

**WHAT SHALL I GIVE MY CHILDREN? STUDENT AFFAIRS  
PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE  
ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF UNDERPREPARED  
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS**

A Dissertation

by

GENYNE LYNETTE ROYAL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies  
of Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Chair of Committee,  
Co-Chair of Committee,  
Committee Members,

Christine Stanley  
Fred Bonner  
Jean Madsen  
Dave Parrot  
Ben Welch  
Fred M. Nafukho

Head of Department,

May 2015

Major Subject: Educational Administration

Copyright 2015 Genyne Lynette Royal

## **ABSTRACT**

Currently and historically, the significant gap in educational achievement between Black and White students in P-20 education has influenced the access, persistence, and graduation rates of African Americans in higher education. Although much of the existing literature on developmental learning addresses students' academic deficiencies, this study utilizes emotional intelligence as a theoretical frame to assess the role of Student Affairs professionals in the development of academically resilient characteristics. This qualitative study explores the relationship between underprepared African American students and Student Affairs professionals to identify the practices, culture, and collaboration with faculty that promote student learning. This study expands existing research on the influence of Student Affairs practitioners, with special emphasis on how they contribute to academic resilience. This study has both social justice and educational attainment implications for underprepared African American student populations. In addition to contributing to academic programs that educate future Student Affairs professionals, this study generates a working hypothesis related to the importance of faculty and Student Affairs professionals who are responsible for the emotional, social, cultural, and intellectual development of students, all of which are factors in academic resilience and intellectual development.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my motivation, my inspiration, and she, responsible for my professional enculturation.

To my motivation, my godchildren:

*Kumasi Cruse, Jr.*

*Ayana Myrick*

*Zhada Myrick*

*Zachary Shelton*

*Clarke Fleming*

*Casey Fleming*

May this work help change the futures of many young scholars much like each of you. I am so proud of you for who you are, and who you have yet to become.

To my inspiration, my maternal grandmother and my godmother:

*Thelma L. Osborne*

To my Nana. The first in her family to earn a high school diploma, and the one to always encourage me to “get all the education”, that I can. I hope this work honors you.

*Ethel Sims*

There are no words to fully convey how much I miss you. I carry you with me always.

For my professional enculturation, my soror and very first mentor:

*Carol Gartrell*

My first mentor, and the most significant student affairs professional to influenced my life. You are the first professional who never saw my flaws or failures as an indication of who I was, but rather who I could become. Thank you for being the model for my own work, and career.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank God for bringing me through a past of “she will never be” and “she is a problem”, to my present, which shows promise, power and unlimited potential. All things are possible in Him, and I am eternally grateful.

Second, I must acknowledge my family for all of their love and support. My parents, Gene and Cassandra Royal have seen me through some of the most challenging days of my life. To be honest, in my youth, I was likely the cause of many of their most challenges as well. Despite it all, I thank you for always being there. Thank you for never giving up on me, and praying the best for me, even when others told you things to the contrary. To my sister, Dr. Camika A. Royal, thank you for being one of my first friends, and now, my sister scholar in the academe. And to my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, I thank each of you for your support and prayers.

To my Shaw University family who have encouraged me, and motivated me since the fall of 1991 to this present day, I thank God for each of you. Many of you have become yet another branch on my family tree, and I thank you and love you all. While this work kept me from many of you during special seasons in our lives, I hold you in my heart always. May this work honor you, and our alma mater. Thank you to each of you who count this accomplishment as a victory for us all. And may Johnny and Alim get to see every word from wherever they are.

To my sorors of the Alpha Rho chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, you ladies are one of the greatest gifts that I never expected to have. Thank you for being examples of our greatness as Black women, and being the exceptional doctors, lawyers, scholars, teachers, mothers and wives, that we hear of too little. I must especially thank my line

sisters, who have been some of my best friends in adulthood. A special thank you to Dr. Virginia Wright and Terri Belle, whom I may not have made it without.

I thank all of my former students, some of whom may find themselves in this work. Thank you for allowing to travel a distance on this road in your lives, and I am always truly blessed when you count me amongst those who have helped you achieve. I hope my example shows you what you are capable of becoming. To those who have given me the title of “mentor” as a result of our time together, I truly thank each of you for what I learned, and continue to learn from each of you. While there are too many of you to name, I would be remiss if I did not thank Ullin Rigby, Ihsan Mujahid, Erica Campbell, Venice Garner and Chelsea Bridgewater, who provided a sense of normalcy during a time that was anything but that. To each of you, who are members of the self-professed “Team Royal”, I love you beyond measure. Continue to pay it forward.

To my dissertation committee, I am eternally grateful for the years of challenge and support. Thank you for stretching me, and seeing something in me that I am only continuing to realize. Fred Bonner for your charismatic push, encouraging me to get into the program. Christine Stanley, thank you for your tenacious push to help get me out! Jean Madison, thank you for your encouragement to do “it” better, and for always being willing to show me just how to that. Dave Parrott, thank you for my new love affair with higher education law, and a new example of gracious student affairs leadership. And thank you, Ben Welch for being the best “cheerleader” any doctoral student/candidate could ask for.

Finally, I my thank all of my Texas A&M family. Thank you for allowing me to serve, to lead, and grow. To my BGSA family, members of my team on the Graduate Student Council, and to Drs. Karen Butler-Perry, Bryan Cole, Mary Alfred and Brian

Williams thank you for all that you are and all that you helped be become, and as  
always, Gig'em!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
 CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	4
Origin of the Problem.....	5
Significance of the Research .....	6
Researcher’s Relationship to the Problem .....	6
Limitations of the Study .....	9
Delimitations .....	10
Definition of Terms .....	10
II LITERATURE REVIEW .....	13
Understanding Underpreparedness.....	13
Developmental Education in the Academy .....	15
Academic Risk to Academic Resilience .....	17
Understanding Academic Resilience .....	19
Postsecondary Access and the Impact on the Quality of Life.....	22
African Americans and Higher Education Access .....	23
Access, Persistence, and Graduation Rates .....	24
Expansion of Human Resources .....	26
Adequate Support .....	27
Degree Attainment and Quality of Life .....	29
Student Affairs and Student Development.....	29
Theoretical Framework .....	36
Student Development Theories.....	36

CHAPTER	Page
Intelligence Theories.....	39
Emotional Intelligence.....	42
Chapter Summary.....	44
<b>III RESEARCH METHODS.....</b>	<b>46</b>
Statement of the Research Question.....	46
Theoretical Tradition.....	48
Site and Sample Selection .....	51
Site .....	51
Big State University.....	54
Prestige Regional University .....	55
Greater State University.....	57
Sample .....	60
Researcher’s Role Management.....	62
Entry.....	63
Ethics .....	64
Data Collection Techniques .....	65
Interviews.....	65
Observations .....	66
Managing and Recording Data.....	66
Assuring Trustworthiness.....	67
Data Analysis Strategies.....	69
Chapter Summary.....	70
<b>IV RESULTS.....</b>	<b>72</b>
Summary of Methods .....	72
Case One: Prestige Regional University .....	78
Institution and University Setting .....	78
The Students .....	80
Student Affairs Participants .....	93
Findings.....	97
Institutional Connections .....	97
Perceived Challenges.....	102
Service Model Versus Developmental Model .....	103
Meaningful Student Engagement.....	107
Discussion .....	109
Conclusions and Recommendations .....	112
Case Two: Big State University .....	116
Institution and University Setting .....	116
The Students .....	118
Student Affairs Participants .....	127



CHAPTER	Page
Findings .....	129
Student Affairs Curriculum .....	129
Student – Student Development Connection .....	135
Institutional Inclusive Learning .....	143
Setting Expectations for Students .....	149
Senior Leadership .....	153
Discussion .....	157
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	161
Cross-Case Analysis.....	162
Identifying Challenges Prior to them Manifesting.....	162
Involvement, Engagement, and Student Learning.....	165
Community, Campus Culture, and Collaboration .....	168
Chapter Summary.....	171
V INTERPRETATION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS .....	 173
Findings .....	173
Research Question One.....	173
Research Question Two .....	177
Research Question Three .....	180
Research Question Four.....	183
Relation to the Literature.....	188
Academic Underpreparedness .....	188
Student Affairs Practitioners and the Field.....	190
Relation to the Theoretical Framework.....	191
Recommendations for Practice.....	202
Underprepared Students.....	207
Recommendations for Future Research .....	210
Recommendation One.....	210
Recommendation Two.....	211
Recommendation Three.....	211
Conclusions .....	212
REFERENCES .....	214
APPENDIX A .....	222
APPENDIX B .....	223
APPENDIX C .....	224
APPENDIX D .....	225

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		Page
1	National Six-Year Graduation Rate, by Race .....	25
2	University of Southern State System Higher Education Institution Information .....	52
3	Regional Data for Institutions in the University of Southern State System.....	57
4	Data on the Southern State Systems' Historically Black Colleges and Universities .....	58

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	Page
1 Model of Student Affairs-EQ Interaction for Intellectual Development.....	176
2 The Cycle of the Academically Resilient Environment .....	183

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

African Americans have historically had a contentious connection with the educational system in this country (Allen, 2005; Allen, Teranishi, Dinwiddie, & Gonzalez, 2002; Bowser, 2007; Feagin, 2000; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Jackson, 2007). Despite the challenges that the population continues to face, many Blacks maintain that one's ability to attain a particular level of education improves one's ability to achieve socially and financially, which is the path to the elusive American dream for many (Allen, 2005; Allen et al., 2002). Yet, African Americans remain one of the most undereducated subpopulations in contemporary United States society (Bernstein, 1996; Graves, 2008; Grimes, 1997; Grimes & David, 1999; Journal of Blacks in Higher Education Foundation, 2006/2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Scholars have identified various places along the educational pipeline, from the learner's earliest engagement in the academic environment in preschool (Feagin, 2000) to the period when the student's ability to be adequately prepared and gain access to postsecondary institutions is significantly impacted (Allen, 2005; Harper et al., 2009; Jackson, 2007). As a result, African American students become disengaged and eventually disassociated with the educational process and thus fail to gain access to higher education at a rate equitable to that of their White peers. Unaddressed, this crisis will result in overrepresentation of African Americans among the nation's poor and the continued decline in the country's ability to achieve its stated mission of liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all of its citizenry. As the credential and knowledge associated with a college degree serve as means of social and financial advancement, the issues of access, preparedness, and support become profoundly significant. In the 1960s, President

Lyndon B. Johnson implemented affirmative action laws to address issues of access in an effort to correct previous injustices and inequities toward African Americans (Allen, 2005; Harper et al., 2009). The transition to open admissions at institutions such as The City University of New York (Ballard, 2004; Traub, 1995) is another example of efforts to address injustices. Open admissions to higher education institutions first illuminated the variance in educational preparedness between traditional-age White students and poor students who were primarily students of color and immigrants (Ballard, 2004; Gumport & Bastedo, 2001; Traub, 1995). This difference in preparation created challenges within the academic environment that faculty specifically, and institutions in general, were not prepared to address.

As the political and social interests of the country have changed since the 1960s, so has the support for federal programs that mandated greater access for historically marginalized populations. Likewise, the stratification of higher education and the associated augmentation of admissions standards has exacted ramifications on access for many, in particular students of color (Ballard, 2004; Harper et al., 2009). Budgetary constraints as a result of waning state support and the call for greater accountability with the teaching mission of institutions have further complicated the ability to support students who are not equally prepared for the level of academic rigor at the collegiate level.

Typically, when discussing academic underpreparedness, the focus is primarily on developmental courses, and by extension, the responsibility to develop the academic performance of students has been designated to faculty, who play a critical role in assisting students to master specific intellectual content. However, academic resilience literature tends to focus on the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development of students, which has been found to be equally significant in students who have become

academically resilient (Benard, 1997; Morales, 2008). These areas of student development have been found to be particularly significant to African American students' academic success (Dupree, Gasman, James, & Spencer, 2009; Ford, Kokjie, & Lewis, 1996; Palmer & Young, 2009). It is significant that this study sought to uncover the phenomenon of African American student underpreparedness while highlighting the ways in which student affairs professionals can facilitate their academic resilience. As additional support is made available to African American students, higher education will be better positioned to help those who have been underserved by aiding them in degree attainment, thus making them competitive in national and global markets.

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (2009) framed the degree attainment gap along the Black-White binary as follows:

Beyond the moral imperative to achieve equality among populations of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, there are economic reasons for doing so. Many states in the U.S. face rapidly changing demographics - with the least-educated populations growing at the fastest rates. . . . Our ability as a nation (and in many states) to close the racial/ethnic gaps at every stage in the education pipeline will play a key role in determining our economic future. (para. 1)

And given the changing nature of our economy, a high school education is not enough. Addressing racial/ ethnic inequalities in higher education will require persistent and meaningful efforts by states to provide postsecondary access and opportunity to steadily growing numbers of undereducated and underrepresented minorities. (para. 2)

The educational gap is as much a “moral imperative” as it is an economic and global one. The moral issue is indicative of the historical and systemic issues of race, poverty, and inequality that persist in this country (Feagin, 2000). Although these issues are substantial and enduring, this study sought to mitigate some of the effects of these societal challenges through the identification of additional means of support and development for underprepared African American students.

Restricted and/or limited state funds have required many states to end or reduce support specifically for academic preparedness and support programs (Saxon & Boylan, 2001; Soliday, 2002), and students have typically been relegated to community colleges to gain specific academic improvements required for success (Fulton, 2012). However, data suggest that the current economy will likely widen existing gaps in educational preparedness as funding for programs is cut (McNeil, 2011). If higher education admission standards continue to increase as the gap in preparedness widens, issues of access will also broaden along racial lines.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In light of these societal and education concerns, this study sought to identify the impact that Student Affairs professionals have on the cognitive, psychosocial, and cultural development that academically underprepared Black students must experience to gain academic resilience. The extant literature currently presents issues of underpreparedness and academic resilience as mutually exclusive. By exploring the current role of student affairs professionals in promoting intellectual development, this study sought to demonstrate the continuum from academic underpreparedness to academic resilience. Existing research on access, persistence, and graduation rates of historically underrepresented populations often explored the purely academic and fiscal resources required to support these students adequately; however, it is now appropriate and necessary to understand the role that student affairs practitioners play in developing the cognitive abilities of students.

The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How does the student affairs professional attend to the emotional intelligence (EQ) of underprepared African American students in order to support faculty efforts to develop intellectual capacity?

2. What do student affairs professionals do to develop academic resilience in students?

3. Can student affairs practitioners mitigate the graduation gap and support educational attainment by providing ways to support and develop African American students who may require additional assistance in their intellectual development?

4. What social, cultural, emotional, and programmatic resources do student affairs practitioners offer to aid in the persistence of underprepared African American students?

### **Origin of the Problem**

During the 1960s, when the City of New York University changed its admissions model to an egalitarian approach as a response to the call for equity in access to higher education, the issues of preparedness and the ability to adequately support students became more pronounced (Traub, 1995). Open access paved the way for remedial education in higher education. For the first time, educators sought to help students who had been underserved, disenfranchised, or separated at some point along the educational pipeline. Over the years, scholars shifted from postulating that the needs of this population were strictly academic to advancing the notion that it was critical for a development model that made space for the many factors that affect student learning (Oudenhoven, 2002; Saxon & Boylan, 2001). Underprepared students may also require sociological, psychosocial, and emotional development in addition to their academic improvement. Despite some marginal efforts to address the needs of particular subgroups within institutions of higher education, educational completion and preparedness gaps persist throughout the P-16 pipeline. While trend data presented an almost continuous increase in the participation of African American students in



postsecondary education, the disparity gap has been similarly consistent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009, 2010).

### **Significance of the Research**

The intent of this study was to discover meaningful ways in which student affairs professionals engaged underprepared African American students who were matriculating at four-year institutions and required additional support to matriculate. The identification of common themes and practices that various institutions and practitioners employ can have a significant impact on both African American access and completion rates. The ability to determine both the specific needs of a population of students that has been historically and systemically left behind and the role of student affairs professionals in the intellectual development of these students was significant in particular, as both the financial and human resources of postsecondary institutions are being highly utilized and scrutinized (American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1998; American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2004). Given the desire to provide access and support in a climate of fiscal restraint, it was critical to explore and empirically present the role and responsibility of student affairs professionals as an additional source to aid in intellectual development.

### **Researcher's Relationship to the Problem**

My interest in this topic stemmed from my personal experiences as a student who entered college on academic probation. I began my matriculation with a clear understanding that I was perceived as less capable academically. As my admissions status clearly indicated, my acceptance was on a trial basis and contingent on my activity in the university tutoring center, my continued follow up with an assigned advisor who

functioned as my mentor, and ultimately my academic standing at the end of the academic year. Although I did not utilize the University's academic support services often, I formed a strong relationship with my mentor and academic advisor, who worked in the University's career center. Through my initial interaction and involvement with him, two things developed: (a) a desire for intellectual engagement; and (b) an exposure to other student affairs professionals who would challenge, support, and motivate me as a student leader and scholar throughout the remainder of my academic career.

When I look back at my first year as a student at Shaw University, I often try to distinguish whether it was the experiences that I had in the classroom or outside of it that had the greatest influence on my ability to become academically resilient. I have never been able to make a distinction. During my freshman year I found my voice as both a scholar and a leader. For the first time I was confronted about my beliefs, my goals, and most significantly, my academic capabilities, which challenged me to think critically. While I can recall two courses in particular in my freshman year that facilitated such growth, I can similarly recall numerous experiences with my mentor and other student affairs professionals that were equally beneficial. As a result of my enlightenment and interaction with so many practitioners in the student affairs division, I sought opportunities to serve my peers in numerous ways, which allowed for continued interaction with these professionals. These numerous experiences and relationships throughout my undergraduate matriculation facilitated the development of a sense of self in contexts that continue to be salient today and are indicative of an academically resilient student.

As a student affairs professional, I worked with many students who were not academically, socially, culturally, or emotionally prepared for the collegiate experience. Prior to any sound theoretical understanding of the field, I approached the practice based

on my personal experience. I often expressed to others that I considered myself a “non-academic educator,” which I defined as one who had the responsibility to “teach” students the skills that they would require to adapt in various academic and social settings, challenge and facilitate the achievement of their personal and professional aspirations, and develop their abilities to think critically, solve problems, and establish attainable goals for themselves. As both Director of Student Life and Development and Executive Director of Campus Life, I expressed to the staff who I supervised that all of our work should be conducted with the ultimate goal of developing intellectually mature scholars and leaders. As we continued to develop our program, we built collaborative relationships with faculty and alumni who improved the ability of our students to make connections among course content, lived experiences, and professional aspirations.

My promotion to Director of Student Life and Development was based on my ability to organize and develop general programs; however, I was later charged with the responsibility of improving our first-year retention rate. Although the university was having success with students who were being admitted through the Act 101 Program, which Pennsylvania provides for underprepared incoming college students, the staff was unable to meet the overwhelming needs of all of the students who often required more than tutoring on various subjects. Restrictions on the program prevented program leaders from providing some resources to students who had not been admitted to the institution through Act 101. The work of my office then became to identify, track, and develop skills that students would need to become stronger scholars. Much of the work benefitted students who were facing academic challenges. At the request of the Vice President of Student Affairs, we continued to grow the program.

My personal experiences supported my desire to explore this topic empirically. Through student development coursework, I came face to face with both theory and

practice. Through a discussion of the developmental needs of first-generation college students, I realized that the practices highlighted in the literature for faculty to support students who are struggling in the higher education environment are the same things that student affairs professionals should do. I practiced this in my professional life but the professors said that my argument was not valid because it had not been empirically tested. That exchange demonstrated a gap in the literature related to student affairs professionals, whose work focuses on student development, which affects student learning. Since my development was profoundly influenced by student affairs practitioners, I have a passion for student development and learning in this specific context. This area of research offers a great deal to be investigated that can inform higher education in general and the significance of student affairs professionals in particular.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Calabrese (2006) described the limitations of a research study as the identified “potential weakness [of the] research design or methodology that restricts the study’s scope” (p. 12). This study was limited by the specific context of the state of North Carolina and underprepared African American students who were, at the time of data collection, matriculating in universities there. Also, levels of academic preparedness vary by state (Frances, 2010), and state governments may choose different ways to meet the needs of their students, which is likely to influence the ability of researchers who seek to replicate this study. While information in this study revealed the challenges in the P-12 educational pipeline, they were for contextual and historical purposes only, as the specific focus of this study was higher education, particularly four-year institutions where underpreparedness is less of a focus in existing research.

## **Delimitations**

Although underpreparedness in higher education is a challenge that affects students of many demographics, this study specifically focused on African American students and the ways in which student affairs professionals may aid their academic resilience to promote greater access and educational attainment. North Carolina was an appropriate setting for this study because it presented a singular state system with diverse institutional types. While a limitation of the study was the focus on those who were matriculating in higher education, the findings of this study could have implications for underprepared students currently in the P-12 pipeline and their access to four-year institutions. The topic may also have social justice implications not only for African American students but for students of color in subsequent studies. Future research should be conducted to determine whether the findings of this study are consistent with those populations as well, or whether other methods of student development are more beneficial for students of different racial or ethnic groups in their cognitive development, intellectual capabilities, and academically resilient characteristics.

## **Definition of Terms**

*Academic resilience:* The “process and results” facilitating a student’s ability to be academically “successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding” (Morales & Trotman, 2004, p. 8).

*At-risk students:* Students who are generally characterized as “low socioeconomic status . . . [having] academic problems, speaking English as a second language [having] a sense of alienation and disengagement from school, and poor peer acceptance” (Schargel, Thacker, & Bell, 2007, p. 15)

*Developmental education:* Reading, writing, and mathematics courses designed to prepare students for college-level work; the courses vary by institution, based on university requirements (Kozeracki & Brooks, 2006).

*Emotional intelligence (EQ):* The connection of emotion and intelligence through four levels of psychological processes in four forms: reflexive regulation of emotions, understanding and analyzing emotions, emotional facilitation of thinking and perception, appraisal and expression of emotion (Mayer & Salovey, 2004).

*Protective factors:* Factors that “moderate the impact of stress” (Morales & Trotman, 2004, p. 11), generally characterized as environmental, familial, and dispositional factors.

*Remedial education:* A set of prescribed courses suggested to “help underprepared students gain skills” (Bettinger & Long, 2005, p. 1) in subjects such as mathematics and English.

*Student affairs:* University division in which the professionals are the focus of this study. Departments that include this population can vary. To provide parameters for this study, student affairs professionals in this study are those who work in 41 areas designated by the Council of the Assessment of Standards in Higher Education (CAS Standards; see Appendix A) to promote professional standards.

*Student development:* The philosophical foundation for the field of student affairs (Magolda, 2009; Reason & Broido, 2011).

*Underprepared students:* Students with inadequate reading, writing, and mathematics skills, and/or those who have lower scores on college placement tests or standardized tests (Gabriel, 2008; Grimes, 1997).

*University of North Carolina (UNC) System:* The public postsecondary educational system in the state of North Carolina that includes 16 higher education

institutions and one residential high school for gifted 11th- and 12th-grade students in mathematics and science.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

African Americans have a historically contentious relationship with the American education system. From the specific need to reaffirm the Morrill Act in 1890 to reinforce the establishment of schools for African Americans, to the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ended the legal practice of separate but equal, to the occupation of the Chancellor's Office at the City College of New York by Black and Puerto Rican students in New York City demanding services and programs to support and recognize their diverse populations, the historic educational foundation of the United States has been riddled with the struggle for access and support of African Americans. Generally, as a byproduct of racism, both individual and systemic, Black students have been characterized as less prepared, motivated and capable than their White counterparts. As higher education evolved as an institution, standards of admission increased and the academy overall became much more stratified. Many students of color became disenfranchised in the educational pipeline, and students who were not given the opportunity to be equally prepared for the rigors of academic performance in postsecondary education became identified as underprepared and requiring special remediation to be successful.

#### **Understanding Underpreparedness**

Two main schools of thought have assisted scholars in gaining an understanding of the underprepared postsecondary student. One antiquated and racially prejudiced philosophical lens constructs the population as a set of students who possess an inferior academic capacity and a decreased sense of self-esteem. These students are also said to possess a decreased sense of control in their lives and to exercise inadequate study skills



(Grimes & David, 1999). This view attributes the ability of students to achieve academically to their academic self-concept (Cokely, 2002; Grimes, 1997), as previous research has suggested that the concept supports the student's ability to persist. The other school of thought takes into consideration the origin of the student's performance by assessing the amount of "risk" that could have some adverse effect on the ability to learn (Bosworth & Walz, 2005). *Risk* was defined by Bosworth and Walz (2005) as those "personal, familial, or environmental" (p. X) challenges that some students experience throughout their lives that have been found to influence negatively their personal and social development. The latter categorization of the underprepared student informs understanding of some of the mitigating circumstances that have influenced students' academic experiences prior to their arrival on the college campus.

In research conducted in the mid- to late-1990s by scholars aspiring to understand the underprepared student, several dynamics were added that broadened the scope of the population (Grimes, 1997). As the nontraditional population of postsecondary students began to grow, many found that those students were considered underprepared because of their lack of social capital, as well as their absence from formal education for a period of time (Grimes, 1997). Some of those students had been out of a formal learning environment for some time, and others maintained personal and professional obligations, including engagements such as families of their own and challenging work responsibilities. The second population that began to have an enhanced presence in higher education and to have an overwhelming presence in the underprepared population were "nonnative" English speakers (Grimes, 1997). Reading and writing are two of the three areas in which one's level of preparedness is assessed, and English Language Learners (ELL) students entering the academy are likely to struggle in one or both of those areas as they engage the learning process.

When considering the needs and the broad descriptive nature of the population, it is critical to examine the demographic makeup of underprepared students. Although nonnative speakers represent a significant part of the population, the current literature suggests that African Americans represent the most significant racial/ethnic subgroup within this populace. In each of the three areas used to assess students' level of preparedness, Black students were significantly represented. The mathematics, reading, and writing scores of African American students is currently on average 27% lower than those of White students. Women represent a higher level of underpreparedness in contrast to their male counterparts, although they typically perform better on English placement tests (Grimes, 1997). Students of a nontraditional age also represent a significant portion of underprepared students who are currently a part of the educational process.

### **Developmental Education in the Academy**

Remedial or developmental education is an educational construct that City University of New York (CUNY) made conventional; it serves as one of the many stratifications of the individual learner and likewise supports the structure of higher education. The underprepared student is not a recent anomaly, and although there is significant representation among African American students, it is not bound by particular race, ethnicity, or gender. Historically, remediation and underprepared students may have greater roots in the socioeconomic status (SES) of students in general, as a significant portion of the current literature suggests that underpreparedness is much more inclusive of students from all racial and cultural demographics and that levels educational preparedness are highly associated with the individual student's educational experiences and academic environment (Astin, 1993; Schargel et al., 2007). Despite the broad manner in which the population can be viewed, the areas of study commonly

associated with underpreparedness are mathematics, writing, and reading (Oudenhoven, 2002). African American students have been identified as scoring lower than any other racial or ethnic group and have been considered the group to be least prepared for the college experience (Grimes, 1997). According to a National Center for Education Statistics (2003) report on remedial education in postsecondary institutions, the number of students who required at least some remediation increased between 1995 and 2000. There was also an increase in the amount of time that students were required to be enrolled in developmental courses to ensure their academic success (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

Two major factors have contributed to an enhanced review of remedial studies: (a) the additional stress on faculty caused by the increased number of underprepared students seeking admission into the academy; and (b) the associated cost of developmental education. As higher education has sought to improve access for American citizens, faculty members have discussed their need to lessen course requirements to “accommodate undergraduate abilities” (Pitts et al., 1999, p. 2). Faculty also report problematic behavior and a lack of motivation among student cohorts who are not prepared to function in the learning environment. Even prior to the recent economic downturn and the need to streamline higher education costs, the expenditures associated with remediation have come under extreme scrutiny. In May 1998, the CUNY system was one of numerous systems to engage in political debate on the associated costs of remediation.

To date, much of the research on the subject of underprepared students has been exclusive to students who are identified as at risk. Many scholars seemingly seek to understand the cause (being at risk) or the effect (being academically underprepared) but fail to review the two areas as related phenomena. For the purpose of this study,

however, it was significant to understand both conditions that contribute to the societal challenges that students face that would cause them to be characterized as “at risk”. It is those factors are inextricably linked to the reasons students engage the higher education experience as they are unprepared academically, socially, and emotionally for the environment and the rigors of college-level work. This connection was critical for the context of this study, as the academic resilience literature uses the term “at risk” in the exploration of the phenomena and identifies the acquired skills that move students from risk to resilience.

### **Academic Risk to Academic Resilience**

In recent years there has been a significant amount of discussion, debate, and research conducted about the value of remediation in higher education and the level of preparedness of college students (Grimes, 1997; National Center for Education Statistics, 1996, 2003). Noel and Levitz (1982) defined the academically underprepared student as one “whose credentials put them in the lowest 10-15% of their total class in terms of academic readiness” (p. 1). More contemporary literature provides specific criteria, assessing the population based on readiness in specific content areas such as mathematics, reading, and writing courses, as well as grade point average (GPA) (Grimes, 1997; Noel & Levitz, 1982). These students are less likely to persist in the higher education environment even when they are able to gain access to a postsecondary institution (Jackson, 2007). For the purpose of this study the term *underprepared* is used interchangeably with the term *at risk* because they are described similarly in academic resilience literature and are synonymously a population of students who have encountered social, cultural, and economic challenges that have adversely affected their academic engagement and level of preparedness (Bernstein, 1996; Ley & Young, 1998). Scholars have studied the phenomenon of underpreparedness and at-risk status from a

political position for years. From a political perspective, the financial expenditures in higher education remediation have been an issue of significant debate. In some states, state finances are stretched and developmental education is being cut, or provided at specific institutional types, such as community colleges. In other states, the subject of developmental education is related to their workforce, as there exists a need to produce skillful and knowledgeable employees for business, industry, and technology (Saxon & Boylan, 2001; Soliday, 2002). The culpability for the diminished ability of some students has also been studied extensively, as earlier studies concluded that Black students simply were not as intellectually capable as their White peers (Boykin, 1986). However, more recent research on underprepared students has provided both the characteristics of those who are more likely to be ill-equipped for the rigor of the postsecondary academic process and the characteristics of those who have been academically resilient (Benard, 1997; Morales, 2008; Thomsen, 2002). Regardless of the perspective of the numerous studies that have been conducted on the level of preparedness of students and their ability to persist, the verifiable truth is that the students in this population are highly represented by Blacks, Latinos, and those of low socioeconomic status (Miller, 2006), and their ability to attain a postsecondary education has a significant influence on their quality of life and their ability to contribute to the larger society (Forde, 2002).

To date, all of the existing literature in reference to underprepared students, developmental education, and student development has been focused on the context of the faculty, discussing the practices that they should implement to develop these students as scholars and aid them to persist through completion of a degree. Previous recommendations have expressed a need for institutions to provide adequate financial support for this subgroup, as studies have found that additional financial challenges can

have a profound effect on students deemed to be at risk. Similarly, mentors and forms of experiential learning have been found to be beneficial for underprepared students. Yet existing literature squarely places the responsibility for this development on the faculty, and little significant research has been conducted to determine the role of student affairs professionals, who work directly with students in personal, social, and cultural areas and play a significant role in the development of campus culture, which has been established as critical for the resiliency of any developing scholar.

### **Understanding Academic Resilience**

Several definitions have been developed by researchers studying the concept of academic resilience. While the notion of academic resilience is applicable to students of any racial or ethnic group, earlier studies on the academic resilience of African Americans were based on a cultural and social deficit frame that blamed the children for their perceived limited academic abilities. In *The Triple Quandary and the Schooling of Afro-American Children*, Boykin (1986) stated, “Afro-American academic difficulties were typically explained in terms of the student’s own inadequacies and problems” (p. 60). Some theorists prior to the 1960s posited that “they may have maladaptive reactions to adversity or inadequate socialization experiences” (p. 60) that are the cause of their poor academic performance. Since that time, numerous scholars have discredited that assumption and have begun to examine the phenomenon as a societal issue that disproportionately impacts Blacks and other students of color as a result of systemic racism (Ballard, 2004; Feagin, 2000; O’Connor, Hill, & Robinson, 2009).

More recent research portrays the phenomenon from the perspective of what educators believe all students should know at a particular level of education, without consideration of race or other societal influences. In one such study, Walker, Gleaves and Grey (2006) called this concept “should-ness” (p. 259). Should-ness is standard

practice, in all levels of education, for educators to expect students to achieve a particular level of academic acumen prior to advancing to the next; however, that position gives little consideration to the ongoing diversity of the students' learning experiences. In *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality*, Shapiro (2004) associated the affluence of families and the communities in which they reside with the quality of the education provided to them. According to Shapiro, students from lower-income areas were often determined to be deficient in terms of what educators believe they should know, and thus they were considered less capable than their peers from communities and school districts that provided better instruction and facilities, and from peers who had parents with more social capital.

Walker et al. (2006) theorized the concept of “adaptability and endurance” (p. #), which posits that students who develop academic resilience must first optimistically adjust to positive change to increase their ability to cope with difficult occurrences in their lives. The position that these students are able to cope more effectively with the challenges or “risks” that they will face is based on the premise that those skills will be transferable and will equip them to address their academic deficiencies. Walker et al. insisted that students must acquire a sense of “identity capital,” which is a necessary component of academic resiliency.

The findings of Walker et al. are consistent with research related to the associated proficiencies attributed to academic resilience of students. Morales (2008) explored the phenomenon as a skill or set of skills that some students develop because of the numerous challenges or “risks” that they have experienced in their lives. Despite the framing, Black and Latino students in this population are typically from lower SES (Morales, 2008). Further study is critical to understand how to develop the ability to

rebound for all students, most particularly those who have to overcome much more than some of their peers in order to achieve academic success.

The failure of higher education professionals to identify and facilitate the development of resilience in students will have an adverse effect on student quality of life (Forde, 2002) and potentially have profound ramifications on society in general. Morales (2008) described resilience as the “unlikely academic achievement among marginalized and disenfranchised students [who have] proven success despite acute and ubiquitous risk” (p. 23). The experiences of some students can provide a wealth of potential resources for the development of those who have succumbed to the societal challenges faced by Black men. This specific group is highly representative of the population classified as “at risk.” Further research can significantly benefit them, as well as the academy. A thorough analysis and construction of developmental and supportive practices in the field is necessary to meet the needs of Black male students, ensure the future of a particular population, and benefit the larger society.

A review of national trend data on educational attainment revealed a gap between Black male and Black female students that indicated an area for further research. However, while African American women display greater achievement than their racial counterparts, they also lack in comparison to their White male and White female peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). This discrepancy is indicative of the need to explore the educational gap along racial lines and identify means to support the student development and learning needs of a specific population. Associated with the need to identify and improve services for African American students is the need to study their ability to persist to time of completion and enhance their social and economic status for themselves, their families, and their community. Identification of ways in which student affairs professionals are currently facilitating development of academic



resilience characteristics in African American students can have a positive impact on access, as increased and/or adequate support can then be made available to students who lack financial and/or human resources.

### **Postsecondary Access and the Impact on the Quality of Life**

St. John and Musoba (2001) presented a case study of the various challenges and methods of support established in Indiana to inform practitioners and policy makers who were seeking to “improve educational opportunities in their states and institutions” (p. 3). Their research focused on three themes: (a) expanding opportunity for those who are historically and typically underrepresented; (b) creation of support services and student preparation to decrease ever-widening gaps between postsecondary admission criteria and college preparation courses, when available to students; and (c) identification of partnerships to effect positive change in access and persistence of “underrepresented” students. Although the focus of their research was on those of lower SES, the case that they presented is significant to African Americans as well and provides recommendations that are equally significant.

Several scholars have described a contemporary form of systemic racism in the housing segregation that exists throughout the country and influences the lack of funding for K-12 education (Bowser, 2007; Feagin, 2000; Shapiro, 2004). St. John and Musoba (2001) made a parallel case about differential college preparation in relation to the SES of students and the schools that they attend in their communities. They posited that, as students are less academically prepared in such communities, “supplemental support” (p. 94) should be available to support persistence. Contextually, this work depicted the challenges faced by underrepresented students generally, which would be inclusive of African American. However, additional context should be considered as it relates to Black students, which include the historical, political, and social challenges, specifically

associated with what they have faced. Gaps in preparation disproportionately affect African Americans and have been consistent despite increased participation in education. Although such challenges exist, the ability to provide adequate support for African American students who are able to gain access is significant for their ability to contribute to society and establish an improved quality of life for themselves and their families.

### **African Americans and Higher Education Access**

Several scholars have provided a thorough analysis of the history of African Americans and their access to education at various points on the educational pipeline (Allen, 2005; Allen et al., 2002; Feagin, 2000; Harper et al., 2009; Jackson, 2007). In the historical timeline of African Americans in higher education, researchers present the transition from the Colonial period when education was illegal for Africans brought to this country to the introduction of Affirmative Action and what Harper et al. (2009) called “pseudo-equality” (p. 407) in their access to the American educational system. From there, scholars have presented contemporary issues that serve as barriers for Black students, such as the lack of parity in funding and support for institutions historically catering to African American students, the exorbitant use of culturally biased standardized tests for consideration in admission, and the dismantling of Affirmative Action.

The contemporary challenges that Black students face are presented as a form of systemic racism, which Allen (2005) stated is prevalent in all aspects of American life. One of the primary forms of racism that serves as a “structural barrier” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 409) for African American students, significant to this study, includes the “higher thresholds of college eligibility” (Allen et al., 2002, p. 448), coupled with the lack of “corresponding advances in public K-12 schools” (Harper et al., 2009, p. 398). The lack of educational preparedness is much more prevalent among poor African

American students who do not maintain the “economic or cultural resources” (Feagin, 2000, p. 170) of their White peers. Schools in poorer economic environments have fewer teachers with certificates or degrees in the content areas that they teach, particularly in mathematics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Generally these students are unable to gain access to schools that will mitigate educational disparities that develop at the onset of their engagement with the public educational environment (Shapiro, 2004). Although African Americans have historically viewed education as a means to achieve the American Dream and improve their chances for financial and social mobility (Allen, 2005; Allen et al., 2002; Bowser, 2007; Feagin, 2000; Harper et al., 2009; Jackson, 2007; Shapiro, 2004), the educational gap persists along the Black/White binary throughout the P-16 system. As the educational system fails to provide adequate support and resources for African American learners and continues to repeal programs designed to support access and develop academic abilities, a significant portion of the American citizenry is facing profound implications related to the quality of their lives. Current data suggest that African Americans are the most significantly represented group in unemployment rates (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). Likewise, less educated African Americans, such as those with a high school diploma, represent 15.8% of those unemployed according to recent data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), the highest rate of unemployment of all racial and ethnic groups. Failure to address the existing gaps in educational attainment, preparedness, access, development, and persistence perpetuates a system that continually oppresses African Americans.

