B. (2007a, August). *Avante: Your house, at your service*. Speech presented at Avante University.
- Jamson, B. (2007b, September). *Facing the rising sun: A new day begun*. Speech presented at Avante University.
- Jamson, B. (2010a, May). Honorary degree acceptance speech. Speech delivered at Swarthmore College.
- Jamson, B. (2010b, May). Keynote address. Remarks delivered at the Women of Color Leadership Conference: Building Civil Communities for Change, Atlanta, GA.
- Jamson, B. (2008a, February). *Let us make man . . . Avante man*. Speech presented at Avante University.
- Jamson, B. (2008b, September). *Masters of the game*. Speech presented at Avante University.
- Jamson, B. (2008c, August). *Renaissance men with a social conscience*. Speech presented at Avante University.

- Jamson, B. (2009a, September). *For what purpose have you been delivered to this place?*  
Speech presented at Avante University.
- Jamson, B. (2009b, April). *The soul of Avante and the future of the aura*. Remarks  
presented at Avante University.
- Jencks, C., & Riesman, D. (1967a). The American Negro college. *Harvard Educational  
Review*, 37(2), 3-60.
- Jencks, C., & Riesman, D. (1967b). Four responses and a reply. *Harvard Educational  
Review*, 37(3), 465-468.
- Johnson, R. B. (1999). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. In A. K.  
Milinki, *Cases in qualitative research*. Los Angeles, CA: Pyrczak Publishing.
- Joseph, P., & Efron, S. (2005). Seven worlds of moral education. *Phi Delta Kappan*,  
86(7), 536-544.
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning reconsidered: A campus-side focus on the student  
experience*. Washington, DC: NASPA and ACPA.
- Keeling, R. P. (Ed.). (2006). *Learning reconsidered 2: A practical guide to implementing  
a campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: ACPA,  
ACUHO-I, ACUI, NACADA, NACA, NASPA, and NIRSA.
- Kim, M. M., & Conrad, C. F. (2006). The impact of historically Black colleges and  
universities on the academic success of African American students [Electronic  
version]. *Research in Higher Education*, 47(4), 399-427.

- Kimbrough, W. M. (2009, October 30). The Jacob Byers Model. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved from <http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/advice/2009/10/30/kimbrough>.
- King, P. M. (1997). Character and civic education: What does it take? [Electronic version], *Educational Record*, 78(3/4), 87-93.
- Komives, S. R., Woodard, D. B., Jr., & Associates (2003). *Student services: A handbook for the professional* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kuh, G. (1998). Shaping student character. *Liberal Education* [Electronic version], 84, 18-25.
- Kuh, G. (2002). Do environments matter? A comparative analysis of the impress of different types of college and universities on character. *Journal of College & Character*, 2. Retrieved September 18, 2008 from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>
- Kuh, G. D., & Hall, J. E. (1993). Cultural perspectives in student affairs. In G. D. Kuh (Ed.), *Cultural perspectives in student affairs work*, (pp. 1-20). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., & Whitt, E. J. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Kuh, G. D., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates (1991). *Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning and development outside the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G. D., & Umbach, P. D. (2004). College and character: Insights from the National Survey of Student Engagement. In J. C. Dalton, T. R. Russell, & S. Kline (Eds.), *Assessing character outcomes in college* (pp. 37-54). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Larsen, C. A., & Martin, B. N. (2005). An examination of the effectiveness of a collegiate character education program. *Journal of College & Character*, 5. Retrieved September 11, 2008, from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>.
- Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. New York: Bantam.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Manning, K. (1999). Conducting constructive inquiry. In K. Manning (Ed.), *Giving voice to critical campus issues: Qualitative research in student affairs* (pp. 11-27). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Martin, W. B. (1982). *A college of character*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Matthews, F. L., & Hawkins, B. D. (2006) Black colleges: Still making an indelible impact with less. In F. W. Hale, Jr. (Ed.), *How Black colleges empower Black students: Lessons for higher education* (pp. 35-40). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- McKeon, R. (Ed.). (1941). *The basic works of Aristotle*. New York: Random House.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Associates. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Milinki, A. K. (Ed.). (1999). *Cases in qualitative research: Research reports for discussion and evaluation*. Los Angeles, CA: Pyrczak.
- Miller, T., Kuh, G. D., Paine, D., & Associates. (2006). *Taking student expectations seriously: A guide for campus applications*. Washington, DC: NASPA.
- Moore, E. L., & Marsh, R. S. (2007). College teaching for student affairs professionals. In E. L. Moore (Ed.), *Student affairs staff as teachers* (pp. 3-11), San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morrill, R. L. (1980). *Teaching values on college: Facilitating development of ethical, moral, and value awareness in students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Nadelson, S. (2006). The role of environment in student ethical behavior. *Journal of College & Character*, 7. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>.
- Nesteruk, J. (2007). Contributing to our students' moral lives [Electronic version]. *Change*, 39, 52-53.
- Nicgorski, W. (1987). The college experience and character development. In K. Ryan & G. F. McLean (Eds.), *Character development in schools and beyond* (pp. 328-357). New York: Praeger.
- Newman, R. (2000). *African American quotations*. New York: Checkmark Books.
- Nuss, E. M. (1998). Redefining college university relationships with students [Electronic version]. *NASPA Journal*, 35(3), 183-192.
- Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2009). Character strengths: Research and practice. *Journal of College & Character*, 10(4). Retrieved June 21, 2009 from [http://www.collegevalues.org/pdf/park\\_peterson\\_character](http://www.collegevalues.org/pdf/park_peterson_character).
- Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford.
- Ponder, H. (2006). What makes African American students successful at historically Black colleges and universities: The first-year program. In F. W. Hale (Ed.), *How*

