

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Education

HIGH-ACHIEVERS AT TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS: EXAMINING TRANSFER  
AND PERSISTENCE AMONG STUDENTS OF COLOR AT SELECTIVE  
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

A Dissertation in

Workforce Education and Development

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2009

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## ABSTRACT

The number of students of who begin their college careers at two-year institutions and eventually transfer to four-year institutions has continued to grow over the years. This increase has been accompanied by significant research. In many instances the research has examine these students' misfortunes rather than their triumphs. This study looked to provide a different perspective by examining the experiences of transfer students of color who have persisted and excelled at predominantly white four-year institutions that have selective admission criteria. Within this study student success was examined in and beyond the classroom. A sample of transfer students from two-year postsecondary institutions who excelled academically (as indicated by attaining a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher) participated in leadership involvement opportunities, developed relationships with faculty and staff that resulted in beneficial personal and professional development, participated in enriching activities such as internships, and received various awards were selected.

This study attempted to address the lack of balance in previous examinations of the success of transfer students of color. The goal was to further understand the experiences of students who had persevered, flourished, and made the most of their college experience. The research sought to gain insight into, and understanding of the phenomenon of being a high-achieving student of color who transferred from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution. The result was to be an illustration of what the participants in this study experienced, how they experienced it, and the meaning they made of their

experiences.

Qualitative research methods were used to explore the lived experiences of 14 participants from two predominantly white four-year institutions that have selective admission criteria. Through extensive data analysis, 39 sub-themes were identified. These sub-themes led to the identification and classification of eight thematic categories that provided in-depth insight into the shared experiences of the participants. The thematic categories were: (1) Reasons for attending a 2yr institution; (2) Life at the 2yr institution; (3) Life as a first year transfer student; (4) Contributors of success; (5) Rationale for involvement; (6) Benefits of leadership and academic achievements; (7) Transferable skill-sets; and (8) Challenges of success.

Based on the data collected from this study implications for policy, practice and future research are proposed.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is fitting that this section of a dissertation exists. My journey has been long, challenging, yet nurturing. While reaching this point is a great accomplishment I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the individuals who provided unconditional love and support during this process.

I would first like to thank God. I know none of this could have been possible if not for you. I want to thank my big sister Daphne for giving me something to reach for. Every time she excelled it made me want to work harder. I cannot forget my beloved siblings and cousins Jean-Marie, Alfred, Carrol, Natasha, Jean-Daniel, Mylene, Nadine, and Garvey. My godfather/cousin Garvey has had a profound influence on me throughout my academic voyage. I still remember how proud I felt when he completed his doctoral studies from Penn State. I can't even begin to explain what it means to a young Black male growing up in New York City to know someone in his family has a doctorate from an institution such as Penn State. During the toughest times of my academic career his success served as a reminder that I could succeed despite any obstacle. I think subconsciously I came to Penn State to continue the legacy he started. I want to thank the Graves & Lopez family for loving me like I was one of their own. Their support and food for the soul played a critical role in my achievements. I want to thank Shanna for loving me for me. I never have to pretend with her. Thanks for motivating me to get this degree. I want to thank my twin in this life, Ashley, for being the gift I don't deserve. You are my everlasting sunshine. You keep me motivated and remind me why I need to work hard

everyday. I want to thank my uncle Yves for being my dad after my father passed away. I learned how to be a man by watching you.

Thank you, Dr. Farmer for guiding me through this process. I still remember your words after I completed my first assignment in the program, "This is just the beginning." I thought getting into the program was the beginning and passing my defense was the end. I now realize this is not the end, rather it is simply the end of the beginning. To my committee Dr. Walter, Dr. Niles, and Dr. Gray I am proud that you invested your time and guidance in molding me as a researcher. I want to thank three of my special mentors Ronald Jackson, Shaun Harper, and Jonathan Poullard for serving as exceptional examples of what all practitioners should aspire to be like. I hope I can one day repay the marker you gentlemen took out on me.

Thank you to all the students who have allowed me to share in their countless triumphs and their misfortunes. Their tenacity to be challenged and supported helped to motivate and remind me why I wanted to pursue a career in student affairs.

I would lastly like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother Claudette Bazile for being the best mother humanly possible. She has always spoiled me with her love and affection. This dissertation in many ways was my tribute to her investment in my success. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my late father Anthony Bazile, who passed away during my second year of college. He was my first educator. He taught me how to read, add and subtract, and how to never let my skin complexion limit my ability to succeed.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The roles of postsecondary educators and administrators in institutions of higher education are both critical and complex as they strive to provide optimal learning conditions that will enable students to self-actualize and succeed. As such, both faculty and staff must work to remove potential barriers from college environments that may hamper students from gaining the competencies needed in their future careers. Since their inception, community colleges have served as a crucial gateway for individuals seeking postsecondary education. The access to education provided by community colleges has led to high enrollment trends over the last 35 years. In the early 1980s, enrollment at community colleges was roughly four million students. This was an impressive increase from two million students in 1970 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001b). The increased enrollment prompted Astin (1985) to predict a continuation of this trend. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, statistics indicated that nearly 5.5 million students were attending community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Currently, that number is estimated to be 6.6 million (Hunter, 2007).

While a considerable number of undergraduate students in the United States attend four-year institutions, recent statistics indicate a larger enrollment of students at community colleges than four-year institutions (Flowers, 2006). According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), over half of the students who seek some form of postsecondary education in this country matriculate at a community college. Access to higher education at community colleges has benefited several populations, including underrepresented

groups, racial/ethnic minorities, low-income, and nontraditionally aged students (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

A number of factors have contributed to the rise in enrollment at community colleges. Some of these factors include the increasingly competitive admissions requirements of four-year institutions, consistent tuition increases, a decrease in financial assistance, lack of quality teachers, and an increase in poorly funded and inadequate high schools (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kerr, 2006). History has shown that community colleges have provided assistance in working through these problems. As stated by Cain (1999), “The public two-year colleges do not simply educate or credentialize. They change lives for the better. They change them radically and they change them permanently and they change them inexpensively” (p. 1).

### *The Problem*

Despite the countless contributions made by community colleges, a number of people view students who start their postsecondary career at community colleges as academically deficient. Many view community colleges as an extension of high school (Cain, 1999). Community college students are described as unmotivated and seen as “second class citizens” (Ling, 2006, p. 3). This stigma is magnified by the lack of success experienced by many transfer students (Berger & Malaney, 2003). Consequently four-year institutions, particularly selective and predominantly white institutions (PWI), have been extremely cautious about admitting students who began their postsecondary careers at community colleges. Over the years, the apprehension about accepting transfer students at selective PWIs has had a greater impact on students of color. This is

principally attributed to the belief that this population generally has the lowest success rate of all transfer students (Koenigbauer, 2006).

The lack of success among community college transfer students has frustrated faculty and staff in both community colleges and four-year institutions. According to Berger and Malaney (2003), 80% of first-year college students at community colleges express an interest in transferring to a four-year institution. Unfortunately, only 40% of those students end up on a transfer track. Of even greater concern, of that 40%, a mere 10% eventually transfer to a four-year institution. Existing data indicate that the difficult process continues once these students matriculate at four-year institutions. According to Kerr (2006), the National Center for Education Statistics reported that approximately 80% of the students who begin their postsecondary career at community college and then transfer to a four-year institution have not obtained their bachelor's degree six years later.

Frustration about the poor success rate of transfer students has led to several research studies in this area (Diaz, 1992; Laanan, 2001). Some of the initial research focused on the decline in the transfer student's GPA during his/her first semester post-transfer, and this related differently to the academic achievements of native vs. transfer students (Best & Gehring, 1993; Graham & Hughes, 1994). Additional research has investigated community college transfer students from social and psychological perspectives (Laanan, 2004). Berger and Malaney (2003) referred to this when they said:

Most studies of community college transfers have focused on academic achievement as an indicator of how well students have adjusted to life at a four-year institution. However, adjustment to college life involves more than performing inside of the classroom; there is a wide range of academic and social

interactions and outcomes that must be considered in a comprehensive view of the college adjustment process. It is important to consider how well students adjust to and fit in with the academic and social environments of a campus in order to have a more complete understanding of how well transfer students adjust to a four-year university (p. 4).

The social and psychological approach was primarily based on Tinto's (1993) previous work. Tinto contended that social integration has a profound influence on student success.

The aforementioned research has provided insight into how the college environment affects student success. Some research has dissected this success using a number of different lenses, including race, age, academic origin, and socioeconomic status. The small body of literature related to transfer students of color focuses on their lack of success during the transfer process (Koenigbauer, 2006). Yet a number of students of color successfully transfer, and not only succeed, but excel at their new institution. The current body of work provides a limited view of students of color who transfer from community colleges to selective predominantly white institutions. An examination of this population without use of a comprehensive lens is potentially detrimental. Previous research offers some insight into this matter. According to Fries-Britt (1998), "the disproportionate focus on Black underachievement in the literature not only distorts the image of the community of Black collegians, it creates, perhaps unintentionally, a lower set of expectations for Black student achievement" (p. 556).

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of transfer students of color who have persisted and excelled at predominantly white four-year institutions that have selective admission criteria. In the study described here, student success was examined in and beyond the classroom. A sample of transfer students from two-year postsecondary institutions was selected who excelled academically (as indicated by attaining a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher) participated in leadership involvement opportunities, developed relationships with faculty and staff that resulted in beneficial personal and professional development, participated in enriching activities such as internships, and received various awards. The earlier literature refers to students who successfully accomplished the aforementioned criteria as high-achievers (Fries-Britt, 1998; Harper, 2002). However, the research on high-achievers focuses on native students.

This study attempted to address the lack of balance in previous examinations of the success of transfer students of color. The goal was to further understand the experiences of students who had persevered, flourished, and made the most of their college experience. The research sought to gain insight into and understanding of the phenomenon of being a high-achieving student of color who transferred from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution. The result was to be an illustration of what the participants in this study experienced, how they experienced it, and the meaning they made of their experiences.



### *Significance of the Study*

The population of students of color expressing a desire to transfer to four-year institutions continues to grow (Koenigbauer, 2006). Despite the growing numbers, literature that specifically identifies students of color who succeed at their new institution has failed to grow at a similar pace. This lack of research has handicapped those who seek to fully understand this population. Insufficient information regarding this population has resulted in their unrecognized accomplishments. Researchers have called for more research on high-achieving students of color. Harper (2002) quoted Bonner's recommendation that higher education must "make room for the gifted African American male collegian" (p. 6). Thus, this study attempted to address the gaps in the literature pertaining to transfer students of color who do succeed. Rather than focusing on males, the study examined both males and females in order to provide more depth into the transfer student of color population.

This study sought to acquire an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of the phenomenon of high-achieving transfer students of color. This approach was designed to locate possible unifying lived experiences among participants. Finally, this study attempted to identify potential contributions to practice through this examination, by creating concepts and models that help transfer students of color to develop holistically. The researcher's goal was to increase, through study findings on programs and policies, the number of students who meet the preexisting research criteria for high-achieving students of color.

### *Research Questions*

The primary research question was: What are the lived experiences of a high-achieving student of color who transfers from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution? In addition to the principal question, the following six questions directed this study:

1. What factors do the participants perceive to be most important in contributing to their success?
2. What motivated these participants to perform and excel academically?
3. What motivated these participants to become student leaders?
4. How have the participants' academic and social success helped to shape their holistic development?
5. What struggles did these participants have to overcome on their journey to academic and social success?
6. How have the participants' post-transfer experiences helped to shape their psychosocial identity?

### *Limitations*

Similar to most research ventures, this study included limitations. In this case, there were seven. First, a number of the participants in this study were selected based on nominations from faculty and staff. Often individuals will nominate students with whom they work closely. Since these students were chosen based on recommendations, it is quite possible that more qualified students may have been overlooked because of the selection bias of individual student affairs professionals and faculty members who responded to my request.

The second limitation dealt with issue access. Although email requests were sent out to student organization listserves, there is always the possibility that some potentially qualified students may not have received the solicitation regarding this study.

The third limitation was a knowledge issue. Because of a lack of familiarity with this topic, students may not have viewed themselves as high-achieving students of color regardless of the definition. They may choose instead to exclude themselves because they feel a high-achieving student of color has “better credentials”. For that reason, clear and concise criteria were developed for the study so that students could determine if they met the requirements. However it was still up to the students to determine if they truly saw themselves as high achievers.

The fourth limitation lends itself to possible criticism regarding generalizability. The study was designed to identify the phenomenon of high-achieving students of color who transfer from community colleges or two-year institution settings to selective predominantly white four-year institutions. The study did not go beyond the participating students and institutions studied.

Perhaps the most controversial of the seven is the fifth limitation. The use of a grade point average requirement evokes two interesting dialogues. Several students may possess all of the other requirements to participate in this study, but fall short in reaching the GPA requirement. Despite having a GPA lower than a 3.0, these students can and will be viewed as success stories by themselves, family, faculty and staff. The argument to include them is a valid one based on previous research showing that GPA is a weak indicator of student success post-graduation (Stange, Baba, Millner, Scharberg, Walker, Williamson, & Yoder, 2002; Tross, Harper, Osher, & Kneidinger, 2000). Others may

argue that a 3.0 GPA does not meet an academic standard of excellence. Perhaps 3.33 or 3.5 on a 4.0 scale, or Dean's list, may serve more appropriately as a minimum.

Additionally, some graduate school and professional recruiters do not consider a 3.0 a very competitive GPA.

The sixth limitation was based on the interpretations made by the researcher. As a person of color, it is important to identify and acknowledge apparent connections and possible bias to the study. A researcher with a different racial background may view the data differently. For this reason, several steps were taken to minimize this possibility. These steps are discussed in detail in chapter three. Finally, this study only involved interviews with students, rather than incorporating insight from university faculty and staff who work with these students. The insight of these individuals could have provided more detail regarding the studied population.

#### *Definition of Terms*

The following definition of terms clarifies the terminology used throughout this research. This is done so that readers have a clear understanding of the terms.

##### *High-Achieving*

High-achieving students are defined by Harper (2002) as “undergraduate students who have earned cumulative grade point averages above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale; established lengthy records of involvement in multiple campus organizations; earned the trust and admiration of peers (as determined by peer elections to campus leadership positions); developed quality relationships with faculty and staff; participated in enriching educational experiences (e.g. study abroad programs, internships, and summer research programs); and earned numerous awards (e.g. scholarships) and honors” (p. 16).

*Native Student*

A native student is one who begins and completes his or her baccalaureate study at the same four-year institution (Kerr, 2006).

*Receiving Institutions*

Receiving institutions are four-year institutions to which students transfer (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

*Transfer Shock*

Transfer shock occurs when a community college transfer student's GPA declines during his or her first semester at the four-year institution (Ling, 2006).

*Transfer Student*

A transfer student is a student who leaves one postsecondary institution and enrolls at another. This does not include students who enroll at another institution during the summer (Berger & Malaney, 2003).

*Assumptions*

Prior to conducting this research, the initial assumptions were as follows:

1. Transfer students have a lower retention rate than native students as a result of institutional failure to invest in resources to improve their transfer process.
2. Four-year institutions are not addressing the needs of community college/two-year institution transfers adequately.
3. Transfer students require specific support to address their unique needs.
4. The criteria for student engagement and satisfaction for transfer students is vastly different to those of native students.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Currently, a number of developmental models exist that have been designed to elicit an understanding of racial identity, most notably Cross's and Helm's. After a thorough review of the different models, Cross's (1991) model was selected for this study. Due to the potential lack of familiarity with racial identity development among the potential readers of this study, a brief summary is provided below.

#### *Nigrescence Theory*

Dr. William Cross originally introduced his racial identity development theory in 1971, calling it Nigrescence theory. The word nigrescence has Latin origins and describes the process of becoming Black. Over the last three decades the Nigrescence theory (Cross, 1971) has made a dramatic impact. Specifically, a number of scholars have used the theory as a basis to conduct empirical research on the racial identity of students of color (Helms 1990b; Hocoy, 1999; Plummer, 1995; Thomas & Speight, 1999). In 1991 Cross revised his theory to show the act of multiple identity clusters within each stage. These revisions stimulated further discussion that subsequently led to the development of the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) nine years later (Vandiver et al., 2000).

Table 1.1

*Cross's Nigrescence Stages and Identities*

Model	Stage	Identity
1971 original model	Pre-Encounter	Pro-White/Anti-Black
	Encounter	
	Immersion-Emersion	Anti-White/Pro-Black
	Internalization Internalization-Commitment	Humanist
1991 revised model	Pre-Encounter	Assimilation Anti-Black
	Encounter	
	Immersion-Emersion	Anti-White Intense Black Involvement
	Internalization	Black Nationalist Biculturalist Multiculturalist
2000 expanded model	Pre-Encounter	Assimilation <sup>a</sup> Miseducation <sup>a</sup> Self-Hatred <sup>a</sup>
	Encounter	
	Immersion-Emersion	Anti-White <sup>a</sup> Intense Black Involvement
	Internalization	Black Nationalist <sup>a</sup> Biculturalist Multiculturalist Racial Multiculturalist Inclusive <sup>a</sup>

Source: Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver (2001).

According to Cross (1991), an African American student progresses through five specific stages of development. All five stages have a direct impact on the student's cultural and racial identity. The first stage is pre-encounter. This stage focuses on the student's belief that the White culture is the proper culture. Consequently the student believes the Black culture is unacceptable. As a result, students at this stage seek to distance themselves from Black culture while actively trying to assimilate into White culture. Generally during this stage students are unaware of many of the entanglements of their racial identity in the world.

The second stage is encounter. This stage refers to student awakening to their racial consciousness. Generally, students begin to realize the effects of racism on their

particular lives. Most often the student is treated differently than his/her White counterpart due to the color of their skin. As a result the student begins to concentrate on what their identity as a minority means in the world.

The third stage is immersion-emersion. During this stage the student begins to develop a great sense of pride in their identity as a Black individual. A student engaged in this stage tends to embrace several characteristics related to their race, such as wearing clothes and listening to music. Some students begin to examine the history of their people. Other behaviors include exclusively spending time with individuals of their own race, and not interacting with individuals from the majority population. At this point, the student generally begins to become comfortable with who they are.

The final two stages promote a greater sense of identity. Typically these stages result in the student's positive approach to issues of race. The fourth stage is internalization. Within this stage the student begins to break away from an absolute behavior or belief of race. This means that they can now begin to embrace the behaviors and characteristics of groups besides their own. Hence, during this stage the student begins to become comfortable with other marginalized groups. In addition, the student begins to allow him- or herself to foster significant relationships with Whites.

The fifth and final stage is commitment. Once the student reaches this stage they have developed a deep sense of commitment to issues that have an effect on Blacks. In addition, the student is able to maintain a positive sense of balance with who they are and what that understanding means. More importantly, the student can now comfortably embrace and interact with individuals who have different racial identification than their own. It is important to note that the process of racial identity development is continuous.



The student may revisit specific stages later in their lives. When examining this process one must understand that a repetition of one or all stages should not be viewed as a failure. On the contrary, doing so provides a richer understanding of the individual's self.

#### *Rationale for Theoretical Framework*

All dissertations contain a number of specific and essential components. Perhaps the most important is the theoretical framework. A framework serves as a rationale for the research purpose, literature review, and research approach. Without a framework the researcher cannot effectively conduct the research. "It makes no sense to go off conducting research without an idea of what is to be researched" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 31). According to Van Dalen (1966), there are eight specific functions of theory. These functions include:

1. Determine the number and kinds of facts relevant to a study.
2. Govern the kind of phenomena researchers study.
3. Provide a framework within which and against which researcher observe, test, and interpret their observation.
4. Classify phenomena.
5. Formulate logical constructs.
6. Summarize facts.
7. Predict facts.
8. Reveal needed research.

Harper (2002) noted McEwen's (1996) assessment that a theory could be used to describe, interpret, explain, and predict. Uncovering a theoretical framework that does this requires an enormous amount of investigation. The researcher must familiarize

him/herself with a variety of existing theories, concepts, and perspectives on the issues under investigation. Based on the complexity of this research, a number of existing theories were explored. This section contains a summary of the theoretical foundations that guided this study. Also included is a summary of theories considered prior to arriving at the ultimate framework.

Initial investigations led to Tinto's (1975) model of student retention. Since the construction of this model, numerous scholars have used it to gain insight into student retention. While this model has been widely tested and applied, some limitations have become apparent. Evolving research argues that some limitations are present in Tinto's (1975) model regarding students of color populations (Guiffrida, 2006). Consequently, in this study the exploration for a more applicable theory continued.

The exploration of theories led to a number of previous studies based on psychosocial theory. Examining the phenomenon of student success both in and outside the classroom requires the researcher to investigate the psychosocial and identity development of a student (Harper, 2002). A majority of psychosocial theories are based on Erikson's theory of human development. Erikson's research highlighted eight psychosocial changes encountered by humans during their lifespan. They include:

1. Basic Trust vs. Mistrust
2. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
3. Initiative vs. Guilt
4. Industry vs. Inferiority
5. Identity vs. Role Confusion
6. Intimacy vs. Isolation

7. Generativity vs. Stagnation
8. Ego Integrity vs. Despair

Each of these stages is reached as a result of a life-changing experience. Each experience requires that a decision be made based on several alternatives (Erikson, 1980).

Chickering developed his psychosocial identity development theory differently than did Erikson. Rather than focus on sequential stages, Chickering (1969) classified identity development into seven vectors. These vectors include:

1. Developing Competence
2. Managing Emotions
3. Developing Autonomy
4. Establishing Identity
5. Freeing Interpersonal Relationships
6. Developing Purpose
7. Developing Integrity

Over the years, further research resulted in a revised list of vectors. The revised vectors are:

1. Developing Competence
2. Managing Emotions
3. Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence
4. Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships
5. Establishing Identity
6. Developing Purpose
7. Developing Integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Chickering's theory of identity development operates under the premise that as a student moves through these individual vectors they develop by building on each other. This means that if a student succeeds in one vector, that momentum can carry over to potential success in another vector. This allows the student to gain confidence and stability. Students typically move through the vectors differently. Some students can find themselves interacting with multiple vectors at the same time. Unlike Erikson's theory, previously interacted vectors can be re-examined by participants.

Since the introduction of the original and revised models of these seven vectors, researchers have examined them continuously (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). The last 20 years have seen increased scrutiny of the applicability of these vectors to the identity development of students of color (Evans et al., 1998; Harper, 2002; Pope, 1998). Reasons for this inquiry include previous research that has identified a variety of differences in students of color's experiences compared to those of the White, middle-class male students from whom this theory originated (Harper, 2002).

Harper's (2002) research explained the need to identify specific factors when examining identity development of students of color. His assessment was based on previous research that identified nine factors related to the development of students of color. These nine factors include:

1. Developing Ethnic And Racial Identity
2. Interacting With The Dominant Culture
3. Developing Cultural Aesthetics And Awareness
4. Developing Identity
5. Developing Interdependence

6. Fulfilling Affiliation
7. Surviving Intellectually
8. Developing Spiritually
9. Developing Social Responsibility (McEwen Et Al., 1990).

Based on the limitations of Chickering's theory, the examination of theories related to students of color continued.

Advocates of a more appropriate theory have suggested the use of racial identity development theory (Harper, 2002; McEwen et al., 1990). Racial identity is defined as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Helms, 1993, p. 3). Since its introduction several scholars have championed its use. It has gained in popularity over the past 20 years (Howard-Hamilton, 1997; Jones, 1990; McEwen et al., 1990; Pope, 1998, Wright, 1987). Harper's research on high-achieving African American undergraduate men provided a successful model of racial identity development theory. As a result, after careful and meticulous examination, racial identity development theory was selected to guide this research.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The focus of this chapter is to examine the literature related to community colleges, their students, those who attempt to transfer to a four-year institution with the hope of obtaining their degree, and the concept of high-achieving students of color. First, the chapter defines what a community college is. Second, it offers a historical background of community colleges from their inception. Third, it provides insight into some of current trends and concepts that generally impact these students once they enroll at the four-year institutions. Lastly, it offers an overview of high-achieving students of color.

#### *Community Colleges*

Although most of the literary definitions of community colleges are similar, some variations exist based on the source of the definition. As a result, two separate definitions of community colleges are offered here. Community colleges are defined by Cohen and Brawer (2003) as “any institution regionally accredited to award the Associate in Arts or the Associate in Science as its highest degree” (p. 5). These degrees are usually awarded to students after approximately two years of taking entry-level college courses. Cohen and Brawer explained that their definition of community colleges includes most of the technical institutes, but eliminates other institutions. These institutions include many vocational schools, adult education centers, and business trade colleges accredited by the National Association of Trade and Technical Schools.

According to Hunter (2007), a community college is “a postsecondary institution that offers programs of at least two but less than four years duration. Includes occupational and vocational schools with programs of at least 1800 hours and academic institutions with programs of less than four years. Does not include bachelor’s degree-granting institutions where the baccalaureate program can be completed in three years” (p. 28). Gabert (1991) listed the characteristics that qualify an institution to be a community college:

1. They are two-year postsecondary institutions.
2. They provide a comprehensive curriculum.
3. They are locally based.
4. They are integrated into a state master plan.
5. They have flexible admissions policies.
6. They charge relatively low tuition.
7. They provide comprehensive student-support services.
8. They have faculties whose primary responsibility is classroom instruction (p. 13).

#### *Original Concept of Two-Year Institutions*

Many agree that the community college systems “are uniquely North America institutions” (Andrews & Fonseca, 1998, p. 5). However, credit for the successful community college invention cannot be given to the United States. In fact, the concept of attaining a preliminary education at one institution, with the hope of eventually obtaining access to a higher-level institution, originated during the thirteenth century in Europe (Quigley & Bailey, 2003).

The concept of a lower and upper division to the college level of higher education originates at the very beginning of such education in the western world. The medieval universities in Europe founded in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries had their basic studies in two divisions, the trivium and the quadrivium. The trivium embraced grammar, rhetoric, and logic. These subjects—all studied in Latin—were intended to develop in the student a firm command of spoken and written language, and at least an introduction to clear-thinking. The quadrivium covered arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. In those times music was studied importantly for its relationship to mathematical concepts. Together the trivium and the quadrivium constituted the famed seven liberal arts of the medieval universities. Following this education, students went on to study philosophy and theology (Quigley & Bailey, 2003, p. 12).

Quigley and Bailey are not alone in their belief that the pioneers of the U.S. community college system were influenced by the success of the European school system. Evidence of this can be seen as far back as fifty-eight years ago. Bogue (1950), offered the idea that several prominent university presidents and advocates were influenced by the success of the European school system. Some of these prominent university presidents included Henry P. Tappan, University of Michigan; Edmund J. James, University of Illinois; William Watts Folwell, University of Minnesota; and Alexis F. Lange, University of California.

According to Bogue (1950), these university presidents believed that students needed to be well prepared prior to attending a four-year institution. Cohen and Brawer (2003) stated that although these men agreed that a postsecondary system needed to be



created, two important developments had yet to occur in order to make this possible: a considerable number of high school graduates, and a public school system able to manage two more years of curricula.

### *Legislation*

The advent of the U.S. community college system was greatly aided by the passing of two key nineteenth-century acts. These acts were sponsored by Justin Smith Morrill, a representative and later a senator from Vermont. Morrill sponsored these acts under the premise that education should be accessible to people of all classes (Place, 1999). These acts helped to change the face of the U.S. higher education system.

#### *Morrill Act of 1862*

The first act was the Morrill Act of 1862. President Abraham Lincoln signed it into law on July 2, 1862. This act provided 30,000 acres of public land to each senator and representative. Once this land was evenly distributed among states, it was sold. The profit generated from the sale of the land was then placed into an endowment fund. This endowment provided support for each state. The Morrill Act of 1862 was also developed so that states would sponsor colleges so they could adequately prepare Americans to answer the increased demand for competent individuals in the areas of agriculture, technology, and military training at that time. The Union was in desperate need of trained military officers to fight in the Civil War (Komives, Dudley, Woodard, & Associates, 2003).

These institutions were established in several states. Iowa, Vermont, and Connecticut were the first three states to accept the Morrill Act. Eight years later 37 states had established programs to educate students in agriculture, technology, and military

training (Nidiffer, 1998; Place, 1999). The Morrill Act of 1862 also opened the door for women to gain access to higher education (Quigley & Bailey, 2003). Three central factors led to support of the Morrill Act of 1862.

1. To increase the efficiency of agricultural production. Farming was the primary source of income for much of the population, and current production was extremely inefficient.
2. To provide direly needed education to farmers and the rural population. Colleges at that time had little (if any) interest in educating farmers and the common population in agriculture and the mechanical/practical arts.
3. The federal government owned over one billion acres of land in the Western territory, and there was disagreement as to how this would be shared and divided. The Land-Grant Act proposed an ingenious plan to use and share these federal territories among all the states (Place, 1999).

### *Morrill Act of 1890*

The second Morrill act was signed into law on August 30, 1890. The Morrill Act of 1890 provided additional federal funding for the original land grants. This act also included new opportunities for people of color that had not been previously available. As a result, Blacks were able to gain unprecedented access to public education (Hoffman, Synder, & Sonnenberg, 1996). Prior to the Morrill Act of 1890, Blacks were not allowed to attend the earlier land-grant institutions. Originally, a provision was put in place to

establish separate but equal institutions. However, only Kentucky and Mississippi established such institutions.

The second Morrill Act attempted to solve this problem by prohibiting distribution of money to states that made admissions distinctions based on race (Casazza & Silverman, 1996). This gave birth to seventeen more land-grants institutions known as the 1890 land grants. These seventeen institutions were publicly funded but segregated black colleges in the seventeen southern states (Rudolph, 1965; Wright, 1988). They included: Alabama A&M University, Alcorn State University, Delaware State University, Florida A&M University, Fort Valley State University, Kentucky State University, Langston University, Lincoln University, North Carolina A&T University, Prairie View A&M University, South Carolina State University, Southern University & A&M College, Tennessee State University, Tuskegee University (then Tuskegee Institute), University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff, University of Maryland-Eastern Shore, and Virginia State University (Hoffman, Synder, & Sonnenberg, 1996). These institutions are now also known as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

#### *The First 75 Years of Two-Year Colleges*

During the late 1880s, the United States saw a substantial increase in high school graduating classes. This increase put a tremendous strain on colleges and universities. As a result, several high schools decided to offer postsecondary courses. “The increasing attendance and graduation from American high schools resulted in new demands for higher education that could not, or would not, be met by existing colleges and universities. Slowly, the high schools began to offer postsecondary courses” (Deegan & Tillery, 1985, p. 6).

In addition to these issues, an increasing number of high school graduates were hesitant to pursue the opportunity to further their education for two reasons. First, there were few to no lower-cost education alternatives to the four-year private institutions. The second reason was their reluctance to leave their local communities. The introduction of the U.S. community college provided an effective higher education alternative for high school graduates seeking to further their education without the burden of relocating to different locations (Sinclair, 1976).

### *Joliet Junior College*

At the turn of the century the vision of influential educators of the late eighteenth century came to fruition. After continued requests for high schools to establish postgraduate courses, William Rainey Harper made a bold move. In February 1901 William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, established an experimental college preparatory high school program for six students in Joliet, Illinois (Gabert, 1991). As a result, Joliet Junior College was given credit for becoming the first public junior college in the U.S.

Shortly after Joliet Junior College was founded, more two-year public colleges were established throughout the United States. They were established in the following states: California, Texas, Iowa, Mississippi, Kansas, Missouri, Michigan, and Illinois (Vaughan, 1997). Since the founding of Joliet Junior College, the U.S. community college system has helped to answer the current and future needs of this country. “Several social forces contributed to its rise. Most prominent were the needs for workers trained to operate the nation’s expanding industries; the lengthened period of adolescence, which mandated custodial care of the young for a longer time; and the drive for social equality,

which supposedly would be enhanced if more people had access to higher education” (Cohen & Brawer, 1996, p. 1).

### *Early Profile*

The early profile of the U.S. community college was very simple. These institutions’ primary focus was to provide courses that could be transferred to four-year colleges and universities. The first community colleges provided some domestic advantages. Students were able to stay home and continue working their family’s lands and business. In addition, local businessmen were able to obtain immediate returns on tax dollars (Gabert, 1991).

The initial purpose of the community colleges was to provide preparation for high school graduates who lacked the skills needed to succeed at a four-year institution.