### **Access, Persistence, and Graduation Rates**

Just as the weakened educational pipeline has had a significant impact on the number of African American high school graduates who generally qualify for admission to postsecondary institutions, graduation rates for Black students also present a

significant gap. The report *Measuring Up: The National Report Card on Higher Education* (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2008) highlights several areas where universities are failing students and society, contributing to slippage in global rankings. College preparation and access to college are two documented areas of weakness in American higher education, as well as college completion rates, which present significant “racial and ethnic disparities” (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2008, p. 7). As the data in Table 1 suggest, African American students graduate from four-year institutions at a rate of 40.5% over a 6-year period. The graduation gap between Black and White students is greater than 15% and serves as the second largest gap between White students and all students of color.

Table 1  
*National Six-Year Graduation Rate, by Race*

Race	Graduation rate
Anglo/White	59.4%
African American/ Black	40.5%
Hispanic	46.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	65.5%
Native American	38.6%

Source: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policy Making and Analysis (2007)

DeSousa (2001) suggested in *Retaining African Americans in Higher Education*, that the focus on African Americans in postsecondary education should be on retention and completion rates. His findings noted increased enrollment of Black students at various institutional types but an extended time to completion and challenges that impacted the ability to persist. A significant amount of research has been conducted to identify challenges to persistence, and findings have suggested that those challenges include the need to work while attaining a degree, the campus climate and inclusion of racial and ethnic minorities, levels of preparedness, and the need for additional time to complete developmental courses (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; St. John & Musoba, 2011; Tinto, 1997).

It is possible that, within the African American student population, any number of combinations of these challenges increase the difficulty to persist. Further study on the intersection of these challenges could be beneficial in understanding how to meet the needs of this student population. However, regardless of the causes of their inability to continue or matriculate in a timely manner, the potential level of global competitiveness in the intellectual community can be adversely effected by the loss of a segment of the institution's intellectual capital, regardless of race or ethnicity, and the financial impact of extended enrollment or failure to complete has significant economic and social repercussions on the individual as well.

### **Expansion of Human Resources**

In relatively recent years, many scholars have researched the influence of campus involvement in relation to students' ability to develop and persist, and have considered the value of the collaborative relationship between student affairs and academic affairs within institutions of higher education as a means of creating a holistic learning environment (Kuh, Schuh, & Whitt, 1991; Tinto, 1997; Whitt, 1999). In *Involving*

*Colleges*, Kuh et al. (1991) discussed at length the manner in which student affairs practitioners “complement the institution’s educational purpose” (p. 7) through the development of the institution’s environment and culture policies, which are in part at the discretion of these student affairs professionals. There has also emerged the desire to provide a more holistic approach to development and learning in higher education, which has resulted in the creation of such publications as *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus On the Student Experience* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2004) and *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1998), seeking to illuminate the improved academic experience for students in a seamless academic environment, where “out-of-class” experiences are collaborative and intentionally developmental. This study sought to support previous research that expressed the benefits of academic and student affairs collaboration, but it also explored the role of student affairs professionals as it related to the development of intellectual skills and abilities in postsecondary institutions.

### **Adequate Support**

Significant data present the growing challenges to access, persistence, and timely graduation for African American students in higher education, yet historically and currently the responsibility to address the intellectual development of students has been viewed solely as the responsibility of faculty members. As previous research has shown, students are failing to receive an equitable education throughout the educational pipeline; as a result, even for those who gain access to a postsecondary institution, the educational gap continues when examined in the context of student graduation rates. This ongoing gap in preparation, access, and graduation rates suggests a need to identify

additional means of support and development for the growing population of developmental students. Although the issue of access is an ongoing matter of debate, some projections of higher education enrollment predict an increasing number of nontraditional students in the academy by 2015 and foresee that higher education in general will become increasingly more diverse in subsequent years (Martinez, 2004). Based on those estimations, it is highly likely that the level of academic preparedness of students will also continue to become more divergent.

Taking into consideration the current economic climate in the country, it is highly likely that the population of underprepared students will continue to increase over time, which will have significant implications for faculty members. Some research suggests that faculty have a desire to make additional support available to students who are academically underprepared to provide a much more egalitarian approach to higher education (Pitts, White, & Harrison, 1999). However, as faculty experience an increased need to balance what has often been perceived as conflicting or copious priorities as teachers, researchers, mentors, and advisors, they are challenged by their ability to provide instruction to a population with such a disparity in skill and previous content knowledge. When additional developmental needs are not adequately met, some faculty have changed their course requirements to allow less prepared students to succeed, which has further ramifications for countless constituencies.

A considerable amount of literature has established the significant role of faculty in relation to student learning; however, student affairs professionals also provide analogous support to ensure academic success, in particular with underprepared students, who require additional personal development to become resilient scholars and to ensure their ability to persist. This research study can present a means of closing the differential graduation rate for African American students in higher education. Several longitudinal

studies have identified a significant racial gap along the Black/White binary college completion rate (JBHE Foundation, 2006/2007).

### **Degree Attainment and Quality of Life**

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) has provided data that support the correlation between attained level of education and ability to earn a living wage. A higher level of education, even in challenging economic times, is associated with a decreased chance of unemployment and an increased living wage. The data show a 4.9% difference in level of unemployment between high school graduates and workers who have who earned at least a bachelor's degree. Similarly, there is a median difference of \$21,242 earned annually between those who have a college degree and those who do not. These findings are similar to results found in studies around the world related to education, employment, and levels of earner income (Brauns, Gangl, & Scherer, 2001). All of those studies support the dominant belief among African Americans that educational degree attainment is parallel to the ability to acquire wealth. Likewise, Ross and Van Willigen (1997) found that those with a higher level of education maintained a greater sense of control over their lives and had better mental and physical health. Although the trend data suggest that degree attainment is improving across all racial categories, the gap along the Black/White binary remains consistent, even as the Latino/White gap narrows (Fry, 2011). This should be an issue of national concern, as many African Americans are not afforded equitable opportunities to contribute to the global competitiveness of the country.

### **Student Affairs and Student Development**

The field of student affairs maintains a history almost as old as the institution of higher education itself. The Colonial period, formal higher education was introduced, however it was only available to affluent, White males. During the early period of



American higher education, institutions encountered challenges with curriculum, institutional governance, and enrollment. Institutions such as Harvard University (1636), William and Mary (1693), Yale University (1701), the University of Pennsylvania (1740) and several other colleges were established to educate the clergy and politicians of the day (Lucas, 2006), yet as a small group of elite institutions they were all established as the foundation of what was to become American higher education. Despite the great development of this burgeoning American institution, the field of what would be known as student affairs, was not introduced until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was during that time that Charles William Eliot, president of Harvard University, identified the need for specific personnel to meet particular needs of students as it related to both academic advising, and further training in social behavior and conduct. At that time Harvard University appointed its first faculty member to serve as the Dean of Men, with the appointment of LeBaron Russell Briggs to serve in that role.

The field of student affairs has changed significantly since the first professionals were given the role and responsibility of addressing the increasing needs of students attending the early nation's growing higher education population. As the first Dean of Men, Russell served both the students and the institution in particular in ways which alleviated the faculty from having to address particular issues emerging, at least in part, as a result of the growing student population as well as the expansion of the curriculum. It was during this time, however, that the service role of student personnel workers was first established. The role and responsibility of such practitioners has evolved significantly from the time of the first Dean of Men and Dean of Women, and as institutions have grown, the diversity of the student population has increased, and the needs of faculty and students alike, have increased (Fiona J.D. MacKinnon & Associates, 2004; Rhatigan, 2009 ).

In addition to the internal influences that have caused the expansion and development of student affairs as a field, there also exist numerous external factors that have greatly influenced both higher education broadly, and student affairs specifically. Almost as early as the foundation of American higher education itself, American politics, law, and societal issues have also influenced the growth and development of the field. In contemporary times, some question the validity and value of many student affairs professionals, and staff more broadly, within the university environment in particular as it relates to the rising costs of matriculation. However, student affairs is a field that has grown in response to many of the external influences in higher education.

Numerous political occurrences could be cited as those that have influenced the growth and development of higher education and the field of student affairs. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 served as the first expansions of higher education broadly. Justin Smith Morrill, a representative from the state of Vermont proposed that postsecondary education be both liberal and practical. His proposition suggested that states donate land to fund higher education institutions. As a result of this act a number of postsecondary institutions were established across the country including those first Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Approximately 50 years later, another political action was taken to expand higher education yet again. In 1944 the *Servicemen's Readjustment Act* was passed in order to underwrite growing college costs, which resulted in the growth of the student population and supported the addition of various campus facilities, including residence halls. Another contemporary example of politics influencing postsecondary education is the 2006 report commissioned by then Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings. *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of US Higher Education*, commonly known as the Spellings' Report, identified several issues which have greatly influenced how practitioners in the field approach their work. Of the six areas identified

in that report, including issues of access, financial aid and transparency, and accountability, many of those typically fall within or are related to departments in the division of student affairs.

Equally, legal matters directly and indirectly related to higher education have influenced the growth and development of the field of student affairs. Historically, institutions of higher education functioned under the premise of *en loco parentis*, in the place of the parent. During that era of administration, student affairs personnel functioned with the level of autonomy as it related to the general well-being of students, however, as of the 1960s Bickle and Lake (1999) stated that “students asked the courts to intervene in university life” (p. 36), as a result of perceived denial of one’s individual rights during the time of significant civic unrest in the country. In cases such as *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961), students established the right for due process as afforded to them under the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment of the Constitution. Even prior to the Dixon case, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) served as what would become the initial case in a series of litigation related to issues of access and quality as it relates to higher education. The most recent litigation was heard by the Supreme Court in 2013, which was the case of *Abigail Fisher v. The University of Texas*, where she challenged the idea of affirmative action in the university’s admissions process. Even more recently changes to Title IX have established increased responsibility for postsecondary institutions as it relates to incidents of bias, sexual assault, and rape. These cases serve as examples of the increased responsibility of institutions as it relates to the management, oversight, and responsibility for students. They also represent a greater increase in the skills and knowledge required of personnel working with student conduct, college admissions, and areas responsible for campus safety and efficacy and support.

Additionally, numerous social or societal issues have also influenced higher education generally and student affairs specifically. As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century the extra curriculum of students was established, as students engaged in debate teams, various fraternal organizations, and collegiate sports (Lucas, 2006). While early in their existence faculty viewed many of these forms of engagement as anti-intellectual and were thought to have no place in the educational environment, these aspects of the university have grown significantly and are considered to be of great importance in student life.

The civil unrest of the 1960s serves as yet another example of societal influence on higher education. During this era youth across the country were actively protesting both the Vietnam War as well as the current state of segregation that was pervasive across much of the country. In particular as it relates to race, one of the greatest outcomes, which was a result of the Civil Rights Movement, was greater access for Black students at predominantly White institutions.

In contemporary times, much of the social discourse around higher education is centered on the debate of higher education being a public or private good; in particular as it relates to the rising cost of college tuition. This debate has resulted in many institutions attempting to streamline their staff, in order to maintain their faculty. Much of the staff that has been affected by these budgetary restrictions has been those within the division of student affairs.

Just as political, legal, and societal changes have influenced the growth of and development of the field of student affairs, the diversity of institutional type, has had equal influence on the field, and how practitioners engage and understand their work. In Joan Hirt's (2006) book, *Where You Work Matters: Student Affairs Administration at Different Types of Institutions*, she described the various types of student affairs

administrators based on “...six studies...” exploring practitioners “work life” or “how they spend their time” (p. 10). Seven institutional types were identified in this study, which were classified as liberal arts colleges, religiously affiliated institutions, community colleges, Hispanic-serving institutions, comprehensive institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and research institutions.

Although the field of student affairs in general has a shared foundation, path of development, and purpose, the ways in which practitioners engage their work is highly influenced by the institutions in which they serve. Some of the factors that bring those differences into being include the mission of the particular institution, its environment, and where incentives, such as professional advancement, salaries, and student impact, are placed by peers within the division. These nuances within the field serve as an important nuance, and provide greater context for both practitioners and scholars of the field.

In as much as higher education has been influenced by both internal and external factors, so has the field of student affairs. The field was initially established out of the growing needs of students and faculty alike. However, student affairs remains one area of the university community that has continued to evolve in order to meet the diverse and countless needs of a thoroughly complex and shifting student population. Much of the contemporary research associated and generated by practitioners, scholars, and governing organizations, is now focused on student learning, faculty and practitioner collaborations, persistence, retention, completion, and student success. The diversity of student learners, and the student affairs practitioners’ ability to understand, engage, and develop students as scholars, is the political and societal issue of contemporary practitioners (Keeling & Hersh, 2011). In particular, as professionals in the field seek to support the persistence and completion rates of underrepresented students, a particular

focus should be given to those who have been subject to the systemic misalignment of the P-20 education pipeline.

The overarching intent of this study was to provide recommendations for student affairs practitioners and educators in the discipline of student affairs or student development in higher education to aid in their efforts to develop the field. Additionally, it was the purpose to explore if and how student learning occurred outside of the classroom, and how it was experienced by some of those underserved by the P-16 educational pipeline. This study was guided by four primary objectives. The first objective was to identify a philosophical framework and specific practices of student affairs administrators that had been applied to develop a sense of academic resilience in academically underprepared students. The second objective was to identify influences that student affairs administrators had outside the classroom that impacted the learning experiences of students in a formal learning setting. Student affairs administrators have commonly been recognized as those who primarily facilitate personal development or “out-of-class” learning (Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994), which is typically viewed as supplemental or “the other” education, traditionally only marginally correlated with the ability of students to excel academically. Third, this study had been designed as a case study analysis with the goal of exploring this phenomenon at several institutional types. Through the exploration of the behavior of practitioners at diverse institutions, it was the purpose of this study to illustrate practices that were comparable and thus most applicable to African American students in general, in contrast to those that may have been specific to a particular institutional type. The fourth objective of this research was to inform and support the emergent practice of building collaborative relationships between academic and student affairs professionals, and to explore how

collaborative relationships influenced the academic resilience of underprepared African American students.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Student Development Theories**

Since the 1970s, scholars have sought to understand the role of personal development and its influence on student learning. In an effort to make relevant connections, Silverman and Casazza (2000) reviewed developmental theories in their text *Learning and Development: Making Connections to Enhance Teaching*, which focused on constructivist learning theories. How students make meaning of their lives and learning experiences has a significant impact on their academic performance. Educators who hope to enhance the intellectual environment have applied theoretical frames to their methods of instruction and interactions with students. Silverman and Casazza categorized these theoretical models in six thematic groups. For the purpose of exploring existing theories, the researcher selected four of those groups to explore and discuss, as they are associated with some of the parallels found in academic resilience literature.

There is a significant amount of research on personal identity development and identity formation, in particular as it relates to young adults, and traditional-age college students (Baxter Magolda, 2003; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). One of the most recognized and applied theories of student identity development is that of the seven vectors posited by Chickering and Reisser (1993). In this theoretical model students are expected to engage the educational institution with a limited sense of “intellectual competence, physical and manual competence, and interpersonal competence” (p. 53) that they will develop, and then advance through the other vectors to develop an appropriate means of managing their

emotions, understanding and developing a sense of interdependence, and building mature interpersonal relationships toward their ability to develop a personal sense of their individual identity, integrity, and purpose for their lives. This theoretical model is relevant to student learning and development; however, it is somewhat limited in its implementation, as it has been seen as a linear and progressive process for students. Subsequent research has revealed that the theory is not always applicable to students from diverse populations, such as those from racially or ethnically diverse populations.

The level of motivation that students present has a profound impact on the teaching and learning experience. Existing theoretical models range from those that consider the basic needs of learners, such as those in Covington's (1984) self-worth theory, Weiner's (1984) attribution theory, Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, and Maslow's (1970) needs satisfaction theory to those that reveal how people perceive themselves as learners. Rotter (1954) examined whether students attribute their successes or failures to external or internal factors and noted in his locus of control theory that those perceptions influence motivation. Consistent with the constructivist framing, each of these theories studies the experiences and understanding of educational involvement, as well as interaction with the level of motivation that students present. This aspect of student development is critical as it relates to the academic resilience of any student; thus, there is a discussion of locus of control throughout that literature. However, while student motivation is an aspect of academic resilience and thus serves as a part of the theoretical frame, it would not facilitate the holistic understanding that was the intent of this research.

Research has revealed considerable interaction among the physical, social, and cultural environments and the student's ability and desire to learn. Strange and Banning (2001) discussed the phenomenon of the collegiate environment at length in *Education*



*by Design: Creating Campus Learning Environments that Work*. The text initially explored the role of the physical environment and the various forms that they typically take, and then goes on to discuss the intentional creation of learning environments through the establishment and development of particular aspects of the institution's climate and culture. Several theories speak specifically to the social culture of the learning environment, which is another aspect of academic resilience that is significant in student success. Two such theoretical models are that of McClusky's (1970) power-versus-load theory and Moo's (1986) social climate theory. McClusky examined the environment in which students function, which is not limited to the university environment but will have some influence on the learner's ability to handle the numerous academic and personal responsibilities. All of those aspects of the student's environment are considered a part of the individual's load, or serve as all of those areas where the student has some obligation or responsibility, whether academic, personal, or professional. Those aspects of their lives are contrasted to the level of power that the individual possesses to complete the numerous tasks. The social climate theory addresses the ability of students to generally feel comfortable in the institution's environment. This theory takes into consideration the ability of students to feel welcomed and supported, and it aids in development of various social skills that allow students to interact successfully in the environment. While there is little research relating the physical learning environment to the academic resilience of students, the personal, cultural, and more widely interpreted social environment plays an important role in academic resilience. However, much like theories of motivation, the environment is just another component of development that was explored in this study.

At the core of constructivist theory is the understanding that all knowledge is interpreted and expresses the context of the lived experience of the learner. In light of

that, numerous theoretical frames assess individual ways of knowing and comprehending information. Kolb's (circa 1970) model of experiential learning, Magolda's (1992) theory of meaning making, Perry's (1970) model of ethical and moral development, and Brookfield's (1986) theory of field dependence-independence, in which he contrasts learners as intrinsic or extrinsic learners, provide significant value to the body of knowledge about how students learn. The lived experience of learners is significant in several ways; however, this study was designed specifically to explore the impact of that experience as it related to the desire to learn and the ability to do so in a supportive environment. Thus, these models informed some aspects of this study but alone were insufficient to capture the developmental aspect of academic resilience and the influence of nonacademic educators.

### **Intelligence Theories**

While this study could be framed in several ways, for the purpose of this analysis the researcher considered the level of intelligence that students possess to support or develop their academic resilience. Scholars who study the phenomenon of intelligence have identified several forms of intelligence that function in contrast to previous research, which expressed a limited and monolithic idea of intelligence. Two such theorists include the research of scholars Robert Sternberg and Howard Gardner. Triarchic memory (Sternberg, 1985) and multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) are two such forms of mental ability that scholars have identified as comparably significant in interpreting intelligence. Although other appraisals of intelligence, such as multiple intelligence and the triarchic theory could have framed this study, considering that this study examined the influence of student affairs professionals, EQ (emotional intelligence) was the most appropriate theoretical frame to apply.

Multiple intelligence (MI) was introduced by Howard Gardner (1983) in *Frames of Mind*. Gardner suggested that the cognitive intelligence tests that were being used at the time to measure intellectual ability were too narrowly focused (Gardner & Hatch, 1989; Hunt, 2011) and did not truly accomplish what they set out to do. Both logic and linguistic forms of intelligence were already of great significance to psychologists who sought to understand the cognitive process; Gardner added musical, spatial, physical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal behaviors as forms of intelligence, based on his research. Logical and linguistic intelligence was correlated to the ability to think logically through “numerical patterns” and the “meaning of words [and] languages” (p. 6).

Although Gardner (1983) was successful in expanding the understanding of intelligence, which established a more “egalitarian” (Hunt, 2011) understanding of intelligence, only two of the seven forms of intelligence were relevant to this study. While the interpersonal and intrapersonal forms of intelligence are applicable to the work that student affairs professionals perform and can be correlated to skills possessed by academically resilient students, musical, spatial, and kinesthetic forms of intelligence have no relevance to student affairs practitioners or academically resilient students. Interpersonal intelligence posits that individuals can appropriately “discern and respond” (Gardner & Hatch, 1989) to the desires and impetus of others. That is certainly a characteristic representative of an academically resilient student (Bosworth & Walz, 2005; Palmer & Young, 2009). Likewise, the intrapersonal form of intelligence is related to the academically resilient student’s ability to assess personal academic strengths and weaknesses to identify appropriate support (Morales, 2008). However, these two forms of intelligence are the only two of the seven that would be within the professional realm

of student affairs administrators and analogous to the characteristics of student populations. Thus, MI was not the most applicable theoretical frame for this study.

Another theoretical approach to human intelligence is Sternberg's (1999) triarchic theory. In *Beyond IQ* (Sternberg, 1985) Sternberg introduced the concept of two basic forms of intelligence: explicit and implicit. The explicit form of intelligence is indicative of its most recognized form that is often subject to testing, while implicit intelligence is defined as those characteristics or behaviors that are perceived as intelligent primarily by laypeople. These two forms, as Sternberg described them, serve as an umbrella for the three subcomponents that frame his theory: contextual, experiential, and components of intelligence.

The contextual component of the theory examines the ability to be adaptive to environments and acculturate to those environments (Berg & Sternberg, 1985; Sternberg, 1985). This component of the theory also gives consideration to interaction of culture and the perception of what intelligence is, as that opinion will vary based on social and cultural norms. In one culture the ability to speak articulately and influence others to think and believe similarly might be perceived as a form of intelligence. In other communities the ability to speak and dress in a manner that is reflective of an urban culture would be perceived as significant, as well as the ability to navigate or manipulate the established systems of governance to maintain a sense of control and leadership in a community. While Sternberg appeared to define culture in a more global perspective, this application of his theory was relevant, as his idea of intelligence is highly subjective and can be interpreted quite liberally.

Sternberg (1985) was quite inclusive and his work is statistically supported, which, for many psychologists interested in the study of human intelligence, gives it greater significance than Gardner's (1983) theory. However, Sternberg shares the

strength of the cultural context that Gardner considered in his formation of the MI theory. The consideration of that cultural context that influences understanding of intelligence provides a greater usefulness of the framing. As a result of this component, some scholars have sought to understand the influence of culture on the academic achievement of students and have facilitated the exploration of even the value of learning as a byproduct of intelligence (Okagaki, 2001).

While it is plausible that the triarchic theory of intellectual development is much more developed and empirically supported than that of MI as a theoretical frame, the theory failed to align with this study. Triarchic theory is constructed as a tool to measure human intelligence and is used to make predictions about cognitive and noncognitive abilities, much like the widely recognized yet narrowly defined form of assessment. The development of an instrument that provides a more holistic view of one's level of intelligence is a significant accomplishment; however, it was not the goal of this study to measure or predict the level of intelligence in the population, but rather to understand behaviors that develop as a form of intelligence. Also, much like the theory of MI, aspects of this theory are not relevant to student affairs practitioners and the identified student population. While future research may consider the influence of practitioners on the explicit forms of intelligence, that was beyond the scope of this study. This research sought to identify specific behaviors of administrators that develop intelligence in learners; to apply this theory would have broadened the scope of the study.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is grounded in the theoretical frame of social intelligence, which has been defined as “the ability to understand and manage people . . . and by extension, the ability to understand and manage oneself” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 188). Research by scholars such as Thorndike (1920), Sternberg (1988), and

Ford (1994) further developed the concept of social intelligence to include particular characteristics associated with a socially intelligent person, which is inclusive of their acceptance of others and their ability to acknowledge their own flaws (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). EQ, as a theoretical frame growing out of social intelligence, has been defined as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). It was the goal of this study to identify and examine the means and methods that student affairs practitioners use to aid underprepared students to become academically resilient or identify their own feelings and emotions that interact with their level of motivation, as well as their ability to adapt to the collegiate environment, and to support them in productive management of their emotions. EQ also facilitates exploration of challenging life experiences or events that at-risk students have typically encountered and considers the use of those emotions as it relates to their academic resilience. The selected theoretical frame has three main aspects that provided a sound basis for this study: the “appraisal and expression of emotion,” the “regulation of emotion,” and the “utilization of emotion.”

One of the objectives of this study was to explore the role of student affairs professionals and their influence on academic resilience in underprepared African American students, specifically how practitioners develop a form of human intelligence to facilitate academic resilience. EQ is a philosophy that has developed out of the psychology that explores the interaction between “emotion and thought” (Salovey, Brackett, & Mayer, 2004, p. i) and signifies the “traits and skills related to ‘success’ in life” (Salovey, Brackett, & Mayer, 2004, p. ii). EQ is a subset of the more general theory of social intelligence, which is broadly defined as the ability to relate and associate with others in an adaptive manner (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Goleman (1995) identified “three main models” (p. xiii) of EQ that have been utilized by researchers. Reuven Bar-On (2007), Salovey and Mayer (1990), and Goleman (1995) created the most recognized models of EQ, however they differ slightly in their proposed usefulness. Bar-On (2007) focused on the “effectiveness and well-being” of individuals through measurement of social-emotional intelligence. Goleman (1995) studied the role of EQ in relation to “performance at work and organizational leadership” (p. xiii), while Salovey and Mayer (2004) have been credited with establishing the foundational work on EQ and are frequently cited in reference to education.

### **Chapter Summary**

The use of EQ as the theoretical framework for the study facilitated the connection of social, emotional, and cultural development to student learning that was addressed through this study. Salovey and Mayer (1990) posited that, as one develops a sense of EQ, one also develops a sense of heightened intellectual ability as a direct result of the improved ability to cognitively process personal experiences. This is also a significant skill, which Morales and Trotman (2004) described as “protective factors” (p. 11) that academically resilient students present. While their findings suggest that the environment, family, and the student’s disposition impact the ability to become academically resilient, the development of EQ will directly influence their disposition: how they relate to and function in their environments and how they process issues that may have developed as a result of their family and others in their community.

Many of the challenges that underprepared students have faced as a result of the social, cultural, and emotional “risks” that they experience throughout the educational pipeline, are those same risks that have resulted in limited access and persistence through graduation. Although historically the development of a student’s academic or

cognitive ability has been viewed as a primarily academic obligation, the literature suggests that the needs of a student with a history of low to moderate academic performance can develop characteristics that are salient to an academically resilient student, which will result in improved academic performance. Students are likely to succeed when they develop in all “spheres of mental functioning” (Mayer & Salovey, 1990, p. 30), including their emotional processing, rationalization, and internal impetus.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) defined qualitative research as the study of a phenomenon in its “natural setting” (p. 4) with the purpose of understanding and interpreting it. This paradigm presents a worldview that acknowledges the existence of multiple truths and values, including the knower and what is known about the environment and/or lived experience. The explicit methods of qualitative research are specifically delineated to ensure validity and reliability of the study, and have been implemented throughout the research design. This qualitative study sought to describe and highlight the experiences and practices of student affairs practitioners working with underprepared African American students at four-year institutions.

#### **Statement of the Research Question**

A foundational objective of this study was to understand the developmental relationship between underprepared African American students and student affairs practitioners and to determine how they are facilitated, maintained, and experienced by the individual student. A considerable amount of literature (e.g. Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Cokely, 2002; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Palmer & Young, 2009; Silverman & Casazza, 200; Strayhorn, 2010) has established the significant role of faculty in relation to student development and learning; however, because much previous research on developmental or remedial education has explored only the relationship between faculty and students, there is very little literature that expresses how student affairs administrators provide analogous support. Likewise, there is little literature that discusses the ways in which practitioners and students in general come in contact with each other to establish developmental relationships, as students may not

have the opportunity to interact on a daily basis with administrators as they would with members of the faculty. As a result, this study was designed to understand how developmental relationships are established and sustained, and what influence practitioners had on underprepared African American students' academic performance from the student perspective.

The purpose of this study was to identify cognitive, psychosocial, and cultural development challenges that academically underprepared Black students faced generally, while specifically focusing on the impact of the student affairs professional in the development of academic resilience in previously “at-risk” and underprepared students. It was anticipated that this study would provide direction for the entire academy as they work to support the academic mission of the institution through intellectual development activities, as well as collaborative practices between the academic affairs and student affairs divisions. The results of this study are informative for both faculty and student affairs practitioners, particularly student affairs practitioners who seek to influence student learning.

This investigation provided new insight regarding how student affairs practitioners contributed to the intellectual development of college students. The results of this study will enhance the scholarship that underscores the connection between student development, academic resilience, and student affairs professionals. Even though there is a significant body of research that speaks to the role of practitioners in the general emotional and personal development of students in higher education (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, Forney, & Guide-DeBrito, 1998; Reason & Broido, 2011; Wilson, 2011), there has been little empirical research that correlates development of student affairs practitioners and intentional development of intellectual development.

An additional goal of this study was to illustrate the responsibility that student affairs professionals maintain as it related to student learning and development of programs, skills, and experiences. Currently, in many postsecondary institutions and in most literature on the field (Schuch, Jones, & Harper, 2011; Zhang, 2011), the role of student affairs practitioners has been relegated to those aspects of the environment that are solely social and supplemental to the collegiate experience. This study sought to explore the role of student affairs professionals in promoting intellectual development and their ability to influence the continuum of academic underpreparedness to academic resilience.

### **Theoretical Tradition**

This study was conducted as a naturalistic interpretive analysis from a critical perspective. As the goal of this study was to “interpret and understand” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 158) the role of student affairs professionals in the context of their interaction with underprepared students, the interpretive paradigm is the most appropriate philosophical worldview to employ. Merriam (2009) stated that the interpretive paradigm presumes that “reality is socially constructed” (p. 8) and that there exist “multiple realities, situated in political, social [and] cultural contexts” (p. 11). This epistemological viewpoint was most appropriate as the perception of students in particular varied based on their lived experiences. Student affairs professionals were required to share from their own professional experiences, which varied based on their behaviors and various beliefs, as well as their lived experience and values as practitioners in the field. Through the interpretation of the various experiences of students and the philosophical beliefs and practices of the student affairs professionals, this study produced common emerging themes.

This interpretive analysis was conducted through a critical lens, as critical research attempts to “confront [the] injustice of a particular society or sphere within society” (Tyson, 2006, p. 264). This study presented systemic issues in the P-16 educational pipeline that limit access and influence the completion of postsecondary degrees in a disproportionate manner for African American students. Salient to the basic assumptions of critical research, this study presented the idea of underpreparedness as one that is “socially and historically constructed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 405). Likewise, the data reflected both historically and currently in educational gaps cannot be studied as an isolated occurrence without consideration of the impact on access to higher education, in particular as standards for admission continue to increase as institutions seek to be perceived as more selective or competitive (Harper et al., 2009; St. John & Musoba, 2011). Although it was not explored in great length in this study, the use of language and the rhetoric as it related to affirmative action and developmental education provided significant contextual information for this study, as did the systemic privilege associated with certain populations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008; Tyson, 2006). This study sought to make connections between the oppressive nature experienced by African Americans specifically, but it was also indicative of persons in a lower SES, regardless of race and/or ethnicity. The critical purpose of this research was to add an alternative voice to the examination of access to higher education and to mitigate the “reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008, p. 405) in the P-16 pipeline.

Although the focus of this study was to identify the role of student affairs professionals and the development of academic performance by African American students, the experiences of those students with whom the professionals interact are significant, as their perspectives are necessary to understand their needs. This research

explored the experiential knowledge (Barnes, 1990), of participants, which offered important context for the study. Students were encouraged to use personal narratives to relate experiences that had caused them to be categorized as underprepared, their understanding of what that assignment had meant to them as African American students, and how their experiences had been foundational in their academic resilience, analogous to this study. The ability to understand and analyze the students' perceptions living at the intersection of their race and level of academic preparedness was significant. These data were critical for a thorough understanding of the students' perceptions and experience and how student affairs administrators engage and develop mentoring relationships with students.

Yin (2009) described the case study method of inquiry as one that aspires “to explain some present circumstance [that entails] extensive and ‘in-depth’ description of a social phenomenon” (p. 4). The case study model has three primary functions in qualitative inquiry: exploration, description, and explanation of a particular phenomenon; all were critical aspects of this study. This research explored the students' perceptions of their level of academic preparedness in the context of their current higher education institutions, as well as their academic transitions and the supportive relationships that had facilitated their ability to become academically resilient. Furthermore, the descriptive nature of the case study method was significant as it was anticipated that this study would identify and describe the practices and/or behaviors of administrators, which have had significant influence on academic resilience in underprepared African American students. The results of the study identified what can be developed into best practices in the field despite variation in levels of preparedness of students and despite institutional type, through explanation of the themes that emerged through the investigative process.

## **Site and Sample Selection**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that “determining where and from whom” (p. 233) data are collected is important in establishing a “provisional plan” (p. 235) for qualitative research. The selection of the site and sample of this study was indicative of the perceived knowledge of the students and student affairs practitioners at the selected institutions. The identification of these particular sites and samples facilitated a focused line of inquiry, which provided significant breadth and depth in the analysis of the phenomenon.

### **Site**

To obtain a substantial variation in the student population, a state was selected in which there was a singular state system of higher education that presented a significant level of diversity in institutional types as well. The University of Southern State (USS) System is such a system, as it includes 17 institutions, of which 16 offer bachelor’s degrees. As shown in Table 2, the system is comprised of two Research Extensive and two Research Intensive institutions, 10 comprehensive baccalaureate universities (five of which are Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCU]), one liberal arts institution, and one special focus institution (USS System, n.d.a). The System serves a racially diverse population, with 40,814 Black undergraduate students, which represents slightly over 23% of the student population (USS System, 2011). As late as 2003 the USS System tracked data on the remedial/developmental programs across the System and in a 2005 assessment of remedial education and additional academic support for students in specific English and mathematics courses (USS System, 2005). Of the 16 degree-granting institutions, 11 provided at least one developmental course in mathematics or reading during the 2003-2004 academic year. Three of the 16 institutions were selected to capture the diversity of institutional type and were identified as

Table 2

*University of Southern State System High Education Institution Information*

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Institution Type</b>	<b>Total Enrollment</b>	<b>African American Students</b>	<b>% of Student Population</b>
ABU	Comprehensive	15,108	439	3.0
EDU	Research—Intensive	20,040	3,236	16.0
FDSU	Baccalaureate/HBCU	2,703	2,088	77.0
GSU	Comprehensive/HBCU	4,592	3,590	78.0
SSTU	Comprehensive/HBCU	8,701	8,111	93.0
SSCU	Comprehensive/HBCU	5,906	5,415	91.0
BSU	Research—Extensive	23,320	1,988	8.5
SS- A	Liberal Arts	3,436	122	3.5
SS- C	Research—Extensive	17,864	1,704	9.5
SS- H	Comprehensive	18,890	3,412	18.0
SS- G	Research—Intensive	13,965	3,462	24.5
PRU	Comprehensive	4,933	1,725	35.0
SS- W	Comprehensive	11,428	541	4.5
WSS	Comprehensive	6,993	481	7.0
WSSU	Baccalaureate/HBCU	5,343	4,424	83.0

providing remedial/developmental courses. The broad range of institutional types, the ability to identify a relevant student population, and most important, the availability of data on the System's academic development curriculum served as rationale for the selection of the USS System as appropriate for this study. Reports and data on the System in general and the institutions in particular were readily available.

The SS System report on Remedial/Developmental Activities (2005) is a longitudinal system-wide study that provided additional context for this study. The SS System has documented several successes with developmental education in the state, including a decrease in the number of academic development courses/programs required throughout the system, and a reduction in financial expenditures since the 1991-1992 academic year. At the inception of the program, the SS System offered remedial/developmental activity to "respond to gaps in high school preparation and performance in order to ensure full opportunity for the success of the student" (p. 1). These activities were offered through "summer bridge programs, remedial course sections, skill labs, [and other] university personnel or contracted with a local community college" (SS System, 2005, p. 1). Throughout the system, each institution was given autonomy to establish criteria for student placement; however, the classification of most students was based on standardized test scores and high school grades. Students could request additional academic assistance and support based on their performance early in the academic semester.

The literature on academically underprepared students provides a general characterization of the student population and the courses in which students typically require remediation (Grimes, 1997; Grimes & David, 1999). While some literature generally characterized the population as "students of color," some researchers have specifically identified nondomestic students or ELL students as underprepared because



of the challenge that the language difference presents in the learning environment (Grimes, 1997). In its report the SS System stated that ELL courses were not included in their data; thus, they were not be a consideration for this study, even though those students are typically classified as underprepared (SS System, 2005). English and mathematics courses were the only two courses where remediation had been provided throughout the System (as Southern State Technical University provides remediation in chemistry; p. 2). These data were instrumental in establishing the limitations of this study; only enrollment in remedial/developmental courses were used in selecting the student population. These and other data from the SS System were beneficial in identifying and selecting the particular diverse institutional types that provided the student and administrator populations.

### **Big State University**

Big State University (BSU) is classified as a “doctoral/research extensive land-grant university” and is located only minutes from the downtown area of the capital city (SS System, n.d.b). In 2010 the University enrolled more than 25,000 undergraduate students, described as predominately White (76%) with African American students representing 8% of enrollment. The average GPA of students admitted to the university at the time was 4.24, and the median range of Student Aptitude Test (SAT) scores was 1090-1280 (SS System, n.d.b). As one of the flagship institutions in the state, BSU expresses a commitment to the system’s initiative, SS Tomorrow, which maintains five central tenets: “economic development, educational innovation, energy and the environment, student leadership development, and health and wellness” (SS System, n.d.b.). Although this is a system initiative, it is significant to note that this statement was not as clearly expressed on many of the other institutional websites; student involvement, specifically for African Americans at predominately White institutions,

serves as an indicator of retention and inclusiveness of students who are typically marginalized (Ford et al., 1996; Palmer & Young, 2009). That this institution has clearly stated this as a central focus of the system and the university supports selection of BSU because involvement and/or student leadership is highly associated with African American students' ability to perform academically and was analogous to this study.

