The Voices of African American Female First-Generation College Student Seniors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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The Voices of African American Female First-Generation College Student Seniors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

A Dissertation by

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Brandman University
Irvine, California
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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March 2020

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ABSTRACT

The Voices of First-Generation African American Female Seniors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

by Tamara Frazier

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities as outlined in Tinto’s College Retention Theory (1990, 1993) and Tinto’s Framework for Institutional Action (2012).

Methodology: This study utilized a qualitative multiple-case study methodology to record the perceptions of eight African American female First-Generation College Student seniors regarding the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that allowed them to persist at their Historically Black College and University. Respondents were purposively selected through snowball sampling. Semi-structured interviews were used to capture their lived experiences.

Findings: There were six major findings that emerged as a result of the data collection and analysis. Institutional academic supports from faculty, staff, and professors and labs and student support centers were needed for persistence among the African American female First-Generation College Students seniors. Scholarships were a necessary institutional financial support for the participants to persist through their senior year. Participation in on-campus programs, informal relationships with faculty and mentors, and friends were institutional social supports needed for persistence.
**Conclusions:** The conclusions indicated that institutional academic, financial, and social supports are equally needed for African American female FGCS to persist throughout college. The conclusions showed there is value in having informal and formal relationships with faculty, professors, and staff as well as access to student labs and support centers were needed to help the participants overcome the rigors of college. Scholarships are a requirement for African American female First-Generation College Students to fund their collegiate education. Furthermore, having friends allowed the participants to feel sense of belonging and connectedness on their campuses.

**Recommendations:** Recommendations include providing funding for faculty and staff training regarding proper instructional behaviors that provide academic support to African American female First-Generation College Students. It is also recommended that increased federal grants, industry stipends, and guaranteed work-study jobs be provided to meet Student financial needs. African American female First-Generation College Students need faculty mentors to support them throughout their collegiate programs.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Pursuing post-secondary education continues to be a necessary investment to secure financial security and economic success (Thompson, 2012). According to the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2018), the total fall 2017 undergraduate enrollment in United States degree-granting postsecondary institutions was 16.8 million students, an increase of 27% from the year 2000. The total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions was 16.9 million students, an increase of 28% from 2000. Undergraduate enrollment is projected to increase by 3% (from 16.9 million to 17.4 million students) between 2016 and 2027 (NCES, 2018). Yet, the underrepresentation of African American students within these enrollment numbers still exists. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), 42% of white students aged 18 to 24 were enrolled in college in 2013, compared to 34% of Black students that age. The college graduation numbers were disproportionately low for African Americans; however, they are also inexplicably low for individuals who are enrolled in college whose parents who have never attended college. These individuals are referred to as First-Generation College Students (FGCS) (Mehta, Newbold, & O’Rouke, 2011).

According to the Cataldi, Bennett, Chen’s, and RTI International’s (2018) report, there were 41% of African American students who were considered FGCS compared to 25% of White students. The report showed that only 72% of FGCS were enrolled in college compared to 93% non-FGCS. In addition, the report showed that only 56% of FGCS completed a college degree compared to 74% of non-FGCS. The U.S. Department of Labor’s (2019) report showed that individuals who were 25+ who worked full time without a high school diploma earned $588.00 weekly compared to $751.00 with a high
school diploma and $1357.00 for those who had a bachelor’s degree. First-Generation College Students are least likely to enroll in college, are more likely to drop out of college, and are less likely to obtain a college degree (Mangan, 2015; NCES, 2018; Skomsvold, 2015; Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). These statistics do not work in favor for FGCS; therefore, they are at a higher risk of experiencing longer periods of unemployment, depending on government assistance, and are at a disadvantage of not living a quality life (NCES, 2018; Redford, Hoyer, & Ralph, 2017; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Sadly, these statistics are a harsh reality of individuals who come from low-income families; particularly for African Americans.

Obtaining a collegiate degree and living a good life is valued within the African American community as well as in any other ethnic community. College choice matters and is important to the degree-seeking individual. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have favorable enrollment within the African American community (NCES, 2018; Postsecondary National Policy Institute [PNPI], 2017). Founded on the vary premise of providing an opportunity to attain higher education, HBCUs, generated an integral role in changing the trajectory of life for the African American community following the American Civil War (Stefon, 2018). For more than a century, these institutions of higher learning have played a pivotal role in providing access to African Americans seeking postsecondary education (Gasman & Samayoa, 2017). Historically Black Colleges and Universities are less than 3% of the colleges and universities in the United States but graduate only 20% of the African American students each year (Baseman, Baez, & Turner 2008; Conard & Gasman, 2015; Gasman & Conard,
Yet, HBCUs have played a historical and fundamental role in the American higher education system.

According to the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (2015) “HBCUs disproportionately enroll low-income, first-generation and academically underprepared college students—precisely the students that the country most needs to obtain college degrees” (p.1). In addition, students enrolled at HBCUs heavily receive Pell Grants (75%) and PLUS loans (13%) to pay for college (Thurgood Marshall College Fund, 2015). The reliance on loans keeps individuals in debt and creates other economic issues. Therefore, it is necessary for colleges to provide institutional supports that allow FGCS to complete their degrees, which will increase their likelihood of living a quality life. The focus of this study is to allow African American female FGCS seniors to share the institutional supports that allowed them to persist at their HBCUs.

**Background**

**History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities were created to provide African Americans access to a safe and nurturing environment of higher learning (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Cantey, Bland, Mack, & Joy-Davis, 2013; Nichols & Evans-Bell, 2017; Stefon, 2018; Strayhorn, 2019). The establishment of HBCUs granted access for an increasing number of African Americans to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees. The first HBCUs or “Traditionally Black Colleges” were established in 1837, in Cheyney, Pennsylvania, which was then called, The Institute for Colored Youth, but is now called Cheyney University of Pennsylvania (Brooks & Starks, 2011). Some 17 years later, two other institutions of higher learning were established for African
Americans, Lincoln University, in Pennsylvania established in 1854, and Wilberforce University, located in Ohio, which was established in 1856. Then Harris-Stowe, located in St. Louis, Missouri was established in 1857. At the culmination of the Civil War, many Historically Black Colleges and Universities were established. During a time when many African Americans were still uneducated, enslaved, and with little opportunity, emerged the establishment of the first colleges for African Americans (Brooks & Starks, 2011). Due largely because of the efforts of many churches, Christian missionaries, and philanthropic groups, Freedman’s Bureau, these organizations, such as the Quakers believed that educational advantages of free education should also be afforded to Negroes (Lovett, 2015).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities, from their inception, operated with the mission of providing educational opportunities for African Americans who were denied access to college (Betsey, 2011; Brown & Dancy, 2017; Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Hale, 2006). These institutions of higher learning have been credited for producing and successfully aiding quality graduates to a promising future. Historically Black Colleges and Universities have torn down the barriers for freedom, improved equality, incorporated diversity and creativity in their programs, and created collective advancement through quality education that have produced scholastic leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, and scholars (Lee, 2015; Lee & Keys, 2013; Pennamon, 2019; Stone & Steward, 2016). By the 1950’s, HBCUs were responsible for 90% of African American students in higher education and most importantly produced over 70% of all African American PhDs and police officers and over 80% of all African American judges and physicians (Allen, Jewell, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007; Bangura & Tate, 2017; Brooks &
Today, HBCUs, continue to focus upon the production of well-rounded scholars, exemplifying academic achievements and leadership qualities.

