

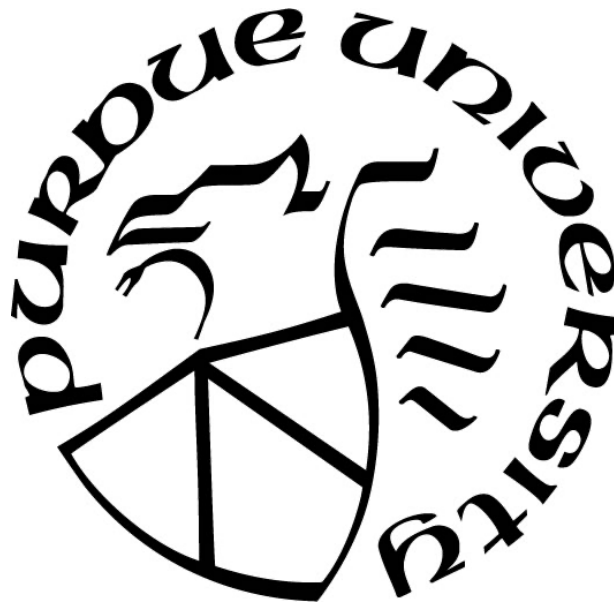
**EXPLORING KINSHIP SYSTEMS: THE RETENTION OF BLACK
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT HBCUS**

by
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A Dissertation

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*To my family, friends, and mentors,
thank you for your ever-present encouragement and belief in me.*

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Many thanks to my dissertation committee for kindly walking me through turning my trials and tribulations into a launching pad for change for those in my community. My experience working with you all is simply a minute reflection of what I hope this study will produce for other Black students on a larger scale; and that is, a level of holistic care that leads to success and more opportunities in higher education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	7
PREFACE	8
ABSTRACT.....	15
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	16
1.1 Assumptions.....	19
The Retention Rate at HBCUs.....	19
HBCUs as a Collective	19
The Role of Religion	20
1.2 Limitations	21
1.3 Delimitations.....	22
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	23
2.1 Kinship Systems	23
2.2 The Black Church, Kinship, and Community.....	24
2.3 Mentorship: The Relationship Between Black Faculty & Black Students	27
2.4 Mentorship: Diversity Training for Faculty.....	29
2.5 Mentorship: HBCUs and The Second Curriculum	30
2.6 Mentorship: Faculty-Student Dynamics, Black Community, & Pedagogical Approach	32
2.7 Diversity, Inclusion, and Retention	32
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	34
Phase I.....	36
Rationale of Survey Questions	37
Phase II	41
Reassessment of Methods.....	42
Observations.....	43
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	45
4.1 From Home to an HBCU	46
4.2 Faculty-Student Dynamics at HBCUs	50
Boundaries in Faculty-Student Dynamics	53
Faculty-Student Dynamics through Black Vernacular and “Other Mothering”	55

Expectations of Black faculty at HBCUs	57
Overview of Faculty-Student Dynamics at HBCUs	58
4.3 Religion, Faith, and Spiritual Practices at HBCUs	59
4.4 Social Activities & Organizations at HBCUs	69
Homecoming as a Kinship System at HBCUs	69
Greek Organizations as a Kinship System at HBCUs	73
Conclusion	75
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION	80
5.1 Summary of Findings and Implications	80
5.2 Suggestions for Future Research	83
KCN Assessment	84
APPENDIX A. SURVEY RECRUITMENT EMAIL	90
APPENDIX B. SURVEY CONSENT FORM	91
APPENDIX C. SURVEY QUESTIONS	93
APPENDIX D. FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT EMAIL	95
APPENDIX E. RECRUITMENT FLYERS	96
APPENDIX F. FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS	98
APPENDIX G. FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM	99
REFERENCES	101

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Students' perspective on recruitment efforts	14
Figure 2: Number of HBCUs in each state and territory	35
Figure 3: Factors considered when selecting an HBCU	49
Figure 4: Positive contributions to students' college experience	50
Figure 5: The impact of religion on students' experiences	59
Figure 6: Engagement in religion, spiritual, or faith-based activities	63
Figure 7: Social activities and organizations at HBCUs.....	68
Figure 8: Withdrawing from school.....	76

PREFACE

Being reared in the rural lowcountry of South Carolina, my educational journey was girded by the presence and care of Black educators. From primary to secondary school, I was surrounded by teachers who shared a similar cultural, social, economic, and religious background as myself. Many of them grew up in the same or neighboring rural town and had dedicated themselves to shaping the lives of Black children who were trekking the paths they had already taken. Their commitment lasted for generations as they were the former teachers of my nephews, my older siblings, and even my parents, aunts, and uncles; they were often close relatives of my grandparents, members of my church, and leaders within our small community. Inevitably, within the parameters of school, they assumed responsibility for my classmates and I beyond contractual obligations. This ranged from pitching in to meet students' basic necessities to not sparing the rod when "correction" was needed — and yes, with the parents' approval. School was a home away from home, and the teachers' disposition often resembled that of an aunt, uncle, or the older responsible cousin. While I was not aware of these relational dynamics and its impact at the time, such kinship systems within secondary school prepared me for college.

Post-secondary school, I made the decision to pursue undergraduate studies at an Historically Black College/University (HBCU). While I now believe it to be one of the best decisions of my life, it was a decision made initially out of financial and geographical convenience. In fact, I only applied because a recruiter at my high school's college fair stopped me as I passed by their table and offered a free application. Transparently, HBCUs were not on my radar. I did not intentionally overlook HBCUs, but my hopes were long set on an institution in Maryland that had a well-known program that interested me. My dad and I actually drove approximately seven hours north (really, he drove and I slept) to attend their orientation. Despite his periodic "this is how you engage with them as a Black girl" speech throughout our visitation, I was not pragmatically conscious of my Blackness and how that would influence my collegiate experience should I decide to pursue my studies there. As such, my desire to enroll in their program overshadowed any amount of uneasiness I may have felt amidst the sea of whiteness.

Months later, I was accepted into the Maryland institute and offered a \$12,000 grant to supplement my out-of-state tuition. While my parents were supportive of my interest in enrolling there, the math did not add up for me. I may have still been young in my “Black consciousness” journey, but I was fully aware of my economical journey and knew that I did not have “Maryland money.” I proceeded to weigh my options as acceptance letters rolled in from other institutions. Not long after, I received a package from the HBCU I almost passed by just months prior. It was an acceptance letter to not only the university, but their Honors College — four years with every expense fully covered and less than forty miles away from home. Accepting this invitation was the fiscally responsible thing to do. Claflin University became my new home away from home.

What I didn’t account for upon my acceptance to Claflin was its similarity in demographics to my early childhood education. My experience at Claflin was largely fashioned and supported by Black faculty, administrators, and peers. They intentionally produced a conscious and culturally-responsive classroom, so my Blackness was not something that had to be accommodated for. Even more, our shared and relatable experiences as a result of our Blackness fostered a connection that I believe transcended traditional teacher-student boundaries. I recall leaning on my professors for guidance and support not just concerning professional goals, but during social justice issues and familial dilemmas as well. They assisted in unpacking matters such as the continuous murders of Black lives; and they shared in my grief during an unfortunate, life-changing event in my family. Such sentiments were reciprocated as they leaned on students as well for similar needs. Overall, they understood that their investment in my education was not a linear process. Rather, it involved considering the intersection of my identity and purposefully providing a holistic approach. While this was *not* always the case, it was the typical temperament of my surroundings. This form of intersectional education, I presume, was in an effort to provide a guardrail that mitigated or prevented challenges so commonly faced by Black students within the American educational system.

Unfortunately, proper guardrails for Black students are not always implemented into an institution or classroom’s structure. This became evident to me as I progressed to graduate studies in 2016. Once again, I was invited to apply to an institution that I’d never considered. However, instead of it being to an HBCU,

it was to a predominately white institution (PWI). My initial visitation was sponsored by one of the school's diversity and inclusion initiatives that aimed to recruit HBCU students. Approximately 30 students from different HBCUs traveled to the institution's campus and we visited our respective departments. Once reconvening, the consensus amongst most of the students was that this institution, for various reasons, was not for them (see Figure 1). While I had my reservations, I completed the free application. A few months later, I received an acceptance letter, along with an offer for a tuition-covered, Graduate Assistantship. Purdue became my new home away from home.

I don't believe that twenty-two consecutive years of living in a predominately Black community made me *incapable* of successfully communing with others in spaces where I am the minority. However, in hindsight, it did set a standard and expectation for what I needed within my academic structure in order to be successful. Needless to say, such necessities were not readily available or easily accessible at Purdue, and this resulted in a culture shock for me. What I now know to be the four stages of culture shock, lasted over three years (i.e., honeymoon, frustration, adjustment, and acceptance).

Phase I: The Honeymoon

The inception of my graduate school career was exciting. I had reached a milestone in my educational journey and anxiously looked forward to the new opportunities that awaited me — a new state, new school, new community, and new lifestyle. I was thrilled to have transitioned from a rural town to a mid-sized city, from the South to the Midwest, from college dorms to my first apartment, from an institution with sufficient resources to one with ample resources, and from my first degree to a terminal degree. Everything seemed to be bigger and better. But in an effort not to glorify the newness of it all, I also did what I thought was my due diligence in hearing the perspective of the department's leading faculty and of its Black students (although there were few) regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within the department and the university at large. The faculty I spoke to from the department denied the existence of any racial tension or any concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of Black students within the department. They assured me that discrimination of any form was not tolerated and if evident, would be

addressed immediately. The Black students, however, shared a different perspective. While they (again, only about 2-3 students available) denied any personal experience with racism or discrimination within the department, they did acknowledge a lack of systemic consideration of Black and other minoritized students as a whole. Yet, they persistently reassured me that the university was becoming quite “progressive” in their equity efforts and that the department could benefit from more “diversity.” Their confidence in change factored into my overwhelmingly positive outlook and expectation of my experience at Purdue.

Phase II: The Frustration

The downward trajectory of my hope was evident on the first day of class. I vividly recall sitting in English 505: Teaching Introductory Composition. My instructor was very welcoming and my cohort, amicable. Yet, I noticed an immediate distinction in our experiences and the way we related to the world. On a very minute scale, humor and cultural references did not translate well for me. Conversations meant to forge bonds between groups only amplified our differences. These differences weren’t inherently problematic. However, it became more significant as I realized how they also seeped into the content and structure of my graduate program.

Unlike many of my colleagues, my knowledge of “traditional” rhetorical studies was practically nonexistent prior to graduate school. From its history to its most-studied figures, the only points of reference to the field were of Black scholars whose works were rarely, if ever, part of the curriculum. I found myself working to get up to speed on the field, questioning how or if I qualified for the program, and seeking culturally relevant and responsive ways to connect with the material being taught. Eventually, when my Plan of Study permitted, I took advantage of Afro/Black-centered courses both within and outside of the department. There I met many students who held the same sentiments that I did — feeling unseen, unrelatable, and disconnected. I had many reasons as to why I felt this way but decided to also launch an investigation to pinpoint recurring perspectives of what Black students were experiencing at Purdue, and what they believed to be the root of it.

The summation of this investigation is called *Exploring Double Consciousness: The Rhetoric and Retention of Black Graduate Students at Predominantly White Institutions*. One of the main goals of this study was to examine “what it means to practice dual identities in various capacities, and how this contributes to students of color's understanding and navigation of Black culture within predominantly white institutions” (Broughton v). Most of this study’s participants, though dispersed throughout different fields and graduate programs, were having a hard time adjusting to the institution’s climate. This was reflected in the high attrition rate of Black graduate students at Purdue. However, for those who remained, they shared many avenues that attributed to their persistence throughout their time at Purdue.

Phase III: Adjustment

Many personal factors solidified that withdrawing from graduate school was no longer an option. So, like many of my Black colleagues, I found myself seeking community beyond my cohort. I resorted to putting my efforts towards finding resemblances of “home.” One of my main forms of community was a local church. It wasn’t solely its predominantly Black population that made it feel like home. Rather, it was the members’ immediate recognition of and empathy towards my journey as a young, Black person. It was their care through many unspoken struggles. From prayer and home-cooked meals to frequent outings and being affirmed that “I belong to them,” my temporary church home mirrored the nurture and care I experienced throughout my upbringing. Unsurprisingly, it was in this church that I also met a lot of Black faculty, staff, and students of Purdue — even those who openly confessed to not believing the religious values but appreciating the fellowship, nonetheless.

These relationships became a hedge of encouragement and positive reinforcement for me. It kept me grounded despite still being largely discontent with my program’s content and the structure of the university at large. It helped me to adjust to the way things were, while moving forward knowing that there was an opportunity for me to allow my grievances to make a positive impact.

Phase IV: The Acceptance

It was evident that Purdue's graduate school targets Black students from HBCUs. However, these students are either choosing not to attend, withdrawing early, or fighting to find a sense of belonging if they choose to remain enrolled. I decided to spend the latter part of my graduate school career searching for the core of what contributes to Black students' academic success. What support did they need and/or desire in order to prosper academically? Were there institutional changes that could be made in order to make the campus and classroom conducive to their learning and overall experience?

This led to the study of *Exploring Kinship Systems: The Retention of Black Undergraduate Students at HBCUs*. This project sought to study the systems of an institutional structure that was already built on centering Black students. More specifically this study postulates that an existence of fictive kinship at HBCUs that currently have an above average retention rate, positively influences the academic experience of Black students. These systems are seen through the lens of faculty-student dynamics, religion, and social activities. The focus of this study was to amplify Black student voices which have traditionally been constrained. A secondary mission of this study was to suggest resources to Black students that will assist them in addressing potential hinderances they face as they pursue higher education. Consequently, predominantly white institutions of higher learning will also receive insight regarding ways to improve the experience and retention of Black students at their institution.

Conducting this study has both affirmed and challenged a lot of my beliefs concerning the experiences of Black students and the Black community. While it is undeniable that constitutional racism and its residual presence has impacted the function of Black livelihood, Black people have used their ingenuity, resilience, and communal nature to fashion their own opportunities. The kinship formed through these efforts and shared experiences has built HBCUs and contributed to its success in retaining Black students within higher education. Specifically, the positive impact of kinship through faculty-student dynamics and social organizations such as homecoming and Black Greek Letter Organizations, has identified students' environmental, relational, and academic expectations they have in order to be successful. Given the foundation of the Black church, religion, faith, and/or spiritual practices was also

presumed to be a kinship system that positively contributed to the Black student experience, and ultimately, their retention. However, students have revealed that while many of them are still connected to the Black church, much of their spiritual practice has evolved into a journey of unpacking what they have learned throughout their upbringing and exploring what their faith now means to them individually. Yet, even within the parameters of religion, faith, and spiritual practices, they still find some of the relationships they have built throughout such entities to be essential to their academic progression.

All in all, this study has left me with the hope of conceptualizing ways Black students can identify the existence and quality of kinship as they discover educational opportunities beyond HBCUs. This study has also inspired me to express the findings of this research in a way other educational institutions, namely PWIs, can assess their own approach to recruiting, caring for, and retaining Black students.

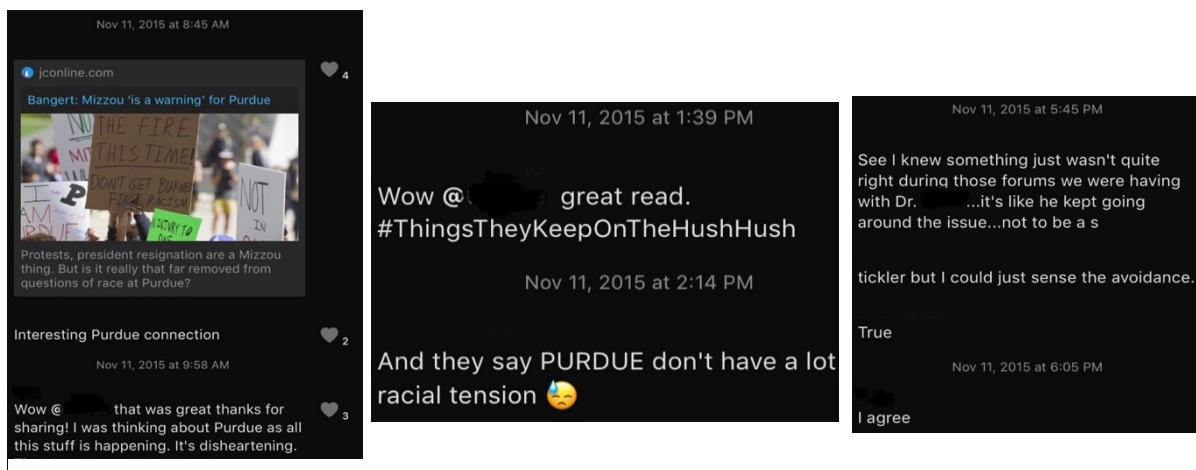


Figure 1: Students' perspective on recruitment efforts

ABSTRACT

Traditional kinship systems involve the organization of individuals who are biologically connected. However, such systems have evolved beyond bloodlines to incorporate individuals that are biologically unassociated but operate in familial-like roles due to shared spaces and/or experiences. Historically, kinship systems or cultural networks have functioned as the cornerstone of survival for those of the Black lived experience. From the days of legalized human chattel slavery to present-day movements seeking justice for the minoritized, the foundation of kinship was typically built through the local church, the assumed maternal positions by Black women, Black secret societies and more. They each served, and continue to serve, as a means for survival and success against a systemically oppressive society. This study explores the notion and existence of kinship systems at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). It specifically examines how fictive kinships through the lens of faculty-student dynamics, religion, and social activities, potentially influences the academic experience of Black students at HBCUs that currently have an above average retention rate. As America's educational institution has lacked diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity for Black people for countless years, the primary mission of this study was to amplify Black student voices which have traditionally been suppressed. A supplemental goal of this study was to offer Black students tools for introspection that will aid them in navigating possible barriers to (post) educational success. In turn, this study gives insight to predominantly white institutions of higher learning on how to positively enhance the experience and retention of Black students, and the overall structure of diversity and inclusion on campus.