According to the 2005 report generated by the SS System (SS System, 2005), BSU is the only Research I flagship university of the two in the state that provides developmental courses. Southern State System stated that it provides a summer bridge program for incoming students to meet some of the academic needs of students; however, that was the expressed extent of the academic development provided by the institution. Although the data present the number of sections of developmental courses in mathematics, BSU shows that no students required such courses in English and, within the small population of students who required these courses, even fewer required what the SS System classified as "duplicated enrollment" (SS System, 2005, p. #) (students who are in "duplicated enrollment" require more than one developmental course). That group at this institution was less than 5% of total enrollment. For the purpose of this study, students who had taken at least one course in either mathematics or English met the criteria for participation.

### **Prestige Regional University**

Founded as an institution to educate Native Americans, the Prestige Regional University (PRU) is a regional comprehensive university; it enrolled 6,166 undergraduate students in 2010 (SS System, n.d.b). Although the institution maintains a significant Native American population (16% of its student body), it also has a significant percentage of African American students, whose representation is almost equivalent to White undergraduate students (32% and 39%, respectively). According to

the institution's 2010 data, the GPA for the incoming class is 3.13 and the median range of SAT scores is 830-990. PRU reports a greater percentage of nontraditional students (31%); it is located in a town of 120,000 residents (SS System, n.d.b), unlike BSU, which is located in an urban setting. This institution presented the most racially and ethnically diverse population of those selected for this study. It claimed "affordability and highly personalized student-centered education" (SS System, n.d.b.) as a salient characteristic of the institution, which presumably would indicate greater student success and thus would provide significant data related to personal and academic development of students.

Upon initial consideration of regional institutions, it was anticipated that the SS-G would provide a sufficient population for the study; however, upon further review, it was determined that PRU would provide a better sample. Table 3 shows that, among the variables expressed in the literature on underprepared students, students of nontraditional age were significantly represented in the population (Grimes, 1997). The most recent data presented by PRU shows that the student population, on average, was two years older than the rest of the institutions in this group. Likewise, socioeconomic status and prior academic performance were indicative of the level of student preparedness in higher education, and PRU had the lowest GPA and SAT scores in its incoming freshman class (3.13 and 830-990, respectively), as well as the highest percentage of students who were Pell Grant recipients (54%; SS System, n.d.b). This institution has been recognized as one of the most diverse regional institutions in the nation (U.S. News and World Report, 2011) and has the largest percentage of Black students in the state, with the exception of the five HBCUs. A thorough review of each institution's demographics revealed that PRU was the most beneficial source of data for this study.

Table 3

*Regional Data for Institutions in the University of Southern State System*

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>ABU</b>	<b>EDU</b>	<b>USSA</b>	<b>USSG</b>	<b>USSC</b>	<b>USSP</b>	<b>USSW</b>	<b>WSU</b>
Average age	21	22	22	23	22	25	22	23
Average GPA (1st-year undergraduate)	3.92	3.56	3.91	3.58	3.54	3.13	3.8	3.51
Pell Grant recipients	14%	25%	20%	0	0	54%	20%	28%
Median SAT score range	1040- 1220	950- 1120	1060- 1270	930- 1130	960- 1180	830- 990	1090- 1240	950- 1130
Duplicate/ unduplicated	304/ 273	1001/ 886	0/ 0	362/ 336	0/ 0	289/ 221	15/ 15	0 0
Percentage of Black students	3%	15%	3%	23%	16%	32%	4%	7%

*Note:* GPA = grade point average, SAT = Student Aptitude Test. Source: *Our 17 Institutions*, by University of North Carolina System, n.d.a, retrieved from [http://www.northcarolina.edu/campus\\_profiles/index.php](http://www.northcarolina.edu/campus_profiles/index.php)

**Greater State University**

Greater State University (GSU) is the second-oldest public institution in the state. It was established in 1867 to educate African Americans (UNC System, n.d.b.). As indicated in Table 4, the GPA of students in the 2010 freshman class was reported to be 2.88, and the median range in SAT scores was 760-920. In addition to being the only HBCU among the institutions considered for this study, the institutional profile indicated that the student population contained 78% need-based scholarship or grant recipients, which presented the lower SES of the general student population, also significantly it

represented an attributed characteristic of the underprepared student (UNC System, n.d.b).

Table 4

*Data on the Southern State Systems' [pseudonym] Historically Black Colleges and Universities*

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>ECSU</b>	<b>FSU</b>	<b>NC A&amp;T SU</b>	<b>NCCU</b>	<b>WSSU</b>
Average age	24	27	22	23	19
Average GPA	2.74	2.88	3.04	2.95	3.01
Needs-based grant	93%	78%	63%	71%	70%
Median SAT score range	740-940	760-920	800-980	770-930	820-940
Developmental sections offered	21	3	20 <sup>a</sup>	63	0

*Note.* ECSU = GPA = grade point average for first-year undergraduates, SAT = Student Achievement Test. Source: *Our 17 Institutions*

<sup>a</sup>Includes chemistry course sections.

GSU also reported the largest population of nontraditional students (45% of the student body, an average age of 27 years), which was also indicative of the population. FSU was the smallest of the institutions identified for this study, with approximately 5,000 undergraduate students, of whom 71% are African American. GSU was also selected for this study because of its location—a city that is primarily known for its military base, which provided relevant data related to personal and academic development, as it related

to both currently and formerly enlisted personnel who present a need for academic development and have displayed academic resilience.

Much like BSU, the most recent available data on developmental courses offered at GSU were in mathematics only. When reviewing the data of the five HBCUs that are a part of the SS System, it was significant to note that each of these institutions reported a higher number of developmental course offerings and student participants, with North Carolina Central State providing the most in the entire system. North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T SU) also reported a significant population of developmental students and was the only institution in the system that provided developmental instruction in courses other than in English or mathematics (UNC System, 2005). The fourth public HBCU in the state, Winston-Salem State University (WSSU), did not indicate in the 2005 report that they provided any developmental courses at the time of the assessment. Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) is the smallest HBCU in the state according to most recent data, and they have the lowest GPA (2.7) and the highest level of need-based grants or scholarships (93%). However, FSU presents several components that were not present at any of the other institutions. Although one of the institutions with higher numbers of developmental courses and students might seem more appropriate for a study of this nature, it was determined that FSU would provide better data based on the general SES and significant number of nontraditional students in this population. None of the other institutions considered for the study reported a military population comparable to that of FSU, which provided significant data for this study and future work on academic preparedness and special subgroups in this population.

## **Sample**

Merriam (2009) described sampling as a set of assumptions that “the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight”(p. 77) into. Although several methods of sampling exist, purposeful sampling was chosen as the most appropriate for this study. Purposeful sampling is generally described as “criterion-based selection” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77), as the sample population meets the particular standards of the group to be studied. Patton (2002) presented 15 variation strategies of purposeful sampling, discussing forms ranging from extreme or deviant case sampling, which he described as “information- rich” (p. 231) as focused on a specific sample that had similar outcomes (positive or negative), to convenience sampling, in which investigators gather data from the broadest range of the identified population simply because the participants are the easiest in the population from which to collect data. Because two distinct populations were examined in this study, two forms of purposeful sampling were utilized.

Criterion sampling was used to capture the appropriate data from African American students. Patton (2009) defined criterion sampling as the “predetermined criterion characteristics [that] are routinely identified for in-depth, qualitative analysis” (p. 238). The previously determined standard in this study assisted with the identification of those African American students from the larger racial group who had an academic background that would classify them as underprepared. The identification and selection of underprepared African American students from each institution was required in order to secure data reflecting the perceptions of the student population, as well as the most appropriate student affairs participants. To identify student participants, notices requesting involvement in the study were sent to students through campus organizations such as Black Greek letter organizations, the Black Student Union (BSU), and other

predominately African American organizations that had a significant presence on the target campuses. Participation was also solicited through use of social networking media. Students who replied to the general request for participation were provided the research instrument (Appendix B) to ensure that they met the established criteria.

The research instrument asked students to identify the developmental courses that they had taken and to report their current GPA to determine that they had earned a GPA of 3.0 or better, which was the standard of academic resilience for this study. To increase the likelihood that the participants had an increased chance of exposure and interaction with student affairs professionals at their respective institutions, those who were involved in campus organizations were given greater consideration. Students were scheduled to participate in a “structured interview,” which Lincoln and Guba (1985) described as a “focused interview” (p. 168) in which “the interviewer knows what he or she does not know and can therefore frame appropriate questions to find it out” (p. 169). Students were asked about their intellectual and academic development, as well as their interaction with student affairs professionals. Specifically, they were questioned about what they perceived to be the most supportive and affirming experiences that they had encountered with practitioners related to their academic improvement. That discourse was used to identify the most appropriate student affairs professionals to serve as participants in the study (Appendix C).

The primary sampling strategy of this study was snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009). While students were able to identify student affairs professions who influenced them directly, to understand the culture and philosophy of the division and the institution, it was necessary to use snowball sampling to capture richer data on the behavior, beliefs, policies, and practices of professionals.



The practitioners who participated in the initial interviews were asked to provide recommendations for prospective participants from the student affairs division who engaged in developmental activities that had facilitated academic resilience in students. The goal was to identify how those developmental activities were expressed and to determine whether they were typical of the division or a particular professional. These interviews were also used to identify the theoretical philosophy of the individual professional and to explore how the culture of academic development was maintained or implemented. The interviews were used to explore the collaborative relationship that these student affairs professionals developed with academic colleagues and whether they associated with their ability to develop student learning and academic resilience. Interviews with student affairs professionals were “unstructured interviews” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 268) designed to acquire data in an exploratory manner for greater depth in the analysis (Appendix D).

### **Researcher’s Role Management**

My role in the interview process was that of the observer as participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009) and my method of collection was a blend of data collection techniques. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the observer-as-participant as one who maintains two roles: “observer and . . . legitimate . . . committed member of the group” (p. 274). As an undergraduate student, I was classified as an underprepared student, who by all standards had developed to become academically resilient. I have spent my entire professional career working as a practitioner in the field of student affairs; as such, I maintain a genuine and unswerving affiliation with both groups. While I maintain membership in both groups, that information was not readily available to students. However, my experience in the field was disclosed to professionals to establish a professional rapport as a scholar and colleague. I anticipated that, as I did so, the

professional participants would view me as an insider and thus provide greater depth when sharing their experiences in the interviews. Each of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to maintain the most accurate data from all interviews, and field notes were used to preserve an additional account of observations that may not have been reflected otherwise. Data collected from interviews were transcribed, sorted, chunked, and coded for analysis and identification of salient themes.

### **Entry**

Patton (2002) stated that entry into fieldwork is marked by two primary responsibilities to: (a) “negotiate with gate keepers,” and (b) acquire “actual physical entry” (p. 310) to the identified site and sample population. To achieve both goals, I scheduled initial meetings with the chief student affairs officers at each of the identified institutions. The leaders were provided an explanation of the purpose of the study and methods, as well as a statement of the research ethics adhered to in the study. Additional information about my professional background in the field was disclosed with the intent to “establish trust and rapport” (Patton, 2002, p. 310) and establish myself as the “observer as participant [with an] insider’s identity” (Merriam, 2009, p. 124). Upon approval from the institution and the chief Student Affairs Officer at the institution, I forwarded an explanation of the stated purpose and methods to all directors in the division so they could inform their staff members and assure the validity of this study to students who may have had general questions about me as the researcher and/or the study in general.

To establish a similar level of trust and rapport with students, I identified several student organizations, including the BSU, the PanHellenic Council, and other large undergraduate student organizations, and met with the executive boards of those groups. While these students may not have desired to know the extent of the methods that were

utilized, it was imperative that they know and understand the purpose of the study. Ethical information such as confidentiality and informed consent were shared, and the student leadership was informed that participants would be given a gift card to a local establishment in appreciation of participation in the study. The local establishment was selected by organizational leaders at each institution, and the monetary value did not exceed \$20 per participant.

### **Ethics**

Merriam (2009) stated that the “validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the investigator” (p. 228). To assure the highest level of trustworthiness, I adhered to Patton’s (2002) Ethical Issues Checklist. Upon entry to the respective sites, I explained the research purpose and identified methods. I also expressed the reciprocal value to those who participated, which included a gift card not to exceed \$20, and their ability to influence and inform the field of higher education. Although the perceived level of risk to all participants was minimal, confidentiality was discussed so that participants were aware of the level of anonymity provided to informants. A significant caveat was shared with students to inform them that, if they shared information that presented them as a danger to themselves or to others, I was ethically obligated to report my concerns to appropriate university personnel.

All data were maintained in duplicate form to mitigate possible loss due to technical problems, and all copies were secured in password-protected files. Field notes were secured and maintained in a locked file cabinet that was kept in my home. Participants were informed that all collected data became the property of the researcher and that access to those data would be shared only with those directly working with the study, such as the transcriptionist and the research committee. Any issues associated with the study that may have caused personal stress or concern were discussed only with

the research committee. Issues of research ethics were discussed with the research committee and/or staff in Texas A&M Office of Research Compliance, if necessary. All data collection was conducted in a manner that was consistent with federal, state, and institution law and policy, as well as the guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Several forms of data collection were applied to secure the most thorough and applicable data for analysis. Patton (2002) presented four primary ways in which interviews should be conducted to capture data in the most significant ways. He discussed at length various forms of observation that can be used in the data collection process. Although observation can be conducted in several ways, the most relevant form of observation for this study was use of field notes taken throughout data collection.

### **Interviews**

An “informal conversational interview” (Patton, 2002, p. 342) was conducted with all participants, combined with what Patton called the “interview guide approach” (p. 343) or the semi structured interview process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). Semi structured interviews maintain an established set of questions as the researcher possesses some knowledge of the subject being studied and has a clear understanding of the data that is sought in the inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). That method of inquiry was used in the interviews with student affairs practitioners, as I maintained my content and professional knowledge of the field. The interviews were unstructured in nature, as the predetermined questions had been created based on the review of literature on underprepared and academically resilient students. However, to acquire richer data and explore and understand the students’ perceptions and experiences, additional probing questions were posed. It was anticipated that the

combination of both approaches to the interview process would “elucidate and illuminate” (Patton, 2002, p. 343) and clearly describe the practices of student affairs professionals and the perceived experiences of the students.

### **Observations**

Four theoretical forms of observation are the complete or full participant, participant as observer, nonparticipant or observer-as-participant, and complete observer (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The observer-as-participant model was deemed most appropriate for this study. Merriam (2009) described this form of observation as one in which the role of the researcher is “known to the group” (p. 124) and thus facilitates access to a broad range of data through interaction with participants. Although I am a career student affairs professional, that goal was secondary in this study. However, I shared my professional experience in the field to establish an “insider’s identity” (Merriam, 2009, p. 125).

All observations were conducted in the professional’s natural environment and the field notes from those observations were used as contextual information about both the administrators and the institution. Merriam (2009) stated that field notes should be “highly descriptive [and describe the] participants, the setting, the activities and behaviors of the participants” (p. 130). The field notes reflected personal feelings and perceptions of the observations. Notes about my observations were not taken during the interviews; however, information regarding the overall environment and interactions of people within the setting were captured in personal recordings immediately following meetings to ensure that information corresponding with the interviews was obtained.

### **Managing and Recording Data**

All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Field notes were used to record observed information that may not have

been evident in the recorded transcriptions of interviews. All field notes were dated, provided an outline of the setting, and described the environment of the interview (Patton, 2002). The reactions of participants and particular quotes were maintained in field notes, as were my reflections of the environment and interviews. Data were stored electronically in password-protected files, and hard copies of transcripts and field notes were maintained in secured file cabinets.

### **Assuring Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers present the importance of establishing trustworthiness as a salient component of qualitative research and state that it is established through the validity of internal and external factors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The aspects of internal validity include the ability of the researcher to provide truth value, credibility, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. External validity is assured through the reliability of the study, or what Lincoln and Guba (1985) described as the “transferability” or “generalizability” of the research. Other methods of establishing external validity include use of thick descriptions in collected data and use of an audit trail to provide additional structure to frame the study.

*Applicability* was established through the use of “sufficient descriptive data” (Patton, 2002, p. #) of the research methods. The description for this study provided its general guideline and established the parameters of this methodology. Greater detail was provided in the final document to ensure that the study can be replicated and the findings were consistent with previous research.

*Credibility* is a significant aspect of developing trustworthiness in qualitative research. The primary way in which credibility is established is through triangulating data. Denzin (1998) outlined several types of triangulation: multiple methods of data collection, use of multiple sources and/or investigators, and application of multiple

theories. For this study interviews served as the only method of data collection; however, multiple sources included student and administrative levels within and across various institutional types. Chosen methods of analysis that utilized existing theory aided in establishing credibility.

*Neutrality* is necessary to ensure that the collected data present truth as it has been expressed by participants and is free of researcher personal biases and views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because I am a practitioner in the field being studied and was previously identified as an underprepared and academically resilient student, I was likely to present some bias. Therefore, as a researcher in search of truth, I established neutrality by presenting a definition of my epistemological, axiological, and ontological position. As the instrument used to collect data, I worked consistently to value the voice and position of the participant, even if they were contrary to my own. Objectivity is necessary in qualitative research and is an appropriate component of the research methodology. Peer debriefing and member checking were also used to ensure neutrality. Members of my research committee and other scholars within my academic department served as the group of colleagues identified to examine my analysis. Merriam (2009) stated that member checking occurs when researchers take gathered “data and tentative interpretations” (p. 229) back to participants to ensure that the data are acceptable. Thus, transcripts, including information from field notes, were shared with participants to ensure neutrality.

*Consistency* was achieved through the use of thick description in the methodology to describe the manner in which the study could be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). In addition to the use of thick description, I used an audit trail to provide a “detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points”

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p. 229) in the data collection process. Through the use of each of the stated methods, it was anticipated that trustworthiness would be strongly established.

### **Data Analysis Strategies**

To understand this phenomenon thoroughly in diverse environmental contexts, this study was a multiple-case study with a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2009). Although the subjects of this study were consistent, literature on institutional stratification suggests that students at various institutional types will vary in academic ability. In light of that, an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon required exploration of the student experience and the practitioner responses at the various institutional types. To provide a thorough analysis and explanation of best practices as they related to the students across various institutional types, it was significant that the differences and similarities of those practices were explored and presented as part of the findings. Merriam (2009) called this form of inquiry “multisite case studies” (p. 49) and confirmed that this method of inquiry is “categorically bound” yet allows for the “enhancing of external validity” through the expansion of the sample population and the analysis within and across the institutional models. An explanation of the institutions identified for this study and their significance was provided in the description of the research design.

This method of analysis has many names, such as cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994); however, this approach allows the research to have “increased generalizability” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172) and will present the negative and positives across cases, as well as present similarities and differences, which can be significant in understanding this phenomenon. Through this cross-case analysis, I described and explained the role of student affairs professionals at each of the institutions, as well as across them. Through the narratives, a greater understanding of the practices, professional philosophies, and division or institutional culture was



acquired, and the exploration of significant elements of those stories presented the significant variables to make connections across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All data were entered into a meta-matrix so that both case oriented and variable-oriented data could be identified, integrated, and synthesized as appropriate throughout analysis.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) described three approaches to content analysis. The initial form of analysis is conventional content analysis, which is typically used “when existing theory or research literature is limited” and the researcher intends to “allow new insights to emerge” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). Miles and Huberman (1994) described the selected process of data analysis as “pattern coding” (p. 69), which they described as the identification of “emergent theme[s]” by which the pattern and explanation of data are interpreted in a way that provides “more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (p. 69). While it might have been expected that certain words would be used frequently by students and practitioners to express their perceptions and report their behaviors, this method facilitated the ability to capture rich and thick descriptions that were expressed by the students despite their lack of familiarity with the rhetoric associated with the study. Student affairs practitioners were more likely to understand and apply theoretical terms that allowed identification of patterns of behavior.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter established this study as a naturalistic inquiry into the phenomena that were occurring in higher education institutions. It was conducted through a critical lens to explore issues of power throughout the educational pipeline. Observations and unstructured interviews were conducted and field notes were taken. Pattern coding was used to identify emerging themes and assist in final analysis of information. Validity and

reliability were established through triangulation of data and multiple sources were used to establish trustworthiness.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

This study was developed to identify understand the specific role of student affairs administrators as it related to the development of academic resilience skills in academically underprepared African American students at four-year postsecondary institutions. Using emotional intelligence as the grounding theoretical framework, four research questions guided this study seeking to explore the development of noncognitive development as it related to students' ability to support persistence and academic success of students who the institutions themselves classified as underprepared.

1. How does the student affairs professional attend to the emotional intelligence (EQ) of underprepared African American students in order to support faculty efforts to develop intellectual capacity?

2. What do student affairs professionals do to develop academic resilience in students?

3. Can student affairs practitioners mitigate the graduation gap and support educational attainment by providing ways to support and develop African American students who may require additional assistance in their intellectual development?

4. What social, cultural, emotional, and programmatic resources do student affairs practitioners offer to aid in the persistence of underprepared African American students?

#### **Summary of Methods**

As outlined in Chapter III, a state with a single higher education system was selected as the focus of this study. Although a number of states met this initial criterion, the state system selected also represented various types of four-year institutions, including research extensive and intensive, and regional comprehensives institutions,

which were inclusive of five Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Initial contact was made with the system office to determine if any specific notice or action was required within their office to proceed with this study. Upon discussion with several employees within the system office, it was determined that any documentation and ultimate participation for conducting any study including system students and/or administrators should be facilitated through the respective institution and be compliant with each institution's policy and procedures.

An email was then sent, describing the study, to senior student affairs administrators on each campus (Appendix D) on each of the three (3) identified campuses where student demographics suggested that they provided developmental courses and maintained the highest level of Pell Grant eligible-students enrolled by institutional type. Additionally, two of those institutions, the regional comprehensive institution and HBCU, required the completion and submission of an application to the Institutional Review Board on their respective campuses. The HBCU identified for the study required the completion of their IRB training as well (Appendix E). In addition to providing some general information to these chief officers in the field, a follow-up meeting was requested with each in order to introduce myself and answer any questions related to the study. All three meetings were schedule between September and November of 2012.

While three meetings were originally scheduled with senior student affairs administrators at the identified institutions, only two of those meetings actually occurred. There were several scheduling conflicts with the senior student affairs officer at the HBCU, and after several attempts to reschedule those meetings I was informed that the person serving in the role at the HBCU had no future availability to meet in reference to this study. Despite receiving IRB approval from the institution, the inability of the chief

officer to meet in order to get permission to meet with their staff members and students, resulted in that institution being removed from the study. This was an unfortunate occurrence, as much of the research in higher education that seeks to understand certain phenomena in the academy often neglects to include HBCUs, and much of the research on Black students tend to segment the population by predominately White institutional attendees or HBCU attendees. Little research exists that looks at Black student populations across institutional types, which would allow greater understanding of the diversity of that population. Initially, it was a goal of this study to be the paradox to that practice; however extenuating circumstances prevented that. While three postsecondary institutions were invited to participate, the findings of this study represent the remaining two institutions – both Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), one research extensive and one regional comprehensive—as the chief student affairs officers there very interested in and supportive of the study.

Upon sharing the student and professional criteria for participation, both administrators provided suggestions of who my initial contact should be in order to assist in contacting students at their respective institutions. Ironically, because my study focused specifically on African American students, both of those chief student affairs administrators referred me to the directors of their Office of Multicultural Student Services. I scheduled meetings with both of those individuals in order to share the information about the study, and also identify ways to best recruit participants for the study.

At the regional institution, the director, who was also working on his doctoral degree at the time, collected all of the information, as well as the advertisements in hard and soft copy, to solicit student participants. He maintained ongoing contact to inform me how many students had inquired about participating, and followed up with me

directly with regard to any questions that students may have had about participating. In late November 2013, with the director's assistance, I coordinated an interest meeting with students who had inquired about participating in the study. At that time, seven (7) students attended the meeting in order to get additional information about participating in the study. Of the seven students who attended the interest meeting, six (6) students indicated their interest in participating, by requesting and completing the Student Participant Data Form (Appendix F). Potential student participants were informed at that meeting that if they met the criteria for the study, they would be contacted the next day in order to schedule interviews the following week. Upon review of the data forms, which was the tool used to determine if the students met the criteria of the study, five students were contacted to schedule interviews. All of those students agreed to participate, and interviews were scheduled for early December 2013. The one student who was not invited to participate had not earned the required grade point average as established in the criteria.

The director at the Research I institution requested only a soft copy of the advertisement used for recruitment, which he planned to use to invite students who fit the criteria of the study. While this institution was the only one that did not require that I complete their Institutional Review Board documentation, they were much more vigilant about the assessment and inquiry of their student population. In December of 2013 following the meeting with the director of Multicultural Student Services at the institution, I was contacted via email from personnel in the University Analysis and Planning office. After several emails exchanged between that contact, myself, and my dissertation co-chair, we agreed that the department would forward the notice to students who fit the criteria as identified through the university database. That email was sent to students in early January 2014. Although the query, completed by personnel from the

office of Analysis and Planning suggested that fifty-eight (58) students at the institution fit that criteria of the study, only a total of five (5) students came out, over two days to get additional information about participating in the study. Of those five (5) students, three best fit the criteria for the study. (None of the students were Pell Grant eligible which was a part of the criteria; however eliminating student participants on that basis would have prevented the inclusion of this institution in the study.) The two (2) students who were not invited to participate in this study were excluded for various reasons. One was not invited because she did not meet the classification criteria. Although she had taken the identified developmental courses at the institution, which was a part of the criteria and she earned a satisfactory grade point average, she reported being classified as a freshman at the time. The second student was not invited to participate because of her role as a student athlete, and in previous discussion with my peer debriefers, student athletes were a segment of the student body that were likely to receive additional academic support which was provided within the athletic department and could possibly skew the findings. She also reported having limited interaction with any student affairs departments.

Students on both campuses were contacted by phone to schedule their individual interviews at a location on campus and time of their choice. Although students were given a copy of the consent form at the information meetings, prior to beginning each interview, students were given the opportunity to review, ask questions about and finally sign the consent forms (Appendix G). Additionally, in order to clearly identify what departments students interacted with, and to support their understanding of what student affairs departments typically include, they were given the list of departments as listed in the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (Appendix H), and asked to circle those that they engaged. Finally, students were asked to sign the *Student*

*Participation Compensation Confirmation* (Appendix I) to confirm their receipt of the gift card that they were provided for their participation in the study.

Following student interviews, administrator interviews were conducted on each of the respective campuses. Students at the regional institution were better able to identify student affairs administrators who they perceived to have some influence on their academic success. From their interviews, a list of potential administrative participants began to develop. The three interviews with the student participants at the Research I institution did not yield a significant list of potential practitioner participants as one student had very little interaction with student affairs practitioners and the other two identified administrators in the departments that they were directly affiliated with. In order to increase the number of professional participants at that institution, upon consultation with my dissertation co-chair, it was determined that the invitation should be sent to other administrators at the Research I institution, in roles similar to those identified by students at the regional institution, as well as those that were suggested by students.

A total of sixteen (16) administrators were invited to participate in the study; eight (8) from the Research I institution, and the additional eight (8) from the regional institution. All were initially contacted by phone, and upon their agreement to participate in the study they were then scheduled for an interview. An email (Appendix J) was sent following that discussion which included the agreed date and time of the scheduled interview as well as a copy of the *Practitioner Consent Form* (Appendix K) for their review. Prior to meeting with the participants, one professional called from the regional institution to cancel their interview as a result of other personal obligations, and another never responded to requests to meet, which resulted in a total of six (6) individual interviews from the regional university. Of the eight (8) administrators invited to



participate from the Research I institution, one failed to respond to requests sent to participate via phone and email, which resulted in seven (7) participants from that institution, for a total of thirteen (13) practitioners serving as a part of this study.

Upon completion of all interviews, the audio recordings were then transcribed, reviewed, and organized to construct topics, coded and analyzed for emerging themes. Pattern coding was used, which Miles and Huberman (1994) describe as the process of identifying “emergent theme(s) [in order to organize data in a] more meaningful and parsimonious” (p. 69) units of analysis. This process was completed for each case, and then across cases for further analysis. In case one, three themes emerged: (a) Institutional Connections, (b) The Service Model versus the Developmental Model, and (c) Meaningful Student Engagement. From case two an additional four themes developed: (a) The Student Affairs Curriculum, (b) Student – Student Development Connections, (c) Institutional Inclusive Learning Environments, and (d) Setting Expectations for Students. A final analysis conducted across cases resulted in the emergence of three additional themes: (a) Identifying Challenges Prior to them Manifesting, (b) Involvement, Engagement, and Student Learning, and finally, (c) Community, Campus Culture, and Collaboration. These emergent themes provided some understanding of how student participants experienced and engaged skills and behaviors which presented academic resilience characteristics, as well as how practitioners understood and approached that work. Additionally, these themes explored the impact of the institutional environment as it related to the learning environment for the identified student population.

### **Case One: Prestige Regional University**

#### **Institution and University Setting**

The campus, situated in the middle of a small town, was viewed much like an oasis in the desert. One of the first things that I was told about the county, where the

institution is situated, was that it is one of the poorest in the state. Prestige Regional University (PRU) is in a small town, surrounded by small towns, and driving towards the campus, there remained small abandoned shacks and old pickup trucks along the side of the road. The disparity of wealth in the area was also evidenced by the mile or so of huge, beautiful red brick homes, only to come into town where there existed a Walmart, and then a series of small locally owned shops, many of which looked as though they had been abandoned for some time. Many of the buildings, newer in appearance, bore the name of the Native American tribe that has resided in that part of the state since the early 1700s, and symbols of their presence were represented throughout the community.

Immediately upon coming through what I later learned was “the town,” one drives into the campus community. There was little exceptional about the physical appearance of the campus. It was like many others, smaller in relative scale to some, but it felt cozy and because of its size it was easy to navigate. The one thing that was evident however, was the diversity of the student population as they walked collectively across campus between classes. Although the university went to great lengths to publicize the diversity of their student body, it was still contrary to the norm to see such great diversity among the groups of students that I passed throughout that initial day on campus. Despite that diversity, the campus was small enough that I was easily identified by Black students as someone who was not a part of the university community. As I walked across campus that first day, and each time after, I would be stopped by an African American student to chat about one issue or another, or I would receive stares from them indicating that they knew I was someone that had never seen before.

The community was described by many of the students and administrators as one being somewhat insular in nature by colleagues. After 5pm, the faculty lot transitioned into additional student parking as there appeared to be almost a mass exodus from town,

and it was said that most of the employees did not live in the small town. Colleagues professedly, were long time employees of the institution and characterized some newer employees as “outsiders,” who could not understand the culture of the institution which was situated in the context of the noticeable poverty and Native American culture of the larger town. It appeared that much like those living in the immediate area, that there was much need, and the student population, many of which were from other parts of the state, seemingly took on a similar identity; low income, low achieving, and of color.

### **The Students**

A total of seven students responded to the flier soliciting participants for the study, of which, five were selected to participate. Of the remaining two students, one did not meet the requested grade point average of 3.0 or better, to evidence a strong sense of academic resilience, and the other had not completed enough credit hours to be classified as a sophomore as established in the criteria for this research. Of the five students who participated, there were three young women and two young men. They represented each of the classifications appropriate for this study, with one sophomore, one junior and three seniors, one of whom was graduating at the end of the fall semester. All of them were in-state students and each of them, with the exception of one, were traditionally-aged students. The combined cumulative grade point average grade point of the student participants was 3.4, and their majors included criminal justice, theater, education, and social work.

As established in the criteria for this study, all of the student participants completed at least one developmental course at the beginning of their matriculation. Of the five participants, four of them were required to enroll in at least one of the developmental courses offered at the university. The fifth student, stated that he opted to enroll in the developmental course in order to ensure his preparedness for college, as he

stated that he was “not confident” in his writing, and had come from “a low performing high school.” Additionally, four of the five student participants stated that although they maintained strong grade point averages in high school, three of those students stated they were required to take developmental courses and attributed that requirement to their Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores.

Students who are classified as “at-risk” are those who are most likely to experience academic difficulty and are more likely to be underprepared for higher education. Schargel, Thacker, and Bell (2007) described at-risk students as those who are generally of “low socioeconomic status [having experienced] academic problems [and have] a sense of alienation and disengagement from school, and poor peer acceptance” (p. 15). While both of the male participants reported that they did indeed come from lower socioeconomic families, the females students respondents described their families as middle class, although all reported that they were Pell Grant eligible. All but one of the students stated that they were fully engaged in their high schools, some taking on leadership positions and generally had positive high school experiences. Considering the demographics of the student participants, they were appropriately characterized as underprepared as expressed in the literature, however, only two of them meet some threshold of being characterized as at-risk.

**Student: Al.** Al was the student participant most representative of the literature on both students described as at-risk and underprepared. A non-traditional student with a low grade point average coming out of high school, Al, was in his twenties when he initially enrolled at PRU. He confessed that he did so because of the young woman who he was dating at the time. Although he had considered college, he believed his high school GPA to be prohibitive, however at the encouragement of a friend he signed up for the National Guard in order to receive tuition remission, and he confessed that the young

lady whom he was dating registered him at the institution where she was enrolled at the time, and that was how he initially returned to school. When asked about his placement in developmental courses he described the prescription of the courses as discriminatory, but had seemingly resolved any issues associated with the placement stating:

To this day, I'm going to be honest. I don't know how I was placed in English 104... I remember he [the academic advisor] was like "Yeah. You have to take 1040 [104]." I was like "Why do I have to take English 104?"... The English was easy. English has always been pretty easy to me, but he was like "No, you have to take 1040 [104]. Apparently, since you've been out of school for so long and you're older, it just would be better if you took 1040 [104]." I was like "That sounds like discrimination. I don't like how that sounds." I was like – whatever, I didn't care. I'll pass it and keep moving... I knew I suck I math, but the English part – it's just when he said that about my age and stuff, I'm like "Really? Seriously, dude?" It just hit me the wrong way, but I don't hold anger. I get over it.

Al was the only one of the student respondents who felt so strongly about his assignment in the developmental courses, and he was also the only participant required to take two of the three courses required. Additionally, because of how he was admitted to the university, as a non-traditional student, he was not required to take the SAT. He was extremely pleased to report however, that he had successfully completed the English course and was enrolled in the math course at the time of the interview and that he had earned an "A" at that point. He was very pleased with his academic achievements over the past three and a half years, and saw himself as a young man whom had overcome a great deal in order to achieve success at that level.

As a child, Al was raised in an abusive home, where he served as the primary bread winner for his family until his mother kicked him out when she began dating another man. After graduating high school, Al moved around, staying with friends for some time while attempting to get on his feet. For a period, he moved out of state and lived in his car while working menial jobs in order to survive. After relocating, returning

to the area and again working in low wage positions, he was presented with the opportunity to enlist and shortly after attend school. When asked what or who he attributed his academic resilience to, he responded:

To be honest with you, I did it myself. I had goals set. I wrote my goals down. I know what I needed. No one really drove me. I drove myself... I know this sounds crazy, but no. I think it's because I'm older and knew what I wanted. That's all it is. I knew what I wanted so it didn't really take much for me...

Self described as a self-motivated student, Al served as a perfect example of how adult learners engage and experience the learning environment. While he described himself as someone who “drove himself,” he exhibited a form of extrinsic motivation as it related to his college experience. As Al discussed his accomplishments as a student who had overcome both his familial and academic challenges, he saw himself as one that was driven to achieve because of his lived experiences. As a young person who was homeless for some period of time, and regrettably forced to work positions where he perceived the experience of racial bias, he displayed a classic case of Vrooms (1995) expectancy theory. As such, Al placed great significance in the attainment of his college degree (valance), and that the completion of his degree would afford him particular outcomes (instrumentality), and ultimately result in an improved quality of life in contrast to his previous living situation (expectancy). While this idea is one that is maintained by college students in general, Al specifically sited his challenging life experiences and his maturity as a nontraditional student as the source of his motivation.

He was representative of a young man who grew up at-risk, and began matriculation as an underprepared student, yet despite the odds, had become academically resilient. At the time of the interview he stated that he had been considering going on for a master's degree and had several questions about pursuing a doctorate. He also spoke about some of his career aspirations, as he was a senior.

Although he was not able to state definitively what he hoped to do professionally, he shared how he hoped to work in some type of law enforcement on the federal level. Al was hopeful and extremely optimistic about what his future would entail, despite his background, and shared:

I do hear people say “Most black people don’t make it...” I always hear that black people are really not the educated type... You hear that throughout our life and even sometimes I hear talk about blacks and the Indians and stuff. Honestly, I think it’s their own opinion. Me personally, I feel like color shouldn’t matter about your education. It’s all about if you apply yourself or not.

Al was quite aware of the narrative often associated with African-Americans in particular as it related to their intellectual potential and capabilities, however he had not allowed that negative characterization to influence his life. Although he had achieved to this stage of his life despite his familial background and experience, he presented no clear path to the expressed career goals. While he attributed his ability to be successful as intrinsic, he expressed a desire to understand what his next steps should be and a desire to connect with individuals who might be able to assist in that regard. Had he been successful in making connections with faculty and/or student affairs professionals at PRU, he might have presented less anxiety about his next steps, post baccalaureate. However, despite this missed opportunity to engage more directly with his peers, faculty and various members of the staff, he certainly presented the motivation and tenacity to ultimately live a productive life.

**Student: Candace.** At the time of the interview Candace was a sophomore at PRU majoring in social work, and she represented the youngest participant in this particular case. She described herself as a “typical high school student” who “went to class everyday” and “made good grades.” She spoke about her level of involvement in high school and her engagement with her teachers as she recounted her high school years

fondly. With the same spirit of positivity, she spoke about the developmental English course that she was required to take, by saying she “...benefitted in becoming a stronger writer as a college student...” even prior to taking higher level English courses. She did not perceive having to take the courses as a setback, or an indication of her academic ability because she maintained such a favorable sense of academic identity, and attributed her placement in the developmental course to her SAT scores saying:

I hate standardized testing. I think I took the SAT every year while I was at high school. My score probably stayed roughly around the same, but it was mainly because of my SAT scores... But I like to write because I'm a journaler... I still benefit[ted] from the class.