While evidence supports that a significant number of HBCUs play a vital role in highly qualified and prepared students, they also continue to rank high in terms of the proportion of graduates who pursue and complete graduate and professional training (Cooper, 2017; Covington, 2018; Fountaine, 2012; Robinson, 2017; Sanders, 2016). The U.S. Gallup Poll (2015) surveyed over 60,000 college graduates from a range of all colleges, showed HBCU graduates as having the highest rate of financial, career, and emotional well-being of college graduates. Additional studies show that in preparing underrepresented students of color for doctoral success, eight of the top ten institutions that prepare African American students for entering doctoral programs were HBCUs (Aubrey, Jordan, Stevenson, Boss-Victoria, Haynes, Estreet, … Williams, 2016; Baley, 2019; Lundy-Wagner, Vutaggio, & Gassman, 2013; Preston, 2018). Other studies have shown a disproportionately large number of African American students who have earned or were currently working towards a graduate degree had an HBCU background (Boykin, 2017; Bush, 2014; Joseph, 2013; Lenhart, Moore, & Parker, 2011; McCall, 2015; Sibulkin & Butler, 2011). Therefore, HBCUs serve an importance in preparing 21st century leaders who positively influence the U.S. economy.

An Overview of First-Generation College Students

First-Generation College Students are individuals whose parents who have not attended college (Choy, 2002). Typically, these individuals are low-income, are unprepared for college, and experience many hardships (Evans, 2016; Kizart, 2014; Reed, 2017; Royal, 2017; Smierciak-Lueders, 2015; Thorngren, 2017). According to the
Council for Opportunity in Education [COE] (2015), only 15% of First-Generation Students (FGS) met college readiness benchmarks, their test scores were the lowest, they were less prepared for college, and this population’s benchmark scores has not changed within the last decade. The Pell’s Institute’s (2016) report showed that there was a 35% gap in college enrollment for students who were low-income compared to students who lived in households that grossed over $116,000.00 per year. The report also showed that 52% of African Americans whose parents made less than $34,000.00 yearly did not enroll in postsecondary education within 8-10 years of graduating high school. In Redford’s et al., (2017) study, only 24% of FGCS were enrolled in college compared to 42% non-FGCS. The study showed that the majority of FGCS came from households that made less than $20,000.00 a year in which the majority of them enrolled in public non-competitive institutions. Furthermore, the study revealed that only 24% of them had obtained a degree and 54% of them reported that they dropped out because they were unable to pay for college. These statistics consistently show that FGCS come from low-income households, are less prepared for college, are not able to afford college, and leave college without completing a degree. Therefore, it is necessary to provide supports and services to these individuals to foster successful outcomes.

First-Generation College Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Historically Black Colleges and Universities have a reputation for enrolling low-income students of color. The U.S. Department of Education (2015) stated “the Federal Pell Grant Program provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and certain postbaccalaureate students to promote access to postsecondary education” (p. 1). The HBCU Digest (2018) found that over 70% of students who attend HBCUs rely on Pell
Grant assistance throughout their course of study and only 20-45% of them graduate within six years. In a report by the PNPI (2017), there was a 3:5 ratio of FGCS and low-income student enrollment at HBCUs. The report also showed that 50% of students who were unprepared are unlikely to persist through their 2nd year at HBCUs. National statistical data does not exist for FGCS who enroll at HBCUs. Individuals who are labeled within this population come from a low-income status when applying for financial aid. As a result, they acquire the most debt.

Dugan and Vanderbilt’s (2014) study showed that nearly 80% of Black college graduate had loan debt, they were less likely to graduate than Whites, and 58% of them were FGCS. Along with financial issues, FGCS encounter social, emotional, and academic challenges while attending HBCUs. Longmire-Avital and Miller-Dyce’s (2015) compared the factors related to social status between FGCS and non-FGCS. The study was comprised of majority African American (87.5%) students, majority female, and majority individuals in their senior class standing (56%). The study found that non-FGCS were more confident and felt that they fared better than their peers. First-Generation College Students were found to have lower self-esteem and decreased social capital than non-FGCS. Hicks and Wood’s (2016) study focused on the social and academic adjustment of FGCS STEM majors at HBCUs. The findings showed that FGCS were more likely to dropout and less likely to persist than non-FGCS STEM majors. Woods-Warrior (2014) study of retention of FGCS at HBCUs included 80% female, 96.7% African American, and 96% juniors and seniors. The results showed that there was a weak correlation between engagement and mentorship with faculty for FGCS. In addition, those who had a weak correlation of engagement and relationships
were less likely to persist and more likely to dropout. These outcomes suggest the need for academic, social, and emotional supports that will assist FGCS at HBCUs to promote persistence and degree completion.

Factors that Influence Persistence of First-Generation College Students

Higher educational institutions have programs that promote student success and these programs vary for institution to institution; however, each college and university have services that provide academic, emotional, financial, psychological, and social supports to all students (Engle & Tinto 2008; Gonzalez Quiroz & Garza, 2018; Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019; Pérez Vélez 2018; Tinto, 1990, 1993, 2012; West & Moore, 2015; Wright-Davis, 2017). These supports paired with other services allow student to persist from year to year in order that they may obtain a collegiate degree. Literature has shown that there are factors such as a campus major (Alexander, 2017), relationships with faculty (Fountaine, 2012), a support environment (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014), close community connections (Strayhorn, 2017), and academic readiness (Gasman, Nguyen, & Commodore, 2017) that promote successful outcomes among individuals enrolled at HBCUs.

Relationships with Faculty

Relationships are an important aspect of the human life that provide support, promotes growth, and deepens connections. Historically Black Colleges and Universities have been known for the quality of relationships that students develop with its faculty and staff (Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Favors, 2019; Fountaine, 2012; Gasman & Arroyo, 2014; Gasman, Nguyen, & Commodore, 2017). Hinton’s (2014) study of retention of HBCU freshmen found that professors were supportive and made relevant applications to real
life situations that were culturally sensitive. Similarly, Alexander’s (2017) study revealed that FGCS felt that their campuses were family oriented and that they were supported by faculty and staff members. Moreover, Kamasa-Quashie’s (2014) study found that the most significant factor of academic success for FGCS who were seniors were the relationships that they had with faculty. The author noted that providing students with meaningful relationships is a predictor of retention and persistence among this population of students. Although there is a lack of research of HBCU regarding FGCS and the factors that are related to retention and persistence, retention researchers agree that a positive campus environment, social supports, and relationships with faculty and staff highly influence persistence rates within their student body (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Hinton, 2014; Hosley-Hyman, 2015; Pearce-Brady, 2019; Strayhorn, 2017; Tinto, 2012).

**Academic Supports**

Academic supports are needed to retention and persistence for all college students especially for those who are low-income, African American, and FGCS (Armstrong, 2019; Gasman & Arroyo, 2014; Mac Iver, Mac Iver, & Clark, 2019; Renbarger & Long, 2019). Merritt’s (2012) study of African American FGCS revealed that those who participated in academic interventions were able to persist at higher rates than those who did not. The study also found that the majority of the participants were satisfied with the academic supports provided by their HBCU. Rhodes’ (2012) study of first-time freshman (including FGCS) revealed that tutoring services were a factor of academic success for the students. The data showed that students who used the tutoring services at more than once a week had higher GPA’s than those who did not use the services. In
addition, students who used computer and study labs experience more academic success than those who did not. Armstrong’s (2019) classified housing as an academic support for 75% of the FGCS in his study. The results showed that females who had stable housing and academic supports were able to significantly persist than the males in the study. Overall, academic interventions are a predictor of success for students in higher education and should be offered to FGCS to support in their retention and persistence throughout their collegiate experience (Fruith & Chan, 2018; Gasman & Arroyo, 2014; Lorenzetti, 2011; Mac Iver et al., 2019).

**Financial Supports**

Safier (2019) reported that the average cost to attend an HBCU (including two-year and four-year public and private institutions) ranges from $3000.00 to $28,200.00 for in-state tuition and can increase to $2000.00-$3000.00 per year for out-of-state tuition. The cost of attending college is increasing and is a factor of an individual’s choice of college. Research shows that most students who attend HBCUs are economically disadvantaged and rely on loans and financial support to fund their enrollment (Hardy, Kaganda, & Aruguete, 2019; HBCU Digest, 2018; Thurgood Marshall Fund, 2015). The literature indicates that students choose to attend HBCUs due to their low cost (Alexander, 2017; Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Bethea, 2019; Gasman et al., 2017; Green, 2017). In Alexander’s (2017) study, the African American FGCS selected to attend an HBCU due to the affordable cost; in which they indicated was a key factor in their college selection. Mack’s (2015) study showed that the African American female FGCS were able to access financial resources through financial aid and summer jobs offered by their HBCU campuses which was a factor that allowed them to be
successful in their first year of college. Furthermore, Tinto’s (1990, 1993) College Retention Theory and Tinto’s (2012) Framework of Institutional Action explained that students who are low-income need institutional support factors such as financial assistance to support themselves in college.