Many of those who stayed in school as postgraduates did so to make up deficiencies or to improve skills in writing and mathematics. Increasingly, however, junior college students bodies became representatives of high school graduates. Thus, there were many students who needed vocational instruction, as well as those who planned to transfer to senior colleges and universities (Deegan & Tillery, 1985, p. 7).

Many of the first community colleges featured small institutions that rarely had an enrollment that exceeded 150 students. Facilities were very limited. Often existing high school facilities were used to meet the new demands of the newly formed community colleges. The colleges were considered a clear extension of high school. Teachers often taught courses generally in the same way they taught their high school courses (Deegan & Tillery, 1985).

A large number of the original community colleges featured considerable numbers of female students. The percentage of female students at times was as high as 60%. Most of the women enrolled in the junior colleges were preparing for teaching. Junior colleges and other two-year postsecondary institutions saw consistent growth over the next few decades. At the beginning of the 1930s there were 450 community colleges in 45 states (Brick, 1994). By the end of the decade there were approximately 575 community colleges. The average enrollment in these schools was 400 students (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).

#### *Impact of Federal Legislation & War Time*

During the 1940s the United States made considerable changes to its higher education system. Deegan and Tillery (1985) called this time the third generation of community colleges. The changes made had a great effect on what is now known as the U.S. community college system. These changes occurred due to several notable events.

#### *GI Bill*

One of these notable events included the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. On June 22, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed this act into law. This act is often referred to as the GI Bill of Rights. Under this act millions of veterans were given scholarships to attend colleges (Andrews & Fonseca, 1998). The GI Bill became the first significant form of federal financial aid provided to students. It offered federal aid in the form of tuition, living expenses, books, and counseling services to veterans wishing to continue attending their school or college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Under this act veterans were provided one free year of higher education for each ninety days of service and one additional month of paid education for each month of

service up to forty-eight months. Millions of veterans were motivated to enroll in college by the end of 1946 as a result of the GI Bill (Wyatt, 1992). In 1947, 49% of those enrolled in U.S. colleges were veteran students. At the beginning of the 1940s, approximately 160,000 students graduated from college each year. In 1950, that number increased to approximately 500,000 (Wyatt, 1992).

The American Association of Community Colleges regards the GI Bill as “a milestone in federal funding for education of individuals and did much to break down the economic and social barriers to allow millions of Americans to attend college. Indeed, more than 2.2 million veterans, including more than 60,000 women and approximately 70,000 Blacks, attended college under the GI Bill” (AACC 2005, p. 4).

#### *Truman Commission*

By 1946, students were returning to college by the hundreds of thousands. This increase in student enrollment placed significant strain on the nation’s higher education system. As a result, President Harry S. Truman established the Commission on Higher Education for American Democracy. This commission was established on July 13, 1946. The Commission was chaired by George F. Zook, president of the American Council on Education. The committee included twenty-eight members. Their occupations varied from educators to laymen (Quigley & Bailey, 2003).

President Truman assigned the commission the broad task of exploring possible original initiatives in which the United States higher education system could engage in in response to the growing need for education. “We should now reexamine our system of higher education in terms of its objectives, methods, and facilities; and in the light of the social role it has to play” (Quigley & Bailey, 2003, p. xv).

In the next year, the commission released its report. The report consisted of six volumes. These volumes included:

Volume I: Establishing the Goals

Volume II: Equalizing and Expanding Equalizing and Expanding Individual Opportunity

Volume III: Organizing Higher Education

Volume IV: Staffing Higher Education

Volume V: Financing Higher Education

Volume VI: Resource Data (Quigley & Bailey, 2003)

*The Case for Two-Year Institutions*

The commission felt that a college education should not only be available to those who could afford it. They suggested that all citizens were entitled to an education (Gabert, 1991). The commission reported that about 1,600,000 18- and 19-year-olds throughout the country were not in school. Many could not attend for financial reasons. Tuition had risen 30% in the last eight years, and the average family annual income was \$2,500 (Quigley & Bailey, 2003). Komives et al. (2003) noted how the commission advocated “dramatically expanded access to postsecondary education, increased financial aid, and a broader curriculum emphasizing world perspective” (Komives et al., 2003, p. 72).

Commission members realized that this would not be an easy task to accomplish. They knew that under the present format the United States higher education system could not support their recommendations. It was in this area that the need for community colleges grew. The Commission suggested that community colleges be used to achieve this task (Vaughan, 1997).



Many questioned whether the population of individuals not attending school could do the work required to succeed academically. According to the Commission, 49% of the population had the ability to further their education beyond the high school level (Andrews & Fonseca, 1998). Prior to the release of the Commission's report, postsecondary institutions were referred to as junior colleges. The Commission believed that the term "community college" was a more fitting name (Gabert, 1991). As a result, the name was adopted by many of the existing institutions at that time.

The Commission's recommendations did not take effect over night. Many states were very reluctant to establish community college systems for years after the report. However, over time change became inevitable. The transition from an agricultural economy to industrial, and then an information based economy created an overwhelming need for more education. The need for more education created what Quigley and Bailey called a "master plan that guided the development of their higher education systems of which community colleges were often the open door" (Quigley & Bailey, 2003, p. xiii).

#### *Transfer Students*

There is considerable research on community college transfer students; however much of it focuses on the student's academic success (Graham & Hughes, 1994; Hughes & Graham, 1992; Laanan, 2004). The research consistently documents the poor success rate of these students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kerr, 2006; Quigley & Bailey, 2003). Graham and Dallam's (1986) research found that when using probation as an indicator of performance, transfer students were prone to academic probation at a higher rate than were native students.

The poor academic performance of transfer students has been a concern of faculty

and staff at both community colleges and four-year institutions. This is particularly alarming considering the fact that the number of students planning to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution continues to grow (Berger & Malaney, 2003). Despite the increased interest in transfer, less than half of those interested students end up on a transfer track. Of those students who successfully do so, only 10% succeed. Despite countless studies and attempts by interventionists, these trends show no sign of decline (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Laanan, 2004).

These alarming statistics have led to increased criticism of community colleges. Critics question the manner in which two-year colleges prepare students for their attempted transfer. Examples include Hagedorn and Maxwell's (2002) reference to the Little Hoover Commission's report, in which accusations were made about the integrity of community colleges: "Poor teaching, inflexible scheduling, that created convenience for faculty at the expense of students, a system that promotes course enrollment over course completion" (Hagedorn & Maxwell, 2000, p. 4). While the critics continue to place blame on community colleges, very little criticism is directed towards four-year institutions (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Kerr, 2006).

It is clear that the intellectual capital of community college students is different from that of the native students. It is important to note references to intellectual capital in this study as these pertain to students who seek to be the first in their family to have a college experience. As previously stated, many of those who begin their postsecondary career at a community college are first-generation college students. While traditional students with a family history of college enrollment tend to flow into success, the first-generation college students often continue to flow into struggles. Four-year institutions

often choose not to accept their responsibility to change this gloomy reality.

Although considerable literature has focused on transfer students, scholars have begun to identify gaps in the literature. Research on post-transfer adjustment is very limited (Kerr, 2006). Few researchers have attempted to focus their research on the transfer student's emotional and psychological development throughout the transfer process (Ling, 2006). Those who have attempted to conduct inquiries into this area have typically referred to the popular concept of transfer shock. As a result, researchers have fallen into the trap of using this concept as their only guided framework (Laanan, 2004).

The term transfer shock was first introduced in research by Hill (1965) during the late 1920s to the mid-1960s on junior college students. Laanan (2004) argued that transfer shock merely describes the cognitive outcome of the transfer student's process, rather than the equally important emotional and psychological development of the student. Similarly, Berger and Malaney (2003) concluded the following:

There is a wide range of academic and social interactions and outcomes that must be considered in a comprehensive view of the college adjustment process. It is important to consider how well students adjust to and fit in with the academic and social environments of a campus in order to have a more complete understanding of how well transfer students adjust to a four-year university (p. ).

This issue is particularly important when looking at students of color. Most such students begin their postsecondary career in community colleges (Koenigbauer, 2006). According to Koenigbauer (2006), racial and ethnic minority students constitute approximately 23% of the enrollment in community colleges. This is higher than the 16% at four-year institutions. The idea of college is often foreign to many students of color, particularly

since they are the first in their family to go to college (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Once these students arrive at the institution, they experience a hostile environment. Several units within higher education have chosen to ignore the challenges faced by students of color. Bonilla-Silva (2006) referred to this as Minimization of Racism. If progress is to be made in this area, research must take into account the importance of identifying the emotional and psychological development of these students.

Selected research has sought to characterize the student's psychological development (Schlossberg, 1995). According to that research, a main component of the transfer process for community college transfer students has to do with transition. Schlossberg (1995) defined transition as the occasion on which a person experiences change. It is during this experience with change that many transfer students fail or succeed. Some of the results associated with failure versus success include academic, psychological and vocational domains. Many researchers accept Schlossberg 4 S's concepts of transition as legitimate factors that affect a students' transition experience. According to Schlossberg (1995), these four factors are: Situation, Support, Self, and Strategies. For readers who may lack familiarity with these concepts, definitions of the four factors are provided below:

1. Situation factor relates to how the individual transfer student views the experience. For example, does the student believe this transition to be positive or negative, voluntary or involuntary, and expected or unexpected?
2. Self-factor is based on the preexisting characteristics of the student. Ling (2006) mentioned experiences as one example of characteristics—has the student done this before? This plays an important role because if the student has done it before

it increases the likelihood for success.

3. Support factor refers to the student's network. This network includes but is not limited to family, friends, peers, or other persons they feel they can depend on while navigating their way through the transition.
4. Strategies factor refers to the plan, tactic, and approach used by the student to deal with the transition (Ling, 2006).

Schlossberg (1995) suggested that successfully dealing with transition requires the student to assimilate into the existing culture of the institution. This helps prevent the student from remaining anxious with the experience. Transition requires the unlearning of old schemas and learning of new schemas. The more adept an individual is at dealing with the transfer process, the more likely they are to succeed (Ling, 2006).

The ability to learn a new system has traditionally been a problem for transfer students. "For transfer students, coming to a four-year college or university requires numerous adjustments to the new environment and institutional culture, including larger classes and campus size, increased academic rigor, new friends, and a new location" (Laanan, 2004, p. ). According to Ling (2006), because of the possible transition issues typically endured by transfer students, they fall into the category of at-risk students. A clear understanding of at-risk students can help to explain the poor retention rates of transfer students. Heisserer and Parette (2002) claimed that transfer students are more likely to feel isolated and unvalued in college. This lack of belonging is consistent with other literature on transfer students (Jackson & Healy, 1996; Kerr 2006).

### *Concept and Trends*

As previously stated, the research on transfer students is significant.

Unfortunately, much of it simply focuses on the issues faced by transfer students. Few researchers have focused on the variables associated with transfer success. The few who have researched this area, such as Ling (2006), claim transfer success can be measured through academic, psychological, and career variables. According to Johnson (1997), the success rate for transfer students is based on four key variables:

1. Academic Integration
2. Academic Self-concept
3. The Perception of the Value of Education to One's Future
4. Intent to Continue One's Education

Ling (2006) cited Alpern's (2000) study in which he suggested that the retention of a transfer student at a four-year institution was related to expectations about the transfer process and career and educational goals. Davies and Casey (1999) claimed that psychological issues play a key role in retention. These psychological issues include transfer shock, which is supported by Kodama (2002). Based on Kodama's study, transfer students who had fewer sources of support from their institution did not perform well, which contributed to feelings of marginality. Other researchers have supported this concept. According to Davies and Casey (1999), transfer students who had less support had negative college experiences.

The need for support is addressed in Berger and Malaney (2003)'s research. Many of transfer students' complaints center on their dissatisfaction with the four-year institution support system. Berger and Malaney (2003) cited the importance of student

satisfaction with the four-year institution when assessing student adjustment. Students' displeasure with the support systems at four-year institutions is so extensive that, according to Laanan (2004), it often characterized as being akin to "surfing the Internet—if you are persistent you will luck up on what you need to know" (p. 45). According to Laanan, the need for support is so great that often students contact faculty and staff from their previous institution when they are struggling.

The negative experiences contribute to additional consequences outside of institutions. Researchers have disagreed for years about education's influence on students' ability to attain their vocational goals. Smart and Ethington (1985) claimed to have found no difference in job status, stability, and satisfaction between native and transfer students. However, according to Astin (1977), House (1989), and Ling (2006), transfer students' poor retention rates made it less likely that they would reach their vocational goals, compared to native students.

Considering the current trends, a great deal of research is still needed to address the transfer student population. Recent statistics indicate that more than 50% of the students enrolled in postsecondary institutions attend community college. Many intend to transfer to a four-year institution (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Laanan, 2004). This is an exciting time for research on community college students. Scholars, such as Laanan, have called for a greater commitment by higher education institutions to addressing transfer issues. Empirical studies need to focus on the crucial needs of this population, such as student satisfaction and universities' responsibilities to create, support, and assist students in their holistic development.

### *High-Achieving Students of Color*

The literature on high-achieving students of color is relatively limited. Yet the population of high-achieving students of color has garnered increased attention from researchers in the last ten years (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Freeman, 1999; Fries-Britt, 1998; Hrabowski III et al., 1998). Some research on high-achieving students of color has been focused primarily on African American students (Harper, 2002). Currently, no unified definition of high-achieving students of color exists. Scales (2006) highlighted this in her research.

According to Scales, “many define high-achieving African American college students differently. Some focus on grade point average, others focus on experiences outside the classroom, and still others base their definition on students participating in scholarship programs” (p. 16). She identified this lack of uniformity in her citation of Harper (2005)’s definition of high-achieving African American students as “students who not only demonstrate academic achievement in the classroom, but are also leaders and actively engaged in out of class activities” (p. 12). She also cited previous research that defined high achievers as “students who participate in race-based merit or honors programs or who maintain a certain grade point average (GPA)” (p. 13).

Despite the lack of an integrated definition, four specific themes have emerged regarding high-achieving students of color at selective predominantly white institutions (Fries-Britt, 2002). The first characteristic is isolation. High-achieving students tend to feel this way based on their obvious difference in skin color. This feeling of isolation is often unavoidable at predominantly white institutions. Generally these institutions have a very low enrollment of students of color. Isolation decreases upon establishment of a



support network. This network generally includes other high-achieving students of color in both academic and social settings (Tatum, 1997).

A second characteristic is a feeling that they have to prove their merit (Davis et al., 2004). Their White counterparts often question how and why they received admittance. Scales (2006) clarified this occurrence as “high-achieving African American college students feel as though they have to prove to Whites at the university that they deserve to be there, as many Whites think they are admitted solely because they are Black” (Scales, 2006, p. 13).

While some students take pride in sharing their academic accomplishments with their fellow students, some high-achieving students of color prefer to hide them. This third characteristic occurs because these students do not wish to become isolated from students of the same color who under-perform. Hiding their achievements helps them fit in, based on the stereotype that students of color do not succeed academically (Feagin et al., 1996). Researchers have questioned this notion of students of color not succeeding academically and the notion that academic achievement is the exclusive purview of White students.

Tatum (1997) identified racelessness as the fourth characteristic experienced by achieving students of color. According to Tatum, some achieving students of color tend to reject specific attributes of their identity in order fit in with their White counterparts. These students of color operate under the belief that their success is contingent on their ability to reject their race. Occasionally these students attempt to duplicate specific behaviors associated with White students. Fordham (1988) explained that in these actions, “Black adolescents consciously and unconsciously sense that they have to give

up aspects of their identities and of their indigenous cultural system in order to achieve success as defined in dominant-group terms; their reality resulting social selves are embedded in the notion of racelessness” (p. 82).

### *Chapter Summary*

A review of the literature shows the great journey community colleges have taken since their introduction to the U.S. higher education system. The contributions made by these institutions are profound. Thus, more and more students are seeking to gain access to higher education by way of these institutions, particularly students of color. As the minority population of this nation continues to grow, so has the enrollment of these students in postsecondary education. The literature reviewed in this chapter highlights and explains the difficulties that await these emerging populations. In addition, the literature contains stories about specific struggles endured by high-achieving students of color in their attempts to succeed. While clarifications of and explanations for the factors that influence the successful transfer of community college students of color are available, a solution is absent. This study sought to fill the gap in the literature by providing a holistic view of the students of color’s successes in transferring to four-year institutions.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the experiences of transfer students of color who have persisted and excelled at predominantly white four-year institutions with selective admission criteria. In this study, student success was examined in and beyond the classroom through a sample of transfer students who excelled academically (GPA above 3.0), participated in leadership involvement opportunities, developed relationships with faculty and staff that resulted in beneficial personal and professional development, participated in enriching activities such as internships, and received various awards. The earlier literature refers to students who successfully accomplished the aforementioned criteria as high-achievers (Fries-Britt, 1998; Harper, 2002). However, the research on high-achievers focuses on native students.

This study sought to address previous examinations of transfer students of color's success that lacked balance. The mission was to further understand the experiences of students who had persevered and flourished and made the most of their college experience. The research hoped to provide insight into and understanding of the phenomenon of being a high-achieving student of color who transfers from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution. The goal was to illustrate the experiences of study participants and the meaning they made of their experiences.

### *Research Questions*

The primary research question was: What are the lived experiences of a high-achieving student of color who transfers from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution? In addition to the principal question, the following six questions directed this study:

1. What factors do the participants perceive to be most important in contributing to their success?
2. What motivated these participants to perform and excel academically?
3. What motivated these participants to become student leaders?
4. How have the participants' academic and social success helped to shape their holistic development?
5. What struggles did these participants have to overcome on their journey to academic and social success?
6. How have the participants' post-transfer experiences helped to shape their psychosocial identity?

### *Overview of Research Approach*

Qualitative and quantitative studies may both serve as roadmaps for researchers. Although both approaches are useful, a qualitative approach was selected for this exploration of high-achieving students. According to Kuh and Andreas (1991), qualitative studies can provide more detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences than can quantitative studies. Since the experiences of high-achieving students are socially constructed, the use of a qualitative approach was determined to be more appropriate for this study.

Although a number of qualitative approaches can be used to generate some potential insight into these participants, careful and meticulous examination occurred prior to identifying a suitable approach. Schwamdt (1989) emphasized the interconnections between paradigms and research methods when he wrote, “Methods need not implicate paradigms, but the choice of a paradigm does implicate the application and evaluation of methods” (p. 390). Thus, a phenomenological approach was used in this study. Creswell (2007) highlighted ten points of data analysis and representation of phenomenology. They include the following:

- Create and organize files for data
- Read through text, make notes, form initial codes
- Describe personal experiences through epoche
- Describe the essence of the phenomenon
- Develop significant statements
- Group statements into meaning units
- Develop a textural description, “What happened”
- Develop a structural description, “How” the phenomenon was experienced
- Develop the “essence”
- Present narration of the “essence” of the experience; in tables, figures, or discussion (Creswell, 2007, p. 156–157).

A phenomenological approach allows a deeper understanding of the very essence of these participants’ experiences. Phenomenology was described by Patton (2002) as helping to describe what people see, and how they see it through their senses. According to Patton (2002), a phenomenon may be a number of things that include, but are not limited to,

time spent in a program, a job, or a relationship. When done correctly the final product should express the meaning shared by those who experienced the phenomenon.

### *Population*

The population for this study was students of color who transferred from community colleges and two-year institution settings, to selective predominantly white four-year institutions. The participants represented two individual top-ranked national universities located in very different parts of the United States. One was located in the western part of the country, while the other university was located in the eastern part of the nation. It is important to note that to protect the identity of the study participants, the names of the universities are being withheld. When the name of the university is mentioned in a verbatim quote it is replaced with a set of three evenly spaced dots. This writing technique is known as an ellipsis. The two universities share a number of similarities. First, both are highly ranked Tier 1 universities that offer a full range of undergraduate majors, master's, and doctoral degrees. Second, both are public universities. Third, neither has any religious affiliation. Fourth, both have undergraduate enrollments of more than 22,000.

### *Sample Size*

Determining an anticipated sample size is a critical decision in the data collection process. However, Creswell (2007) noted that a sample size can change while the researcher is conducting the study. Therefore, Creswell recommended that the researcher remain flexible. On occasion, the number of participants in phenomenological studies can range from one to 325. The original total anticipated sample size for this study was eight participants, based on Creswell's (2007) reference to Duke's (1984) recommendation that

three to ten participants in a phenomenological study is an adequate number. However, after continued consideration it was determined that more participants would provide beneficial depth. As a result, 14 participants were interviewed for this study. The distribution between the universities was not even. Eight of the participants came from the western university, while the remaining six represented the eastern university.

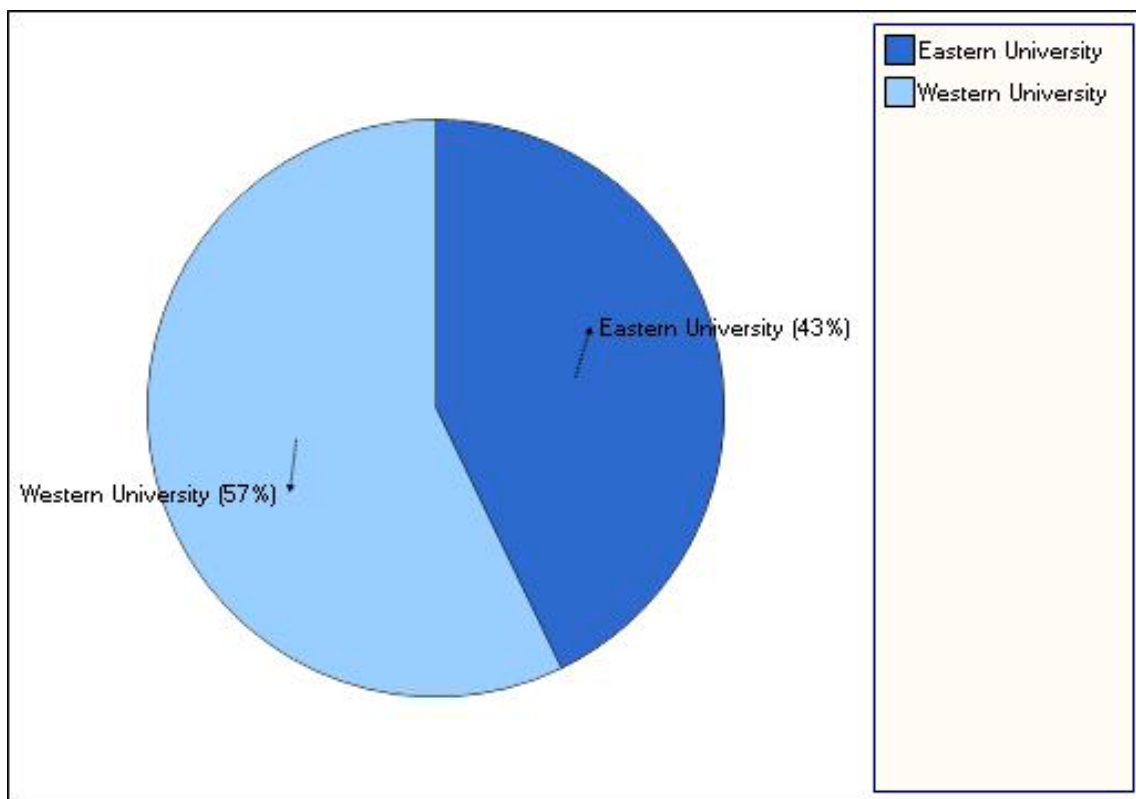


Figure 1. Distribution of Participant Representation from University Sites

Cases = 14

*Data Collection*

*Recruitment*

To recruit these students the criteria for study participants (transfer student, grade point average above 3.0, participated in a number of leadership involvement opportunities, developed relationships with faculty and staff that resulted in beneficial personal and professional development, participated in enriching activities such as internships, and received various awards) were shared with student affairs administrators and faculty at the western and eastern universities. These administrators were limited to chief student affairs administrators, academic advisors, student activities professionals, outreach professionals, and organizers of various campus programs.

Requests for recommendations from these various units were based on the likelihood that these professionals and their officers would be the primary contact with the target population. These administrators were asked to nominate students whom they felt fit the aforementioned profile. To ensure optimal advertisement of this study, additional flyers and email were sent to various student organization listserves. It was difficult to identify participants for the study, so in addition potential participants were approached via an in-person recruitment strategy. This method worked extremely well because it allowed potential participants to put a face to the interview request letter.

After receiving the nominations and applications a formal invitation was extended to each participant via telephone, e-mail, and letters, informing them that their participation was voluntary. Once confirmation was receiving from the student, each student was asked to file out a profile form. This form helped to verify the student's eligibility as a high-achieving student of color who had transferred from a community college or a two-year institution. The verification form required the student to report their



current GPA, list all former and current leadership positions held, and highlight all awards received at their receiving institution.

### *Interviews*

Each participant was asked to participate in an individual face-to-face one-hour interview. Face-to-face interviews were chosen over focus groups for a variety of reasons. Most notably, they provide the researcher with opportunities for direct observations (Creswell, 1994). The interviews were semi-structured open-ended interviews. In using this technique participants could provide authentic reflection while at the same time upholding focus and order. Though specific questions were asked during the interview, the responses frequently led to deeper conversations that subsequently helped to validate and expand upon the participant's comments and experiences. Information was obtained via an interview protocol. Prior to the individual face-to-face one-hour interview, each participant was given a brief overview of the study.

### *Data Analysis*

A number of qualitative techniques were used to analyze the data collected from the participants. Upon collecting the data, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Once the interviews were transcribed the verbatim interview transcripts were read for each participant. While carefully reading the transcripts reflective comments were written along the margins of the printed copies. This was done to begin to identify what the data were conveying. This qualitative technique was called marginal remarks by Miles and Huberman (1994). After reading the transcription, written summaries of each interview were produced. This was then followed by the utilization of the Qualitative Research Software program NVivo 8.0. NVivo was used to upload and arrange the electronic

versions of the transcription linearly.

Once the transcriptions were uploaded, they were then coded in specific patterns known as nodes. This helped to identify commonalities among the participants.

Identifying these commonalities was at times a difficult process. Consequently, initial categories were identified using keywords and phrases. These keywords and phrases were then collapsed into smaller categories. Once this was done, the third and fourth steps in the essential measurement of trustworthiness were implemented (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

(The first two measurements known as credibility and transferability are discussed later in the methods of verification section of this chapter.)

These third and fourth measurements are known as dependability and conformability and involve external examiners. The role of these outside examiners is to evaluate the completeness and suitability of the research process. According to Lincoln and Guba (1986), these examiners must have a proper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The data were analyzed by one other researcher. The identification of initial themes, final themes, and the association of responses to themes was compared between both researchers. This subsequently helped to identify and solidify specific thematic categories. These categories are presented in chapter four.

Although the aforementioned techniques were extensive and important, an equally important technique was engaged in prior to analyzing the data. Data analysis began long before the first interview was conducted. Creswell (2007) explained that the data analysis process requires information reduction, analysis, identification of common themes, and thorough search for all possible meaning in the data. During this process Patton (2002) highlighted the process of critical self-reflection known as epoche. According to Husserl

(1970b), epoche is a Greek word that means to stay away from or abstain. The process is ongoing. It is done to ensure the meaning identified by the researcher was based on information from the participants, not the researcher. This technique is referred to as *bracketing*. Bracketing out allows the researcher to see the data in their purest form. During this process all predilections, prejudices, and predispositions are set aside (Moustakas, 1994). It is important to participate in this action based on the impact of the researcher on the research. Creswell (1998) explained that the researcher is part of the instrumentation and is therefore influenced by the research process. Husserl (1970b) alleged that:

We must exclude all empirical interpretations and existential affirmations, we must take what is inwardly experienced or otherwise inwardly intuited (e.g., in pure fancy) as pure experiences, as our exemplary basis for acts of Ideation....

We thus achieve insight in pure phenomenology which is oriented to *real* (*reellen*) constituents, whose descriptions are in every way “ideal” and free from ... presupposition of real existence (p.577).

Based on Husserl, assessment of previous research requires the researcher to provide a full description of their own experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. This is done to help the researcher explore how their past experiences affect how they approach the research (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). Based on these recommendations a brief description of the researcher’s experience as it relates to this topic is provided below.

*Background on the Researcher*

Education has been at the forefront of my existence, beginning with my birth in the late 1970s to two immigrant parents who realized that the “American dream” was not in the stars for them. As a result, that dream was passed on to me. My parents invested in me the only form of currency they had—their time, energy, and faith. They believed that education would be the key to my success. Unfortunately for most Black/Latino males growing up in Brooklyn, NY, those investments do not guarantee success. The odds are much higher for incarceration, death, or drug addiction than a high school diploma.

Some would say luck more than anything else saved me from these alternatives. On the contrary, hard work, determination, and support have played vital roles in my success. A clear reflection of this occurred during my undergraduate years at Stony Brook University. While my overall experience was positive, it was not absent of the challenges faced by many students of color. These challenges included: culture shock, socioeconomic access issues, low-academic self-efficacy, and a desperate search for someone with whom I could identify. I was fortunate enough to find support through a mentoring program. This program offered students of color opportunities to connect with faculty and staff mentors who provided a much-needed connection to the larger campus community. Unfortunately, not all students of color are afforded similar support systems that enhance their abilities to negotiate the institutions at which they are underrepresented.

According to the existing literature on high-achieving students of color, I was a high-achieving student at Stony Brook University. My records indicate I graduated with a grade point average above 3.0. I was an active member of a number of student organizations. My work as a dedicated member of those organizations led to my

subsequent appointment to a number of executive board positions. Every summer, I was able to secure paid internships. My reputation as a dedicated student helped me to develop quality relationships with faculty and staff. Many of those relationships continue to flourish to this day. During my senior year at Stony Brook University I received a number of awards for my academic success, my ability to provide leadership to my peers, and my service to various communities.

In the following years, several individuals have referred to me as the “best of the best.” They believe I was the smartest student at my university. Contrary to their belief I make the humble confession that I was not the smartest student at the university. While I knew I was “smart”, over the course of four years I consistently encountered students of color with higher academic aptitudes than mine who left the university due to poor classroom performance. For years I often wondered how this could happen. Perhaps the following circumstances provides some explanation.

I faced a number of challenges as an undergraduate. Perhaps the most difficult was the death of my life-long hero during my second year. My father died during spring midterms. Rather than withdrawing from the semester, I was encouraged and supported by various members of the campus community. These included fellow executive board members and faculty and staff with whom I had built relationships. As a result, I not only passed every class that semester; I almost made dean’s list. My success was a combination of my commitment to the university and the university maintaining its commitment to support and cultivate my growth.

My connections to the university caused me to change my career goal from becoming a lawyer like my dad, to becoming a student affairs administrator. Though this

decision wasn't necessarily popular, the change of vocation has driven me towards a life in which I strive to provide the same opportunities I was afforded as an undergraduate for our newest students of color. This drive has taken me on a voyage through a variety of experiences that are highlighted on my curriculum vitae. Despite my vigorous efforts during my professional voyage, I consistently encountered disengagement trends among students of color.

This lack of equity taught me that my efforts could only have an impact at the micro level. It became clear to me that the workforce lacked the training and development to address these issues. After conducting a thorough search, I selected the doctoral program in Workforce Education and Development, with a focus in postsecondary technical and community college leadership, at Penn State because it would afford me the skills to reach these goals. Thus, this research venture is a project close to my heart. I therefore have identified the need to follow the recommendations from previous research—a researcher must bracket out their thoughts and assumptions as they read the transcripts from interviews with participants (Harper, 2002). I must ask myself the question, “is this what the participant meant; is the judgment I've made here truly characteristic of his experience” (p. 73).

### *Trustworthiness*

Based on my self-identification with this research, it was important to take the necessary steps to ensure that my interpretations of the data were accurate. Preexisting research provides four essential measurements of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). These measurements include:

1. Credibility

2. Transferability
3. Dependability
4. Conformability

These four qualitative measurements are equivalent to the quantitative positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Each measurement has specific responsibilities to a qualitative study. Below is a comprehensive explanation of how credibility and transferability were used to help measure trustworthiness.