Keywords: HBCU, Retention, Kinship, PWI, DEI

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the historical background of Black descendants' experiences with the American educational system and the perpetual discrimination they face in pursuing higher education. It draws on previous studies to contextualize the present need for returning to the foundation of HBCUs as a means of reevaluating the needs of Black students in higher education. It also highlights assumptions and limitations of this study, along with how they have been mitigated and managed in order to provide impartial data regarding students' experiences.

The historical underpinning of America's educational institution has lacked diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity for Black and other marginalized populations for countless years. Its intentional racial divide and oppression of non-white groups since its inception, remains a perpetual fight — even in a lawfully post-segregated era. As a response to the outlaw of segregation and persistent contention, many institutions have widened access to higher education per college admittance of Black students. However, this limited means of affirmative action has obscured practical measures needed to holistically accept and retain Black students in higher education. More specifically, acceptance rates of Black students have steadily increased approximately 22% over the past forty years (National Center for Education Statistics). However, institutional structures have not sufficiently been able to retain them. As of 2018, the retention rate of Black students was 52.1%, the lowest rating compared to Asian, White, and Hispanic students (NSC Research Center).

Previous research, many of which are conducted within predominantly white institutions (PWIs), suggests factors Black students need to successfully matriculate through higher education.¹ One study entitled “Exploring Double Consciousness: The Rhetoric and Retention of Black Graduate Students at Predominantly White Institutions,” explored the experiences of Black graduate students attending Purdue

¹ Example studies: *Get Them Here: Keep Them Here: A Study of the Recruitment and Retention of Black Students at Greenwood University* by Jocelyn Fisher, et. al, *Cornell University Seeks to Boost Retention of Black Students in Computer Science* by The Journal of blacks in higher education, and *Increasing the Retention of Black Students: A Multimethod Approach* by Helen F. Giles-Gee.

University (Broughton). It specifically focused on theoretical approaches to W. E. B. Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness," how Purdue's Black graduate students, most of whom attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) for undergraduate studies, understood this phenomenon, and the implications their experiences had on the retention rate of Black graduate students in higher education institutions like Purdue. That study was guided by some of the following questions:

1. From your experience at an HBCU, which of the following contributed to your understanding of your identity?
2. Which components influenced your decision to pursue graduate studies at a predominately white institution?
3. Do you deliberately participate in on-campus cultural activities, organizations, or culturally-diverse settings?
4. In what ways has participating in cultural activities or groups contributed to your academic success?
5. Do you believe that Purdue creates an environment that is inclusive to multicultural students?
6. Do you experience a varying of identities (or social roles) as a result of being a Black student at a predominately white institution?
7. In what ways has your graduate program's curriculum or method of instruction embraced other cultural practices?
8. Have personal experiences or other motives generated any contemplation about remaining enrolled at Purdue?

The responses to this study suggested an anticipated pattern among Black graduate students regarding the components needed and desired to successfully navigate PWIs and higher education at large. This included faculty-student mentorship, culturally-relevant curriculum, financial assistance and comfortability, and a caring community that shared and/or acknowledged Black experiences. The absence

of these factors were reflected in the relatively high turnover rate of Black students at Purdue (Broughton 44).

This invites the question of which institutions purposefully creates educational spaces that recognizes the systemic disadvantages against Black students and, as a result, implements strategies and tools to aid and affirm their holistic selves. Presumably, HBCUs were formed, in part, for this purpose. As early as the 19th century, Richard Humphrey formally launched Cheyney University, an establishment devoted to providing educational opportunities for Black people. Many Black leaders and Quaker-philanthropists followed suit to Humphrey's mission at Cheyney. While the growing presence of HBCUs did not eradicate the inequality and disadvantages Black students faced, it is believed to have given them a place of solace that fostered a positive educational community and experience, and the potential for success.

The organization of HBCUs is worth further exploration as its structural influences on students' academic experiences may set a benchmark for comparing the approaches to diversity and inclusion among various institutions and the means in which they shape Black students' academic experiences. What measures do HBCUs take to aid in the retaining of Black students? How does this reflect the historical foundation of HBCUs? Would Black HBCU students propose that factors similar to those explored at PWIs is what encourages them to remain at their institution (i.e. faculty-student dynamics, community, financial stability, and culturally-relevant curriculum)?

For this study, I contend that kinship systems as revealed through Black faculty-student connection, religion or spiritual practices, and social groups and activities, are the leading contributors to the retention of Black students at historically Black colleges and universities. These factors tend to mirror foundational elements historically found in the Black community, and arguably used as a means for survival and success within a systemically oppressive society. Exploring how these function and influence the academic trajectory of Black students amplifies their voices that have traditionally been suppressed.

A supplemental goal of this study is to offer Black students tools for introspection that will aid them in navigating possible barriers to educational success. In turn, this study will also give insight to PWIs

of higher learning on how to strategically and positively improve the experience and retention of Black students, and the approach to diversity and inclusion on campus.

1.1 Assumptions

The Retention Rate at HBCUs

This study is not a comparison between the retention rate of HBCUs and predominantly white institutions. Rather, it selects private HBCUs with the highest retention rate as a qualifier for measuring the impact of cultural factors at an institution. As such, the study presumes that the HBCUs of this study do not face challenges concerning retention of Black students, beyond or equal to that of PWIs. This is potentially a byproduct of the typical student-demographics found at an HBCU. However, if accurately proportioned, it is not guaranteed that data would reflect HBCUs having higher or equivalent retention rates. Nevertheless, the focal point of this study is to investigate how cultural networks have influenced the experience of students who chose to remain at their institution.

HBCUs as a Collective

HBCUs, like Black people, are not a monolith. Although they have shared experiences and missions, each school has its own identity, cultural norms, and approach to cultivating student experiences. An underlying assumption of this study, however, is that its findings will reflect, to an extent, the impact of kinship systems at HBCUs in general. Yet, it is understood that HBCUs as a collective are not homogenous due to various factors such as the location, the values held by institutional leadership, the demographics of faculty and staff, the town and gown, and more. Still, given the historical grounding of HBCUs and their overall purpose to provide educational opportunities to Black/African American people, conclusions made from this exploration are intended to be descriptive rather than prescriptive across HBCUs.

The Role of Religion

This research holds preconceived notions regarding the role of religion within the current HBCU culture and the Black community. Religion, particularly as seen through the Black church, was a pillar in earlier, Black-lived experiences. “The Black church was born in slavery” says theologian, James Hal Cone. Although “[the Black Church] symbolizes a people who were completely stripped of their African heritage as they were enslaved by the “Christian” white man,” it also operates in a profound narrative of collective ingenuity (91). The institution of slavery relegated all economic, political, social, and most times, physical power to the white slave owner. Therefore, Black enslaved individuals were challenged with finding safe opportunities to plan for liberation and to openly exist in community. The institution of church became that place for them. While the opportunity to conduct church gatherings were contingent upon the owner of the plantation, those who were permitted to gather, did so. Functioning as an oasis for the Black liberation struggle, the Black church has been the most influential institution of the Black community. Throughout the years, it has served as a place of refuge for Black people, even those who did not fully believe in its spiritual doctrines, as it has fostered systems, like fictive kinship, that support the continued fight for justice and equality.

This collective, Black ingenuity is evident through the education of Black people. As a result of legally being banned from educational institutions, Blacks established their own. Black leaders, alongside the support of Quaker Philanthropists — a set of Protestant Christians — formed many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Given the historical, social, and financial connections between the Black church, religious leaders and HBCUs, it is presumed that this partnership has always influenced the morals and values that are prioritized within the institutional structure of HBCUs. For instance, practices such as weekly prayer, Sunday and midweek chapel service, Bible Study, among other resemblances of church practices are typically ingrained, and in some cases, mandated for students. This study initially assumes that the ordinances of the United Methodist denomination are still heavily reflected in the day-to-day of the institution, as well as in the personal principles of their faculty and students.

Similarly, it is assumed that traditional religion, in some capacity, still plays a central role in the upbringing of most Black/African descendants. The church, although described by Dubois as a “hub for social gathering,” has served as a haven for those marginalized by systemic racism (Zuckerman). It has been a cornerstone in the lives of Black people across the African Diaspora, despite one’s subscription to the faith or not. While this may have been true as late as the early 21st century, it may not hold as much weight in a current society that encourages the pursuit of one’s “truth” and more readily accepts “nontraditional” life choices. That is, the basis on which gatherings in the Black church were once prevalent, have become singularized as individuals seek to challenge and reappropriate the value and presence of religion in their lives. This assumption is reflected in some of the focus group questions, however, it is framed to encourage honest responses from participants regarding their religious experience.

1.2 Limitations

While this study created space for Black student voices and developed tools to enhance their collegiate experience, there are limitations to this exploration that are worth acknowledging. Above all, this study does not garner the perspective of students from all HBCUs. Ideally, all HBCUs would be represented to offer a more holistic perspective to the impact of cultural networks on Black HBCU students. However, this was not feasible given the scope set for this study. In a similar manner, participants in this study are not representative of their entire institution or the experiences of all Black students.

Lastly, this peculiar era of COVID, coupled with other political, racial, and social pandemics, required a data collection method that prioritized participants’ safety and wellbeing. In order to do so, and to adhere to institutional policies that disallowed visitation, all participation was virtual. Subsequently, there were no means of witnessing or measuring how cultural networks unfold beyond the perspectives shared via the survey and focus group sessions. Another limitation attributable to COVID was sustained remote learning. Students experienced a significant shift in engagement with their instructors, peers, and school at large. This could have impacted how they perceived their collegiate experience and relationships.

1.3 Delimitations

As a preliminary study on the impact of kinship systems, this exploration only targeted five private HBCUs, each of whom had a retention rate of at least 70%, a student-population of less than 2,500, and were in the southeast region of the United States. Such qualifications aimed to control for factors such as:

- Faculty-student ratio
- Influence by state government entities on institutional operation
- Proximity to traditional values²

Thus, as aforementioned, retention rates were not being assessed, rather it was used as a control for measuring how kinship systems materialized at the selected institutions. Participation was limited to students who classified as undergraduate juniors or 3rd year students, and seniors or 4th year students. This ensured that the perspective received by students were of those who had sufficient experience with their university and chose to remain there for more than half of the expected duration.

Overall, this chapter introduced the historical background of Black descendants' experiences with the American educational system and how they have responded to the prejudices faced in their pursuit of higher education. It provided context regarding the need to explore the root of HBCUs and the Black community at large as a means of identifying the needs of Black students in higher education today. This chapter also discussed ways assumptions and limitations of this study were addressed in order to rightfully present the experiences of this study's participants.

² Proximity is referring to an institution's tendency to reflect morals, values, and practices common (or acceptable) to an area and/or group of people. This benchmark fluctuates over time.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter explores the work of scholars who have contributed to an aspect of kinship systems being discussed in this project. It specifically addresses the meaning of kinship systems, and its use within the Black church and community. This section also gives an overview of literature that discusses the various dynamics between Black faculty and Black students, the incorporation of culturally-relevant curriculum in years past, and diversity, inclusion, and retention of Black students.

2.1 Kinship Systems

Traditional kinship systems, as described by Sociologist Dr. Harry M. Johnson, involve the organization of individuals who are biologically connected (Johnson). It indicates the function of these relationships, setting boundaries and guidelines for rules of engagement. While the intricacy of kinship varies across cultures, there is a level of formality that can often be found within each, such as the “terms of reference” (i.e. father, mother, brother, cousin, etc.) (Johnson 188). Nevertheless, these titles and roles can hold various implications for the person that fulfills them. According to definitions used by scholars of other studies, kinship systems also have the potential to evolve beyond their bloodlines to incorporate individuals that are biologically unassociated but operate in familial-like roles that are just as vital. This evolution of consanguineal to fictive kinship is especially evident in the relationships of Black/African descendants.

In "Continuities and Variations in Black Family Structure," Anthropologist Joyce Aschenbrenner contends that the composition of Black family kinship is often placed against the backdrop of the white American nuclear family (181). Previous studies have measured the socioeconomic and familial viability of Black families mostly according to the presence of two parents in the home and their affluence. Yet, systemic discrimination of Blacks since the earliest forms of Black chattel slavery in America unveils the impetus for most of the disruption seen in the Black nuclear family (Barnes 377). As such, Blacks have developed “a communal sense of social responsibility, permitting not only survival but also the maintenance

of a sense of individual dignity” (Aschenbrenner 181). They have drawn strength, support, and resources from consanguineal and affinal ties — nearby family members who assume responsibility for the wellbeing of their relatives.

Aschenbrenner’s concept of “a communal sense of social responsibility” becomes applicable to those of shared experiences (e.g. systemic disparities and discrimination) (197). The foundation of these bonds/arrangements is mostly ancestral, collective trauma, and manifests itself in entities such as the Black church.

2.2 The Black Church, Kinship, and Community

Spirituality and religious practices have always played a pivotal role in Black culture, serving as a form of deity connection, protest against injustice, and moral compass. When it came to the formal establishment of schools for Blacks in America during and post-legalized chattel slavery, many were founded by quaker philanthropists and other clergymen (Davis). Expectedly, church culture and community infiltrated the operation of schools. This is still reflected today in HBCUs’ affiliation with the Methodist denomination of the Christian religion. While some may argue that the legality of religion in higher education has visibly decreased, remnants of its function is still evident today in our HBCUs. It is worth considering whether this perpetual element of “church” contributes to students’ ability and willingness to finish at their university.

Phil Zuckerman, a Professor of Sociology, assembled a collection of Du Bois' essays regarding his vantage point on the institution of religion and its evolution and positioning within the lives of Blacks. While Du Bois actively professed Christianity, practiced its doctrine, and became Biblically literate throughout his youth, he grew to become highly critical of organized religion (Zuckerman). His involvement with different denominational teachings enlightened him to the multiple functions of the Negro church – politically, socially, economically, and spiritually. The functions are assessed in light of African religions, chattel slavery in the United States, and Black liberation movements and religious practices henceforth.

As Du Bois identifies the Negro church as the provenance for Black educational institutions, the following highlights key frameworks that will be critical to analyzing how religious affiliations of historically Black colleges and universities operate as its progeny. More specifically, Du Bois' contentions call for additional scholarship concerning:

- The influence of the American church on the plight of Blacks
- The primary function of the Negro/Black church in the Black community
- The church's contribution to the social benchmark for morality in the Black community/schools

The narrative surrounding Christianity in America has been Eurocentric and white-supremacist. Regardless of the biblical commands to be in unity with like-minded believers and to treat others (i.e. your neighbor) how you would like to be treated, the American church, predominately white, was complicit in the successful execution of the chattel enslavement of Blacks. Their perception of Black/non-white human beings was that of "heathens" that needed to be converted to Christianity and "purified" (Zuckerman). Contrarily, Blacks appropriated the same Christian practice as a tool of protest. Through persistent unjust treatment and overall mental, physical suppression, the Black church became more than just a place for spiritual practice.

In *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois argued that the black church "is, to be sure, a social institution first, and religious afterwards" (205). As a result of slavery dismantling the Black family unit, the "Negro church" became the building block for social organization, change, community, solace and hope. Although spiritual practices were essential to those of African descent, Du Bois contends that social matters often took precedence over the spiritual. However, this function of the church is twofold. While the church served as the cornerstone for social uplift/justice, its means of social gathering contributed to the diminution of youth in the church. Du Bois' discussion of the Negro church's growing practice of asceticism speaks to the significant decline of youth's association with the church (Zuckerman).

These are the questions currently being raised. Black people, especially the younger generation, are in search of a faith that can actively withstand and support the vicissitudes of Black life. There are many structures of the Black church that lend itself to the decline of Black youth engagement, and the overall

pivot that a lot of its congregation and community members have made away from its traditional practices. Baldwin, Du Bois, and Harris each have credited this to the Church neglecting to properly address public concerns, while consistently dressing the message of Christ to appeal to a particular agenda. As a result, the church has become, according to Baldwin, a de(vice) for some and a tool for respectability politics in seeking “purification.” As Du Bois suggests, it has also simply become “the cornerstone of social organization” that doesn’t provide much guidance for morality (just ascetics).

Conversely, Rev. Dr. Sandra L. Barnes offers a more contemporary perspective on the role of church culture in the lives of Black people. While Du Bois recognized a disdain the youth has towards the church, Barnes presents a qualitative study of how Black Church culture contributes to its congregations’ participation in community action. She first offers a broader definition of “culture” and defines it as “[a provision of] materials for which strategies of action are constructed” (Barnes 271). Barnes specifies that culture is not confined to its traditional definition of being a “shared way of life.” Rather, culture uses symbols and tools to help negotiate one’s experiences and decisions. For instance, how a congregation interprets/learns its ritual practices, language, sayings, songs, and biblical stories, contributes to their involvement and personal investment in community engagement (Barnes 972). This perspective is often led by the church leaders’ usage of religious symbols, and further shaped by the lens of the congregation’s individual Black experiences.

The kinship system found within the Black church and more specifically, within their denominations, often creates a form of community due to shared experiences, spaces, and status (i.e. socioeconomic status, faith, neighborhoods, etc.). Barnes highlights that each community constructs how they respond to social issues. For instance, she contends that the Pentecostal and Holiness denominations typically house impoverished individuals who are indoctrinated to prefer contemporary Gospel music – implying some level of implication for the form of social action they become involved in. Presumptively, the fusion of inspirational music, rap, and hip-hop found in contemporary Gospel music has the potential to draw in youth who offer more unconventional religious practices and/or obliges the church to address their daily struggles as Blacks in America.