**Social Supports**

Tinto (1975) stated, “…the frequency and perceived worth of interaction with faculty outside the classroom is the single strongest predictor of student voluntary departure” (p. 10). Therefore, students need positive and meaningful relationships with faculty and staff members inside and outside of the classroom environment. In Kendricks, Nedunuri, and Arment’s (2013) study, the participants underlined the importance of positive faculty interactions as a predictor of success. The participants shared that the faculty at HBCU are supportive, engaging, and provide a family-oriented environment. Additionally, Chen’s et al., (2014) study showed that faulty interactions were highly favorable with student satisfaction. Shorette and Palmer’s (2015) found that positive relationships with faculty lead to positive self-concept among HBCU students. Tinto (2012) described that social supports include opportunities such as but are not limited to student-peer and student-staff relationships, participation in learning communities, social activities, and services that reduce stress and promote self-worth. Hinton’s (2014) study showed that factors such as racial integration, cultural inclusion, peer support, and freedom promoted retention among HBCU freshman students. Rhodes’ (2012) study showed that over 70% of the participants had a sense of belonging at the HBCU. The participants reported being involved in social events such as extracurricular activities, career fairs, and social gatherings. Hicks’ (2012) study of FGCS STEM
students found that although their experiences differed from non-FGCS, social supports were occasionally used to improve their self-efficacy. The study also revealed that the participants were provided with a nurturing environment which also contributed to their self-efficacy scores. According to Albert Bandura, the concept of self-efficacy is one’s own ability to adjust and cope in various situations, which coincides with how one views themselves. Bandura (1977) explained that self-efficacy is the foundation of human inspiration, motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being, which is aspects of the core belief that one has the power to affect changes by one's actions (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997).

**Tinto’s College Retention Theory and Framework of Institutional Action**

Tinto’s (1975) initial model of student dropout behavior has evolved over the years as research has evolved. His original framework explained the factors that lead to a student’s departure in college which include their individual characteristics, goal commitment, family background, academic performance, pre-college experiences, peer and faculty relationships, institutional commitment, and academic and social integration. Tinto (1990) offered an outline to community colleges regarding student retention. The author explained that institution’s need to commit to developing programs that provide students with social and intellectual communities, ensure their commitment to meeting the educational and social growth of students, and provided students with an opportunity for educational choice through developing an effective mission. Tinto (1990) indicated that things such as faculty-student relationships, activities that involve students into the campus community, opportunities to nourish students, faculty and staff commitment, consistent contact between faculty and students, peer interactions, intellectual growth,
and a clear mission should be included in an institutions retention program. Tinto (1993) expanded on his earlier framework of retention and provided specific tasks and supports of effective student retention which are recruitment, freshman orientation, pre-entry assessments, transition assistance, early contact, community outreach, academic support, monitoring, counseling, academic advising, intentional first-year programs, and financial assistance. Tinto’s (2012) Framework for Institutional Action was birthed out of his College Retention Theory which detailed academic, financial, and social supports that allow students to persist and complete college. The author described academic supports consist of activities, programs, and skills that students participate in and develop to increase their grade performance. In addition, the author labeled social supports as opportunities, activities, relationships, and actions taken by the student and provided by faculty and staff members that allow students to integrate into the institution’s community. Moreover, financial supports were described by the author as monetary support that allow students to pay for institutional fees and needs they have throughout their enrollment. Tinto’s (1975) original work on student retention began by investigating the factors that cause them to drop out of college. The author explained that in order to understand student departure from college, individual characteristics and dispositions must be investigated. He suggested that the greater commitment to academic and social integration an individual has the more likely they will remain in college.

Retention is referred to as a student’s continuous enrollment from their first year of study to their second year of study within the higher educational system (Cotton, Nash, & Kneale, 2017; Ishler & Upcraft 2005, National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCRC], 2017; Tinto, 1993). Creating and sustaining a safe, nurturing, and equitable
student environment is essential to closing the persistence gaps that disproportionally affect students that learn best in culturally sensitive learning environments (Gasman, Thai-Huy Nguyen, & Commodore, 2017; Goings, 2016; Raheem & Brunson, 2018; Strayhorn, 2017). These combined factors are key components that are effective approaches that increase student retention rates. To bolster the student retention at HBCUs, campus leaders have sought the support of federal and state funding, established institutional strategies, which encompass academic support programs, counseling and retention centers, remediation services, career supports, merit-based scholarships and emergency loans, corroborate and private donations, and Title IV programs like Summer Bridge and Trio programs, making retention a major part HBCUs mission (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Hinton, 2014; Mack, 2015; Pearce-Brady, 2019; Rhodes, 2012; Richardson, 2018).

These supports and services coupled with other programs led to persistence for students. Persistence is defined as a student’s continuous enrollment from year two until graduation (Bergam, Gross, Berry, & Shuck, 2014; Kerby 2015; NSCRC, 2017).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities have spearheaded programs specifically designed to improve the retention rate of those students that may not have come to college with the adequate resources to navigate through the higher education system. Research suggest that HBCUs are outperforming PWI’s in the area of retention and graduate students at higher rates (Hardy et al., 2019; Richards & Awokoya, 2012).

White-McNeil (2016), believed that much of HBCU retention improvement success stems from the cultural influences, social organizations, small class sizes, student-faculty-staff relationships, family-like atmosphere, open-door policies of the HBCU all combine
to provide a sense of identity and heritage within the goals of education, resulting in a unique experience.

Tinto’s Retention Theory and Framework for Institutional Action provides the theoretical grounding for this study. The following constructs- academic, financial, and social will provide the lens through which the perceptions of African American female FGCS seniors regarding institutional support factors will be amplified.

**Statement of Research Problem**

Individuals who do not attend college do not obtain degrees, which decreases their likelihood of being competitive in today’s workforce. It is no secret that those who do not have a college degree earn less and have less access to resources. Individuals who are raised in low-income household experience challenges such as financial issues, academic and technological deficits, community violence, health issues, a continuous cycle of poverty, inadequate support, and a list of other difficulties (Brown, Wohn, & Ellison, 2016; Cross, Kim, Cross, & Frazier, 2018; Jones, 2018; McFadden, 2016; Rall, 2016). Being low-income does not exempt one from acquiring success; however, it does put one at risk of experiencing adversities. Research has shown that there are individuals who are considered low-income and FGCS who fight the odds, push past their circumstances, and pursue a college degree (Andrews, 2017; Arzy, Davies, & Harbour, 2016; Ramos, 2018; Renbarger & Long, 2019; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Although research has shown the resilience of these individuals, it has neglected to document the achievements of African American females FGCS at HBCUs. Therefore, the aim of this study is to give African American females FGCS who are seniors at HBCUs a place in the literature.
The majority of FGCS grow up in low-income households that create many challenges to success among this population. A report by de Brey, Musu, McFarland, Wilkinson-Flicker, Diliberti, Zhang, and..., Branstetter (2019) showed that only 34% of African Americans were enrolled in a postsecondary institution, 72% of them received loans, only 6% of them ages 25-64 had completed a bachelor’s degree, and only 11% completed a two-year college within three years. Additionally, the report showed that earnings for African American ages 25-34 who did not complete a high school degree were $20,500.00 compared to $44,600.00 of African Americans who had a bachelor’s degree. These outcomes put African Americans at a higher risk of experiencing unemployment, homelessness, dependency on government assistance, and have less earnings compared to Whites and Asians, which does not allow them to live a quality life (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2019a/b; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019; U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). These statistics do not separate the outcomes for African American females. A report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor (2018) showed that African American women ages 16 and over had an unemployment rate of 4.8% compared to 3.2% of White women and African American women over the age of 25 had an unemployment rate of 3.8% compared to 2.7% of White women. National data continues to show that African Americans have less favorable outcomes compared to Whites.