#### *Methods of Verification*

When conducting research, it is critical for the researcher to ensure that the majority of the right part of the story is captured for the study. This is difficult, according to Creswell (2007), because “there are no right stories, only multiple stories” (p. 44). With that understanding, researchers believe it to be critically important to present as accurate an account as possible of the participant's story (Wolcott, 1994b). To accomplish this task researchers have used several different validation strategies. To achieve optimal validation, multiple strategies were used here to strengthen the research.

The first strategy was member checking. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this is the most essential technique in establishing credibility. When used correctly the researcher collects the data and then analyzes and interprets it. Once this is done the conclusions are given to the study participants to gauge the accuracy of the researcher's findings. Using this strategy as a blueprint, 14 participants were contacted a minimum of two times after their individual interviews. The first contact came shortly after transcription of their interview, via a written summary of that interview. The participants

were sent a copy of their transcriptions and summaries and asked to review them and provide any feedback deemed necessary. This was done to elicit possible additional data. Most participants agreed completely with the summaries, while the rest provided beneficial additions.

Once that was done the information was used to begin writing the findings chapter. Upon completion of a solid draft, each participant was sent a copy. Within the email the participants were asked to carefully examine the accuracy of the account of their experiences. Many of the participants responded that they were pleased with the assessment of their lived experiences as transfer students of color. No one said that they were unhappy or disagreed with the findings.

The second strategy was rich, thick descriptions, which help potential readers of a study to make decisions based on transferability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), detailed descriptions allow readers to determine if the information applies to a specific setting. When presenting the findings, countless verbatim quotes were incorporated. At times the quotes were quite long. This was done so potential readers would have a comprehensive view of the life of these high-achieving transfer students of color. To protect the actual identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used.



## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS

#### *The Participants*

Due to the depth of data collected during this study it is important to provide a comprehensive report of the participants who were so willing to give of their precious time to this study. A brief analysis of this study's data showed that all but two of the participants began their postsecondary education at a two-year institution. Despite the difference in postsecondary beginnings, all participants transferred to their four-year institutions from a two-year institution. Each participant had spent at least a full year at his or her new institution. The academic standing of the students ranged from senior to graduate. Six students were entering their senior year, while six had recently graduated in the spring and summer semesters of 2008.

The last two participants had graduated two–three years ago. One student graduated as far back as 2004, while the other did so as recently as 2006. These participants were included based on the depth and insight they were able to provide concerning the lived experience of this population. In addition to having been high-achieving transfer students of color during their undergraduate years, both had subsequently worked with this population post-graduation. While both graduated years ago, they were not the oldest participants. The average age of the participants was 23.4. The youngest participant was 21, while the oldest was 28.

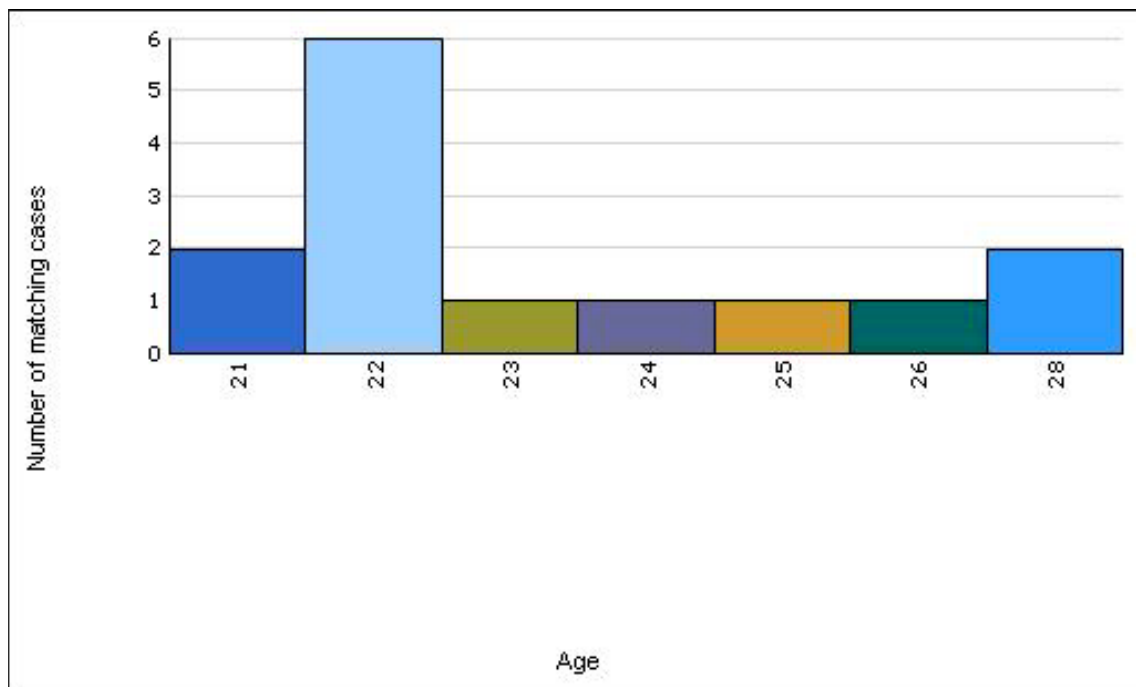


Figure 2. Visual Diagram Documenting the Distribution of Participants' Age

Cases = 14

The sample population included an even representation of seven males and seven females. Eight participants identified as Black, five as Latino, and one as other. The participants represented a diverse pre-postsecondary institution educational background. Ten of the participants attended public high schools, two attended private high schools, one participant attended a specialized high school, and the last participant was home-schooled. The high school demographics were also diverse. Four of the participants attended predominantly White high schools, four attended predominantly Black high schools, two attended predominantly Latino high schools, and one attended an evenly distributed White/Asian high school.

The participants represented a solid career of positive academic performance. While all participants did not always excel academically, the average high school grade

point average (GPA) of the participants was a 3.05, with the lowest being a 1.88 and the highest a 4.0. The two-year institution GPA of the participants was 3.47, with the lowest a 2.2 and the highest a 4.0. At the four-year institution all 14 participants met the GPA requirements for this study. The average GPA was a 3.37, with the lowest a 3.00 and the highest a 3.95.

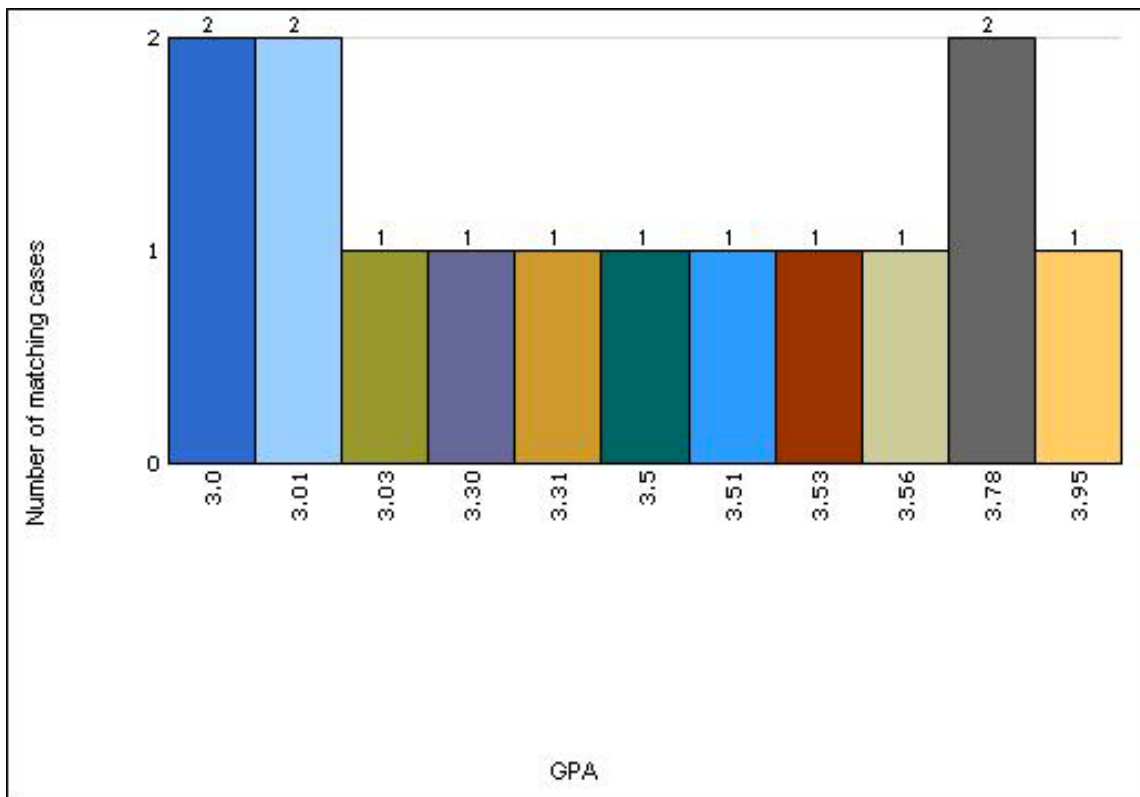


Figure 3. Visual Diagram Documenting the Distribution of Participants' University GPA

Cases = 14

Although the aforementioned statistics provide some information regarding the participants, they fail to give a clear picture of their identity. It is for this reason that a brief biography of the participants is included below.

*Participant Profiles**The Achievers of Eastern University**Participant Christina*

Christina is 21-year-old Black female from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was raised in a two-parent middle-class household. Her educational capital came from her mother, who is a college graduate. Throughout her life Christina has established a history of achieving inside the classroom. She attended a predominantly Black public high school and graduated with a 3.3 GPA. Her academic achievement continued during her time at her two-year institution where she maintained a 3.0 GPA. She later transferred to Eastern University and graduated in 2008 with a 3.01 GPA. While there she majored in theater. Her achievements at the university were not limited to academics. Christina held leadership positions in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People, the National Pan-Hellenic Council, and S-Plan. In addition she participated in the prestigious LeaderShape Institute. Christina is currently pursuing a career in film.

*Participant Lloyd*

Lloyd is a 23-year-old Black male from Queens, New York. He was raised in a two-parent working-class household. While both his parents stressed the importance of school, neither was fortunate enough to attend college. Lloyd's academic history was not always stellar. He graduated from a predominantly White public high school with an 85 average. However, while enrolled at his two-year institution, he had a 2.2 GPA. He saw significant improvement in his grades at Eastern University. Lloyd graduated in 2008 with a 3.3 GPA while double majoring in Crime, Law, & Justice and History. His

achievements outside the classroom included serving on the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity (CORED), the Multi-Cultural Undergraduate Law Association, the Cabinet of Student Leaders, the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People, the Counsel of Commonwealth Student Governments, and the MLK 2008 Overall Committee, and also served as a residence assistant.

Lloyd was also the recipient of a number of awards, including the Robert D. Lynch Outstanding Student Leadership, ... Senior Honor Society, and ... Senior Honor Society. To advance his academic experience he studied abroad at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. Lloyd currently is pursuing a career in law. He was able to focus his career goals during his internships at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, and Anderson Kill & Olick, PC.

#### *Participant Chiquita*

Chiquita is a 22-year-old Black female from Silver Springs, Maryland. Her mother raised her in a middle-class household. Attending college was always the expectation of her parents, who both graduated from college. Chiquita graduated from a predominantly Black public high school with a 3.3 GPA. Upon graduation she enrolled at a two-year institution, where she maintained a 3.48 GPA. In 2006 she transferred to Eastern University. There, she majored in Hotel Restaurant & Institutional Management. Chiquita graduated in 2008 with a 3.03 GPA. Her accomplishments went beyond the classroom. While at Eastern University she held leadership positions in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, the National Society Minorities in Hospitality, the Multicultural Dance Troupe, ... Hotel Restaurant Society, and DADA (an organization that promoted the success of Black females in college and their local communities).

Chiquita currently is pursuing a career in hospitality. Chiquita was able to identify this career goal as due to her internships in hospitality at the university's Housing & Food Services Department, and second internship at the popular hotel franchise, The Double Tree.

*Participant Justin*

Justin is a 22-year-old Black male from Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. Justin was raised in a single-parent upper-middle-class household by his mother. As a college graduate, his mother emphasized the importance of education. He graduated with a 2.6 GPA from a well-respected predominantly White public high school. His grade point average improved to a 3.33 during his time at his two-year institution. Two years later he transferred to Eastern University. Though his GPA decreased to a 3.01, he was able to graduate in two years while majoring in Sports Journalism with a double minor in English and Kinesiology. During his college career he held leadership positions in Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Incorporated, the Students of African American Brotherhood, the TV Club, and Com Radio. His internship with SIRIUS Satellite Radio played an important role in his decision to pursue a career in sports journalism.

*Participant George*

George is a 22-year-old Middle Eastern senior from Schnecksville, Pennsylvania. He was brought up in a lower middle-class household by his parents. His mother graduated from college in Israel, while his dad obtained his bachelor's and master's degree in the United States. George has had a stellar academic career since high school. He graduated from a predominantly Black high school with a 4.0 GPA. He was able to continue that stellar 4.0 GPA at his two-year institution. He is currently enrolled at

Eastern University majoring in chemical engineering with a minor in chemistry. George expects to graduate with his bachelor's and master's in May 2009. He is considering a career in engineering upon graduation. His career interest stems from his internships with Sanofi Pasteur INC., Swiftwater, Lafarge Cement CO., Whitehall, and AGERE MICROSYSTEMS (Now called LSI Logic Corp).

His accomplishments outside the classroom are also impressive. They include leadership positions in the Council of Commonwealth Student Governments, the SAF Board Representative, the C. Maranas Group, the Administrative Council on Undergraduate Education, the International Genetically Engineered Machines Team, the University Faculty Senate, the Board of Trustees, the Student Activity Fee Board, the University Advising Council, and the Schedule of Courses Quality Improvement Team. Equally as impressive are his countless awards; some of which include the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship for Excellence in Math, Science, and Engineering, the Larry Duda Undergraduate Student Research Award in Chemical Engineering, the Department of Chemical Engineering Summer Research Fellowship in Bimolecular Engineering, the Certificate of Exemplary Service, the Residence Life Award, Outstanding Student Award, the University Above and Beyond Award for Student Leadership, and the University President Sparks Award

*Participant Charles*

Charles is a 21-year-old Black male senior from Harlem, New York. He grew up in a two-parent middle-class household. Charles graduated from a predominantly White specialized public school, with an 88 average. Upon graduation he enrolled at his two-year institution, where he maintained a 2.87 GPA. After transferring to Eastern

University his GPA improved to a 3.0. His out-of-classroom leadership activities include Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Incorporated, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Student Minority Advisory Recruitment Team (S.M.A.R.T.), and serving as a Resident Assistant. Charles expects to graduate in 2009. Upon graduation he would like to pursue a career in medicine as a doctor. He has been fortunate to gain experience in medicine through his internships with Harlem Hospital.

*The Achievers of Western University*

*Participant Leonard*

Leonard is a 22-year-old Black male from Santa Monica, California. He graduated from Western University in May 2008 with a 3.31 GPA while majoring in political science. He graduated from a predominantly White public high school with a 2.67 GPA. Prior to attending the Western University he attended a state school. While there he maintained a 4.0 GPA. After receiving advice from the state schools staff that it was easier to transfer to one of the prestigious Western Universities from a community college he transferred to a community college. His GPA at that community college was 3.88. During his time at Western University he held leadership positions in Sigma Epsilon Omega, the Pre-Law Society, the Black Pre-Law Society, the Commissioner of Student Trustee, Sustainable Works, the Black Collegians Program, the Queer People of Color, and the Dean of Students Advisory Committee.

Leonard also received a number of awards and scholarships, such as the Academic Achievement in English, Outstanding Academic Achievement, the Sydney Goldfard Memorial, and the Alpha Kappa Alpha Scholarship. His internship with CBS San Francisco has influenced his decision to pursue a career as an entertainment lawyer.



*Participant Angela*

Angela is a 28-year-old Chicano Latina from San Jose, California. She graduated from Western University in May 2008 with a 3.78 GPA while majoring in English. She graduated from a predominantly Asian public high school with a 2.9 GPA. Prior to attending Western University she attended a state university. While there she struggled with a 1.0 GPA. After taking time off from school she enrolled at a junior college. Her GPA at the junior college was a 3.95. During her time at Western University she held leadership positions in Kappa Delta Sorority, the Associated Student Cabinet, the Black Student Union, the Rugby team, Phi Theta Kappa, Phi Beta Kappa, and the Dean of Students Advisory Committee. Angela hopes to pursue a career in law.

*Participant Victor*

Victor is a 24-year-old Chicano Latino male senior from Norwalk, California. He is an Ethnic Studies major with a minor in education. Victor's current GPA is 3.53. He graduated from a predominantly Latino public high school with a 2.8 GPA. Prior to attending Western University he attended a community college. His GPA at the community college was a 3.38. During his time at Western University he has held leadership positions in the Puente Club, M.E.Ch.A, and the Student Body Senate. Upon graduation he plans to attend graduate school with a goal of becoming a professor.

*Participant Omar*

Omar is a 25-year-old Chicano Latino from Lynwood, California. He graduated from Western University in 2006 with a 3.51 GPA while majoring in English. He graduated from a predominantly Latino public high school with a 3.1 GPA. Prior to attending Western University he attended a community college. His GPA at the

community college was a 4.0. During his time at Western University he held leadership positions in the Puente Club, M.E.Ch.A, Transfer Colectiva, and the Chicano/Latino Academic Student Development. He also received a number of awards, such as Regents Scholar, Achievement Award Program Scholar, National Association of Chicana/Latino Studies, Puente Scholar, and the Bronze Falcon Award.

In addition to his leadership experience at Western University he also interned with the Chicano/Latino Academic Student Development, the RAZA Retention and Recruitment Center, and the Greenlining Institute. Omar intends to pursue a career in higher education as a professor.

*Participant Dannielle*

Dannielle is a 22-year-old Black female from Sacramento, California. She is currently a senior majoring in Molecular Environmental Biology with a minor in African American Studies at Western University. Her GPA is 3.78. Prior to attending Western University she attended a community college. Her GPA at the community college was a 3.86. Dannielle did not attend a formal high school. Her parents believed they could provide her with a better education than the education available in the poor Sacramento public school system. During her short time at Western University she has held leadership positions in the Biology Scholars Program and the Black Students in Health Association. Upon graduation she intends to pursue a career in medicine.

*Participant Gladys*

Gladys is a 22-year-old Chicano Latina from Woodland, California. She is currently a senior double majoring in Psychology and Ethnic Studies at Western University. Her GPA is 3.00. She graduated from a predominantly White public high

school with a 3.1 GPA. Prior to attending Western university she attended a community college. Her GPA at the community college was a 3.5. During her time at Western University she has held leadership positions in the Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS), the Transfer Collectiva, the Biology Scholars Program, and the Libros Para Niños Fund.

In addition to these leadership positions she has participated in research through the McNair Research Scholars Program, as well as interning at the city's Free Clinic. In 2006 she studied abroad in Nicaragua. Upon graduation she intends to pursue a career in clinical psychology.

*Participant Karla*

Karla is a 28-year-old Latina from Mexico City, Mexico. She is currently a senior majoring in Development Studies with a minor in Political Economy for Industrialization Societies at Western University. Her GPA is 3.5. She graduated from a majority Latino/White public high school with a 1.8 GPA. Prior to attending Western University, she attended a community college. Her GPA at the community college was a 3.3.

During her time at Western University she has held leadership positions in the Pan America Unida, Amnesty International, the Student Parent Association, and Phi Theta Kappa. Karla has also received a number of awards, such as the Student Leadership Institute, the Rotary Club of Villa Park Scholarship, the Don Nichols & Georgia Summers Honors Scholarship, the Chancellor's Ball Scholarship, the Board Scholar Award, the AACU Scholarship, and the Alumni Scholarship. Karla made the most of her college life through internships with the United Nations and by studying abroad at the

University of Fribourg in Switzerland. She would eventually like to pursue a career in foreign policy.

#### *Participant Janaya*

Janaya is a 26-year-old Black female from Long Beach, California. She graduated from Western University in 2004 with a 3.56 GPA while majoring in Sociology with a double minor in Italian Studies and Geography. She maintained a 3.88 GPA at a predominantly White private all girls' high school. Janaya left high school before graduating, choosing to start college early at a community college. Her GPA at the community college was 3.75. During her time at Western University she held leadership positions in Alpha Gamma Sigma, the NAACP Youth Council, the Reentry, Transfer, Student Association, KALX Radio Station, and Alpha Kappa Delta. During her undergraduate career she interned at the Historical Society of Long Beach (which is part of the Getty Multicultural program), the Public Corporation for the Arts section of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission program, and the New Langton Arts.

Janaya also had an opportunity to study abroad in Siena, Italy. In fall 2008 she will begin her master's program in Race, Ethnicity and Postcolonial Studies at the London School of Economics. Janaya eventually would like to pursue a career as a college professor at a community college.

#### *Interview Results*

Findings from the interviews with the 14 participants from two separate universities are presented in this chapter. In many cases the actual lived experiences of these participants are supported by their verbatim reflections. The findings help to answer the primary research question: What are the lived experiences of a high-achieving student

of color who transfers from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution? The findings also illustrate a number of similarities shared by the participants who experienced the phenomenon of being a high achieving transfer student of color.

Through extensive data analysis, 39 invariant constitutes also known as sub-themes were identified. These sub-themes led to the identification and classification of eight thematic categories that provided in-depth insight into the shared experiences of the 14 participants. The thematic categories are: (1) Reasons for attending a 2yr institution; (2) Life at the 2yr institution; (3) Life as a first year transfer student; (4) Contributors of success; (5) Rationale for involvement; (6) Benefits of leadership and academic achievements; (7) Transferable skill-sets; and (8) Challenges of success. Each category is accompanied by the appropriate set of invariant constitutes which are then described and discussed in depth. In some instances the data method known as “in vivo” language was used. This technique is used when sub-themes are introduced with verbatim phrases directly from a participant’s interview. A summary is included at the end of this chapter due to the considerable amount of data presented.

#### *Reasons for Attending a 2yr Institution*

For years, students who matriculate at two-year institutions have been viewed negatively. As previously mentioned in chapter one, many believe these students are significantly deficient academically, in addition to being unmotivated. This stigma has been counterproductive to student development, and is somewhat inaccurate. The first major finding relates to the participants’ rationale for attending a two-year institution rather than a four-year institution. Within this theme the following sub themes are

discussed: (1) Grades were inadequate, (2) Under prepared, (3) I needed a place to go, (4) Better prepared, and (5) Comfort.

### *Grades were Inadequate*

While some of the circumstances surrounding the enrollment of the 14 participants do support the existing stigmas, they only provide a glimpse into a topic with much depth. Some of the participants struggled to perform at a high standard due to a number of variables. These included, but are not limited to, lack of motivation and outside stressors. Karla offered the following:

I was working and going to school and taking care of my siblings so . . . and I really never appreciated school because my dad, he was . . . he graduated from elementary school. That's about all the education that he had. My mom graduated from high school. But they really never thought of I mean it wasn't, it was like beyond my vision. Like college was not something that I envisioned to, to accomplish. It was just . . . So that's why I have a bad GPA. I barely made it.

The struggle to find balance and separate life outside the walls of high school was shared by many of the participants. This shared experience was not limited to the students who struggled academically. Some of the participants with who maintained solid grades also made references the affect of outside stressors. "Man half the time I wasn't thinking about the quadratic equation. All I could think about in class was if I was going to go dinnerless for the third straight day," a participant noted.

It is important to note that despite the environmental struggles in these students' lives, many performed quite well in the classroom. Analysis of the 14 participants' grade point averages shows their average high school grade point average (GPA) was 3.05,

which is equivalent to a B average. This is a competitive average among applicants to many four-year institutions throughout the nation, and contradicts the aforementioned perception about students in two-year institutions. A further contradiction is the fact that several of the participants were often enrolled in advanced placement classes.

As the students began to rehash their high school experiences, the path to the two-year institution became clearer. A number mentioned their grades as a motivator in deciding to attend a two-year institution and claimed that their Scholastic Aptitude Test (S.A.T.) served as their ultimate barrier to college. Thus, despite their academic achievements they convinced themselves they were not qualified to attend their ‘dream school.’ Christina offered some additional insight regarding this:

Well mainly before I felt like I didn’t do good on my SATs so I just didn’t even apply to the main campus cause in Philly ... is like if you go to ... main campus it means that you’re really, really smart. So most people just don’t apply there because they know . . . they just think you can’t get in.

The issue of the S.A.T. was mentioned by numerous participants. Here, for example, is what Dannielle said about the S.A.T. as an obstacle to college:

Well being home studied it was hard to . . . it was a lot of work you had to do to be able to take the SATs cause you didn’t have any like school records or anything. So one method that we used was to go ahead and finish home schooling and go to a community college. If you go for two years you don’t have to take SATs. You, they just go off of your JC GPA and all the stuff you done there. So that was the, that was kind of the plan.

*Under Prepared*

The poor S.A.T. test scores of the participants' underline a bigger issue. While many of the participants excelled in their own high school, compared to those in other high schools, they sometimes came up short. One participant had concluded that her high marks and advanced placement classes meant nothing. "I would get into honors classes but once there I didn't feel really well prepared you know to, to deliver in the work". Many had attended inner-city public high schools. Thus, like many of the inner-city high schools in the United States, their education was not comparable to the education received by their white counterparts in private schools, or for that matter those students who attended public schools in affluent school districts. One participant shared his personal encounter with this issue:

I remember going away to this honors school camp during the summer of my junior year. I went there feeling really, really confident in myself and my ability to do good work to feeling like a kid with special needs. After about a day or two of taking classes with the prep school kids, my confidence disappears like an ice-cream cake disappears at a summer birthday party.... Their text books were like the 5<sup>th</sup> edition. We were using the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition in my school. I didn't even know they had a higher editions. Let alone two editions higher. How do you compete with that?

Initially, some students blamed themselves for their poor test scores, believing that their scores were a result of their personal shortcomings. However, after having time to reflect, some expressed emotions that ranged from disappointment and frustration, to unequivocal anger. "They flat-out betrayed me," said one participant. Victor concluded:



I think you know my counselors were, were just wanted me to graduate. So when it came down to my senior year instead of trying to take some college prep math classes or something they said oh now well you need to graduate so you need to take consumers math so you could be sure to fulfill your math requirements. I'm like what's consumer's math, right? It was just total, total BS.

Other participants spoke with similar frustration. "I got the, just the basic units to graduate high school and nothing, no programs or anything that would put me college bound or college track", one student added.

This form of educational practice is not beneficial to students. In fact, it is a great injustice to a student's present and future aspirations. Practices like these left some of the students questioning their self-worth. Omar commented: "I guess I didn't meet up to their standards then they didn't see any potential in me. They just tried to get me along through school."

### *I Needed a Place to Go*

The circuitous route to college for these 14 participants was not completely the result of the substandard education and practices of their secondary school. Some acknowledged that a lack of focus and direction placed them in the predicament of having limited options upon graduation. As one achiever put it: "It seemed like everyone one was going to good colleges, except for me. I was like when did everyone decide to grow up? No one told me."

Graduating from high school with limited options can be a frightening reality. For years the two-year institutions have served as a comfort for students with limited options.

They often provide a safe haven for individuals looking to increase their options or gain a competitive advantage in their vocation. Omar offered his story:

Well I wasn't planning like higher education at all. When I was a senior in high school during the summer after I graduated I got a job at K-Mart and just didn't like it. So it wasn't until like somebody told me well if you go to community college everything will be great, but they said I could do a lot better than K-Mart.

That was all I needed to hear. And so I went. I enrolled in a couple of classes.

Despite the benefits of attending community colleges, many students often shy away from these institutions due to the public perceptions. Several of the participants admitted that they tried to keep the fact they were attending a two-year institution a secret during their first semester.

All but two of the participants in the study began their postsecondary education at a two-year institution. One of the participants commented on her decision to attend a four-year institution first rather than the two-year institution:

I went to San José State because when my mom wanted me to go to university even though I, I felt under prepared for a four-year university and my high school counselor also and my high school teacher both recommended you know you should just go straight into university. And I think that was probably a mistake. I urge any student that's even remotely like me to go into a two-year college.

Several of the participants expressed anxiety with attending a community college rather than a four-year college. Though they went to the school with mixed emotions, the end result was much more than they anticipated. Victor provided the following reflection:

Once I graduated from, from high school you know of course I wasn't prepared to go to college. So I was kind of reluctant to go to community college cause I kind of . . . or, or there's kind of like a stigma around community college right. I, I, I would see my brothers and others go to community college and you know they wouldn't transfer or, or, or they just drop out after a couple semesters or, or whatever. So, so I went to, to community college just kind of as, as I didn't know what else to do. So I kind of went without a, a, a plan, without a, a, a purpose. Turns out it was the best decision of my life.

### *Better Prepared*

The serendipitous circumstances of life at the two-year institution offered a number of benefits. One was the opportunity for individuals to enhance their ability to succeed upon transferring to a four-year institution. This enhancement applied to development in and outside the classroom. From an academic standpoint, many of the students were able to receive the academic preparation they failed to receive during high school. Christina commented: "I learned things I should have learned my junior year. I cant imagine what life would have been like if I went straight to... and didn't know this stuff." Other students spoke about the benefits of going to school without the pressure they believed awaited them at a four-year institution. "I chose to go to ... because I felt unmotivated go to .... Even though I felt prepared I really felt like I needed prep time before going... I was just like kind of stressed with the expectations of university," a participant shared. Other students mentioned how despite their initial disappoint with their placement at a branch campus, they found comfort in the benefits that awaited them at the two-year institution.

So I was like okay you know two years at a smaller campus. Why not? You know the teacher to student ratio is a little bit smaller and I'll probably get you know a little boost so that by the time I get to my junior and senior year you know I'll be all set," one participant noted.

Perhaps even more valuable was the social development these students received. Several spoke passionately about their lack of maturity after graduating from high school and believed that the best thing that could have happened to them was to go to a two-year institution. One student offered this comment when asked why she felt so strongly about her experience at her two-year institution:

Because actually I think you'll get, be better prepared holistically. I would actually say that my, the course curriculum at the junior college was more rigorous in terms of you know the GED. Plus you have a lot more support than you do at the university. Unless you're going to a small, private liberal arts college where they offer you a lot of support....I grew up because they provided an environment for me to do so.

### *Comfort*

A few of the participants made it a point to stress the role that their desire to feel comfortable had on their ultimate decision to attend a two-year institution. In their interviews, some students mentioned that college was their first academic experience with being the minority in the classroom. It is extremely important to keep in mind that the environments in which many of these students lived in prior to college had a substantial representation of people of color. Therefore, rather than attend the main campus of an institution, some made a conscious decision to enroll at the smaller branch

campus with a larger representation of students of color. “She said there were a lot of black students there. So I would feel, so I wouldn’t feel you know just left in the middle of the boondocks where there’s not people just like me,” Justin commented.

The students’ desire to feel comfortable went beyond connecting with students of similar races. Classroom size was also important. Several of the participants expressed their anxiety with transitioning from a small high school classroom to the large classrooms in college. One participant remarked: “I wanted no part of that. I saw the television shows and movies. How could I go from 25 to 500?” Chiquita expressed similar views regarding classroom size and being undecided about what kind of institution she was looking for.

Well I attended ... really because of the smaller classrooms and the smaller campus. I wasn’t really sure if I wanted to go to a big university yet. Also I knew that they had a two-year program in hotel/restaurant management which was what I was strongly interested in and I knew I would be able to move up to the main campus after two years.

Attending a school close to home played an important role, with reasons varying depending on the participant. One participant recounted: “The admissions lady told me that either ... or ... would be the best choice. So since ... was closer to Philly I wanted to do that.” A different participant offered a heartfelt reason for wanting to stay close to home. Despite finishing in the top one percent of his class and receiving acceptance to a number of prestigious universities in the nation, he decided to stay closer to home due his father’s car accident.

I went there because my dad got in a car accident and was disabled so I needed to come home every weekend and work . . . . . I had to do what was right for my family before myself. So I don't know if it was the best decision for me but I don't regret it at all.

### *Life at the 2yr Institution*

To fully appreciate the lived experiences of these participants, it is critical to provide an account of their life at their two-year institution. This theme served as the groundwork for their countless achievements throughout their postsecondary journey. The second major finding relates to the highs and lows of the 14 participants' tenure at their two-year institution. While among the group a total of nine separate two-year institutions were represented, their experiences were extraordinarily similar. Within this theme the following sub themes are discussed: (1) The Journey can be lonely, (2) Where are the services, (3) They cared, (4) I can do it, and (5) Transferring.