Along with music as a cultural tool of the Black church, Barnes reports that African American churches are more likely to engage in prayer as a form of ritual and petition compared to white churches. Prayer as a cultural tool was (and is) used as “a weapon for social change” as they cried out to a higher deity regarding the plight of Blacks (971). Participants found this practice to be individually and collectively conducive to those involved, and also was believed to guide their decisions when it came to moving forward in the Black liberation struggle.

Barnes’ findings offer many implications for studying the doctrinal and denominational differences found within HBCUs affiliation with the Methodist denomination. How do their religious practices foster kinship, and thereby influence the retention rate? In what aspects of college life are religious customs and practices evident (e.g. weekly Power Hour, Bible study, mandated convocation, etc.)?

2.3 Mentorship: The Relationship Between Black Faculty & Black Students

Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) play a vital role in the advancement of the Black community. They open doors for Blacks and other marginalized groups to gain access to higher education, when previously, this right was not afforded to them. Modern HBCUs have evolved since its inception and although these institutions as a collective vary in operation, they each proclaim the same mission to educate Blacks in a culturally appreciative and culturally-relevant atmosphere. This means educating students through the lens in which they see the world. It is centering students’ experiences in light of the material being taught. This method of inclusion possibly aids in retention of Black students that often unfolds through faculty-student dynamics.

Inclusion and retention initiatives often implement mentorship programs to facilitate relationships with their minority population. This is especially true within the university setting as it is believed that mentorships offer the underserved opportunities to bridge the gap between their current positioning and what they are aiming to attain. PWIs, however, are stigmatized for not providing adequate mentorship of Black students by Black faculty members (Brittain, etc.) — presumably a result of disproportionate hiring of Black, equally qualified faculty members. This is critical as over 50% of participants of a 2018 study

reported that the faculty-student dynamics at their HBCU contributed to their identity and overall experience (Broughton). The weight of Black faculty's presence has significant implications for Black students' academic trajectory.

Though the expectation for Black faculty mentorship appears as more of a "given" within HBCUs, it does not speak to the perceptions, contentions, or quality of mentorship between Black faculty and Black students. Two Iona College scholars conducted a study titled, "Intraracial Dynamics of Black Professors' and Black Students' Communication in Traditionally White Colleges and Universities," in which they explored ten Black faculty member's perception of mentoring Black students. Each faculty member was a full-time tenured professor at a predominately white institution in New York. The purpose was to examine the effect of Black mentorship on the retention rate of Black students. This study is fitting as it is believed that because Black faculty and students may have shared experiences, they better empathize with Black students, and can provide strategies to help them successfully navigate PWIs and other institutions of higher education.

From this study, Moore and Toliver present a series of challenges that the participants face in their relationships with Black students. This includes:

1. Navigating institutionalized racism
2. The expectation of "handouts" or lowered standards by Black students
3. Debunking or acknowledging perceived privileges (e.g. socioeconomic status)
4. Developing trust due to the hierarchy of power
5. The dual identity that Black faculty inevitably face as they cater to the needs of Black students and expectations of academia, without much tangible credit

Despite these challenges, the participants of this study recognized the value of mentoring Black students, especially in predominantly white spaces. For instance, many of them found the need to intentionally affirm their identity and racial stance at the inception of the semester in front of their students as a potential sign of allyship and empathy (937). They also worked beyond the general expectation to provide their Black students with extra guidance and support, in order to meet their specific needs given

that the university's embedded inequity disenfranchises Black students. Lastly, these professors also aligned their roles as mentors with the commitment that Black students be held to an equal standard within the classroom. Along with this expectation, however, the participants assured that they implemented culturally-relevant pedagogy to further meet the needs of their racially-minoritized students.

2.4 Mentorship: Diversity Training for Faculty

From a training perspective, Womack, Wood, and collaborating scholars reflect a similar stance as Moore and Toliver in their work entitled, "Culturally Aware Mentorship: Lasting Impacts of a Novel Intervention on Academic Administrators and Faculty." In their study of diversity training, they conduct a year-long test on the impact of a Culturally Aware Mentorship (CAM) training program for instructors. This training was given to faculty and administrators across three institutions, two of which were minority-serving institutions, and the other closely focused on and invested in diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Like Moore and Toliver, Womack, et. al. contend that lived experiences of historically underrepresented faculty and students should be incorporated into educational instruction, and that competent mentors are those who are introspective and advocate for the racially marginalized. They use this program to demonstrate that effective mentors must have an "awareness of how one's social identity shapes worldviews and experiences can help individuals better understand their own perspectives and learn to interact with people from similar and different backgrounds" (Womack 2). Feedback gathered from this study emphasized the need for such a program as higher administration gained applicable lessons on being intrapersonal and interpersonal, and skill building. CAM activities forced participants to view their colleagues and students in light of their experiences and cultural backgrounds. Some participants even voiced becoming more cognizant of the various ways diversity and inclusion unfolds, and practical measures they can take to ensure that they are mentoring others from a place of empathy, awareness, and action.

2.5 Mentorship: HBCUs and The Second Curriculum

The findings of each of the aforementioned scholars parallels a deeply rooted pedagogical practice of HBCU instructors referred to as the Second Curriculum. In the early 1900s, many teachers and students within HBCU classrooms pursued a common goal of eradicating the efforts of Jim Crow through their educational studies. Initially operating quite discreetly due to the supervision of white, governing forces who fought for the sustenance of white supremacy, the preparation and mission for Black liberation was conveyed through an unwritten Second Curriculum. Coined from the works of Chandra Guinn, Professor Jelani Favors, an Associate Professor of History at Clayton University — a predominantly Black institution north of Georgia — introduces the Second Curriculum through the activist pedagogy of Black instructors.

Professor Jane McAllister, a prominent academic-activist and advocate for the Second Curriculum, made a concerted effort to shape Black students into “instruments of social and political change” throughout the 20th century (Favors 98). Favors states that “McAllister converted her classroom into a training ground and openly urged students to take bold strides against white supremacy” (Favors 99). On a practical basis, this involved McAllister and other instructors challenging the perspective of scholars whose works were implemented into The Second Curriculum was a means for teaching and learning through the lens of Critical Race Theory — an approach that strictly opposed the “zero tolerance for educated Blacks who sought to break stride with the expectations of local custom or law” (Favors 105).

Despite the preference of white governance to prevent the education of Blacks, especially Black youth, the Second Curriculum put wind in their [Black students’] sails and strengthened their resolve...in the burgeoning civil rights movement” (Favors 117). For Black youth, this unfolded through sit-ins, protest, and marches against racial discrimination internationally, nationally, and locally. With the mentorship of Black faculty members who supported the Second Curriculum, Black students radically protested against Jim Crow efforts — whether it was on their campus or at neighboring universities.

Expectedly, the radical nature of the Second Curriculum did not easily pervade all HBCUs. More specifically, the “leaders” of some HBCUs did not hold the socioeconomic power to successfully infiltrate the curriculum with that of Black empowerment. Favors states that, “Most of Jackson State’s all-black

faculty wrestled with the ideas of livelihood versus liberation” (Favors 100). This was evident throughout President Jacob Reddix’s tenure at Jackson State University. In the midst of civil and racial unrest, JSU — a state-governed HBCU — physically and psychologically discouraged their Black students from participating in uprisings or resistance of any capacity. With the assistance of President Reddix, the state maintained a heavy hand on JSU students and exhausted many efforts to dissolve the Second Curriculum. JSU perpetuated conservative rhetoric in that it enforced discriminatory laws and actions upon students and teachers, that discouraged them from organizing and fighting for the Black agenda. This ranged from imposing on teachers’ office hours and physically attacking students during their protests, to firing any teacher who was reported to have participated in any rally, march, or pro-Black organization (e.g. NAACP, SNCC, etc.) (Favors 102).

The mission of this unwritten Second Curriculum was to 1) prepare Black youth to successfully engage in the Black liberation struggle through education, 2) to affirm the scholarship and work of Black faculty, and 3) to promote racial consciousness of minoritized people. This was not confined to the walls of a classroom, but it also permeated the town and gown dynamics and the faculty-student dynamics. It was the hopes of older generations that Black youth would combat racial injustice by acquiring an education that would permit them to “prove themselves” to one day, holistically participate in the democracy America proclaimed existed (Favors 99). While the stark differences between McAllister and Reddix’s approach still exist, it is believed that the Second Curriculum remains embedded in the infrastructure of contemporary HBCUs.

Contrarily, predominately white institutions (PWIs) generally wrestle with uplifting the voices of Black students and acknowledging their experiences. Although structures such as cultural centers and minority-focused programs may exist on the campuses of PWIs, Black students who have experienced both an HBCU and PWI contend that there is a lack of allyship within and outside of the PWIs classroom. According to the aforementioned 2018 study, 50% of the respondents did not believe that Purdue is inclusive to multicultural students — 77% of which were HBCU graduates (Broughton). While this does not insinuate that their individual HBCUs believed in the Second Curriculum, activist pedagogy, or positive

faculty-student relations, it does show that Black students' experience at Purdue, a PWI, was not readily welcoming to Black students.

2.6 Mentorship: Faculty-Student Dynamics, Black Community, & Pedagogical Approach

A study conducted by Brooks and Allen sums up the contentions of these authors and how Black kinship systems go beyond consanguineal relationships. In their findings, Brooks and Allen report how HBCU students developed fictive kinship with Black faculty and families of/around their university. For instance, Black faculty typically recognized a shared struggle with students as they faced socioeconomic adversity that could have prevented them from completing their undergraduate studies (Brooks and Allen 822). Although this empathy may not be predominately exclusive to HBCUs or Black faculty and students, the experience of socioeconomic inferiority and Blacks is. Local families, including those of other students, also shared in responsibility for students' wellbeing. Brooks and Allen also tested the role of religious affiliations. Resultantly, the local church and students' home churches participated in taking care of students in a number of ways (e.g. financially, spiritual guidance, mentorship, and more) - displaying a form of rapport or kinship although not actually related.

Brooks and Allen's studies give space for a more extensive definition of kinship within HBCUs and the various ways and reasons it may unfold. This study intentionally hones in on how kinship may manifest through faculty-student dynamics, religious practices, and social groups and organizations, and how these factors possibly contribute to the retention rate of Black students.

2.7 Diversity, Inclusion, and Retention

Scholars Brittian, Sy, and Stokes conducted a similar study to measure the influence of mentorship programs for Black students. Contrary to what other scholars have claimed, this study discovered that mentorship did **not** display the common college-student concern (i.e., financial stability, grades, etc.) or their psychological health. In fact, Black students who were mentored had "significantly lower GPAs" than non-mentored students (92). Of course, this finding calls for more contextualized research. However, this

qualitative and quantitative study explores some of the underlying causes of low retention rates, specifically for Black college students at the University of Southern California.

Some of the suggested causes of low retention rate for Black students includes acculturative stress, stress from transitioning, and social support. Acculturative stress is the overwhelmingness one may feel as a result of having/attempting to adjust to a different culture (87). It is having a strong sense of not belonging due to cultural differences — a culture shock in many ways. Presumably, this concept is intertwined with imposter syndrome and double consciousness, where the student may feel inadequate or as if they don't belong because of contemporary and historical-social factors. It is when “One ever feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (Du Bois 11). In a similar fashion, this divided identity can also be seen as a result of what Brittian, Sy, and Stokes perceive as stress from transition, another contributor to the retention rate of Black students. For many students, transitioning to college-life can be a challenging undertaking. This is often due to an unanticipated amount of freedom, responsibility, and disparate group of people. For Black students at PWIs, Brittian and colleagues contend that the transition can be much more difficult given the minimum opportunities for social support and networking (92). All in all, it is believed that these factors contribute to Black students' behavior, experiences, and overall retention. The authors endorse the university's approach to improving the retention of Black students by “[developing] an holistic approach to cultivating a healthy, productive atmosphere for Black students,” and creating specific programs that display “afro-centric pride,” and promote diversity, inclusion, and self-efficacy.

All in all, this chapter explored the research of scholars who have contributed to the discussion of kinship systems in some capacity. It specifically discussed the meaning of kinship systems and networks, the presence of kinship systems within the Black church and community, the various dynamics between Black faculty and Black students, the inclusion of culturally-relevant curriculum in at HBCUs, and diversity, inclusion, and retention of Black students.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to amplify Black student voices and offer them tools for navigating potential barriers to educational success. It specifically explored the existence of kinship systems through the lens of faculty-student dynamics, religious affiliations, and social activities and organizations at HBCUs; it also considered other possible informal and programmatic ways kinship might unfold and consequently, influence the experience and retention of Black students. This chapter will discuss the methods used to identify institutions, participants, and questions for this study. It provides the rationale of factors considered when determining which HBCU to explore, which classification of students to recruit, and the most effective and appropriate means for collecting and analyzing students' perspectives.

In an effort to document students' experiences and measure institutional kinship networks, this study took a mixed-methods approach. This technique is most conducive when exploring communities, particularly minority-based communities, as it allows for:

1. Centering community members' voices and experiences
2. Evaluating relational dynamics between members
3. Grounding quantitative data into qualitative data
4. Contextualizing the interpretation of data collected

As such, this project consisted of two segments, a survey and a focus group. Participants of each segment were recruited from five Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs):

1. Claflin University – Orangeburg, SC
2. Tougaloo College – Jackson, Mississippi
3. Morehouse College – Atlanta, Georgia
4. Spelman College – Atlanta, Georgia

5. Talladega College – Talladega, Alabama

Each school selected is a private institution located in the southeastern region of the United States. As a private institution, these colleges are regulated by their state, by the federal law, and by their board of trustees. Such schools are also financially supported by endowments (i.e. donations by alumni, community members and organizations, etc.) and student tuition, rather than by the government. For that reason, it is presumed that private colleges have more leeway and/or more input in the regulation of their institution; therefore, private HBCUs were selected for this study because of the extent of autonomy its leaders may have in choosing how to govern the institution and subsequently, include kinship systems.

These five schools are also located in the southeastern region of the USA, as are the majority of HBCUs (see Figure 2: Number of HBCUs in each state and territory). While it is understood that HBCUs are not monolithic, its geographical location can imply particular values and ways of life that are to be acknowledged when evaluating students' experiences. Evaluating how these five institutions in the southeast embody and perpetuate particular morals, values, and

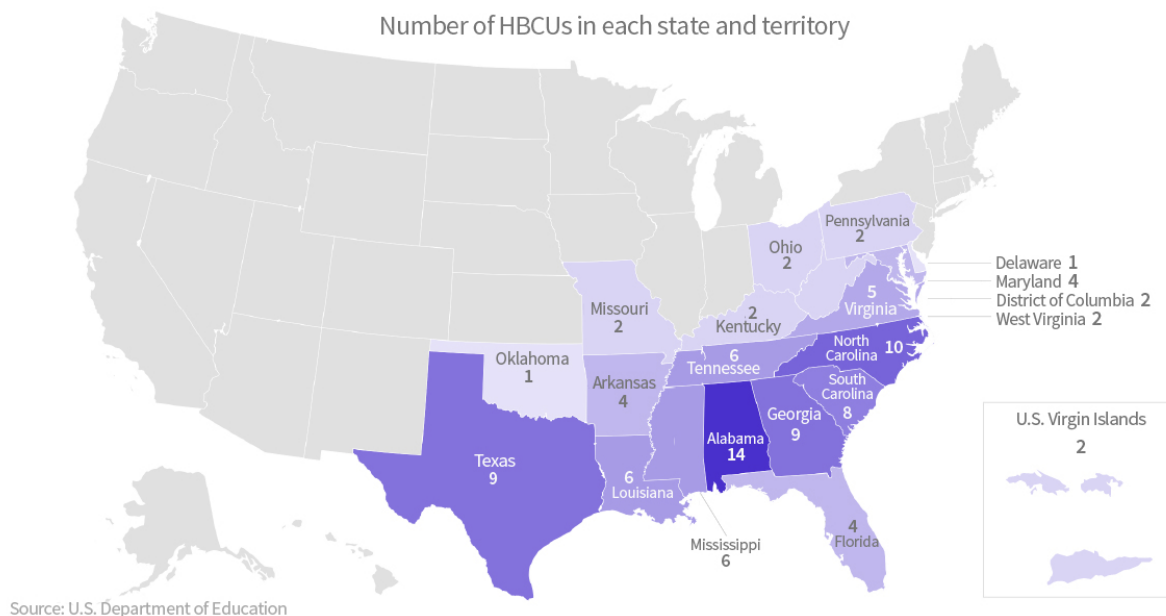


Figure 2: Number of HBCUs in each state and territory

practices of its surrounding culture has important implications for how their kinship networks speak to those of other HBCUs. Even more, the HBCUs of this study also had a minimum retention rate of 70%, and a student population of less than 2,500 at the time of selection. Selecting these institutions allowed the study to control for:

1. A level of autonomy regarding school's governance and regulations
2. Traditional cultural norms between campuses and their community
3. Student satisfaction as indicated by retention rate
4. Student-teacher ratio

Participation for both phases was strictly voluntary and limited to upper-class students who attend Claflin, Spelman, Morehouse, Tougaloo, and Talladega. Participants had to classify as Juniors or Seniors (i.e. students in their 3rd or 4th/final year). This ensured that the data collected represented students with a sufficient duration at their university that reflects their perseverance, along with their perspective to assess the factors that contributed to their experience.