When exploring the literature on HBCUs, research often focuses on the academic success and retention of African American males (Chen, Ingram, & Davis, 2014). There are a limited number of studies that address the institutional factors that assist African American females with academic success at HBCUs. The few studies that addressed
African Americans in higher education and graduates focused more on underrepresentation (Reese, 2017), mentoring (Bartman, 2015), and gaps in access (Libassi, 2018). There are even fewer are studies that address the factors that exist for African American female FGCS that effectively persist through higher education at HBCUs. Furthermore, there is only one study that focuses on African American female FGCS seniors at HBCU’s and their academic success (Kamasa-Quashie, 2014). However, that study focused on both male and female.

According to Winkle-Wagner (2015), research pertaining to the topic of HBCUs have explored low enrollment and graduation retention of these institutions using quantitative methods and data sets that do not provide an adequate representation of the academic success of African American female FGCS. Likewise, Strayhorn (2013) added that current research studies on African American females are delimited due to the incessant comparison to unmatched demographic groups and populations. While there is substantial data on the retention of African American males at HBCUs, the percentage of African American females at HBCUs represented the highest percentage of minority women who earned bachelor’s degrees in computer sciences and STEM (Gasman & Nguyen, 2016; Harper, 2018; Jackson, 2013; Joseph, 2012; Strayhorn, Williams, Tillman-Kelly, & Suddeth, 2012). It is important that the academic accomplishments of African American female FGCS seniors are highlighted on a regular basis across all levels of public discourse within higher education so that HBCUs are viewed as models of success for future generations of African American students; especially for those who are FGCS.
**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities as outlined in Tinto’s College Retention Theory (1990, 1993) and Tinto’s Framework for Institutional Action (2012).

**Research Questions**

The research questions of this study are:

1. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be academic institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?

2. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be financial institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?

3. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be social institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?

**Significance of the Problem**

First-Generation College Students who attend college are the first in their immediate family to do so (Mehta et al., 2011). Obtaining a degree has its rewards as does its challenges. Due to their low-income status, unpreparedness, low test scores, and lack of family support, FGCS endure many challenges while in college (Callan, 2018; Dugan & Vanderbilt, 2014; Green, 2017; Kirkman, 2018; Mack, 2015). The results of
this case study can be used locally, nationally and internationally by anyone who has an interest in increasing the likelihood of FGCS completing a degree program. This would include families, k-12 and higher education administrators and policy makers. Patton (2015) posits that case studies can be used by program and policy makers, or practitioners, and funders, in what has come to be called evidence-based decision making (Patton, 2015). This case study will serve as a blueprint for assisting current and future African American female FGCS seniors at HBCUs in order to increase retention, attrition, and persistence rates.

The academic deficits of dropping out of college and lack of degree attainment, FGCS have been repeated throughout the literature; however, there are no national statistics of African American female FGCS and their outcomes. This study focuses on the academic, financial, and social institutional supports that African American female FGCS seniors accessed at their HBCUs. This study will provide awareness to higher educational institutions regarding academic, financial, and social institutional supports perceived by FGCS to be essential to their successful persistence throughout their academic programs. Tinto (1990, 1993, 2012) has outlined academic, financial, and social supports that promote retention and persistence. In addition, Tinto (1993, 2012) indicated that students of color and low-income students typically underperform than their White counterparts and explained that cultural relevant services and supports are needed for their effective retention. This study will provide institutions with insight regarding the supports needed for African American FGCS to successfully obtain degrees. Additionally, this study will offer information to K-12 systems regarding academic preparation for African Americans who are low-income and FGS who desire
who attend HBCUs. Moreover, the information provided in this study will bring understanding to the issues that African American students encounter to influence policy development within this population to address their educational gaps in learning.

The literature has failed to document the experiences of African American female FGCS seniors. There is no research that gives voice to African American female seniors who are FGCS that attend HBCUs. This study will focus on the experiences of African American female FGCS seniors, making this the first study to explore the factors that led to their persistence at HBCUs. This study will add to the body of literature regarding persistence among African American female FGCS in their pursuit of a degree at HBCUs.

**Definitions**

This section provides definitions of the terms that are relevant to the study.

**Academic supports.** Are considered services that increase academic knowledge of students which can be offered through basic skills training, tutoring centers, remedial courses, study groups, summer bridge programs, peer-to-peer tutoring, teachers, advisors, professors, faculty, volunteer mentors, supplemental courses, and summer learning experiences (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014; Tinto, 2012).

**African American/Black.** Individuals who are African American or Black “are generally defined as people with ancestry from Sub-Saharan Africa who are residents or citizens of the United States” (Livingston, Pierce, & Gollop-Brown, 2013, p. 1).

**College retention theory.** Retention is related to a student’s experience at their higher educational institution that include factors such as academic, social, emotional, individual commitment, and university commitment (Tinto, 1993).
**Educational leader/leadership.** Refers to an educational leader, faculty member, staff member, professor, or any moral steward, educator, and/or community builder (Murphy, 2012).

**First-generation college student.** Refers to an individual whose parents who have not attended college (Mehta et al., 2011).

**Framework of institutional action.** Tinto (2012) suggests that “…students are more likely to succeed in settings that establish clear and high expectations for their success, provide academic and social support…and actively involve them with others on campus…” (p. 8).

**Financial support.** Is considered any type of financial assistance by means of scholarships, stipends, grants, loans, and work study programs that help students in paying for college (Tinto, 2012).

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities.** These are colleges whose enrollment is over 70% of Black population. There are currently 102 HBCUs that are both publicly and privately funded (Knight, Davenport, Green-Powell, & Hilton, 2012).

**Institutional supports.** Programs and services that are offered by higher educational institutions that meet the academic, social, emotional, psychological, vocational, and financial needs of students (Tinto, 2012).

**Minoritized.** Benitez (2010) explained that “minoritized” is a term used to denote students of color as the “process [action vs. noun] of student minoritization” (p. 131).

**Persistence.** Refers to student’s continuous enrollment at their institution past the second year of study and through degree completion (Kerby, 2015).
**Predominately White Institution (PWI)/Traditionally White Institution (TWI)/Historically White Institution.** Is a predominantly white institution, any institution of higher learning which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment.

**Racially minoritized students.** Minoritized groups such as Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans and Pacific Islander, and Native American students who have been historically labeled “minorities” by the dominant group; however, they numerically make up a larger dominant group in America (Stewart, 2013).

**Social support.** Is considered “…social forces internal and external to campus, especially those that influence students’ sense of belonging and membership in the social communities of the institution” (Tinto, 2012, p. 27), such as social groups, peers, friends, campus fraternal organizations, alumni groups, networks, and motivational groups that improves student and campus connectedness, which grounds the students’ availability and willingness to take part in support services such as, tutoring, learning communities, and other helpful academic policies, supports, and practices.

**TRIO program.** This program is “funded through the U.S. Department of Education to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs” (North Carolina A&T State University, 2019, p. 1).

**Delimitations**

The following delimitations are included in this study: This study is delimited to eight first-generation African American females who are in their senior class standing...
and attend a Historical Black College and University at Alabama State University (ASU), Spelman College (SC), Texas Southern University (TSU), and Tuskegee University (TU).