### *The Journey can be Lonely*

The participants represented two separate styles of two-year institutions. The first population attended more traditional two-year institutions such as community colleges and/or junior college campus. Hence, they spent a majority of their two-year college experience commuting to campus. The second population attended and lived at branch campuses located in different locations throughout the state. While the attributes of the two types of institutions are distinctly different, many of the experiences were similar. One comparable experience in particular was the sense of loneliness the students felt at their individual institutions. Much of this stemmed from their adjustment to an

environment exceptionally different from their city or town of origin. Charles provided the following reflection:

As a freshman I came you know like from a big city. You know everybody knows New York City—the city that never sleeps. Big environment. Anything you need: convenience store, chicken spot, whatever right down the block you can go there. Then I went to like . . . coming from all the way like a big city to a small town area where it wasn't so many colored people and it was like a predominantly white institute. I was kind of like indifferent to it because not only was like it was like a, like a suburban area with just like farms and cows and a lot of deer and stuff like that, everything wasn't open all the time. Like the only thing that was open 24 hours was a Sheetz gas station. And I was like . . . it was kind of difficult being accustomed to always roaming around at, at night to you know a rural area.

The struggle to orient ones self to a new environment was not simply limited to access to stores and adjusting to cows and farmland. “The people of that town didn't want us there, and they made that clear. The N-word was defiantly a part of their vocabulary,” a student noted. The hostile environments caused by racism and bigotry were not limited to only students who attended branch campuses. One junior college student recalled the following: “It's a bit of a bedroom community. Not a lot of ethnic minorities there. And there's a lot of racism and a lot of antipathy towards minorities there. Very few blacks, very few Asians, a lot of Hispanics but not that many who go to school.” The student went on to say:

So while I was there I really just consistently shocked at the things people would sort of freely say and say to me as though I would somehow agree with what they were saying. And, and being oblivious to the fact that they were completely offending me in everything that they were saying from the idea that we should deport all illegals, Blacks need to be put in their place. I guess they thought I was white because of my completion. They didn't make a distinction that just cause I was light skin didn't mean I wasn't a person of color. So yeah, just so that any number of really just horrible insensitive things. And this extended everywhere.

Despite these unfavorable settings the participants were able to rise above these predicament. "So it was definitely a huge change for me with respect to demographics. But at the same time I knew I was there for a purpose and you know, I just tried to, to keep that I guess at the forefront as much as possible," one student shared.

#### *Where are the Services*

Compounding the problems with adjusting to a new setting was the lack of services available for students of color at these institutions. Although the aforementioned research shows a majority of students of color attend a two-year institution at some point in their college career, this does not excuse these institutions from providing services specifically targeting this population. Many of the students could not recall any services focused on enhancing and improving the success of students of color at their two-year institution. One student commented: "There were no services for students of color. Believe me I looked."



Lack of support can have a far-reaching affect on students. It can impact ones psychosocial makeup. This can cause a student to lose focus, confidence, and motivation.

Lloyd offered his personal story of how the absence of these services impacted him:

I think that a large portion of like the, of college development, especially for students whose parents haven't gone to college regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status is having mentorship and I don't think that I had a, a, a strong level of mentorship at ... to properly you know prepare me. So you know my, the end of my freshman year, I did okay. I was close to like a 3.0 cum. But coming into like my sophomore year it was a lot more difficult for me and like I, I experienced different challenges and I really didn't have the backing or anybody to really help direct me or help me through those challenges.

Victor expressed a similar story regarding trying to survive and succeed without help.

I mean being there without any guidance and just kind of being on my own I, I, I kind of felt like, like I didn't I don't know belong to, at, at the school or I couldn't relate with the work. I, I, I wasn't happy being at the, at the community college and just . . . so I think I ended up dropping some classes and, and failing some others. I just stopped going. So I thought end of, of, of, of my first year I was, I was placed on academic probation. I had under like a 1.0.

### *They Cared*

Despite the majority of the participants expressing their dissatisfaction with the services that existed at their institutions for students of color some did speak highly of specific services. For example Gladys shared this reflection:

Well the RISE program was actually, it's a place where all the resources are funneled for students that are underrepresented in universities because the two counselors that run the program they're whole like purpose of starting RISE was to increase the transfer rates of underrepresented students.

Fortunately for the deprived participants, there were some individuals who worked tirelessly to help make the college environment more relaxed for the students. Justin recalled a student organization called Students of African American Brotherhood created by a Black male staff member at his campus. Though this group had no specific affiliation with any office or department at Justin's two-year institution, he explained in the following quote that it had a significant impact on him and other male students of color.

Basically he took most of the black students in especially the black men, tried to introduce them to the different programs and other things he tried to take us to church. He actually got me in the choir. And the Students of African American Brotherhood, we would all sit down talk about our problems on campus, talk about how we could improve it, we threw social parties and fund raised. So it was a good experience. I mean that was basically the only major program we had. And when he left to go take another job, the program and or support went with him.

Other students shared similar views of how professionals of color helped them. "The only support system I really had was that of I guess African Americans administrators," Lloyd shared. Angela expressed similar sentiments:

They had, they had a, a couple counselors that specialized for us. One was a guy named Antonio Vasquez. He, he was good. There was a couple . . . some of the VPs were of color. And they had a special interest in helping a student of color particularly Latinos or Africa Americans with anything that was coming up. And they'd point me I guess to those. This was good since there were barely any services directed specifically at retaining students of color.

Support was also offered by faculty at these institutions. It is important at any institution that support is offered from all directions. This helps to build students confidence, and ultimately leads to success. One participant recalled her professor rapidly saying: "the goal is to excel not survive. I believe in you, I know you will make me proud."

*I can do it*

Life at the two-year institution served as a "coming out party" for several of the participants. While several of the participants began their college careers lacking confidence in themselves and their abilities, these perceptions began to change. Participants saw their grades increase, thus invoking aspirations that never before existed. Omar recounted the origin of his confidence in himself academically:

I guess it was after my first semester that cause coming from high school I wasn't really focused on the grades. Like I was actually enjoying learning the stuff that I was learning. And after the first semester I, the way it used to work at . . . is that to see your grade you would go to the classroom that you were at and your grades were posted by ID number of whatever. And you can see . . . and then when I went, I went to the four classes I was taking and each, each class had an A. That was like the first time that ever happened and that just . . . I've never felt like that

before in terms of academically that way. So and that just fueled my fire. And I'm all like if I can do this my first . . . get straight As my first semester then I can definitely just transfer to a four year. I'm like look, after that there was no question. The, mainly the question was which four year?

The academic achievements of the participants had a far-reaching affect on the participant's lives outside of the classroom as well. Participants spoke of their newfound confidence and how it translated to confidence in other aspects of their lives. "I became a better person because of my success. I believed in myself. I was more conscious of life and not wasting it," a participant shared. The success also trickled down to others as well. "My dad pulled me aside one day and, and he told he. He's like you know you have some real good opportunities to go to school that, that we never had," Victor recalled. Confidence such as this made Victor want more of his life. Victor shared:

After hear my dad say that, I wanted to, to be college educated. I, I, I, I wanted to be the first in my family. I, I, I wanted to set an example. And you know which was something that I, I didn't have growing up.

### *Transferring*

As the students immerse themselves into their studies success continued, thus bringing about confidence. As the confidence of the participants grew so did their aspirations. They began having thoughts of life beyond the walls of their current institutions. Rather than applying to any college, the participants set their sights on elite universities. Some of the participants recalled going through the transfer process on their own. When asked what assistance did they receive from their two-year institution concerning the transfer process Dannielle said:

Practically none. I kind of had to figure it out myself a little bit. I filled out the application, did my personal statement myself. I kind of . . . about the day before I turned in my application I just ran my personal statement by a English teacher and she did some small corrections and stuff and gave me some pointers.

Other students shared similar stories of doing it by themselves. “It was just a something I did on my own. You fill out the paper, whatever it was on line”, George claimed.

Another student shared:

It’s funny. I just remember putting in the transfer request and praying that it was going to go through cause I knew you know you had to have a certain GPA requirements and things of that nature and I wasn’t sure if I, I met those requirements at the time.

Taking initiative to do things on their own became a being a recurring theme throughout their collegiate experience. Discussion of this occurs later in this chapter.

As some participants looked for support in accomplishing their transfer goals, many found hurdles awaiting them. Participants spoke of advisors who made the transfer process more difficult than it needed to be due to their lack of knowledge of the process. This was disheartening to the participants specifically since one of the chief responsibilities of these advisors was to help them with the transfer process. This issue is not an indictment of the competency of advisors and counselors at two-year institutions. Rather it stems from other issues. Due to the lack of funding many of these institutions receive, staff members are spread thin. As a result many of the staff at these institutions are not afforded the luxury of being a specialist; they have to be generalists. At times this

is to the detriment of the students whom they are hired to serve. Lloyd offered the following applicable example:

I remember going to my, one of the advisors the advisor who was assigned to me he wasn't even in my college or anything like that. Instead of him telling me what I needed to do, it turned into me telling him the process. I only knew bits and pieces. During the meeting he pulled out a noted pad and took notes so he could remember for the next student. I couldn't believe it.

Not all stories of assistance with transferring were bad. Actually many participants spoke passionately about the high quality assistance they received. Omar spoke at length about this in the following quote:

It was . . . that, that, that was actually one of the best experiences I've had in my life. There was actually somebody that . . . a counselor that actually sat down and talked to me and like saw something in me that I guess nobody in my K-12 education ever say, something that I can actually do well. And he, he would sit there and just ask me questions about so how's your situation and if you want to do this, this is what you have to do, and pretty much explained to me how the whole system of transferring and everything worked in addition to like personal issues that I want to overcome or whatever and direct me to resources that can help me deal with those issues.

Other students were fortunate that their institutions had developed long-standing relationships with their receiving schools. Thus, they were more familiar and efficient with the transfer process. Janaya recalled:

I think ..... is probably one of the better schools in terms of preparing students who are interested in transferring to transfer like they have a transfer student center on campus. When I was there you know you can meet with a counselor that can talk to you about you know what classes do you need to take in order to transfer... They organize events called the northern ... college tour. So they like piled all the students who were interested in a bus and we drove up.

Omar spoke of a similar program created by his two-year institution:

Then with that program then they would bring us up on, on, on trips to visit...So they would bring us to the campus and, and being here on the campus I mean I, I, I just thought it was amazing and, and that I, I mean that experience of, of coming up and my first time being on the college campus...that was pretty motivating. I don't think I would have those opportunities to visit college campuses without the program.

Perhaps the most influential assistance these aspiring transfer students received with the transfer process came from representatives not specifically related to offices, departments, and or units of the participant's two-year institutions. A majority of the students spoke of the tremendous impact student organizations had on their transfer process.

A real good friend of mine he recommended that I join, I, I join this program. It's called the, the Puente program. So it's a University of California office of the president sponsored program that's designed to get under represented students to transfer to four-year universities. It made a world of difference for me.

Programs such as the Puente program can have more of an impact on student success than structured university initiative. This is primarily since they are student organized. The level of trust developed as a result of peer to peer mentoring programs is immeasurable. Another student shared a similar story about the Puente:

Once I got involved with the Puente Program they work on with you on, on like career goals, personal goals, and they give you all, all the, the information that, that you need to transfer you know in the form of, of academic counseling ... There's a lot of different components to it. There's a mentoring component, a counseling component. So, so I think going through the program I was . . . it, it, it, it was really motivating to me seeing all these other students of, of, of color that were transferring to, to school and have majors and, and wanted to, to, to transfer. And, and I saw all these people that were doing it. So to me that was pretty, pretty motivating. And, and so I, I, I, I started to take my school more, more seriously and you know I, I, I, I got real proactive about my, my education. Trying to see what it takes to get into a, a schools like.....

The stories of how peer support impacted student success were a recurring topic throughout this study. More evidence of this is discussed later in this chapter.

#### *Life as a First-Year Transfer Student*

As previously mentioned only a small percentage of students who indicate desires to transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution actually transfer. In light of this, the mere fact that these students transferred should be seen as a success. It is however important to keep their stories in perspective. While these 14 participants have experienced great success at their four-year institutions, their lives were filled with



amazing stories of triumphs, disaster, courage, and perseverance. This was particularly the case during the participants first year at their new institutions.

The third major finding represents the participants first year as transfer students at their new university. Due to the larger number of salient information that emerged from the data, this theme is constructed first by discussing the expectations of the participants followed by the reality they experienced. The following two sub themes are discussed: (1) Dealing with expectations, and (2) Dealing with reality.

#### *Dealing with Expectations*

Prior to enrolling at their new institutions the participants had a number of expectations of their new school. These expectations varied based on the individual participants. However some expectations were consistently expressed. The first expectation dealt with academics. Several of the students expected an environment where the academic responsibilities would be more demanding. "I did expect it to be more challenging because it was more competition." Not all of the students were concerned with the scholastic challenges that awaited them.

Despite their university's strong academic reputation, some students had confidence in their ability to perform at a high level. "I expected to come up here and do well. I thought I was prepared enough at ... to still do as well as I did at ... up here." Other students spoke of their fear of increase class sizes. "I guess I anticipated just kind of the typical college experience like you now being on your own, going to classes where there's like a zillion kids. Just something very different than I had experienced kind of up until, up until that point."

A few students expected to be in classes where the professors were engaging and supportive. “I thought I was going to learn so much from the professors that my head was going to explode.” A number of participants spoke of how excited they were to take a class with well known scholars. “I couldn’t wait to be in his class,” one student remarked. Another student shared how he went to the professor’s website and ordered the textbooks to one of his classes the same day he received his acceptance letter to the university.

The second expectation that many of the transfer students had of their new institution was related to the size of the university. Transitioning from a small two-year institution to a larger four-year institution scared some participants. One participant shared: “I was happy to get in, but I was worried about the amount of students the university had.” Others looked at the size of their new university as a benefit. Lloyd shared his perspective on this:

I kind of looked at my ... experience holistically I guess once I decided to come here as an opportunity to experience the best of both worlds in that ... can be likened to a small liberal arts college if you will with you know as far as the amount of students who were there having 4,000 students. And then ... was kind of like an opportunity to experience like the true large public institution. So you know with that being said it was again like an experience, an opportunity to experience the best of both worlds. So I looked at it at transferring to ... as an opportunity to grow more as a student, as a professional, and as a, as a leader.

The perceived benefits of a large university were shared by other students as well.

Leonard explained his expectations in the following quote:

I was expecting it to be ... overall positive. I was expecting to meet different people from different places. You know you look on their web site and see that people from all over the country go there and there's like a group for everything for everybody who ever wanted to do anything there. So I mean I was ready for a pretty like different experience.

Other students worries extended beyond the size of the institution. Their concerns pertained to how welcoming of environment it would be to them. "I kind of expected it to be really unfriendly. I expected it to be kind of crazy cause ... has that reputation of being, like having a bunch of crazy people around," Dannielle shared. The reputation of a party school did not worry some students. In fact some of the participants expressed how this reputation led to their enrollment. Justin shared:

I came up here before during homecoming so stuff like that. But I mean I thought it was going to be a big party school. That was cool with me, cause I didn't want to just go to a school with absolutely no college life. I had done that for two years already. I wanted more. So the college life definitely factored into my decision.

The third expectation was related to support from their new university. Several of the students were fortunate to receive support from their previous institutions. They expected this trend to continue based on the increase size of staff and perceived resources at their new universities. One participant remarked: "I just knew they were going to support me. You couldn't tell me anything to the contrary".

Optimism was not shared by all of the participants. Other students transferred with low expectations for their new university. Victor quote concerning his expectation

of his university's services provides an example of the low expectations several students shared:

So, as a, as a student of, of, of, of color I, I was, I was expecting to, to, to not have a lot of services that, that I, I don't know maybe needed. I didn't think that they were out there. I, I, I, I wasn't sure what, what .... had to offer. I mean and as far as student services. So, so I really wasn't expecting much. I, I mean as far as, as being in the classroom right whether there's not a lot of students of color, or, or, or just kind of feeling out a place in, in this environment. I, I, I, I, I thought that that would be a big problem.

#### *Dealing with Reality*

As the students started their lives at their new institutions, they began to realize many of their expectations would not come to fruition. As previously stated several students expected a rigorous academic environment at their new institution, many of the students expressed how shock they were once they actually matriculated. Students came face to face with the reality that life with respect to academics at their new institutions was going to be very different. "It was a lot more difficult than I thought it would be in the sense that not just the concepts and the theories were difficult to comprehend, it was just the workload." Leonard noted. Similarly, Charles shared: "The studying was a little bit more intense. Like I had to develop ... study habits. Like I had like I had to step it up like tenfold because what was, what worked for me in ... didn't necessarily work for me at ..." Prior to transferring, Chiquita shared a view similar to many of the other participants. She expected to continue being a Dean List, however this was not the case. Chiquita stated:

The lows. Okay. Definitely not doing as well as I used to do at ... My grades didn't drop significantly but they did. I was no longer on dean's list. Like I said it was really hard for me to get an A on a test up here. Really hard. I don't think I ever did get an A on a test up here.

Omar shared a similar reflection: "I had been used to three years of straight As and then coming here like the first English paper that I write I get a B- in. And then one of the following semesters I got like I hadn't had a C since my, since high school."

Compounding the academic issues was the class sizes. A number of the participants spoke of their shock with the classroom sizes. Some participants remembered sitting in an upper division class with over six hundred student. Gladys shared: "I expected class to be bigger, but I thought it would go from like 25 to 75 since I was going to be taking upper division classes. No way was I ready for 600 students". Several students spoke of the role class size played on their psyche. Karla remarked: "I couldn't function in class. It felt as if I was at a football game rather than class."

The ability to effectively navigate the academic culture continued to come up during the interviews. Student spoke about the difficulties of learning a new culture. Students remarked that while this was not their first semester in college, it was their first semester at their new institution, and the "Game" was completely different. Omar offered the following analogy: "It was like I went from playing minor league baseball to the World Series." Lloyd offered the following perspective: "Things are I'd say a lot more fast paced, a lot more competitive. And it's, it's easier to get lost also if you're not careful."

As the participants attempted to adjust to their new academic environments, several of the students turned to their professors for support. Janaya spoke about her previous experiences with professors prior to transferring. She shared that throughout her life she was fortunate to receive a “one on one” form of education from her teachers and professors. She was saddened to discover this was no longer going to be the case at her new institution. Other student spoke of similar experiences with professors from their previous institutions offering much needed support. Unfortunately many of them didn’t receive the support they desired at their new institutions. Charles spoke extensively of this:

Oh for one I didn’t get as much help as I needed from certain professors and things of that nature. Like the professors of course they’re going to expect you to work. But if I have like a question about the chapter and stuff like that, they’ll usually come up with the same question like hey did you read the material? And that’s kind of like a you know kind of a weird question because if you’ve read the material and didn’t really understand it and they ask you if you didn’t give the effort, it’s like you know a kick in the face. Like you know you don’t really understand what you’re reading and just basically some, some of the professors, not all of them, kind of shove you off like that and since you know ..... is real friendly and they promote it to be real friendly, it kind of had me shocked actually.

As disappointing as Charles’s recounts are, they pail in comparison to other examples some students shared. Several students spoke of professors belittling them about being transfer students during office hours and even worse in class. “I remember him referring

at me as Mr. T, A.K.A. Mr. Transfer whenever I asked a question. One time he turned to the class and said this is why we shouldn't accept transfer students". Another student shared a similar reflection. "I had several professors tell me "why don't you get this? Oh you are a transfer student". I was like how is that suppose to make me feel". Janaya shared similar experiences:

When I started at the university being a transfer student was like almost a four letter word. Like you now faculty would look at you a certain way, you know, graduate student instructors are like oh you're a transfer student? Oh from community college. You know there's automatically that perception of you know you're not good enough to be here.

One student remembered his professor suggesting he switch his major to African American studies focus, believing he might be better suited in that department.

Due to behavior of professors and administrators, some participants admitting to deliberately hiding their identity as transfer student. George claimed: "I think a lot of people that change campuses don't say, they don't, they don't tell anyone that they came from a different campus unless they trust them or they know them or they've gotten to know them after a while". He went on to say:

When I tell people I come from a different campus they're like so shocked because I'm the top person in my class. They're like how. Like what are you talking about? You're joking. They're so shocked. I was kind of disappointed that people judge me just because I came from a different campus actually.

Such behavior by peers helped to motivate students to strive to succeed. Evidence of this is examined later in this chapter.

In addition to the absence of support that participants felt, some of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the teaching styles of their professors. A number of students referred to the assignments given by their professors as “busy work”. Leonard reflected on his experiences with the following quote:

Like at times it seemed like wow you’re just assigning me all this reading and making this, this extra hard just to weed out the people who you know aren’t up to par I guess. Like they didn’t really want you to do well. They wanted you to work super duper hard to get a good grade, which is kind of understandable at the same time you know. But it’s a little it’s kind of like, kind of frustrating cause you feel like you’re just jumping through hoops and you’re not really learning the material really.

Angela expressed similar sentiments: “It’s just like you’re, you’re a big sponge. You soak up all this information just to regurgitate it on a test. You’re not really learning.”

The adjustment issues the participants dealt with extended beyond the classrooms. Several students struggled to adapt to the culture of their new universities. Both of the universities represented in this study had reputations of being “party schools” nationally. Typically universities with such a reputation engage in high-risk behavior. Although many of the participants were aware of this, several of them admitted to being shock at the magnitude of parting that existed at a university with a phenomenal academic reputation.

Well ... is not a dry campus, .... was a dry campus. But there was still drinking at..... But here there is so much drinking going on here.... it’s kind of you know



funny when you're sitting in .... Hall about 2:00, 3:00 in the morning and you hear people screaming down College Avenue.

Danielle shared a similar story regarding life at in the residence hall:

Actually my first year I lived in, in a house with 21 other people. I lived in the African American theme house but there weren't hardly any African Americans there. And so that probably was the biggest like just whoa what is this you know. It's just like crazy stuff used to go on in that house and it was just I don't know. It was, it was kind of hard with that being my first year.

While a number of the participants admitted to drinking, they made a point to say they stayed in an drank with friends a majority of the time due to their fear of drunk Caucasian students. "Oh you were extremely aware of not drinking and going out in an environment where there are few people of color. I'm not saying every White student was out to get you, but it was in the back of our minds," a student noted.

Discovering that their new university was not always welcoming to students of color surprised some participants. Prior to attending his new university, students like Leonard expected to experience an open environment due to the reputation of his new university. Many were disappointed to find out this was not the case. Rather than existing as the multicultural environments they advertised to be, several students claimed they saw the opposite. According to the participants, the Black students often stay within their own cliques with other Blacks, and the same was true for Latinos, and Whites. Leonard claimed:

I would say that, I'd say that it's very, it's so big and there's so many groups it's like you kind of get stuck in your little niche. . . You get stuck in your little niche

and everything is kind of separate. Like you know everyone kind of has their own group and they only really communicate within their group, within their groups.

They don't . . . people don't really branch out like I thought they would.

Rather than allow this to be the status quo, some of the students made efforts to build relationships with students of different backgrounds. Discussion of this appears later in this chapter.

As previously mentioned, several students expected to receive resources to help them adjust to their new university. Regrettably some offices within the universities failed to meet the participant's expectations. Oddly, the Eastern Universities did not have a formalized orientation process for transfer student despite enrolling a significant number of transfer students each semester. This lack of resources contributed to a number of pitfalls transfer student dealt with during their first year. "I came up here so lost. I looked everywhere for an office for transfer students. I looked on the web, looked in the directories; I even called the university police. I couldn't believe they left me out here with no help," a student shared. Other students expressed similar disappointment with the manner in which their university oriented them. "There was no help. I had never even been up here until move in day. I just got emails and a folder from my college. I was like thanks a lot. Sure hope this folder has magic powers." Despite their survival, some participants still had ill feelings towards the university.

Though two years had passed Chiquita claimed she still was disturbed with the transfer process. "I understand transfer student may not need an orientation exactly like the one freshmen get, but we still need something. Sure this wasn't my first college campus, think about it my first campus had only 800. I went from 800 to 40,000."

The lack of services for transfer students was also seen at the Western University. While more services existed at the Western University, this did not completely shield the students from the pitfalls of the university. Some of the students expressed feelings as though the university didn't want them to truly be there. Janaya reflected:

I can see where it's really easy for students to fall through the cracks at ... And I've seen a number of students either you know friends or students that I've worked with in teaching who easily just kind of like really frustrated and kind of fed up with the system and kind of feel like you know ... isn't really the place for them and so they leave.

Angela shared a similar reflection: "You get the sense that you don't belong there. Like you know you don't, you're not good enough to be here and we're not going to help you figure anything out."

#### *Contributors to Success*

Experiencing disappointments should not come as a surprise considering researchers have pointed to the effects transfer shock has on first year transfer students. However as the previous theme showed, transfer shock was only one of the challenges the participants dealt with during their first year at their new university. Despite challenges, they were still able to persist and succeed in environments that offered numerous opportunities to fail. Due to their acceptance into this study we know despite countless "landmines" the participants became high-achieving transfer students of color. This thematic category helped to explain how their success transpired. As previously mentioned, these high-achieving transfer students excelled academically with grade point averages (GPA) above 3.0, participated in a number of leadership involvement

opportunities, developed relationships with faculty and staff that resulted in beneficial personal and professional development, participated in enriching activities such as internships, and received various awards.

Surviving the pitfalls of higher education can be a difficult task. This is especially true as a transfer student of color. The fourth major finding provides a number of essential explanations for the achieving students success at their four-year institutions. Within this theme the following sub themes are discussed: (1) Students of color, (2) University offices, (3) University staff/administrators, (4) Picking a major, (5) Family, (6) Me, myself, and I, (7) Identifying as a person of Color, and (8) Identifying as a transfer student.

#### *Students of Color*

Succeeding at the four-year institution required a number of factors. One of the most significant factors was the support of other students of color. The participants of the study spoke enthusiastically about the assistance their fellow students of color provided to them. Help came from established student organizations aimed at improving the retention of transfer students of color. One such example of this was Transfer Colitiva. This program was actually co-founded by Omar; one of the participants in the student. According to Omar, Transfer Colitiva uses a non-traditional leadership structure. Rather than implementing the traditional positions of president, secretary, and treasure seen in many student organizations, the organization operates as a collective. Omar describes it as a “circle ... it’s a support network.” This organization served as a resource for a number of the participants in the study. When asked how much their success was attributed to this organization one student poignantly said, “without this I’m in the streets

or dead.” Omar reflected: “Well pretty much all my good friends are, have come from these places, from the colitiva.”

In addition to the Transfer Colitiva other student organizations helped to provide a calming atmosphere for the participants. Achievers spoke of the craziness that existed at their university and how minority student organizations helped them. Danielle commented:

... is kind of crazy but you can find the people who aren't. I would say the people are kind of how I expected them to be but I've been lucky to get involved with the BSP, the biology scholars program, which is basically a lot of minority students in sciences and so that has, that's made it's own little world inside ... that is just much different. But like me I was able to find BSP, which kind of made the difference.

In addition to aforementioned organizations were culturally based organizations, which provided an environment where students could embrace their culture despite being away from home. Members of these organizations stressed how important simple functions of the organizations were to them. One student shared a meaningful reflection:

They had a taste of the Caribbean where they would bring in food from different places so that all the students can taste that for a small price because you know we're college students. We don't have that much money. Do you know how important it is to have food that taste like home? Every time they had that event I was able to walk around with a comfort for at least a week. I felt better about life in general and my ability to make it here. It reminded me of where I came from, and why I am here. That my friend is priceless.

Other traditional organizations such as historically minority fraternities and sororities also played critical roles in the comfort of these students of color, as they have since their existence. These fraternities and sororities provided much needed social outlets for students. This was specifically important because of the location of the two universities. Participants spoke of how rare it was to go to a social function, which targeted minorities. Having the opportunity to attend these social gatherings was extremely important to the participants. Evidence of this is seen in the following quote:

Typically if you go out to the bars here you are not going to hear hip-hop, salsa, or what have you. I know hip-hop has gotten more mainstream, but when you go out the venue here is still mostly White. You still are reminded you are a minority. Verses if you go to an NPHC party, you know you are the majority. You tend to have more fun cause you are relaxed. You can be yourself. I can't really explain it. It's just a feeling.

Other students shared similar remarks. "I don't even go out if it's not a minority party. The White frat parties focus more on drinking. I don't drink so there is no opportunity for fun for me. At a Black party its about having fun. I can just dance", Dannielle shared.

Existing students of color also served as valuable resources to the transfer students. When asked to explain this, several students explained how their peers served as their academic advisors, their mentors, and their tutors. In many cases students spoke of picked their classes according to the recommendations of their peers. When asked why not ask staff members hired by they university to assist in these specific areas one student responded: "I've been to that office and I know they don't care about my success. I am confident my friend care. We are all in this together. We are all we got." Others students

shared similar perspectives. “If ... promotes anything it’s just among the students themselves. Its not really so much minority friendly from like faculty and stuff like that,” Charles claimed. Charles also shared a personal issue regarding his inability to pay his rent. As a result he was temporarily evicted from his apartment. Fortunately he was able to obtain resource through a university office to help pay his rent. When asked “Did you find out from promotions or did, did you find out because another student of color told you?” Charles replied: “Another student of color told me.”

The contributions made by existing students of color to the transfer students were not limited to just social integration. A number of students spoke of the impact their peers had on their academic success. Many of the participants spoke of success as a student of color being contingent on the collective. Omar noted:

So whenever I was writing a paper it wasn’t just individual, it wasn’t just me writing away. It was me and another person like reading each other’s paper, bouncing off ideas, for mid-terms, finals they were studying usually gathered students that were in the, in the, in the classroom to do study groups, to see what term . . . who read . . . cause the thing about .... you get 13 books for in English for each classroom and you’re not able to read 13 freaking books in a semester. So and everybody knows that. So we get together and like who read this? Who’s going to read this? So it’s more comprehensive than just one person doing it.

### *University Offices*

The success experienced by these transfer students at their four-year institutions cannot solely be attributed to student peers. Actually, a number of university representatives and offices played vital roles in their success. Perhaps the most

instrumental office responsible for the successful transition of participants at the Western University was the transfer office. Unlike its Eastern University counterpart, a center specifically designed to work with transfer students existed at the Western University. Every transfer student at the Western University was assigned a specific counselor from the center. The center helped to provide assistance with issues such as making a successful academic transition to the university, how to progress in ones major, develop strategies for success, and career planning. According to the transfer center's recent annual report 48% of the students who actively participated and took advantages of the resources of the office held a GPA of 3.0. Even more impressive 25% held a GPA of 3.5.

One of the vital resources provided through this center are transfer classes. These series of classes are optional, but can be taken for credit each semester. A number of participants in this study spoke of the benefits of these classes. "I would say Ron Williams was a really good transfer professor that specialized in like you know kind of getting you used to the ... atmosphere and preparing you for the professional world. I thought that was very helpful," Leonard shared. Victor shared his thoughts of the center in the following quote:

As a transfer student you know I feel I don't know like I'm not special right. Like I'm a transfer student and I might be in the class and, and there's no other transfer students and can't nobody else relate to me. And in this classroom you know it's we're all transfer students. Let's talk about our transfer experience from everything from, from study strategies to, to just learning the ropes of the, the university. I mean it, it, it was definitely just a place for transfer students, transfer students to get together and, and share information.



During Janaya's interview she shared how she believed the university had progress in regards to addressing transfer student issues. She offered the transfer center willingness to advocate for more services for transfer students as a reason for the change. As discussed in theme three, Janaya mentioned transfer student was "almost a four letter word". However she believes this has began to change.

But I think now you know that's changed quite a bit because there are more services for transfer students apart from the center. You know they make more of an effort to have you know transfer specific student orientations, you know, all of the things that were absent or you know just barely starting you now when I was a transfer student have grown significantly in the last six years.

#### *University Staff/Administrators*

As important as the resource provided by these offices were to the success of these students, it could not have occurred without the dedicated employees of those offices. A number of students unequivocally gave credit to the individuals within these offices. Natural many of the participants spoke of the relationships they built with staff members of color. Several students spoke of how these relationships were invaluable to their success. Lloyd shared:

He was instrumental as well. We were originally from you know the same neighborhood in, in Queens. So just having you know a familiar face and someone who understands the multilayered challenges that you experience as an African American male and just being able to, to be there and you know kind of talk to him and not feel like it's someone who just doesn't understand my experience. That was instrumental to me also.