Phase I

Phase I was an anonymous survey. Survey participants were solicited via a forwarded email with the accompanying consent form, sent by their institution's engagement specialist or someone of an equivalent position (see Appendices A and B). The survey was available for four weeks. At the end of the anonymous survey, participants had the option to complete a contact survey providing their 1) first name and last initial, 2) race/ethnicity, 3) institution, and 4) email address if they were interested in participating in Phase II of the research. The survey asked 10 open and close-ended questions about the participants' communal upbringing, expressions of kinship, and their HBCU experience (see Appendix C). The survey was used to identify potential correlations between institutions, and potential participants for the latter portion of the study. The following

section provides the rationale behind the survey questions used for Phase I. It excludes the demographic information, along with interest questions concerning Phase II of this study.

Rationale of Survey Questions

Question 4: Rank the racial demographics of your home community according to its predominance.

- *White or European American*
- *Black or African American*
- *Native American*
- *Alaska Native*
- *Asian American*
- *Native American*
- *Other Pacific Islander*
- *Other* _____

Identifying the predominant racial demographic of participants' home community provided context regarding their geographical proximity to a Black community and thereby, the extent of which kinship systems, as defined in this study, may exist within their day to day lives. This question also sheds light on which group of people influenced the culture of their home community. Responses to this question, in part, was used to examine participants' rationale in selecting their college, along with the root of any expectations or preferences they had regarding the campus's culture or demographics as a result of who they were surrounded by during their rearing.

Question 5: Describe the dynamics between the members of your home community.

- *Mostly strangers*
- *Acquaintances*
- *Dependable friends*
- *Family-like*
- *Other* _____

Question #5 further explored participants' communal upbringing. As kinship systems mirror familial-like dynamics, this question asked participants to gauge how close-knit the members of their home community were. This provided insight on the care and responsibility assumed for one

another in their home community. It also has implications for students' expectations (or lack thereof) of their faculty members, institutional leaders, and peers.

Question 6: What are the main factors that influenced your decision to attend an HBCU? Select all that apply.

- *Faculty-student dynamics*
- *Financial assistance*
- *Social activities or organizations*
- *Religious, spiritual, or faith-based community*
- *Family legacy*
- *Other*_____

Students' motive for deciding to attend an HBCU speaks to what drives the institution's public credibility. It identifies what the school is known for doing well, while also emphasizing areas that need improvement or is not significantly important to student retention. It is also important to note that participants committed to an undergraduate institution based on preconceived notions that both garnered their trust and also appeared to meet some level of expectations — financially, structurally, socially, etc.

Question 7: Have you ever considered withdrawing from school? Why or why not?

- *Yes*
- *No*
- *Explain:*

Question #7 called for students to reflect on their collective experience at their institution. While students' participation in this study makes it evident that they are still enrolled, this question requires them to think about reasons they may have considered leaving their school. Unlike questions prior to this, this question more directly reveals an institution's shortcomings and/or students' personal challenges that schools should be cognizant of for the purposes of holistic care and retention efforts.

Question 8: Rank the following according to how it has positively contributed to your college experience:

- *Faculty-student dynamics*

- *Social Activities or organizations*
- *Religious, spiritual, or faith-based community*
- *Financial assistance*
- *Academic opportunities beyond the classroom*

Question #8 explicitly highlights factors that students believe are working well at their institution, and factors that have a positive influence on their experience. This question reiterates which factors are aiding students in staying the course, and which may not be as relevant. Data collected from this question further confirms or denies if such kinship systems are useful and desired in the Black student experience, and to what extent.

Question 9: Describe the similarities or differences you believe exists between your home community and your college community (i.e., racial demographics, member dynamics, religious/spiritual practices, etc.).

This reflective, open-ended question called for participants to think about the commonalities and differences between their home and campus community. This data, in light of the retention rates and in tandem with previous questions, illustrates if students selected and remained committed to their institution potentially because of its familiarity or dissimilarity to their upbringing. Did they grow up in a predominantly Black neighborhood and desired such demographics in a college town? Was their home an area where they were the minority and, in turn, they sought out a majority-Black campus? Was participation in religious activities heavily encouraged (or even mandated) growing up, and now they distanced themselves from religious practices in college? Question #9 was intended to prompt students to think about the aspects of community that has both aided them in thriving, or that has imposed on their collegiate experience in some way.

Question 10: Describe your relationship with your faculty members.

- *Engagement limited to classroom requirements*
- *Engagement beyond classroom obligations for professional advancement*
- *Engagement beyond classroom obligations for professional advancement and personal connection*

- *Family-like*
- *Other*

Allowing students to define the relationship they have with their professors provides data that speaks to kinship as seen through faculty-student dynamics. It also insinuates that students have an idea or an unwritten standard of what constitutes “professional” versus a “personal connection.” While in essence, the two positions can overlap as discussed later in the conclusion, this question gives language to which category students experience the most at their institution. The focus group discussion provides more context as to how each category manifests for each student.

Question 11: How often do you engage in religious, spiritual, or faith-based activities on or near campus (e.g. chapel service, bible study, prayer service, etc.)?

- *Never*
- *Very Rarely*
- *Rarely*
- *Occasionally*
- *Frequently*
- *Very Frequently*

Question #11 aims to gauge how often students participate in religious activities. As a result of religion being different things to different people, the question was phrased to be inclusive of all facets of “religion.” More specifically, this question touches on the significance students find in engaging such activities on or near campus. Data collected from this question highlights the modern relevance of kinship as seen through religion and the implication that has for Black students and the Black community at large today.

Question 12: What university-sponsored social activities or organizations, if any, positively contributes to your experience in college (e.g. homecoming, greek life, chapel service, etc.)?

Question #12 explores kinship systems through social activities and organizations sponsored by the university. While examples are provided, this open-ended question asked

students to reflect on their campus' social settings, specifically, the ones that have enhanced their collegiate experience. As previously mentioned, this question also provides insight on what the institution is doing well that is encouraging or contributing to students' desire to remain at their institution.

Phase II

Phase II involved five, 60–90-minute focus group sessions via Zoom, with one session being held per month. For this segment, probability sampling, specifically, stratified sampling was used to identify participants from the pool of students who showed interest (see Appendix D). The first two respondents from each university. If after 2 weeks, there were not two respondents from each university, the first 10 respondents. Once 10 participants were achieved, the contact survey closed, and responses were no longer accepted. Focus group participants were provided with the following pseudonyms: Danny, Taylor, Sydney, Ryan, Nicky, Aubrey, Blake, Jamie, Justice, and Emory. They had the option to opt out of any question and to turn their cameras off. Should they decide to keep their cameras on, participants had a clear or blurred background to prevent items from showing that might lead to them being identified by others.

Focus group discussions gave the participants the opportunity to converse about key components of the study and offer input on aspects that had yet to be considered. Specifically, participants engaged in conversation with other participants covering the following topics:

1. Choosing an HBCU
2. Faculty-student dynamics
3. Religion, faith, and spiritual practices
4. Social activities and organizations
5. Reflections

Participants were to receive a total of \$100 to be distributed in increments of \$20 at the conclusion of each focus group session. Compensation was delivered via Giftbit to the email participants provided. Giftbit is a digital gift card platform that allows the participant to redeem their incentive with a variety of retailers, restaurants, and other businesses. If the participant chose to withdraw from the study or was removed from the study prior to completion (e.g. disregarding research protocol), compensation was only provided for the month in which they completed the focus group session.

Reassessment of Methods

It is worth noting that the initial conception of this project also consisted of supplemental video logs created by participants, along with campus visitations for observation. Selected participants were set to record periodic video journals in between monthly focus groups. These 5–10-minute journals were to be guided by a reflective question provided by the researcher that extended from the previous focus group session. It was an opportunity for participants to discover and share potential connections between concepts discussed in the focus group and what they experienced in their day-to-day college life. Participants would have been able to view and/or respond to the video logs of other participants. Ideally, this footage would have been used in conjunction with the survey and focus group results, but also as a final video product to supplement the final written dissertation.

One of the potential obstacles of this method was participants' capability and/or willingness to produce quality video logs. Students would have been expected to use their personal device to record their video logs, whether in vlogging or confessional style, and upload it to a shared Dropbox folder provided by the researcher. Because of its intended use as a final product for presentation, some level of training (or access to recording resources) would have needed to

be provided in hopes of guiding them to producing quality and authentic footage. In addition to the technicality of it all, this study takes place in the midst of COVID-19 where most entities were still functioning virtually. Considering most students were in school remotely, the potential for “virtual fatigue” was heightened. Although some students may still have been willing to participate, again, the quality of the content for various reasons, may not have been up to par. Lastly, given the scope and set timeframe of this study, it would not have been feasible to collect and sufficiently analyze approximately 50+ videos of students’ responses.

Observations

The surveys, focus group session, and video logs were intended to be supplemented by visitations to each research site (i.e. Claflin University, Spelman College, Morehouse College, Tougaloo College, and Talladega College). Visitations were approved to include observation of campus events, activities, and classroom sessions, along with research-related communication with current faculty, staff, and students as initiated and allowed by the individual. Each campus site was to be asked to provide the following support:

- Access to institutional data regarding enrollment and retention rates
- Access to public spaces/common areas of campus to observe daily activities
- Access to classroom sessions as permitted by the instructor prior to attendance
- Permission to attend university-sponsored events within the indicated time period
- Digital documentation of personal experience while visiting the site including but not limited to video and audio recording on and off premises for the purpose of note-taking

Similar to the video logs, COVID-19 impacted the possibility of visiting these institutions. While the visitation ban was temporarily lifted at some schools, it was later reestablished at each institution prior to the beginning of the study.

Overall, this chapter reviews the mixed-methods used throughout this study to explore kinship systems and its impact on the retention and experiences of Black students at Claflin, Spelman, Morehouse, Tougaloo, and Talladega. It discusses the approach used to select five HBCUs, its participants, the questions for the study, and the advantages and disadvantages of other methods considered for this exploration.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of this study. It draws upon responses to Phase I's survey and Phase II's focus group sessions to provide a detailed overview and analysis of students' perspectives. It begins with a chronological approach of students' rearing and proceeds with a topical outline of students experiences with kinship as seen through faculty-student dynamics, religion, faith, and spiritual practices, and social activities and organizations.

Sixty-two students were represented across five institutions in the survey results: Claflin University (66%), Tougaloo College (24%), Morehouse College (6%), Spelman College (2%), and Talladega College (2%). All students self-identified with an ethnicity of African descent, with the majority subscribing to Black and/or African American. Of the sixty-two participants, thirty-seven classified as Seniors or being in their fourth/final year, and twenty-four classified as Juniors or being in their third year of undergraduate studies. One respondent was a freshman. For Phase II of the study, the following pseudonyms were given to the 8/10 students who were able to participate: **Aubrey, Blake, Danny, Jamie, Nicky, Ryan, Sydney, and Taylor**. Three of these participants were juniors at Claflin, four were seniors at Claflin, and one was a senior at Tougaloo. Considering the significant participation from Claflin University, the coming discussion is largely indicative of their institution. However, the findings are still applicable to each of the 5 HBCUs as the responses of Phases I and II are considered in tandem with one another. Throughout this discussion, "Respondents" or "Participants" will be used when referencing all sixty-two students and input provided through Phase I's survey. Discussions held in Phase II's focus group will reference participants by their pseudonym.

4.1 From Home to an HBCU

Seventy-nine percent of survey participants grew up in a predominantly Black/African American community. The majority of them describe the members of their home community as being family-like or like associates. While the concept of family is subjective and often complex, it is understood throughout this study to be consanguineal, affinal, and/or fictive relationships where the individuals provide a level of support and assume a form of responsibility for one another's wellbeing. This definition gives space to the fluidity of participants' understanding of family, which is later reflected in their discussion of their relationship and expectations of their faculty members at their respective HBCU. Nevertheless, students' upbringing in a predominantly Black, family-like environment sheds light on their rationale for choosing to attend an HBCU. It is likely that the settings in which they were reared, both within and outside of the home, built the foundation for the desires they would come to have of their educational institution.

For instance, focus group participants were asked to share when they first became aware of historically Black colleges. Danny shared that, "My parents, more so my mom, was an alum from SC State University and we grew up going to their homecoming games and, you know, attending some events... football games and things of that nature, and I was kind of indirectly taught what HBCUs were..." Danny states that his initial exposure to the existence of HBCUs was "experiential" because he frequently interacted with individuals who were associated with HBCUs. Similarly, Aubrey states, "I grew up in HBCU culture because all of my aunts who went to college, they all went to different HBCUs, so, they used to take me to the homecoming or to the alumni events that they would go to." Contrarily, other participants did not have as early of an awareness as Danny and Aubrey. Taylor, Sydney, and Nicky did not learn of HBCUs until they were in high school. For Taylor, she was introduced to these institutions through a member of her Black Student Union who was in the midst of contending against school counselors who were

attempting to dissuade her from applying to HBCUs. This sparked a conversation amongst the BSU students and initiated Taylor's interest in pursuing her educational career at an HBCU. Sydney and Nicky were introduced to HBCUs by their guidance counselors near their senior year in high school.

Although each participant held various background knowledge regarding historically Black colleges, they did share a similar level of adversity pertaining to their high school culture and its influence on their decision to attend a historically Black college. Each focus group participant identified their schools as predominantly white institutions. Nicky states,

“...the school district that I was in and the programs that I was in, it was mostly made up of white students, so whenever they would talk about going to a school, they would say “Harvard, Yale” ... My guidance counselor opened up a whole new world of HBCUs for me because I would have never thought about looking at Winston Salem or NC A&T since I was so, I would say, brainwashed but because that's the only thing that I knew. I was just so focused on going to the best PWI at that point.”

Nicky, like many of the other participants, believed that it was simply embedded in the fabric of their high school's structure to overlook and/or dismiss cultural diversity by way of primarily promoting Eurocentric institutions. Their school positioned PWIs, and other Eurocentric learning as the pinnacle of knowledge. Danny says,

“I would agree with Nicky and I want to be honest, it was more so of a whitewash for me because in my high school, there were a lot of students who grew up knowing where they wanted to go. Some wanted to go to Clemson and some wanted to go to USC and it's that sort of environment where that was what their focus was

on and, in fact, some of the guidance counselors were unsure of what some HBCUs are. So I had to do my own research and ask my own questions to find out what it was because it wasn't until high school, my senior year of high school, where I knew how many HBCUs there were because there wasn't much talk of it.”

Like Danny and Nicky, Taylor also admits to succumbing to a form of “whitewashing” where her educational experience was very white-centered. During her time of preparing for college, speaking with recruiters from HBCUs was never an option for students at her school. Even beyond the inaccessibility to historically Black colleges, participants found that such inequalities were also within the details of their classroom curriculum.

Aubrey shares a story of her when her high school offered a “multicultural studies class” that any student could enroll in. Given her status as a senior who had attained all of the necessary credits, she took the course and held a position similar to that of a Teaching Assistant. Aubrey had a love for history and was excited about the opportunity to learn about other cultures. She notes that the instructor of the course was a white male who often “downplayed” the struggles and exploitation experienced by minorities. One instance in particular, the professor makes a statement regarding the relationship between African Americans and enslavers. Aubrey restates the instructor’s comment where he says, “Only 20% of the slave owners really beat their slaves, the other ones were good to their slaves. They treated them like family.” Expectedly, Aubrey was frustrated that the instructor would intentionally misinform his students, “especially a bunch of white kids who don’t grow up around that. It kind of makes the environment worse...obviously I stepped in.”

Such incidents are not uncommon to Black students³. They are often placed in disadvantaged situations partially as a result of having instructors that are either implicitly or explicitly biased towards Blacks and other minoritized groups. Instructors like the one Aubrey experienced generally do not have shared experiences with their students which, inevitably, makes the teacher unrelatable and the students disconnected.

Students in this study noticed the lack of cultural diversity and inclusion within their high schools' classrooms and college recruitment efforts, juxtaposed with their developing knowledge of HBCUs through family, alumni, Black social organizations, and personal research. These factors shaped what they desired in their collegiate experience; in particular, students reported that the following aspects influenced their decision to select their respective HBCUs:

Respondent 1: predominantly Black

Respondent 2: Racial demographic

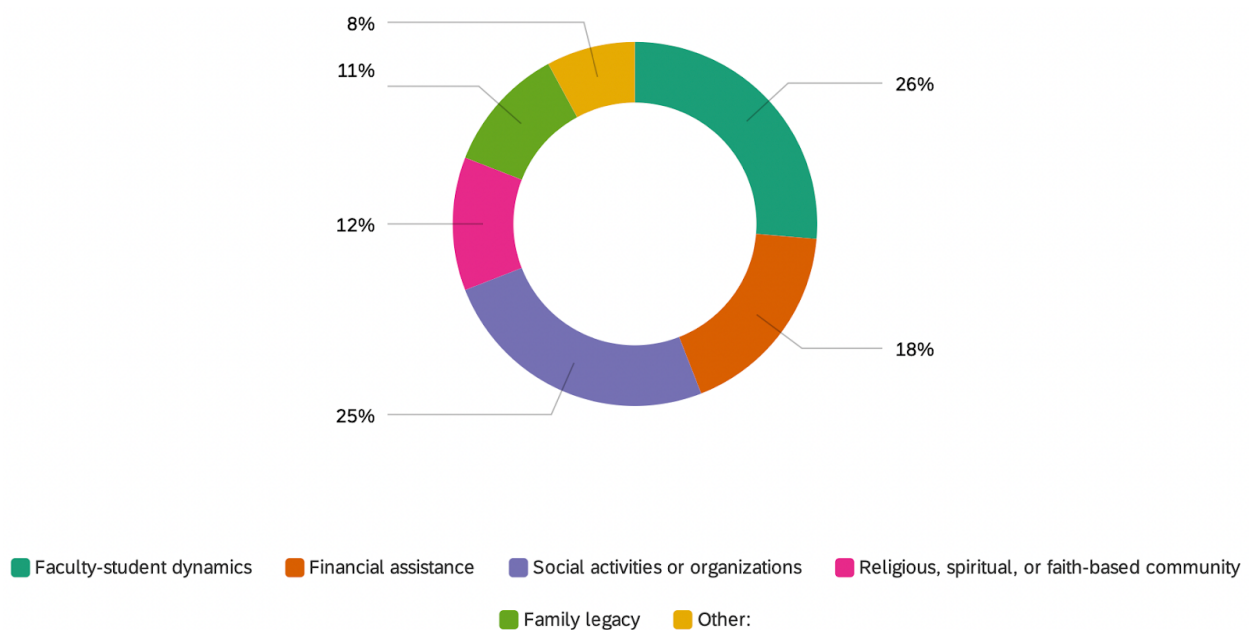


Figure 3: Factors considered when selecting an HBCU

³ Davis, S. M. (2021, February 1). Being Black in the Ivory: Tips for Amplifying the Voices of Blackademic TRUTHtellers in the Academy. Black in the Ivory. Retrieved from www.blackintheivory.net.