**Organization of Study**

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction of study, along with background information, the statement of purpose, the significance of problem, definition of terms, and study delimitations. Chapter II examines the review of literature on Historically Black Colleges & Universities, specifically the history, relevance, successes and challenges, as well as the overall school environment. Chapter III presents the methodology used in the study, including the population and sample, as well as the criteria for selection of the individuals for the study. Chapter IV offers the findings of the study, including a detailed analysis of the data. Chapter V provides an interpretation of the data, draws conclusions based on the analysis, suggest implications for actions, and offers recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that African American female First-Generation College Student (FGCS) seniors perceive supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). This chapter will review and summarize literature related to HBCUs. Specifically, the chapter will cover the legacy of HBCUs, HBCU student outcomes, and African American FGCS experiences at HBCUs. Finally, the theoretical foundations and theoretical framework underpinning this study and gaps in the literature will be presented.

The Legacy of Historically Black Colleges & Universities

The rich legacy that continues to thrive amongst HBCUs is one that is responsible for providing a sense of hope and opportunity for many African Americans as far back as the start of the U.S. Civil War. Hill (2007) explained that the establishment of these institutions primary mission was to provide a safe haven where African Americans could be educated and to provide educational opportunities were, they otherwise would not exist in the United States. According to Lee and Keys (2013), prior to the establishment of the Black-Land Grant system in 1890, access to higher education for African Americans in the United States was primarily limited to private universities such as Howard University and Fisk University. From 1865 to the 1960’s, the majority of African Americans that attended these institutions increased (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Currently, there are 102 public and private remaining HBCUs in operation (Knight, Davenport, Green-Powell, & Hilton, 2012). The legacy of HBCUs have not only provided African Americans with thriving educational opportunities, but also with goals
oriented toward financial success. Finley’s (2015) study found that HBCU graduates are also most likely to have strong relationships, enjoy what they do each day for work, and they are more goal oriented. Today, HBCUs continue to excel in their ability to create a safe, purposeful, and effective learning environment in which underserved students (i.e. African Americans, first-generation, low-income) are educated regardless of academic preparation, socio-economic status, background, or life circumstances (Gasman et al., 2017; Goings, 2016; Hinton, 2014; Jackson & Jackson, 2016; Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

**HBCUs Providing a Landscape for Leadership in the 21st Century**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities provide a requisite communal space to engage the intellectual development of the African American student (Strayhorn, 2017; United Negro College Fund, 2019b, West & Moore III, 2015; White-McNeil, 2016). Toldson’s (2013) study found that faculty at HBCUs tend to be more approachable, with smaller class sizes where a relationship with faculty are often genuine and they are more sensitive to cultural backgrounds. In addition, the study showed that students who attend HBCUs have reported that they felt a sense of belonging from day one, as demonstrated through the camaraderie of the new student orientations, constant display of school pride, campus environment energy, provided a welcoming feeling of support from the entire campus. According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2010) report, HBCUs have produced over 40% of Congress members and engineers, over 50% of lawyers, and over 80% of judges which has widened the African American middle class. Historically Black Colleges and Universities have played a viable role in the development of African American young adult college student socialization. Wooten (2015) affirmed that, creating the self-assurance and confidence needed for their African American students to
thrive, HBCUs in the 21st century have fostered a modern day Black liberation that, produces leaders and are effective in developing majors where individuals can experience freedom and thrive in the U.S. economy.

**Outcomes of Students who Attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

The efficacy of HBCUs is measured by the many distinguished and notably successful graduates these institutions produce. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2010) report showed that students who attend HBCUs report higher levels of engagement on some survey dimensions than do their counterparts at non-HBCUs. The Gallup’s (2015) report explained that students who are graduates of HBCUs are provided a quality education, with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to reach their full potential and to challenge the structural barriers created by institutional racism. Despite policy initiatives to the contrary, the achievement gap between African American and White students in post-secondary education persists in the United States. Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, and Wilkinson-Flicker’s (2016) report showed that only 13% of African Americans ages 25 and older had a bachelor’s degree compared to 33% of Whites and 52% of Asians. Arnett (2015) explained that HBCUs, particularly those in the South, have historically received less funding and inequitable program offering compared to the states’ PWIs. Similarly, Russell Owens and Elliott’s (2015) reported that HBCUs have long experienced the denial of resources needed to serve a student body and in some cases, states take funds that should be invested in strengthening academic programs at HBCUs and use them to create similar academic programs at PWIs, hindering HBCUs ability to increase enrollment and generate revenue.
Simms (2014) added that yet and still, educational outcomes at HBCUs are cohesive and distinct from other institutional groups.

HBCUs have reduced the achievement gap among African American and White Americans at the post-graduate level inclusive of critical areas of STEM. Burrelli and Rapoport’s (2013) reported from 1986 to 2006, 24% to 33% of African American, doctoral recipients in science and engineering earned their undergraduate degrees from HBCUs. Additionally, the contributions that HBCUs have made to student educational outcomes and success have been monumental. Furthermore, Simms and Bock (2014) reported HBCUs awarded 22% of bachelor’s degrees, 17% of master’s degrees, 12% of doctoral degrees earned by African Americans in STEM in which HBCU educational outcomes have demonstrated they foster success.

Capitalizing on strengths, resilience, and tenacity, HBCUs play an integral role in providing their students the essentials needed for a lifetime of academic and professional success. The U.S. Gallup Poll (2015) showed that HBCU students were found to have the highest status rankings including financial and career. Brown (2016) elucidated that HBCUs continue to produce exemplary professionals who are political, industrial, and transformational leaders. Graduates of HBCUs have shared how these universities impacted almost every aspect of their diversity of thought perception and undertaking throughout their collegiate experience. A report by Black Women’s Roundtable (2019) found that,

Black graduates of HBCUs tend to fair better in the post-college experiences than do Blacks who graduate from Predominately White Institutions, HBCU graduates were more likely to indicate that they outperformed their non-HBCU counterparts.
across a variety of indicators, including financial well-being (40% vs. 29%), social well-being (54% vs. 48%), physical well-being (33% vs. 28%), community well-being (42% vs. 38%) and living with a sense of purpose (51% vs. 43%) (p. xiv).

The U.S. Gallup (2015) report showed that African American graduates of HBCUs were more than twice as likely as those who graduated from predominantly white institutions to recall feeling supported by a professor. In Palmer’s et al., (2018) study, the participants shared that HBCUs provided them with cultural diversity. Also, Hardy’s et al., (2018) study showed that participants appreciated the encouragement of the HBCU staff to think and perform as scholars, which was not present in their previous institutions. Furthermore, Preston’s (2017) study of doctoral students showed that there was an appreciation for the program’s rigor and support from the HBCU faculty and staff. As education seems to serve as a status representation for most institutions of higher learning, HBCUs seem to have established a platform for propelling its students into future success (Palmer et al., 2018).

**Degree Attainment**

In a study done by Franke and DeAngelo (2018), findings showed a significant positive effect for African American students attending HBCUs, resulting in students showing a 15.8% higher likelihood to graduate in six years over PWIs. Although it is often reported that HBCUs generally have low graduation rates, a report by Harper (2018) found discrepancies in some HBCU reporting narratives. The American Council of Education’s (2017) report stated that Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) including HBCUs graduation rates exceed “the federal graduation rate…this is especially true for
exclusively full-time students, the most comparable student population when looking side by side at NSC completion data and the federal graduation rate” (p. 1). The report showed that, students who attended private HBCUs who were full-time students had a graduation rate of 66.7% compared to the 43.9% federal rate. In addition, the report also showed “a 43 percent total completion rate for public four-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which increased to nearly 62 percent for students who enrolled exclusively full time, compared to a federal graduation rate of 34.1 percent” (p. 1). Simms (2014) explained that much of the discrepancy regarding HBCU graduation rates stems from the skewed narratives stemming from some HBCU selection process of students coming from more challenging backgrounds and are less academically prepared. However, Chiles (2017) argued that graduation rates at HBCUs are not logically comparable with those at other institutions; HBCUs and non-HBCUs do not enroll students with the same criteria, due in part to the large number of low-income students HBCUs accept, making up the identified as those eligible for the Pell Grant.