*Black colleges empower Black students: Lessons for higher education* (pp. 119-127). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

President Bernard Jamson Reflects on His 100 Days in Office. (2007). Retrieved June 30, 2010 from <http://www.avante.edu/news/archives/oo1175.html>.

President Jamson's Dossier. (2008, Spring/Summer). *Avante Magazine*, 55.

Prince, G. S., Jr. (1997). Are we graduating good citizens? [Electronic version], *Educational Record*, 78(3/4), 34-42.

Ray, C. M., & Montgomery, D. M. (2006). Views in higher education toward methods and approaches for character development in college students. *Journal of College & Character*, 7(5). Retrieved November 1, 2008 from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>.

Roebuck, J. B., & Murty, K. S. (1993). *Historically Black colleges and universities: Their place in American higher education*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Rovaris, Sr., D. J. (2005). *Mays and Morehouse: How Benjamin E. Mays developed Morehouse College 1940-1967*. Silver Spring, MD: Beckham.

Ryan, K., & McLean, G. F. (Eds.). (1987). *Character development in schools and beyond*. New York: Praeger.

Salls, H. S. (2007). *Character education: Transforming values into virtue*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.

Schensul, S. L., Schensul, J. J., & LeCompte, M. D. (1999). Semistructured interviewing. In S. L. Schensul, J. J. Schensul, & M. D. LeCompte, *Essential ethnographic*

- methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires* (pp. 149-164). Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Schram, T. H. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Schwandt, T. (1994). Constructivist, interpretive approaches to human inquiry. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 118-137). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schwartz, A. J. (2000, June 9). It's not too late to teach college students about values [Electronic version]. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 46(40), A68.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Seymour, A. (2008, Spring/Summer). Vision of a Renaissance. *Avante Magazine*, pp. 51-57.
- Seymour, A. (2010, May). Peaceful student protest gets administrators' promise to address concerns. *Inside Avante*, p. 4.
- Shaw, T. O. (2006). Character education: The raison d'être of historically Black colleges and universities. In F. W. Hale (Ed.), *How Black colleges empower black students: Lessons for higher education* (pp. 89-98). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Simon, M. D. (2009, October 1). Avante employee fired for e-mail. *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. Retrieved from <http://www.ajc.com>.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strange, C. C. (2004). Measuring up: Defining and assessing outcomes of character in college. In J. C. Dalton, T. R. Russell, & S. Kline (Eds.), *Assessing character outcomes in college* (pp. 25-36). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Stewart, D. (2001, August 16). Advice to HBCUs: Use the media to your advantage [Electronic version]. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, p. 31.
- Taub, D. J., & McEwen, M. K. (1992). The relationship of racial identity attitudes to autonomy and mature interpersonal relationships in Black and White undergraduate women. *Journal of College Student Development*, 33, 439-446.
- Templeton, J. M., & Schwartz, A. J. (Eds.). (1999). *Colleges that encourage character development*. Radnor, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.
- Thelin, J. R. (2003). Historical overview of American higher education. In S. R. Komives, D. B. Woodard, Jr., & Associates, *Student services: A handbook for the professional* (4th ed.) (pp. 3-22). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Thelin, J. R. (2004). *A history of American higher education*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Thomas, A. E., & Green, R. L. (2001). Historically Black colleges and universities: An irreplaceable national treasure. In C. L. Jackson (Ed.) *African American education: A reference handbook* (pp. 245-265). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