Respondent 3: My quest to learn about my blackness and all of its greatness.

Respondent 4: I wanted to continue my higher learning in an environment where my ethnicity is celebrated, and not just tolerated

Along with preferring a significant presence and acceptance of Blackness in college, students also longed for a particular quality of social activities and organizations, and financial assistance. However, above all, the factor they considered most when selecting their HBCU, was its faculty-student dynamics (see Figure 3).

4.2 Faculty-Student Dynamics at HBCUs

Participants were asked to rank the following factors according to how it positively contributed to their college experience over the past 3-4+ years: Faculty-student dynamics, Social Activities or organizations, Religious/spiritual/faith-based community, Financial assistance, and Academic opportunities beyond the classroom

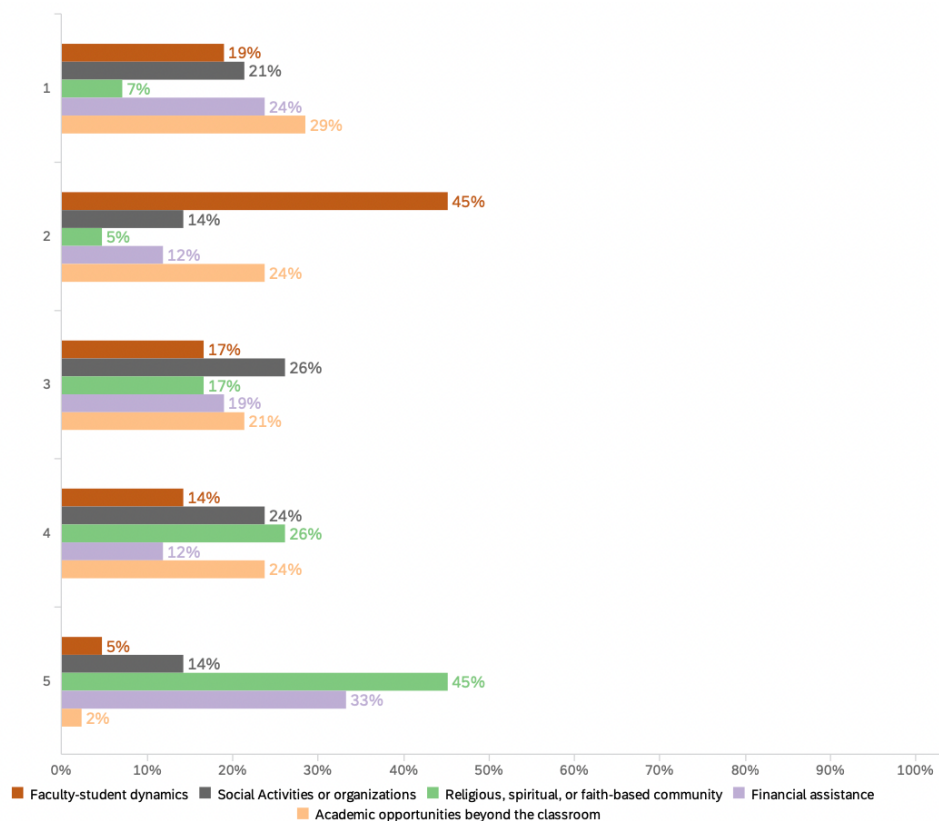


Figure 4: Positive contributions to students' college experience

Academic opportunities beyond the classroom. A few of the factors ranked closely for number one (see Figure 4). However, “faculty-student dynamics” ranked number two by a significant difference, indicating that most of the participants found their relationship with their faculty members critical to their matriculation.

Majority of the focus group participants from Claflin stated that the racial demographics of their respective departments were mostly Black, followed by a few appearing of Indian descent, and then a couple being of European descent. Jamie, a student from Tougaloo, stated that the instructors in her department are predominantly Black and Asian, with a few being white. Many studies have confirmed the significance of students seeing their identities reflected in their teachers. Nevertheless, participants of this study suggest that not only is there potential relatability due to shared ethnicity, but there is also a desire for comradery, community, and assumed responsibility that is expected because of it. More specifically, Black students find it conducive to have an instructor that is Black and relates to the Black experience, but it is even more impactful when these instructors are able to form personal bonds with students, which insinuates that they value them holistically. The latter is what participants are experiencing at their HBCUs. Forty-two percent (42%) of survey respondents described their relationship with their faculty members as “Engagement beyond classroom obligations for professional advancement and personal connection.” This materialized in different ways for the focus group participants.

For example, Blake shares a story of how her relationship with one of her professors evolved over time and encompassed professional and personal qualities. Blake met her Computer Science professor the summer before her first semester at Claflin. This professor taught many of her classes throughout her time at Claflin, so she frequented their office often.

She helped me with finding internships, scholarships, things like that. [I] actually went to a conference with her and from freshman year to senior year, I've just formed this sort of bond with her. I can talk to her at any time. I'm able to contact her. She's now Chair of the department. She became Chair this year, so of course I went to her office, I was like '*Ahh! Yes, girl!*' You know, '*Queen!*' So...it's crazy to see how much our relationship has changed from just freshman year.

Nicky shares similar sentiments regarding her professor for African American Heritage. She describes him as one who engages in playful banter or as she says, "talk mess." His amiability allowed Nicky to develop a level of trust to where she felt confident in him serving on essential committees throughout her matriculation. She was confident that he would advocate on her behalf because of the rapport they built since freshman year. Jamie's relationship with some of her instructors at Tougaloo reflects the same. She acknowledges how some may refer to it "as a bad thing" or even "odd" because of how she has been able to maintain a great relationship with her professors. Jamie says, "...my sister, she's in high school, and she's just like 'Why do your professors text you?' I have a really good relationship with them...[we] go out on more lunch dates, things like that..."

Lastly, Ryan illustrates how having a great relationship with his instructors beyond classroom obligations is possible and valuable. He shares how his relationship with his professors at Claflin has grown throughout his undergraduate career. His professors have become so keen to his work ethic and the quality of his work that they take notice of anything that may indicate a problem and inquire about it immediately — both professional and personal matters. This was especially true for Ryan's favorite professor, a professor of religion who recently passed away. Ryan says, "...if anything was off, he could tell, and he would contact me or even call me personally

while he was out driving or at a restaurant. So, I think over my time at Claflin, I've gained a better relationship with my professors and them understanding me, especially if I'm dealing with anything personally.”

Blake, Nicky, Jamie, and Ryan each speak to the existence of faculty-student dynamics as a form of kinship system. Although biologically unrelated, their professors exceed contractual requirements to assume the care of these students in its totality. However, just as in consanguineal kinship, the successful function of fictive kinship involves boundaries and expectations, whether implicitly or explicitly indicated (Johnson 188). From the stories previously shared, one may inquire about the necessity for and/or progression of connecting with students past classroom requirements. How are boundaries formed and in what ways do they unfold for students that find relationships with their faculty members to be conducive to their academic success?

Boundaries in Faculty-Student Dynamics

Focus group participants agree that boundaries exist between them and their professors, however, they are typically unspoken and contingent upon the professor's openness, reciprocity, and the bond they have established over time. For Blake, Nicky, Taylor, and Ryan, boundaries were established or made clearer once the instructor gained their trust by taking the initiative or being open to learn more about them as an individual, and not just as a student. In Blake's case, an element of trust was built when she confided in and vented to her main professor concerning feeling harassed and treated unfairly by another professor. The main professor's immediate response was to guide Blake through the process of reporting it through the necessary channels. Blake's experience was not minimized, nor was her character questioned. She states, “Seeing that she was just willing to take action as soon as I mentioned that I felt like I was being treated unjustly, just made me feel like she really cared for me.”

In Nicky's case, she recalls building trust with a faculty member who simply asked her how she was doing as she (the professor) prepared to leave campus. Nicky typically witnessed instructors who were focused on going home at the end of the day, so for an instructor to genuinely show interest in her life and wellbeing, Nicky shares that this "resonated" with her. From there, they have been able to solidify and grow their relationship even after the instructor's tenure at Claflin ended. Nicky now also consults with this instructor concerning her "spiritual healing." She says, "I just really appreciate that she got to know me for me, instead of [seeing] another student as a number at Claflin." Taylor substantiates Nicky's claims with a similar experience. She experienced the opportunity to build trust with an instructor through the instructor making an extra effort to explain the class material, while also taking the time to get to know them personally. Taylor says, "...that definitely made me and my friend feel more comfortable, not even just coming to her for academic advice, but if we [needed] any personal advice too, she really made it clear that she's someone that we could come to as a resource."

Lastly, Ryan experiences trust being built,

when the Professor starts to shift the conversation with you, when it's not always about work but it's...more about your personal life and getting to know you and understand you and how you are and why you are the way you are, whether it's in their class or outside of their class...a lot of the times I try to connect with my professor even if they don't connect with me first, because I feel like it's important to get to know your professors on a different level, especially if they allow you to...

For these students, faculty members' intentionality in learning more about their personhood gives space to building trust, which ultimately leads to forging bonds that exceeds the curriculum and strengthens the kinship network.

Faculty-Student Dynamics through Black Vernacular and “Other Mothering”

The barometer for the depth of kinship networks is also sometimes evident in the language participants choose to use when engaging with their instructors. Jamie shares that she communicates with some of her professors through southern pleasantries such as “Yes, Ma’am,” “No, Ma’am” or “No, Sir” and “Yes, Sir.” In fact, she implies that this is a common display of respect given to all instructors. However, for Jamie and others, there is a distinct difference between the professors that solely receive pleasantries, versus the professors that are also addressed as “Hey, girl,” a nonacademic colloquialism, and a reflection of Black vernacular. Jamie shares that such relationships are often built with her Black professors. She states, “...a lot of the professors are foreign, and not to say that that prevents me from having a relationship with them, but obviously there’s a barrier. So, with that being said, most of the professors that I have a relationship with are Black.”

Black vernacular, commonly referred to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Black English (BE), Black Vernacular English (BVE), or Ebonics, is a variation of the English language traditionally spoken by Black American descendants of enslaved Africans. It is the blend of English with native languages of enslaved Africans, such as Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa – often derogatorily labeled as “broken English,” and now frequently co-opted as internet slang, social media lingo, among other names (Zenerations). While in the traditional, often predominantly white academic space, the use of BVE or one’s home dialect is used as resistance against power structures, and also as a tool for breaking social barriers. Beyond that, there is typically the shared experience for speakers of BVE of being disenfranchised, along with facing other socioeconomic and political barriers. As such, the use of BVE between these students and their professors draws on a sense of relatability, which is also indicative of the closeness of their relationship and the function of their kinship system. Jamie’s use of “Hey, girl” is evident of this. It is also previously

seen in Blake's excitement as she says, '*Ahh! Yes, girl!*' You know, '*Queen!*' as she cheers on the Chair for her accomplishments.

Likewise, Nicky shows her comfortability with her professor even in day-to-day requests saying, "Hey girl, can you do this?" Nicky's experience further highlights the correlation between students' dependence and trust in their faculty members for their overall educational advancement. She shares that professors who have gained her trust, prioritized her personhood, advocated on her behalf and made her comfortable to where she can freely express herself, have long-term implications for her success. Through these kinship systems, Nicky shares that the faculty members,

...they become big sisters or mothers or grandmothers to me so it's like I know they're going to do this for me... A lot of people say, "your mom is not supposed to be your best friend," but my mom is my best friend, so I will talk to them like I'm talking to my mama like "Girl, guess what" and then, "Can you do this and this for me, thanks!" And you know, that's it.

Big sisters, mothers, and grandmothers — kinship systems that Nicky and many of the other participants have found beneficial to their collegiate success. This connection reflects the concept of "other mothering" as theorized by Patricia Hill Collins, mirroring centuries of Black women functioning as the center of immediate and extended families, and communities at large (Story). This concept denounces the stereotypical notion of Black motherhood as being the "Mammy" caricature that was so commonly portrayed throughout slavery and the Jim Crow era. Rather, it centers on the act Black mothers who have used their thoughtfulness and ingenuity to nurture and care for the wellbeing of their own children and children within the Black community (Collins). They shared in the responsibility of children and families within their proximity, and especially

those of marginalized groups. Regardless of the circumstance by which a child could not be taken care of by their biological mother, other mothers assumed care of the children (Story). The depth of this care is apparent in Nicky, Blake, and Jamie's relationships with their Black women faculty. Such kinship networks have kept them committed to and successful in their educational journey.

Expectations of Black faculty at HBCUs

As aforementioned, the core of impactful faculty-student dynamics is built on gaining students' trust, prioritizing their holistic wellbeing, and creating space for them to show up as their authentic selves. These aspects complement and inspire students to stay the course in their academic journey. Nevertheless, the relatability due to shared racial identity significantly contributes to students' success. While participants have a general standard of their faculty, below they also vocalized having a higher expectation of their Black faculty and how the implications this has for their education.

Nicky: "Whenever I see a black woman, [I] already think of her as being a "boss."

Like my PR professor, she literally is the definition of a "Black Queen Boss," and I didn't go into her class thinking that's how she's going to be or that's what I expected, but now that I've taken her, now all of the Black women professors that I have, that's the expectation that have for them."

Jamie: "Yes, I do expect more from them (i.e. Black professors), because I expect them to be able to relate to me more than maybe the Asians or any other race could. Is that necessarily the case, all the time? No, but I do come in with the expectation of, 'Oh, she should understand, she was a Black young lady once in college.'"

Taylor: "I know I 100% had those expectations. That was definitely part of the reason why I chose to go to an HBCU as well. I knew going in I would have that...it

was more so directed toward that mentorship. Just knowing that these would be people that I could go to who could relate to my experiences, so would be more than willing to talk with me and write recommendations and really just be a resource to me...I would say those expectations have been met. For some of my professors, some of my Black professors, I know that they're relating to my experiences, and I know that they are people that I can go to as mentors....”

Overview of Faculty-Student Dynamics at HBCUs

Black students at HBCUs value and prioritize their relationship with their faculty members, especially their Black instructors. While it can easily be expected that Black faculty members at historically Black colleges and universities seamlessly connect with their Black students, the participants of this study have voiced specific stipulations that contribute to a thriving relationship that ultimately pushes them forward in their academic studies. That is that faculty members:

1. Provide culturally relevant curriculum
2. Build trust through genuine interest in their holistic wellness
3. Give holistic consideration in light of being systemically marginalized
4. Create opportunity for personal connection within moral reason

5. Be understanding and proactive concerning racial inferiority in education

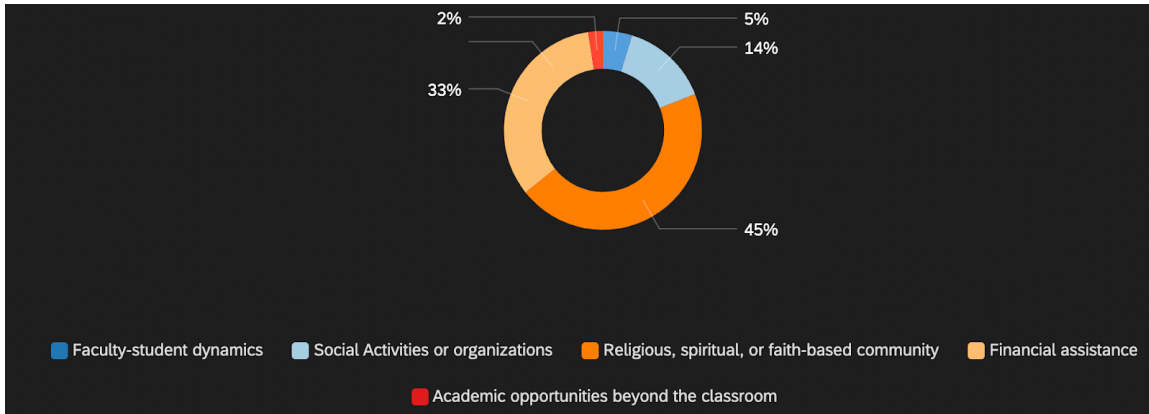


Figure 5: The impact of religion on students' experiences

The concept of “a communal sense of social responsibility” rings true for Black students. Their expectations of Black faculty does not negate rigor or challenges in their scholastic efforts, nor does it automatically make non-Black faculty members exempt from students’ hope and expectations. Rather, fictive kinship through faculty members ensures that Black students are given sufficient support, access, and opportunities, in a society that is certainly antithetical to it.

The institutions represented in this study have, according to its participants, indicated some level of success in the 1:1 relationship professors have built with their students. Participants have illustrated that this aspect of their academic experience is one of the most critical and influential; on the contrary, another form of fictive kinship found through religion, faith, and spiritual practices has evidently had less of a positive impact than expected given its history and former role within the Black community (see Figure 5).