The importance of making connections with staff of color was discussed by others as well. Karla sheds some light into this:

“It’s great to speak to someone who understands you. I can say a phrase in Spanish, and she gets it. If I say it to someone else I have to explain. And sometimes when you are down and struggling you don’t feel like explaining. You just need someone who gets it. She gets it!”

Another student spoke of his relationship with an academic advisor who wasn’t assigned to him or his friends, but served as their advisor. According to the student, countless members of the minority community often went to him for help rather than their assigned advisor. This was principally due to their belief he cared about them. When asked how did this advisor become so popular within the minority community, the participant replied. “When you care about one Black student, word spreads. And once word gets out, we come running. There aren’t a lot of men of color out here. So if you know of one doing great work, that’s big.”

The successes of these students were not limited to relationships with university staff of color. In fact many students spoke of White administrators who were equally as important to their success. Lloyd again spoke of his relationship with an administrator who was neither Black, nor a man. Lloyd noted: “One of the first experiences that I had when I came to University ... was the interaction that I had with the Multicultural Resource Center. My advisor was Diane Farnsworth. She was instrumental, instrumental in trying to provide support to me.” Other students spoke of their advisors sitting them down and instilling confidence in them. “My advisor Jim Bordi, he really got me prepared ... He explained to me how different it was going to be but he felt, he felt as

though I was a really good student and I could make it. I believed in myself because he believed in me,” Chiquita recounted.

*Picking a Major*

As previously mentioned the participants of this study experience academic success at two highly competitive Tier 1 universities. The academic focuses of these participants were very diverse. The majors represented in this study were: Theater, Crime, Law, & Justice & History, Hotel Restaurant & Institutional Management, Political Science, Sports Journalism, Sports Journalism, Biology, English, Ethnic Studies, Molecular Environmental Biology, Psychology, Development Studies, and Sociology. In addition to these majors several participants minored in Kinesiology, Chemistry, African American Studies, Political Economy for Industrialization Societies, Italian Studies, and Geography.

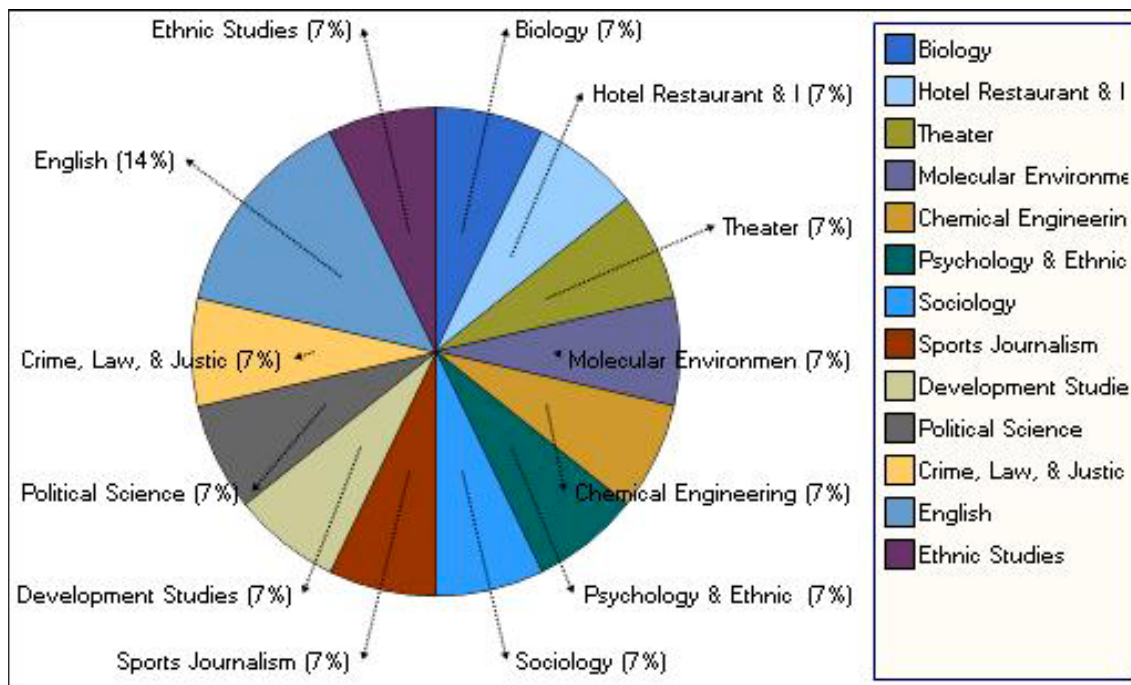


Figure 4. Visual Diagram Documenting Participants' Majors

Cases = 14

Succeeding in these majors is a difficult task for any student, regardless of the scholastic aptitude. Yet these high-achievers were able to maintain an average GPA of 3.37. An examination of the participants' academic history demonstrates all 14 participants selected their area of focus prior to attending their four-year institution. Thus, a sense of direction had been identified prior to matriculation at their four-year institutions.

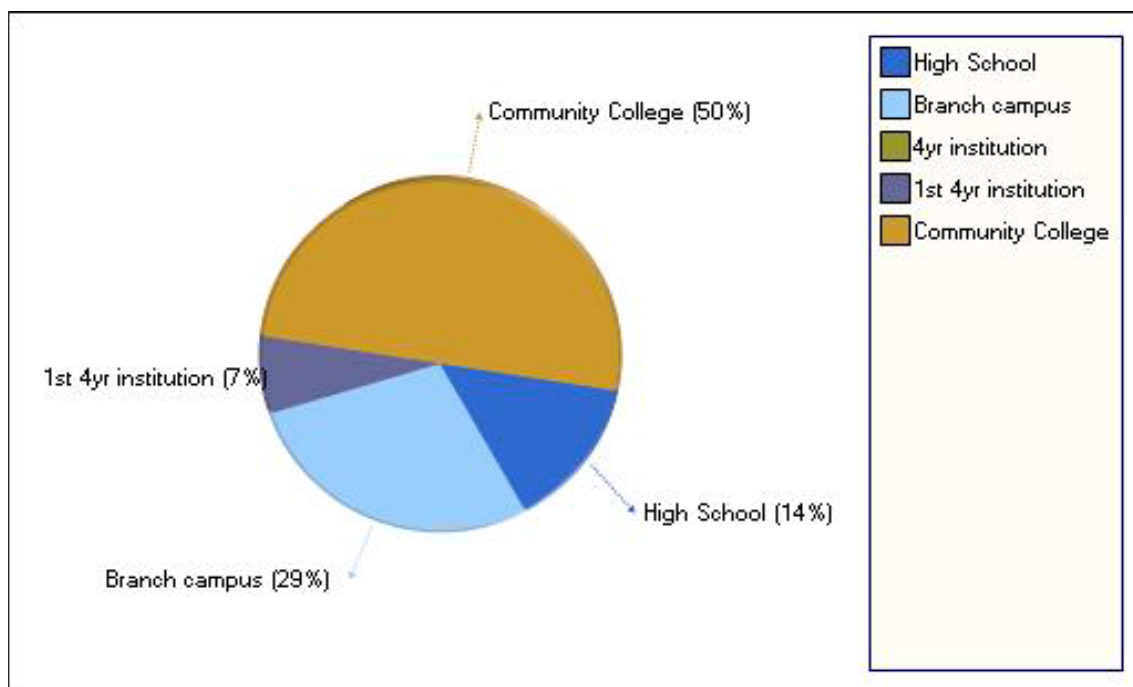


Figure 5. Visual Diagram Documenting When Participants Selected Major

Cases = 14

When asked if they felt choosing a major prior to transfer had an impact on their success, a number said yes. George intends to graduate in spring 2009 with his B.S. and his M.S. He attributes his successful completion of these degree requirements to his decision to major in Chemical Engineering since high school. The benefits of choosing a major early were also shared by Chiquita who shared:

Yes I believe so cause I knew what I wanted right from the start and I just went from there whereas other people, they're a little bit apprehensive. They're not sure what they want to do and they ended up staying for a little bit longer than I did so yeah I definitely feel as though that choosing before I went into ... helped me out a lot.

Justin shared a similar perspective. “Yeah I believe so. Picking out, picking out a goal that you want to do in your first year is paramount because so many people they switch their major back and forth and they end up taking credits they don’t even need.”

Similarly, Gladys offered a comparable assessment regarding the benefits of choosing a major early:

Because I already had a plan. Like my plan was to major in psychology, to go to graduate school afterwards and because I had a limited amount of time though as a transfer student, I have two years, I felt like I didn’t have time to be wishy-washy and go here and there. And so I, I knew right away that that was my plan and that was my goal and that I had to meet that goal.

Danielle assessment of deciding on a major dealt with her ability to find a plan she was comfortable with, and strategies she could implement in order to maximize her success.

Below is a segment of that discussion:

Just dealing with the subject for so long I kind of know what I need to do to do well ... You have to tweak it for every class of course but you have a process that you approach certain classes with you know. And that kind of cuts down the time it takes to kind of figure out how am I going to study for this or how am I going to approach this? And it kind of gives you a head start. You can do well on that first exam you know you can, you don’t waste time doing things that don’t work. So that has helped.

The belief choosing a major early impact ones success was not shared by the entire sample. Actually some students claimed it had no bearing on their success in any manner. Leonard shared “I don’t think deciding my major early necessarily helped that at

all.” However he did agree it helped with his acceptance to his university. Primary since he was able to demonstrate to the admissions committee he had an idea of what he was interested in. Thus strengthening his application. Similarly, Victor also agreed having a clear defined major helped them with the acceptance process. Victor shared his opinion in this matter with the following:

Not necessarily. I, I think for the, for the admissions process if, if, if you have your, your major ahead of time and, and you’ve taken the prerequisites and, and, and kind of show I don’t know like a, like a path towards a major I think that that would be better for the admissions process.

Other students who disagreed pointed to their desire to succeed as a contributor to their success, rather than the selection of a major. “I know that I want to practice law and that’s my end goal. So I stayed focused on that end goal. I think just being educated was, as the main focus of me,” Lloyd explained.

### *Family*

During this particular sub theme participants got every emotional. While many agreed their peers, university initiative, staff, administrators, and early decisions on a major played a key role in their academic and social success at the university, a majority claimed their families played the biggest role. Participants spoke highly of the role their parents had on their success. Victor remarked:

My parents definitely when it came to, to school they always supported us right. They said go to school, but, but they couldn’t . . . I don’t know they didn’t tell us oh you got this financial aid deadline coming up or let’s work on that personal statement. You know my parents couldn’t do that. When I wanted to transfer, my

parents said well you know we'll support you. We don't know how but, but, but we'll support you. That was always big to me you know whether it was financially that they helped me out or, or anything that I needed. I, I know that I could always go to my parents.

Justin attributed his success to the support he received from his parents as well. In his following quote he examines the differences between student who receive support from their families and those who do not:

I'd say I stand out. I try to go above and beyond the classroom at all times. And some people they just don't. I've had like a bunch of friends who were I mean on different . . . all sides of the spectrum. Some come from public schools, some come from private and you can tell like the upbringing of supportive and encouraging family and those from a non supportive family by what they did in high school . . . I would say like my upbringing and my family support were really separate me with my life. My mom always used to be on my case. I mean some people they tell their mom they got a D and you know they're like oh well do better next time. If I told my mom I got a D she's like well what do you need to do to, to get that up? And she'll talk to me like why don't you go to your teacher, why don't you go to your advisor? She'll give me examples of what to do instead of you know basically settling for less.

Although a number of the participants came from a traditional household that consisted of a mother and a father, many of the participants mentioned their mother as the contributor. Leonard shared: "I just say that my mother is really cause she, she's been like really great to me. Always so encouraging, always positive like really helping me



out so much when, whenever she can, so selfless. So I would say yeah my mother would be number one.” Other participants spoke of the active role their mother took in their education. Janaya remember:

She you know made sure that we were in good schools. You know she always knew what we were studying in class and you know what our teachers you know were teaching us or you know kind of had a relationship with . . . because I was in private school our classes were smaller you could have more of a relationship with your teachers to say well you know what’s going on with Janaya? Is she doing okay?

A number of participants discussed how due to the dedication and sacrifices of their parents, they wanted to work hard to repay their parents. Gladys offered this quote regarding taking care of her parents:

I think that I work hard and I’m going to work hard so that I can support my mother and my family when I get older. I think that like is without question, it’s kind of interrelated to them so I do all the hard work for them basically.

While many of the participants came from household where one or both parents had a college diploma, a majority did not.

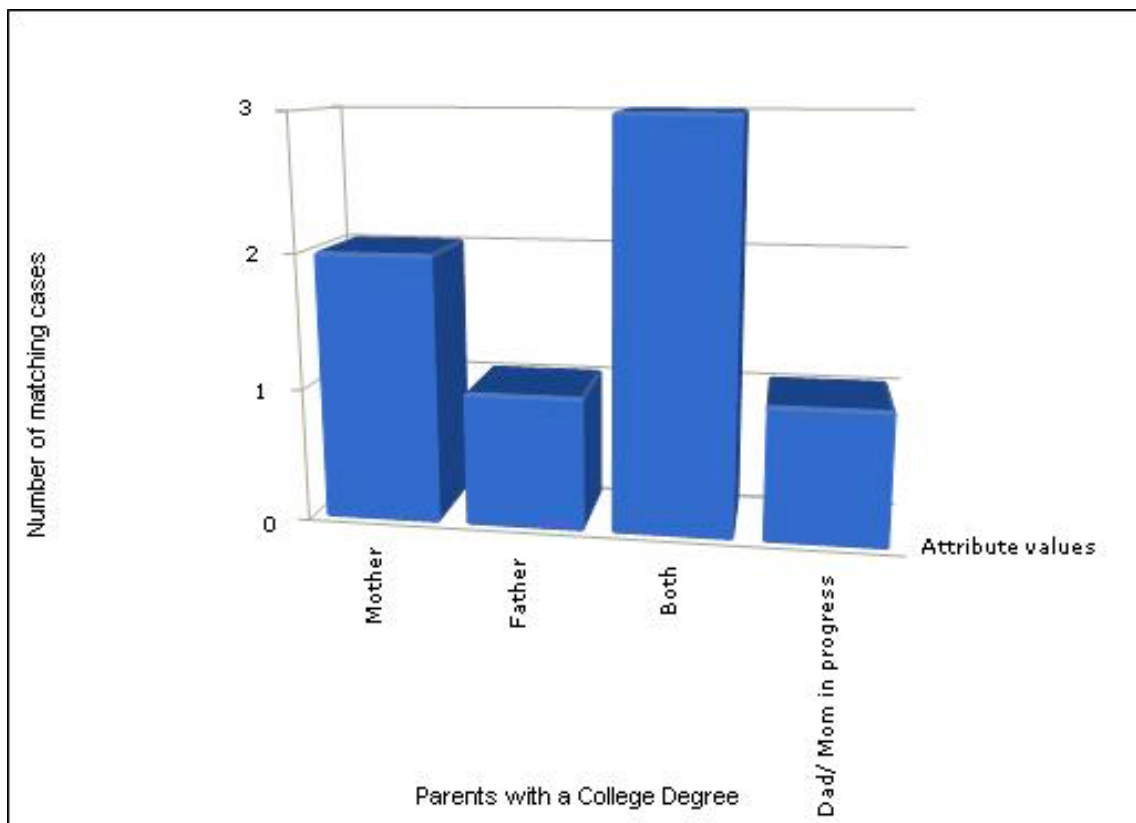


Figure 6. *Visual Diagram Documenting Participants' Parent's Postsecondary Education*

Cases = 7

Despite the difference in educational capital of the two homes, participants shared similar stories of their parents stressing education throughout their upbringing. Dannielle shared how her parents place such high value on education. According to Dannielle, her mother home schooled her because of the ineptitude of Sacramento public school system in her area and lack of funds to send her to private school. Participants also remembered their parents stressing the benefits of getting an education. Many of the parents point to this as a means of escaping the struggles they were raising their children in. Students pointed to this to explain why many of their parents were in significant debt as result of struggling to pay for their education. “My parents have taken out so much loans just so I

can succeed. I can't afford to fail. Not when they invested so much into me and my brother, Christian noted." Lloyd poignantly explained the impact of his parents' sacrifice on his ability to remain motivated with the following statement:

With respect to my parents' socioeconomic status, both of my parents worked. However, it seemed as though, you know, that money didn't stretch very far as far as taking care of family expenses and then still having funds to, to take care of ourselves aside from that. So it seemed like a, a bi-weekly struggle. My parents definitely lived paycheck to paycheck growing up. So even though they tried to, tried to help you know make sure I didn't really want for a lot of things, it still wasn't realistic with the, the funds that they had. With respect to my outlook on education, my parents instilled a strong drive within me at a young age to be educated. My father said to me that my only job was to learn as a child and to, to better myself and to put myself in a position where I would be subservient to no one.

Family member that consisted of relatives beyond mothers and father was also instrumental to the success of these high-achievers. Several students could not identify just one family member to attribute their success to due to the manner in which they viewed family. Omar provided the following insight into this:

I lived with my father and grandmother and aunt. And I lived with everybody pretty much. With Latinos it's, it's immediate family; it's not just brother, sister or whatever. Pretty much everybody. And then we . . . even if we didn't live in the same house they lived across the street, they lived two blocks away.

Other members of family that contributed to the achievers success were spouses.

“Coming up here, moving out here with my wife and, and, and not having a family I, I, I mean without my wife I mean I wouldn’t know how, how I’d be able to, to, to get through the day sometimes,” Victor emotionally mentioned.

*Me, Myself, and I*

The participants displayed a great sense of humility when discussing individuals who had contributed to their achievements. Rarely did the achievers mention themselves as a reason for their success. It was only after being asked directly how much credit was owed to them that they acknowledged their individual dedication and efforts as helping to produce countless accomplishments. Justin commented:

Just basically I get, I mean anybody could tell you anything but you need to execute it yourself. You need to find out what’s really right for yourself. I was the person who drove 8 hours in a day to get my internship. I was the person who was studying late at night, even though people were telling me like this is college I need to buckle down some.

Chiquita shared a similar option: “I feel as though I am. I’m the one who took the classes, I’m the one who studied, I’m the one who pulled all nighters, you know, to get the grades that I got.”

Throughout the interviews, participants spoke of having to advocate for themselves. According to them their universities provided many opportunities, however students were only able to benefit from them if they were self motivated. One student remarked: “The benefits are not just going to come to you while you sit in your room playing play station.” Lloyd remarked: “They, my actual experience here at ... has

differed from that which I experienced at ... But it's more or less just furthered in my mind the fact that you have to be your own advocate." Janaya provided even more depth to this:

I found that ... apart from it being a really great institution like the reputation of the school precedes the actual experience particularly for undergraduates you learn to be very self-reliant, self-sufficient, you get more of an education in being ... And it's like you really learn how to be an advocate for yourself. There's no handholding, there's no like hey you're a student of anything. It doesn't matter if you're a student of color, it's like you're just a student. It's like people say if you need a resource, if you need support you got to go find it. No one's looking to bring that resource to you. I think that's probably the biggest lesson that people learn kind of coming to ...

Another achiever shared similar thoughts:

As a student you have to be your own advocate and you have to seek out people and you have to seek out those opportunities. But they are here. And you just have to take advantage of them. So with respect to the potential for growth, there's a, a very I don't want to say very great but there's a high potential for growth here at ... but you just have to take advantage of it.

### *Identifying as a Person of Color*

Although initially participants reluctantly mentioned themselves as a contributor to their success, once they began to speak, additional reflections were offered. Due to these reflections, the topic of racial identity was examined. As a result identifying as a person of color emerged as a sub theme of this thematic category. A majority of the

participants spoke of how they used their identity as Black, African American, Latino, or Other as a motivation to excel. Gladys noted:

It's been like a puzzle because some, I carry that with me and everywhere I go. I carry the whole idea of we're just, we're complicated people, and I have to do well. So stepping into certain classrooms it's like I don't fit in. But then other classrooms I feel like I can wiggle in and I feel more comfortable and that's the same way that I feel when I was searching through different groups on campus. Some, some places I just didn't blend with the people ... It helped to focus me.

The achievers spoke of how fortunate they realized they were to attend such a prestigious university, and didn't want to waste that opportunity. This was reflected in Dannielle quote in which she explains the following:

I think it's made me work harder ... And I guess that's increased as every semester goes by because ... I'm an Afro studies minor and taking those class really makes you aware of the opportunities that you have here and kind of you know how a lot of people don't get, don't get this. And so it just kind of puts in your mind you know get the most out of it you know ... And so I guess that's made me like just appreciate the opportunities and work harder at them.

Victor shared a similar perspective regarding the opportunity to attend his university as a person of color. "Oh yeah that's had a major impact. ...I mean specifically as a Latino I, I definitely feel that, it's something ... I always kind of see that as like a pride right. Cause everybody applies to ... but, not everybody got in." Others spoke of skin color remaining at the forefront of their mind. Serving as a reminder of the struggles their race had endured. "I know when this school was founded people that looked like me couldn't

attend. "I am here for those who weren't allowed to come before me, and those who will come after me," one student shared.

Serving as a representative of their race also played a role in their success. All of the participants mentioned how they recognized their actions and success helped to influence students, faculty, and administrators perceptions of their race. Many spoke of their responsibility to dispel stereotypes of lateness, disengagement, and poor work ethic. Thus, several achievers spoke of sitting in the front of their classroom and raising their hands to answer and ask the tough questions. "Basically the ratio of Black males succeeding in my field is low, and I do notice that I'm the only one in the majority of like my harder classes. And I do see that as a problem. So I represent because I have to," Charles reflected. Angela expressed similar reflection. "I think it's been significant because I do understand how underrepresented people like me are."

The motivation generated from a strong identification of self was apparent with all the participants of this study. Again participants repeatedly mention how knowing they were a person of color kept them motivated, focused, and unable to quit. Lloyd provided his reflection of this:

I feel I have a strong sense of identity and a strong sense of self and who I am and my abilities. And I think that that's one thing that has remained constant regardless of everything else that has happened or you know obstacles that I've faced is that I know who I am. And I retain that and that's something I've never let go of. So with respect to my identity here at the university, I just look at myself and know who I am. And then that carries me through and I have

confidence in everything that I do because I know that again I was put here to do great things. And that's ... I will achieve nothing short of that.

Refusing to allow their identity as a person of color to dominate them also contributed to the achievers success. A handful of achievers spoke of how knowing they were a minority caused them to not allow this fact to consume their daily activities. "I was too busy succeeded to worry about, oh by the way I'm Black," Christian remarked.

Participants spoke of how several students they knew were more focused on being a person of color who complained about being marginalized rather than using that as a motivator to succeed. Participants mentioned how not concerning themselves with a reality they had no control over helped them. Janaya commended:

I didn't necessarily see it as, as like oh I need to do this because I'm Black. Or I need to be high achieving you know here at ... because I'm black. Like I never you know I, I see that level of like racial ignorance to some extent being almost a blessing in that sense is I didn't feel like I needed to censor myself or I didn't need to you know not do things or do things in a certain way because I thought people were going to perceive me because of you know my color.

#### *Identifying as a Transfer Student*

Motivation derived from ones identity was not limited to just race. As the participants shared their lived experiences as transfer student, it became apparent their identity as a transfer student had a profound impact on their success. As previously discussed participants spoke of numerous unfavorable and hostile responses they received from representatives from all groups at their university. In chapter two, examples of



stereotyping and discrimination to transfer students were described as a common occurrence, the following information was new to me.

Despite attending a predominantly white institution, participants spoke of how their transfer identity was more of a hurdle than their minority status. When asked to explain one participant shared the following:

I've been a Black woman all my life; therefore I've had my entire life to adjust and deal with the criticism and issues that comes with that. I've been a transfer student for two years. That gives me less time to deal with the stupidity and ignorance of individuals.

Other participants shared stories of students of color discriminating against them based on the fact they transferred from a branch campus. "I remember ... told me when I graduate from here I won't really be a graduate of ... since I started off at a ... campus," Justin remarked. Another student shared:

I remember telling a friend of mine what my GPA was, and he responded by telling me of course you have a good GPA. You started off at a branch campus with easy professors. You didn't have to come up here and take all these hard classes and fail and learn from your mistake. Your lack of performance in high school made it easier for you in college. I got punished for being smart. You better have good grades coming from a branch campus. Otherwise you would look really stupid.

Participants expressed a deep and profound disconnect from their minority peers at times as a result of their hurtful and unsupportive beliefs. "Imagine being Black at this school and feeling like you can't connect with anyone. Not even the Black students".

Rather than accepting the discouraging environment presented to them, a number of students channeled their frustration and used it as a motivator. Charles remarked: “I was more aware of being a transfer student than I was of being a Black man”. I wanted to show people, especially my Black friends I wasn’t any lesser than them”. George also used his identity as a transfer student to motivate him to succeed. Evidence of this is seen in the following quote:

I applied for the Goldwater scholarship up here and there was a lot of turmoil because I came from another campus because usually people come up here and their GPAs go down significantly you know after the first semester. But after lots of arguing and convincing I said it won’t happen and in reality it didn’t happen, which was good. So I was still able to go forward although I was kind of insulted that just because I came from this X demographic or X thing they judged me pretty much.

It is important to note that the university had reservations regarding George’s performance despite having a 3.9 GPA. When asked how his university’s lack of confidence in him made him feel, he responded:

It made me feel, it made me feel little and it made me have, feel more pressured. But it kind of motivated me just . . . that is the general trend. Like probably statistically significant like 95, 98% probably their GPAs significantly go down. So I just wanted to prove that stigma wrong.

Gladys believed that because of dedication to performance and desire to change the stereotypes associated with transfer students, some perceptions have begun to change. “I think people forget that about me, you know they don’t even think about it any more.”

### *Rationale for Involvement*

To fully comprehend the 14 achieving students' motivation to actively participate in out-of-classroom activities it is critical to examine the foundation of their motivation. The fifth major finding of this study explains the basis by which these students chose to allocate significant portions of their college life to out-of-classroom activities. While thousands of college students participate in student organizations daily, these students did not merely participate—they held leadership positions. This thematic category is critical to this study because it provided substantial perspective of these participants' morality, ethics, characters, and ideals. The following sub themes are discussed: (1) Involvement prior to college, (2) Continuing the legacy, (3) For the students' color, and (4) To provide a voice in the room.

#### *Involvement Prior to College*

During the individual interviews it became apparent that a number of the students participated in out-of-classroom activities throughout high school. Some of these activities included but are not limited to the student government, high school and professional bands, debate teams, virtual business clubs, and the school newspaper. Initially I thought all 14 participants became student leaders in college due to their involvement in high school. This was not the case. The rationale for involvement for these students came elsewhere, and is discussed in a separate sub theme. As for the students who participated in high school activities many of those who participated stressed that student involvement had been a way of life for some time. As a result they could not imagine attending school and not taking an active role at their institutions. Charles commented:

“I’ve been a student leader since high school. I became a student leader at . . . , and then I did the same up here.”

Other students spoke of how much they benefited from out-of-classroom activities in the past. Therefore they made conscious decision to seek opportunities to get involved at their new institutions. As one achiever put it: “involvement kept me out of trouble in high school, so I made sure I got involved in something at every school I attended after that. When you have time as a Black man, that’s when you get yourself in trouble.”

Another contributing factor to these former high school leaders was the issues of boredom. Many participants indicated their fear of being bored and stagnant without a life out side of the classroom. Christina put it simply in her quote: “really I guess because I get bored fast.”

It is important to note that although many of the former participants had a burning desire to take on leadership positions at their new institutions, several did not jump into involvement their first semester. When asked why they chose to wait Christina share: “I learned the hard way to strategically get involved instead of just doing everything. I did that at . . . and my grades suffered.” Other student expressed similar sentiments. They wanted to acclimate themselves to the university as a whole before taking on time consuming activities. For the most part their acclimation concerns dealt with establishing an academic comfort. Leonard noted: “I needed to sink my teeth into school first before I sunk my teeth in activities. I was here to excel academically first.”

### *Continuing the Legacy*

Another contributing factor to participation in out-of-classroom activities derived from the participants’ feelings that they owed something to the student leaders who had

been there before them. Several students spoke with intense passion regarding students who took them under their wing during their first year at their new university. According to some participants, established student leaders made it a priority to mentor and cultivate them during their first semester and year at the new university. These student mentors introduced the students to countless resources. Some students claimed they would not have known about these resources had it not been for the help of their peer mentors. One student shared:

When I first got up here I wasn't even thinking about becoming a student leader. I wanted to go to parties, meet girls, go to the football games, have fun, oh and yeah do well in school. Mike took me under his wing I guess and helped me to focus on things beyond superficial stuff. Before I knew it I was involved. I realized later how much it helped, guess when I needed a resource I always knew where to go. It's no coincidence I'm graduating in two years and my friends who didn't have a mentor have no idea when they will be done.

Other students spoke about the devotion of time senior student leaders gave to their development. "I mean he was always meeting up with me and making sure I was on my grind," Justin said. Some examples of mentoring included taking students to student organization meetings, the university writing center, and various resource offices at the university.

It is important to note the importance of these student leaders as role models. Having a student of color to model yourself after during one's transition period is an invaluable resource. One female student shared:

I didn't know how to dress up for interviews. People always tell you to dress up or wear business casual. But if you don't know how to put an outfit together you are at a serious disadvantage. I didn't have that example growing up. She thought me how to get it together.

Based on the numerous contribution made by former student leaders in their lives, the participants felt responsible to the new generation of student leaders. Many of the participants expressed how honored they were to have the opportunity to continue the legacy of effective mentoring. In addition to this, a number of participants claimed their commitment to continuing the legacy help them as well. According to achievers giving back gave them a sense of purpose. This in turned keep them motivated to do well in school. As one student put it "if I'm not in school, that's one less mentor the future leaders have."

Not to be lost in the importance of this sub theme is the debt the participants felt they owed to professionals at the university. A number of participants expressed they felt it was their responsibility to mentor students and point them in the direction of the administrators and staff who had been so instrumental in their development as leaders. According to them they wanted to make sure other students new of the advocates that existed within some of the university's offices.

#### *For the Students' Color*

Perhaps a bigger motivation for student involvement was the responsibility the students felt they owed to the over student of color community. It was pretty apparent that these students new the biggest issues that their particular ethnic group suffered from, and were committed to aggressively addressing it. The number of student organizations

the participations held leadership positions was countless. However different these organization my have been, all of the students expressed how they made sure issues that impacted students of color were address in some manner.

While the retention rates and issues of racism have been a staple of many minority based student initiatives, these participants looked to create more programs that centered on the holistic needs of students of color. Examples of this included creating university wide health fairs to address the various health disparities minorities face. Creating book swap programs to combat students failing to stay competitive in class because they can't afford the expensive textbooks. During finals week students organize study a thons to promote purposeful and meaningful studying.

A number of the students felt it was important to direct their attention primarily to issues that directly impacted their community, rather than issues that affected all students at their university. This discussion was made for a number of reasons. One primary reason was to desire to put all their energy into overarching goal, with the hopes of generating optimal results.

Not all students brought into this philosophy. Many student leaders did not simply hold leadership positions in predominantly minority organizations. When asked why she decided to do this Christina responded: "you can't look to bring about change if you only speak to people who already agree with you." Other students shared similar thought regarding this. Chiquita explained:

You are less credible as a student leader if all you want to do is make contributions to your own people. You have to make people realize if one population is struggling the university struggles. I discovered many of the issues

Black students face are quite similar to White students. Blacks are not the only ones who struggle to pay for school and books. It's important that we talk about these things.

Several student shared they realized many of the predominantly white student organizations had far more resources than the predominantly minority clubs. The achievers realized joining these organizations would greatly benefit the minority community. In many cases these crossover students were the only minority representative. While environments like this may have caused trepidation for many student leaders of color, these students refuse to use this as an excuse. Due to their involvement in these clubs and organizations, collaboration became a tradition between the predominately white organizations and the predominately minority organizations. One such example was an annual week of collaboration of events between the two community aimed at promoting a multicultural environment.