- Whiteley, J. M., & Associates. (1982). *Character development in college students*. Schenectady, NY: Character Research Press.
- Williams, J., & Ashley, D. (2004). *I'll find a way or make one: A tribute to historically Black colleges and universities*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Wingate, J. G. (2006). The role of Black colleges in promoting self-concept and student centeredness among students. In F. W. Hale (Ed.), *How Black colleges empower Black students: Lessons for higher education* (pp. 111-117). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Winston, R. B., & Creamer, D. G. (1997). *Improving staffing patterns in student affairs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Yanikoski, R. (2004). Leadership perspectives of the role of character development in higher education. In J. C. Dalton, T. R. Russell, & S. Kline (Eds.), *Assessing character outcomes in college* (pp. 7-23). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yoos, C. J. (2007). "Il faut cultiver notre jardin." Cultivating the college garden of character—A process of character development in liberal arts colleges. *Journal of College & Character*, 9. Retrieved January 17, 2008 from <http://www.collegevalues.org/articles.cfm>.
- Zamani, E. M. (2004). African American women in higher education. In M. F. Howard-Hamilton (Ed.), *Meeting the needs of African American women* (pp. 5-18). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

**APPENDIX A****REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION****REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION**

M. Emilye Mobley  
3107 Dawnshire Avenue  
Charlotte, North Carolina 28216  
m\_mobley@uncg.edu

Dear Avante University Campus Leader:

My name is Emilye Mobley and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I have spent most of my career serving historically Black colleges and I am interested in how character development is infused in the life of your institution. I have elected to conduct my dissertation here for two reasons: the college's legacy of producing ethical leaders and your mission statement, which states the college's commitment to "emphasizing the intellectual and character development of its students."

I am requesting your participation in this study. Participation will involve you allowing me to interview you for one hour about your character developing experiences at the institution, or by participating in a focus group with other students. The focus group will last for one hour and a half. Your name will not be used in the dissertation in an effort to maintain confidentiality. Please understand that your participation in this study is voluntary and that you may withdraw your participation at any time.

I thank you in advance for considering this request. If you are willing to support this study by participating or if you have questions, please contact me via e-mail at m\_mobley@uncg.edu or by phone at (704) 607-3287.

Sincerely,

M. Emilye Mobley

**APPENDIX B****INFORMED CONSENT****UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT**

Project Title: Character Development at a Historically Black Institution

Project Director: Deborah J. Taub, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education & Higher Education

Student Researcher: M. Emilye Mobley, Doctoral Student, Higher Education

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this dissertation project with this student researcher, a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. This form outlines the purpose of the research study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

The purposes of this research study are as follows:

1. To investigate how the senior executive officer perceives and frames his role in supporting and encouraging character development
2. To identify examples of how character development is infused in curricular and co-curricular activities
3. To determine the meanings that students make of character developing experiences

You are being asked to participate in this study by allowing me to interview you for a period of one hour regarding the subject of character development at your institution, or by participating in a focus group with other students for one hour and a half. You will be randomly selected for either the interview or the focus group. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will limit access to the tape as described below.