4.3 Religion, Faith, and Spiritual Practices at HBCUs

Spirituality and religious practices have always played a pivotal role in Black culture. It has served as a means to deity connection, protest against injustice, and moral compass. The

versatility and purposes of spiritual practices existed prior to slavery in America, and even more so once the Black church became a sanctuary to all: believers, marginalized believers, nonbelievers, and even the unchurched. For years, church culture has been ingrained in the daily lives of those in the Black community. From Sunday service, Sunday's evening service, Monday morning prayer, and Tuesday's choir rehearsal, to Wednesday night Bible Study, choir rehearsal again on Thursday, Friday's Missionary meeting, and Saturday's prayer breakfast; it was common in many sectors of the Black community to experience a variety of fellowship throughout the week. This included visitations to other local Black churches, along with community events centered on addressing concerns faced by the community. The impact of the Black church and its influence is still evident today as many participants acknowledge growing up with or adjacent to some form of spiritual practice.

For instance, Taylor shares that she was raised in the Christian faith and that that was a significant part of her life. From attending weekly service to participating in ministries such as the choir, Taylor and her family were committed to their non-denominational church. On a similar note, Danny was also heavily involved with his church growing up. In fact, he identifies as a "PK," formally known as a preacher's kid. Expectedly, his involvement and contribution to his father's church extended beyond Sunday attendance. Danny served as a musician and was exposed to a variety of denominations and traditions as he traveled to different churches. Similarly, Ryan says he was "born in the church" as his grandparents who raised him are also pastors; Nicky shares that her father is the pastor of an AME church, and lastly, Jamie mentions that she grew up in a small family church. Collectively, focus group participants did not lack church experience. They each experienced "church" at an early age, typically alongside their families. This faith was rooted

generationally, and survey participants found its practice at home to be comparable to what they witnessed or experienced at their college. Some of the comparisons include:

Respondent 1: "...there are many churches but because it is a larger city there aren't a large amount of religious people, Claflin is Methodist associated and consists of many people who respect religion/spiritual practices but don't practice/believe it themselves."

Respondent 2: "Both communities (home and school) are deeply rooted in the love of God..."

Respondent 3: "...many members of my home community practice Christianity, and the same can be said for the majority of the members that make up my college community."

Respondent 4: "...The spiritual community is very active throughout both my home and University"

Respondent 5: "...at home each church and its members are able to recognize each other because everyone's Pastor is involved within each other. In my opinion, my college community is more engaging in religious activities and practices and college students. Every Sunday, various churches send buses and transportation for the college students and after church on Sunday they provide home [cooked] meals and offer us motivation and inspiration."

Respondent 6: "The biggest similarity would probably be faith. Mostly everyone in my community is faith based or Christian religious in some way."

Respondent 7: "Religious/Spiritual Practice and this institution felt like a home away from home"

Kinship as experienced through religion, unfolded in a manner that reminded some students of being home. Gaining provision in the sense of transportation, exhortation, and home-cooked meals demonstrates the shared care given towards students of the HBCU community by the church. While it gave some students a feeling of familiarity and “home,” their engagement of religious activities while in college only occurs from time to time. In particular, thirty percent of participants say that they only “occasionally” engage in religious, spiritual, or faith-based activities on or near campus (see Figure 6).

In studies conducted by the Pew Research Center (PWC), the continual decline of engagement with religion, both globally and among younger generations is evident. In 2019, the PWC identified Millennials to be the largest group to reject or become unaffiliated from Christianity and other faith-based groups. According to Barna Research, a Christian-based polling firm, not only is there a steady decline nationally and largely among Millennials, but it is taking place during their time in college. Barna Research discovered that “roughly 70% of high school students who enter college as professing Christians will leave with little to no faith.” This, in part, could be attributed to the following factors: 1) newfound freedom and access, 2) presumed hypocrisy, and 3) lack of acceptance from the church.

Once enrolling in college, participants gained a new form of agency. They were no longer in a space to be closely supervised or micromanaged by parental figures. This implied that previous expectations of weekly or daily engagement with the church were now optional. Participants, like Taylor, took this as an opportunity to challenge her upbringing and inquire about the possible validity of other religions. She says,

Even though I grew up in the church, I was always just kind of...I guess just intrigued by the fact that — okay, I practice Christianity and that's just one religion

out of so many religions, and [I was] always really curious about how I'm supposed to believe in this one religion so much. But you know, someone else believes in their religion the same way that I do.... So, I was always really confused and challenged by this idea that you're supposed to just believe in this one thing, like this is right, but there's so many other people that believe the same exact thing about their religion so...it just didn't make sense to me that *I'm* right and someone else's wrong. So, I would say, going to college... [allowed] me to just continue to expand on that thought.

Engagement in religious, spiritual, or faith-based activities on or near campus	
Occasionally	30%
Frequently	21%
Never	14%
Very Frequently	14%
Rarely	12%
Very Rarely	9%

Figure 6: Engagement in religion, spiritual, or faith-based activities

Taylor's home environment surrounded her with individuals of the same beliefs. However, her college environment gave her access to other religions, which led her to not holding as tightly to the inerrancy of her religion as before.

Taylor's exploration of her faith is not uncommon. Nicky and Jamie both found themselves being challenged, both voluntarily and involuntarily, regarding how their faith contends or aligns with that of other people. Nicky shares that until recently, she unreservedly introduced herself as a member of the AME church. AME, formally known as the African Methodist Episcopal Church,

is a predominantly African American group that follows the doctrine of the Methodist denomination. Nicky substantiates her reasoning for no longer identifying as AME by emphasizing how the spiritual element of her faith usurps the legalistic structures implemented by the denomination. Nicky further came to this realization in college once noticing the politicization and false piety of those who also identified as Christian. On the other hand, Jamie invited conversations with students she befriended that practiced other religions. As a result of these friendships, and even the relationships with those of mirroring beliefs, Jamie now identifies herself as “less religious and more spiritual.” She says, “...my college friends, they really helped me. My close friends, like my roommate, would just sit down and we were able to have those conversations and talk about why we felt [challenged by beliefs we once held].” I think those are important conversations that I had at the time because I needed to...how I wanted to move forward.” Jamie admits that while she may still attend church, she has since “strayed away” from a lot of the beliefs her church held.

In students’ newfound freedom and access to different religious ideologies, the significance of practices they performed earlier in their lives took a negative shift. This is not only a result of encountering contrasting perspectives, but some have also grown frustrated by the inconsistency they have witnessed by those whose lifestyles did not appear to adhere to the religious standards they claimed to follow. This presumed hypocrisy has also diminished the weight that religious kinship once carried for students prior to college. For instance, one of the most familiar and prized aspects of the church is its choir. The choir’s mission, evidently, is to minister to others through spiritual songs. In many ways, it is a recurring profession of faith, and an opportunity to share the doctrine of the faith they proclaim to believe. Nicky was a member of her university’s choir. While she knew that her primary focus was to honor her god through song, she found the character of the

individuals that formed the choir to be unacceptable. Nicky says, “It was that piece outside of singing where people were very messy...live up to what you're singing or you're preaching or you're speaking about...that's a reason why I left and why I don't really like to claim that as an outlet for religious or spiritual practices.” Nicky also experienced similar sentiments at the inception of her disassociation with the AME denomination. She states that they would repeatedly chant religious sayings, yet their lifestyle reflected opposing ethics and priorities.

While other participants were not as forward in voicing a disapproval of those who professed their faith without much proof, it was evident that there was tension that existed as a result of misalignments students noticed between what they believed their faith meant and the actions of those who claimed to believe the same thing — even if it was their own actions that did not always align. Although some participants implied that there was not an expectation to be perfect, they did find it challenging to extend much grace to hypocrisy. However, this reasoning heavily intersects — and perhaps contradicts — with the following reason as to why students are no longer as committed to their religious kinship; and this is due to its lack of acceptance of those within and outside of their community.

Within the campus' religious community, Nicky adds that her separation from the university's choir was more than just their tendency to live a feigned lifestyle. Rather, it was also because she felt outcast by the group. Nicky says “When I was on the choir, the Gospel choir, I felt a little bit out of place because everyone seemed to have a clique going in and it was one of those things where, if you're not in the clique, you're never going to get in...so it really turned me off, and it made my decision to leave the choir a lot easier than what it was before when I first began thinking about leaving.”

Considering the literature explored throughout this study, it is important to note that kinship systems do not negate the existence of differing opinions as evident. It does, however, call for the inclusion and valuing of those with shared experiences, and/or missions, and above all, those with shared care and responsibility for one another (Aschenbrenner). For example, a trivial, non-foundational disagreement amongst Christians involves the debate of women wearing pants. However, Christian women are not excluded from the group of believers because they still share in its main belief in Jesus the Christ and the purpose that He has served. As such, Christian men and women still (or should) consider one another brothers and sisters in Christ and treat one another accordingly (Viars). Unfortunately, Nicky's experience with being excluded further validates participants' suggestion that religious kinship is currently not an essential factor to the success of students.

Similarly, note Danny's experience with failed religious kinship within his HBCU:

One of my experiences my sophomore year, I took a Bible Literature course which was basically teaching us the understanding of what's going on in the Bible in terms of who's writing it and common language [being used at the time] and things of that nature, and the reason why I had difficulty in that class is because the professor who was over that class was very different because of his opinions on saying many of the writers [of the Bible] had an opinion on it [the topic or biblical text in question] and it was depicted differently than the way I was raised. So, in terms of having to cater to those needs [of the instructor], just to pass that class was very different, and you know I had to really change my perspective, just to appeal to his grades and his syllabus.

Danny's experience, evidently, shows a disunity of both faculty-student and religious kinship systems. However, given other participants' experiences, it could be suggested that religion, faith, and/or spiritual practices, even amongst those who identify with the same group, allows for little to no compromise on non-foundational issues. More specifically, in religious kinship, presuming that Danny's instructor also identified as a Christian like he did, the ultimate shared value or mission is that of the Gospel story of Christianity. As a fellow believer, Danny depicted a desire to contend for differing interpretations of Biblical texts if religious kinship was truly valued and prioritized within the institution.

Unlike Nicky and Danny's personal experiences with the lack of being accepted, Jamie offers a different perspective as to how the lack of acceptance further pushed her away from faith/religious practices as she understood it growing up. She shares that her distancing from the church was because of its disapproval of individuals who identify as non-heterosexual or as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Jamie states, "They [the church] were kind of against it, and for me, I love everyone. It's not my job to judge. So, I was able to kind of stand firm on those beliefs once I got to college. I was like 'I think this is right and I think this is what I should stand for.'" Jamie's comfortability in staying true to her beliefs can possibly be attributed to Barna Research's contention that college years are a period of spiritual exploration for students. Consequently, she found solace in exploring ideologies that are unconventional compared to traditional Christian values. Yet, despite Jamie's favor in being able to explore a more liberal approach to her Christian faith, her approach does not require a religious kinship system in order to thrive.

Overall, religious kinship is a very complex and nuanced system. What was once portrayed as a familial-like bond within the church, is now heavily being confronted. Younger generations are leaving the groupthink aspect of religion and allowing their experiences and observations to

produce an individualized spiritual journey for them. As a result, religion and its kinship systems are not as impactful to students' overall success despite them sharing that it does have some bearing on their day-to-day activities (e.g. praying before a test, before driving, etc.). Institution-wise however, focus group participants believe that space needs to be created on campuses for more fluid, nontraditional religious practices. Nicky says,

It [Claflin] is a United Methodist sponsored institution, and a lot of things that we do, we do a lot of prayers and things like that, so they don't force you [to participate] because it's against the law, but I feel like it's kind of hard [to practice your own religious, spirituality, or faith] whenever you go to like a concert, where the choir

Homecoming, athletics, naacp, convocations, honor societies

Greek life (AKA)

Homecoming, hump Wednesday, market Friday.

Greek life, homecoming, choir, meltdowns, fried chicken Wednesday

The Claflin University DREAM Gospel Choir, Homecoming, Student Leadership (Being a peer mentor and orientation leader), NAACP, the sisterhood organization, student success activities

Homecoming would have to be the most fun. Chapel service allows my friends and I to grow together.

DREAM Gospel Choir, Homecoming on campus employment

The biggest would be the Honors College, my sorority, and SAB events that can be seen during Homecoming.

Chapel service and of course partaking interest into the Greek life.

I really like homecoming a lot of Claflin alumnus come back everyone is like a big family even if you don't know anyone you will meet someone that will help you.

All of them, especially power hour and homecoming. I just crossed into Greek life so I'm looking forward to that aspect as well

Greek Life Chapel Service Band Performances

Homecoming, CASA (Campus Alliance for Student Activities)

Homecoming.

Homecoming, Tutoring Opportunities

Figure 7: Social activities and organizations at HBCUs

singing a hymn and you see people you know ‘catching the spirit’ or whatever you want to call it, sometimes you can feel uncomfortable because that's not what you're used to, that's not what you align with. So, I can see it as being kind of iffy or difficult for someone who doesn't practice or believe in the same thing as the United Methodist church or many of the classroom students on campus.

Overall, participants claim religious kinship does not carry weight on their academic success, but they do value religious freedom and exploration, and hope that their individual campuses would become places that are more conducive for religious exploration. In the same vein, as these participants identify as Christians, they would like for those who also identify as the same to live a life that reflects that, while respecting those who choose not to subscribe to those practices.

4.4 Social Activities & Organizations at HBCUs

Social activities and organizations at the selected HBCUs are very prominent kinship systems. Students were asked to share which university-sponsored events or groups positively contributed to their college experience. Predictably, the most common responses were homecoming and Greek organizations (see Figure 7). These social kinships are deeply rooted in the history of HBCUs and, according to participants, are still thriving and instrumental to the HBCU experience today. Homecoming and Greek Organizations both serve as entities that promote the familial-like structure students desire and have contributed to students’ decision to remain committed to their educational endeavors at their particular HBCU.

Homecoming as a Kinship System at HBCUs

HBCU homecomings have become an extended bond of the kinship systems built throughout students’ undergraduate journey. It is an opportunity for alumni of the university to

reconnect and connect with current students, faculty, and community members. Homecoming is a multi-generational fellowship rooted in community, comradery, and celebration of Black culture and Black excellence. As Danny and Aubrey mentioned in the inception of this study, their earliest recollection of HBCUs was when their parents and other relatives took them to their alma mater's homecoming or to different alumni events. Danny describes HBCU homecomings as a "pinnacle" of all the efforts that students, faculty, and alumni have contributed towards Black culture, and towards Black people's personal and collective pursuit of higher education.

Participants share that at their institutions, there is typically a week filled with events where students bond through step-shows, food, parties, and games. It is "time with the girls" as Blake says, and a time to relax from the stressors of college. Participants reflected on their experiences with homecoming as they use it as an opportunity to meet and connect with alumni. They share that not only is homecoming for alumni and current students, but there are many opportunities that target the participation of students' families and friends. Some participants also highlighted that many of their faculty members are alumni of their institution or another HBCU, so they also take advantage of that time to fellowship and enjoy the weekly festivities as well. Even outside of a particular HBCU, Danny shares how students often engage in the homecoming festivities of neighboring HBCUs. For instance, he mentions that many students of Claflin University, South Carolina State University, and Benedict College commonly engage with one another's homecoming. Consequently, networks become interconnected and the kinship extends and multiplies.

Alongside the social events of their HBCU's homecoming, Blake highlights that it is also a crucial time for students to put their boots on the ground to solicit philanthropic gifts from alumni and from the community. She says,

Part of why it's [HBCU homecoming] so big is because... I used to work in our Call Center where we will try to call old alumni to try to get money towards scholarships and stuff for the university. We literally had to work during homecoming. When you start working there [the call center] they're like 'Listen, when homecoming comes, we're going to have to put y'all on shifts' because homecoming is when the university gets the most money. They'll get scholarships from different classes, Greek organizations... So as an institution, it's one of the biggest events to try to fundraise and give back — basically [encourage] alumni to give back to their university and then host a lot of events for them.

Evident again is the element of sharing responsibility and care for one another. Financial support and security for Black students is critical to them successfully navigating higher education. In research conducted by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), the most common impediment that Black students face is that of financial destitution. In their article, “The Numbers Don’t Lie: HBCUs Are Changing the College Landscape,” they share that seventy-two percent of Black students acquire debt as they strive to achieve their educational goals, compared to 56% of their white counterparts (UNCF). As such, while individuals are “home” for homecoming, HBCUs ensure that they prioritize students’ financial wellbeing through requesting financial support from within their own community. This cycle of support will continue to revolve as students remain connected to their institution post-graduation.

When asked if they see themselves participating in homecoming once graduating from their institution, and if they feel obligated to support the institution post-graduation, this is what they said,

Danny: I am an HBCU advocate. Many of my friends and my mentees are not only from this university, but other universities and if given the opportunity to go back for homecoming or come back for various events with my fraternity, I'll be willing to do my part and support them... because that's [the] least I can do [for] how much they've been able to provide for me. It's [also] definitely part of a legacy for me. My grandmother, her name is on a brick that's located on the university's campus and that spoke to me in a sense, that she made her mark on Claflin University's campus, whether it is a little way or in a way that just impacted me... And the way I've been able to connect with a lot of faculty and students here on this campus, I don't want to move away from those connections. I don't want to ignore a call to action that allows me to work with [them in some] sort of fashion. With Claflin, despite its setbacks and difficulties...it's an honor, a privilege of being part of it.

Jamie: I do not pay to go to college. Matter of fact, college pays me. I think that that money did not come from anywhere and that I should give back to future generations because I really do appreciate them and my parents appreciate it, and I know it's going to be a bigger help for me moving forward with the next loans that I'll have to take out, so I'm giving back. But also, I've been inspired by a lot of Tougaloo alum and by a lot of visitors at Tougaloo, and so I feel like I should do the same thing. The profession that I'm going into, I was inspired my first week [during] freshman year, so if I would not have met her, not have heard her speak, I don't really know what direction I will be going in right now. I think it's my duty to

do the same thing for future generations, through money and through sharing my experiences.