According to the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2013) the more a college serves and enrolls Pell Grant recipients, the lower its graduation rate. The report showed that “Pell recipients lowers average 6-year graduation rate from 67% to 28% and from 85% to 33% at public and private colleges, respectively” (p. 3). In addition, the report showed that Pell Grant recipients also lower an institution’s test scores. These outcomes reflect student socioeconomic status as well as college readiness. Richards and Awokoya’s (2012) report of HBCUs and non-HBCUs showed that students who are low-income, unprepared for college, and have academic deficits are more than likely to either drop out of college or take longer to graduate. The report also showed
that graduation rates at HBCUs were nine points lower than non-HBCUs and the six-year graduation rate was also lower. The authors reported that if students who enrolled at HBCUs did not have disadvantages their degree completion rates would be higher than non-HBCUs.

Collegiate programs were created for students to complete their degrees in four-years. However, Smith-Barrow (2016) explained that graduating in four years was once the norm for college students, but now more than a third of full-time students at four-year schools take more time to finish. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2019),

The 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor’s degree at 4-year degree-granting institutions in fall 2011 overall was 60 percent. That is, by 2017 some 60 percent of students had completed a bachelor’s degree at the same institution where they started in 2011 (p. 1).

Smith-Barrow (2016) reported that the six-year graduation rate for full-time students who enrolled in the 2008-2009 academic year at HBCUs was 36%. In contrast, Nichols and Evans’ (2017) report of HBCUs and non-HBCUs showed that freshman who were majority low-income at HBCUs had better completion rates for African American students than non-HBCUs. The report also showed that the average institutional graduation rate for African American students at HBCUs was 37.8% compared with 32% for non-HBCUs. Although discrepancies exist in the data, students who attend HBCUs benefit from their experiences.
Student Retention at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Retention refers to a student’s continuous enrollment from their first year of study to their second year of study within the higher educational system (Cotton, Nash, & Kneale, 2017; Ishler & Upright, 2005; NSCRC, 2017; Tinto, 1993). Tinto’s (1990, 1993) College Retention Theory and Tinto’ (2012) Framework for Institutional Action will be utilized in this study as the theoretical foundation to explain the academic, social, and financial institutional factors that led to the successful persistence of African American female FGCS seniors enrolled at HBCUs.

Creating and sustaining a safe, nurturing, and equitable student environment is essential to closing the persistence gaps that disproportionately affect students that learn best in culturally sensitive learning environments (Gasman, Thai-Huy Nguyen, & Commodore, 2017; Goings, 2016; Raheem & Brunson, 2018; Strayhorn, 2017). These combined factors are key components that are effective approaches that increase student retention rates. To bolster the student retention at HBCUs, campus leaders have sought the support of federal and state funding, established institutional strategies, which encompass academic support programs, counseling and retention centers, remediation services, career supports, merit-based scholarships and emergency loans, corroborate and private donations, and Title IV programs like Summer Bridge and Trio programs, making retention a major part HBCUs mission (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Hinton, 2014; Mack, 2015; Pearce-Brady, 2019; Rhodes, 2012; Richardson, 2018). These supports and services coupled with other programs led to persistence for students. Persistence is defined as a student’s continuous enrollment from year two until graduation (Bergam, Gross, Berry, & Shuck, 2014; Kerby 2015; NSCRC, 2017).
Historically Black Colleges and Universities have spearheaded programs specifically designed to improve the retention rate of those students that may not have come to college with the adequate resources to navigate through the higher education system. Research suggests that HBCUs are outperforming PWI’s in the area of retention and graduate students at higher rates (Hardy et al., 2019; Richards & Awokoya, 2012). White-McNeil (2016), believed that much of HBCU retention improvement success stems from the cultural influences, social organizations, small class sizes, student-faculty-staff relationships, family-like atmosphere, open-door policies of the HBCU all combine to provide a sense of identity and heritage within the goals of education, resulting in a unique experience.

First-Generation African American College Student Outcomes

First-Generation College Students are individuals whose parents have never attended college. Studies have consistently proven that FGCS have less favorable outcomes than non-FGCS (NCES, 2018; PNPI, 2018; Redford et al., 2017; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Redford’s et al., (2017) report of FGCS revealed that African Americans had the worst outcomes. The study showed that only 14% of the study’s sample were African American FGCS compared to 49% white FGCS. In addition, only 11% of African Americans were continuing FGCS compared to 70% White FGCS. Moreover, the results showed that most students came from low-income families, they were less likely to persist, and less likely to graduate in which African Americans have the most unfavorable of those outcomes. Similarly, the PNPI’s (2018) report showed that of college going students in the U.S. 41% of African Americans have FGCS status. The findings revealed that African Americans were more likely to be in remedial courses,
experience financial difficulties, are more likely to attend two-year colleges, and are more likely to be enrolled part-time. The participants reported having to borrowing large sums of money to pay for college which reflected their low-income status of living in households that grossed less than $20,000.00 per year. Wilbur and Roscigno’s (2016) study compared the experiences of FGCS to non-FGCS which included a study sample of African American, Hispanic, and White individuals. The findings concluded that FGCS were more likely to live at home with their parents due to financial issues, were less likely to afford college expenses, more likely to dropout, and less likely to obtain a four-year degree than non-FGCS. These statistics show that African Americans who are FGCS have less favorable outcomes than their counterparts, thus they need more support to successfully complete a college degree.

**African American First-Generation College Student Experiences at Historically Black Colleges and Universities**

Research shows that HBCUs serve majority low-income, FGCS, and African American students (HBCU Digest, 2018; Hardy et al., 2019; Thurgood Marshall Fund, 2015). Individuals have expressed that they choose to attend HBCUs because of the low-cost, nurturing environment, family-oriented community, and culturally inviting atmosphere (Alexander, 2017; Arroyo & Gasman, 2014; Bethea, 2019; Gasman et al., 2017; Green, 2017). The purpose of Alexander’s (2017) study was to explore the factors that African American FGCS selected to attend HBCUs. The study revealed that the campus was inviting, and their campuses were family oriented. In addition, the affordable cost and academic major were other factors that influenced their decision to attend a HBCU. Similarly, Green’s (2017) study explored the factors that motivated
African American FGCS to attend HBCUs. The results showed that internal motivation and values were factors that contributed to their decision to attend college. Overcoming obstacles such as neighborhood, home, and school environment, and negative social media perceptions of African Americans were factors that influenced the participants to attend college. The participants shared that their family and support networks were factors that allowed them to persist. Woods-Warrior’s (2014) study showed that FGCS who participated in a retention program were more likely to persist than FGCS who did not. The results showed that academic, interpersonal skills, and social activities were factors that led to successful outcomes among FGCS. In addition, the participants expressed that they had quality relationships with faculty/staff, and they benefited from the mentoring that they received. Colson McLean’s (2013) study focused on factors that impacted retention among FGCS who were freshman. The majority of the sample were African Americans that attended HBCUs. There were 90% of the participants who agreed that academic advising helped them set academic goals. The majority of the participants expressed that they were satisfied with the financial aid advising they received. Freshman orientation was found to be a positive factor among the participants. All of the participants were members of the TRIO program in which they shared that their involvement in the program had a positive impact on their 1st year success. Additionally, family was a factor that motivated the students to persist past their first year as was their peers and a sense of community. Mack’s (2015) study of African American female FGCS athletes investigated the factors that were related to their persistence. The participants expressed that positive relationships with staff members, coaches, and nurturing relationships contributed to their successful outcomes. Resources like the
TRIO program, Upward Bound, and work study were services that participants expressed that they needed to make it through their first year. Moreover, the participants shared that they were determined to succeed and pushed themselves not to give up despite being a FGCS. Most notably, the participants were resilient encouraged themselves to remain strong and strive for their best. Bethea’s (2019) study showed that African American FGCS reported having racial awareness teachings and cultural pride which were among factors that contributed to their persistence at HBCUs. The findings revealed that although African American FGCS had lower levels of self-efficacy than non-FGCS this was also a factor as well as spirituality which contributed to their successful outcomes. There are only a few studies that explore the experiences of African American FGCS experiences and outcomes at HBCUs. Therefore, there is a need for literature to examine the outcomes of African American FGCS who attend HBCUs. This researcher found no studies that focused on FGCS African American senior perceptions regarding institutional factors of support.