Although coming from what seemed to be a model academic background, Candace presented some familial and personal challenges that had converged with her collegiate experience in very specific ways. From our initial introduction, Candace spoke often of her mother and her pleasure with assisting in this research study, because her mother was also in the process of working on her dissertation. I later discovered through the interview that the “mother” that she was actually referring to was her stepmother, and that she was coming from a somewhat complicated family dynamic.

The youngest sibling of two, Candace self-identified as a bisexual young woman, significantly involved in Christian ministry on campus. While she described herself as one with a “great sense of self,” she admitted that she had not disclosed how she identified to any of her family members because they were “very holy.” She admitted that she had always been curious about her sexuality, but she had not had the opportunity to explore her feelings associated with her identity because her stepmother was a practicing therapist and she feared that counselors she had seen in the past would disclose information to her parents because they were friends. She stated that she had experienced a lack of “emotional stability” and challenges with “being able to cope with



different things and... stressful situations..." as a result of her identity and also her relationship with her biological mother.

As previously stated, Candace referred to her stepmother as her mother. When she described her family life, she talked of her biological parents shuffling her back and forth between homes and the system that she adopted in order to function as best as she could. Structure became an extremely important tool for her to maintain her grades despite the constant transition. Candace stated:

I have to live in a very structured home, so being at my dad's house and knowing that their expectations of me getting my homework done and things that follow each day, I just did that at my mom's house, too. So it wasn't so much of just having to adjust back and forth from there aren't many rules here, but there are a lot of rules here. I just carried rules or my daily routine from my dad's house to my mom's house. So that helped with grades especially.

The importance of structure was an overwhelming theme expressed by Candace. She spoke early in the interview about the group of friends that she currently surrounded herself with and how they collectively worked to structure their time in a way that allowed them to get their work done and enjoy their weekends. Seemingly, because Candace's parents divorced so early in her life (she reported being four or five years old at the time) the transition between homes was normal for her, but she had developed a required sense of structure that she worked to continue today.

In terms of her identity, Candace shared that she was working through those challenges with a counselor in the counseling center and since doing so she stated that she had developed the ability to be "okay" with herself. This enhanced sense of personal identity has helped Candace develop in other ways, specifically as it related to her level of involvement in campus organizations and coping with academic stresses. With greater comfort in who she was, she had set out to attain a leadership position on campus for the

upcoming academic year. Additionally, she spoke about the working through differences and with different populations sharing what she was learning outside of the classroom that had been beneficial for her personal development and supported her ability to be a learner, saying:

...I can't change people... I only have control over myself. I can't change my mom and the person she is... I can't change a particular instructor.... I guess that taught me about personally how I deal with other people or groups of people...

Baxter Magolda (2003), stated “making students identities central to learning is crucial... [to] complex meaning making... [and] creating inclusive educational practices” (p. 235). Candace was one student in particular who felt empowered through her interaction with a student affairs professional. Additionally, because she was in the process of becoming more self-assured as an individual, it also allowed her to feel the same way as it related to her academic abilities. The level of “control” that she felt she developed as a result of this interaction presented her development in the self perception realm and also influenced her development in the self-expression realm of emotional intelligence.

**Student: Lisa.** Lisa was a senior at the time of the interview who reported having a current cumulative grade point average of 3.8 who had “always been a stickler” about her education. Based on the information that she self- reported, she was another respondent who would be classified as underprepared, although she did not come from a family that would classify her as “at-risk.” Lisa spoke proudly about her high school experiences and accomplishments as one who was deeply engaged and involved in the experience, and summarized her high school years as “enjoying everything about...” it. Lisa attributed her assignment to the developmental English course to her SAT scores:

I'm just not really good at test-taking. So my SATs threw me off. I took it the very last day. I wasn't able to take it again my senior year. So whatever my score was what my score was.

Although she reported feeling somewhat indifferent about her placement in the developmental course she reported doing well in it, and did not consider it to have any impact or influence on her as a student or her capabilities. Lisa, seemingly accepted both her standardized test scores as well as her placement in developmental courses as a simple matter of timing, and she spoke almost nonchalantly about her experience. Because this student reported having a strong sense of her academic identity and ability her placement seemed to have little impact on how she perceived herself.

Lisa had spent all of her three and a half years at the university deeply involved in her academic department, so much so that it seemingly limited her interaction with her peers in a broader way, although it seemed to present little concern for her. When asked about student affairs professionals who she would attribute to her success and development as a person and a student, she spoke most fondly of members of the staff whom she referred to as "really close" to her. Because of how her department was structured, she seemingly struggled a bit to separate the influential roles between the faculty and administrators in that area, and often spoke generally about how many individuals in the area helped her develop. However, when asked to provide specific examples, she recounted the ways in which administrators motivated her, and how she carried that encouragement with her into classes:

...he's given me so much motivation to just push and not to be nervous. I get anxious. I have anxiety sometimes... I was talking to him in random conversation about having to take chemistry because I'm not a science person.... I was telling him about it.... I remember when he told me that right before I had to take one of my tests. I just knew the material, but I just get so much anxiety because I want to do it right. He just calmed me down when I got to the test ...he actually taught me to be peaceful in my approaching things.

Although Lisa seemingly discussed her academic ability, completely confident in her cognitive ability, she admittedly experienced anxiety as it relates to testing. A young woman who spoke of herself in such a self-assured way, also expressed the benefit of additional support which helped her in terms of her own self-regard and self-actualization. Furthermore, that interaction had also facilitated her ability to be self-directed and controlled in her academic engagement even away from the student affairs professional whom she believed had helped her develop as a scholar.

**Student: Sebastian.** Sebastian was a senior preparing to graduate only days following our interview. Of all of the student participants from PRU, he was the student who had held the most leadership positions, including a role in the Student Government Association. Because of his level of involvement on campus he was able to speak in a very informed and broad way about the experience of the students, the university, and in particular the student affairs professionals. Sebastian was also the most thoughtful in his responses as he spoke about his life experience and PRU as well.

Given his familial background Sebastian certain would be characterized as an “at-risk” student. His parents divorced early in his childhood, and he reported that his father was a drug dealer in Philadelphia who was also physically and verbally abusive to his mother. His father’s criminal activity resulted in the relocation of his family to a small town in the south when his father was incarcerated. In Sebastian’s senior year in high school his mother suffered an aneurism that ultimately resulted in her death after being in the hospital for two months. Her death left Sebastian to care for himself and his siblings, yet he shared:

I went to school the next day – not to be a tough guy, because my mother was indeed my best friend. But at that moment, I knew early on – I can't explain where it comes from – I knew I had a job to do... I was more obligated to get things done. So it didn't affect me at all. In fact, it empowered me because I

knew that sometimes you want to do something, and you have to do it yourself. I did it. I walked to the social security building and the social services and social security. I walked to the grocery store, and I didn't complain. It wasn't easy, but I made it happen.

Despite the challenges that Sebastian faced his senior year of high school he graduated with a 3.5 grade point average, and enrolled at Prestige by choice. When recalling his college choice, he expressed the deliberate process he went through to identify an institution that he believed would be the best fit for him academically and yet provide a level autonomy, which allowed him the opportunity to become engaged in meaningful ways. He was looking for what he called "helping hands" to help him navigate the collegiate environment and his life. For him, a part of that navigation included taking the developmental English course, although he was not required to do so. Sebastian described his high school as "low performing," and because of that, despite his prior academic performance he enrolled in the developmental course.

Because of Sebastian's involvement on campus he was able to speak about the student affairs administrators in a way that many of the other participants were not, but he was also most proficient in his ability to make connections between his academic and co-curricular learning. While he expressed great appreciation for some of the administrators in the division, he was somewhat critical of the majority, stating that they seemingly failed to understand "the troops on the ground" and that some presented "limitations" in their understanding of their role within the university community. He went on at length discussing the need for practitioners in the division, and in general needing to come out of their offices specifically to engage students in meaningful ways. Sebastian continued to provide examples of the ways that he had experienced that personally with one administrator in particular:

I would call him a father in the sense that he is a teacher and a guider. Many people get in relationships and when the time is up or the season is up, so is that friendship. Our friendship is strong, our relationship is strong – as a student, and a professional... It does matter to many students how they are thought of and how they think. I think he offers a new level of critical thinking that goes above numbers and passages, but goes to the heart of a person.

Although Sebastian often spoke of his ability to “do it” himself, he expressed the significance of both faculty and administrators in his ability to grow and develop as a scholar. Undoubtedly, Sebastian had taken the opportunity to reflect on his involvement and engagement both inside and outside the classroom in order to weave a holistic view of his own development. He also was quite clear about the roles that select individuals have played in his personal life, which hold great significance, both personally and intellectually. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), define critical thinking as the ability to “...make correct references from data, deduce conclusions from information or data provided, interpret whether conclusions are warranted based on given data... Make some corrections and solve problems” (p. 156). All of these are skills that Sebastian attributed to relationships and experiences that he has had with both faculty and student affairs professionals. His inability to distinguish his experiences with one over the other was indicative of what literature describes as a holistic learning environment.

**Student: Tina.** Tina was a junior from a small town located about four hours from PRU. A soft-spoken young woman, much like her peers in this study, she did not report coming from a challenging social-emotional or academic background. She graduated from the only high school in her community where she was an A/B honor role student, who had earned a 3.3 grade point average at Prestige, at the time of the interview. To her understanding, she had been placed in the developmental English course because her “SAT scores were fairly low in the writing section.” Much like Candace who was also required to take the developmental English course, Tina was not

concerned about the assignment and believed it to be beneficial as she had gone on and “...made all A's...” in her remaining English courses.

As a student who appeared to be somewhat timid initially, Tina soon relaxed and was able to provide the greatest amount of information about how her involvement on campus and how it provided a source of supplemental or experiential learning at PRU. Unlike Sebastian, who had held several highly influential student leadership positions on campus, Tina sought out organizations much smaller in scope that had greater ties to the community. By her account, those organizations had allowed her the opportunity to develop non-cognitive skills, such as effective communication, team-building, and empathy for those across campus and the local community. Much like Sebastian however, she had been able contrast her co-curricular engagement with her academic experiences in order to create an enhanced learning experience.

I think I've developed quite a bit... it [involvement] just kind of help brought me to the light of I need to be more careful of my surroundings and know what's going on in the world. [The advisor] helped us develop kind of the softer side and being able to listen... We're learning how to teach students and how to help them adapt to different things and bringing them to the point where they to understand... I can listen to the teacher more and kind of understand what they're saying before I just automatically assume this boring for the day I don't want to listen. It allows me to open up my mind and to hear what they fully have to say and to try to understand the material on my own first. It [the co-curricular] feels different. I have had experience working in group projects, but in group projects it's kind of like oh you're assigned this, you're assigned this, you're assigned this and you go your separate ways and you come back to just finish the project and it's not really truly working together, you're just doing it to get the grade.

Tina described her experience outside the classroom as a way of practicing certain skills and behaviors that she attributed to her success as a student. The way in which she described these experiences were much like Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning. Kolb defines this process as the “...transmission of content...”

through the “...interaction between content and experience...” (Knowles, Holton II, & Swanson, 2005, p. 197). Much like experiential learning opportunities Tina described the benefit of engaging with her peers, with the support of her advisor who was a student affairs professional, in ways that taught her how to engage others, adapt to different situations, and she also applied those skills and behaviors when she engaged with faculty. Tina reported that her experiences, in particular her work in the community, helped to influence her career aspirations, and that it also developed her significantly. Her experiences helped in her development in the interpersonal realm of her emotional intelligence; in particular as it relates to her interpersonal engagement, the and or increase sense of social responsibility. With Tina, I found that her out of class experiences not only influenced her interpersonal development, but it also influenced the ways that she engaged with faculty, her coursework, and ultimately her career goals.

### **Student Affairs Participants**

When the study was initially designed, the expectation was that the student participants who fit the criteria for this study—being both underprepared by university standards and evidencing some level of academic resilience, by earning a 3.0 GPA or better—would be able to recommend a number of student affairs professionals who they perceived had helped them develop in ways that influenced their student learning. This proved to be somewhat challenging for the student participants, however four of the six practitioner participants were named by the student respondents. The administrators included in this case study, were three directors and three coordinators, and their years of service to PRU ranged from one director, who had been at the university in some capacity for twenty years. The newest professional included in this study, was both the newest to the field and the university, serving at almost seven months at the time of the interview. Two of the practitioner participants—both directors—had worked in the field



of student affairs over fifteen years while only one of the coordinators had served as long. Combined, the practitioner participants in this study represented more than sixty years of knowledge and experience in the division of student affairs and had both theoretical and/or practical experience in areas including residence life, admissions, student conduct, student leadership, activities and programming, counseling, Greek life, and student diversity.

All of the practitioner participants with one exception had earned at least a master's degree. Two of those who completed the master's degree were currently pursuing doctoral degrees—one of which was a candidate at the time of the interview and the other anticipated becoming a candidate in the fall. The degrees earned by participants represented a diverse educational background in areas including political science, psychology, communications, business and marketing, administration, and student development, to name a few of the majors represented in the sample population.

At the time of the interviews, a new senior student affairs officer had recently been selected at PRU. Most of the participants expressed optimism about the new appointment although they admitted not having much knowledge of their incoming leader. While the structure and line of reporting can vary by campus, PRU's structure represented the most typical model used by most institutions of similar size. In most models of student affairs, in particular within this university system, there exists one senior student affairs officer with two or more assistant and/or associate vice officers, each with a number of departments reporting to them directly.

As previously stated, four of the six professional participants were recommended by African American students who were classified as underprepared by the institution, yet had earned a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Lisa, a senior in the study identified William as someone who was "peaceful," and who served as someone who had motivated her to

believe in herself and her capabilities. She attributed a great deal of her emotional growth to him, and ascribed some of her growth in that regard to her ability to learn. Another senior, Sebastian, emphatically identified Grippos as an administrator who helped him develop his critical thinking skills, and easily equated the learning experiences he shared with him to those of several other faculty members who challenged him in similar ways. Candace and Tina, both referenced staff in the same department, however due the sensitive nature of the Candace's relationship with personnel in the office, the individual that Tina suggested was identified and contacted to participate in the study. Tina, who engaged Wren through a campus organization, clearly credited experiences with her as those that best assisted her in understanding and assessing her own areas of strength as well as those areas of personal growth. Each of these practitioners, whether fully aware of their role in the development of the students, were identified as critical in some form in their experience and their academic success. While the core mission of any institution of higher learning is student learning, pedagogical literature suggests that learning and development occurs simultaneously, and challenges in either the students' cognitive or non-cognitive development greatly influences the other (Knowles, Holton II, & Swanson, 2005; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 2012).

Many of the practitioner respondents were able to express their responsibility in student learning and development through the lens of their respective positions. Thomas, a director, stated the "meaningful experiences" facilitated through his office promoted both learning and individual development through the "application of intellectual knowledge to real-world situations." Similarly one of the coordinator participants, Wren, expressed her role as one that caused students to "think critically" about all areas of their lives including both the personal and academic areas of their lives, in order to assess their own "strengths" and identify "their growth areas." Oftentimes the

experiences that student affairs professionals provide are perceived solely as social activities; however Helen a coordinator at PRU explained the type of learning and development that occurs in her area:

They're planning the events and they're putting on the events. And it's teaching them a lot of really basic – or not even really basic – but a lot of... direct things that they're learning Basically - how to navigate the university... how do I navigate my new job or how do I navigate red tape in general. And so there are kind of like direct learning outcomes like... how do I exist in a place and make things happen? How do I plan ahead? How do I plan an event? Those are the very direct and physical things that they're learning and you can see that. But then also they're learning things that are a little bit below the surface like how do I interact with people. Who am I, to that end I guess. Who am I, and how do I make that work with other people? And how do I hold myself accountable? Those kinds of things. How do I exist in a diverse environment? So, a bunch of different thought processes are going on all at the same time and all they're doing is planning a Bingo night.

Most of the practitioner respondents conveyed a general understanding of their role in the learning environment, although there was little knowledge or understanding of what practitioners themselves do as practitioners to support underprepared students, although they are believed there to be a significant representation of those students throughout the university community. Because practitioners and PRU had little knowledge or understanding of the specific needs of academically underprepared students, those who were suggested by the student participants were surprised that they had any first-hand experience with students who were classified that way. The work that practitioners described was broadly applied to students with the expectation that all students can benefit from this form of engagement. While this was certainly not problematic, as it appeared that their methods remained beneficial to this subpopulation within the larger university community.

## Findings

### Institutional Connections

Institutional connections can be defined and explored from a number of perspectives. Significant research considers the connection of faculty to the university, or more specifically, how faculty of various ranks engage with the larger community (Astin, 1993, Kuh et al, 2010). Likewise, there exists a body of literature that presents data on student involvement or engagement, within the university community, which has been found to be most significant in student retention and persistence (National Institute of Education, 1984; Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012; Kuh, 1995). What has been explored to a much lesser extent, is the manner in which student affairs professionals engage the university community, and in particular how collaborative relationships are established and developed to support and enhance the overall learning environment of the institution, both with students and faculty, which seemingly would be necessary in order to create a holistic learning environment.

The terms engagement and involvement are often used interchangeably. In a national report led by Alexander Astin (1984), titled *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education*, he described student involvement as the amount of time, energy, and effort students devote to the learning process... by devoting considerable energy to studying, by working at on-campus rather than off-campus jobs, by participating actively in student organizations, and by interacting frequently with faculty members and student peers. (p.17) Furthermore, in the literature it is the engagement with faculty more specifically, which occurs outside of the classroom that also is attributed to student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010).

In the book *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010) discussed their findings of twenty higher education

institutions that were having success with their student persistence and graduation rates. One of their significant findings was related to student – faculty interactions. Their findings suggested that faculty members who were “... accessible and responsive to the needs of students... helping them develop as independent thinkers and problem solvers...” (p. 207), served as a common best practice among those institutions. These faculty members served as mentors who were invested and involved in students’ academic and career aspirations. Little research exists however, which explores the role of student affairs professionals and their ability to function in similar ways. Furthermore, while the same text suggested active and collaborative learning as a successful strategy, in student learning theory it is that a connection is made between active learning that occurs within the student affairs division and that associated with course content.

**Student-student affairs.** Several of the student participants were able to articulate the benefits of engagement with student affairs professionals in ways that both supported them. Tina and Sebastian in particular were most able to share in reference to their involvement and investment within the university community, but also as it related to the personal and general benefits from engagement with professionals in the division. Tina stated that she had found that her engagement in activities had equally or greater significance to her in her learning experience, and both she and Sebastian expressed how their in-class and out-of-class experiences had provided value in their learning and development. Each of these students also spoke about the relationships that they had developed as a part of that engagement as well. Tina credited the practitioners that she engaged for being able to see “the need” that students present and helping them identify skills and abilities to develop or resources to help them across campus. Sebastian expanded that idea of engagement as he discussed the level of involvement with another practitioner:

He [referring to Grippos] has always been someone who has always been open-minded and always listened to student concerns... He's someone who listens and responds... Because it [his work] may not be academia, it may not contribute to the numbers in the sense of academics... It's a bit underappreciated. I think he offers a new level of critical thinking that goes above numbers and passages, but goes to the heart of a person.

Here both Tina and Sebastian talk about the relational engagement, which was diagnostic of individual needs as well as supportive and challenging. All of the student respondents, who were able to share their experiences with specific practitioners, spoke of the engagement with the organization and the professionals in the area as equally significant in their learning and development. Much like Tina and Sebastian, Lisa spoke of the individual encouragement that she experienced in her relationship with practitioners, and how that extrinsic motivation encouraged her in her experiences with student affairs professionals and translated into a source of motivation and confidence in her abilities as a scholar in the classroom.

While some of the student respondents clearly expressed and understood the role of student affairs professionals as one that was central to their learning and development, few practitioners believed that their faculty peers did. Three of the practitioners stated that they had been invited into classes to share information with students, that was associated with, or in reference to their departments, but there was very little in terms of collaboration in student learning, or even student support. The majority of respondents suggested that their involvement was relegated to the role and service function of their respective areas with little consideration of how they could further engage students in a holistic learning environment.

**Faculty-student affairs.** The ability to establish and develop collegial relationships between faculty and student affairs practitioners was significant in the creation of a holistic learning environment for students. At PRU, administrator respondents reported three (3) main ways in which these collaborations were established

and how they functioned. The two primary ways identified by respondents, include the development of personal relationships that were established outside of the institution, and the other was based on the shared racial/ethnic identities of individuals across campus. Because of the nature of those relationships, respondents found them to be reciprocal in nature. The third form of interaction was much less significant in nature, however it was the one that all of the respondents identified as the primary means of collaboration, that being a specific service to the faculty members as it related to the specific function of their departments.

All of the administrative participants spoke about the opportunity to go into academic classes and speak about their role on campus or specific content related to their courses, however to the extent of the invitation, that was all of that level of faculty-student affairs engagement. Of the five participants, four of them shared how they went into a few classes each year to discuss the role of their office, or to provide information that the students can attain from engaging with the specific department. While each respondent stated that they were pleased to have the opportunity to address students in the academic space, in most cases this type of interaction failed to lead to any greater collaboration, although respondents perceived the opportunity to be a form of partnership that was most common on the campus. One such statement supported this experience as Wren spoke about her involvement with faculty through their courses:

It's usually being invited to guest lecturer in their classrooms, and I have done anything. I have done masters and undergraduates. I've done anything from how to work with minority students. I've done mainly LGBT. I've done health stuff. I've done sexual responsibility and awareness. I've gone into classrooms and talked about interviewing. So the biggest collaboration with faculty is really when they're like, "Hey, you have certain skill sets. I'd really love for them to know about another professional field and how you're doing this thing. So, please come and talk to my students about that..."

Wren's statement was reiterated by the majority of practitioner participants. Additionally, this respondent cited this form of engagement as significant in engaging students, although it failed to provide a platform for great collegiality and/or collaboration in student learning and development. While it was somewhat limited in nature, practitioners seemed most appreciative of the opportunity to serve faculty in such a manner.

One of the most meaningful ways in which faculty and student affairs interaction was facilitated was through the personal relationships that individuals from faculty and student affairs had been able to create, which had carried over to campus collaborations, or those relationships established between those of similar racial identified groups. Thomas spoke at great length about his ability to engage faculty in a number of programs and activities sponsored through his department, and to create learning opportunities that were designed to be collaborative in nature. He was able to do so, as he and one of the deans from one of the colleges had identified similar personal interests, which facilitated their friendship. Through social discussions held away from the university setting, they both discovered opportunities to collaborate on learning opportunities for students in which they engaged with both faculty and student affairs practitioners.

Grippos spoke of students who were referred to him by faculty of his same race, and most often those students also shared their racial identity. He stated that faculty of this particular race told students to come to see him, in addition to talking to the students themselves. He described this as a type of collaboration for holistic learning, where the faculty was "providing academic support..." and he provided "that other support and guidance..." The sense of collaboration was developed as both a form of mutual support for underrepresented faculty and staff of this racial subgroup, and was also extended to



include the greater support and development of the students both intellectually as well as socially and emotionally.

While the last two forms of engagement between faculty and staff reportedly had provided the greatest support for collaboration in the teaching and learning of students, as well as meeting their various social, emotional, cultural, and academic needs, there was reportedly very little of such collaboration occurring. While there was little in previous research to suggest that the manner in which faculty and student affairs engagement occurred best in particular ways, it was clear that at PRU those informal networks were most beneficial for greater collaboration and support of students in order to provide a holistic learning environment.

### **Perceived Challenges**

One of the greatest perceived challenges to greater faculty-student affairs collaboration as expressed by respondents was the true understanding of the functions of professionals within the field in general, but at the university specifically. Thomas provided the most significant insight in that regard, as he explained how the Division of Student Affairs had been positioned at the university. Although he reported coming from a student development background, he shared that his experience in the division as one that was more oriented to serving the university community as a resource and facilitator of activities, as opposed to any other. This sentiment was expressed by four out of the five respondents. One participant stated that he was initially charged primarily as a liaison between students and upper administration and another expressed that many of his peers on the faculty wanted his assistance in managing student behavior, even within the classroom on some occasions. A fourth participant shared that faculty often contacted her office if a student was of some sort of an emotional or social concern, but none of the participants confirmed that the majority of faculty understood their role in a

developmental and or educational nature. The final respondent stated that he did not believe that faculty were informed that his office maintained significant contact with students. Generally, administrators were perceived as providers of services within the community, as opposed to partners in student learning and development.

The manner in which student affairs professionals are situated within the university community can greatly influence their ability to engage students and faculty in meaningful ways, in order to support student learning and student development. In *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-wide Focus on the Student Experience* (ACPA & NASPA, 2004), the concept of the “interconnectedness of student learning” (p. 14) looks at the student experience in domains, the social context, the academic context, as well as the institutional context. As the three domains are experienced by the student, the student is also developing a sense of identity, emotional intelligence, and experiencing the process of meaning making as they engage various experiences. Higher education institutions are most successful when they are able to support students in these ways, and create an institutional ethos that facilitates collaboration to ensure greater student success. The ways that these collaborative partnerships are established and developed matter within the institutional environment, for practitioners, faculty, and most importantly students.

### **Service Model Versus Development Model**

As the field continued to grow, a number of professional organizations were formed and over time, and several mergers occurred, which have resulted in the development of two primary existing organizations. Those two major student affairs organizations along with other scholars and researchers in the field, have developed several documents that serve as the standards and expectations for practitioners in the field. The *Student Personnel Point of View* (author, 1934) was the first document

created, designed to clarify the role and responsibility of those doing this work in higher education. The second iteration of this statement on the role of student affairs professionals was created in 1949 following World War II, in order to meet the needs of a growing student population. Although, slightly changed in the second version of the *Student Personnel Point of View*, the core of the statement remains the same which focused on the institution's obligation to consider the student "as a whole... [and] puts emphasis... upon the development of the student as a person rather than upon his intellectual training alone" (Rhatigan, 2009, p. 11). These documents serve as the foundational statements of what would become the field of student affairs. While several other documents were created to further express and define the role of practitioners in the field, it was not until the 1960s that the field moved away from the service role and began to focus more directly on student development. The seminal statement supporting that framing of the field was published in 1972, by Robert Brown in his manuscript entitled *Tomorrow's Higher Education: A Return to the Academy*. In his challenge to the institution of higher education, and professionals in the developing field he stated, "...the most important challenge of all is a higher education to face the need for a reaffirmation of student development as its primary goal" (Brown, 1972,). Several years later the Council for the Advancement of Standards in higher education (CAS) was formed to serve as a means to further assess and outline the role and responsibilities of various departments functioning within the division of student affairs. Student development and learning outcomes associated with those respective areas serve as the focus of the field for many contemporary practitioners.

PRU is an institution that reportedly focused on the service role for the larger community as opposed to the developmental model that contemporary practitioners practice. In particular, the ways in which administrators spoke about their involvement

with faculty indicated a significant responsibility to serve in a number of capacities. That was however starkly different when practitioners spoke of their role as it related to students. Likewise, students spoke very little about the service roles of administrators, in particular as they related to those who they identified as having helped them become better scholars. The students generally described the practitioner participants as “timely” in the responses to meeting the various needs and/or concerns of students, and likewise considered them to be a valued “resource” in navigating the university community and challenges associated with matriculation; they disproportionately identified ways in which they perceived the administrators aided in their development.

Regardless of the student’s level of engagement on campus, each was able to express the skills they acquired through their interaction with particular student affairs administrators. Some of the student respondents credited professionals for their improved or enhanced ability to communicate effectively, and to develop problem-solving skills. Others recognized their own personal emotional and social development in particular as it related to their ability to work and relate with others. Several of the student respondents also spoke of an increased sense of self-responsibility and social responsibility, all of which they believed to bolster their ability to perform better as students. One student in particular spoke about how engagement and interaction with practitioners had allowed her to implement skills learned in classes in meaningful ways. Tina spoke both about one of the administrators and her experiential learning experience with her:

... [Wren] helped us develop kind of the softer side and being able to listen to people and to direct them in the way they need to go to handle their problem. Each semester [in her major] you're required to do field experience. But I think it's different due the fact that you do field experience to get a grade and you have to do a certain assignment when you go in the classroom. Whereas, with [organization] you get to see where the student is already at and help them

advance even further and to build upon what they already know and to help them understand what they don't know.

The students' voices expressed the significant value that they were finding in their experiences and engagement with student affairs practitioners, which they understood to be developmental in nature. Tina in particular was one of the student respondents who integrated her in-class learning experience and her development experience with Wren, in order to serve the campus and broader community. She credited Wren for her ability to actively and reflectively listen in order to problem-solve and effectively plan, while also utilizing techniques acquired through her coursework. In her assessment, the skills she learned supported and empowered her to perform better both intellectually and socially.

Student affairs practitioners also spoke in like terms as they discussed their role and responsibility with students. Collaboration, self-awareness and the development of autonomy were common themes expressed. Additionally, many of the respondents also spoke theoretically in reference to their work with students at PRU. Several participants referenced the general demographics of the university, as the population was significantly Pell Grant eligible, and expressed that many students required even their basic needs met, and stated that in such cases their theoretical approach to students was grounded in Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs. Others cited Kohlberg's (circa 1958) theory of Moral Development, Komive's (2005) theory of Leadership Development, Identity versus Identity Confusion, and Multicultural Competence theories as integral in their work. Helen, the newest professional respondent said the following of even the most rudimentary engagement with those in the field:

[There is]...certainly an educational opportunity because it helps them. They're planning the events and they're putting on the events. And it's teaching them a lot of really basic – or not even really basic – but a lot of, kind of, the direct

things that they're learning. Basically, are how to navigate the university, and they can take that and basically use it like how do I navigate my new job or how do I navigate red tape in general? And so there are, kind of like, direct learning outcomes... How do I plan ahead? How do I plan an event? Those are the very direct and physical things that they're learning and you can see that. But then also they're learning things that are a little bit below the surface like how do I interact with people. Who am I to that end I guess? Who am I and how do I make that work with other people? And how do I hold myself accountable?... How do I exist in a diverse environment? So a bunch of different thought processes are going on all at the same time and all they're doing is planning a Bingo night... I mean, just talking about multicultural competency and social justice and things like that - there's critical thinking going on.

Helen presented the manner in which the development of student skills and abilities are improved on, even in what some would describe as relatively insignificant organizational experiences, student affairs professionals

### **Meaningful Student Engagement**

The student respondents in this study described their participation with student affairs practitioners in very specific, yet supportive and developmental ways. All of the students described relationships with administrators that were very individualistic, in that they perceived their interactions to be focused on them and their specific needs, yet many of them also observed that treatment was provided for a number of other students as well. The students also spoke about the support that they received, which validated their sense of self-worth and positive self-regard. In some cases that validation supported their identity formation, but more often, student participants expressed that the form of support given encouraged their ability to become more autonomous, self-reflexive, and have increased motivation to achieve both socially and academically.

That individual engagement was also expressed as an alternative to other critical relationships that the student respondents believed to be significant. Tina and Sebastian both spoke about relationships that filled a space for them that they found significant.

Tina, who was a double major, spoke about the difference in the connection that she was able to make with faculty in each department. She explained that in one major she was “unhappy” because she felt that professors were treating her in a marginalizing way or others who had simply instructed her to “ask your classmates,” instead of providing her the assistance that she requested. Sebastian referred to Grippos as a “father figure” and described him in that role as a “teacher and a guider,” which was significant given the context of his relationship with his father. These student respondents identified a specific gap in their ability to engage faculty and in their personal lives that their engagement with student affairs professionals was able to fill and that they found beneficial in their ability to be successful academically.

Student affairs practitioners also expressed their understanding of how some students perceived them as paternalistic, yet they related those perceptions to their roles and responsibilities as administrators in the field. Grippos stated, “I am not a parent... I want students to see me as an ally,” who has perhaps expressed the same support and/or direction as their parents or others who care about their best interests. Thomas shared the story of another student who had lost his father during his matriculation, and later confided in him that since the loss of his parent he saw Thomas as one serving in that role for him. Thomas expressed his surprise about the student’s feelings of connection; however this sentiment was expressed by a number of the student participants who identified practitioners who they perceived to help them grow both socially and intellectually. More often, practitioners described their work as supportive both systemically and individually. Systemically, practitioners characterized their work as the development of “meaningful experiences overtime” as well as those that establish the support, and social and cultural environment of the institution. Likewise, their responsibilities included the services and programming which they understood to

“support retention.” However through those interactions, student respondents also identified a culture of care, or “nurturing” which William called it, that the students found to be beneficial in their ability to be successfully both socially and intellectually. While none of the student participants expressed that they sought out involvement in order to find any level of individual engagement, each of them found value in the relationship.

### **Discussion**

This study sought to understand what services student affairs professionals provide, which develop and support academically underprepared African American students in their ability to become academic resilient. While the capacity to become academically resilient can be beneficial for all learners who are likely to experience some personal or intellectual challenges throughout the course of their academic lives, those skills are much more significant for those students who are less academically prepared for the academic and cultural experiences of postsecondary education (Dupree et al., 2009; Ford et al., 1996). While existing literature suggests that underprepared students, as well as those representative of first generation student and lower socioeconomic status are all likely to require additional develop and support (Tinto, 1997), much of that research focuses on the role that faculty should play in the development of academic attainment, as well as the ways that students’ peers can also influence both the students’ learning and persistence. To a much lesser degree, is research that explores the work that professionals within the field of student affairs do in order to support and develop one of the most vulnerable student subgroups within the university community.

This study was framed in a way that allowed for underprepared students to identify and express the ways in which student affairs professionals’ influenced and



developed their abilities and skills as scholars, and the practitioner's approach. Although the majority of the student participants were able to speak to the ways that practitioners in the field influenced various aspects of their personal, emotional, and social development, many were also able to share how those experiences provided a sense of self-actualization, autonomy, personal and social responsibility, problem-solving and critical thinking, and resilience. The ability to identify and understand the influence and support that practitioners provide from the student perspective was a significant aspect of this research. Equally significant were the ways that student affairs professionals undertook their work, in particular as it related to student learning in general, but also students who may have required additional support specifically.

While students were able to identify student affairs practitioners who they believed to assist in their ability to become academically resilient, there was often a narrative that gave the indication that the experiences that they encountered were not typical of most students at PRU, nor were the practitioners identified typical of those employed within the division. Sebastian, one of the senior student participants in the study stated that fact quite frankly, and shared that as an active student leader, he expressed that concern with senior university administrators. Additionally, Grippos admitted that although he sought to support many students across campus, there was a perception that his office only catered to students from a very specific demographic group, which kept many students from engaging with him in meaningful ways.

Many of the practitioner participants described their role within the university as one central to the university's mission of teaching and developing students to become educated and informed citizens, yet they believed their work was perceived to be inconsequential to that mission. The service aspect of student affairs work is substantial, as the social components of an institution facilitates a number of cultural and traditional

norms for the university community, including perspective students and alumni, however as the field of student affairs has evolved and the diverse needs of students has increased, it is problematic to have practitioners relegated to a service role in a campus environment with such high developmental need. That service role is portrayed in the ways that professionals describe their work with faculty colleagues, as they are primarily sought out to deal with problematic behaviors. While it is certain that many of the behaviors professional staff is sought out to address, can certainly lead to students eventually separating from the institution, the student affairs practitioners who are contacted to assist with students, are often involved at the point of some identified problem such as academic or university policy violation, or some personal challenge has become apparent. At PRU, very little collaboration was facilitated in a way that was prescriptive or developmental, which failed to provide an environment where some of the institution's most marginalized students could identify and engage appropriate support in order to be successful and ultimately persist. In light of such a lapse in collaboration between faculty and student affairs practitioners, and the limited role professionals appear to have within the university community, the involvement of students in university organizations becomes much more significant.

The role of student engagement and involvement (E&I) has significant implications for the ability of the average student to persist, yet in much of the previous research, that practice was explored through the level of engagement and involvement with faculty and within the classroom (Tinto, 1997). Helen, the newest practitioner participant, who was in her first professional experience, expressed a counter-narrative to that posit, that suggested that all students are engaged to the learning experience through their classes. She suggested from her own experience that she “was not plugged into [the university she attended] through the classroom.” Helen provided a compelling

example of a student who performed well academically, yet was challenged in social ways that threatened her general success. Through her involvement and engagement with student affairs professionals on campus, her behavior was identified and challenged in a way that allowed her to develop, and ultimately influenced her entrance into the field. Helen also was one of few professional participants at PRU, who understood and expressed her function, which was perceived as purely social in nature, as one that truly allowed students to develop critical skills for student success. Her narrative was also supported by Tina. Both described their roles and experiences as ones that influenced students' ability to develop emotional intelligence in four of five realms; self-perspective, self-expression, interpersonal, and decision-making. Several student participants described how involvement and engagement with student affairs practitioners, which they only experienced because of their campus involvement, provided experiential learning experiences and authentic teamwork opportunities, and facilitated critical thinking. This matter would be less problematic if students generally were involved and engaged with student affairs practitioners such as Helen, however, Thomas reported that institutional data suggested that "less than 20 percent of our students are involved in student organizations." With such low involvement, in particular in the absence of a holistic learning environment, many underprepared students may be missing the additional support and development required in order to persist at an institution like PRU.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

All of the student participants, who had been successful at PRU, displayed a sense of intrinsic motivation in some form in order to identify people and resources that they believed to have supported their student success. Whether that motivation led them to seek support in their understanding of their identity in very personal ways or in more

developmental ways, which literature suggests is typical of most traditional age college students, it was through these relationships that a safe and empowering space was developed and opportunities for students to grow were provided. It is important to note however, that these students may have possessed skills that many of their peers, in particular, those who may have been less academically prepared, possessed as many of these students had a history of involvement and engagement in high school, and presumably had some knowledge of the general benefits of being an active student. Identifying ways to encourage and increase student involvement for all students is going to be important at PRU, because students may not have any other ways of identifying and experiencing the support and development that underprepared students require.

It is also important that I clarify some of the language that I am using as it relates to the support and development of students at PRU. While both terms are prominent in much of the literature that defines the work and role of student affairs professionals, it is important to note that those who are working in the field, and have not yet earned a degree in higher education or student affairs, operationalize support and development in a way that differs from those that do. While those educated in the field understand challenge and support as a function of development, there is an assumption that educated practitioners understand the value to engaging students in reflective activities in order to aid them in the establishment of enhanced skills and abilities. Those without that theoretical understanding perceived support to be more about their ability to be a listening ear, or one that would show students how to resolve issues. While neither understanding and application of those functions is negative, that latter can lead to some of the negative assumptions typically made about student affairs practitioners as those who coddle students, and allow some to function under the antiquated model of *en loco parentis*.