Another benefit that resulted from these partnerships was an elimination of perceived stereotypes of Black and Latino students. Several students spoke of how they intentional set out to dispel the false perception that existed regarding students of color at their university. One student commented: "I had sure I was on time for all meetings, spoke well, and dressed appropriately. Even if it was a casual meeting I had on a tie. It was important for them to know we don't all look like the people in the BET videos." Participants spoke of how some Whites students were shocked and pleased to discover many of their preconceived beliefs were untrue. Gladys shared:

When I started working with the White student leaders they were shocked to discover I could hold my own as an intellectual minority student. They were



surprised that I didn't just listen to Salsa music. Yes I like Coldplay. Actually one of the girls is now a good friend of mine.

Of all the comments made by the participants, Lloyd offered one of the most passionate reasons for his involvement:

There needs to be a greater support system. Yes, the responsibility falls on the actual person themselves to have the drive to achieve and excel. But they also need support, a strong support system, and they need to be given the tools by which they can truly excel and succeed. And I feel like that's one of the premier ways in which the educational system period at all different levels has failed these students. And hopefully you know with people like you and myself trying to combat these types of issues we can truly affect change. And that's what I hope to you know dedicate a portion of my life to—affecting change and helping those who are less fortunate.

#### *To Provide a Voice in the Room*

Serving as a representative for students of color in predominately white organizations would have been enough for most minority student leaders. However, because these students had built a reputation of going above and beyond they realized true change could only occur if they broadened their ambitions. A number of students spoke about how they strategically sought out opportunities to meet and speak with “the powers that be” or “the movers and shaker” of the university. In other words, they sought opportunities to interact with senior-level administrators at the universities in the hope of generating much needed change. Charles offered his rationale for interacting with administrators:

There are students here that complain about the state of affairs at this university. Their right! Things are messed up, but all they do is complain. I didn't want to sit on the sideline and complain with them. I took my concerns into the game they dealt us and made plays. I wanted to be the change I wanted to see in the world. As the participants explained in detail their missions and goals for their university community I could not help but feel impressed by their forward thinking. Rarely do you see such character in individuals so young.

Participants repeatedly spoke of the importance of having the concerns of minority students be at the forefront of the administrations minds. "I discovered that there were individuals looking out for our best interest. But if we don't tell them what our interest are than how can they help," Angela shared. Lloyd had similar comments regarding university offices seeking his help: "I've come to be you know one of those people that administrators look at as you know someone to come to for I guess you know some advice in some capacity or direction with respect to the student perspective on things."

In many cases these students were the only students of color representation in rooms filled with members of board of trustees, university provost, and directors to name a few. When asked to reflect on how important they felt their role was Lloyd explained:

I guess being put in key leadership positions at the university and being an advocate for students you're placed in a predicament where you are a representative voice for the student body. And I consider myself to be a representative voice both for the multiethnic university student body but also all

students at the university who seek betterment, who seek to be treated fairly. I can't think of a bigger pressure and honor than that.

When asked to reflect on how much their devotion to their community helped to shape policy at their university Omar offered the following observation: "I think there's a distinction between the resources that are, that were conceptualized by ... These are resources that were fought for. These were not resources that were just easily gained or just given by the administration or any like higher, higher level." It was very apparent that these students enhanced their university due to their commitment to serve as a voice for their student constituents. One achiever noted: "After my meetings with the administrators they'll pull me aside and say I really, really appreciated your comments and you really, really made us think about an aspect that we hadn't thought about before."

#### *Benefits of Leadership and Academic Achievements*

During the data collection process it became quite apparent that these students enhanced the lives of many as a result of their commitments and selflessness. Beneficiaries of their devotion included the general student body, student organizations, university offices, and the university community as a whole. While the participants admirably served their community without the selfish mindset of "what's in it for me", they did benefit from their altruism. Due to their interactions with so many high-ranking administrators and faculty members at their university these students were afforded advantage and privileges most student never receive. The sixth major finding addresses what some of these perks were. Within this theme the following sub themes are

discussed: (1) Opportunities to meet famous individuals, (2) Scholastic opportunities, and (3) Professional opportunities.

### *Opportunities to Meet Famous Individuals*

Participants spoke of dinner with deans, provost, chancellors, and even the university president being common occurrences throughout their college experience. “I had dinner at the vice-president for student affairs house. No one gets to do that. She had a dinner at her house with powerful people and sent me an invite. I was one of only a few students there. The only minority”, one student noted. Attendance to events became common occurrences. “I feel like I’m always getting invited to something by the university. Some weeks I don’t worry about what’s in my fridge, cause I know I have two or three dinners or luncheons to attend,” Lloyd noted. Similarly, George commented: “It’s to a point now if there is an event on campus I expect to receive a phone call or email.”

Due to frequent interaction with these administrators, students spoke of how common it was for them to walk the campus and have a senior-level administrator stop them and speak with them. Leonard shared:

“A couple of times I was walking on campus with my friends and admin people would stop me to talk. My friends once joked you know everybody I wouldn’t be surprise if you knew the president. I did responded by saying actually. I laughed. I didn’t want to come off like I was cocky.”

As their fellow students began to take notice of the relationships they had with university official, staff members as so began taking note. One student spoke of a staff member asking him to put in a good word for her with the head of the search committee. “She said

that my word held a lot of weight. I remember thinking in my head isn't this backwards. Aren't students supposed to ask staff for recommendations?" Another student spoke of his supervisor asking him to speak with the director of the alumni association to see if he could receive a complimentary ticket to the homecoming game. "I asked him why he wanted me to ask rather than him. He said he knows you better."

The relationship established with senior-level administrators also led to interesting opportunities. One participant shared a story in which a member of the board of trustees called him regarding how students learn in a large classroom. Two days later he received another call from another trustee requesting permission to attend class with him the following day. "So there I was in class with one of the trustees. Unbelievable."

The memorable interactions these achievers experienced went beyond members of the board of trustees, provost, and presidents. Participants spoke of meeting with countless public figures, political activists, politicians, entertainers, and scholars. Receiving tickets to an event where the famous guest was speaking was the minimum form of interaction. In many cases participants were allowed to go backstage, have dinner, and attend private socials. An example of these interactions occurred during Barack Obama's visit to the eastern university. While visiting the university, Lloyd was able to play a game of basketball with Mr. Obama.

### *Scholastic Opportunities*

The benefits afforded to the students went beyond just social. Due to how well they excelled in their classes, participants were given numerous opportunities for academic development. Students were allowed to attend professional conferences with distinguished faculty from their departments. In some cases they presented with the professors.

Opportunities such as these generally are only offered to masters and doctoral students. Achievers were also given opportunities to engage in research with professor. In some instances research request came from faculty members the student had never taken a class with. One achiever noted how he given the opportunity to conduct research with a professor he had never met before from the University of Michigan because of a recommendation made by the professor's colleague. Similarly, George spoke of a similar occurrence: "A research professor contacted me to see if I was, wanted to be involved with research completely out of the blue, which I said yes to. Now I'm still doing research for him, which was good."

In addition to participating in research, achievers were able to publish in refereed journals. For example, George had five refereed journal publications. In addition to this he was the only undergraduate student featured in the American Chemical Society annual report. Other students have traveled overseas to collect data with renowned scholars from their departments.

### *Professional Opportunities*

The 14 high-achievers were fortunate to receive other benefits aside from access to celebrities and research opportunities. Performing well in the classroom and beyond has afforded them with numerous internship opportunities. Many resulted in pre-graduation offers. An indicator of their market competitiveness is reflected in an offer received by one of the participants. According to the achiever, they received a \$100,000 salary offer upon graduation. George shared an example of how his success has impacted his employment prospects:

I think that pretty much it just leveraged me to be like when I go to the career fairs you know I give them my resume and then almost every company that I go approach their career fair they really take an interest in you. They'll invite you to come to like a side dinner somewhere. They'll try and take you in schmooze you and feed you with expensive foods and try to get you to work for them. So I, when I talk to my friends that doesn't happen to them. I thought it was like a common thing and they're like oh what are you talking about? It's like oh.

Justin described his strong relationship with his department—one that provided him with up-to-date information on possible jobs. In fact, his postgraduate employment with Sirius Satellite Radio came as a result of information passed on from the Dean of his department.

Six of the participants either graduated in the spring or during the summer. All six had job offers prior to graduating. When asked about the biggest contributor, Gladys said “networking.” Gladys went on to say, “the networking that I’ve done I think I’ve been able to avoid the gatekeepers and find, find people who are going to open doors for me to continue my education and help me to reach my dreams.”

#### *Transferable Skill-Sets*

Operating as a high achiever provided the 14 participants with numerous experiences. These experiences led to success out of the classroom. It is important to note that not all of their experiences were successful. Despite challenges, the participants mentioned growth that had occurred during those trying times. As a result they now view those triumphs under disastrous circumstances as a success.

With each welcome or unwelcome successful opportunity, the participants were able to gain knowledge of self and hone specific proficiency, thereby creating a stockpile of transferable aptitudes and know-how they could use upon graduation. The seventh thematic category focuses on the specific skill sets the high-achievers accumulated as well as how different their lives would have been if they weren't high achievers. Participants discussed numerous transferable skills. The following sub-themes are based on the skills stories mentioned most frequently. (1) Confidence, (2) Impact on career, (3) More well rounded, (4) Time management (5) Performing well in the classroom due to being busy, (6) Humility, and (7) Life without achievement.

### *Confidence*

Possessing talents and abilities is a very important component in achieving success beyond the college career. However, those attributes are inconsequential if the individual possessing those talents lacks the confidence and communication skills to utilize them. This sub-theme has to do with the maturation of these high-achieving students' confidence.

A number of participants mentioned the extraordinary impact of their success on their confidence. In several cases students spoke of how prior to performing at a high level they lacked confidence in themselves. This lack of confidence often impacted their ability to communicate in a manner required of a student leader or an engaged student. Christina shared:

When I was growing up I never use to talk. Matter fact, my brothers use to talk for me. It was just a partner that excited most of my life. I wouldn't speak my



option around people I wasn't comfortable with, or knew. And class, forget about that. If I didn't know the material I wasn't gonna ask.

Feelings such as Christina's began to change as the participants began to accumulate experiences. Christina noted:

I did that and I did like other retreats, just random retreats throughout the year and stuff like that. So I did . . . that's how I met new people and met people around the campus and stuff like that. So yeah I think, I think that my extracurricular activities really made me who I am now cause I wasn't involved. I was really, really quite.

A number of participants shared examples similar to Christina's. Chiquita offered the following:

Okay. I definitely gained more confidence. I was never the person that you know kind of walked up to somebody and initiated conversation. But definitely with those organizations with all of the networking that I've done with those organizations, all the communicating I've done, I've become a lot more personable, more open and I communicate better I feel.

One participant explained his growth as: "I was like a mime before, now I can't shut up."

Not all of the participants believed they had gained confidence in themselves for the first time while in college. Several participants spoke about having confidence in their abilities prior to college. "I was always confident," Charles noted. Whenever their confidence began, all of the students agreed their success at their four-year institutions played a role in those feelings of confidence. One student shared:

I use to think I was confident, but I was actually cocky. For no reason might I add. Cause I hadn't done anything worth being cocky about. Growing up, you had to have swagga. It wasn't until I started excelling in numerous activities that I truly had become confident.

Developing confidence has played a critical role in how these participants commanded the respect of their peers. Moreover, it has made them competitive interns and future employees. Several students spoke of their increased ability to articulate their thoughts in a professional manner, in student organizational meetings, classroom discussions, interviews, and summer internship. Lloyd noted: "The factor of not being intimidated and knowing that I have the ability to critically reason and to know that my opinion is valued." Other participants spoke of their impressive maturation. Karla remarked:

I used to hate presentations. I remember once I had a class presentation and I put it on PowerPoint. I walked in front of the class pressed the button and sat down. The class looked at me like I had two heads. I was so embarrassed, but I didn't know what to do. I wasn't a good public speaker. But now I can do presentations with no problem.

### *Impact on Career*

The second identified sub theme dealt with the participants' career goals. The data showed a unanimous consensus that their careers aspirations had been spectacularly influenced by their achievements. As discussed in previous themes, the more success the students obtained, the more ambitious their goal grew. While earlier discussions focused on their ambitions related to their postsecondary careers, this sub theme speaks of life beyond college.

According to the participants, life as a high-achieving student of color afforded them numerous skill sets that they could apply in “the real world.” Several spoke of learning how to properly conduct themselves in meetings. “Yeah so all our meetings were run under the Parliamentary Procedure model. You know Robert's Rules. I had to learn how to properly second a motion and such... I learned a lot about running meetings,” according to Leonard. In addition to gaining knowledge of proper procedure, students spoke of becoming more professional, and specifically about conducting fundamental tasks. Charles gave some insight into this:

It also promoted professionalism on certain executive board meetings that I was involved in. I had to dress up. I had to come in, I had to actually write a report for an agenda. I had to fill in the report and I had to give weekly updates on what we were doing within the programs.

Charles's story was similar to that of many of the participants in the study. Many of the high achievers spoke of the benefits and real-world applicability of their experiences.

Lloyd asserted:

I mean there's a certain aspect of critical reasoning, real world application, and responsibility which is placed upon someone in those positions of leadership and someone who's placed in those positions of being the only student voice on committees with high level administrators. Not just you know faculty and staff at the university, but people who make the decisions with respect to the direction of the University on a, on a larger level. So having the opportunity to serve on those type of committees has given me real world experience, which will carry me, will stay with me for the remainder of my natural life.

In some instances students were able to obtain opportunities to enhance their resume despite their lack of experience. Leonard remarked about his internship with CBS San Francisco, in which he lacked the experience required for the internship, that he was hired anyway because of his extensive leadership at his university.

I got my internship at CBS she was actually . . . my boss was a woman of color and I think that she liked that a lot and she saw that I participated in not only, not only like you know things that related to me but also the vast ....community. And I think that she was, she was willing to take more of a chance on me cause she saw that. I was active in my community, different communities.

Other students shared comparable stories. Chiquita offered this example: “I was not qualified for the job, but my resume showed so much leadership. They gave me a chance. When the summer was over they offered me a position. They told me they wanted me to work their fulltime when I was done with school.”

Chiquita’s story summed up the personality of many of these high achievers. Due to being aggressive and “seize the moment” individuals, the participants have made the most of their opportunities. This attribute has served them well. Leonard offered the following reflection:

I think that’s it’s basically prepared me I mean you especially if you’re going to be involved, if you’re going to be in media you have to be willing to step up and you know put your best, put your best work forward and take lead and take kind of charge of things. I think that it’s helped me help . . . I, I’ve learned how to kind of do that in groups and just kind of voice my opinion and listen to others at the same time.

As these impressive students began their professional careers it is clear their success during their postsecondary career has catapulted them onto a path of future achievements.

Lloyd commented: "I think that all of the training which we received during our undergraduate career is meant to help us in the future as a professional." Justin offered a similar observation: "Basically I mean everything prepares you for a next step. And once I got to that step it was just you know just being out on my own and learning from my experiences and learning from what people have taught me."

### *More Well Rounded*

Excelling as a high-achieving student is not easy. It requires an individual to achieve in and beyond the classroom. In order to accomplish this, a student must possess a particular skill. Throughout their college experience, these participants were able to hone in on the skill of being well-rounded. Throughout the data collection process it became very apparent that the participants intentionally strove to develop multiple aspects in order to grow holistically. Such development made them see the world differently. Angela attempted to explain this in her following statement:

Cause I think it makes you more well rounded just to, to get exposed. I think that there are a lot of people, not just in the English department, but in general that when they don't get involved you meet them and they're incredibly out of touch. And that makes them just unattractive to people.

By placing an emphasis on having a personality that is fully developed in all aspects, these participants were able to truly make the most of their college experience. Many felt that college was their opportunity to focus on different aspects of their identity, and as an opportunity to gain the art of learning and development, rather than a means to an end.

One student shared: “I came to school to obtain an education in every thing, not just my major. I wanted to learn life lessons.” Lloyd echoed a similar point-of-view. “All of the skills which we learn are meant in some way to help us better ourselves in the future. To become more educated, to make rational decisions, to think critically about those decisions which are made.”

Students with well-rounded personalities are generally highly recruited by multiple recruiters. Charles offered an example of how his balanced skill-sets made him a coveted intern.

When, when it comes to like applying for different internships they like to see that I’m involved. Not just you know staying in my room all day and you know reading books and stuff like that. They like to see you know how well I, I cope with my environment, how I’m making a major difference or how well I can juggle my time. So it definitely helped me with my resume a whole lot.

In some cases students candidly asserted that they placed more importance on their out-of-classroom learning than their classroom education. When asked to explain why, Christina contended:

I’d rather have a 2.5 and be involved with a bunch of things and then go to a job interview that somebody has a 4.0 who didn’t do anything but sit in their room. That person don’t know how to talk to people, that person don’t know how to do things.

Other students saw no need to place a higher focus on either academics or involvement. Some participants felt both aspects of their life were equally as important. Gladys offered the following conclusion:

I really know like it's important to have, have a balance in each one because being successful academically will help you be better as an activities because you'll bring more strength there. And being active also helps in the classroom so you don't, so you can bring from like the real life struggle into the, into the classroom and help other people see new perspective.

### *Time Management*

Succeeding as a student, as a leader, as a research assistant, and as an intern was not an easy task for these students. If it were that simple more students would excel at the same high rate that these achievers did. When asked how they were able to do so extremely well, the common response was time management. "Definitely time management. Mastering that; well trying to master that has paid great dividends," Karla commented. Several participants spoke of how due to the magnitude of their responsibilities they lacked the luxury of squandering time. As a result, the participants strategically organized the different areas of their lives to achieve maximum results. Leonard credited his ability to manage his time to electronic gadgets and calendars:

Yeah I had a Trio but now I have a, a different one. But it's like put all your schedules in .. everything you have to do, set reminders, which has been so helpful because like I'll be . . . you know I give myself like two hours before everything that I have to do. So I'm like whatever I'm doing you know and then I have a big calendar. I always have a big like four month calendar thing right above my desk and I just you know I'm good about writing things I have to do in there. That's basically how I stay organized.

Similar to Leonard, other participants made reference to using some form of a calendar.

Charles noted: “It forced me to get a planner because I know that if I fail to plan, I plan to fail. Basically I had to always plan ahead. It forced me to think two, three steps ahead.”

Developing this skill required simple and sometimes creative interventions on the students’ part. Leonard shared how he used the conventional space of the library as his means to succeed:

I mean it definitely was not easy. I spent a lot of time in the library. And I also had a roommate that was also in the fraternity as well and usually we were just always in the library really late. I think, and I think that it’s funny you know we sit still like had a lot of fun as well. We still managed to party. but I think that during the week I think just in the evenings like after our classes and everything it was just library and just study, relate you know get things done.

Christina spoke of using unconventional methods to balance her time. “I used to take my books to events. I would get to luncheons really early all dressed up with my schoolbag. I knew I had to be at the event, and I knew I had to study, so I did both, at the luncheon.”

Not all of the participants were able to bring their books to all events that they were required to or wanted to attend. Therefore, late nights become a common practice for many of these achievers. While staying up late to study doesn’t separate these students from most undergraduate students, staying up late after attending a party, or going to the bar does. Justin explained his late-night adventures, and how they set him apart from his peers:

Late nights and compromises basically. I’m really like a night owl. I’ll burn the midnight oil. Like I used to do this at ... all the time. I used to party with my friends like on a party day like a Saturday there will be a party. And then at 4:00



I'll be studying and then we get our grades and they'd get like a 2.0 but I'd get a 3.4 something. And they'd be like how did you do this? Like we was doing the same thing. I'd be like were you up at 4:00am? And they was like oh so that's what you do? Like they were made cause they were like they thought I was snaking them and stuff like that. So I mean just I mean after a party or after any late night activity I'll just pull out a school, school book and start studying.

*Performing Well in the Classroom Due to Being Busy*

Throughout this data collection process the participants discussed the countless activities they had willingly devoted their time and energy too. In some instances, participants poignantly expressed placing a bigger emphasis on the out of classroom area of their life, rather than the in class portion of their student existence. Regardless of which area was more important, they still saw it as a vital piece to the puzzle of their life. As a result, this led all of them to maintain a 3.0 GPA or higher at their four-year institutions. When asked how they were able to do this, the participants voiced a shocking explanation. According to the high-achievers, their sizeable and at times overwhelming schedules led to their academic achievements.

Out-of-classroom activities played a vital role in the academic achievements of these students in a number of ways. In many cases it helped the student to be more engaged in class discussions and projects. George remarked:

A lot of times it was these social activities that give me the motivation to go to class and keep me learning and it was those outside of classroom discussions about what happened in the classroom that really like fired, like added more fuel to like my drive.

While a number of participants shared similar opinions, many spoke of more profound benefits to being busy. The participants unanimously felt that their eventful lifestyles provided no time to “slack” on their work. George noted:

I have nothing to do and I have homework during the week, I'm not going to do that homework until the end of the week. But if I have a lot of things to do I have to organize my time so precisely. I only have so much time to do anything. So I'm much more efficient. I don't waste any time. If I wasn't involved I would waste a lot of time.

Some students claimed they did their best work when their “backs were against the wall.” When asked if they believed this was due to a chronic bad habit, Justin emphatically said no. They had examined the quality of their last-minute work and found it to be superior. George expressed the following. “I find myself and I find in general that when you don't have much time to do things, you do things better.”

Despite the assertions of Justin, procrastination emerged as a consistent attribute shared by many of the participants. Janaya shared:

I'm like I feel like if I don't have stuff to keep me busy then cause I have a really bad problem with procrastination you know you just kind of put it off. You know I'll do it later, I'll do it later. So it won't be as good. but if you're . . . I'm one of those people like if my life was very compartmentalized then I know it's like I need to get this done between this time and this time or it's not going to get done. And not getting it done is unacceptable. So you know having that sense of you know there are always things that I need to do and school was part of that and integrating it together I think was really important.

Another student shared: “Give me free time nothing gets done. Give me no time I can take on the world.”

In some cases students shared how their grade points averages were actually lower during the semester when their credit loads and out-of-classroom responsibilities were lighter. Conversely, in many cases the participants’ highest semester grade points averages occurred during the semester where their academic and out-of-classroom responsibilities were heaviest. Leonard remarked:

Surprisingly enough I think my last semester I was probably most involved with everything. I did the best I ever did. That’s when I was doing the fraternity and you know the, the other meetings for the other stuff. But I think that it, I think I did better when I was more involved. Like I think it kind of forced me to make, manage my time a little better. I think that when I had like my first semester I didn’t do that much. My grades were lower. I think that I had a lot of free time on my hands so I kind of had more time to slack off or you know not do anything. Leave everything to the last minute. So yeah it.. it was a total like the more I did the kind of better my grades were.

### *Humility*

With each accomplishment and each accolade, it could have been quite easy for these students to become cocky and self-absorbed. Society has shown us an abundance of examples of individuals who fell victim to these negative traits. Yet these students remarkably showed no sign of this. In many instances when referred to as high-achievers, or examples of success the participants were quick to deflect the attention elsewhere.

Lloyd commented: “It’s funny you mention the word academic success because I don’t

feel as though I have excelled or succeeded to my full ability academically.” Some participants questioned whether they were the best students to speak to about being a high-achiever transfer student despite their countless achievement. Janaya mentioned: “I mean before I agreed to do this interview I questioned if I qualified. I mean I know I have an ok 3.5 but I felt that was low compared to other students.”

As the interviews continued the participants were asked to reflect upon why their peers had nominated and elected them to leadership positions. Rather than stroking their ego, the participants humbly provided reasons for the favorable considerations of their peers. Christina shared: “Honestly I don’t know. A lot of positions I had I never thought I would win the positions.” Instead of stating how great they were, participants such as Lloyd commented:

The leadership positions which I have taken on aren’t positions by which I feel like okay I just have another position under my belt. But they are positions in which I feel like I can really affect change. And if I’m not successful in some capacity at doing that, I feel like I’m not doing my job and I shouldn’t be in the position. So that’s how I always look at my leadership positions. And I believe that in having that mentality that’s what has helped people I guess to I guess recognize me as a leader or, or have faith in my abilities as a leader.

Omar shared a similar mindset.

I think honestly I think they saw the sincerity like in me. Like there were, I think there were, there are people that are resume builders as opposed to people that actually want to make a difference. And I think they noticed that I’m one of those who want to make a difference not build resumes.

Another student commented: “It wasn’t about me pounding my chest and saying look how my of the man I am, it was about the group.”

It is important to note that all of the participants did not always view themselves as humble. A number spoke of previously being “full of themselves” and having to learn to be humble. George recalled: “It made me grow and it humbled me too at the same time cause when I was at .... and I was president at ... my ego was very large bluntly. But I was humbled as time passed on.” Christina commented: “So I was always kind of like a leader but it made me more of a, instead of a dictator a listener.” Several spoke of fellow students who were not effective leaders due to an authoritarian mentality. Students spoke of leaders who were not respectful of others’ opinions. After seeing poor examples of leadership they consciously made sure they remained open to others’ opinions.

Leonard shared his philosophy regarding being a leader and working as a team:

I’d definitely say the big thing is working in a team. I mean I think that you know it obviously wasn’t me by myself. I had to work with you know the fraternity where there’s 20 other people, Pre-Law Society there’s you know a number of people. And I think just teamwork is a good thing that I learned from there. You know just dealing with other people and getting things done because everyone has their own set of opinions and their own . . . they’re, they’re different ways of doing things. And you can’t always do simply what you want to do. You have to meet, have some kind of like halfway point.

Karla similarly noted: “It can’t be my way or no way.”

Quite a few students spoke of their evolution of philosophy regarding how to allocate duties. In many instances, these achievers were accustomed to accomplishing a

goal on their own. Yet after working with others, they realized it was more important to buy into the team concept. “Previously I kind of did things all by myself. I was really into doing by myself. I didn’t want to be with other people. But I’ve learned the benefits,” Danielle remarked. Other leaders spoke of learning the hard way the benefits of allocating duties. Because of their previous mindset they believed the work couldn’t get done if it wasn’t done by them. These ways of thinking sometimes led the participants to feel useless and stressed. Justin remarked:

I, I’ve tried to build communications with basically everybody because I mean after I’m gone I still want those communications to run accordingly because it’s not just when you’re here. I mean you can’t do the work all by yourself. I noticed that especially at a university this big. It’s important to trust your members to do the work.

### *Life Without Achievement*

Throughout this thematic category we had examined the transferable skills that the 14 high-achieving participants were able to obtain, develop, and improve upon throughout their tenure at their individual four-year institutions. The data showed growth in their confidence, improved career prospects, more balance, better management of their time, and humility. It would be easy to infer that none or most of these would not have occurred if they hadn’t excelled in multiple facets of their live. While this may be true, due to the number of reflections made by the participants in this area, it is important present their stories at the end of this particular theme.

During this portion of the interviews the participants reflected on a number of central aspects of their life that would have been vastly different if not for their achieving

identity. The first area was their ability to persist at their four-year institutions. Danielle noted:

I think it would be extremely different. I don't think I would be at this school probably. I think I would be . . . I don't know. Just, just somewhere else cause I guess those people don't seem really confident in my ability to do what I need to do and get what I want you know out of my education. And if I didn't have those I don't . . . I, I can't say for sure I would be around here but I can't say for sure.

Gladys provided additional insight related to leaving the university in the following introspective quote:

I would be depressed. I, I don't think I'd like you know . . . oh I don't know. Maybe I would have dropped out. I don't know. I mean if I would have really felt that isolated and I mean there would have been probably three options. I would have either dropped out and left and tried to transfer somewhere else, I probably just would have been really depressed and stuck it through and probably not been as academically successful. I think I needed that balance in my life. Or I would have changed. I probably would have felt like assimilating, conforming was just like the easiest route. I probably wouldn't be myself then.

Prior to attending college Omar worked at K-Mart. When asked how different his life would have been if he had never been involved in organizations he passionately replied: "I think I, I if I hadn't . . . I would have gone back to LA." Similar to Omar, Victor stated: Wow I, I, I mean like going back to my . . . days I, I mean if it wasn't for my involvement I, I, I wouldn't think I, I'd be here."

The second area was the students' level of engagement. Several spoke of how uninterested they would have been with the university and their education. Janaya believed the following:

Yeah. I think I would definitely be one of those students that kind of was either you know just doing well or kind of just felt disengaged from the campus. Like before when I talked about students who tend to fall through the cracks and how that's really easy on campus it's you know I probably would have been one of those students where I would have just been like okay I'm going to class. Take my test and going home. But I wouldn't feel like I needed to or you know felt like I could do anything kind of beyond that.

Victor echoed similar sentiments regarding establishing a connection with the university and the important effect it had on him:

My involvement also made me want to, or, or helped me to develop like a connection to school right. So it's, it's not like I[m just like if I'm just going to class and, and leaving campus you know right away. I mean being involved, being a part of an organization, putting on events, if, if it's doing outreach it, it definitely makes me feel more part of, of the school and, and, and the more attached to the work I do here.

Christina put it simply when asked how different her life would be: "To be honest, my whole life."

The third area related to missing out on beneficial aspects of the university. "If you don't get involved and become in leadership roles you're missing out on a bigger part of the university that you, that most people don't know about," Christina remarked.



Numerous participants repeatedly mentioned how fortunate they felt to have known and discovered resources on campus due to their heavy involvements in extracurricular activities. According to the participants, student leaders on their campus tend to accumulate a bank of knowledge. They subsequently share this knowledge with other student leaders. Charles noted: “I wouldn’t be able to utilize all the, all the resources at University Park for like internships you know trying to get the best out of what I can if I wasn’t involved in these organizations.”

The fourth area was perhaps the most important. The participants spoke of their personal growth in some many different ways. Some spoke of breaking free from the ignorant, closed-minded and divisive ideologies of their neighborhoods and family upbringing. Some of principal beliefs centered around acceptance of people with different sexual orientations and the belief that all Caucasians people were the enemy. “I don’t know like people talk about the Caucasians but people. I don’t know, I’ve met some really, really, really good people that are Caucasian that support me that I can call before I’ll call somebody you know a friend or color,” Christina remarked. Angela also viewed the world differently—when asked how different her life would be:

I think it would be a lot poorer. .... Well because all of these things that I have done have been fulfilling. Even if they’ve been frustrating they’ve been fulfilling in some way. They enabled me to look at something differently or appreciate something that I may have overlooked or understand something or people that I may not have understood before or may have been dismissive of those or even critical.

The fifth area focused on how precious their experiences have been to them. Lloyd supplied some insight into this. “Well first and foremost I have to say that my experience, my out of the classroom experience with respect to leadership or serving on different committees or task forces that the university has, has graciously placed me on has been invaluable.” He went on to reflect:

Leadership in the best way is that you know the application side of things has been very clear with my interactions with faculty, staff and administration. From planning to just seriously just looking at the state of .... and what things need to be improved, from advocating for students without financial stability, advocating for first generation students, advocating for students who just don't have a voice, to larger planning with respect to student leaders from all aspects of the university. And I think that that, that's, that's, those are some of the main, main things that I treasure about my experience in leadership here.

### *Challenges of Success*

Throughout this chapter we have seen countless examples of how leadership, motivation, and the will to succeed at a high rate has resulted in opportunities for the 14 high-achieving transfer students of color in this study. Yet, it is extremely important to note that these rewarding occurrences were accompanied by significant challenges. These challenges at times caused enormous conflict within the participants. The eighth and final thematic category provides some insight into the five invariant constituents pertaining to these challenges. The five invariant constituents are (1) Stress, (2) Always in the public eye, (3) Losing my friends, (4) Authenticity of color, and (5) Romantic relationships.

*Stress*

As discussed in the aforementioned participants profile section of this chapter the high-achieving students consistently “had a lot on their plates.” Consequently, this led to numerous obligations that at times caused a great deal of stress. Participants spoke openly about being overwhelmed. In many cases the students spoke of feeling like the “token” person of color for the university. This meant that they were more often than not the only student of color at specific functions put on by the university. One student noted:

I was always invited to events. If there was an event at the presidents house, ....., the alumni center, I got an invitation. Sometimes I would tell the staff assistant I can't make it. I would receive a call later that day from the university administrator himself asking me to please come. Sometimes I felt I had no choice. I'll be honest with you the food was great, discussions were engaging, but sometimes I felt like the token Black person. I was the designated Black male leader to call. I am not saying I was ungrateful, but it made me feel weird. If that makes sense.