Challenges Experienced Among African American First-Generation College Students

Research shows that African Americans grow up in single parent households, live in communities with violence, reside in impoverished neighborhoods, endure racism and oppression, are stigmatized, experience trauma, and encounter an array of other unnecessary issues (Alter, 2015; Doherty & Craft, 2011; Hanks, Solomon, & Weller, 2018; Saleem, English, Busby, Lambert, Harrison, Stock, & Gibbons, 2016; Sharkey, 2013; Williams, Banerjee, Lozada-Smith, Lambouths, & Rowley 2017). These circumstance put them at greater risks of developing health issues, involving themselves
in criminal activity, experiencing long period of unemployment and homelessness, participating in risky behaviors, having cognitive and development deficits, and other problems that are not conducive to successful outcomes (Berry, 2019; Damaske, Bratter, & Frech, 2017; Lynch, 2017; Pruitt, 2017). Moreover, research has consistently shown that FGCS experience challenges and barriers to collegiate success such as finances, lack of family support, lower motivational and self-efficacy levels, family responsibilities, being academically unprepared, lack of positive interactions, and racism (Callan, 2018; Evans, 2013; Green, 2017; Kirkman, 2018; Mack, 2015).

**Lack of Quality Relationships and Resources**

Callan’s (2018) study showed that African American female FGCS experienced a lack of quality interactions among staff members at their PWIs. The participants shared that they had difficulty with integration into the college community and with the African American community at their institutions. Additionally, the participants indicated that they lacked resources and they didn’t have family help due to their family members not attending college. Also, the participants shared that they had to navigate college on their own and had to figure out things on their own. Green’s (2015) study focused on African American female FGCS at PWIs. The study revealed that the students were prepared for college; however, they experienced challenges and barriers to academic success. Results showed that the participants lacked interactions with staff and had difficulties with adjusting to their campuses. Furthermore, the participants reported having financial challenges and a lack of quality relationships. In Edwards’ (2014) study, African American female FGCS expressed the lack of quality relationships with professors. The
participants shared that the faculty members had cultural ignorance and they experienced racism at the PWIs.

**Finances**

Financial resources are important to FGCS to pay for college due to their low-socioeconomic status. In addition, FGCS need financial support to pay for necessities and to provide for themselves throughout their collegiate journey. Colson McLean’s (2013) study of majority African American FGCS freshman who attended HBCUs had challenges with speaking to staff members about their outside college commitments. Moreover, the participants expressed that they had to take out over $20,000.00 worth of loans in their first year of college due to not having financial resources to pay for college. Furthermore, the participants indicated not having enough money to afford things such as food, travel, and other expenses. Similarly, Evans (2013) study of African American female FGCS showed that finances were a barrier encountered among the participants. The individuals in this study shared that they lacked resources due to their low-socioeconomic status and that struggled to pay for things such as their necessities. Likewise, Mack’s (2015) study of African American female FGCS student athletes showed that they were concerned about finances to provide for their needs during college without having to be a burden on their families. The results showed that they were unprepared for college. The participants expressed that they frustrated during their first year of college due to the amount of preparation it took to be successful. Kirkman’s (2018) study showed that African American males FGCS experienced racism and microaggressions at their institutions. The participants expressed that it was challenging just being a FGCS and having to navigate their way through college especially with a
lack of resources. The results showed that things such as the rigors of college, feelings of being alone, financial aid challenges, and the need to take a break from college were difficulties that the participants encountered while being a FGCS. It is no secret that attending college costs money and for low-income disadvantaged students who are pursuing a degree, the cost of college becomes a barrier which higher educational institutions should address to ensure that this population has an equitable chance to succeed in college as their counterparts.

Factors that Promote Persistence for African American First-Generation College Students

First-Generation College Students who attend college require more supports than non-FGCS to experience success because research has shown that they have less favorable outcomes than non-FGCS (Bethea, 2019; Covarrubias, Jones, & Johnson, 2018; Harlow & Bowman, 2016; Nicols & Islas, 2015). There is limited research that explores the factors that promote success among African American female FGCS (Dickens Callan, 2018). According to Strayhorn (2013),

Much of the research that has examined college students’ academic and social challenges has focused on women and White students or has compared White students to a heterogeneous group of students of color, rather than a specific racial/ethnic group that is adequately represented in the study’s sample (p. 118). Although there has been a lack a research within this population, the literature has found that academic supports, mentoring, social networks, psychosocial services, a nurturing environment, academic advising, a positive self-concept, intrinsic motivation, family support, financial assistance, spirituality, and various institutional resources contribute to

**Motivation**

Wiltsher’s (2016) study found that motivation was an indicator of success among African American FGCS who attended HBCUs. The study showed that FGCS had higher levels of motivation than continuing-generation students. The study suggested that positive environments, peer role models, social capital, and positive faculty relationships are factors that are related to successful outcomes for FGCS at HBCUs. Similarly, Wilson’s (2018) study of African American FGCS revealed that their motivation and resilience were factors that contributed to their success in spite of the obstacles they encountered. Cultural programs and organizations were also a key factor that influenced their success. Likewise, Andrews’ (2017) study of African American male FGCS at HBCUs showed that resilience was an indicator of success. The participants reported having family support, educational goals, and motivation to overcome racism and other challenges they faced. Moreover, Bethea’s (2019) study of African American FGCS and African American non-FGCS enrolled at HBCUs showed that both groups experienced high levels of self-efficacy. The authors suggested that FGCS should be provided with tutoring service and academic interventions to increase persistence rates. Furthermore, Golden-Battle’s (2017) study of African American FGCS showed that students relied on their cultural wealth for persistence. In addition, the participants shared that they had supportive social networks which contributed to their motivation and resilience. Jackson’s (2017) study of African American FGCS included a sample of 50% female and 50% male. The study investigated the factors that contributed
to motivation in college which included breaking stereotypes, overcoming generational poverty, and career aspirations.

**Positive Relationships**

Rachell’s (2014) study of African American male FGCS who were athletes at HBCUs emphasized that their success was attributed to the nurturing environment, a sense of belonging, and a support network. Family members, mentors, and academic supports were also identified as indicators of success among the participants. Pearce-Brady’s (2019) study of African American FGCS who participated in a HBCU TRIO Program had successful outcomes due to the supports that were offered by the institution. The participants highlighted the quality of relationships they had with program faculty and staff. In addition, the participants were more involved in social activities; including extracurricular activities. Most importantly, peers and faculty were viewed as family. Kirkman’s (2018) study of African American male FGCS revealed that mentors, community resources, and faculty support were factors that contributed to successful outcomes. Kamasa-Quahie’s (2014) study of African American male and female FGCS showed that supports such as positive relationships, academic advising, and support networks are necessary for FGCS who attend HBCU’s are necessary and needed for success.

**Factors That Promote Success Among African American Female First-Generation College Students**

Research shows that African American women are leading in STEM fields, educational success, experience higher career success, and complete degrees more quickly than African American males (Black Women’s Roundtable, 2019; Harper, 2018;
Palmer, Hinton, & Fountaine, 2012; Strayhorn et al., 2012). The resilience, motivation, self-efficacy, and confidence of these African American women can provide a guide as to better ways to serve African American females within the FGCS population.