Taylor: The fact that not everyone has this experience or is not able to go to college, I feel obligated to definitely use my college experience to help students who are in high school right now, or middle school, who are in positions where they may not be on the track to go to college, or they may just not have the opportunity to go or for whatever reason. I definitely feel the obligation in that sense, using my experience at Claflin to help students in that situation because there's so many. For me, I feel very blessed to be able to go to college in the first place, and [am] aware that not everyone has that opportunity, so definitely, I've always felt like 'Okay, you're given this so it's your job to give back and help people who aren't as fortunate, as you.'

Other participants echoed Danny, Jamie, and Taylor's sentiments. They all foresaw themselves giving back to the HBCU community that made a concerted effort to provide towards their academic, social, and financial wellbeing. As Danny mentioned, homecoming was everyone's opportunity to celebrate these strides, and to plan ways for it to continue for years to come. Every student, alumni, faculty, and campus organizations stepped into the role to make it possible. One of the most vital kinship groups that continuously contributes to the mission of HBCUs are its Greek organizations.

Greek Organizations as a Kinship System at HBCUs

Students also named Greek organizations as a form of social kinship that has positively contributed to their college experience. Greek organizations, also referred to as Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLO) or fraternities and sororities of the Divine Nine, were formed as a response

to the denial Black people faced in joining other Greek organizations within the historically white Pan-Hellenic Council (Goode). BGLO includes the following organizations: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (1906, Cornell University), Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (1908, Howard University), Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. (1911, Indiana University), Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. (1911, Howard University), Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (1913, Howard University), Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. (1914, Howard University), Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (1920, Howard University), Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. (1922, Butler University), and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. (1963, Morgan State College). These historical organizations, once again, share the collective responsibility of advancing the Black race through a means of nonbiological familial networks. They openly advocate for the betterment of Black people and seek ways to socially uplift the Black community.

Jamie, Blake, and Danny each shared that they are active participants in Black Greek Letter Organizations, namely Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. While the scope of the discussion did not involve the specificities of the dynamics within their organizations, they shared details regarding the contribution their organizations make towards their university's homecoming. This typically included games, parties, and activities for students, along with monetary contribution to the university. Beyond homecoming, however, BGLOs promote themselves as being heavily involved on campus and within their communities, shedding light on social issues and serving marginalized Black communities (Goode). The strength of the networks of each Black fraternity and sorority is deeply embedded in the history and operation of HBCUs and is intended to last a lifetime. As previously mentioned, Danny shares that he intends to remain connected to his HBCU by way of his fraternity.

Because of the ways they have provided for him, he plans to do what he can to support the fraternity in their efforts.

Homecoming and Greek organizations as kinship systems reflect a familial-like, support system that students desire. For students, these systems are a means of getting and remaining connected to individuals who have experienced the Black educational trajectory, and who avail themselves to offer support in any way possible. These systems are also a guiding point for students as they acknowledge turning to alumni for instruction, advice, and long-lasting connections. Students recognize the collective care given to their well-being — academically, financially, socially, and more — and are motivated to hone in on these structures that they have deemed conducive to their success.

Conclusion

All things considered, 56% of the survey participants have never considered withdrawing from their institution (see Figure 8). Some students provided the following reasons:

Respondent 1: Tougaloo College feels like home to me. I love the students and faculty which is why I have never wanted to transfer. Additionally, I believe that Tougaloo offers programs and mentorship that will help me in my academic career.

Respondent 2: I love the family-like atmosphere of my university; I have come to feel at home when I am on my college campus. While my classes can definitely be challenging, my professors are always more than willing to work with me outside of class so that I can go over any material I may be confused about.

Respondent 3: The reason why I have not decided to withdraw from Morehouse College is that I love my institution because my professors and fellow classmates make it feel as though I am apart of this huge family.

Respondent 4: Claflin University has served as a safe place for me. Attending my prestigious University is my motivation to live up to the university's motto and be that "visionary leader" who does visionary work. Through that, I have been able to learn that truth and service is your foundation and that in all that I do, I need to



Figure 8: Withdrawing from school

remain intentional. Claflin University offers life experiences and has allowed me to wholeheartedly grow in myself as a black woman. I have learned how important I am and the many roles I must wear in my community to advocate for social change. Lastly, Claflin University helped me walk into my purpose and understand my why, yet offers me the tools I need to fulfill it.

A familial-like dynamic through faculty-student connection and care, ranks as the top reason for Black students choosing to remain at their university. Students repeatedly reiterate their desire for a "safe place," "family-like atmosphere," and "mentorship" within their college campus. More specifically, earlier responses reflect that they desire this from their Black professors whom they expect to assume a level of responsibility for them due to the likelihood of them having a shared culture and experiences.

Contrarily, it is essential to also recognize reasons why 44% of students have considered withdrawing from their institution. Their purpose for wanting to leave their institution highlights

areas of improvement for HBCUs, PWIs, and other non-minority-centered institutions. The most common reasons are the following:

Respondent 1: Unnecessary added financial stress every year with 2+ added courses and added tuition

Respondent 2: Not having the motivation, also financial burdens

Respondent 3: Because I felt like I had money issues or I just didn't believe in myself.

Respondent 4: Financial hardship

Respondent 5: Yes. There was a time period where I experienced exhaustion within my studies and needed a break.

Respondent 6: Just because I sometimes feel like giving up. I'm about to graduate and I still question whether or not this is really what I want to do with my life. So, I think for me it's just a matter of doubting my choices and goals.

Respondent 7: Tuition and financial difficulty, lack of support and motivation

Respondent 8: I considered withdrawing from school because of how overwhelming the environment was for me at the time. But after attending the institution for a few years now, I ultimately decided to stay and see how everything plays out.

Respondent 9: I completed my sophomore year of college virtually due to COVID-19, and I suffered from depression, anxiety, high levels of stress, and food

insecurity. Therefore, I wanted some form of relief, so I thought about reducing my responsibilities at school and extracurricular activities.

Respondent 10: I suffered from depression and school began to weigh me down.

Respondent 11: During my sophomore year I considered withdrawing because I was going through a season of depression. I began to feel like continuing was going to bring nothing but failure.

Respondent 12: Because i got stressed and overwhelmed.

Financial challenges and mental stress are the top reasons participants considered withdrawing from school. As indicated by previously shared statistics, more than half of Black students acquire debt during their educational journey.⁴ Expectedly, uncertainty in financial provision and/or having to strive to acquire the necessary funds could impact students' drive to remain enrolled. Kinship through financial support is worth exploring in future studies.

Moreover, pursuing a college degree does not make students exempt from the pressures that come with day-to-day life. While participants did not always explicitly state the source of their feeling overwhelmed or exhausted, it could be attributed to a variety of things (e.g. family, finances, friendships, etc.). However, it is evident that the era of COVID weighed heavily on some of their wellbeing. As navigating the medical, political, racial, and social pandemics was a collective struggle worldwide, it is very likely to have been an impediment in student's college experiences.

⁴ Mustaffa, Jalil B., and Caleb Dawson. "Racial Capitalism and the Black Student Loan Debt Crisis." *Teachers College Record* (1970), vol. 123, no. 6, SAGE Publications, 2021, pp. 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812112300601>.

Overall, this chapter presented the findings of this study. Using Phase I's survey and Phase II's focus group sessions, an analysis was provided of students' viewpoints regarding kinship systems as seen through faculty-student dynamics, religion, faith, and spiritual practices, and social activities and organizations. Experiences shared throughout this analysis will later be used to suggest future studies and institutional changes for Black students in higher education.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a synopsis of the data collected concerning Black students' experiences at HBCUs, and how the existence of particular kinship systems contributes to their retention at their institution. It also draws on ways this project's findings could expand in future research, and also be applied to institutional practice in an effort to improve DEI efforts and the retention of Black students.

5.1 Summary of Findings and Implications

Participants of this study discovered that their earlier non-inclusive educational experiences, along with familial ties led them to pursue an education at an HBCU. For many of them, their predominately white high school left them seeking an environment that holistically considered the intersections of their identity within its operation. Specifically, students saw a lack of cultural diversity and awareness among the leaders of their secondary school which inevitably was reflected in their classroom curriculum. Due to some of their family's HBCU background, along with the insight from other HBCU alumni and minority-centered organization, participants believed that an HBCU would provide an environment where students saw themselves in the instructors, in the curriculum, and in the campus' culture.

Based on students' experiences, HBCUs have successfully retained students primarily through kinship systems as seen in its faculty-study dynamics. In particular, the five HBCUs of this study have set a benchmark for building relationships with Black students that has garnered students' trust which, subsequently, aids them in navigating higher education. Over time, students found these relationships with their instructors to evolve into a personal connection where faculty members become like sisters, grandmothers, and mentors. While the categories of "sisters,"

“grandmothers,” and “mentors” can hold varying degrees of meaning and expectations, students’ underlying desire seem to be for an intersection of expertise and personability. That is, the hope is that professors excel in their conventional expectations such as catering to students’ learning styles as Jamie mentions, along with supporting their academic efforts through means such as writing recommendations and making time for office hours as Taylor shares. But students’ also thrive when that level of care evolves to a personal connection where they can celebrate each other’s wins as Blake experiences with her professor, and also provide a listening ear and perhaps guidance in personal matters as Ryan experienced with his professor.

Undoubtedly, students have a higher level of expectation of their Black instructors. They expect that they would be relatable and would assume a higher level of care towards them. However, participants’ responses also greatly reflect a desire for relational intelligence. That is, faculty members, regardless of race, should take a holistic approach to interacting with their students by considering how their emotions, experiences, and values contribute to their identity, perspective, and experiences. This study has found that students are willing to place effort towards both their academic endeavors and professional connections, when the professor is considerate of how their personhood may impact their academics. Collectively, participants look for their faculty to be “approachable,” “accountable,” and “compassionate.” As Ryan shares,

I think when you have leadership that you feel like you can talk to you all the time, it helps students to be more proactive and engaged in everything else that's going on on campus. With our previous president, he could almost know you by name. It didn't matter who you are, you could have been in school four years ago, two years ago, or just someone that worked [on the] Board of Trustees or anything, and he will remember you... leadership that engages with the students and actually make

it known that they're there for you and that they're ready to listen to any kind of problems or anything you have in regards to what's going on with the school, definitely helps a lot.

Secondly, social activities and organizations, particularly homecoming, plays a pivotal role in students feeling connected to their campus community. Students find this gathering as an opportunity to fellowship with alumni of all ages, while being able to rally their resources in an effort to fulfill the institutional mission of educating Black students and celebrating Black achievements and culture. This kinship system seen through homecoming implies students' reliance on intergenerational guidance as they pursue higher education. Such desires were also evident in the inception of this study as most participants indicated that their family's HBCU ties, and their experiences with connecting with HBCU alumni in their youth inspired their reason to pursue studies there. In addition to this collective drive, excitement, and support that HBCU homecomings produce, its gathering is unique in that it fully gives space to Black joy, culture, and excellence that is not found at other homecomings. It is also a time where Black students are even more emersed and embedded in a network of Black professionals that can serve as an avenue for upward mobility that is often systematically gatekept from them.

Surprisingly, students did not believe religion, faith, and/or spiritual practices influenced their reason to remain at their institution. Despite the role of the Black church within the Black community and within the inception of HBCUs, along with most of the focus group participants "growing up in the church," students consistently reiterated that it did not positively impact their collegiate experience. Rather, college has given them agency to decide how involved they would like to be with religion, faith, or spiritual practices. As a result, many of them are using this period of time to unpack, unlearn, reappropriate ideas of religion, faith, and spiritual practices. However,

ironically, participants stated that the focus group session discussing religion resonated with them the most throughout the entire study. This demonstrates that while religion, faith, and spiritual practices are indeed important to them in some capacity (even if taking an unorthodox stance or rejecting it altogether), it has no direct bearings on their collegiate experience to the extent of wanting to leave the institution.

5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Ideally, future studies will allow for conversing with students in person. While hosting conversations virtually was best for safety reasons, it impacted students' capacity and willingness to fully engage with one another (e.g., interrupted Wi-Fi and other virtual barriers). Face-to-face interactions could improve the flow of conversation. It would also provide the opportunity to measure non-verbal cues from students as they respond to particular topics.

Another possibility for future research is to conduct a longitudinal study. Closely observing a group of students as they progress throughout undergraduate studies could offer more detailed insight on the factors that influence their collegiate experience the most. This method would also allow me to follow-up with students in between focus group sessions to see how they are experiencing kinship systems as we are discussing them. Along the same line, a longitudinal study could potentially give access to witnessing how students navigate institutional and societal changes (e.g., pandemics and changing of leadership).

Gender is another significant aspect to consider for future studies. Throughout this exploration, there was evidence of gender potentially playing a part in how students connected with their faculty members. While there were only two males in this study, the language used to speak about their relationship with the faculty members differed from how the women discussed their faculty-student dynamics. For instance, the women mentioned greeting their instructor as "girl" or

“queen,” and even thinking of her as a grandmother. The men, however, referenced their close faculty members as “mentors.” This also further draws on the concept of “other mother” as briefly mentioned at the inception of this study. Black women have and continue to share in the responsibility and care of others within their vicinity — students included. It would be useful to study how “other mothering” is manifested throughout the institution, and if that impacts students’ experiences and retention rate.

Another key factor to consider in further studies of kinship and retention, is students’ experiences with finances. Undoubtedly, sufficient financial provision is critical to all students’ trajectory, but especially Black students – even more so, Black students at HBCUs. Nicky shares that many of her peers were frustrated with the limited “funding options.” She states, “...because of my estimated family income, even though I may be fortunate in the area, that doesn't mean that my parents are contributing...” Nicky contends, and research indicates, that discussing funds will be vital to contextualizing Black student experiences as this study expands.

Lastly, a supplemental goal of this study was to offer Black students tools for introspection that will aid them in navigating possible barriers to educational success; subsequently this study and future research aims to also give insight to predominantly white institutions of higher learning on how to positively enhance the experience and retention of Black students, and the overall structure of diversity and inclusion on campus. Illustrated below are the workings of an evaluation tool for an institution’s kinship systems, named Kinship and Cultural Networks Assessment —

KCN Assessment

The KCN Assessment is a two-fold evaluation that prioritizes the holistic needs of Black students pursuing higher education. **Part one** is a self-assessment that allows students to annotate a rubric on how an institution’s structure aligns with the core values rooted in successful kinship

systems. Ideally, students would use this rubric during their college exploration process as a starting point for discerning how or if an institution prioritizes such cultural networks, and how that may influence their academic and personal journey should they choose to enroll there.

Part two is an annual qualitative assessment of how Black students in higher education have experienced their institution's cultural climate within that academic year. Near the end of each spring semester, students who identify as Black/African descent will gain access to the assessment to rank how they believe their institution embodied particular kinship/cultural factors. At the closing of the assessment, the institution will be given a grading report that explicates both its areas of strength and needed improvement. The report will also provide practical steps for institutions to begin addressing the areas deemed unsatisfactory by their students. The assessment will be conducted annually provided the institution remains subscribed. The results of the assessment will be accessible to the public.

Part One

Concept:	Evidence:	Think:	Ask a student:	Notes:
Diversified Leadership	The board of trustees and the remaining chain of command	<p>Do the individuals in positions of power (e.g. administration and faculty members) reflect different racial, ethnic, and gender identities?</p> <p>Are there any public bulletins that show the beliefs and/or moral compass of university leaders?</p>	<p>Do you feel seen, heard, and valued when voicing your concerns to higher-ups (i.e. anyone senior to them)?</p> <p>Can you share 3-5 individuals within your department or the university at large that you believe advocates for your wellbeing?</p>	
Personable Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public forums Public Interactions 	<p>What are current students' perspectives on how leadership strives to communicate and interact with them?</p> <p>What do public spaces (e.g. social media, "the yard," etc) display regarding the engagement between university leaders and students?</p>	<p>Do you have a "go-to" person that holds a leadership role in your department or the university at-large? How would you describe that relationship?</p> <p>Would you describe the university leaders you've interacted with as accessible, accountable, and compassionate?</p>	
Culturally Relevant Curriculum	Course Syllabi	<p>Do the required readings reflect different racial, ethnic, cultural and gender identities?</p> <p>Does the course material recognize the contribution of voices from different backgrounds — minorities included?</p>	<p>In what ways do you believe the course material is culturally relevant or responsive to the students represented in the class?</p> <p>In what ways do you believe the course material is culturally reflective of the individuals that have (or currently) play a part in this field?</p>	
Diverse Pedagogical Approaches	Course Syllabi	<p>What teaching methods are implemented beyond traditional lectures? How are students' learning styles considered?</p> <p>Are there pragmatic ways to engage with the course material?</p>	<p>How would you describe your learning style? Is this style used in the classroom in any way?</p> <p>What are your study methods outside of the classroom that helps you to grasp the material?</p>	

Town & gown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within a 20 mi radius of campus • Public, school-sponsored events 	<p>Are there attractive amenities available in the community surrounding campus?</p> <p>Are there any public bulletins that reflect locals' engagement and/or support of the institution's mission and its students?</p>	<p>What are your favorite things to do outside of campus?</p> <p>In what ways have you seen locals supporting students at this school?</p>	
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Part Two:

1. I feel seen, heard, and valued when voicing your concerns to faculty, staff, and/or administration
 1. Strongly agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neither agree nor disagree
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly disagree

Comments:

2. I can identify 3-5 individuals within my department/university that I believe advocates for my well-being.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

Comments:

3. I have a "go-to" person that holds a leadership role in my department/university at-large?
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

Comments:

4. The university leaders I've interacted with are accessible, accountable, and compassionate.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

Comments:

5. My course materials are culturally relevant and/or responsive to the students represented in our class.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

Comments:

6. My course materials are culturally reflective of the individuals that have (or currently) play a part in this field.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

Comments:

7. My learning style is used in the classroom in at least one way.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

Comments:

8. I have developed study methods outside of the classroom that helps me to grasp the material.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree

- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

Comments:

9. I can identify 2-3 of my favorite things to do within a 20 mi radius of campus.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

Comments:

10. Local residents seem supportive of students at this school.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

Comments

APPENDIX A. SURVEY RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings [name of Community Service/Engagement liaison],

I am writing to request your assistance in my research entitled *Exploring Kinship Systems: The Retention of Black Undergraduate Students at HBCUs* (IRB # 2021-712). [This survey](#) is anonymous and will only take about 10 minutes to complete. Survey participants will be eligible to participate in the latter part of this study which involves monthly focus groups during the fall '21 semester. Focus group participants will receive compensation of \$100 (see attachment for additional focus group procedures) [\[attach consent form\]](#).