Several students shared similar stories about their obligation to the university for the many benefits they had received. “How could I say no? Not after all they did for me. I had to pull an all-nighter after, but I looked at it like if it wasn't for them I wouldn't have a class to pull an all-nighter for,” Charles remarked. When Christina was asked why she felt she was consistently being asked to attend functions instead of other students of color, she replied: “Most students of color are not leaders. So it's kind of hard like to talk to them about something that is going on in another organization because they don't even

know what you're talking about." Lloyd saw the lack of student of color representation in leadership positions on campus a different way.

I feel that the potential is there in many students to be leaders, but they are not motivated to do it. This is not an indictment of them. If you are not engaged, or feel a connection to the university than you won't want to give back. I'm not sure you can blame the university for someone decided to be just a student.

Chiquita offered this assessment of the lack of students of colors who were leaders:

"Many are called, few are chosen."

The lack of student leaders often contributed to the stress of the students. A number of participants felt that if they didn't do the work, no one would. As a result they rarely missed an organization meeting, even if it was in their best interest to do so. One student noted: I had the flu and was advised to stay in bed. I chose to not listen, cause I had a meeting to run." Victor offered the following comment as a rationale for such behavior. "I see how it could be negative and, and, and I've, I've seen how, how others get to passionate about, about all the work that they're, that they're doing or an event that they're trying to get off the ground."

In many instances, the participant shared that due to stress both inside and outside the classroom, they often suffered from burnout. Angela recalled:

I was so burned out. Because I think because I, I sort of black or white and either or and putting my energy into one you know one or the other. By the time that those projects come to an end I could be completely wiped out and not want to do anything for a few months. Completely wiped out. And I think that's just kind of

a bad habit. But one that I haven't . . . either I'm unwilling to change or I'm willing to live with.

Other students spoke of other consequences from their workloads. All expressed their struggles to obtain a substantial amount of sleep. In many cases students spoke of pulling all nighters several times a week, just to keep up with their class work and various leadership responsibilities. Gladys offered the following statement to explain how she is able to succeed:

Yeah it, it can take a toll on my stress levels because sometimes I become so overwhelmed that, that I put myself . . . I put my health last. So I will like lose sleep, I will not engage in doing fun things, just to make sure that I'm balancing out school, you know, activism and my family. I live an hour away so I kind of go back home a lot. And I'll put everything else you know I will not sleep and eat badly and not like exercise to get my stress out or even like go dancing which I love to do just to make sure that I can like stay a high achiever.

Similar to many of the high-achievers, Danielle's formula for success was: "So four hours of sleep every day, study all weekend and that's how I was able to balance it."

When asked about the effects of maintaining such a strenuous schedule George offered the following rationale:

I've aged but if you look at the president of the country or you look at CO's and stuff like that, if you look at them every year how they've changed, how their face changes, how their wrinkles changed it's like they've aged extremely fast. I, I haven't slept which helps not at all with that. So I probably won't live as long overall but when I am alive maybe I'll have a happier life overall.

*Always in the Public Eye*

Due to the participants' achievements throughout their respected universities, the 14 participants were well known around campus. While popularity as a student is nothing new at a university, more often than not popular students are known within their immediate circles. This was not the case with the achievers in this study. They each had participated and excelled in so many facets of the university that it was harder to find a student organization, university office, or professor in their department who didn't know them directly, or know of them. We have discussed how knowing so many individuals contributed to a number of perks and privileges for the participants. However, their popularity led to a number of issues.

Participants consistently spoke of the lack of privacy. In some cases students felt a significant amount of mental anguish. "Sometimes I felt like I was going crazy. I could go anywhere without someone saying hi," Justin noted. Janaya expressed similar frustrations. She offered some perspective on this topic with the following story:

I was sitting in my class and you know this kid like taps me on the shoulder and was like hey you're that girl from .. I'm like yeah you know so but I was like yeah but I'm also a student too. Could you not bother me? You know like that sort of thing. I didn't say that to them but this is what I'm thinking in my head.

Although many of the participants initially enjoyed their popularity; as time went by they began to resent it. One student shared: "When I first came here no one knew me. As I got more involved, that began to change. I like feeling like everybody knew me. But then it got crazy. All my privacy was gone." One of the areas affected was their personal life. A

number of the male students shared stories of how their dating life was public knowledge, even if they wanted it to be private. One student shared the following:

So I was interested in this girl for some time. I finally got a chance to hangout with her. You know get to know her. We started hanging out more and more. One night we went to the movies. I lie to you not the next day I received over 20 messages on my facebook account asking me what was going on between her and I. My friend don't have to deal with things like this.

Another student also shared a similar story in which he stated the following: "If I sleep with a chick tonight, by tomorrow it will be the topic of discussion."

As a result of so many individuals knowing these participants, many felt they were always being watched. George claimed: "I think like I'm under a microscope all the time by everyone: students, administrators, everyone." Living under the microscope of the university made the participants extremely uncomfortable. Several students spoke of never feeling like they could be themselves. Gladys shared: "I can just be me. I'm held to this unfair standard." Lloyd expressed a similar outlook on this topic:

When you maybe want to just chill out and relax like you can't do anything without someone laying it back to oh Lloyd da, da, da, the leader da, da, da, did this. You know so it's like you always experience that. So maybe sometimes when you just want to sit down and relax and not be in the limelight it seems like you're always there or what you do always hinged or, or, or, or looked upon in a certain way.

Similarly, Charles spoke vehemently about the unwanted high standard placed on him due to his life as a high-achieving student:

Sometimes I feel like you know I don't want everybody to watch me. I, I just want to be a regular student. I just want to be like another number. A lot of them . . . why do they have to watch me all the time? Why does everybody have to listen to what I say? Why does so many people have to be influenced by me? Like there's a lot of people that, that do look up to me and it's like you know sometimes I don't want to be placed on that pedestal. And it causes a lot of stress because any wrong move you make is amplified three times as much.

Despite the pressure associated with excelling as high-achieving students, many participants had learned to accept the scrutiny of the university as “something that comes with the territory.” While many wished that wasn't the case they knew there wasn't much they could do to change it. Lloyd offered the following observation:

I think that and I, I think this can be said for a lot of people who are in the public light regardless of what type of light that may be, is that they're always in the light. So there's nothing that you can just shut off when you want to and just go out on a Friday night and you know just chill out and you know not have people still associate you in . . . or, or put you into a certain category as a leader or you know as you know an administrator or whatever that . . . or as a, as a politician or as a local community member or leader. People will always put you in that light.

### *Losing my Friends*

Throughout the 14 separate interviews the participants spoke of countless relationships they had established as a result of their success. These relationships developed into longtime friendships. However, while these relationships were being forged, others were coming apart. According to the participants, success had taken a toll



on a number of their preexisting friendships. In many cases, as the achievers became more involved with the university, some of their friends began to distance themselves from them. Many of the participants shared stories of how friends claimed the participants had changed, or no longer viewed the friendship as a priority. Charles noted: “A lot of my friends is like you, you know you’re not the same person. You too busy to pick up the phone and call your ordinary friends.” Other participants mentioned instances in which individuals accused them of being elitist. Christina dejectedly remarked:

I was friends with this girl since high school. So when we came up here I started getting involved with stuff, but she didn’t want to. I went to meetings with my brother who was involved in a lot of things. So naturally I got involved. So I had less time for stuff. So a lot of times when she wanted to go out to the mall I had meetings. One day she came to my room gave me back everything I ever gave her and said she didn’t want anything from someone who had their nose so high in the air.

Participants also claimed that resentment played a critical role in the deterioration of friendships. Many transferred to their four-year institutions with individuals from their previous two-year institutions. Upon transfer, their lives went in different directions. In some cases their transfer friends did not perform well in the classroom. In other instances they did not participate in extracurricular leadership activities. According to some participants, this caused some of their friends to be jealous. Christina remarked: “Some of my former friends would say comments like, why do you think like you are a leader. I wouldn’t follow you. You ain’t nothing special.” Others spoke of having to hide their academic achievements from friends for fear they would lose their friendship.

I think people, I think people are real competitive here. And so in order to just eliminate that whole competitiveness they just don't say actual grades you know. Everyone, but everyone will ask how did you do? How did you do? Did you do well kind of thing. It's like oh yeah I did okay. No one, no one will really say what they got and like that just cause a lot of people are just really competitive and they kind of try to put you down if you didn't do as well or they'd have an attitude if you did do well. I learned the hard way to keep my mouth shut. I can't walk around and tell my friends my grades, cause a lot of them take the same classes as me and don't do well. I once told a friend of mines my bio grade and she stopped talking to me for the whole semester.

Charles mentioned a similar philosophy regarding the sharing of grades. "Friends and grades are a big no no. Tell a friend your grades, you might as well tell them goodbye."

The loss of friendship was not completely one-sided. Many of the participants admitted having to sever existing relationships with friends due to differences in fundamental principles. Their exposure to different communities at their university led participants to change their views on issues they was once believed in. some of these included how they interacted with people of different cultures, sexual identity, and religious affiliations. Many of their peers were not offered or chose not to take advantage of those opportunities. This resulted in numerous conflicts. One participant recalled heavy backlash from his friends for attending a program sponsored by the LGBTQA office. "They were like how can you go to that. Don't you know they are a sin." In the process of defending his attendance to support a university program coordinated by his fellow student leaders he realized his old friends' beliefs seriously contradicted his. He

remarked: “I remember them saying words I once thought were cool, were no offensives to me. I knew right then and there I had changed. I saw the world differently and didn’t want to go back to seeing it the way I previously saw it.” Other students spoke of their transition to a more mature understanding of life. Lloyd shared the following:

Ordinarily being from New York you know and having certain experiences as a young person you don’t trust people. Over time you realize I’m not in New York anymore. I’m not you know dealing with you know teachers who expect me to fail. I have to be hard all the time. I began to eject those ideas, while my friends didn’t. I had a choice to make stay stagnant and sink in the quicksand of ignorance or more to solid ground.

Janaya’s choices of friends were simple. She justified this with the following statement.

“But you know there are always going to be people who kind of look at you like hey you know why are you trying to do this? But again it just kind of comes down to who are you surrounding yourself with?”

#### *Authenticity of Color*

To achieve and excel in life after college an individual typically has be articulate, dress appropriately for various professional occasions, and participate in activities that at times are foreign to their original upbringing or for that matter what society deems appropriate for their race and culture. While assimilating into mainstream America is beneficial and often a necessary practice for an individual seeking to survive and thrive in today’s society, this can be complicated. Previously, the benefits of immersion into the university for the high-achievers in this study was discussed. Doing so opened them up to a network of connections and memories that will inevitably last a lifetime. Along the way

to their success, countless members of their peers groups cheered and supported them. However, it would be extremely inaccurate to portray the experiences of these students as filled with the complete support of all their student of color peers.

In theme four we discussed the importance of racial identity to these high achievers' success. Despite the fact that the 14 participants identified as individuals of color, at times their Black and Latino peers questioned their authenticity. As these transfer students of color were being accepted and celebrated by numerous university affiliates, many of their student peers were rejecting them. This was primarily due to their association with individuals who were likeminded and equally as focused rather than the color of their skin. Several students mentioned spending time with their White counterparts more than their same-color peers. This often caused great conflict among their Black and Latino friends. Christina remarked: "Some of my Black friends use to say I acted like I wasn't Black any more. They would ask me why you hanging with those White people." Another student remembered a friend claiming their behavior was similar to that of a house slave. Such a reference goes back to times of slavery. During such times slaves who lived in the house with the slave masters at times received benefits other slaves didn't. This caused enormous animosity and distain among the house slaves and field slaves. References like these are extremely sensitive, thus, explaining why the participant was so furious.

According to achievers from both universities, the campus environments were often very cliquish. Leonard provided the following assessment of his university's campus environment in relation to intermingling:

I would say that, I'd say that it's very, it's so big and there's so many groups it's like you kind of get stuck in your little niche and you don't really . . . I don't know. It's like very . . . you get stuck in your little niche and everything is kind of very . . . everything is kind of separate. Like you know everyone kind of has their own group and they only really communicate within their group, within their groups. They don't . . . people don't really branch out.

Leonard's opinion was supported by Janaya. According to her, members of the Black community served as an example of this. Janaya noted:

That the black community on campus tends to be you know very exclusive. That you know because there's only three of us here you know we have to you know stay together. We sit together in class, we're always together all the time. And that's just not the experience that I was used to. I mean I'm used to hanging out with like different types of people you know all the time.

Similar to Janaya, many of the participants had deemed association with only students of color as limited and unprogressive. The students looked to associate themselves with all students, rather than with their "own people." This decision had serious ramifications beyond just friends expressing their dissatisfaction as noted in the previous quote provided by Christina. Several students expressed feeling at times disconnected and separated from their fellow minority peers. Dannielle shared:

I think as a student it's you know it's one of the things you just struggle with because you know you're already feeling a sense of isolation being like the only student of color in your predominantly white institution. So to get it on both sides you know is really hard.

Janaya spoke of a similar feeling of isolation: “And so I mean there were a lot of times where I felt more alienated from you know kind of the Black community on campus because I didn’t want to participate in kind of that level of exclusivity.”

Another common attack made against the participants’ minority identity was based on their ability to articulate themselves in an educated manner. Several participants shared stories of how their friend often accused them of “talking White.” Justin shared the following story:

You know there’s also of course that classic example of and I’ve always had to deal with this my entire life of people like you talk white. I’m like I can’t help it. I’ve been in White schools since I was 2. Like you know it’s like the people that I’ve been around you know since I was 3 or 4 or whatever have been majority white or you know with a sprinkle of other kids of color. So it was just the way that I talk.

Lloyd offered the following:

I pride myself on my ability to speak with confidence and a purpose. This has served me well in many circles. Ironically it has hindered me in the Black circle.

If I say I did well instead of saying I did good I am all of a sudden an Uncle Tom.

Other students found the assessment of being intellectual and articulate as a White trait preposterous. Leonard commented: “As if being intelligent is germane to only being Caucasian. That is ridiculous.” To be fair, the questioning minority legitimacy was not limited to just Black and Latino student. Gladys remarked: Whites and minorities would say..like why do you . . . it’s like why do you talk white? Are you mixed? What are you mixed with? Like I get this all the time.”

In addition to associating with White students and mastering the English language, the activities the achievers participated in caused their peers to question their authenticity. Chiquita spoke of the backlash when she told a group of friends of hers she was thinking of voting for Hillary Clinton for President rather than Barack Obama. According to her, those relationships have yet to return to where they once were. When asked how she felt about this she responded:

I think people just have their own perception of, of things period—of, of life, of society. And you know just because you're black or just because whatever you know doesn't mean that you know you're going to vote for Barack Obama in the elections. You know? People look at their lives and you know they see how they live their lives and what they stand for and based on that they choose to support certain things or not support it. So, so then people may look at you know me being in these certain leadership positions and not see that's something which they feel is, which they feel is instrumental, which they feel is positive. And you know that's perfectly fine with me. That's their prerogative as long as they don't try to hinder me or, or you know stop me from doing what I'm doing.

By refusing to limit their associations to only students of color, the university benefited a great deal. I was extremely proud of the confidence and strength these participants displayed, despite feeling rejection and isolation from a critical support network. When asked how it felt to be rejected by some of their peers, Omar commented: "Black, Latino, Asian, or White somebody is not going to like you at some point." Janaya offered the following:

For me it's more I see it less as a negative but more as a challenge. Like that you know those of us who are in the community, who recognize that you know our accomplishment isn't necessarily something to be criticized. That you know it should be you know used as a source of inspiration.

### *Romantic Relationships*

Analyzing the fifth and final sub-theme of this thematic category proved to be a challenging task. First, what would be the most ideal placement? I went back and forth about whether to present this as a sub-theme or as its own individual thematic category. This was largely due to the amount of data collected on this topic. The second challenge was consistency. Throughout the presentation of the eight thematic categories and their subsequent invariant constituents, data were not presented from male and female perspectives. However, due to the vastly different experiences in approaching romantic relationships, the previous pattern had to be discontinued. After a number of discussions with external examiners it was decided to include this segment of the data as a sub theme since both populations had talked about the challenges in establishing and/or maintaining a romantic relationship during their college life.

Prior to conducting this research a decision was made to ask at least one question regarding romantic relationships. This was mostly due to my understanding that the college experience cannot be examined fully without looking at their interactions with individuals with whom they share a romantic connection too. Since this was not the primary focus, one question was asked regarding relationships during the interviews. That question was: "How has your active involvement and high-profile status as a student leader impacted your romantic relationships or opportunities for romantic relationships?"



Although I naively perceived this question to be simple, I quickly discovered that there was nothing simple about this question at all. Many of the participants spent a considerable amount of time sharing their stories. Though I had not expected to collect this essential data, I was tremendously thrilled with the unanticipated fortune. In many respects this was a serendipitous finding.

*Males and their relationships*

When the question of dating came up, all of the male participants seemed comfortable discussing this aspect of their lives. Even Victor, who had been married for almost a year and a half, was willing to discuss this topic. Many of the men believed that their successes in and outside of the classroom increased their dating prospects. This was consistently seen among the men whose sexual orientation was either hetero- or homosexual. Some of the men shared stories about how their dating partners admitted to being attracted and fascinated by their individual achievements. One claimed that a girlfriend had said: “there is something so sexy about a man who knows he is boss”. George shared a story about a girlfriend’s attraction to him due to his high achieving status at the university:

She definitely was drawn to me because of my high . . . like she pretty much admitted it one time in a very casual conversation like oh by the way here’s you know what happened. It’s not like that now, but it was the initial what cause that.. helped her notice me.

Other participants admitted that their achievements made up for their perceived deficiencies. One male noted: “Like I’m pretty average looking guy I think. So when I go to bars and people don’t know me nothing special happens. I, I don’t know how to

dance. But if I go somewhere where people know me, I receive attention.” Lloyd offered the following comment regarding the dating life of an achiever:

All right. I think that I’m going to just generalize it. I think that people are attracted to people who are doing positive things and who, who have bright futures ahead of them. So with that being said you know I, without sounding cocky or, or too much into myself, definitely there are you know young ladies who you know who, who have expressed interest in me and things of that nature. So you know I think that that’s just a fact of being involved and you know being a positive . . . or trying to be a positive person and trying to do positive things. People are just naturally attracted to that.

By and large, the male participants were not having difficult locating dating prospects. Many were in a relationship, had experience with maintaining a relationship, or simply dating people. For the most part they claimed that their busy lives did not interrupt their busy schedules. In many cases they looked for partners who were busy as well. Charles commented: “It helps to mess with a girl who is busy. That way you don’t have to worry about checking in.” Similarly, another male participant shared the following:

Well not really. I mean I think that at . . . I mean I, I had two boyfriends while I was there and I think that both of them are also were very busy at the same time so it’s kind of you know like you know you find time when you can.

As previously mentioned, some of the males were not in a serious relationship; they were simply dating. When asked why, all of the men cited personal choice. While they had had a number of opportunities to pursue a serious relationship, they had decided against it for several reasons. One was the issue of prospects. Some of the men felt it was a challenge

to maintain just one relationship. One male commented: "Its just too wide open up here. I have numerous opportunities. I figure why limit myself now. I'm young I should enjoy this." Others spoke of the challenge of dealing with the jealousy of their partners:

My girl knows a lot of girls like me. And she is not comfortable with that. I can't have any female friends because she suspects they are going to make a move on me. I guess she feels this way because there aren't a lot of quality men here.

Some men were not in relationships due to the stress of previous relationships. This issue of stress was not limited to just the single men. In some cases the men were frustration by dating a partner who wasn't involved. As a result, the males claimed their partners couldn't relate to their busy schedules, as well as their motivations for involvement. This was also shared by Victor, who was married with a child. Victor offered the following example of the conflict between him and his wife regarding his high-achieving lifestyle:

My wife's all mad cause I can't make a I don't know party or something. But I, I'm, I'm, that's one of the things that, that cause she's a community college student too and, and, and she hasn't been able to transfer yet and, and, and I think that's one of the things that, that, that I try to tell her is you got to make school a priority. I mean instead of going out with I don't know your, your family or going to a party. I mean it takes sacrifice but it's going to pay off in, in, in, in the long run. That's the way I see it. She doesn't see it that way.

George spoke of fights with his girlfriend due to a lack of free time. "We fight about this all the time. I don't think she will ever understand. Sometimes she is fine. It depends on her mood."

Many of the single men claimed an additional reason not have a monogamous relationship was their focus on the “bigger picture.” These men believed that a relationship was not a priority of theirs. To them, achieving in college and eventually in their life after college was more important. Charles shared the following related comment:

I'm so career driven, like I'm not even thinking about a relationship right now. But in my junior/senior year I really didn't have a relationships with a girl so I always thought my career first and my status first and then the females will always come later.

Lloyd shared a similar outlook regarding relationships, school, and leadership involvement in the following quote:

To be honest, my, my leadership and my academics were always at the forefront. Nothing else came before that. So with that being said you know either you, you accept how I'm living or what I'm doing or not. You know but that's not going to change for anybody or to have a relationship with anybody. Academics are more important.

Some males attributed their ability to successfully graduate from college to not having a serious relationship. According to one male during his college career his grades suffered when he was in a relationship. Although when he first broke up with his girlfriend he admitted to feeling as though it was a negative experience, in hindsight he now sees it as a positive one. Justin offered the following comment regarding relationships and their influence on graduation:

It's, I, I would say it's, it's more of a balance especially when you're in a relationship and an organization and you're trying to graduate. And those three factors will probably stop you from you know not even graduating to graduating even probably at a later time. So relationships probably really do put a stretch on your graduation time.

### *Females and their relationships*

As previously mentioned, when the question of dating was brought up during interviews with the male participants, the gentlemen seemed very comfortable answering these questions. The complete opposite was true with the female participants. The female achievers at times seemed uncomfortable. When asked if this caused by the interviewer being a man, they responded no. Several participants claimed that the topic was chronically uncomfortable whether they were speaking to me, a female researcher, or their friends. Despite their uneasiness the women provided authentic feedback.

Similar to the male participants, most of the females were not currently in a relationship. However, many were not single by choice. When asked about their dating life one female participant responded: "Oh Lord. There's nothing to talk about." Most of the participants expressed some form of frustration with the current state of their dating life. A number of reasons were offered for being single. The first contributing factor was the lack of potential male prospects at their university. Unlike one of the male participants who mentioned a "wide open" landscape of potential women at his institution, the female participants experienced the opposite. Janaya spoke about this at length. Below is a snippet of that discussion:

I think another part of it is availability an opportunity. Not to go on some like tirade about African American women and dating prospects in higher education but you know the higher you go up the ladder the less available you know you are. Or can become. So and at ... there are not a lot of people in color in general and you know there's like . . . I think now it's like 3% of you know African Americans at, at .... And I think when it was there, it was like 5.

The second contributing factor in continued status as single women was similar to that of their male counterparts—many were too busy to maintain a romantic relationship. Some went on to say that they enjoyed their freedom and were worried that a relationship would take that freedom away. Gladys commented:

Okay. That's impacted me my whole life I think because I've always, I've always gotten so much just like joy and energy out of like doing the things that I enjoy doing that I've never really like thought about having like a boyfriend or something. And like I can honestly say like I never like really go out and party. I never really . . . cause like I that's the time I get my sleep and I do once in a while but I don't get, I just don't feel like I have that luxury from time to time. A boyfriend takes away those luxuries.

Another participant provided a similar reflection:

I think that it makes it harder to be in a relationship, especially in a time where like you're learning so much. I feel like sometimes being in a relationship it, it really does make it harder to, to be independent like student here and be like fully engaged with all your opportunities and your time to learn cause you're like thinking of someone else.

Some spoke about their partners' frustrations with their busy schedule. This frustration was also apparent with some of the women's past partners. The manner in which their women's partners viewed their busy schedule differed from that of the men. One female participant claimed: "If a guy is busy it may cause a fight, but it's somewhat ok. If a girl is busy her boyfriend might say why are you always out? Do you know how that makes you look?" Likewise, Christina spoke about life as a busy female and the perceptions of males:

Actually it affected it a lot because a lot of people like don't like I guess you could say don't like girls that are just out there just always going cause I'm never in the house. Like my day is from 8:00 am to like 2:00 in the morning. So like I never really had time for that. I like to talk to people on the phone and stuff like that but yeah it affected it but I didn't really care because this is you know it's my life and this is what I wanted to do. and I, I'll, I, I could have made time for a relationship but honestly you know I'm so young that I, I don't want to be . . . I would rather just have a bunch of friends than to have one single person that I have to just like focus to all the time.

According to the participants, the third contributing factor to remaining single was the lack of quality men of color. Several felt that the men who were making advances on a number of occasions were not up to their standards. One female commented:

A lot of these guys don't have their stuff together. I was really surprised to see that. When I was coming to college I thought I would meet sophisticated guys. That is not the case. One guy wanted to go out with me but he was on academic

probation. I'm not a status person, but why would I be with someone who doesn't share one of my core values.

When asked if they felt they had any control over the situation, Janaya responded: "The level of frustration for you know educated women of color. I think it's definitely there and you know people that I've talked to feel like you . . . it's, it's almost something you kind of have to accept."

Other females shared the same perspective. Christina stated that: "There are so few men up her with focus. I mean it's rare to see a Black or Latino guy doing his thing. As the conversations progressed some of the female participants admitted to knowing a few men of color who they classified as 'quality', however they explained dating those 'quality' men was difficult due to their lack of interest in relationships, or relationships with women of color." One female commented:

I truly believe there are quality Black men here. I dated one of the them for a while. But a lot of the men know they have a superstar status so they don't want to settle down. Then you have the men who don't want to be with a Black girl. They want a White girl. So as a woman of color I know that we have to compete with the fact they have so much options.

The topic of men of color dating outside their race led to expressions of frustration from a number of the female participants. In some cases the female achievers admitted to thinking about dating outside their race, too. However, some felt that it was more acceptable for a man of color to date outside his race than it was for a female of color. "That's social taboo," Dannielle commented. When the topic of interracial dating came up, Janaya offered the following perspective:



I, I wrote my senior thesis on interracial dating for African American women and kind of the whole situation of dating prospects for you know women of color and looking at like you know what have the scenarios been? Cause I feel like the numbers are constantly being thrown at you like you know 40+% of you know African American women have never been married. And you know there's not as many available. You know men of color particularly African American men who are educated or you know on the same level because of you know what they say as being like violence and lack of education. But it's like you know where does that put you, you know? It's like how do you feel about that? Cause like at the end of the day when you really think about it it's like yeah you know you're an educated you know woman of color but not that many people are interested in interracial dating you know because that's just another level of complications that I think most people are not you know kind of willing to take on. And that's reflective of just kind of the interracial marriage numbers in the United States.

Of the few participants who spoke of dating outside of their race, all admitted to feeling a deeper and more profound connection with a man of their own race. My common place is with a Black man," Dannielle shared.

Existing as a high-achieving female student of color served as a conduit for meeting numerous individuals. Unfortunately, at times it also contributed to the female's loneliness. The fourth contributing factor pertained to issues of intimidation. According to several of the participants, they had experienced occasions on which a male suitor admitted to feeling intimidated or insecure about themselves as a result of the woman's accomplishments. "I'd probably say more of the, the intimidation side mostly because

I'm an intimidating person to begin with. But that compounded with just being engaged on campus tends to shy people away," Janaya remarked. Other students spoke about past significant others breaking up with them due to their success. Dannielle shared a story about her former boyfriend, who claimed he could no longer sustain a relationship with her because her success made him feel inferior: "he told me he didn't believe in himself when was with me," Dannielle recounted.

Some females confessed that they had hidden their success from their partners for fear it would drive them away. One female spoke about this at length. Below is a segment of that discussion:

I dated this guy with a huge ego. He always had to be the top student in everything. Like he was so competitive. He hated to lose or be second. It was crazy. Anyway, we took this class together and he always bragged about how well he was doing in it. When he asked me my grades I straight up told him lies. Cause I knew he couldn't take it. He would say stuff like well you need to work harder. Or like follow my lead. Little did he know I was the person the professor was talking about in class that got everything right on the test.

Other females vehemently disagreed with this practice. To them it was more important to be themselves than to be someone their partners wanted them to be. Janaya offered the following reflection:

Personally I don't feel like I need to you know it's like I am who I am. I'm not going to be any less of that. if I'm you know being less of that because you know I want to attract a certain type of person or I just want to be in a relationship for fear of being alone it's like I'm doing a disservice to myself and to whatever

potential person you know that I'm going to be with because essentially it's going to become an issue. It's like well you know you're always blah, blah, blah you now. So I personally never felt like I should do that. I mean I'm more comfortable being by myself than having to be you know less of who I am for the sake of a relationship.

Similarly, Christina commented:

I think it goes either way. I think you'll find there are people who are perfectly willing to kind of diminish who they are in order to kind of have that relationship because the relationship is more important to them versus you know people like myself who were like hey you know this is just the way it is and you know I'm going to be better off doing my thing.

#### *Summary of Findings*

Throughout this chapter, the data helped to answer the primary research question, “what are the lived experiences of a high-achieving student of color who transfers from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution”?. Based on the findings we discovered that existence as a high-achieving transfer student encompassed several different layers. We first learned that many of the current negative stereotypes related to why students elect to attend two-year institutions are erroneous and grossly inaccurate. Many of these students had a history of performing well in the classroom. In many cases it was circumstances outside of the classroom that impacted their decision to attend the local community college, or branch campus of their four-year university.

The participants shared stories of highs and lows at their two-year institutions. From discovering a new or greater sense of confidence, to questioning whether the culture of higher education was structured in a manner that enabled them to succeed. The participants discussed the support they received, as well as the unfortunate lack of knowledge and resources at their two-year institutions. They allowed us to see and comprehend their rationale for wanting to take on the challenge of transferring to selective predominantly white four-year institutions.

Due to the achievers' selflessness we were able to catch a glimpse of what life was like as a first-year transfer student. It is during this portion of their participation that we were able to see tangible evidence that support and perseverance were essential components in the success of these participants. Though these students were able to survive the dreaded "transfer shock" that many of their peers fall victim to, we discovered the participant success was attributed to more than just luck. In fact, their success was a direct result of help from individuals such as their family, their peers and university administrators and staff. In addition to these individuals the participants reluctantly credited themselves for their success. However, they made it a point to stress their identity as person of color and as a transfer student helped to galvanize them. Lastly, many attributed their success to simply declaring a major prior to transfer.

It was also brought to our attention that becoming a student leader did not happen by accident. In many instances the achiever intentionally sought out these opportunities. All participated in leadership activities for several reasons. Rationales for taking on such important and time-consuming duties ranged from their involvement prior to college, to

feeling a deep and profound responsibility, to continuing the legacy of students of color who had taken on critical leadership roles for the advancement of students of color.

We learned that when achievers contribute their time and energy to the advancement of the academic and social reputation of their university, they are afforded a number of opportunities. This included but was not limited to interacting with central figures of the university, meeting famous individuals, receiving scholarships, and the opportunity to engage in internships and research with professors. As a result of these perks, the students were able to gain confidence. We also discovered that being busy helped the students learn how to properly manage their time. Mastering the art of time management helped them perform better in school. Perhaps even more important, the students mentioned developing a greater sense of self as a result of these experiences.

Although these achievers excelled in and outside the classrooms, we discovered their experiences included conflict and drama. It became very apparent that the old adage “to whom much is given, much is expected” truly applied to these achievers. The participants were always meeting or at the forefront of a university activity. More often than not, if a student of color’s voice was needed in a meeting with senior-level administrators the students were there. Stress and lack of sleep became a staple of their lives. The achievers spoke of never feeling they had time to themselves. Due to their immense popularity, they were always in the public eye. While many admitted to enjoying the initial spot light, some had begun to dread it.

Developing as a student leader required the achievers to make tough decisions. At times those decisions forced them to break away from previous ideologies. This was not always popular with their peers. In many instances their authenticity as a person of color

was questioned. However, by and large the participants were confident in what they were doing, and possessed an unshakable confidence in who they were and who they wanted to be.

We discovered that life as a high-achieving transfer student of color was at times different due to gender. The dating prospects for the males were in some instances much more promising than the prospects for women. The more successful the men became, the more attention they received. The women found the opposite to be true. They spoke of a lack of suitors, and an increased sense of romantic loneliness. At times they were faced with what they perceived to be a choice between loneliness and success or happiness and ordinariness.