Student affairs often consists of practitioners with a diverse array of educational experiences, however, in order to assure that an institution maintains student affairs practitioners who can best meet the needs of all of its students, ongoing training and professional development should be a function of the division. While the current fiscal environment permeating higher education has made traveling a challenge for many institutions, there are ways to develop the divisions' staff in ways that may be more affordable. One such way would include using members of the division, who do have a theoretical and practical understanding of student development. Additionally, facilitating a discussion of literature on best practices in the field by respective departments could be beneficial. Many practitioners maintain the assumption that time in the field makes one an expert in it, however, as research and best practices evolve, and our student demographics continue to change, it becomes imperative that colleagues in the field remain current and be well informed, as their ability to do so directly impacts their effectiveness in their work in the larger campus environment.

Finally, as student affairs professionals better understand the contemporary practices in their respective areas of the large division, as well as those theoretical foundations critical which define our work, it is also critical that senior level administrators work to facilitate a culture of collaboration between academic and student affairs professionals. In an environment where data on the student population would suggest that students may benefit from a holistic environment, both cognitive and noncognitive or psychosocial development is essential for student success and persistence. While there are certainly faculty members who work to attend to all aspects of students' learning and development throughout the academy, it is a faulty assumption that it is practiced consistently. In particular at PRU both student affairs practitioners, and even more significantly, students report finding very little support and development

from faculty outside of the classroom. That is certainly not a denunciation of faculty at the institution, but rather an assessment that is certainly influenced by a number of factors, including the location of the campus in relation to where many of them live as some reported that faculty tend to have a relatively significant commute to campus. Regardless of the various causes for the fractioned experiences of students, it is apparent that for many students who could benefit from the additional support and development, that the ability to engage it is haphazard at best.

In order to successfully mitigate this occurrence, providing opportunities for faculty and student affairs practitioners to engage one another and encourage collaboration, would be paramount. As I found in the example of Thomas, when faculty and administrators were able to gain a better understanding of their respective roles and functions, collaboration was able to occur. Student affairs administrators were then able to provide cocurricular opportunities that then supported and enhanced theoretical concepts that were presented in class. Additionally, student affairs practitioners can identify ways to provide experiences in their respective areas that will allow students to engage in behaviors that challenge them and perhaps develop noncognitive and psychosocial aspects. Their ability to do so, as reported by some student participants, translated to an increased ability to take risks and experiment with skills associated with academic success, without a direct negative impact on their grades.

PRU could significantly improve its six-year graduation rates for students at the institution should it choose to develop both the practitioners in the division of student affairs as well as the faculty-student affairs divisions. (IPEDS reports a six-year graduation rate of 38% for all students, and 35% for Black students in 2012.) It is clear that when students are able to connect with student affairs staff through organizational involvement (not to be confused with event or social engagement), students are able to

develop in ways that other students may not. Although most of the student affairs practitioners at PRU were obviously passionate and committed to their students, there was an evident gap with some professionals between their passion and knowledge. By employing some simple strategies to continue the development of professionals across the division, it will not only enhance the functioning of the division, but also allow both faculty and practitioners to understand ways they can be intentionally collaborative around student development and student learning.

### **Case Two: Big State University**

#### **Institution and University Setting**

Set in a midst of a thriving urban community, Big State University appeared to be the center of all of the local activity even several miles away from the campus. There sat a strip of quaint stores and eateries that lined one street directly across from the campus, and swarms of students were rushing about by bus, or bike, or on foot making their way to and from classes and their other activities and engagements. Only minutes from the state capital, the campus was beautifully manicured and presented both the historic charm of the institution as well as contemporary aesthetic that exuded a sense of intellectualism and university exuberance. The campus itself was massive in nature, and I found myself on a number of occasions stopping to read campus maps to identify where I was in contrast to where I was hoping to be. There was significant construction going on across the campus, which was emblematic of its ongoing growth and development as an institution, and also occasionally challenged my ability to traverse the physical campus. Despite its size, the campus felt highly populated, and in particular the area surrounding the student union/center was full of student activity including the activity of student organizations soliciting student involvement, and on this day in

particular, it also included a cow in the middle of the court which students were using to advertise their work with livestock.

Although the campus was obviously predominately White, it was relatively easy to locate groups of Black students together in a number of places on campus. Walking through the library, the student union/center and several buildings that housed student affairs departments, groups of Black students seemed to be conducting meetings and forming study groups. It appeared that the groups of students easily identified me as a visitor in their space, both as a nonstudent and a Black person they had never encountered before, but in hindsight, it was likely because of the aesthetics of the facilities and the significant presence of students regardless of the time of day.

Additionally, the ways that students situated themselves around several rooms reminded me of Beverly Tatum's (1997), "*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*"?, as I noted that there existed more pockets of Black students than there were groups of diverse student groups. The attention given to both the buildings themselves as well as the time given to the obvious student interaction, may have made my presence somewhat obvious to the Black students in the space.

Contrary to my own professional experience at much smaller institutions, I found the manner in which professionals within the division of student affairs to also be somewhat segregated in nature. I was most surprised to find that the senior student affairs officer at Big State had an office that was in the same building as the president's office. Initially, I perceived that as something quite telling about the level of esteem that the president has for those who work in the division by housing them among the other university vice presidents, however upon arriving to the office it was located in the basement of the building and the space felt very much about the business of the institution in an almost stoic manner, as opposed to the energy, vibrancy, and activity of



most areas within the student affairs division. Later through my discussion with practitioners on the campus, I was informed that the recent closing of one of the universities facilities had dispersed many departments across campus while renovations occurred to the building that traditionally housed many of those offices, although it remained unclear if the senior level officer in the division was ever in that space.

Big State was a different institution in that it had recently restructured its traditional division of student affairs to one that included both traditional student affairs departments as well as those that provided academic support services for students. The model was relatively new even at the time of interviews, and all of the participants spoke of the transition of new leadership, new structure, and the ability to understand their roles in the new context. The existing hierarchy was influenced by the decision on the system level to combine those areas, however interestingly enough, Big State was currently the only institution within the system that had implemented that model. Academic student support areas tend to report differently on various campuses, and is usually dictated by the interests and expertise of faculty and senior academic administrators respectively. Generally, student affairs professionals at Big State spoke of their initial concerns about the change, and as long time administrators at the institution, some expressed being quite concerned about how the change would influence their ability to perform. However, at the time of the interviews, professionals had functioned within the new model for approximately one year and all were pleased with the direction that the newly formed division was taking and many cited the increased ability to collaborate with other functional areas as one of the greatest benefits to them and the students.

### **The Students**

Big State University (BSU) required that I work with university administrators

responsible for institutional research in order to identify my student participants for this study. Upon disclosing the criteria for student participants, I was informed that a total of fifty-eight students met the established criterion. Emails were sent to all of those students requesting their participation, however, of those students; only five students attended the interest meeting and expressed their interest in assisting with the study. Of those five, three students were invited to participate. The other two were eliminated from the study as one was currently classified as a freshman, and the other was a member of one of the major athletic programs on campus, and therefore subject to additional academic and social support beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, because of the student's athletic schedule, the student was not able to identify any significant contact with student affairs professionals on her screening documentation.

Of the three remaining students who consented to participate in the study, there was one young woman classified as a junior at the time of the interview, and the two remaining participants were classified as sophomores; one a male student and the other a female student. BSU had recently discontinued offering the developmental math course on their campus, however, because students who had been required to take the course could still be matriculating as juniors or seniors at the institution, that course was listed as one that students potentially could have taken. Additionally, though literature suggests that developmental courses are typically those in math and English, BSU provided a chemistry course that they listed as developmental. The two sophomore participants had both completed the later mentioned course, while the upper-class participant had taken the developmental English course. Each of the participants was required to take the developmental course, except one, who opted to take the course on his own.

The literature on underprepared students portrays a very broad demographic, including those students who are of a lower socioeconomic status, poor academic background, have lower Standardized Assessment Test (SAT) or American College Test (ACT) scores, come from challenging familial environments and/or typically first generation college students (JBHE, 2006). To further nuance the definition of the underprepared student population, scholars point out that institutions are able to establish the standards of preparedness for students admitted to the university (Noel & Levitz, 1982). It is significant to mention, that the student participants, had they chosen to attend other institutions, would likely have been admitted as honors students. Of the three student participants, two completed honors courses at their respective high schools, and the other attended a school acknowledged for its academic excellence each academic year. The GPAs of these students at the time of their high school graduation, as well as their SAT/ACT scores represent students with exemplarily academic backgrounds, despite their enrollment in developmental courses. That final distinction made in the characterization of the underprepared student population, significantly broadened the scale of the population, and as I found with these participants in particular, provided a more diverse view of this student subgroup, and thus presented a greater understanding of the population.

**Student: Beverly.** Beverly was the only junior who met the criteria to participate in this study. Upon meeting the young woman, I got the sense that she has benefitted greatly from her experiences at BSU. An active student, her cheery personality was infectious and it only took moments in her presence to see her level of leadership and involvement as she engaged both her peers and administrators in her presence. Beverly was also a strong communicator, with significant insight into her own growth and development as a student, and gladly credited those administrators around her for that

growth. Contrary to much of the literature on underprepared students, Beverly graduated from her high school, which she stated was “nationally ranked” and had been recognized as a “school of excellence” for a number of years. She graduated from high school with a 3.8 GPA, and reported earning a GPA of 3.5 at BSU at the time of her interview, and her assumption was that despite her grades and the score on her standardized tests that she had been placed in the developmental English course because she neglected to take the AP course in high school.

As a tremendously active student, Beverly was able to easily identify and discuss the numerous administrators and experiences that she credited for her academic success. One of the areas that she identified most in terms of her personal development, that influenced her overall intellectual development, was her culture identity. Beverly was quite thoughtful as she talked about her identity as a young Black student at a predominately White institution, and was careful to add that she “did not believe [BSU] was excessively racist,” however what she had learned about Black people historically, provided a strong context for what she was able to do even now, and it also served as a sense of motivation and purpose for her accomplishments.

Additionally, Beverly was quite articulate and she spoke about how her engagement with administrators which had given her the confidence to find her voice, and think critically about an experience with a classmate of hers. She recalled the scenario saying:

It was my freshman year and we had a diversity class for entering minority students. And then me and my friends we were already sitting in the class. We were in the front row. A white person, a white girl specifically walks in the room and sees that we’re all in the front. And then she looks at her schedule like, oh man, I must be in the wrong class. Now if I were to go into a classroom setting on this university and turn away from every classroom that I saw that I was only person of that race I wouldn’t go to class because I’m always one of few.

She specifically identified two people, and experiences with those individuals that she believed helped her significantly. BSU provides several orientation experiences for students as they begin matriculation, and also has a first year college for students who are unable to gain admission to the college in which they hope to enroll or they are undecided in their major. Through these programs, Beverly was able to meet and engage several administrators who she credited for her ongoing development. She mentioned several administrators that she had the opportunity to interact with as a result of her interview; however she discussed two of them at length when speaking of her development. While both of the personnel that she identified served in administrative roles, neither was working as a part of the student affairs division at the time of the interview, however Taron, had held several positions at BSU, including one within the division.

**Student: Jay.** Jay was a soft-spoken, mild mannered young man who seemed quite eager to acquire as much information as possible. He described himself as one who represented the counter narrative of a Black person who is seen as “ghetto, loud or just act very obvious...” and went on to acknowledge that he always had to be “a step ahead” because of that “stereotype.” Talking with Jay was an interesting experience as he seemed to want to assure me that he was answering the interview questions correctly, inquiring several times throughout the interview if the responses that he was providing were what I was “looking for.” I later realized that this was quite indicative of his acute sense of learning from his environment and experiences, which took on the form of modeling behaviors of those around him in order to attain skills for success.

After meeting with Jay and getting a sense of how he engaged the postsecondary experience as well as those around him, I was not surprised to find that the

developmental course that he had taken was not required for him, but rather that he had opted into the course. Although he reported being a high school student who graduated with a weighted grade point average above a 4.0, he chose to bypass the placement test in chemistry and simply register for the course instead. He stated that he simply hoped to “brush up on chemistry and not set himself up for failure.” This young man was from a community that he described as both equally diverse and middle-class, yet reported that a number of his peers had not persisted through high school graduation.

Jay was another student who was fairly active on campus and served as a resident advisor at the time of the interview. Jay was also a part of several student organizations. In discussing his interaction with administrators, he was quite clear that his interaction had been extremely limited, however upon further discussion, I realized that his greatest influence came from upper-class students who were serving in the same leadership role. Kuh (1995), stated that the “interactions with peers [serves as the] antecedents to their learning” (p. 149). Jay certainly was one to fit this example. He also spoke about mentoring relationships that the upperclassmen maintained with graduate students working in the department, as well as senior level students and their direct interaction with professional staff. He described his experience as the various tiers of mentoring and modeling of positive academic behaviors, and goal setting which he attributed his academic success.

**Student: Nicole.** Nicole was the second sophomore participant in the study. She described her home as a small town located within the state, and described her high school as “really poor.” Despite the economic resources of the community, she graduated from her high school with a 4.625 GPA, which is the highest of all of the student participants at BSU. Although Nicole graduated at the “top of her class,” she was assigned to the developmental chemistry course. Unlike Jay, reportedly she was not

given the opportunity to take the placement test and was immediately placed in the course. She admitted that she was “kind of upset” and said that she “had to be placed back” because her high school was “poorer.” Oddly enough, despite her academic accomplishments, Nicole seemed somewhat unsure of her capabilities both academically and socially within the university environment.

An extremely quiet young woman, Nicole had a gentle smile that she almost mistakenly seemed to allow to escape. Although her laughter was often muffled by her personal insecurities, she spoke softly but assuredly about her Christian beliefs, which were most salient to her. Also unlike her peers, and indicative of her experiences at BSU, Nicole was in a state of flux with regard to her major. Initially, Nicole aspired to be a doctor, which later changed to a physician’s assistant, and at the time of the interview she stated that she was hoping to become a nurse practitioner. Although upon our initial discussion Nicole stated that she had prayed about her decision to change her career aspirations, but upon further discussion she broke out into tears and admitted that she had changed her major because her recent academic experiences caused her to question her intellectual ability.

While she reportedly enjoyed the city life that BSU provided, she admitted how much she struggled to get engaged in the university community and how she felt “isolated” on the campus that was “majority White.” Although Nicole attempted to join a few campus organizations, one at the suggestion of her academic advisor, she found the membership fees to be prohibitive. As her faith was extremely important to her, and she did maintain involvement with a Christian organization affiliated with the university. Through the organization she admitted finding some sense of community; however the organization was not campus-based. That organization facilitated relationships with peers in her local church, and young African American women from other universities

across the state. Although Nicole had failed to find a community within the institution, she felt better adjusted in her collegiate experience at the time of the interview.

Sadly, Nicole was a student who represented the student who is typically lost in the university environment. When asked to identify anyone on the campus who had positively influenced her, she was not able to do so. Seemingly, in an attempt to provide some response to the question, she provided the name of her academic advisor, whom she would occasionally receive mass emails from and met with perhaps quarterly. In my estimation, the advisor had identified the need to get Nicole plugged in, however her schedule had prevented any meaningful follow-up that might have influenced her engagement. She admitted that she did attempt to hold a leadership role within the Christian organization, and for a brief time worked to encourage collaboration with religious organizations, however when her vision was met with resistance she relinquished her role, and was obviously frustrated and upset, even at the time of the interview.

Unlike the other two participants at BSU, Nicole was unable to provide any administrators (or faculty) who had influenced her academic success, and much like Jay, she spoke of the influence her peers had on her both spiritually and culturally. However, despite that similarity, the only peer groups that had any influence on Nicole were students that she met outside of the university community. She recounted how these upper-class students from other universities influenced her cultural identity and self-perception through a conversation she overheard recalling how she had “relaxed hair at the time” and the other young women in her discussion group all had “natural hair.” From their discussion she gleaned why they had chosen to change their hair, and it influenced her to do the same. Additionally, because Nicole had no interaction with student affairs administrators on campus, she could only state that the Christian



organizations advisor, who was not employed by the university, had been her only other influence and her greatest help in getting adjusted to the city and by extension, her collegiate experience.

Nicole represented a most challenging scenario. Despite her outstanding academic performance as a high school student and at BSU, she was significantly suffering from imposter syndrome. Kolligan and Sternberg (1991) described this phenomenon as a “perceived fraudulence [which] involves a complex interplay of inauthentic ideation, depressive tendencies, self-criticism, social anxiety, high self-monitoring skills, and strong pressures to excel and to achieve” (p. 323). Although in their study the findings suggested that the way young adults perceive themselves shape their belief in their own ability, they failed to identify any external factors that may contribute to this belief. While Nicole exhibited a number of the characteristics assigned to individuals who suffer from imposter syndrome, it appeared that much of the ideations come as a result, at least in part, to her classification as an academically underprepared student at BSU. As a result of this assignment, this extremely intelligent young woman had struggled silently and learned to rely on her faith in order to maintain a sense of focus on her academics. She stated:

For me, it's like God has me to experience different things in order for me to rely on him more. Last semester I made a C in organic one, and I was happy with that C. With that experience that I went through that whole semester, I had to rely on God more each and every day just to make it to that C. I'm doing it again this semester because I'm in organic two. It's hard to rely on God because you feel like you have everything in control, but the more rely on him, the more easier it gets. You see he has everything under control, and all you have to do is just put your trust in him.

Nicole reported having extreme challenges getting connected and engaged within the university community, and while she exhibited great faith it was also hard for her to

hide her feelings of inadequacy and isolation. Admittedly she experienced failed attempts to get involved and it appeared that the apparent absence of an adult to serve in the role as advisor, had exacerbated some of the challenges she had faced. Her assignment to a developmental course, despite her academic background, coupled with her inability to have out-of-class experiences, resulted in her inability to develop a sense of competency. Unfortunately, the lack of those experiences had caused her to retreat into self-isolation with her only refuge being sound in her faith.

### **Student Affairs Participants**

As there was only one student who was able to provide the name of a student affairs professional whom they believed to have some influence on their social and cognitive development, thus department directors from within a typical student affairs division were invited to participate. A total of eight directors were contacted via phone and email in order to solicit their participation and provide detailed information about the study. That sample of eight administrators was inclusive of the one practitioner recommended by Beverly. Of the eight administrators invited to participate, seven agreed to be a part of this study. Each administrator participant represented a department within the division, and as such seven different departments were represented including, student leadership and civic engagement, Greek life, residence life, student conduct, theater, and counseling services. The additional administrator had transitioned from one department to another within the division, and because of the new divisional structure at the university, she remained within the division, although her role at the time of the interview was not in a traditional student affairs division. Despite that, the participant was able to provide relevant data for the study, and as such was included in the study.

The professional participants had significant experience in the field. Four of the seven participants were lifetime career professionals, and had worked all of their

professional careers in a higher education setting exclusively. The average length of time that this group of practitioner participants was in the field was 24 years, at the time of the interview. Taron was the relative newest professional participant, although she had been working in at BSU in some capacity for eight years, while Peggy maintained the longest career in the profession with thirty-seven years in the field. In addition to Peggy, three other practitioner participants acquired a minimum of twenty years of service in student affairs. This group represented a significant amount of experience within the field. In addition to their length of time in the field, as career professionals, many of the participants also worked in a number of other departments within the traditional student affairs division. It was significant to make that distinction, as the totality of their experiences informed their responses to interview questions.

In addition to the significant experience in the field, participants at BSU also represented various levels of education and degrees in the field. While only one of the participants had earned a Ph.D. at the time of interviews, and two additional participants had completed coursework toward a terminal degree in higher education administration. The remaining participants all held degrees at the master's level in a number of disciplines. The vast majority of participants held their degrees in areas associated with the field, such as student personnel services, counseling, and education. Other fields of study included degrees in art history, theater, organizational management, chemistry, and human development. Because so many practitioner participants had earned degrees in areas directly related to higher education and/or counseling, student development language was easily incorporated in the discussion with many of them, and seemingly as well as most appropriately, was at the core of their work with students, and greatly influenced their approach to policy and procedure within many of their areas.

The level of academic attainment and length of experience in the field was also equal to the length of service by these professionals to BSU. Of the seven participants, three had provided service to BSU for over twenty years, while the additional four had been employed by the institution ranging from their first year with the university, to their fifteenth year. This was also significant, as many of the participants were able to speak about their work and how it had changed at the institution over a significant period of time. Additionally, the division had recently undergone significant restructuring, which included the inclusion of academic support departments within the division, and a new person in the role of senior leadership for the division. All of these aspects of the practitioner participants and the institution were significant to consider as I sought to understand the practices and philosophies of practitioners at BSU.

## **Findings**

### **Student Affairs Curriculum**

Although student affairs practitioners are typically not perceived to be as a part of the university community that has an established curriculum, discussion with participants presented something quite different. Many of the practitioner participants spoke about their work in their specific departments, but also the intersection of that work with other colleagues in the division as well as professors in some cases in order to present a broader curriculum. When examined, the curriculum of student affairs professionals at BSU involved all aspects of emotional intelligence, which was facilitated to students through small groups and individually. This work was done in formal settings such as group meetings and programs, and also informally as practitioners discussed engaging students at social events and through ongoing interaction with various student organizations.

Specifically, practitioners identified several areas, which comprised the curriculum they had established for students. While several forms of self-perception were identified as a part of the course of study, self-actualization was one that Rayne suggested as a part of the basic skills student develop through interaction with members of her staff, which aided in student success. She identified the various ways that her and her staff worked to assist students in the development of skills such as “time” and “stress management” in order to facilitate personal and academic success, and described their work as “the first line of defense” which in turn allowed students the ability to “manage what their needs are.” It was Rayne’s philosophy that her department served to help students meet their basic needs, which were foundational to their overall achievement.

Jay, was one student who spoke directly about his desire and need to manage his time appropriately in order to be successful. As a new student leader during the academic year, he expressed finding great value in learning how to manage his time and take care of himself in ways that supported his academic goals. Although Jay expressed no direct contact with staff from Rayne’s office he described many of the services that were available through her department and others throughout the division. One of the other skills that Jay described as critical to his academic success, was his ability to ask for help. Jay stated:

Instead of just going with the flow all the time and setting myself up for failure, basically I try to find a way as much as possible to make my resources work for me. If I know I’m struggling with a subject or I know I need to maximize what I can get done in a limited amount of time, I’ll hit up a lot of people and call a lot of people, text a lot of people, see if I can get some study groups going. I’ll reach out to people. I wouldn’t normally do that because – when I came to college, it was like if somebody else is helping me or getting answers off somebody, you’re cheating. You’re not really understanding. So I was always trying to do everything by myself. I slowly came to realize that you can get a lot more work accomplished if you let other people help you, but don’t just get the answers, make sure you understand it yourself. Two heads is better than one. So that’s just a lesson that I’ve learned the hard way.

Cleveland also spoke about students' ability to self-assess, and ask for help, as well as, the development of decision making skills, which were critical in a student's ability to make good choices as they related to academic, personal, and social experience. Those lessons were not parceled out to distinguish "good and bad" students, but rather to develop a student's ability to fully consider the greater impact of the decisions that they were often required to make. Cleveland explained at great length the ways in which his office had worked with many students, most of whom had arrived at his office because at some point they had failed to ask for the appropriate assistance and/or made poor choices in their academic, social, physical, or emotional lives. Described as "developmental" and "therapeutic" in nature, Cleveland provided a narrative of his work, challenging behaviors ranging from academic misconduct events, such as cheating on test and plagiarizing, to incidents of which appeared to be public intoxication and other problematic behaviors within the university community. While he expressed his belief that many of his colleagues on the academic side likely see him as someone much more punitive in nature, he described his approach to each student saying:

There is none of that values-based assessment for students. It's all behaviorally based. It's like 'I'm sure you are a great guy. That's how you got in here. I can see your high school grades in your high school transcript. You are first semester freshmen, and I know as much about you as anybody in this entire community. I know your parents are still together and live at the same address and here's what they do for work.' We have access to all that data. So that student comes in, and then we can say, 'Let's talk about your decision. What went into this? How did you make the call that you were going to be out there with your buddies drinking beer and acting the fool? Let's back up as an talk about how that all started, and let's see if there are some things we can do to prevent that sequence of events from happening again in the future' ...so there are behavioral diagnostic stuff. ... maybe there is some genetic predisposition around some substance use issues, certainly some abuse. Maybe there are some emotional fragility that we are trying to work through. Somebody has perhaps just gotten out of a long-distance relationship, or somebody is overwhelmed or homesick or they're lost. Or they are bipolar, and they thought they were doing great so they would experiment

with not taking their medication for a while. Or they have an anxiety disorder, and they've been told very clearly that the mood stabilizers don't mix well with alcohol... There are very adult, scary kinds of things these days that sometimes 17, 18, and 19-year-olds are dealing with.

Both Rayne and Cleveland described some of the most fundamental components of the curriculum that they provided for students. In helping students problem-solve, think critically about some of their experiences, and help them engage in the decision-making process, they taught students so that they could employ those processes again throughout their academic careers, and their lives. Cleveland also boasted that BSU maintained a low recidivism rate, which suggested that once students were successful in learning such skills, they were effective in using them and applying those skills to other situations. These forms of development were individualized and personal, and helped students learn how their identity and experiences intersected with the environment and ultimately influenced their own outcomes.

Robert introduced the concept of meaningful experiences through student involvement, which Peggy and John also shared in the work in their respective areas. The most significant example provided included service learning opportunities, which were local to global in scope. Robert spoke specifically about the development of values, which was a part of the local community service work that was facilitated by the collective Greek letter organization members at BSU. He also suggested that the work that students did through their respective organizations assisted in that development, as well as provided "high impact experiences." Peggy discussed the "diversity trips" coordinated through her department, where residential students were taken to other parts of the country to experience and understand the lived experiences of others, noting that most of the students at BSU had never had the opportunity to travel outside of the state. Similarly, John spoke about the leadership development programs conducted through his

office, and the various ways that students developed their sense of identity through them. In the description of how these skills were taught and developed, NAME contributed the work her staff did in order develop “critical and creative thinking” through programming, but she also spoke about the role of student leaders in that work and their enhanced ability to engage their peers in ways that helped them further develop.

Beverly, as one of the most engaged and actively involved participants in the study, was able to speak about the value added to her overall academic experience through various activities and leadership opportunities such as these. She recounted one of those encounters with administrators stating:

...she’s just helping me develop as a culturally and with my speaking abilities. She you know – with the symposium counselor training she always told me you’re a really good speaker. And when you speak you demand attention. And you know I always, I just was like Mama Thorpe stop trying to boost my head up. Like don’t – because I’m really – I was really shy. So for someone to say that to me I was like wow, she might be onto things.

Taron, as the only African-American professional participant at BSU, spoke to specific challenge and support required for Black students. Because of her work with students of color through her various roles at the institution, she was able to best discuss the challenges that some Black students faced, and how she worked with them in ways that allowed them to advocate for themselves. Taron said:

I feel like this generation of students... They don’t know how to advocate for themselves... Because I feel like they have always had people advocating for them, you know, unless they were actively looking for someone who’s going to give them that support, I don’t know that they would find it. I feel like they would just go through their day doing the best that they can unless they stumbled across someone who they felt could support them the way that they needed to be supported. Or they, you know, they just wouldn’t find that person.



It was through this situation that Taron was able to guide and support the student in the development of their interpersonal and self-expression. For many students of color, finding a way to mitigate feelings of marginalization and empowering them to advocate for themselves, is critical for their overall success. Taron described her engagement with students in this way as salient to her work as a practitioner in the field.

While it was important to note that professional participants did not describe their work using the term curriculum, many of them identified with the role of being a teacher of noncognitive skills. The ability to learn many of these skills was critical to students in their ability to persist. And most significantly, students were able to learn these skills and apply them throughout their academic careers for greater success.

Rayne best summarized the work of professionals in each realm of emotional intelligence stating,

...it really gives students a platform to develop some of the needs that are getting in their way. Before I would have said, and hopefully I will get back to this being a true statement for me, is the best thing is being about to watch a student walk across that stage knowing that I made an impact and a difference in that being able to give them the tools that they needed assisted in their ability to get where they're going. There's no greater reward than that. I mean we are impacting students on such a basic fundamental level... that is just unbelievably rewarding.

Robert summarized the impact of professionals work on the self-perception, self-expression and interpersonal realms by saying:

...I have always thought that my job is to make sure that those involvement experiences are meaningful, are rich and not also overwhelming so that they are not crossing the line into dominating the students' life so that it hinders their academic success. ...the most significant partnerships are with (other student affair departments) that coordinates all of our major service learning initiatives and has a mission to connect with faculty around that. And I know that there have been some partnerships there in helping faculty infuse service into their curriculum. ...our contribution to that work is again if we're helping our

organizations create that positive experience for their members which is predicated [on many things] this idea of service as a core value then I would hope that our student who are in a classrooms with a service learning component.... Some really don't have a clue and others know that very well, and I think what we do is we provide an opportunity for students to be exposed to this idea of service... which hopefully will follow them later in life.

The work that these professionals conducted in their respective roles directly represented each of the realms of emotional intelligence, and although admittedly, in most cases they did not prescribe their interaction with students based on their academic status within the university, the students themselves found their work beneficial in their ability to function as strong scholars.

### **Student-Student Development Connection**

The student participants at BSU truly exemplified the various ways in which students at various institutional types engaged, or failed to engage with student affairs professionals and the developmental nature of their work. As a junior, Beverly spoke most directly about contacts and interactions with practitioners, whom she believed to help her develop both intellectually and personally throughout her higher education experience. Through these relationships, she was able to recount as almost immediate in parallel to her arrival to the university. While all of the student participants shared that they participated in the orientation experience specifically for Black students, Beverly identified that experience as her initial engagement with various student affairs professionals. She was successful in maintaining those relationships, along with others she developed throughout her matriculation, by later serving as a mentor for incoming Black students through that same program. Because of her level of involvement and engagement, she was able to identify the most contact with practitioners in numerous areas that cut across various departments and divisions, as some professionals such as Taron, had experience working within several divisions within the institution.

Jay however provided some initial concern. As an active student, my early expectation was that he would be able to provide information about significant contacts with professional staff members, much like Jasmine, however, that was not the case. We struggled through his interview as I assumed that perhaps, because he was so new in his leadership roles, that he was still unaware of terms like student affairs. He also continuously inquired if he had answered my questions “right,” which caused me to constantly reassure him that his honest responses were good enough. In his account however, he constantly referred to the graduate students who were providing leadership in his residence halls, and the upperclassmen who held similar positions. He went on at length about the skills and the level of development that he achieved by both working with and modeling behaviors from those that he identified as professionals in the field. It was not until I met with the professional staff, that his perspective became distinct, and provided greater context for the student-student development relationship.

While Beverly benefitted from a wealth of interaction and engagement with practitioners directly, Jay also benefitted, although in a less direct and precise manner. Although no less intentional, Nicole had no connections that she could speak of. Although she admitted that her academic advisor suggested that she get involved with several campus organizations, Nicole stated that the one organization she visited required a fifteen-dollar membership fee, which she could not afford. After visiting the organization’s meeting only once, she failed to return. As Nicole’s religious identity was so salient to her, she found a sense of stability in her church, and a Christian women’s group that functioned for Black college women across the state. However, Nicole had no contact and/or support within the university community, which resulted in her feeling very isolated within the campus community at least until she found support outside of the university. She shared:

Here at [BSU], it's more – you're an individual and a student, but you're more isolated since the campus is majority white. You're more isolated to receiving other things.... we [her Christian group] have national conferences and we have institutes where they just develop you as far as being a good spiritual leader and being a generally good leader on campus and being involved and connecting with other people. [It] has helped me become a better student by – it's helped me become a better student by being more open, being more willing to talk to people I've never met before, people that I would never even thought of talking to, and just connecting with different organizations who may or may not be of the same faith I am, but just talking to them and seeing their perspective of life.

Although Nicole spoke about finding a group where she did feel connected, that group functioned primarily outside of the university community. While she found a way to create a community away from her hometown, and she attributed that to her growth in her ability to relate to others, she remained afraid, unsure, and disconnected to the institution. Literature suggests that a student's inability to connect with the campus, or involvement within the environment, often leads to student departure (Education, 1984). While Nicole apparently had not considered leaving the institution, she presented obvious challenges with developing meaningful relationships and identifying adequate support within the university.

While the majority of literature exploring student success finds that engagement with faculty has a significant impact on the individual learner's ability to persist, there also exists a body of research that suggests that similar engagement with "faculty and staff" can have similar impact on the student. Much of that literature goes on to delineate the specific activity that faculty engage in with students such as research opportunities, and community engagements, and various mentoring relationships (Tinto, 2012). However, it seems that little previous research provides such an outline of the engagement practices of student affairs practitioners, which also support student persistence and success. Previously in this study I discussed those skills and development that practitioners provided to students, which both the student and

professional participants believed to be significant in their intellectual development. However, equally significant to what was being provided for these students was how these tools and skills were provided. As presented by Beverly and Jay, there were two primary ways that this form of engagement was facilitated, which was found to be through the one-on-one engagement with practitioners as seen with Beverly and/or the tiered-engagement as seen with Jay.

Each of the professional participants identified, and shared occasions in which they worked with students in a one-on-one manner that was most beneficial to the student's development and engagement. In addition to the one-on-one engagement with students, professional participants also identified small groups as ways to engage students directly, but those small groups also provided a means of identifying and facilitating ongoing developmental relationships with students as well in some cases. Of the seven practitioners who served as a part of this study, six of them intentionally maintained some small group contact in order to identify students, make assessments of their individual needs, and work with students directly to assist in development in those particular areas. Some of the small groups were formed specifically to facilitate topics and programming through the residence halls or small support groups through the counseling center, which students opt into. Other small groups identified were comprised of student leaders through various campus organizations, more specifically leadership boards of various groups. Individual students, and their specific developmental needs then became a part of the student-student affairs professional relationship. Cleveland described this best by saying:

...programs that on the surface may appear to be more activity-oriented, but they are really just as much about preventing students from getting lost... to try to pull them into the middle of this experience so that they come into contact with people like myself or [other] staff... Yeah, we have a lot of staff that are really

involved and committed to not just an activity, but learning outcomes, educationally defined outcomes associated with those activities.

While activities and programs serve as tools to engage students with intention in seemingly informal ways, practitioners also suggested that these opportunities to engage students also allowed for them to develop one-on-one developmental relationships. Those relationships then facilitated the opportunity to challenge, support, inform, and refer students in ways that aided them in their development as both members of the university community and scholars on matters of academic success and persistence. The individualized engagement with students was used by all of the professional participants and while Clinton used the term “heart-to-heart,” overwhelmingly, other professional participants used the precise term of “one-on-one” and they characterized this form of engagement as the most meaningful way to engage and develop students at BSU. Rayne described the process and the progressive relationship as a “partnership” in that, and Cleveland stated that through such discussions professionals are able to provide, in part, “coaching and mentoring and guiding and challenging and supporting” to students and help them develop a sense of “personal responsibility.” Through one-on-one discussions with students practitioners, they described various scenarios where they challenged students in terms of their decisions making, asked probing questions that caused them to explore aspects of their identity, facilitated discussions on personal and academic goal setting and skill development in particular areas, as well as value development and problem-solving in a manner that supported student scholars in their ability to think critically about their lives and the lives of those around them.

Taron, who expressed the most experience working with students of color at BSU stated that the role that she and her colleagues provided was important. As one of two of the participants in this study, who also had the opportunity to teach courses at the institution, and the only one to work in both academic and student affairs divisions as

BSU, she provided some additional insight into the need that some students would face. Additionally, as the only African-American professional participant, she spoke directly about the needs of many Black students and the challenges that they may face finding the support and mentoring within their academic colleges.

...this generation of students... They don't know how to advocate for themselves.... you know, unless they were actively looking for someone who's going to give them that support, I don't know that they would find it. I feel like they would just go through their day doing the best that they can unless they stumbled across someone who they felt could support them the way that they needed to be supported. Or they, you know, they just wouldn't find that person. They're...in other departments, faculty and staff know who...those people are. I think that they know that. That's why they tell students, ok, in the same department, ok, you need to go see and so, cause they know that person is going to be willing to help the student. To take the time to maybe ask some questions, as opposed to just, you know, brushing them off and so I think that the faculty and staff recognize who those people are. I just...I don't know how to articulate that. Sometimes I think that if a student doesn't come across the right person, that with the hustle and bustle of the day and what those professors are doing in their college, researching, writing, you know. ...and some of them are adjunct so they're only here for, you know, [a] two hour window and then they're gone. I don't know that they are, that there's this super conscious effort to say hey I'm the professor you need to talk to. But also, once you identify yourself as that person you may be bombarded... [And] If a student of color is over there and let's just say there is a faculty member who does not look like them that is very supportive of students...um...how does that student know to get connected with that particular faculty member? I'm just...I'm challenged to think with how that student would know that that's the professor to see unless between him and that professor there is someone who directs them to that person.

Because of her various roles on campus, Taron was able to identify some of the challenges that Black students would face from her own accounts. It was an experience that Nicole spoke of directly, as she recalled feelings of isolation and lack of support within her own academic department. Furthermore, Taron understood her role, and the roles of colleagues within the student affairs division as one to fill that void when able, but also to serve as a resource to students who may have faculty in their respective colleges, who could serve in such a role. Taron acknowledged that those members of the

faculty do exist, however she spoke of her ability to engage students through the introductory course that she taught in a way that allowed her to develop supportive and developmental relationships with students outside of the classroom. She summarized the ability to engage and develop students by adding with absolute assuredness,

... I am so student oriented—it's easy for us [student affairs professionals] to have our finger on the pulse of the students. Because you know, we're in proximity, they have access to us. And it is this access and orientation that facilitates practitioner's ability to work with students in the manner which they often do.