As the researcher, I agree to meet the following conditions:

1. I will audiotape our interview and transcribe the tape for the purpose of accuracy. The transcript will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. The tape will be stored separately in a locked file box in a storage space rented by the researcher. At the end of the study, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed.
2. You and your institution will be assigned fictitious names on the transcript. Your real name will not be used at any point of data collection or in the final manuscript. The name of the institution will also be suppressed.
3. Informed consent forms will be stored in the principal investigator's office in a locked file cabinet. At the end of the study and once the tapes and transcripts have been destroyed, the consent forms will be moved to the researcher's home and stored in a locked file cabinet for three years.

4. The data collected will be published, but no identifying information will be used. The researcher will seek institutional permission if providing the name of the college becomes a factor in future publications.

Participation in this study involves minimal risk because no identifying information will be shared. There is a slight potential for the completion of the interview to become an emotional experience because participants are being asked to reflect on their individual life experiences.

Study participants may find that the benefits of this project include deeper insight into the development of their personal character and values. Information gathered may also cause participants to consider the demonstration of their values and civility in relation to their personal deportment and in their contributions to community at the institution. Additionally, the study will contribute to the field by proposing suggestions and recommendations for teaching and promoting character and values in colleges and universities.

As a participant in this research project, you are entitled to know the nature of my research. You are free to decline to participate and you are free to stop the interview or withdraw from the study at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing your participation. Please do not hesitate to ask questions at any time regarding the nature of the study and the methods I am using as your suggestions and concerns are important to me. You may contact me with your questions via email or phone at the contact information below:

M. Emilye Mobley  
m\_mobley@uncg.edu  
(704) 607-3287

This consent form and the interview/focus group protocol have been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, which ensures that research with human participants follows federal regulations. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions about the study may also be addressed to the Project Director, Dr. Deborah J. Taub at [djtaub@uncg.edu](mailto:djtaub@uncg.edu).

Your signature below, along with mine as the researcher, indicates an acknowledgement and understanding of the terms described above.

Sincerely,

M. Emilye Mobley

I agree to participate in the study as outlined above.

---

Signature of Participant/Date

---

Signature of Researcher/Date

**APPENDIX C****INTERVIEW PROTOCOL—STUDENT*****Interview Protocol—Student***

1. Tell me what led you to attend this institution? Anything else?
2. Do you have a personal value system? How does it affect how you treat other people? Please share examples.
3. I have brought a copy of the college's mission statement. Describe how this statement has impacted your experience here.
4. How have character and ethics been promoted and encouraged through your courses and extra-curricular experiences?
5. Describe a good citizen in this community and the world community?
6. What are the expectations of members of this community?
7. What faculty and staff members have influenced you most since you came to school here?
8. Is there anything else you want to share about your experience at this institution?

**APPENDIX D****FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL*****Focus Group Protocol***

1. Why did you come to this institution?
2. Does your personal value system affect how you treat other people?
3. I have brought a copy of the college's mission statement. Describe how this statement has impacted your experience here.
4. How have character and ethics been promoted and encouraged through your courses and extra-curricular experiences?
5. Describe a good citizen in this community and the world community?
6. What are the expectations of members of this community?
7. Is there anything else you want to share about your experience at this institution?

**APPENDIX E****OBSERVATION PROTOCOL*****Observation Protocol***

The definition of civility adopted for this study is a form of awareness grounded in ethics (Forni, 2002). The purpose of observation in this project is to observe examples of civility (and incivility) at institutional events and in common areas where community members congregate. Focus will be placed on respect, courtesy, and community. These data will speak to the way students and other community members making meaning of value-related experiences and how their values are demonstrated in their day-to-day interactions.



**APPENDIX G**

**CONTACT SUMMARY SHEET**

**CONTACT SUMMARY SHEET**

Type of Contact \_\_\_\_\_  
(Interview, Phone Interaction, Observation)

Date of Contact \_\_\_\_\_

With Whom? \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

Completed By \_\_\_\_\_

1. What were the main issues or themes evident in this contact?
2. Summarize the information gathered through each question.
3. What information did you fail to get, but had anticipated?
4. Please list other important information captured through this contact.
5. What new or outstanding questions will you ask in the next contact with this participant?

Adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*