If possible, **please forward this information** to undergraduate students at your institution who are age 18+, and classify as a junior or senior (i.e. 3rd or 4th year in undergraduate studies). Should you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at kbrought@purdue.edu. Thank you in advance for your assistance. I've placed the link to the survey below for your convenience.

[View Survey](#)

All the Best,
Kimberly Broughton

APPENDIX B. SURVEY CONSENT FORM

Title: “Exploring Kinship Systems: The Retention of Black Undergraduate Students at HBCUs”

Researcher: Kimberly Broughton
Purdue University’s Department of English
IRB # 2021-712

Title: “Exploring Kinship Systems: The Retention of Black Undergraduate Students at HBCUs”

This research project focuses on how different cultural networks influence the experiences and retention of Black undergraduate students at Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU)s.

To participate in this study, you must:

1. Be enrolled at Claflin University, Tougaloo College, Morehouse College, Spelman College, or Talladega College
2. Classify as a junior or senior (i.e. 3rd or 4th year in undergraduate school)
3. Self-identify as Black/African American.

This survey, in part, qualifies you for the focus group portion of this study. For this survey, you will be asked to answer 10 open and close-ended questions about your experiences at your institution of higher education. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the survey. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, and **participants will remain anonymous.**

Risks and benefits: All research carries risk. The standard for minimal risk is that which is found in everyday life. Answering questions about lived experiences, opinions, and feelings may be interpreted as sensitive and make participants feel uncomfortable. At any point during the study, participants may voluntarily withdraw. Please note that breach of confidentiality is always a risk with data, but we will take precautions to minimize this risk as described in the confidentiality section below.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this survey. **However**, participants identified to participate in the focus group will receive a total of \$100, distributed in increments of \$20 at the conclusion of each focus group session (total of 5 sessions).

Confidentiality: Data collected will be handled as confidentially as possible. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, data will be temporarily stored in Qualtrics and Box, secure survey and storage tools that are approved by Purdue, until it has been transcribed and de-identified.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this survey is strictly voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adverse effects or affecting your relationship with the investigator.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this survey is Kimberly Broughton. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have prior to proceeding with this survey. If you have questions at the conclusion of the survey, you may contact Kimberly Broughton at

kbrought@purdue.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this survey, you may contact Purdue's Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (765) 494-5942 or access their website at <https://www.irb.purdue.edu/>.

By proceeding with this survey, you agree to have read the above information and consent to take part in the study. If you are selected to participate in the focus group of this study, you will be contacted via email.

APPENDIX C. SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey

1. Institution
 - Claflin University
 - Tougaloo College
 - Morehouse College
 - Spelman College
 - Talladega College
 - Other _____
2. Race/Ethnicity
3. Classification
 - Junior or 3rd year in undergraduate school
 - Senior or fourth/final year in undergraduate school
 - Other _____
4. Rank the racial demographics of your home community according to its predominance.
 - White or European American
 - Black or African American
 - Native American
 - Alaska Native
 - Asian American
 - Native American
 - Other Pacific Islander
 - Other _____
5. Describe the dynamics between the members of your home community.
 - Mostly strangers
 - Acquaintances
 - Dependable friends
 - Family-like
 - Other _____
6. What are the main factors that influenced your decision to attend an HBCU? Select all that apply.
 - Faculty-student dynamics
 - Financial assistance
 - Social activities or organizations
 - Religious, spiritual, or faith-based community
 - Family legacy
 - Other _____
7. Have you ever considered withdrawing from school? Why or why not?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Explain:
8. Rank the following according to how it has positively contributed to your college experience:

- Faculty-student dynamics
 - Social Activities or organizations
 - Religious, spiritual, or faith-based community
 - Financial assistance
 - Academic opportunities beyond the classroom
9. Describe the similarities or differences you believe exists between your home community and your college community (i.e. racial demographics, member dynamics, religious/spiritual practices, etc.).
10. Describe your relationship with your faculty members.
- Engagement limited to classroom requirements
 - Engagement beyond classroom obligations for professional advancement
 - Engagement beyond classroom obligations for professional advancement and personal connection
 - Family-like
 - Other
1. How often do you engage in religious, spiritual, or faith-based activities on or near campus (e.g. chapel service, bible study, prayer service, etc.)?
- Never
 - Very Rarely
 - Rarely
 - Occasionally
 - Frequently
 - Very Frequently
2. What university-sponsored social activities or organizations, if any, positively contributes to your experience in college (e.g. homecoming, greek life, chapel service, etc.)?
3. In light of increased safety precautions, the data collection process of this study will be held virtually. Would you be open to digitally participating should you be selected to continue in the remainder of this study?
- Yes
 - No
4. If yes, please select “Continue” below. You will be redirected to another Qualtrics survey to provide your contact information.
- **Continue**
 - Exit Survey

APPENDIX D. FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT EMAIL

To Whom It May Concern: [participants bcc'd]

Thank you for showing interest in participating in focus groups for the research study entitled *Exploring Kinship Systems: The Retention of Black Undergraduate Students at HBCUs* (IRB # 2021-712). This research project focuses on how different cultural networks influence the experiences and retention of Black undergraduate students at Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU)s.

Focus groups will be conducted virtually via Zoom from August 2021 - December 2021. During this timeframe, you will engage in one focus group per month for a total of 5 focus group sessions. Each session will last approximately 60-90 minutes, and will involve audio and visual recording. You will have the option to participate with your camera off. Data collected will be handled as confidentially as possible.

You will receive a total of \$100 to be distributed in increments of \$20 at the conclusion of each focus group session (total of 5 sessions).

Taking part in this focus group is strictly voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adverse effects or affecting our relationship.

Please see the consent form linked here [hyperlink for full consent form] to confirm your participation and for additional information regarding research protocol. Also note that the first 2 submissions from each institution will be selected. Should you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at kbrought@purdue.edu.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

All the Best,
Kimberly Broughton

APPENDIX E. RECRUITMENT FLYERS



Exploring Kinship Systems: The Retention of Black Undergraduate Students at HBCUs

This research project focuses on how different cultural networks influence the experiences and retention of Black undergraduate students at Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU)s. To participate in this study, you must:

- Be enrolled at Claflin University, Tougaloo College, Morehouse College, Spelman College, or Talladega College
- Classify as a junior or senior (i.e. 3rd or 4th year in undergraduate school)
- Self-identify as Black/African American

For more information, visit: bit.ly/HBCU-kinship or scan here:



Flyer 1: The original flyer

HBCU KINSHIP

Participants Needed:

Exploring Kinship Systems: The Retention of Black Undergraduate Students at HBCUs

This research project focuses on how different cultural networks influence the experiences and retention of Black undergraduate students at Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU)s. To participate in this study, you must:

- Be enrolled at Claflin University, Tougaloo College, Morehouse College, Spelman College, or Talladega College
- Classify as a junior or senior (i.e. 3rd or 4th year in undergraduate school)
- Self-identify as Black/African American

For more information, visit: bit.ly/HBCU-kinship | Compensation is available in Phase II of this study



Flyer 2: The revised flyer

APPENDIX F. FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

Month 1: Choosing an HBCU

1. When did you first become aware of HBCUs?
2. How early did you know you wanted to attend an HBCU?
3. Talk about your deliberation process of selecting your undergraduate institution.
 1. Who was involved in your decision-making and what influence did their input have?
4. What were your ultimate deciding factors?
5. What has been the main source of motivation for making it to this point in your academic journey?

Month 2: Faculty-student dynamics

1. How has your relationship with your professors evolved since being a student at your institution?
2. Describe your communication style with your professors. What's considered professional or unprofessional?
3. Describe your interactions with your professors inside and outside of the classroom.
4. Think about the professor that you engage with the most. What of their characteristics enhances your academic experience? What of their characteristics makes your academic experience more challenging?

Month 3 - Religion, Faith, & Spiritual Practices

1. Tell me about your experience with religion, faith, and/or spiritual practices prior to attending college.
2. What similarities or differences exist between the religious practices of your upbringing and that of your collegiate experience?
3. Discuss your involvement in religious, faith, or spiritual practices since being at your institution.

Month 4 - Social Activities and Organizations

1. Talk about your level of engagement with social activities on campus.
2. Discuss the most memorable social activity you've engaged in since being at your institution.
3. Describe your involvement with campus organizations.

Month 5 - Reflection

1. Discuss the benefits of this study, if any.
2. Discuss the limitations of this study, if any.
3. Discuss how aspects of this study could be applicable to your future personal and professional goals.

APPENDIX G. FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Title: “Exploring Kinship Systems: The Retention of Black Undergraduate Students at HBCUs”

Researcher: Kimberly Broughton
Purdue University’s Department of English
IRB # 2021-712

Purpose of Research: This research project focuses on how different cultural networks influence the experiences and retention of Black undergraduate students at Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU)s.

Duration of Participation: Focus groups will be from August 2021 - December 2021. During this timeframe, participants will engage in one focus group per month for a total of 5 focus group sessions. Each session will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

Focus Group Protocol:

1. All participants will be undergraduate students from various Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Participants will be assigned pseudonyms prior to the inception of the first focus group.
2. Focus groups will be held virtually via Zoom. Each session will be audio and video recorded for the purpose of transcribing the conversation.
3. Information shared in the focus group sessions should **not** be shared with anyone outside of the group. Participants should maintain their own privacy and confidentiality, and that of people they talk about by not using names or other identifiable information.

For this focus group, you will engage in conversation with other participants covering the following topics:

1. Choosing an HBCU
2. Faculty-student dynamics
3. Religion, faith, and spiritual practices
4. Social activities and organizations
5. Reflections

Risks and benefits: All research carries risk. The standard for minimal risk is that which is found in everyday life. Answering questions about lived experiences, opinions, and feelings may be interpreted as sensitive and make participants feel uncomfortable. At any point during the study, participants may voluntarily withdraw. Please note that breach of confidentiality is always a risk with data, but we will take precautions to minimize this risk as described in the confidentiality section below.

Compensation: Participants will receive a total of \$100 to be distributed in increments of \$20 at the conclusion of each focus group session (total of 5 sessions). Compensation will be delivered to the email participants provide via Giftbit, a digital gift card platform that will allow the participant to redeem their incentive with a variety of retailers, restaurants, and other businesses. If the participant chooses to withdraw from the study or is removed from the study prior to

completion (e.g., disregarding research protocol), compensation will only be provided for the month in which they completed the focus group session.

Confidentiality: Data collected will be handled as confidentially as possible. However, we cannot guarantee that the other study participants will not breach your confidentiality. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, data will be temporarily stored in Box, a secure cloud storage tool that is approved by Purdue, until it has been transcribed and de-identified.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this focus group is strictly voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adverse effects or affecting your relationship with the investigator.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this survey is Kimberly Broughton. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have prior to proceeding with this survey. If you have questions at the conclusion of the survey, you may contact Kimberly Broughton at kbrought@purdue.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this survey, you may contact Purdue's Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (765) 494-5942 or access their website at <https://www.irb.purdue.edu/>.

By proceeding with this survey, you agree to have read the above information and consent to take part in the study.

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Kimberly Broughton

Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN

Ph.D., Rhetoric and Composition, May 2022

Dissertation: *Exploring Kinship Systems: The Retention of Black Undergraduate Students at HBCUs*

M.A. Rhetoric and Composition, May 2018

GPA: 3.9

Thesis: Exploring Double Consciousness: The Rhetoric and Retention of Black Graduate Students at Predominantly White Institutions

Claflin University, Orangeburg, SC

Alice Carson Tisdale Honors College

B.A. English, May 2016

GPA: 3.98

Experience

UX Writer

Vanguard Group, Charlotte, NC

December 2021 - Present

Develop content for Vanguard's support site, collaborate with design teams and subject matter experts to create products and services that deliver excellent client experiences.

Assistant Director of Content Development

Purdue University's Writing Center, W. Lafayette, IN

Aug. 2020 - May 2021

Developed video content for the OWL, updated static content through Cascade CMS, recruited, mentored and supervised content developers (graduate students and undergraduate), and oversaw undergraduate staff in responding to queries and error reports from OWL users

Writing Consultant

Minority Engineering Program - Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN

June 2020 - August 2020

Instructed high school and first year college students from historically underrepresented groups with writing and research practices such as creating outlines, revising and editing drafts, and finding and incorporating resources.

Summer Assistant Director

Purdue University's Writing Center, West Lafayette, IN

July 2020 - August 2020

Compiled and submitted the annual report on the Lab's statistics, services, and outreach activities in addition to regular tutoring duties.

Writing Consultant**Purdue University's Writing Center, West Lafayette, IN****August 2019 – August 2020**

Advised clients with producing rhetorically-sound content for all genres through individual and group consultations, and through designing and hosting workshops for faculty, staff, and students.

Content Developer**Purdue University OWL****2017, 2019**

Provided post-production video editing through Adobe Premiere Pro and other Adobe Creative Cloud tools.

Graduate Instructor of Introductory Composition (Instructor of Record)**Purdue University****August 2016 – 2019**

Guided students with developing rhetorical skills needed to write and communicate effectively.

Student Support Specialist**Communities in Schools, Charleston, SC****January 2016 - May 2016**

Supported resourcefully vulnerable elementary students with developing life skills and acquiring educational and daily resources.

Writing Consultant**Claflin University's Writing Center, Orangeburg, SC****January 2013 – April 2015**

Instructed clients with producing rhetorically-sound content for all genres through individual and group consultations, and through designing and hosting workshops for students.

Peer Counselor**Claflin University Upward Bound, Orangeburg, SC****Summer 2013**

Served as a Transition Specialist for incoming college freshmen and assisted them with college level math and science.

Tutor**Cross Elementary School, Cross, SC****August 2012 – May 2016**

Supported students with learning math, reading, writing, and science and supported the Title I Facilitator and Instructional Coach with engagement activities

Awards

National Awards

Mellon Mays - Travel and Research Grant

May 2021

Supplementary funding to assist in the completion of doctoral dissertation – \$5,000.

Mellon Mays - Graduate Studies Enhancement Grant

November 2019

Supplementary funding to assist in the completion of doctoral studies – \$2,000.

Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow

June 2014-May 2016

Two-year scholastic fellowship for undergraduate, minority scholars aiming to pursue graduate studies and work in academia – Approximately \$1890 per semester.

Lindon Barrett Scholars Mentoring Program

Summer 2015

Research internship at the University of California, Riverside that prepares selected undergraduates from historically black institutions for graduate study in English, particularly in the field of African American literature and culture – Approximately \$3000.

Purdue University Awards

Sullivan Scholarship Recipient

2021-2022

New Tutor of the Semester Award - Purdue OWL

Fall 2019

Quintilian Award for Excellent Teaching

Spring 2017

Claflin University Awards

Alice Carson Tisdale Scholarship

August 2012-May 2016

Four-year scholarship based on academic excellence, leadership potential, and community service – Covers full tuition and room and board.

Honors

National Society of Leadership and Success (Sigma Alpha Pi)

December 2013

Lifetime membership and access to scholarships based on academic excellence.

Miss NAAHP (National Association of African American Honors Programs)

November 2012

Academic organization that provides African American honors students the opportunity to network, present scholarly research, and compete academically.

Sigma Tau Delta Honors Society

August 2014-Present

An international English Honor Society used to promote community literacy through undergraduate, graduate, and professional students who excel in English Language, Literature, and Writing.

Conference Presentations

American Association for Blacks in Higher Education Conference - Charleston, SC

March 2020

Exploring the Contribution of Theoretical Frameworks to Minority-Based Studies in Academia

National Conference for Undergraduate Research (University of NC, Asheville)

April 2016

Reshaping the Black Liberation Struggle

Claflin University's Research Day (Claflin University)

March 2016

Studying Black Women Rhetors since the Black Power Movement

UNCF/Mellon Mays South Eastern Regional Conference (Rice University)

November 2015

Rhetorically Analyzing the Discourse of Angela Davis

Claflin University's Annual Pedagogy Conference (Claflin University)

October 2015

The Influence of Male Dominance on the Choices of Female Characters in The Color Purple

Lindon Barrett Scholars Research Presentation (University of CA, Riverside)

August 2015

Analysis of Angela Davis' Rhetorical Strategies in her "Open Defense Statement"

Claflin University's African American Literature Conference (Claflin University)

November 2014

The Rhetoric of Black Women's Liberation in the 20th Century

Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Micro-Teaching Presentation (Emory University)

June 2014

The Art of Rhetorical Speaking

Campus Involvement

Purdue University

UR@ Syllabus Approach Document Coordinator (2018-2019)

Black Graduate Student Association - Fundraising Chair (2017-2018)

Claflin University

Honors Council – Corresponding Secretary

University 101 Peer Mentor

University Orientation Leader

Wesley Foundation Campus Ministry - Student Board