While all of the practitioner participants expressed being strong proponents and practitioners of the individualized method of engagement, several concerns and challenges around this form of engagement were identified. As Taron stated, students may have challenges identifying faculty members in their respective disciplines who look like them. However, she went on to say that, those faculty member who do take on that role, are often overwhelmed and inundated with students who seek them out in order to acquire a supportive adult, within the university environment. John supported Taron's statement in his narrative expressing the challenges Black students face in identifying administrators to serve as advisers to student organizations for predominantly Black student organizations:

... unless they're in the Nubian Message – the African-American newspaper, we're not seeing African-American students engaging. There could be a whole variety of reasons for that. We have some but proportionately not at the level that we would like to see. Within the student organizations – the more broad 600-plus, we do see African-American students engaging. But a lot of times, they're engaging in specifically African-American organizations: So I think there's pockets where we see good representation. And there's pockets where we see not nearly enough as what we'd like to see. On our campus right now, student organizations aren't required to have an advisor. That's one of the things we're looking at. I've just now assumed the responsibilities for the student orgs. And



frankly, it's one of those things that I think needs to happen. I think we need to have – for the reason we're talking about – making sure more students have more access to a greater number of faculty and staff, right.

The ways that students engage, or connect with practitioners is often called student involvement. Although this may be a challenge for Black students at predominantly White institutions, much like BSU, it was clear that once students were able to make connections with practitioners, they were often able to develop individualized, or one-on-one mentoring relationships that allowed them to grow and develop in ways that were both intentional and personal. Keeling and Hersh (2011) stated, “It is not possible to learn the content of a discipline without at the same time exploring the connections between and implications of that content for one's person history, values, and experiences. A developmental view of purposes, processes, and desired outcomes of learning recognizes and celebrates his inherent integration of learning about the self and learning about the world.” (p. #). This statement summarizes both the work of student affairs professionals as expressed by many of the historical and contemporary documents established to guide the field, but also represents the approach to the work of many of the student affairs participants in this study. It is also in that ability to make “connections between” those experiences and aspects of their identity that were most salient to them, that the students found the most value.

This philosophy certainly is not a new idea, but here I identified the ways that these concepts are operationalized. In much of the existing research on student success, findings suggest that one of the common practices is to provide a supportive campus environment, which includes the ability to support students with “nonacademic responsibilities,” “socially” and assist in providing “good relationships between students” among their peers, with faculty, as well as administrative staff (Kuh et al., 2005). However, while literature provides what specific actions faculty should take, such

as “talking about career plans” and “working with faculty” on nonacademic campus committees, for example, there is much less in the literature which describes how those in administrative roles, particular student affairs professionals, facilitate such student development and support in order to provide such an inclusive environment.

The student participants, as well as practitioners, all spoke about their intentionality associated with maintaining contact with the other in order to support them developmentally. Furthermore, contact with student groups facilitated the ability to work with students on a one-on-one basis. While literature explicitly states that faculty engaging students in out-of-class experiences are highly beneficial in student success, this study found that student affairs practitioners have similar effects on students as well.

### **Institutional Inclusive Learning**

Both Beverly and Jay were able to speak about the ways their academic and campus involvement influenced them in ways that made them better students, and aided in their academic success. In some situations this discussion became somewhat challenging for participants as they failed in their ability to make distinctions between what they learned in classes and what they learned through various experiences outside of the classroom. Additionally, in when asked to provide examples of the skills they have developed in order to be academically successful, the students often provided examples of what was taught to them theoretically, but actually applied experientially through student engagement and with, in some cases, the student affairs professionals’ support. Beverly connected her class experiences and career aspirations with her involvement in her campus organizations, saying:

[I want]...to be a market research analyst at a company; I’m starting to look into more science-based companies now because I realize that every company has a communications department that deals with some type of marketing effort. And I think before I was a little bit narrow minded but now I know that every company has a communication’s department that deals with marketing and research and

things of that nature. And I don't necessarily have to be in marketing... I believe that's marketing within itself and word of mouth. Like that's the whole difference these days. We have the social media to promote. But I'm more of a word of mouth type of person because you don't know who's looking at those so I want to make sure that I get it out to you. So that's one... just by networking and knowing someone within the inside.

Jay also said:

I took an entrepreneurial course... She [the professor] would stress in her course all the time about making time for yourself, knowing yourself. That's how you're going to be a successful entrepreneur or anything in general as far as having better leadership qualities to become an efficient person. I took a lot of the things and learned.[the professor] gave a lot of tips about communication [and] why people are misunderstood and how to fix relationships and work on anything in general, interpersonal relationships in general. I started applying a lot of what I learned in those two classes that I took last semester. I applied it to myself to try to pretty much [develop] better time management, understanding myself... just taking it all in.

Both Beverly and Jay were successful in taking course content and applying it to their lives. The ability to practice and employ skills and behaviors learned in classes through organizations and leadership roles have increased the sense of competency in students. Being given the opportunity to practice those skills outside of the classroom both affirmed the theoretical concepts they were presented, and also diminished some of the associated stress that would come as a result of failing to master those skills effectively.

Chickering and Gasmon (1987) described seven methods of supporting and facilitating student success, including “adult contact, cooperation amongst students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, respect for diversity of talents and learning style”. Through the narrative of participants, both students and professional practitioners, five of the seven were identified as salient to their experience. In the description of their learning experience, both Beverly and Jay provided an understanding of how they experienced the learning environment, which was one that

was seamless, and holistic in their ability to practice and apply theoretical concepts in spaces that did not impact their academic success, however, also provided valuable opportunities to master skills that supported and enhanced further learning. The student affairs practitioners in the study believed the partnerships established between their division and academic affairs were extremely critical in the institution's ability to provide a holistic, or inclusive learning environment. In their narratives, they provided several ways in which these partnerships have occurred, what they saw their role being as it related to faculty, and also how such a culture was established.

Of the seven professional participants of this study, five were able to provide ways in which they partnered with faculty in order to facilitate student learning outside of the classroom. Two of the seven, stated that they served as faculty as well as their student affairs role, which facilitated their ability to engage their academic colleagues in ways that some others in the division were not. Collectively, all of the professional participants were able to express numerous ways to facilitate partnerships for student learning, with the exception of one. That one area, however, presented yet another area of opportunity for student development and learning that has yet to be fully explored.

One of the most consistent areas of collaborative education at BSU was through the various service learning opportunities, as well as their national and global study activities. John spoke of the ability to partner with faculty on each of the institutions service learning opportunities, and even how faculty had begun to reach out to his office in order to both participate and filter students to the program. John spoke about one aspect of their service learning program, that being the alternative spring break, where faculty serve as advisers. He found that in areas such as his, that his department and faculty are "integrated" and helping with programming and able to share an awareness "of issues that students may have." Cleveland noted that the work done through John's

office was one of the greatest opportunities for collaboration, and facilitating the holistic learning environment. Cleveland shared:

I would say the majority of the University employees that are involved in that are staff. But that's mostly because – let me explain that a little bit. When you're talking about things like alternative spring break trips through [student leadership], there are staff teams that lead that. So those are my colleagues in DASA. Some of those could be faculty. Faculty aren't prohibited from doing that. But historically, that seems to be more staff oriented. If you are looking at things like study abroad, which is not in our division, but it's a program that we have a lot of contact with... Then there are a whole host of these other programs – like Leadershape - it is a leadership development program that just occurred last week that's sponsored out of CSLEPS... one of the therapists in the counseling center and myself do a significant chunk of the training for this study abroad faculty, managing crisis in country and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, we have a lot of staff that are really involved and committed to not just an activity, but learning outcomes, educationally defined outcomes associated with those activities.

Perhaps less known, but expressed as equally significant, were the national immersion trips coordinated by Peggy's office. Peggy best described the partnership and experience for all of those involved with these trips:

We've gone to New Orleans; we've gone to the Cherokee reservation in western North Carolina, to Atlanta, to DC a number of times, to New York and to Boston. I think those are the biggies.... We have - the RDs, the resident directors spearhead this under the guidance of the assistant directors and the associate directors, but they have - after they choose the people to go on the trip there's a pre-trip experience where students either read something or get together to talk about what they want to get out of it, they understand what the itinerary is going to be, etc. and then they go on the trip. Every trip it's been our fortune to have every trip have a faculty or student affairs, another professional go with us. And on every trip at the end of every day or if they go to plays then it's the next morning, but they have a processing, a revisiting of what they learned, sometimes journaling first and then most of the time discussion, and most of the time our non-housing person leads that. And it has been remarkably successful. and what they have written about their experiences after the trip, or if they have journals that they're willing to share that my associate directors when they write their monthly report will include what students learned from the trip, and it's eye opening. A lot of these kids have not been out of [this state]. A lot of them, not

being out of [state], have never flown on a plane... It's just remarkable what they're coming back with saying that they have learned. And that I think is just very, very special.

Peggy and John were able to partner in ways that provided models of experiential learning, and developed students in their self-expression and interpersonal, as well as aspects of their self-perception and realms of emotional intelligence. Cleveland and Rayne presented how they were able to address other areas of self-perception as well as students' decision-making and stress management realms. Both expressed the numerous invitations that they received from faculty to engage students within the classroom, in order to allow them to provide information about support for, and expectations of, those within the BSU community. Additionally, both explained their role in supporting faculty through providing advice from their respective areas, they both were able to describe various other ways which their areas were able to partner with faculty. Rayne stated:

...faculty do call and they ask questions. And they - we consult with them regarding different situations. For example, if a faculty member as a student that wrote about rape in a paper they may call us. Or, if they have a student that they have concerns, might have been under the influence in class and what do they do. Or another student said that this student posted that they didn't want to live anymore on Facebook. That's the kind of calls that we get. And we get faculty calls at least weekly...

Cleveland also described ways he had been able to effectively partner with faculty in order to support student development and emotional intelligence:

...there have been—specifically men—African-American men that I have worked with. I can think about five or six guys all in one year were all connected with one set of problems around some drugs and a bunch of young guys sort of the thug life kinda attitudes. Everybody thought they were real players came from an environment where that had real value for their survival and self-esteem. Not one of them came from an intact family. Not one of them could say that there wasn't some other collateral problem – alcohol, drugs, incarceration – somewhere in their family, if not in their immediate family, in aunts, uncles or

other adults who could positively influence their lives – but really kind of a mixed message there. The kinds of things – using those guys as a case study, there are a couple things we tried to do. Dr. Allen [name changed for anonymity], an African-American woman... is a psychologist, but really more sort of research-based. [She has] became a resource for me. On a regular basis when I had black students where I had some sense that “This guy is lost. He’s gotten a message that is destructive at some point in his life, or he’s gotten no message. Nobody gives a damn in this kid’s life.” She has been a resource for me to say “I want you to go and sit down and talk to her. You’re not in trouble here for this part. This isn’t a penalty. I want to go sit down and talk to this colleague of mine, and let’s just see where that goes.” That has been one strategy that we have used... We have African American therapists on our counseling center staff and have for the 23 years I’ve been here. We started a group called Afrocentric [name changed for anonymity]. Afrocentric was a very holistic approach to identity and growth development that encapsulated academic counseling, working on group affiliation and dynamics, individualized therapy, and exercise. I probably referred 20 guys over the first half a dozen years through the program. It was a pretty intense program – a significant time commitment, heavy intellectual expectations. There was reading, and some of it was culturally based pieces. Some of it was cultural history based pieces. It grew into a situation for each of those men that persisted Like any therapy group, or T group - what happens is when the group spends enough time together, they begin to confront each other, like “Oh, that’s bullshit. You’ve been with us for three months, and you are still saying that same stupid stuff – you’re making excuses. Get off the dime and get something done.”

The ability to serve as a resource for faculty, and facilitate ways for them to practically implement their research, had also facilitated collaborative working relationships that provided additional support and development for students. Numerous accounts were provided by student affairs practitioners, who presented themselves as both partners with faculty in student learning, as well as in service to them, in ways that aided in the overall development of the general student population. Furthermore, it was those partnerships that developed relationships for further collaboration in the establishment of an experienced holistic learning environment for students. These findings were consistent with findings related to best practices in student success for students in general (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010), however they also prove to be

beneficial specifically for underprepared students. In relation to student learning Guarasci (2002) stated, “If we seek active and collaborative learning classrooms, then we need administrative pedagogies that accentuate the same values” (p. 109). He went on to suggest that in order to achieve a learning centered community, that there must exist an “interdisciplinary” approach to student learning. A sentiment that John shared as he stated:

...sometimes we hinder ourselves with the org charts. And we use that as an excuse as to why we can't do this or that. I say the student's always in front. If that's in our site, then we make decisions on what's best for the student and not on what organization structure says we should do.

This is even more critical for underprepared African American students who find value in their ability to practice or implement skills in various settings, which among other things, supports them in the development of a number of realms of emotional intelligence.

### **Setting Expectations for Students**

In *Student Success in College*, Kuh et al. (2005) posit that when, “Faculty and staff demonstrate their commitment to student success by holding students accountable while also offering encouragement and support” (p. 182), it facilitates an environment for academic achievement. While much of the focus is associated with roles traditionally attributed to faculty, there exist two explicitly stated functions, which have also been identified as roles salient to the student affairs administrator. Several institutions that have evidence of student success establish a culture of achievement by communicating high expectations for their students from the beginning of their matriculation. Additionally, these institutions place an emphasis on supporting students who are “...in academic trouble...[or desiring additional] enhancement of their [academic] skills” (Kuh et al, 2005, p. 192). The students and student affairs professionals in this study found



these practices to be significant and salient, respectively to their experience and responsibility in the field.

At the basis of much of the professional participants' work, was this central idea of student development for greater student success, which in part was expressed through the expressed expectations of student achievement through both formal and informal means of student engagement. Keeling and Hersh (2011) stated that it is

...not possible to learn the content of a discipline without at the same time exploring the connections between and implications of that content for one's personal history, values, and experiences. A developmental view of the purposes, processes, and desired outcomes of learning recognizes and celebrates this inherent integration of learning about the self and learning about the world. (p. 42)

Again, the student participants, as well as the practitioners found significance in their ability to engage each other in meaningful ways in order to aid learners in their ability to make relevant connections between their academic course work, their lived experience, and their ultimate success as individuals and scholars.

There were two formal ways that practitioners expressed as means of engaging students, and challenging them in ways that implicitly communicated an expectation of high achievement. Some students, such as Nicole, may have experienced feelings of inadequacy as a result of their placement in developmental courses. In cases such as these, it may be even more beneficial to the student if they receive additional encouragement in order for them to excel, and lessen the impact of such a classification. Cleveland often worked with students, who had violated some aspect of the academic code of conduct, and also worked with students in order to help them to develop an academic recovery plan. He used his time to communicate high expectations for

individual students during this time. John also spoke about how he used the academic recovery plan for student leaders, saying:

...it may be that they're not achieving academically once they get here because of choices that they've made. What we've done in those cases is we created a student leadership regulation. It was over a series of years. We tried to work with the student leadership to help them set standards for themselves – so students setting standards for other students about the appropriate balance between academic and co-curricular.

And consistently over time, they weren't in a place to set those standards for themselves. They always fell back on well, we don't wanna be exclusive. And we would say neither do we. But a 1.4 does not graduate you from Big State University. Or a 1.9 does not graduate you from Big State University... So several administrators and myself – you'll be meeting with Cleveland... We created a regulation that tried to base launch some standards for student leaders. These are the students that are elected and/or appointed.

So a couple things: (1) Students have to maintain a 2.5 minimum GPA to be in those elected and/or appointed positions. If they fall below that 2.5, then they have the ability to meet with their organizational advisor and put together a recovery plan. If they fall below for a second semester, then they have to step away from the position. There's the opportunity for the advisor to assess those individual situations. For example, we have a student right now. His cum up to this semester had always been about a 3.0. He had a really bad semester below a 2.5. Now his cum is at, I think, a 2.6. He still meets the 2.5 cum. He clearly doesn't meet the semester requirement of 2.5. But we're talking with him; trying to help him assess what happened. What are the support systems he needs to take advantage of? And how do we ensure that it doesn't happen again? So he can be put on a plan. We have another student who knew that he was having some problems. So we met with him. And he's meeting with his academic advisor and his faculty... his faculty are filling out interim reports about his performance and sending those ... she can help him monitor his success and see where there might be potential traps. So we do some of that proactively. We do some of that reactively depending on where we're at with the students.

As previously discussed, Taron maintained the opportunity to engage students through the course that she instructed to connect with students, however through all of her various roles within the institution, she also provided a number of examples in her

ability to motivate students to engage in ways that they had not considered for their own intellectual and psychosocial development. She recounted a discussion with one of her students:

...I had been encouraging her, you need to do Study Abroad, you need to do it sooner than later cause sometimes those experiences really are eye opening for students and they really can kind of get some certainty about, oh this...or passion about what they really want to do. And so I was telling her, you need to go study abroad, and so she was like Ms. Taron, I'm so glad I went because there were like students there that didn't look like, and she said to me, I know I would not have talked to them, if I had met them on campus, or any other environment. Cause she said, I already think the white students that come here, are privileged and they got everything handed to them, and she said, when she was on her excursion, on her study abroad, she said that she found out that two of students, two of the girls, had it worse than she did growing up. And so she was like, I'm glad that I had that because I never would have talked to those white girls outside of that environment. I would have paid them no mind in class...it just would not have happened. And so, I think, I would like to think, that we kind of helped that... having a dialogue and asking questions, and that certainly opens up the opportunity for people to share and for people to be receptive that people come from difference lenses.

Although Taron talked about how she continued to encourage the student to participate in study abroad, in doing so she also communicated high expectations for this student. The student had not given any prior consideration to participating in study abroad, or opportunities such as this, however the influence of the student affairs professional introduced her to the possibility of something new. In communicating her high expectations for this student, she was able to influence the student to engage in an opportunity, which is identified as a high impact experience, but also would help to broaden her understanding of other students who she might not have experienced otherwise.

Communicating high expectations to students, and motivating them to engage opportunities that they had not considered themselves are both identified as behaviors

that support student persistence (Tinto, 2012). For students whose institutions have classified them as academically underprepared, they will likely benefit from such involvement. Student affairs practitioners are able to support students through exposure to challenging opportunities within the institution, as well as those external opportunities, much like their faculty partners across campus. Likewise, through their individualized engagement with students they are also able to express their expectations of students as scholars. Beverly was both motivated by practitioners, and understood the opportunities that they provided as a way of expressing their expectations for her, which she confessed she always strived to achieve.

### **Senior Leadership**

BSU was one of few institutions in the country that functioned under a less traditional model of student affairs. Although the professional participants in this study were from departments typically apart of a traditional division model, they all spoke about the recent changes in their division, and how it influenced their work. At the time of the interviews, it had only been about a year since the institution merged the student affairs division with those of academic support services. New leadership was also brought in to provide leadership for the newly formed division, and practitioner participants spoke at length about how they understood their roles within the new structure, and their hopefulness about the direction of the institution in particular as it related to student learning and university retention.

Although the students made no distinction between the various levels of administration, and as a result, did not provide anything significant with regard to the role of senior level administrators; practitioner participants described this aspect of the institution critical in their ability to engage students in meaningful ways, and thus made this subject critical to explore. As previously discussed, the ability to engage students in

meaningful ways, in particular as it relates to their academic achievement; the ability to partner and/or collaborate with faculty colleagues is necessary in order to facilitate a holistic learning environment. And while all of the practitioner participants expressed that they always understood their role as one that supported the learning mission of the institution, they credited the ability to explore and employ collaborative relationships in new and significant ways to the new structure and leadership.

For many of the practitioner participants, the ability to collaborate with faculty on the intellectual development of students was less challenging, even prior to the institutional change in structure and leadership, however as one might assume, that was not the norm throughout the division. As an example, Peggy highlighted the ways that her office had been able to collaborate with faculty in the development of residential colleges, and additionally served as a part of the university's Quality Enhancement Program. She identified herself as an "external... voice of the learning that happens..." outside of the classroom on that committee. It certainly had helped that residential colleges were an area that faculty also have great developed interest in, regardless of the institutional structure. However, while Peggy and several others within the former division structure had been successful in fully integrating student learning and development within their departments, Robert shared a perspective that presented the existing challenges and expressed some hope as the institutional structure continued to develop. Robert shared:

It's rare that you have a department that can actually put together a reasonable objective in each area [of the institutions strategic plan]...so as long as long as the thinking is, we all contributed in our own unique way and collectively we get this institutional strategic plan, then I think we'll be off to a good start. But I think we're still very much in the – we're all together in the room now and I think we all know each other's names, but we really haven't figured out what our...what's our next big plan...what's our next big thing... I think we are

headed there. There's a lot in our university strategic plan about...and they are buzz words...but student engagement and involvement, and the phrase 'high-impact experiences' kept coming up. So, I would like to see us more clearly and more broadly define what fits into that. So, yes, I'm sure a study abroad or an alternative service break trip is absolutely a high impact experience. I think some of the things we do with our students are high impact as well.

Kezar (2002) conducted a national study of various higher education institutional types to understand the landscape of institutional collaboration, as well as its best practices and its challenges. As presented by Peggy and Robert, institutions that presented "moderately or very successful collaborations" (Kezar, 2002, p. 41), those collaborations were only identified within specific departments within the student affairs division. While neither Peggy's nor Robert's areas were represented in Kezar's study (her research found that the most common areas for faculty-student affairs collaboration occurred in "counseling, first-year experience, orientation [and] recruitment" p. 42), Kezar noted that collaborations such as those can facilitate the development of others across the institution. In summary, Kezar identified two principles for successful collaborations between faculty and student affairs practitioners, which were also identified by professional participants in this study such as "structural strategies" (Kezar, 2002, p. 50) as the one that had already occurred at BSU, and the development of "senior administrative support" (Kezar, 2002, p. 49) as further expressed by BSU participants.

One of the common assumptions expressed by several of the student affairs practitioners was the idea that their faculty colleagues had little understanding of their role. Regardless of their previous experience with faculty at BSU, many of the student affairs participants credited their new leadership for illuminating their roles within the university community, and for facilitating the opportunity to collaborate in ways that truly established a holistic learning environment.

...when staff, faculty, are willing to kind of cross that bridge or if the deans have the expectation that they're going to partner and cross that bridge then it happen... (Our senior leadership) was doing his presentation... and one of the things that he put in his presentation and even said this, he said, "you know I was a little hesitant about putting this in here but the counseling center to date had over seventeen thousand contacts with students so far this year and that's a department that we have to support." Now, he was hesitant to put that in there because of the old stigma related to mental health and holy cow what's wrong with us that we have all these students that need this kind of help, and what kind of message does that send? And will that impact enrollment and admissions and all of that crap that keeps students from getting help. But he made the decision to support us and put it in there for when he's presenting to the deans and the provost, and the chancellor. That's huge-HUGE- because the counseling center is never mentioned in those kinds of discussions. It's just "fix it." Just don't let anybody die and "just fix it." But it's done in a very hush-hush manner. It's not hush-hush anymore... So we are going to spend time in helping them be successful. I think one of the things that we do really, really well is not thinking that we can do it all or have all the answers, and helping them plug in other campus partners. for example, if somebody comes in on our triage and they have a litany of things happening, yes, we're going to set them up with a counselor but we're also going to give them a referral to disability support if they need that, or make sure that they have the tutoring information if they're an international student are they connected with that student organization.

Many of the professional practitioners understood their role to be central to the mission of higher education in general, which was grounded in student learning, even prior to the new structure of the institution. However, most agreed that the addition of having someone in leadership, who was able to identify and express on a broad institutional level, the work of practitioners on their campus, both presented and illuminated their work in ways that allowed greater collaboration for student learning and student success. John agreed that senior leadership was important in supporting student learning and creating a holistic environment, as he stated that he believed that senior administrators established the environment for a culture of collaboration. As a career administrator, he also supported the idea of changing organizational structures; as

such action can enhance the collegiate experience for students. He summarized the perspective of the student affairs practitioners best when he stated:

...at the end of the day, it's right around the work they (faculty members) do with students. Sometimes at Big State, it can be well, my focus is – I'm a researcher. I'm an extension. My job is to do extension. And those that work with students say our job is to do everything that connects back to the student experience. And we're all right! That's the challenge. The complexity of the institution does mucky the water a little bit about whose job it is; how do we do it and all that kinda thing. ...we've all said we need to develop systems that work across organizational structure 'cause a structure should help you. But if it starts to hinder you, then you have to work in other ways. At the end of the day, the student doesn't care where MSA (Multicultural Student Affairs) is housed. It means nothing to them. What means something to them is they have access to mentors, access to resource, access to opportunities. And for us as professionals, we've gotta work across those administrative lines to make that happen.

### **Discussion**

BSU presented several practices and strengths that are supported in student success literature. As one of few institutions that had intentionally combined academic support and student affairs practitioners in an effort to create a holistic learning environment, the benefits of such organization became clear in particular at an institution this size. The ability of student affairs professionals to work collaboratively with colleagues responsible for the academic success of students facilitated the ability to address the many and diverse issues affecting learners. Typically, the way that postsecondary institutions tend to educate professionals for the field, and the way professionals function within them, perpetuates the siloed functioning of areas. The problem with such a practice is however that the lived experience of students in general, and academically underprepared students specifically, is experienced simultaneously. Historically, when the needs of underprepared students are explored, they are purely from an academic perspective, and seemingly separate discussions are facilitated in



reverence to the required support and skills that might need to be developed, in literature and in practice. In even some of the most informative work around student success, very little explores precisely what those functions are that support student learning, in particular in relation to administrative staff. I found many of those practices at BSU.

Kuh et al. (2005), in *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, present the practices of 20 institutions that participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement, and participated in “higher-than-predicted student engagement” and “higher-than-predicted- six year graduation rates” (p. 355). From this study, they identified numerous practices that institutions should practice, in order to support all students. While there was no particular claim made in reference to students who are characterized as academically underprepared, the findings of the current study support that such an environment is important for this student population, as student participants who were involved and engaged on campus clearly spoke about their ability to “think about and apply what they are learning in different settings” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 193) as a means of developing in their self-perception, expression, interpersonal, decision-making, and stress management, all of which represent the five realms of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, many of the student affairs professionals also spoke in terms of providing experiences that supported and developed students in these areas, and spoke purposefully and intentionally about their role in this regard. It was almost common for professionals to reference the institution’s mission as it related to student learning, retention, and persistence in their narratives, and using the institution’s strategic plan as a guide for their work in their respective offices. Despite BSU’s success in their apparent ability to systemically create a culture for student success, even as expressed by the students who were actively involved on campus, there was a narrative around Black

students in general, that should be presented as it may provide some greater context for supporting this subgroup within the larger student population.

The racial identity of the student participants was very salient to how they identified, yet it was discussed in very different ways by each of the students. All three students reported participating in the new student orientation at the beginning of their matriculation at BSU. Each of the students stated that they found significant value in that experience, but for very different reasons, they credited that experience for their respective academic successes in different ways. Jasmine, who maintained her connection with that orientation experience even as a junior, credited that orientation and ongoing involvement with an enhanced sense of cultural identity, which she described as a source of motivation for her academic achievement. In her narrative, Jasmine described the historical information about ancient African scholars as something that she understood to be indicative of her own academic abilities. Jay, however, described himself as the counter-narrative of the ways that Black men are typically characterized. While he admittedly self-identified as Black man, he was very clear to differentiate himself from the stereotypes that were often attributed to him. He spoke about his engagement as ways that prove himself different from the stereotypical norm, and a source of motivation for his academic and cocurricular achievements. Nicole, the student who was struggling the most, both socially and academically within the university community, reported the orientation experience as the only initial tie she had to other African-American students, as she perceived her academic college and their respective orientation to be both culturally and socioeconomically alienating. When she was able to speak of other students who influenced her, they were all other Black students from other institutions who she met and engaged through a church that she found in the community. While the department (not housed within the student affairs division)

reportedly had provided a significant central experience for Black students at the onset of their matriculation, there may be an existing gap in the ongoing support of students in a way that is significant to their development with self-perception, expression, and interpersonal realms.

Student affairs administrators also expressed some concern in this area as well. Many practitioner participants (all of whom self-identified as White with the exception of one) spoke about the need to partner and collaborate with Black faculty and the use of African American colleagues in the support of like students. Some of those partnerships, for example that of Cleveland and several Black faculty members, were ongoing and presented to be highly effective with many Black male students at BSU. Several other examples were provided by others, however the challenge or inability to meet the needs of many students who self-identify as Black, was a reoccurring theme. Although the number of student participants prohibited one from making generalized assertions about the Black student population, through these students, I was able to understand the ways that their self-awareness and self-regard increased their self-actualization. With Jasmine and Jay, despite the diverse ways they contextualized their racial identity, they both used their racial identity as a tool to motivate their academic achievement. Sadly, with Nicole, I found the opposite. As a sophomore at the institution at the time of the interview, she showed very little growth in her own understanding of her potential and her abilities, and presented a low level of emotional intelligence in each of the realms. Nicole reported having the highest GPA and SAT scores of all of the student participants at BSU, however she was obviously struggling the most within the environment. And although her grades had not suffered greatly at the time of the interview, she shared that she changed her career aspirations based on her perceived ability. Her diminished sense of academic skill had only developed upon entering BSU. Finding few opportunities to

become engaged and involved in the university community, prohibited her having any meaningful participation that would allow her to demonstrate her competence; she had not identified anyone who could provide unconditional positive regard or support, and she did not possess anyone to encourage her and provide resources for her to succeed, which Thomsen (2002) posits as some of the conditions that exist in academically resilient environments. While Nicole's situation may be anecdotal, it provided an example of what can happen to academically underprepared Black students at BSU, when students are not able to connect with professionals outside of the classroom, such as student affairs professionals, who are the focus of this study.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It will always be challenging for institutions such as BSU, to ensure that it will meet the needs of every student within the university community, however, administrators should be mindful about missing those students, who might be seen as the most culturally and ethnically marginalized as well as academically vulnerable. In this case, I found a stark difference of experience between Jasmine and Jay, and that of Nicole. Regarding the first two students mentioned, I found that through their ability to become involved it created an environment consistent with an academically resilient milieu, and facilitated the development of emotional intelligence. Nicole, although academically successful, displayed a regression in her emotional intelligence. And although it will not likely influence her in her ability to persist, her experience had diminished her positive self-regard, self-actualization, and decision making, to name a few areas of development that can directly influence a student's cognitive development. The ability to identify students who may possibly get lost in the magnitude of the institution is likely something that can only be addressed through of form of personal engagement with student affairs professionals, which was not always evident at BSU.

It is a significant accomplishment that an institution the size of BSU can create and build a culture of collaboration between academic and student affairs professionals in meaningful ways. While the majority of the students could not specifically identify student affairs professionals who directly influenced their ability to be academically successful (there were some exceptions) those who were involved on campus were certainly able to make connections between what they learned in and out of class, and were also able to communicate the ways that those out of class experiences helped them become better scholars. Jasmine, as the most senior level student, and the most involved, she was able to make these connections with more ease than Jay, as though she had perhaps had the ability to think through some of these intellectual benefits more than him. While it is almost common practice in the field of student affairs to have established learning outcomes for both in-class and out of class experiences, it is less often that student affairs administrators share those expected outcomes with students. In sharing and discussing those outcomes with students, it might better facilitate students to recognize their own collaborative learning wherever it occurs throughout the university community. Additionally, as it related to student leaders such as Jay, who expressed modeling behaviors of other student leaders who he identified as successful students, it would allow those experience tiered supports to communicate those outcomes and their academic and psychosocial benefits in meaningful ways.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

#### **Identifying Challenges Prior to them Manifesting**

There were several practices that were consistent among practitioners regardless of their institutional type. While all of the student participants who were engaged within the university community, found significant support in many of the professionals they encountered, the ways that student affairs professionals engaged them was not as

intentionally based on their level of preparedness for academic work. Most practitioners in the study disclosed that they did not have access to students' academic record, and those few who reported having such information, admitted not accessing information unless the student was reported for being engaged in some challenging and/or inappropriate social or academic behavior.

While some practitioners in the field disagree with the practice of identifying or publicizing particular student subgroups broadly, or choose whom should have access to a student's academic record because of their interpretation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), it then becomes even more important for certain institutional practices be set in place, to ensure that the most vulnerable student scholars have adequate support. Additionally, across the total student participants in this study, I found the diversity of students' attitudes about being classified as academically underprepared, was somewhat different, as some found the designation as an indication of their academic background, that they did not believe to limit them, but rather motivate them to achieve. Others considered the designation a function of systemic racism, noting test bias in standardized testing and the socioeconomic standing of the communities in which they were educated, while others perceived their placement as simply an opportunity to enhance their skills and abilities. While all of the students did not see the placement as negative, the educational background of many of these student suggests the limited use of such a classification as underprepared. Regardless of the exact or numerous reasons for failing to identify underprepared students and their specific needs, this study found that these students believed there to be developmental and supportive value in their active involvement in organizations and engagement with student affairs practitioners regardless of the institutional type. However, because practitioners may have no way of identifying underprepared students who would benefit from such

involvement and engagement, it should be a common practice for institutions to encourage this behavior in all students.

In addition to informing students of the potential benefits of involvement and engagement for academically underprepared students, it is also critical for faculty to understand the ways that involvement and engagement can support student learning. Often the narrative around cocurricular involvement is presented as one that is counter to that of student learning, however when faculty and student affairs administrators work collaboratively, students are best able to experience the university community as a seamless learning environment. Additionally, as both faculty and student affairs administrators often share the concern about students' over-commitment to their cocurricular lives, which can negatively influence their academic performance, by working collaboratively, and supporting student affairs administrators in the establishment of policies that help identify, support, and redirect students who are not performing in classes should be collaborative and ongoing.

Neither of the institutions in this study presented a proactive way of identifying or establishing specific ways of ensuring that the academically underprepared students at their institution, regardless of their race and/or ethnicity were identified, prior to exhibiting some problematic behavior, academic or otherwise. Sadly, this is common among many institutions of higher education. It is somewhat easy to find institutional, systemic, and national data on the level of student preparedness by race/ethnicity, and it is commonplace to find data presenting the graduation gap on all levels by race/ethnicity. Likewise, there exist data about the rate of success or failure of students required to take developmental courses, however there is a modicum of such data related to the level of psychosocial support provided to students. In a joint statement by several research centers and commissions, seven core principles were presented as a means of

“transforming remedial education” in order to facilitate greater success of students assigned to those courses (Charles A. Dana Canter, Complete College America, Inc., Education Commission of the States, jobs for the Future, 2012). In discussing some of the shortfalls of higher education remediation, one of the areas of weakness that the report states is its lack of “non-academic supports” that this student population receives. The inability of administrators whose function, at least in part, is to facilitate the development of students, is problematic and serves as a potentially missed opportunity in providing some of the supports that may benefit this student population.

### **Involvement, Engagement, and Student Learning**

It is also important to note that the ways that students engage student affairs practitioners was expressed differently by practitioners on each campus, although those students who were involved and engaged with student affairs professionals, spoke about that engagement similarly. Some student affairs professionals, in particular those at PRU, understood student engagement to be central to their work, regardless of their level and length of time in the field. Practitioners at BSU were somewhat different, and that they directly work with students but it was not their primary focus, although each of them expressed the intentionality of engaging with students. Also, the student affairs professionals understood the goal of student engagement and these interactions somewhat differently, while many of the practitioners in PRU understood their role to be supported in nature while many at BSU understood their role to be both supportive and developmental in nature.

Students are typically connected to student affairs professionals in four ways; they were referred as a result of some challenge or issue, through student involvement in organizations or held various leadership roles, the students are seeking an adult within the community with whom they self-identify, and/or they are seeking help on their own



for both socioemotional, psychosocial, and academic issues. Although the majority of professionals did not have the opportunity to make initial connections with students through classes, many students found their way through these means. This suggests that encouraging students to be involved and engaged outside of the classroom does not simply provide students with an outlet or a way to connect with peers, but also facilitates the ability for students to potentially receive the additional development, which they require in order to be successful students.

Regardless of how practitioners understood their work, and how connections were made with practitioners, students all spoke about their experience with professionals in consistent ways. All of them spoke about the ways that their relationships with student affairs professionals challenged them to try new experiences and take advantage of opportunities outside the classroom, exposed them to new thoughts and ideas, helped them shape their own standards and goals, and helped them to develop an ability to advocate for themselves and others. Many of these skills and behaviors are indicative of someone with a developed sense of emotional intelligence, and are also parallel to many of the ways that literature talks about the ways faculty engage students outside the classroom, and their ability to influence student success.

Students who were juniors and seniors at the time of interviews were better able to make connections between the learning they experienced both inside and outside the classroom, regardless of the institutional type. The sophomore student participants did not readily make connections between their experience and engagement outside of the classroom. Engaging students in reflective discussion by asking them to evaluate their experiences and make connections to the learning environment helped students significantly in making those connections. The greatest difference among those sophomore students, were in those who were engaged with practitioners, who

understood their work as developmental in nature and not solely about the facilitation of activities. Units much like counseling services, and student leadership and involvement on both campuses incorporated reflective activities in their engagement with students, and could account for the differences found in some underclass students.

There are significant differences between each of the institutions, however it appears that the outcomes, at least as experienced by students, were the same. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2010), in the study of DEEP (documenting effective educational practice) institutions, presented five functions of successful postsecondary institutions. These include, the level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interactions with faculty, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment. This study suggests that the influence of student affairs professionals cuts across a number of these areas as defined in that study. In academic and collaborative learning Kuh et al. (2010), stated that using contributing in class discussions, making presentations, collaborating on projects inside and outside of class, and participating in community-based projects serve as some of those objectives and institutional practices. Talking about career plans, and discussing and ideas from readings, helps to create lifelong learners as a result of interaction with faculty members. Enriching educational experiences include talking with diverse student populations, and participating in various professional civic cultural and social activities. And finally, a supportive campus environment which is described generally as helping students succeed academically, cope with nonacademic responsibilities, and support good relationships among the various members of the university community. All of these behaviors, regardless of whom they have been attributed to in previous research, also serve as functions of student affairs practitioners. Moving beyond the dichotomous nature of the higher education structure where one serves as the role of professor, or

simply other, would better support all students, but in particular students who are classified by their respective institutions as academically underprepared.

### **Community, Campus Culture, and Collaboration**

It is understood that for each college and university there exists a campus culture that is specific to that institution. It is one of those aspects of higher education that makes some institutions a better fit for students, faculty, and other professionals alike. Despite those differences, there should exist some salient goals and objectives of any institution of higher education, including a system in which those objectives are achieved; in particular as it relates to student success. All too often however, what is found at many institutions, of varying size, is that those efforts often lack coherence and are dissociated in ways that can provide additional challenges for a student population that already includes some of its most vulnerable learners. The communities, campus culture, as well of the intentionality of collaboration were vastly different at BSU and PRU, even as it related to it systems established to facilitate student success.