It is clear that to know a high-achieving transfer student of color is to know a person who is solemnly committed to his or her academics and community. These are rare college students who have a compassion for issues outside of their immediate scope and circle of understanding. They epitomize scholarship, service and leadership. The achiever possesses wisdom to abide by the will of the majority, without sacrificing individuality. He/she has championed the building of community and has participated in many campus activities that have enabled him or her to create a formula for success in every task he or she sets out to complete. In the end the pictures painted via the lives of these students is nothing short of a collection of 14 breathtaking works of art.

## Chapter 5

## SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of transfer students of color who have persisted and excelled at predominantly white four-year institutions that have selective admission criteria. In the study described here, student success was examined in and beyond the classroom. A sample of 14 transfer students from two-year postsecondary institutions was selected who excelled academically (as indicated by attaining a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher) participated in leadership involvement opportunities, developed relationships with faculty and staff that resulted in beneficial personal and professional development, participated in enriching activities such as internships, and received various awards. Eight of the participants transferred from community colleges, the remaining six from branch campuses of a top-ranked national university.

To facilitate the task of gaining insight into the transfer students lives the following research question was selected to help guided the study: What are the lived experiences of a high-achieving student of color who transfers from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution? In addition to the principal question, the following six questions directed this study:

1. What factors do the participants perceive to be most important in contributing to their success?
2. What motivated these participants to perform and excel academically?
3. What motivated these participants to become student leaders?

4. How have the participants' academic and social success helped to shape their holistic development?
5. What struggles did these participants have to overcome on their journey to academic and social success?
6. How have the participants' post-transfer experiences helped to shape their psychosocial identity?

Few studies exist that specifically explore the success of transfer students in and beyond the classroom. The small number of studies that do examine the success rates of transfer students used quantitative methods to do so. Additionally, the previous research examined what factors affect successful transfer in the classroom.

This research sought to understand how the successful transfer occurred. Previous studies do not investigate the concept of a successful transfer student holistically. The majority of research simply looks at academic success. In addition, the previous studies have not concentrated exclusively on populations that are often understudied, such as high achieving transfer students of color. Thus, this study attempted to address the gaps in the literature pertaining to transfer students of color who do succeed in multiple facets of their collegiate life. More specifically, this study looked to acquire a precise and profound understanding of the phenomenon of high achieving transfer students of color. This approach attempted to search for possible unifying lived experience among the participants, by using the psychosocial approach of Cross' racial identity development theory.

To answer the research question, a qualitative research method was employed. This method was informed by traditional phenomenological techniques. A



phenomenological approach allowed a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. As previously discussed in Chapter Three phenomenology helps to describe what people see, and how they see it through their own eyes. Patton (2002) states examples of a phenomenon are: time spent in a program, a job, or a relationship. When done correctly the final product should express the meaning shared by those who experienced the phenomenon.

The data for this study were collected by way of one semi-structured individual interview with each of the 14 participants. The interviews were designed to provide and gain profound insight into the lives of the participants from their pre-college experiences, to their experiences at their two-year institution, and then subsequently their experiences at their four-year institutions. During the interviews, the achievers were asked to reflect on what helped and hindered their journey to success. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour.

All 14 interviews were done in person. Prior to conducting the individual interviews, each participant was asked to fill out an informed consent form. By signing this form the participants gave me permission to digitally record their interview and use direct quotes to provide all anticipated readers with significant depth into the lived experiences of these participants. It is important to note that although the participants gave me permission to quote them directly, I replaced the names of the universities and the participants with pseudonyms. This was done after extensive discussions with a number of established researchers. As a researcher I felt it was my responsibility to protect the participants from any potential backlash that may occur as a result of their deep and profound honesty.

After conducting the interviews I transcribed each interview verbatim. Prior to beginning the process of analyzing, I made sure to bracket out my thoughts and assumptions as I read through each transcription. The data were then analyzed through the use of comparing data between all participants until specific categories emerged. This was done continuously until the data had become saturated and no new information could be discovered. I then had an outside researcher familiar with the population being studied examine the data to ensure I was accurately interpreting the participant's data. Once this was done I began to code the data. This was done through a number of specific steps. These included open coding, then axial coding, followed by selective coding. The findings resulted from the coding were presented in Chapter four. These findings are discussed in the discussion and interpretation of findings section, which immediately follows this one section.

As the final coding process took place 39 invariant constitutes emerged. Thus leading to the identification of eight thematic categories that provided a deep understanding of the shared experiences of the 14 participants. The categories are:

- (1) Reasons for attending a 2yr institution
- (2) Life at the 2yr institution
- (3) Life as a first year transfer student
- (4) Contributors of success
- (5) Rational for involvement
- (6) Benefits of leadership and academic achievements
- (7) Transferable skill-sets
- (8) Challenges of success

### *Discussion and Interpretation of Findings*

Due to the considerable amount of information that emerged from the research, I felt it important to first, clarify how the study answered the aforementioned research questions and second, explain how it related to the theoretical framework. As previously stated the principal research question was: What are the lived experiences of a high-achieving student of color who transfers from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution? Though there was only one chief research question, six subsequent questions helped to direct this study. It is these six questions that will be addressed in this section. It is important to note that some of the answers to the supporting six questions clearly illustrate more of a correlation with the theoretical framework, while others do not. This in no way serves as an indictment on the framework. To help any potential reader to follow this efficiently, each research question will be reiterated and examined.

#### *Question 1:*

*What factors do the participants perceive to be most important in contributing to their success?*

When conducting this study it became abundantly clear that the success of the participants could not be attributed to one specific person, an office, or a circumstance. There was no one defining moment. Rather, it was a series of events, and a whole host of individuals and offices that led to the success of these students. When conducting a study with multiple participants it is rare that you will find an unequivocal agreement on specific topics. This struggle was the case with this question. Although the majority of the participants mentioned similar contributors to their individual success, I was unable to

achieve a consensus “number one reason” for their success. I was however able to make parallels with whom they mentioned to Cross’s theory.

The participants mentioned their peers, certain offices, administrators, choosing a major early, themselves, and their identity as explanations for succeeding. As I examined the data it began to make sense that there wasn’t that “one thing.” Because in reality there never is that one thing in a person’s life. Life has always been and will continue to be a journey in which individuals climb into a vehicle in search of influential stops along the way. Many of these prominent stops occurred as a result of the efforts of the participant’s peers.

The impact of their peers was immeasurable. Individual members of the student of color population at both universities helped to mentor, shape, and protect these students from the pitfalls that many transfer of students of color fall victim to. It helped to have a person with whom they could identify with immediately without speaking a word. During the high achievers first semester at the university they faced a number of challenges. Some of those challenges related to their race. To help with these tumultuous times, the students seemed to naturally gravitate towards their fellow students of color. This relates to the second stage of Cross’s theory in which he explains that a student immersed in this stage begins to understand the influence of racism in their lives. By understanding the circumstances and challenges that faced them, the participants were able to use the resources available to them to overcome their disadvantages.

Another contributor of success that related to the participant success was their identity as a person of color. According to Cross (1991) students at this stage begin to concentrate on what their identity as a minority means in the world. This understanding

was clearly transparent during the participants' recounts of their life as a student of color. The students repeatedly spoke of their life as one of the few student of color in their classes and in important meetings. They felt a responsibility to provide a positive reflection of their races to the university and society as a whole. While they did not allow their identity to consume them, they did allow it to however resonate in all aspects of their actions and quest to achieve success.

*Question 2:*

*What motivated these participants to perform and excel academically?*

As discussed in the previous chapter many of the participants had maintained a long-standing history of academic achievement. The average high school grade point average (GPA) of the participants was a 3.05. The two-year institution GPA of the participants was a 3.47. Once at their four-year institutions the participants GPA was a 3.37. These GPA's are quite impressive. However, to say their previous experiences with success were singularly responsible for their post-transfer success is inaccurate.

Particularly since all 14 did not always have a GPA of 3.0 and above. Actually some participants GPAs were well below a 3.0 GPA. One participant had a 1.88 GPA in high school. While a participant who had above a 3.0 GPA in high school struggled during his tenure at the two-year institution with a grade point average of 2.2. Therefore, the academic achievements of these participants did not happen by accident, or luck. On the contrary they occurred as a result of hard work, dedication, and forward thinking.

The participants spoke of how they were actively aware that their academic achievements served as a passport to success during and after college. Several of the participants had aspirations of enrolling in prominent masters programs upon graduation.

To achieve acceptance into these programs they understand poor academic performances were not an option. Other participants were seeking to work at well established companies. Securing a position in one of these companies required an applicant to stand out academically when compared to their White counterparts. Regardless of what the participants' intentions was post graduation all 14 participants expressed that they were raised with the understanding that success and upward mobility could be accomplished if an individual obtained a college education from a "great" university. This was a paramount reason as to why these transfer students decided to transfer to selective predominantly white four-year institution.

*Question 3:*

*What motivated these participants to become student leaders?*

The findings of this study revealed that the high achievers became actively involved in various student leadership positions for a variety of different reasons. While it has become fashionable for members of society to be selfish and self absorbed. I saw no evidence that this was part of the achievers character. On the contrary, these participants displayed a genuine passion for student advocacy. The zeal to serve their community in many cases derived from their perceived sense of responsibility. Several of the participants continuously related their involvement to the pre-established legacy of minority student serving in prominent leadership roles at their campus. According to the achievers from both universities, over the years there have been a number of outstanding student of color leaders on their campus. These students transcended the limitations of their skin complexion to become a powerful voice on the campus. In some instances

those voices were the voices of transfer students of color. This legacy helped to feed the participants ambition to be the voice of the transfer student population.

In many cases the student only participated in leadership roles that impacted students of color. This philosophical idea of responsibility coincides with stage three of Cross's theory. According to Cross (1991), students at this stage tend to develop a sense of pride with their identity. Thus prompting exclusivity with people of their own racial identity. Many of the students felt they had to use their access to resources to improve the quality of life for their fellow students. Attempts to do this were done by way of promoting and facilitating programs that helped to increase the retention rates of students of color.

Another motivating factor of their leadership involvement was due to the support they had received from the student of color community. As discussed in the supportive research question one section, the students identified their peers as a reason for their success. As a result they felt an obligation to do the same for the subsequent generation of transfer students of color. It was their belief that if they did not pick up the baton their fellow student would suffer.

As the participants continued to develop, they transitioned into the fourth stage of Cross's theory. The achievers began to break away from the caring only for students who "looked like them", to concerning themselves with student issues on a broader sense. According to Cross (1991), during this stage the student begins to develop a comfort with other marginalized groups. Similarly, the participants of this study were able to break away from an absolute behavior or belief of race. As a result of their development they were able to embrace behaviors and characteristics of groups besides their own. This

resulted in students joining organizations that were diverse, and at times predominantly White. Hence the student began to allow themselves to cultivate significant relationships with their Whites counterparts. The high achievers thus looked to use their high profile status to enhance the experiences of all students. This became their primary motivation for out of classroom activities.

*Question 4:*

*How have the participants' academic and social success helped to shape their holistic development?*

Succeeding in the classroom provided countless rewards for these participants. It opened up the door for scholarships, internships, graduate schools, and professional careers. Yet as significant as these rewards were, the students claimed it did not play the most significant role in their development as high achievers. All 14 of the participants spoke at length of how the successes in their lives beyond the classroom helped them to mature and evolve more as confident and dynamic individuals. Therefore they were able to become well-rounded individuals. This was accomplished once they arrive at an understanding that learning was not limited to the just a classroom setting.

By placing emphases on out of classroom learning, the students were able to obtain and develop the transferable skills needed to communicate and lead in any setting. In many cases the students were willing to sacrifice their academic success to develop these skills. The high achievers passionately believed that know how to do something is important, but know how to communicate that you know how to do something in many respects is possibility even more important. Their holistic development is a byproduct of



their balance with exceptional grades and more importantly becoming an exceptional person.

*Question 5:*

*What struggles did these participants have to overcome on their journey to academic and social success?*

To say the 14 participants' experienced success during their collegiate careers is an understatement. The high achievers accomplishments varied from one participant maintaining a grade point average of 3.78 as a molecular environmental biology major, to an achiever having five publications in refereed journals. From a student founding a critical student run organization that address to poor transfer rates of students of color, to a student interning at the United Nations. From a student studying abroad in University of Fribourg in Switzerland, to a student planning on obtaining her masters in Race, Ethnicity and Postcolonial Studies at the London School of Economics. Many may arrive at the erroneous assumption that these students journeys to academic and social success were easy and absent of the many issues transfer students of color face. Yet, on the contrary these students often faced insurmountable odds. Rather than fall victim to these common impediments, the achievers persevered.

The struggles began as far back as the participants' time in high school. Even though many of the participants had competitive grade point averages, their Scholastic Aptitude Test (S.A.T.) scores at times failed to meet the requirements of the Eastern University as well as Western University. This led many of the participants to attend community colleges, junior colleges, and branch campuses. Despite succeeding at the two-year institution academically, a number of the two-year institutions lacked the

funding to hire staff members to help assist the participants with their transfer process. Never the less they were able to rise above these challenges and receive acceptance into two exceptional universities. However the barriers continued.

One of the biggest barriers to their success was the academic transition from the two-year institution to the four-year institution. The academic pressures and expectations intensified once the students arrived at their new institution. In many cases the students saw at the very least a slight decrease in their grade point averages. The class sizes at times jumped from approximately 30 to 500 hundred. In addition to adjusting to a new classroom, participants discovered that unlike the professors at their previous institutions who provided support and attention, some professors at their four-year institutions were disrespectful and intimidating. Students were ridiculed because they were transfer students. In addition to this, their academic aptitude was questioned constantly. Some students spoke of taking classes with professors who were more interested in publishing than they were in teaching. A significant amount of the participants learning happened as a result of them taking initiative to learn on their own.

Another struggle the students dealt with was the lack of student resources available. This was not simply limited to just transfer students of color, rather it extended to the transfer student population as a whole. One institution did not have a transfer office. Even more concerning, the university did not provide any formal orientation for transfer students. If and when the participants had concerns related to the adjustment to their new university they were left to fend for themselves.

The issues of adjustment to the social climate of the university provided a third challenge for the participants. Most of the students were not from the town or city in

which their four-year institution was located. Therefore this caused a great deal of struggle for the students to adapt to a new culture and new environment. The locations of the universities often put students in positions where they faced racial and sexual discrimination.

On several occasions as I interviewed the participants I could not help but be amazed by the determination of these students to refuse to allow their unfortunate circumstance to dictate their current and future goals. It was truly an empowering experience to sit across some of the most prolific students I have ever met.

*Question 6:*

*How have the participants' post transfer experiences helped to shape their psychosocial identity?*

The development of these 14 high achievers was nothing less than astounding. Keep in mind that many of these students grew up in lower income households, maintained by single parents. Many of the participant's parents did not attend college. Despite this formula for mediocrity, they were able to surpass the expectations set forth by society and excel. For the participants, their focus was not on who they were and where they came from; rather it was on who they wanted to be.

As I conducted the individual interviews, it became apparent that many of these students had successfully progressed through the five stages of Cross's racial identity development theory. Several students admitted that at one point in their lives they felt as though their identification as a person of color hindered them from being successful. At times they actively looked to reject their culture, because they felt this was the only way

they could assimilate into mainstream America. This mindset typically occurred prior to transferring.

Upon transferring, a number of the participants came face to face with the reality that regardless of what actions they took to distance themselves from their culture, it could not change their skin complexion, or the manner in which society viewed them. This caused the participant to begin to reexamine who they were, and what their identity meant. This process of their psychosocial development could have caused these students to feel a great deal of animosity towards themselves and their White counterparts. On the contrary these students embraced and reaffirmed their pride in their culture. They began to feel more comfortable in “their own skin”. Thus, their confidence grew. They began to take on positions of leadership. They became active voices and symbols for the student organizations they had been elected to represent.

As their success and understanding of the influences of social stratification increased, they began to see the gray area in a world of Black and White. As a result their leadership positions were no longer exclusively in minority organizations. They joined fraternities which were not exclusively Black, they joined secret societies, and honors societies that were majority White. The student dedicated themselves to academic excellence. They no longer felt that “being smart” or “speaking well” was germane to only White students. By doing this some conflicts did occur. At times their peers questioned and challenged their authenticity as a person of color. Had these challenges occurred prior to the participants’ pre-transfer experiences, they possibly would not have been able to proactively deal with those accusations. More than likely they would have regressed or succumb to pressure of being the person their peers and society wanted and

expected them to be. Instead of developing into the person they wanted to be. Because of their psychosocial identity development they didn't allow the options of others to derail their commitments to evoke changes that benefited the university as a whole.

It is critical to keep in perspective that these students psychosocial identity is an on going process. They will inevitably revisit some of Cross's racial identity development stages during different periods in their lives. At this point their psychosocial identity is that of an individual who epitomize enthusiasm, leadership, focus, and thoughtfulness in all endeavors. This is by far a direct result of their post transfer experiences.

#### *Implications for Future Research*

The findings of this study deepen our understanding of transfer students of color who have persisted and excelled at predominantly white four-year institutions that have selective admission criteria. Although Cross's (1991) racial identity development theory was helpful in revealing different aspects of these students' lived experiences, it could not completely accounted for the all aspects of the phenomenon of high achieving students of color who transfers from a community college or a two-year institution setting to a selective predominantly white four-year institution. It did however help to illustrate how important being fundamentally motivated was to the success of these students. Without this internal drive these students could not have become high achievers. While vital, the motivation of the participants was not simply limited to their internal drive. In fact a large part of their inspiration to succeed derived from external motivators. These motivators included involved parents, dedicated teachers, and concerned administrators and staff.

The study helped us to understand that the students' lives were no different than other college students. Meaning, they too faced considerable challenges that tend to derail students aspirations for success. Where they were able to separate themselves from other transfers students of color was in the manner in which they choose to address the challenges, and the opportunities afforded to them. The students used the difficulties and shortcomings in their lives as motivation to succeed academically, and to pursue careers that distanced them from the social and economic hardships of their upbringing. This discovery leaves us with a deeper understanding that the lived experiences of high achieving transfer students of color are multidimensional.

Despite the insightfulness of this study, it is important to note that this study examined the lived experiences of 14 transfer students at two universities. Therefore, it is unable to offer generalizations to the larger community of transfer students of color. Due to the exploratory nature of this study I did not look to identify different patterns based on gender and socioeconomic status. Yet, the findings do allow conversation to begin regarding the multifaceted aspects of these transfer students lives. It provides a solid starting point for future qualitative researcher of this population. Future researcher designs can choose to concentrate on areas specifically related to a gender, a specific socioeconomic background, the educational capital of the students' parents, implications of policy set forth by universities and higher education as a whole, or center it on the faculty and administrators who work directly with these students.

#### *Recommendations*

The findings of this study hopefully will be of assistance in reminding ourselves that the success of these students cannot solely be placed in the hands of the transfer

students. All stakeholders must play an intricate role in the motivation, development, and success of these students. It is important to remember the stories of the achievers. The students spoke at length of how the encouragement of their parents, extended family, teachers, counselors, administrators, and professors influenced how they perceived themselves and their abilities to succeed. It is important to note that the students did not simply highlight one specific instance or individual as the key to their success, rather they spoke of the encouragement they received from numerous individuals in their lives to put forth their best effort possible as contributors to their achievements. This kind of encouragement helped to control potential anxiety that can cause challenges to their ability to perform. As a result regardless of if the students were struggling or performing well, they remained calm due to the confidence that was instilled in them throughout their educational journey. These practices must continue.

### *Higher Education*

At times specific areas of the universities were extremely influential to the student's success by providing critical support, by way off resources and mandates. In addition, the university facilitated enriching opportunities for these students to develop holistically. Encouraging higher education as a whole to adopt these strategies can be advantageous as they seek to develop, improve, and sustain more high achieving transfer students of color. Higher education must understand that when a student is accepted into a university a contract is established. The student is required to put forth a substantial amount of effort in order to graduate. The university is also required to put forth a considerable amount of effort to support the student. Creating a transfer center can be a critical resource for students. It was made clear during the interviews with the

participants from the Western University, that the transfer center played a vital role in their success. They often claimed that if it wasn't for the center, life as a transfer student would have been more difficult. Universities can not make the erroneous assumption that since these students have previous experience at a postsecondary institution, they do not require assistance. This philosophy is dangerous and unsupportive. Educators and administrators ought to look to be visible, engaged, supportive, and accessible. This must be a fundamental philosophy if we want to improve the success of transfer students of all populations.

### *K-12*

Again, the responsibility cannot rest with one stakeholder. The struggle to succeed academically can affect the brightest and most talented student. The achievers of this study struggled at various points in their lives for a variety of reasons. Several of the students performed well in their high school classrooms but struggled on the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Their high schools and poor school district failed to provide them with the tools to perform well. In fairness, the blame cannot exclusively be placed on the high schools and school districts. Some participants acknowledged being unmotivated and distracted in high school. However, by and large the educational system in this country must improve. Schools continue to be underfunded, and often employ unqualified teachers.

Evidence of this was provided in Chapter four, when one participant spoke of attending an academic summer camp with mostly White private school students. At the camp he was using his textbook which was several editions older than the ones the White students were using. We cannot continue to put students in a position where they feel



hopeless and helpless. These transfer students deserve our commitment. It is unfair of us to place the burden of success entirely on them. In many respect these student succeed in spite of us, rather because of us. This is unacceptable.

### *Students*

Finally, let us remember in the end the students must put forth the effort. Indeed there is room for improvement for parents, universities, and higher education as a whole. However, the students must execute the work required of them. We must continue to set high expectations for these students if we want them to achieve high rewards. Emphasis needs to be place on making sure that the students don't allow the sad reality of the existing and potential struggles to achieve to deter them from trying. We must help and encourage these students to stay encouraged and motivated.

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## APPENDIX A

### Student Recruitment Script

**High –achievers from community colleges: Examining transfer and persistence of students of color at selective predominantly white institutions.**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to provide insight into transfer students of color who have persisted and excelled at predominantly white four-year institutions that have selective admission criteria. This study looks to examine student success in and beyond the classroom.

#### INFORMATION

You have received this invitation to participate in an exciting research study based on administrators from your university identifying you as a *high-achieving* transfer student of color at your campus. Previous research defines high-achieving students as having a combination of the following criteria: students who have excelled academically with a grade point averages (G.P.A) above 3.0, participated in a number of leadership involvement opportunities, developed relationships with faculty and staff, participated in enriching activities such as internships, and received various awards. The researcher would like to conduct a semi-structured interview during the summer of 2008. The interview will last approximately one and a half hours. During this interview you will be asked to reflect on your experiences as a transfer student, and how they impacted you.

Cassette tapes will be used to record your remarks during the interviews and notes will be taken. All tapes and written notes will be destroyed in December 2011.

### BENEFITS

A study such as this can provide substantial insight into the lived experiences of high-achieving transfer students of color at predominantly white four-year public institutions. It is the hope of this study that administrators, faculty, and other concerned individuals within higher education can learn how to better promote and facilitate the support, survival, success, and increase numbers of students like you.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation in this research is confidential. ID numbers will be assigned to digital files and transcriptions. Coding forms and participant files will also be labeled by ID numbers. The data will be stored and secured in 411 Keller Building in a *locked* file. Only the person in charge will have access to the data. All data will be kept for three years after the study has been closed. This is in accordance with federal regulations, which states research records must be kept for a minimum of three years after the study has been closed. As a result recordings will be erased in December 2011.

### PARTICIPATION

Your decision to participate in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is complete your data will be destroyed.

## CONTACT

If you have any questions or concerns at any time about the study or the procedure please feel free to contact the lead researcher, Stanley A. Bazile, 237 Ritenour Building, University Park, PA 16802. The lead researcher can also be reached at [sab44@psu.edu](mailto:sab44@psu.edu) or (814) 863-0461.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Administration Recruitment Script**

Dear University Administrator,

Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Stanley Bazile, a doctoral candidate in Workforce Education and Development in the College of Education at the Pennsylvania State University. Beginning in the summer of 2008, I will be conducting a study of transfer students of color who have persisted and excelled at predominantly white four-year public institutions that have selective admission criteria. The study is being conducted as research for my dissertation. This study looks to investigate student success in and beyond the classroom. I will be examining a sample of students who have excelled academically with a grade point averages (G.P.A) above 3.0, participated in a number of leadership involvement opportunities, developed relationships with faculty and staff, participated in enriching activities such as internships, and received various awards will be selected.

An examination such as this can provide substantial insight into the lived experiences of high-achieving transfer students of color at predominantly white four-year public institutions. It is the hope of this study that administrators, faculty, and other concerned individuals within higher education can learn how to better promote and facilitate the support, survival, success, and increase numbers of these students.

In order to successfully complete this study I will need your assistance. Can you please

send the attached letter to students you believe fit the aforementioned criteria for this study. As a former student affairs administrator I understand the high demands of your position. As a result once you have sent the email detailing the study to potential students your obligation in this study is over. The students will be asked to contact only me if they are interested in participating in the study. I hope you choose to pass this information along to your achieving students. The detailed stories of these students' triumphs and success can have a tremendous impact on student retention in the future.

All the best,

Stanley A. Bazile  
Doctoral Candidate, College of Education  
The Pennsylvania State University  
University Park, PA 16802  
Sab4@psu.edu  
(814) 863-0461



## APPENDIX C

### Participant Profile Form

#### Contact Information

Name\_\_\_\_\_

School Address\_\_\_\_\_

City\_\_\_\_\_ State\_\_\_\_\_ Zip\_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address\_\_\_\_\_

Hometown\_\_\_\_\_ State\_\_\_\_\_

#### Academic Information

Year in School: Junior\_\_\_\_\_ Senior\_\_\_\_\_ Graduate\_\_\_\_\_

Major(s)\_\_\_\_\_

Minors(s)\_\_\_\_\_

Exact Final High School GPA (4.00 scale) \_\_\_\_\_

Exact two-year institution cumulative GPA (4.00 scale) \_\_\_\_\_

Exact current undergraduate cumulative GPA (4.00 scale) \_\_\_\_\_

Ultimate Degree Aspiration: Bachelor's\_\_\_\_\_ Masters\_\_\_\_\_ Ph.D\_\_\_\_\_ J.D\_\_\_\_\_

M.D\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please explain)\_\_\_\_\_

High School Demography \_\_\_\_\_Predominantly Black

\_\_\_\_\_Predominantly White

\_\_\_\_\_Mixed/Balanced

High School Type \_\_\_\_\_Public \_\_\_\_\_Private \_\_\_\_\_Other(Please explain)

Name of two-year institution \_\_\_\_\_

### **Background Information**

Family structure            \_\_\_\_\_ Two Parents            \_\_\_\_\_ Guardian (not parent)

\_\_\_\_\_ Single parent household (mother)

\_\_\_\_\_ Single parent household (father)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please explain)

### **Undergraduate Activities**

Clubs/Organizations

Leadership Positions held (if any)

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**Honors, Awards, and Achievements**

Awards	Year Received
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_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Internship**

Year \_\_\_\_\_ Company \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Year \_\_\_\_\_ Company \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Year \_\_\_\_\_ Company \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

**Study Abroad Programs**

Year \_\_\_\_\_ University \_\_\_\_\_

Country \_\_\_\_\_

**Immediate Post-Graduation Plans**

\_\_\_\_\_ Full-Time Employment

\_\_\_\_\_ Graduate/Professional School (Anticipate Major Field) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please Explain) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure At This Time

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little about your life before attending college.
  - a. Academics – ability
  - b. School demographics
  - c. Co-curricular activities – e.g., leadership, community service
  - d. Family – socioeconomic status
2. What factors influenced you to attend a two-year institution rather than a four-year institution?
3. Tell me a little about your experiences at your two-year institution.
4. What kind of services existed for students of color at your two-year institution?
5. How well did you do academically at your two-year institution?
6. What kind of leadership activities were you involved in?
7. What factors led to your decisions to transfer?
8. What assistance did you receive from your two-year institution?
9. How did you choose to attend this university?
  
10. What expectation did you have of your university before enrollment? What kind of experience were you expecting to have?
11. How has your actual experience differed from the experience you were expecting to have here.
12. Tell me about your first year highlights and disappointments at this university?
13. Did \_\_\_\_\_ university help with your transfer process?
  - How did they help?
  - What resources were they provide?
  - Were they effective?
14. How did you select your major?
  - When did you select your major?
  - Do you feel it had an impact on your success?
15. Who/what influences your academic interest?
16. How would you describe your academic experiences in college?
17. How important is it for you to succeed academically?
18. What are your career plans? How has your academic success affected your career goals?
19. In what ways have your experience with academic success prepare you for a career in... or enrollment in..
20. Who is your favorite professor?
21. If your favorite professor wrote a letter of recommendation on your behalf, what would she or he say about you? Tell me about the experiences you have had with this person..... how did she or he come to know so much about you?
  
22. Tell me about the extracurricular activities you are involved in.

23. What skills have you gained as a result of your involvement in out-of-class activities and leadership on campus?
24. What (social) relationships have you built as a result of your active involvement?
25. What opportunities or doors have been opened for you as a result of your involvement?
26. What opportunities would you have missed out on if you weren't an active student leader on campus? How different would life be if you were not involved?
27. How has leadership and active involvement on campus affected your grades and academic performance? How do you balance it all?
28. How has your active involvement and high-profile status as a student leader impacted your romantic relationships or opportunities for romantic relationships?
29. Can you associate any negative consequences with your active involvement and high-achieving status?
30. You have been elected to serve in few leadership positions in clubs and organizations. Why do you think your peers elected you to these positions?
31. Have the students of color on this campus been supportive of your leadership..... (if so) how did you gain their trust and admiration? (if not) why do you think they have been so unsupportive?
32. Do you feel your are different from than other students of color at \_\_\_\_\_ university? (if so) in what ways are you different
33. If someone were to ask you what race you are, what would you say? Why?
34. How has your identity impacted your success at this university?
35. Have you built favorable relationships with administrators and staff?
36. If your favorite administrator or staff member wrote a letter of recommendation on your behalf, what would she or he say about you? Tell me about the experiences you have had with this person..... how did she or he come to know so much about you?
37. How has your leadership involvement impacted your career goals? In what ways have those successful experiences prepared you for a career in... or enrollment in..
38. If you could turn back the hands of time, what would you change about your transfer experience?
39. Who is most responsible for your success?
40. Do you know transfer students of color who weren't successful?.....Why do you think they were not successful?
41. How would you summarize your transfer experience?
42. Any recommendations?
43. Do you have any questions for me?

**CURRICULUM VITA  
STANLEY ANTHONY BAZILE**

---

**EDUCATION**

**Doctor of Philosophy**, Workforce Education and Development  
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

**Master of Social Work**, Concentration in Higher Education Administration  
Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY

**Bachelor of Arts**, History  
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**Coordinator S-Plan Mentoring Program, Office of Health Promotion and Wellness**  
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**Doctoral Intern for the Dean of Students - Campus Life and Leadership**  
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**SELECTED PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS**

Zamani-Gallaher, E.M. & Bazile, S. (forthcoming 2009). Multicultural student services at community colleges. In D.L. Stewart (Ed.), *Building brides, revisioning community: Multicultural student services on campus*. Sterling, VA: ACPA/Stylus Publishing.

Bazile, S. A., & Walter, R. A. (2009). Certification of Postsecondary Career and Technical Instructors: Issues for Debate. *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*, 45(3).

Bazile, S.A., (2009, January). *Nurturing ambition: Developing strategies and learning outcomes which contribute to the increase of high-achieving transfer students of color at selective institutions*. Presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Education, Honolulu, HI

Bazile, S.A., (2009, January). *Developing social change agents through intentional health related learning outcomes*. Presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Education, Honolulu, HI

Watts, S.K., Bazile, S.A., Hershey, K., Holman, N.S., Huff, W.D., (2008, April). *Unmasking the complexities of diversity: An entry-level practitioner forum*. Session presented at the ACPA Annual Convention, Atlanta, GA.

Bazile, S.A., (2008, January). *A call to action to address the retention rates of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions*. Presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Education, Honolulu, HI

Bazile, S.A., (2008, January). *Black male professionals in student affairs: Critical issues and perspectives*. Presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Education, Honolulu, HI