The existing structure at the BSU was significantly different from that of PRU, and was also not the norm for higher education institutions in general. Only several months prior to conducting this study BSU realigned those units that were traditionally student affairs with academic support units, all of which reported to one senior level officer. While those from the traditional student affairs units reported some skepticism about the structure of the division prior to the arrival of the new chief officer, at the time of the interview, all were quite pleased with their leadership as well as the way that the new structure allowed them to engage and interact with colleagues that they had not the opportunity to engage and collaborate with in the past. While many of the student affairs professionals reported that they all understood their work to be about student learning both inside and outside of the classroom, overwhelmingly they expressed this structure

as one that brought them into the community of those working directly with students' academic success. Practitioners felt they functioned as a part of the whole, as opposed to serving as an annex to the larger learning environment.

PRU was the complete opposite compared to BSU. Not only did many of the practitioners understand their role as one of service to both students and faculty members within the university community, many of them also expressed the perceived limited understanding that many outside of the division maintained about their work and ability to contribute to the institution's mission of student learning. Faculty still used affairs practitioners in classes as a way of presenting services available to them through those respective areas. They would also refer, or reach out for assistance with students who had got in some academic trouble or were displaying behaviors that were disruptive and problematic. Of all of the professional participants in this study at PRU, only two reported the opportunity to collaborate with faculty in ways that directly supported student learning. And of those two, only one was based on the professional's initially perceived knowledge scale and ability; the other developed as a result of a personal relationship.

The campus community does play a significant role in the ability of students to persist, however equally significant is the ability of faculty and student affairs professionals to collaborate. One of the main sources of collaboration, as well as the perceived positionality of the division, was attributed to the chief officer of the division. At the time of the interview, practitioners at PRU were serving under an interim chief student affairs officer, who had ascended from among their ranks. Many hoped that she would be confirmed in that role in order to maintain the stability and consistency of the division. In a follow-up with professional participants, it was later found that an external candidate had been selected to serve. Not only was this incoming professional from

outside of the institution, he was also coming from outside of the field of student affairs. As a result, some expressed concern about the division being further ostracized from the learning mission of the institution, and their greater association with the business in and service aspects of the university.

When institutions are intentional about creating a campus culture around student development and learning, practitioners also understand their work in this way. Practitioner participants attributed the responsibility for facilitating this kind of environment to senior leadership within the division. One might also attribute the collaborative nature of student learning to the organizational structure of the institution. While there exist numerous postsecondary institutions that have maintained the traditional higher education organizational structure, that also facilitate the collaborative nature of student learning, the organization of BSU was one to give consideration. Several of the practitioners at BSU suggested that the institutional structure should represent how the student experiences the environment, and in that regard could potentially represent the future of the field. Regardless, practitioners' influence and understanding of their role as it relates to student learning is highly indicative of how they are perceived and situated within the university environment and should be given consideration.

As suggested in the work by Joan Hirt (2006), practitioners in some cases described their role as generalist and specialist, as attributed to regional comprehensive and Research I institutions, respectively. However, interestingly enough, some of my findings were somewhat different from hers. For example, Hirt stated that at the beginning of her study practitioners believed the work of practitioners to be primarily the same across the field, which was not the case with my study. Practitioners identified their role or function quite differently from their colleagues at different institutions from

the onset of our discussion. Also, Hirt described regional practitioners as generalists who are focused on the development of students, while the Research I practitioners are typically specialists who see themselves as professionals providing a service to students, and I did not generally find that at either of my sites. The practitioners at the regional institution had limited understanding of the developmental function as it related to their role, and overwhelmingly functioned in a service capacity. While at the Research I institution, the practitioners there saw themselves as being in service to their faculty partners, but were also very much involved and engaged in the development of students. They also came across as specialists who had a broader view and understanding of their role and function, and the ways that their work integrated with others across the division and institution. All of this is a bit of a departure from Hirt's findings. These distinctions may represent some of the limitations that the author stated as a "simplistic expression of highly complex notions" (p. 15). Or, they may serve as a further indication of how the field broadly, and practitioners specifically, continue to advance the practice, in order to best serve their student population.

### **Chapter Summary**

There are some significant differences between institutions beyond their size classification and demographics, which likely influence how practitioners understand their role and responsibility within the university community. There also exists significant diversity between student populations. In her interview, Rayne suggested that there were not any academically underprepared students at BSU, however she commented that the institution where she previously served certainly did have underprepared students, unbeknownst to her the previous institution where she served and she referenced was also the other institution represented in this study. One of the most significant differences, despite those areas previously mentioned, were in the ways

that practitioners understood their work and their position out of the within the larger institution. All of the practitioners believed that they had the ability to support and/or develop student learning in their current roles however, they did not believe that they were in a position to engage students in a meaningful way. The biggest difference between institutions in that regard was as a result of the organizational structure, as well as leadership. The community of scholarship is developed through the culture of collaboration, and both greatly contribute to general student success, and can be of even greater benefit to those students who could benefit from the additional support and the development of skills and behaviors, which enhance the ability of students to persist and achieve academic success.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **INTERPRETATION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter presents a summary and discussion of findings, which will focus on the results, implication for the practice, future research, and recommendations.

Additional limits to the study will also be identified. The purpose of this study was to determine what ways student affairs professionals engage and influence academically underprepared African American students, in order to support their ability to persist and successfully complete matriculation. This study was explored through the frame of emotional intelligence, which allowed me to understand various forms of development through the five identified realms of this model, in particular as it relates to the work of practitioners in the field.

Four research questions guided this study; those questions include, 1) How does the student affairs professional attend to the emotional intelligence (EQ) of underprepared African American students in order to support faculty efforts to develop intellectual capacity?, 2) What do student affairs professionals do to develop academic resilience in students?; 3) Can student affairs practitioners mitigate the graduation gap and support educational attainment by providing ways to support and develop African American students who may require additional assistance in their intellectual development?; and 4) What social, cultural, emotional, and programmatic resources do student affairs practitioners offer to aid in the persistence of underprepared African American students?

#### **Findings**

##### **Research Question One**

How does the student affairs professional attend to the emotional intelligence (EQ) of underprepared African American students in order to support faculty efforts to develop intellectual capacity?



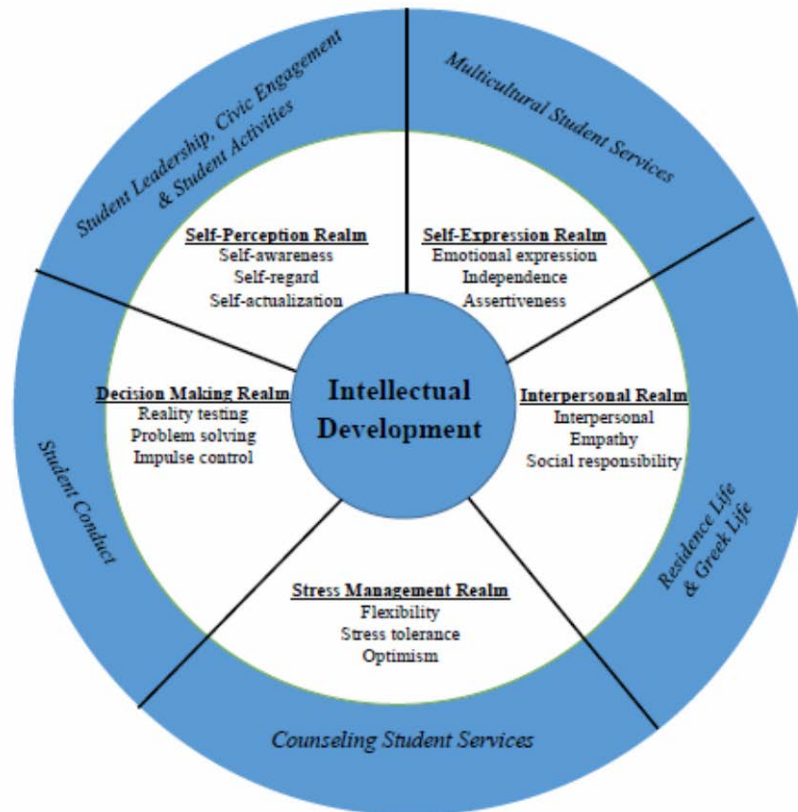
Stein and Book (2011) posited five realms of emotional intelligence, which were developed as a result of earlier work by Reuven Bar-On (year). Those five realms include: self-perception, which is defined by one's self-awareness, self-regard, and their self-actualization; the self-expression realm, identified by an individual's emotional expression, independence, and assertiveness; the interpersonal realm which includes one's interpersonal skills, as well as their empathy for others, and the commitment of one's social responsibility. The final two realms of emotion intelligence as Stein and Book describe them include the decision making and stress management realms, which are defined as a person's capacity to problem solve, control impulses, and engage in reality testing, as well as maintain some sense of flexibility in varying stressful situations, tolerate those stressors and maintain a sense of optimism, respectively.

The analysis of the data presented several ways in which student affairs administrators meet the needs of underprepared African American students. Generally, students and administrators spoke about their experiences and roles in ways that were particularly tied to emotional intelligence. As there were two distinctly different populations as a part of this study, there were a number of ways which these realms could be explored. For example, student participants who experienced direct interaction with student affairs administrators would often describe skills that they acquired or developed through those interactions, such as Jasmine (BSU) who spoke about the her profound growth in the interpersonal realm, as she recounted her ability to speak out in classes which were predominately represented with her White peers, and expressed her feelings about issues associated with race, which she had developed a sense of passion about, and did so in a manner that was controlled, yet advocating for others. Or perhaps Lisa (PRU), who noted her development in the interpersonal realm, as she discussed the ways that she had established a sense of social responsibility which was influencing the

choice of her major and her engagement with student leadership that was increasing her sense of empathy for others that she worked with, as well as those in the community that she was serving. Each of the students, who were actively engaged were able to articulate the emotional intelligence skills that they were developing, and when prompted to reflect on that growth in regard to how those experiences had helped them become stronger students, they were able to do so successfully.

While it was the goal of this study, in part, to understand how student participants experienced the work of practitioners, it was equally important to understand how the work of professionals influenced emotional intelligence in order to develop intellectual capacity. As presented in Figure 1, the role of student affairs practitioners within the division was represented in each of the realms of emotional intelligence. While a minimum of one department within the division was represented in relation to at least one realm of emotional intelligence, it is important to note these departments are representative of the specific realm in part because of the staff working within the respective departments, but also the function of that unit. For example, in the illustration in Figure 1, Multicultural Student Services is associated with the self-expression realm, but student participants and practitioners both expressed the experience and development of those same characteristics or skills in relation to the counseling, and various student leadership positions in residence life, and student leadership.

Theorist such as Salovey and Mayer (1990) who are two of the earliest theorists on emotional intelligence, and those who have developed the utility of emotional intelligence as a tool for professionals in many fields, have posited two primary points which suggest that the role of student affairs administrators is essential for some students. In much of the literature presenting the history of the study of intelligence,



*Figure 1 Model of Student Affairs-EQ Interaction for Intellectual Development*

there exists the consensus that cognitive intelligence (IQ) becomes somewhat stagnant once the age of seventeen is reached (Stein & Book, 2011), and that form of intelligence is one of several identified forms of intelligence – including verbal-propositional intelligence, spatial-performance intelligence, and social intelligence which served as the precursor for what we now know as emotional intelligence or EQ (Mayer & Salovey, 2004). While these theorists and others of EQ, work to present its distinction from cognitive measures, they also present how they relate to one another. One of the primary premises of EQ is that regardless of one’s age, race/ethnicity and/or gender, it can strongly influence one’s ongoing growth and ability to achieve as individuals grow and

develop. Many of the student participants in this study had also stated how development in the realms of emotional intelligence had helped in their ability to become better students. Furthermore, many of the practitioners, even when they were not able to articulate the outcomes of their work in language specific to the EQ model, many of them saw and practiced their work in manners that were consistent with it. Likewise, many of those professionals also understood their work as a function of student learning and the overall success of students at their respective institutions.

### **Research Question Two**

What do student affairs professionals do to develop academic resilience in students?

There is little existing research that explores the relationship between emotional intelligence and those factors that contribute to academic resilience in students, however in this study it was almost impossible to distinguish between the two. On many occasions, in particular from the student participants, it appeared that the five environmental characteristics as posited by Thomsen (2002), served as the predicating aspect required in order to engage students in ways that would allow them to develop in any of the realms of EQ. It is through the establishment of what Thomsen describes as “resiliency in the environment” (p. 85), that students also engage what Morales and Trotman (2004) call “protective factors” (p. 59). The findings from this study suggest that it is within such environments and in the context of such relationships with practitioners that EQ is best developed and supported in student participants.

Thomsen (2002) and Morales and Trotman (2004), described an environment where students have a positive connection with peers and adults, they have opportunities to demonstrate their competence, and also are provided support and encouragement. Furthermore, Thomsen (2002) stated that academically resilient students are taught life skills associated with decision making, stress management, and effective

communication, as well as having people around them who believe they can be successful and help them identify and engage resources that can help them in that regard. Student affairs practitioners described the facilitation of this kind of environment as salient to their roles and/or function of their departments. Although many of the professional participants in this study were on the director's level, many expressed the ways that they either facilitated such environments through their own direct engagement, through the expressed expectations to their staffs, or through policy that they developed and operationalized within their areas. Grippos and William, at PRU spoke at length about maintaining connections with students directly, and through those engagements, they developed caring and supporting environments within their respective offices. Helen, of PRU, spoke about providing opportunities for students to develop and exhibit their capability for success through the facilitation of meaningful participation in event planning and student leadership opportunities. Peggy, at BSU, spoke about the expectation that her staff create environments within their area where staff and student leaders develop their communication skills by serving as "facilitators of learning." Similarly, Robert spoke about his engagement with student leaders within his area who might work with peers in their decision-making and the establishment of high academic expectations as a function of the organizations. The best example of a policy developed in order to establish an environment, which sets high expectations, would perhaps be in the required grade point average for students who are engaged within several areas under his leadership. Not only are students held to a particular academic standard, they are also challenged in their decision-making, and priority and goal setting.

Many of the student participants, who identified student affairs professionals (six out of the eight) described their relationships with individuals in the field as those that were instrumental in their academic success. The best examples of such relationships

were expressed by Beverly, matriculating at BSU, and Sebastian, the oldest of our student participants who was graduating from PRU the week of his interview. Beverly spoke at length of the ways that professionals within the division served as mentors for her. Through relationships with her mentors, Beverly spoke about the additional opportunities that she was afforded to demonstrate competence through various external programs and activities. Beverly described those opportunities as meaningful ways of expressing their belief in her abilities to achieve, and she approached each experience with their confidence in her mind. Sebastian, spoke of Grippos in very similar ways, and credited him for providing opportunities to demonstrate his competence in environments that he himself had not considered. As a result of these experiences, both students presented what Morales and Trotman (2004) call their “dispositional factors” (p. 18). For example, one of the dispositional factors related to student success is identified as the ways in which “students interpret the opportunities afforded to them” (Morales & Trotmen, 2004, p. 20). Being provided opportunities to be successful, and identifying prior successes, even outside of the classroom facilitates the development of this protective factor. Likewise, as I found with Sebastian, he expressed what theorists identify as “social competence, good problem solving skills, and a clear sense of purpose” (Masten, Best, & Garmezy as cited in Morales & Trotman, 2004, p. 20). While this student expressed possessing a strong locus of control, which is another attribute of the dispositional factor, he credited his mentor as one who helped develop other aspects of his disposition as characterized in the literature.

It is clear that these student affairs professionals developed academic resilience in students both through the environments that they created as well as the relationships that they maintained with students. The ability to engage and support students through the relationships they developed, facilitated a sense of confidence in students who,

questioned their ability to be successful and/or have been classified as academically underprepared. While practitioners did not use language, or discuss their behaviors, as ways to develop academic resilience, they did speak of their work in relation to student persistence and retention. This difference in language was likely a result of the current focus in higher education generally in that regard, as well as the ways in which higher education systemically relegated matters associated with students' academic success to members of the faculty, however findings suggest that student affairs practitioners also can and should continue to facilitate and support academic resilience in students; especially those who might be classified as its most academically vulnerable.

### **Research Question Three**

Can student affairs practitioners mitigate the graduation gap and support educational attainment by providing ways to support and develop African American students who may require additional assistance in their intellectual development?

While it was clear that all of the students in this study were academically sound, and had developed or were developing a set of skills that would support them in their ability to persist and eventually graduate, there was not enough data to suggest that the experience of students and the work of student affairs professionals generally can impact the graduation gap in higher education. This study did however present enough data to make some determinations about the work of student affairs professionals as it related to student persistence, which inevitably influences an institution's graduation rate, and has the potential to lessen the Black-White binary graduation gap that exists at many postsecondary institutions across the country. While the U.S. Department of Education (2014) reported an increase in degree attainment in all students of color, with the most growth occurring among Hispanic students, there continues to exist a gap of over 60% between Black and White students. (That percentage is smaller than the 68.5%

difference in 1999-2000, however the exhibited narrowing in this gap is also as a result in the decreased number of White students who completed degrees in 2009-2010.)

In *Increasing Persistence: Research-based Strategies for College Student Success*, Habley, Bloom and Robbins (2012) discussed the psychosocial constructs of persistence, reviewing both the educational and motivational theories. In their findings, they posit that the students “motivational measures were predictive of academic performance” (Habley et al., 2012, p. 159), and greatly influenced students ability to persist. Through the meta-analysis of both educational and motivational measures, several factors presented themselves as highly correlated, including the students “academic goals, academic- related skills, academic self-efficacy [and] social support...” (Habley et al., 2012, p. 144). These measures were found to be indicative of, and associated with, all of the characteristics of an academically resilient environment within the student affairs units.

In Figure 2, an image is provided to depict the cyclical nature of the academically resilient environment, and can be used to understand how student affairs professionals engage students in this process. While the place where students engage practitioners in this cycle will vary, the findings suggest that students experience, and some practitioners understand and function in ways presented; for example, in the case of Beverly at BSU and her interaction with Taron, and Lisa and William at PRU. In both cases, those students entered the cycle at the point of *meaningful participation*. Both of those young women expressed a desire to get involved simply as a function of the higher education experience, as they were both involved in high school; however once they engaged particular activities they were also introduced to members of the staff, in their respective cases being Taron and William, who then provided a “positive connection with an adult”



within the university environment. Those relationships helped the students develop a sense of self-efficacy as Lisa recounted an early interaction with William stating:

...he's given me so much motivation to just push and not to be nervous. I get anxious. I have anxiety sometimes so I get nervous before a performance. He's always telling me 'You have everything it takes. That's why you're here...' I remember one instance, I was talking to him in random conversation about having to take chemistry because I'm not a science person... I was telling him about it, and he was like 'Sometimes you just have to be like an actor. You just have to do without thinking.' I remember when he told me that right before I had to take one of my tests. I just knew the material, but I just get so much anxiety because I want to do it right. He just calmed me down when I got to the test.

Lisa, who was a senior at the time of the interview expressed how she developed a sense of self-efficacy as a result of her early interactions with William. Through their exchanges with one another, Lisa was able to recount her growth and development in her beliefs about herself and her own abilities, both as a performer as well as a student in her academic courses. Beverly shared experiences similar to these, with parallel outcomes to Taron.

Although there were no student participants who expressed their engagement with this cycle of resilience as facilitated by student affairs professionals, the practitioners themselves often spoke of their work in this way. Cleveland at BSU shared his approach to this role as one based in supporting and developing students in their ability to make sound decisions as a primary function of his job. In his role, his first opportunity to engage students in a one-on-one basis was actually after they had made some poor decisions either socially or academically, which resulted in being referred to his office. He provided great detail about how his office helped students explore and understand their current academic skill, or the lack thereof, and assisted them in attaining the skills needed to function appropriately in an academic environment, both socially

and intellectually. While some in his particular functional area might differ in their approach to the work, Cleveland was very clear about how he understood and engaged his work, which he described as “the development of ethics and, sort of risk management in the population, academic integrity, ethical decision-making, that kind of thing... trying to demonstrate their own behavior respect, collegiality, how we work through that stuff, valuing people...” In his role, students engaged his area in a manner which developed life skills and/or academic related skills, however through a caring and supportive environment they also communicated and helped the student set high goals both personal and academic, which supported them in their ability to persist.

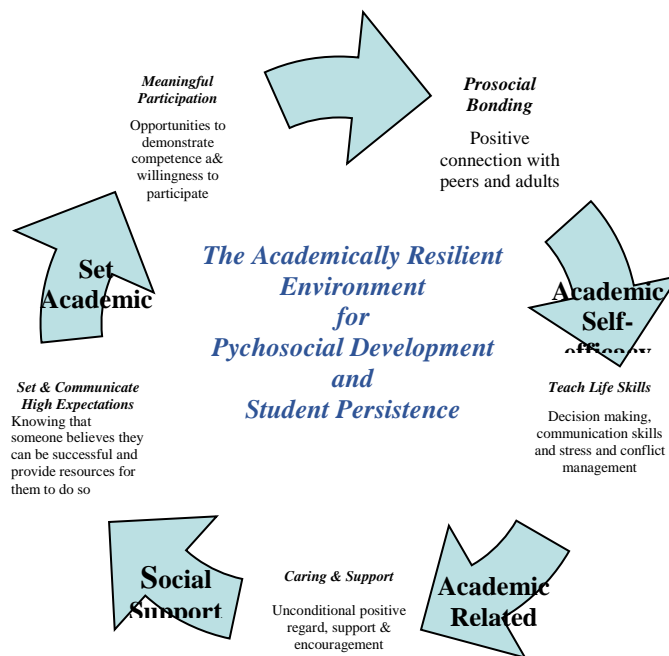


Figure 2 The Cycle of the Academically Resilient Environment

#### Research Question Four

What social, cultural, emotional, and programmatic resources do student affairs practitioners offer to aid in the persistence of underprepared African American students?

There exist several ways that the African-American student participants in this study described the social, cultural, emotional, and programmatic ways of engagement, which they perceived to have influenced their ability to persist. Those areas identified were consistent across the institutional types represented in this study. Although, students at both institutions readily shared various examples of how experiences in this context had supported their development as scholars, practitioners in the field did not always understand their work in similar ways. Most often practitioners discussed their work as a way of creating an environment that was conducive for learning although not directly supporting the individual learner, in particular, those who the institution had characterized as academically underprepared. Despite that difference, several areas were identified within the student affairs division that typically supported this student population in meaningful ways.

While social activities function as those institutional events that build community, present and express university traditions, and typically provide students an outlet from their various academic obligations, as identified by several students these activities provided much more. As previously stated, students who engage in the planning of activities often are given the opportunity to develop in their own self-awareness, self-actualization, independence, interpersonal skills, reality testing, problem solving and flexibility, among other things. All of these skills are indicative of individuals who have, or are, developing in their level of emotional intelligence. The development of these skills and characteristics were also believed to be influential in the academic success and persistence of student participants. Stein and Book (2011) have suggested that emotional intelligence is not solely predictive of an individual's cognitive abilities; however emotional intelligence theorists all agree with the idea that EQ can both support intellectual development and often distinguishes the difference between

those students who succeed and those who do not. The data from student participants support that belief, and thus student affairs professionals should begin to understand their work as more than just environmental and/or cultural but also individual and intellectual in nature.

Cultural programming was also significant in the life of many of the student participants across institutional type. It is important to note however, that those professionals, unlike their peers, did often make connections between the students' racial and cultural identity and their academic performance and success. At BSU, students spoke specifically about the orientation experience and the historical truths and contemporary perceptions of African-Americans in this country. As a result of that experience students identified an additional source of motivation for their academic pursuits and accomplishments. Nicole and Beverly both spoke about the history of Africans in ancient civilizations, as well as the struggles of early African-Americans as a source of pride, which was indicative of their own abilities as scholars and their ability to overcome challenges. Jay focused on the often cited deficit narrative around Black men in contemporary times, and worked to establish himself as the counter narrative, which served as a source of motivation for him. That same sentiment was expressed by Al and Sebastian at PRU. Not only was cultural programming beneficial to the students, so were relationships with professionals working in multicultural and diversity areas.

One of the findings of this study that was unexpected was the role that care played in the development of the students. Although students spoke about their growth and development in ways that represented various realms of emotional intelligence, it was quite clear that form of development was only able to occur as a result of the environment that the practitioners provided. This is not intended to be a contradiction to earlier sentiments about the role of student affairs professionals and the institutional

environment. This discussion about care and the environment was often associated with particular student affairs professionals, and not associated with the larger institutional environment. Nel Noddings (1988), presented a discussion on the ethics of care and education. She described the ethics of care as "... modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation" (Noddings, 1998, p. 222) for students in education. It is through this type of relationship she posited that students understand and accept a level of expectation from teachers. While Noddings focused on the development of ethical individuals and learning about caring for others within the context of the larger society, she is somewhat critical of the focus on academic achievement alone, this study found that care actually served as a catalyst for the ability of student affairs practitioners to communicate expectations for their students. The students in turn sought to live up to the expectations of these student affairs practitioners as it related to their engagement and performance in both in class and out-of-class experiences. Because this finding was so significant it is important to understand how students experience this care, in particular as the ways students described practitioners in this regard was also consistent with Thomsen's (2002) description of the academically resilient environment.

Thomsen (2002) described the academic environment as one that provides meaningful participation, pro social bonding, teaches life skills, includes unconditional positive regard and reinforces high expectations both verbally and through appropriate resources. She described meaningful participation primarily and the opportunity for learners to demonstrate competence. A number of student participants in the study spoke about their ability to engage leadership opportunities and activities which allowed them the opportunity to practice skills and behaviors which they later applied to the academic setting. The ability to practice certain behaviors without the possibility of them having an adverse affect on their academic performance, was one that many in this study found

beneficial. All of them expressed value in the relationships that they had developed, and were developing with practitioners in the division. While some, mostly upperclassmen, were able to speak about the positive connections that they developed with both faculty and student affairs staff, the underclassmen who had not fully engaged with faculty in the majors spoke more directly about the caring adults in their environment being student affairs practitioners. Also, many of these students identified these individuals as mentors who helped them process decisions, taught them how to communicate effectively with various constituents in the university community, and how to adapt to the university environment appropriately.

Finally, students identified these practitioners as sources of encouragement, support, direction, information, and motivation in particular areas that students had not considered before. Through communicating expectations to students, not only in their classroom performance, but also through their recommendations for various leadership opportunities, internship experiences, and other high-impact learning opportunities, students realized that they learned to communicate effectively, made appropriate decisions, and developed a sense of social responsibility among other things. As Figure 2 depicts, the development of emotional intelligence in student participants in this study was facilitated by the academically resilient environment which was created by student affairs professionals. It is also important to note, then again this experience was facilitated primarily through one-on-one relationships between the student and professionals. This may help us further understand how student affairs professionals engage learners in ways that support their development and further enhance their ability to be successful and persist within the larger university environment.

## **Relation to the Literature**

### **Academic Underpreparedness**

African Americans have long maintained complicated relationships with America's educational system; from the period of slavery, when learning to read was considered illegal, to the reiteration of the Morrill Act of 1890, to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to challenges in adjustment and acclimation at predominantly White institutions. In more contemporary times, many of the issues the Black community has experienced as it relates to postsecondary education specifically include the validity of standardized tests as an indicator of African American student ability, challenges of affirmative action and myths of ease of access because of race, and changes in the federal financial aid program, which have disproportionately affected students of color. Equality, for the vast majority of African Americans in this educational system is a goal that is yet to be realized. While there now exists fewer overt barriers to access, the existing gap between Black and White students that present as early as the third grade, and continue to be experienced even through college completion rates, serves as yet another form of systemic racism, which relegates many already disenfranchised Blacks in America. The lack of parity in educational funding, resources available to students, and conditions of the learning environment are some of those systemic issues that have been found to adversely affect Black students and other students of color early in their educational experience. However, in addition to those historical, legal, financial, and social challenges, the misalignment of K-12 and postsecondary education serves as yet another systemic barrier for students of color.

Merriam (2009), states that at the heart of any critical research is the exploration of power dynamics. Understanding who has power, how that power is negotiated, reinforced, and supported is significant in understanding both the misalignment of the P-

16 pipeline, as well as the phenomenon of underpreparation in postsecondary education. Merriam stated, “Power in combination with hegemonic social structures results in the marginalization and oppression of those without power” (p. 35). There may exist no better example of power, social structure, and marginalization and oppression, then that of the P-16 pipeline. In a system where students can graduate with a grade point average higher than a 4.0, and still be assigned to developmental courses, or feel less adequately prepared for the rigors of higher education, there we find systemic issues, which adversely affect Black students who were the focus of this study.

To date, underpreparedness has primarily been explored and studied as an issue of the individual learner. While developmental courses were offered at many four-year institutions, as well as community colleges, much of the research around this student population has described them as deficit. Whether by evidence of prior academic performance, scores on standardized test, their economic status, and/or they’re being first in their families to attend college; the flaw, failure, or shortcoming, was always focused on that of the individual learner. While institutions of higher education have attempted to diminish the use deficit language or deficit thought as it relates to many of those marginalized within the larger community, postsecondary education is also complicit in this practice as they have also failed to adequately address the misalignment in our educational system and in turn have classified students as underprepared with the intention of providing additional support in order to ensure their academic success while also potentially extending their time to degree and in most cases failing to adequately identify and provide psychosocial support and development needed in order to excel and achieve student success.



## **Student Affairs Practitioners and the Field**

This research presented the ongoing evolution of student affairs practitioners. This is not new work, however understanding this work in the context of academic resilience, in particular as it related to students who were classified as less academically prepared for success, was a new way to understand and engage this work. In 2014 the Research and Policy Institute of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), conducted a study on chief student affairs administrators. In that study 863 practitioners, of which, 240 were from public four-year institutions, chief student affairs practitioners provided demographic information, divisional structure information, as well as information on the current focus of leadership in the field. When asked generally about their primary duties and responsibilities in the field, most of the leadership responded by saying that they spent the majority of their time dealing with administrative issues (30%), followed by personnel management (16%). However, when asked more specifically about their most pressing issues on campus, their top responses, as it related specifically to student learning and success, were graduation rate and student persistence (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Unfortunately, what this report failed to identify, as does much research in the area, are the ways that student affairs practitioners can and do support and develop individual learners. Although much more research is required to fully understand the ways in which student affairs professionals can support the intellectual development of students, in particular as it relates to those students who may be less prepared for the academic rigor of postsecondary education, this study did present some understanding in that regard.

Findings suggest that supporting student learning as a function of the division was a primary responsibility for practitioners in their respective departments, but such a practice was also best experienced by students when it was salient to the division, as

expressed by its leadership. This was one significant difference between the two institutions that served as a part of this study. BSU had both the institutional hierarchy and leadership that integrated the student experience and student learning. Practitioners and the division clearly understood their role and responsibility as it related to student persistence and academic success. They saw themselves as partners in the holistic learning environment of the institution. Unfortunately, this was not the same of practitioners at PRU. While some of the practitioners at PRU, described and engaged their work in similar ways as their peers and BSU, it was the exception and not the standard. In particular, both Helen and Thomas, who were working in student leadership, were the only ones at that institution who fully expressed their roles in that manner. Again, while many of the practitioners spoke about their work in a developmental nature, unknown to them, they spoke about the development consistent with the five realms of emotional intelligence. When student affairs practitioners are intentionally included in the intellectual development of students, within the larger campus community and more broadly across higher education, professionals within the field might seek to understand their work as it relates to the cognitive development, in particular with academically underprepared students.

### **Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

Over the last thirty years, emotional intelligence (EQ) has developed as an area of psychology that explores an individual's non-cognitive variables, skills, characteristics, and proficiencies, which can influence their general success. As a result of this work, and numerous other measures developed to understand what is typically know as soft-skills, scholars and practitioners alike have sought to understand how such capabilities can support achievement in various areas of business, industry, and education. Early theorists not only provided a foundation for how we define EQ, but

they also constructed the initial theoretical model connecting EQ, previously called social intelligence, to that of cognitive processes. Although later research has moved away from that premise and has focused more on the overall success of an individual, it is at least in part, the former belief that this study adopted. In as much as an individual is able to manage challenges, think critically about personal issues, and engage in self-reflection in a manner that is affirming and progressive, it was the premise of this study that those skills support the intellectual growth of postsecondary scholars, regardless of their academic background or their previous academic record. Stein and Book (2011) describe these skills as the

capacity to objectively assess our strengths, as well as be open to viewing and challenging our limitations, mistaken assumptions, unacknowledged biases, and shortsighted/self-defeating beliefs... [it] encompasses our ability to read the political and social environment... to intuitively grasp what other want and need, what their strengths and weaknesses are; to remain unruffled by stress... (p. 14).

As these skills are developed by students, their ability to become academically resilient also develops. As these students continue to develop their ability to persist, their ability to achieve academically is also cultivated.

This study sought to understand if student affairs professionals engaged students in a way that facilitated the development of EQ skills and characteristics, and if so, to identify ways in which it occurred. Furthermore, it sought to understand how that development aided in the persistence and overall success of previously academically underprepared students. Much of the literature on student success and persistence in higher education makes reference to engagement and involvement with a faculty member “or an adult” within the university environment (Tinto, 1997), however much of that work fails to identify who those “adults” are, and what they do. Using the frame of

EQ as a means to explore the work of student affairs professionals has presented how practitioners in the field have indeed influenced and assisted in the development of skills and characteristics, which have helped some students persist.

The most recent research in EQ is defined broadly by five general skills and/or characteristics including an individual's self-perception, self-expression, interpersonal, decision-making, and stress management skills. However, specific skills are associated with those general areas, which will be discussed here as well in order to fully understand where and how students and student affairs professionals experience and understand their work as it relates to these areas. It is through this process that we are able to fully understand and identify where such characteristics are developed.

Literature defines self-perception as the ability to be self-aware, have a positive self-regard as it relates to one's own strengths and weaknesses, and develop a sense of self-actualization. Several students and practitioners described their work, and their experience with professionals, in ways that developed such skills and abilities. At both BSU as well as PRU, the counselors described their role and responsibilities using this precise language. While each of them admittedly understood their role as one they described as therapeutic, they also defined their association with student affairs as much more organizational than salient to their function, yet they also each understood how their work directly influenced their students' ability to learn. The ability to help students understand who they are and how they experience their multiple identities within the various contexts, as well as understanding their strengths and identifying their weaknesses, seeing those aspects of themselves positively with potential and a desire for continued development, was salient to their work.

Candace, the student who engaged the counseling experience, and described it as an area that supported her in her academic performance would agree. As she spoke about

her experience in this regard, she was able to express how the counseling experience helped her to develop a stronger sense of self despite coming from a home where her sexual identity was not acceptable. Although she had not chosen to disclose that aspect of her identity to her family at the time of the interview, she expressed that her confidence in who she was, had empowered her as a student and student leader. Coming from a family that perceived a bisexual identity negatively, Candace struggled with the idea of fitting in while being herself, but from the counseling experience she gained a sense of confidence that reinforced her belief in who she was an individual, but also who she was capable of becoming. In our discussion she related that ability to see who she is with the potential of who she can become as it related to her placement in the developmental course, which she was required to take. Candace saw the course as just another way to be a stronger student. She was able to perceive the course in such a way because she had developed, and was continue to develop, a sense of self, that was not defined by others and their assessments of her, but her own self-regard and self-actualization. It is clear to see how students translated their developmental experiences to their academic perspectives in order to persist.

While counseling services served as a straightforward example of the ways that practitioners and students engage each other in developmental ways in order to also support student learning, there were several other practitioners who described their work in this way, as students also experienced them in such a way. Both described experiences and opportunities through offices facilitating student activities and student leadership had also helped students develop in such ways. While many of the practitioners in those various offices also described their work in such ways, the students provided the greatest account of their own individual experiences, stating how working with the planning of events required their work on a team where who they were as individuals, what strengths

they brought to the team emerge, and they were able to identify areas of potential growth and the ways of developing in those areas. Once adopting those practices they expressed their ability to apply those same behaviors to their classes.

As a further example, Tina was a student who attributed her development in the same way through her involvement in student activities. She initially sought to get involved on campus simply because she thought it was something that she should do as a college student. However, when asked about the skills that she had developed and how she applied those skills to her academic performance, she was one of the students who was best able to make the connection. Lisa spoke at length about what she had learned about herself in the context of her organizational involvement, which included her personal strengths and areas for growth. While previous research posited that group work can enhance student learning and retention (Astin, 1997; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006; Tinto, 1998), the focus again is primarily on group work associated with coursework. Lisa however presented a common flaw associated with this approach as she explained that with many group assignments for classes, members of the group typically take portions and still work independently. She went on to say that it was in her involvement in campus organizations that she truly experienced benefit of group team work, which Carnegie Mellon's (2014) website for teaching excellence defined as the ability to "break complex tasks into parts... plan and manage time... refine understanding through discussion... [and] give and receive feedback on performance" among other things. These are some of the skills that Tina was able to identify as a result of her involvement in student organizations. Additionally, she added that because the organization, unlike many of her classes, had upperclassmen engaged as well, she was able to assess her talents, skills, and abilities in contrast to upperclass students some of whom she would like to emulate in order for her to be successful.

Helen also expressed her intentionality around the planning of seemingly trivial events as a way to engage students and challenge their assumptions and behaviors in various ways. She used the example of students planning something as large as a campus concert, or as small as a bingo night and expressed how she used those opportunities to help students become more self-aware, develop positive self-regard, realize their individual potential, and motivate them toward continued development.

Self-expression is another skill that an individual with high emotional intelligence will present. The ability of one to communicate effectively in both verbal and nonverbal ways, as well as be independent, thoughtful of others, and yet able to advocate for themselves, is central to this realm of EQ. While several areas could be identified as developing students in this way, such as student leadership in particular, it was the area of multicultural student services that was consistently referenced by students in this regard. Even those student participants who expressed minimal engagement and interaction with professionals within the student affairs division acknowledged that any ability to express themselves, regardless of how outspoken or limited they may be in that regard, was supported and developed by these areas.

In relation to this, there should be no surprise that the two most outspoken and articulate student participants in this study were both highly involved with various professionals doing multicultural/diversity and inclusion work at their respective institutions. Beverly (BSU) and Sebastian (PRU) were both students who were highly involved on their respective campuses and spoke about how they worked to actively advocate for themselves, their peers, as well as their communities as a result of their involvement with these offices and individuals doing this work. Sebastian for example spoke about his history of respectfully challenging faculty, staff, and students about the appropriate ways to better support students within his institution's environment. In a

very thoughtful and succinct manner, he was able to articulate the manner in which he identified a problem, processed his thoughts with staff in that office, and then went out and challenge various processes, procedures, and policies on the behalf of his peers. He went on to say how he applied that process to his ability to advocate for himself as he sought to experience research opportunities with faculty.

Beverly also cited practitioners in multicultural student services for her ability to challenge what she described as potentially marginalizing behaviors in the classroom. In her interview, Beverly spoke passionately about her White peers arriving to a class and obviously checking their class schedule when they noticed that there were “too many” Black students in the room. She shared a narrative where she challenged that behavior by expressing how she perceived the situation and how that could never be her experience at the large predominately White institution in order to challenge that behavior but also give her peers some insight into her experience.

Taron (BSU) and Grippos (PRU), who worked with students through the department of multicultural student services spoke of how they worked to develop such skills in students. Taron provided an example of a student who had recently moved into a residence hall on their campus where the resident advisor had chosen a Disney princess theme for the residents on her floor. A student came to her feeling alienated because although several princesses were depicted, the newest princess, Princess Tiana who is African American, was not included. Taron spoke with the students about the ways that she could address the situation so that she and other students of color did not feel marginalized. Grippos also spoke about how many faculty and students had begun to perceive him as an individual who would develop a student’s ability to advocate for himself or herself, once they unfortunately found themselves the subject of an academic dismissal from the institution.



As the focus of this study was that of Black postsecondary students, it was expected that aspects of their racial identity would be of specific focus, however the expressed level of relevance to the students' academic success was underestimated. Unlike many of the departments represented in this study, the work of multicultural student services and experiences with professionals from the area, represented student development in each of the realms of EQ. While the methods of this study did not support generalizability, it is significant to note that the experience and function of this office was the only area that applied to the majority of student participants in this study. Even those students who were not as outspoken and/or engaged, credited this office and/or practitioners from this area for their ability to support and develop self-awareness and social responsibility, as well as communicate a sense of social responsibility, impulse control, and overall optimism.

Several areas within the student affairs division support and develop the interpersonal development of students. While most would suspect that students generally develop the ability to form mutual relationships, simply as a result of living and learning together, the ability to be empathetic and develop a sense of social responsibility may not be as easily attained. It is here however that the largest group of student affairs functions is represented through various service learning opportunities, leadership, civic engagement, residential programs, and opportunities as well as Greek life. For many of these departments and functions within the division, practitioners understand this to be the fundamental responsibility of their area, and serves as the most widely recognized value added to the higher educational experience.

Decision-making is the fourth realm of EQ, which includes an individual's ability to test reality and develop problem-solving skills, both of which are cognitive in nature. Finally, the ability to manage one's emotions in order to make rational decisions

and control impulses is a final characteristic of the realm. While several students, such as Sebastian, associated his experiences with professionals within the division as a means for developing his decision-making skills, there was one department presented within this study that exemplified their function in this area. While practitioners in a number of areas including counseling and leadership expressed their responsibility in this regard, none did so as precisely as the area of student conduct.

Cleveland (BSU) spoke at length about his sphere of influence as it related to reality testing, problem solving, and impulse control in both academic and personal student behaviors. As the conduct officer at BSU, his office maintained the responsibility of addressing student violations. He expressed that their approach to their work is “therapeutic” and it is profoundly developmental in nature. Without any knowledge of the theoretical framing of this study, Cleveland recounted several situations that represented cases where students needed assistance developing in their ability to problem solve, use self-control, and practice reality testing.

A salient characteristic of an emotionally intelligent individual is their ability to problem solve in situations. In his narrative, Cleveland spoke about the number of students that he and his colleagues had engaged each year for issues of academic misconduct, many of which were as a result of plagiarism. One skill that an individual with emotional intelligence possesses is their ability to know when they need help and when to solicit that assistance (Stein & Book, 2011). He explained that the vast majority of students that they saw for such violations were not inherently bad, or intentionally violating any policy, but rather they had not learned how to problem solve the academic process in an appropriate manner. He goes on to provide examples of students who have been referred to his office because of a violation of the institution’s alcohol policy, however he found that the student actually had limited impulse control, and had chosen

to stop taking their medication in order to drink with friends. The student may have failed to act “in their own best interest, and [gotten] carried away...” (Stein & Book, 2011 p. 177). A final narrative that was offered presented the case of a group of Black male students who had come from challenging familial backgrounds, who were engaging in inappropriate behavior on campus. These students struggled as a result of trying to navigate between the lives of their family members and their community back home, and that of the university environment. These young men were unable to be objective in their reality testing, and were later referred to an institutional program developed to challenge and support Black men within the university community.

Although none of the student participants expressed any involvement or engagement with this particular area, it was clear that the primary function of this office was understood and expressed in a manner that was highly associated with this realm of EQ. It is also significant to note, that while this was the case at BSU, there were substantial differences in the ways that practitioners from BSU and PRU spoke about their work. In the same office as PRU, he spoke about his work being much more reactive and punitive than his peer. This is likely the same situation that may be found in various departments across various institutions. Cleveland was clearly quite intentional about his approach to student conduct as one that was developmental in nature, and best represented the ways in which decision-making skills were developed in students.

The final realm of EQ is the stress management realm, where individuals develop a sense of optimism, learn to be more flexible, and possess a higher level of tolerance to stress. Counseling student services is typically one area within the division that typically works to develop such skills in learners, and practitioner participants from that area spoke about the development of these skills as an aspect of their work. Although that is certainly an area associated with counseling services, a number of

student participants expressed developing skills associated with this realm through their various student leadership roles. One such example was Jay, who was developing those skills while serving as a resident advisor.

Jay was one of those students who stated specifically that stress oftentimes became too much for him. Although he had a desire to be engaged and also succeed academically, he struggled with the ability to manage his time effectively and still be able to be social with his peers. It was through his involvement and his leadership role as a resident advisor that he was given the opportunity to see other student leaders, learn from their time management skills, and also practice some of the stress management techniques that he was taught in class. He stated, “successful entrepreneurs make time for yourself and know yourself,” he understood those skills, and began to utilize them in his leadership roles both as a resident advisor through the Residence Life department, and also as a member of the choir and BSU. Not only did Jay identify various ways to manage the stress to develop the time management skills, he also learned to be more flexible and more optimistic about what he was able to engage in and participate in as a student and a scholar.

Initially, as this study sought to understand the role of practitioners in the development of students’ stress management skills, their flexibility and it related to changing situations and conditions, and their optimism, it seemed as though some of these skills were developed almost autonomously. However, practitioners such as Peggy spoke about their responsibility and number responsibilities of their staff members in not only facilitating programs for students that was support various scales including those that would mitigate student stress she also spoke about the expectation that staff in her department model behaviors which teach students much like Jay how to be more flexible and remain optimistic in challenging situations. Many of these situations occur within

the residence halls and things are given opportunities to practice skills and techniques from various leadership roles.

This study has allowed me to understand how the experiences and opportunities outside the classroom, and various forms of engagement have developed students in a manner that further supports their success in the classroom. It is significant to note however, that it appeared that many of the students had not considered how their experiences outside the classroom influenced their behavior and growth holistically until they were challenged to think about their experiences in that regard. Exceptions include Sebastian from PRU, and Beverly from BSU. Both of these students were upper-classmen who had experienced a number of opportunities within the university environment, and clearly had made those connections of how their learning and development had developed both inside and outside the classroom as a result of their total experiences. These students were most proficient and thoughtful when they expressed how they had experienced practitioners, engaged organizations, as well as additional opportunities afforded them through relationships with student affairs practitioners. With this understanding it is imperative that professionals begin to understand and recognize where they not only supportive to the development of students in a psychosocial manner, but also as a means which supports and influences their abilities as scholars. It is the development of these skills and characteristics that allow these students to persist and achieve socially, and academically at their respective institutions.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Institutions, regardless of type, should focus on the development of academically resilient environments, in particular when some members of the university community are not given access to the educational background of students. One thing that was

consistent with practitioners, regardless of their respective areas or the institutional type, was that very few of them had access to, or were aware of, a student's academic history, which could directly influence numerous aspects of their ability to get acclimated, succeed, and persist. Of the thirteen practitioner participants in this study, only one stated that he had full access to student information and used that data to inform his interactions with students. However, even in that case, the review of relevant student history would only be explored after a student had been referred to the office because of some problematic behavior. Although this study found that the student affairs practitioners can and do facilitate an academically resilient environment, none of the administrators understood their work in that way, nor had they even given any consideration to the academically underprepared student population within their respective institutions.

Currently, much of the research and discussion around academic resilience puts emphasis on the student in the formal learning setting and most often focuses on developmental courses, and the first year experience, and the like (Charles A. Dana Center; Complete College America, Inc.; Education Commission of the States; Jobs for the Future, 2012). However, very little attention is given to the psychosocial development of students identified as less academically prepared for their postsecondary institution. As previously discussed, the five aspects of an academically resilient environment are also experienced through the engagement and involvement with student affairs professionals. With such knowledge, institutions and practitioners should facilitate their work in a manner that not only continues to support such development, but also requires that it is done with greater intentionality. Furthermore, institutions generally, and student affair divisions specifically, should assess their developmental work in this regard. Student affairs divisions can and should assess the ways in which

they support student learning in the postsecondary environment. Assessing and reporting practices based on student learning and development literature can help some faculty, senior administrators, and various other university constituents better understand their role and function within the larger learning environment. Likewise, university leadership should encourage, support, and assess the learning environment in the ways that students actually experience them as opposed to the manner in which the institution is organizationally structured. While this study focuses specifically on those students believed to be academically underprepared, all students can benefit from an environment that is holistic, as student success literature suggests. But, in particular, for those students who might be perceived as being less prepared, establishing such an environment that supports those students without always requiring them to be specifically identified as a subset of the larger community and thus further marginalizing them, can be helpful.

Another recommendation relates to how we discuss both the diversity of preparedness as well as the racial/ethnic diversity of students within that group. In an effort to mitigate the negative association with Affirmative Action and/or feelings of inadequacy on the part of some students, classified as academically underprepared, many in the field have moved away from language about race and ethnicity in discussions related to student support. The irony of such conversations is that many higher education professionals will explore and examine the phenomenon of the existing graduation gap along those very lines. However, much of the literature and the language related to access and preparedness focuses on socioeconomic status and first-generation students. While existing research would support the focus on these populations, it is problematic when they are used as an alternative subpopulation to the exclusion of race and ethnicity, as, cultural differences associated with their identity within the university environment can present challenges for marginalized students, and in some cases as found in this

study, that identity can serve as a source of motivation for some students to achieve academically. As such, there seems to be a disconnection in the literature and in practice as it relates to access, persistence, preparedness, and graduation, in particular as it relates to Black scholars.

It is important to understand that the premise of this study, at least in part, was to explore how we understand underpreparedness. Early literature on the subject of student preparedness in higher education was certainly presented from a deficit lens. Much of the discussion was about the limited intellect of students of color, those that were from poor school districts, and were of diverse nationalities. In an effort to move beyond this deficit framing of these student populations much of our language and our research has moved away from looking at these populations specifically to identifying ways in which we might better support them in their academic pursuits. Current data present the narrowing gap between Latino students in contrast to their White and Asian American peers. However, the existing gap between Black and White students as well as Native American students continues to persist. These findings suggest that recommendations made in the field, maintaining that by meeting the needs of low income and first-generation students, we will also increase persistence and mitigate the graduation gap for all students of color, is not accurate.

While there exist many shared experiences and challenges facing populations that have been historically and currently subject to marginalization, the lived experiences of each of these communities throughout the history of this country varies greatly. Literature on Latino student populations typically identifies cultural and familial issues as those that challenge the experience of Latino learners in higher education (Morales & Trotman, 2004). While those challenges persist they are seemingly having less of an impact on their ability to persist. Some literature suggests that as Latino families become



acculturated to the larger American society, that cultural issues, including those that have challenged their academic completion become less of an obstacle. The culture of the African-American community is, and has been different as education had and continues to be perceived a way to improve the quality of one's life and that of their families. Generally African-American families support college-going behaviors within their community. Despite this general belief in the value of education in general and higher education specifically, Black students continue to persist and graduate at lower rates.

In much of the research in the 1980s, there was a great focus on the experience of Black students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), followed by a body of research in the 1990s, which focused on the experience of Black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). While both important areas of study, neither provided much information as it related to the learning experience and/or success of Black students, which would help us understand how to help students learn and engage effectively within those environments and within the higher education environment. Much of the pre-existing literature allowed us to understand how to support students in ways that build community, supported their identity development, and developed them in the ability to function within the university environment, however there was little focus on their specific ability to learn and persist. Additionally, limited literature exists exploring the P-16 pipeline, as much of the research is disaggregated. It is in such a study that we are able to explore and understand the ongoing systemic challenges facing these students in postsecondary education. To be clear, the level of a student's preparedness for intellectual engagement on the postsecondary level is not dictated or determined by the color of their skin; however it is through such a review that one is able

to identify systemic challenges that likely influence African-American students in ways that are specific to them.

### **Underprepared Students**

Existing literature on academically underprepared students is generally described as a homogeneous group that seemingly fits nicely in assigned socioeconomic, social, and experiential descriptors; however, this study identified great diversity within this group. Yet, to fully understand the experience of some students, who may be classified as academically underprepared for postsecondary education, one must explore a broad body of educational research. There is a body of literature that focuses on risk, and yet another that focuses on one high school completion, and yet another which focuses on access. The literature that specifically looks at access primarily focuses on financial support, pre-college knowledge, and most recently, under-matching—a few examples of the body of research as it has developed over the years. Additionally, there exists a body of literature that looks at developmental learning, and yet another body of literature that explores persistence, retention, and graduation rates while the latter area of study often references students' preparedness as a controlled group within the study, to suggest that as long as students are adequately prepared the recommendations that literature provides a reference to persistence, retention, and graduation are certainly applicable. The challenge however, is that the work with students, much like the students educational experience is much more fluid and diverse.

Beyond the fragmented nature of previous research as it related to underprepared students and postsecondary education, there also have been numerous challenges in relation to public education, which have resulted in a several calls for national reform in the American educational system, both in K-12, which influence college preparedness, as well as in higher education in particular as it relates to access and adequate support

upon matriculation. Some of the reform recommendations, such as the Common Core, suggests core curriculum that students should take across their respective states, in order to ensure consistency in content. Currently, over forty-eight states, districts, and territories have adopted the Common Core standards (Common Core State Standard Initiatives, 2014), which opponents dismiss as simply another form of political posturing, in order to address the broadening chasm in American student preparedness for the work force, and competitiveness in a global economy, much like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. The focus of many of these assessments has been around the standardized testing of students, which some research suggests is not an accurate assessment of a student's ability of knowledge. Additionally, establishing a singular curriculum does little to address the lack of financial parity in K-12 education, in particular when several indicators of a quality school may be limited in some lower income communities, such as the "teacher[s] academic skills...experience, professional development... pedagogy, technology and class size" (Shapiro, 2004, p. 170).

Postsecondary education has not escaped the call for reform, as many have noted the increasing cost of a college degree and, in particular, as it related to this study, the value and appropriateness of developmental course offerings at four-year institutions. Some have challenged the effectiveness of developmental courses without giving consideration to the personal development of students (Charles A. Dana Center; Complete College America, Inc.; Education Commission of the States; Jobs for the Future, 2012), and others have cited developmental education as "another form of affirmative action" (author, year, p. #), and the "cost" (Arendale, 1998, p. #), of such programs as ways to relegate such courses to the community colleges. Despite the decision of many states to provide developmental courses through their community colleges entirely, many institutions still identify their students, who are both

academically successful and qualify for admission to the institution, are believed to be students who could benefit from additional support in their academic pursuits at their respective institutions.

This study, however, presented a diversity of the student population that has typically been classified as academically underprepared. Many of these students present a strong academic background evidenced by their grades, standardized test scores, and/or graduating class standing. These students represented a diversity of socioeconomic status, were both first generation students and not, and most significantly, had many of them chosen to attend a different institution, some of the student participants could have been admitted through the institution's honors program. Some of these students could be identified as those who were at-risk, while others would be subject to what Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) calls the opportunity gap, which explains at least in part that as a result of the educational disparities, historical and sociopolitical debt, students of color in America have been denied opportunities to achieve.

It appears that the way we understand academic underpreparedness is limited, and often influenced by the particular research, which is often fragmented, deficit, and individually oriented. When exploring the phenomenon of underpreparedness throughout the educational pipeline, and across institutional type, the level of preparedness is subjective. Diversity in preparedness can be described as sociopolitical, and existing deficits are systemic, which has individual implications. Because of the subjective nature of academic preparedness, as well as the misalignment throughout the educational pipeline, classifying all students as those who are less prepared is problematic, and can be marginalizing. It is likely more appropriate to call the students disparately prepared. The term, disparately prepared student, could be used to describe both the population and/or individual learners who may not have equal access to academic opportunities

which have been provided to some, and/or those students who have exhibited a high level of academic competence, although historically classified as underprepared as a result of the educational misalignment of the P-20 pipeline. Such a classification, removes the assumption of the student's individual ability and makes the level of preparedness more about those educational opportunities and experiences that some students have not had the opportunity to engage, as well as those who have a history of academic success, despite the variation in their ability to engage the higher education system. Broadening our understanding of college preparedness, the diversity of that student population, and the discourse associated with it, will better help practitioners and others best understand how to support and develop these learners.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

#### **Recommendation One**

Higher education scholars, in particular, those whose areas of research include college knowledge, persistence, and completion, as well as the graduation gap, should unapologetically focus on ways to adequately support and develop African American students. Current studies are finding that the Latino student population is having greater success in completion and graduation throughout the educational pipeline, while Black students and Native American students remain stagnant along those same measures. Much of the research around Black students in higher education has focused on creating environments where they do not feel marginalized as a result of most institutions' history of segregation, and its contemporary challenge with the establishment of a common critical mass of peers. There exists much less literature however, which explores how to directly support and enhance the academic engagement of Black students in postsecondary education. When those in the academy are able to adequately develop young Black scholars within the higher education environment, I posit, that we would

broadly be able to mitigate the existing graduation gap, and positively impact the African-American community as well as the American economy generally.

### **Recommendation Two**

This study suggested that emotional intelligence (EQ) is best developed in environments that provide aspects of academic resilience such as prosocial bonding, expressed high expectations, and opportunities to exhibit competence. While many of the practitioners in this study expressed these roles as salient to their position, most graduate programs do not prepare graduate students to be professionals who clearly understand and articulate how their work directly supports the learning mission of higher education. Although senior level student affairs administrators, according to a recent study conducted by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA, year), identify issues of persistence and completion among their primary concerns, what the report failed to present, was how chief officers understand their role as it related to the learning mission of the institution and not just the general conduct and culture of its students. As higher education continues to be held more accountable for its costs and value to students, student affairs practitioners cannot continue to function in a manner that fails to directly influence the learning mission of any institution. Graduate programs, in their preparation of future leaders in the field as both scholars and practitioners, serving must be more intentional, focusing on those theories of student development, which will support all students in becoming stronger scholars. Additionally, as the development of disparately prepared students should occur both inside and outside the classroom, graduate programs should also focus on one aspect of student learning and the diversity of the preparedness of students in the academy in order to support them adequately.

### **Recommendation Three**

Currently, the majority of cognitive development theories focus on the growth of

one's ethics, values, morals, and various other epistemological processes. Furthermore, those theories that do relate to student learning are often written with a focus on faculty, as they have primarily been seen as the sole facilitators of student learning and development. In order for graduate programs to adequately prepare future student affairs practitioners to serve, and be recognized as partners in the intellectual development of students, the field could benefit from an expansion in the body of literature that explores the cognitive development of disparately prepared students, as well as other student populations, in particular as it relates to a student's scholarly identity. Furthermore, practitioners should consider EQ as such a model in order to enhance, support, and develop the learning environment and learners. The findings of this study suggested, that when practitioners work with students in the development of those skills within its five realms, it can assist in the development of successful academic behaviors, which support students in their ability to persist.

### **Conclusions**

In Gwendolyn Brooks' (year) poem, *What Shall I Give My Children?*, she asks the question:

What shall I give my children? who are poor, who are adjudged the leastwise of the land, who are my sweetest lepers... Crying that they are quasi, contraband because unfinished, graven by a hand less than angelic, admirable or sure.

While Brooks was certainly speaking about those of meager means, and those who were disenfranchised in American society, this poem also resonates for me as I think about those who have historically been viewed as "quasi" throughout our educational system. It is disheartening to review the African-American educational experience throughout history, and see how those behaviors of intellectual suppression and educational

segregation, are now continuing to effect Black students disproportionately through systemic issues that are both pervasive and enduring.

This study did not provide any definitive measures in which higher education scholars or practitioners could apply broadly to their population of African American students in order to develop them as learners, and then ensure their persistence. This study did, however, challenge the discourse around preparedness and the role of student affairs professionals as it related to the learning. Future research should focus more specifically on broader populations of those who are identified as disparately prepared in postsecondary education, in order to continue the exploration of the in-group diversity of our student populations, whether they be by race/ethnicity, or by variations in their educational opportunity. Furthermore, as the diversity of our student population continues to expand, the various forms of development should also grow with it. Currently, in our country, we often hear reports of the dwindling middle class, which one might suggest is indicative of gaps in future educational opportunities which greatly influence student preparedness. Our ability to prepare for the diversity of educational opportunity today, will inform our ability to support our students in the future. The answer to the question, “What shall I give my children?” will be determined by how willing scholars and practitioners are able to work collaboratively to create a learning environment that facilitates greater student success and support for those who have been perceived as “leastwise of the land.”



## REFERENCES

- Allen, W. R. (2005). A forward glance in a mirror: Diversity challenged—Access, equity and success in higher education. *Educational Researcher*, 34(7), 18-23.
- Allen, W. R., Teranishi, R., Dinwiddie, G., & Gonzalez, G. (2002). Knocking at freedom's door: Race, equity and affirmative action in U.S. higher education. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 23, 440-452.
- American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. (1998). *Powerful partnerships: A shared responsibility for learning*. Washington, DC: Author.
- American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. (2004). *Learning reconsidered*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ballard, A. B. (2004). *The education of Black folks: The Afro-American struggle for knowledge in White America*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc.
- Bar-On, R. (2007). *Theoretical foundations, background and development of the Bar-On model of emotional intelligence*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuvenbaron.org/bar-on-model/essay.php?i=1>
- Barnes, R. D. (1990). Race consciousness: The thematic content of racial distinctiveness in critical race scholarship. *Harvard Law Review*, 103, 1864-1871.
- Benard, B. (1997). From risk to resiliency: What schools can do. Retrieved from <http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/library/dig126.html>
- Berg, C. A., & Sternberg, R. J. (1985). A triarchic theory of intellectual development during adulthood. *Developmental Review*, 5, 334-370.
- Bernstein, A. R. (1996). *Underprepared students*. Washington, DC: Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.
- Bettinger, E. P., & Long, B. T. (2005). Addressing the needs of under-prepared students in higher education: Does college remediation work? Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w11325>
- Bosworth, K., & Walz, G. R. (2005). *Promoting student resiliency*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association Foundation.
- Bowser, B. P. (2007). *The Black middle class: Social mobility and vulnerability*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

- Boykin, A. W. (1986). The triple quandary and the schooling of Afro-American children. In U. Neisser (Ed.), *The school of achievement of minority children: New perspectives* (pp. 57-92). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Brauns, H., Gangl, M., & Scherer, S. (2001). *Education and unemployment: Patterns of labour market entry in France, the United Kingdom and West Germany*. Mannheim, Germany: Mannheim Centre for European Social Research.
- Calabrese, R. L. (2006). *The elements of an effective dissertation and thesis*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1992). *Education and identity*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *American Association for Higher Education & Accreditation Bulletin*, 2-6.
- Cokely, K. (2002). The impact of college racial composition on African American students' academic self-concept: A replication and extension. *Journal of Negro Education*, 71, 288-296.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998). *The landscape of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DeSousa, J. (2001). Reexamining the educational pipeline for African American students. In L. Jones (Ed.), *Retaining African Americans in higher education: Challenging paradigms for retaining students, faculty and administrators* (pp. 21-44). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Dupree, D., Gasman, M., James, K., & Spencer, M. B. (2009). Identity, identification, and socialization preparation and retention of African American males in institutions of higher education. In H. Frierson (Ed.), *Black American males in higher education: Research, programs and academic diversity in higher education* (Vol. 7, pp. 1-20). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F. M., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). *Student development in college: Research, theory and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fiona J.D. MacKinnon & Associates. (2004). *Rentz's student affairs practice in higher education*. Springfield: Charles C. thomas Publisher, LTD.
- Feagin, J. (2000). *Racist roots: Roots, current realities, and future reparations*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Ford, C. A., Kokjie, F. A., & Lewis, M. K. (1996). Factors that contribute to academic resilience among urban “at risk” African-American male college students. *Challenge, A Journal of Research on African American Men*, 7(3), 17-29.
- Forde, M. L. (2002). Quality of life and resiliency: Student development success. *Community College Journal*, 72(3), 25-27.
- Fry, R. (2011). *Pew Hispanic Center*. Retrieved from <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=146>
- Fulton, M. (2010). *Getting past go*. Washington, DC: Education Commission of the States.
- Gabriel, K. F. (2008). *Teaching unprepared students: Strategies for promotion success and retention in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gardner, H., & Hatch, T. (1989). Multiple intelligences go to school: Educational implications of the theory of multiple intelligences. *Educational Researcher*, 18(8), 4-9.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Graves, L. (2008). *The gap in graduation rates: At many colleges, a disparity who makes it to a diploma*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/education/articles/2008/05/02/the-gap-in-graduation-rates>
- Grimes, S. K. (1997). Underprepared community college students: Characteristics, persistence, and academic success. *Community College Journal of Research and Practices*, 21(1), 47-56.
- Grimes, S. K., & David, K. C. (1999). Underprepared community college students: Implications of attitudinal and experiential differences. *Community College Review*, 27(2), 73-92.
- Gumport, P., & Bastedo, M. (2001). Academic stratification and endemic conflict: Remedial education. *Review of Higher Education*, 24, 333-349.
- Harper, S. R., Patton, L. D., & Wooden, O. S. (2009). Access and equity for African American students in higher education: A critical race historical analysis of policy efforts. *Journal of Higher Education*, 80, 389-414.
- Hausmann, L. R., Ye, F., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2009). Sense of belonging and persistence in White and African American first-year students. *Research in Higher Education*, 50, 649-669.
- Hirt, J. B. (2006). *Where you work matters: Student affairs administration at different types of institutions*. Lanham: University Press of America, Inc.

- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*, 1277-1288. doi:1177/1049732305276687
- Hunt, E. (2011). *Human intelligence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, J. (2007). *Strengthening the African American educational pipeline: Informing research, policy, and practice*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- JBHE Foundation. (2006/2007). Black student graduation rates inch higher but a huge racial gap persists. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 54*, 58-66.\_
- Jones, S. R., & Abes, E. S. (2013). *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Keeling, R. P., & Hersh, R. H. (2011). *We're losing our minds: Rethinking American higher education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kincheloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. (2008). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (pp. 403-455). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2005). *The adult learner* (5th ed.). San Diego, CA: Elsevier.
- Kozeracki, C. A., & Brooks, J. B. (2006). Emerging institutional support for developmental education. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 136*, 63-73.
- Kuh, G. D., Douglas, K. B., Lund, J. P., & Ramin-Gyurnek, J. (1994). *Student learning outside the classroom: Transcending artificial boundaries*. Washington, DC: ASHE-ERIC.
- Kuh, G. D., Schuh, J. H., & Whitt, E. J. (1991). *Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning and development outside the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ley, K., & Young, D. B. (1998). Self-regulation behaviors in underprepared (developmental) and regular admission college students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 23*(1), 42-64.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Magolda, M. B. (2009). The activity of meaning making: A holistic perspective on college student development. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*, 621-639.
- Martinez, M. C. (2004). *Postsecondary participation and state policy*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (2004). What is emotional intelligence? In P. Salovey, M. A. Brackett, & J. D. Mayer (Eds.), *Emotional intelligence: Key readings on the Mayer and Salovey model* (pp. 29-59). Port Chester, NY: Dude.

- McNeil, M. (2011). *Cuts to K-12 expected in wake of debt deal: Advocates brace for impact, though extent still unclear*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/10/37debt.h30.html?qs=economy+impact+on+education>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miller, M. A. (2006). *Assessing college-level learning*. San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.
- Morales, E. E. (2008). The resilient mind: The psychology of academic resilience. *Educational Forum*, 72(2), 152-167.
- Morales, E. E., & Trotman, F. K. (2004). *Promoting academic resilience in multicultural America: Factors affecting student success*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (1996). *Remedial education at higher education institutions in fall 1995*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (1997). *Confronting the odds: Students at risk and the pipeline to higher education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *Remedial education at degree-granting post secondary institutions in fall 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *Achievement gaps: How Black and White students in public schools perform in math and reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress*. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2010). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic groups*. Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences.
- National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. (2009). *Racial/ethnic gaps*. Retrieved from <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?submeasure=354&year=2007&level=&mode=policy&state=0>
- National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. (2007). *Progress and Completion: Graduation Rates*. Retrieved from: <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?submeasure=24&year=2007&level=&mode=policy&state=0>

- National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. (2008). *The national report card on higher education*. San Jose: The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.
- Noel, L., & Levitz, R. (1982). *How to succeed with academically underprepared students*. Washington, DC: ACT National Center for the Advancement of Educational Practices.
- O'Connor, C., Hill, D. L., & Robinson, S. R. (2009). Who's at risk in school and what's race got to do with it? *Review of Research in Education*, 33(1), 1-34.
- Okagaki, L. (2001). Triarchic model of minority children's school achievement. *Educational Psychologist*, 36(1), 9-20.
- Oudenhoven, B. (2002). Remediation at the community college: Pressing issues, uncertain solutions. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 117, 35-44.
- Palmer, R. T., & Young, E. M. (2009). Determined to succeed: Salient factors that foster academic success for academically underprepared Black males at a Black college. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 10, 465-482.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluative methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pitts, J. M., White, J. W., & Harrison, A. B. (1999). Student academic underpreparedness: Effects on faculty. *Review of Higher Education*, 22, 343-365.
- Reason, R. D., & Broido, E. M. (2011). Philosophies and values. In J. H. Schuh, S. R. Jones, & S. R. Harper (Eds.), *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (pp. 80-95). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Rhatigan, J. J. (2009). From the people up: A brief history of student affairs administration. In G. S. McClellan, & J. Stringer, *The Handbook of Student Affairs Administration* (pp. 3-18). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Ross, C. E., & Van Willigen, M. (1997). Education and the subjective quality of life. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 38, 275-297.
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9, 185-211.
- Saxon, D. P., & Boylan, H. R. (2001). The cost of remedial education in higher education. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 25, 2-8.
- Schargel, F. P., Thacker, T., & Bell, J. S. (2007). *From at-risk to academic excellence: What successful leaders do*. Larchmon, NY: Eye On Education.
- Schuch, J. H., Jones, S. R., & Harper, S. R. (2011). *Student services: A handbook for the profession*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Shapiro, T. M. (2004). *The hidden cost of being African American: How wealth perpetuates inequality*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Silverman, S. L., & Casazza, M. E. (2000). *Learning and development: Making connections to enhance teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Soliday, M. (2002). *The politics of remediation*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- St. John, E. P., & Musoba, G. D. (2011). *Pathways to students' academic success in higher education: Expanding opportunity for underrepresented students*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1985). *Beyond IQ*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Sternberg, R. J. (1999). A triarchic approach to understanding and assessment of intelligence in multicultural populations. *Journal of School Psychology, 37*, 145-159.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2010). Buoyant believers: Resilience, self-efficacy, and academic success of low-income African American collegians. In T. L. Stayhorn & M. C. Terrell (Eds.), *The evolving challenges of Black college students: New insights for practice and research* (pp. 49-65). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Tatum, B. D. (1997). *"Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?": And other conversations about race*. New York: Perseus Books Group.
- Thomsen, K. (2002). *Building resilient students: Integrating resiliency into what you already know and do*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 68*, 599-623.
- Traub, J. (1995). *City on a hill: Testing the American dream at City College*. New York, NY: Perseus Books.
- Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). *Labor force, employment, & earnings*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0627.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2011). *Employment projections*. Retrieved from [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_chart\\_001.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm)
- University of North Carolina System. (2005). *Remedial/developmental activity report*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina System, Office of the President.

- University of North Carolina System. (2011). *Enrollment data 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.northcarolina.edu/about/facts.htm>
- University of North Carolina System. (n.d.a). *Our 17 institutions*. Retrieved from [http://www.northcarolina.edu/campus\\_profiles/index.php](http://www.northcarolina.edu/campus_profiles/index.php)
- University of North Carolina System. (n.d.b). *University profile*. Retrieved from [http://www.northcarolina.edu/campus\\_profiles/ECSU\\_profile.pdf](http://www.northcarolina.edu/campus_profiles/ECSU_profile.pdf)
- U.S. News and World Report. (2011). *Education: Colleges*. Retrieved <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/regional-universities-south/campus-ethnic-diversity>
- Walker, C., Gleaves, A., & Grey, J. (2006). Can students within higher education learn to be resilient and, educationally speaking, does it matter? *Educational Studies*, 32, 251-264.
- Whitt, E. J. (1999). *Student learning as student affairs work: Responding to our imperative*. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.
- Wilson, M. E. (2011). *College student development theory*. Boston: Pearson Learning Solutions.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zhang, N. (2011). *Rentz's student affairs practice in higher education*. Springfield, IL: Thomas.



## APPENDIX A

### COUNCIL FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF STANDARDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#### CAS MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) is to promote the improvement of programs and services to enhance the quality of student learning and development. CAS is a consortium of professional associations who work collaboratively to develop and promulgate standards and guidelines and to encourage self-assessment.

#### OVER THIRTY YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) has been the pre-eminent force for promoting standards in student affairs, student services, and student development programs since its inception in 1979. For the ultimate purpose of fostering and enhancing student learning, development, and achievement and in general to promote good citizenship, CAS continues to create and deliver a dynamic and credible Book of Professional Standards and Guidelines and Self-Assessment Guides that are designed to lead to a host of quality-controlled programs and services. These standards respond to real-time student needs, the requirements of sound pedagogy, and the effective management of 40 functional areas, consistent with institutional missions. Individuals and institutions from nearly 40 CAS member organizations comprise a professional constituency of over 100,000 professionals.

##### *Academic Advising*

##### *Adult Learner Programs*

Assessment Services

##### *Campus Activities Programs*

##### *Campus Religious & Spiritual Programs*

##### *Clinical Health Services*

##### *College Unions*

##### *Conference and Events Programs*

Dining Services

Distance Education Programs

##### *Financial Aid*

Graduate and Professional Student Programs

##### *Housing and Residential Life Programs*

Internship Programs

##### *LGBT Programs*

##### *Multicultural Student Programs/ Services*

##### *Parent and Family Programs*

##### *Registrar Programs and Services*

##### *Student Conduct Programs*

##### *TRIO, Other Educ. Opportunity Programs*

##### *Women Student Programs*

##### *Admission Programs*

##### *Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Programs*

Auxiliary Services

Campus Information and Visitor Services

##### *Career Services*

College Honor Societies

Commuter and Off-Campus Living Programs

##### *Counseling Services*

##### *Disability Support Services*

##### *Education Abroad Programs and Services*

##### *Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs*

Health Promotion Services

##### *International Student Programs*

##### *Learning Assistance Programs*

Master's Student Affairs Admin. Programs

##### *Orientation Programs*

##### *Recreational Sports Programs*

##### *Service-Learning Programs*

##### *Student Leadership Programs*

Undergraduate Research Programs

\*Highlighted departments are those that are typically represented in the division of Student Affairs.

**APPENDIX B**

**STUDENT PARTICIPANT DATA PROFILE**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Institution \_\_\_\_\_

Major \_\_\_\_\_ Current Cumulative Grade Point Average \_\_\_\_\_

**Please Circle One of the Following Below**

Classification :      *Sophomore*                                  *Junior*                                  *Senior*

Age Range :      *18-24*                  *25-32*                                  *33-40*                                  *40+*

Gender :      *Male*                                  *Female*                                  *Transgendered*

**Contact Information**

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional Modes of Communication**

Mode	Yes or No	Contact Name/Address/Number
Facebook		
Skype		
Text Messaging		
Other		

**Please Check Courses Taken**

\_\_\_\_\_ English 100

\_\_\_\_\_ Math 100

**Please List Your Campus Involvement**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

## APPENDIX C

### STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you self-identify and what does that mean to you in this educational environment?
2. Can you identify and Student Affairs staff who have helped you grow as a student?
3. How did you initially come in contact with them, and how often do you interact with them?
4. In what ways have the identified student affairs professionals helped you become a better student?
5. Can you name and describe experiences that you have had outside of the classroom (non-academic) that have helped you develop as a student?
6. How do you perceive that your development (social, emotional, cultural) has helped you improve academically and where there any student affairs professionals involved in this development?
7. What skills have you gained through your involvement on campus?
8. How have those skills developed you as a student?
9. Have any student affairs professionals helped you develop a sense of identity, purpose or direction, areas for personal or academic growth?
10. Would you consider any of the student affairs staff at you institution a mentor? If yes, please explain.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTITIONERS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How do you perceive your role as a Student Affairs professional as it relates to student learning and the development of intelligence?
2. What are the systems established within the division that have been developed to develop, support or augment the academic performance of underprepared students?
3. How has your institution, division or department facilitate a culture of collaboration between academic and student affairs in order to create a holistic learning environment?
4. What do you do as a Student Affairs professional mentor and/or develop the student that has been identified as academically underprepared?
5. What are some of your practices that you as a professional have engaged in order to help students develop their sense of identity, feel included within the environment, and capable as scholars?
6. What programs, activities or other means do you utilize to in order to identify students who are academically underprepared and how do you assess the needs of the student?
7. Is there an associated theoretical concept that has been accepted and applied in your work with students who have a history or present some level of academic hardship?

Have you or any members of your department/division ever been contacted by faculty members for assistance in dealing with the social, emotional, cultural and academic development of a student?