**Family Support and Spirituality**

Johnson’s (2013) study showed that African American female FGSC had positive high school experiences and received encouragement from their parents and high school counselors which were influential pre-collegiate experiences among the participants. The participants reported that self-reflection, strong support networks, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation were factors that allowed them to persist at their institutions. Most notably, the participants expressed that their race, spirituality, and gender were salient factors that allowed them to have positive interactions within their college community and to experience successful outcomes. Evan’s (2013) study explored the factors that allowed African American female FGCS to graduate from college. The participants expressed that God and their family were major factors that contributed to their success. Also, the participants shared how they were determined to be the first in their families to graduate and to be able to provide for themselves and their families. Furthermore, the participants highlighted that their perseverance was an additional factor that they displayed to successfully complete their degree. Green’s (2015) study of African American female FGCS at PWIs showed that a positive self-identity and intrinsic motivation contributed to their persistence and success. Most importantly, the participants shared that factors that strongly related to their persistence was spirituality, family, and self-confidence.
Institutional Support

Williams’ (2009) study of African American female FGCS revealed that institutional supports such as academic assistance and programs that promote academic success are necessary for this population to be successful. A few of the participants were placed in developmental programs due to their test scores and sought out academic assistance due to rigorous coursework which allowed them to be successful. In addition, the participants expressed that engaging in extracurricular activities provided through the institution was a factor that allowed them to experience success. Alfred’s (2011) study examined the relationship of African American female FGCS who participated in institutional support programs and persistence rates. Although persistence rates were low among the participants, the results did show that these services did support the individuals and over 40% of them were able to obtain a degree or certificate of completion. Roby’s (2019) study examined the self-efficacy of African American female FGCS who participated in a TRIO program at their institution. The results showed that participants who stayed in the program had higher levels of self-efficacy. In addition, the program was found to allow the participants to persist at their institution. Garrion’s (2019) study investigated the effectiveness of a study skills course that African American female FGCS participated in. The participants shared that through the course they were able to complete goal setting and establish relationships with faculty and staff which contributed to their persistence at their institution. Although research has showed positive outcomes of African American FGCS, there is a gap in the research regarding the experiences of African American female FGCS and their experiences and most of the literature regarding FGCS focuses on African American males and Whites.
Factors That Promote Persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Historically Black Colleges and Universities traditionally have enrolled low-income students, those who are unprepared for college, and FGCS; therefore, it is necessary to provide supports to students with such characteristics in order to foster success. Gasman and Samayoa (2017) stated, “HBCUs place emphasis on ensuring that students’ academic and social needs are met in order to further develop their competencies and readiness for college-level coursework” (p. 1). Academic and social supports are integral part of a higher educational institution system and are needed to produce successful outcomes of the student body. Mfume (2016) explained, “HBCUs are often associated with supportive, encouraging, and uplifting environment, as well as with an intrusive and intentional network of student support services (p. 67). In addition, leadership and cultural competence are additional factors that contribute to the retention and persistence rates of students at HBCUs each year.

Academic Supports

Academic supports such as tutoring, learning centers, library assistance, and academic advising all contribute to successful academic outcomes. Rafi, Karagiannis, Herring III, and Williams’ (2014) study focused on outcomes for students at HBCUs. The study found that students who access tutors and learning centers have better academic outcomes than student who do not. In addition, the study showed that African American females did better and African American males. Similarly, Garrett, Huang, and Carter’s (2017) study found that students who were in STEM programs were able to persist due to factors such as tutorial centers, academic curriculum, and social support. Moreover, Strayhorn’s (2017) study of African American males showed that tutoring and
the writing center were on-campus supports that attributed to their successful outcomes at their HBCUs. In addition, the participants expressed that counseling and peer support were also factors that contributed to their success.

The majority of the HBCUs have encompassed summer bridge programs within their institutions to ensure student success. Many of which utilize these programs to be implemented for incoming freshman designed as a tool to use for strategic student success. Mfume’s (2016) study highlighted that summer programs are an effective resource to support students at HBCUs. The author further explained that campuses should offer more programs that include tutoring and mentoring support which contribute to student academic success. Moreover, Gasman and Samayoa’s (2017) study reported that the focus of Norfolk State University’s Summer Bridge Program is pairing them with current students to provide them with academic tutoring and social support. The program also provides them with social skill training and equips them for professional setting while building them up academically. Furthermore, Bir and Myrick’s (2015) study showed that African Americans that were enrolled in a Summer Bridge Program at their HBCU were more likely to graduate within six years than African Americans that were enrolled in the program. Participants in this program were given weekly academic advising which included academic supports on the weekend. In addition, the participants in this program were more likely to persist than those who were not enrolled in the program.

In Jackson’s (2013) study, the participants were African American female transfer students from a two-year HBCU. The participants shared that academic expectations and supports allowed them to have clear expectations to allow them to excel academically at
their perspective HBCU. Historically Black Colleges and Universities provide a variety of doctoral programs that allow students to excel academically. Aubrey’s et al., (2016) historical study of HBCU doctoral programs highlighted the growth of their programs since 1880 which have produced professionals that are highly skilled and equipped for the workforce. Historically Black Colleges and Universities provide academic supports to students who are underprepared, low-income, and first-generation which increase their retention and persistence rates. Mikyong and Conrad’s (2006) study showed that although HBCUs receive less funding, the faculty have lower salaries, and the students have significantly lower incomes than African American students who attend PWIs, HBCUs prepare their students for successful academic outcomes. Similarly, Hardy’s et al., (2019) study showed that HBCUs educate majority economically disadvantaged students; however, their outcomes are better than African American students who attend PWIs. The findings showed that African American students at HBCUs retention and graduation rates were higher than those who attended PWIs. Furthermore, Hardy et al., (2019) stated, “our data show that HBCUs are currently succeeding at providing a quality education to less academically prepared and financially disadvantaged students. Moreover, HBCUs have continually fulfilled this mission despite a consistent history of operating under limited resources” (p. 479). Therefore, the data shows that academic supports are a necessary component of a higher educational system for African Americans to persist and graduate within their cohort.

**Social Supports**

Social support in higher educational can be received amongst peers and faculty and has been shown to be an indicator of success when social interactions are positive.
and healthy. In Jett’s (2013) study of HBCU African American male mathematic majors, the findings showed that the participants appreciated their peer support which contributed to their positive outcomes. The participants also voiced that having African American male faculty also contributed to successful outcomes. Palmer, Davis, and Maramba’s (2010) study sought out to find the factors that related to persistence of African American males at HBCUs. The authors found that peer and faculty support were factors that contributed to persistence among the participants. In addition, the study found that racial sensitivity, understanding, and role models increased motivation and academic success. Likewise, Lee, Khalil, and Boykin (2019) found that STEM female students described the HBCU campuses as having a racial sensitive climate and culture which allowed them to thrive within a positive environment. The findings also showed that students were provided with healthy interactions amongst faculty who were socially supportive. Similarly, Fountaine’s (2014) study focused on faculty interactions with female doctoral students at HBCUs. The findings showed that participants had high rates of engagement with study which contributed to their persistence rates. In addition, the faculty were able to assist the students in finding funding for their programs. Furthermore, the authors emphasized that strong relationships between students and faculty are an indicator of success. Correspondingly, in Goings’ (2017) study of two successful African American males, the participants shared that much of their success was attributed to positive interactions with faculty and staff members. The participants also expressed appreciation for peer support. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2018) students at HBCUs had better career preparation than students at PWIs. The report showed that this resulted in the positive interactions with faculty and staff members.
Additionally, the students explained that attending career fairs allowed them to have greater social support amongst their peers. Furthermore, Strayhorn’s (2017) study of African American males enrolled at HBCUs expressed that they had more supportive environments than African American males who attended PWIs. The participants at HBCUs indicated that their campuses were supportive, they had strong support systems, and that faculty and staff were factors that attributed to their success.

The purpose of Gasman, Fluker, Commodore, and Peterkin’s (2014) study was to explore the factors that related to successful outcomes for students in honor programs at HBCUs. The participants attributed their success to faculty and peer mentoring. The students also shared that HBCUs have a positive supportive environment. Gasman and Castro-Samayoa (2017) found that student success contributed to the ethos of HBCUs. The authors described,

HBCUs’ ethos of success is steeped in the idea of family. Many of these institutions emphasize collaboration over competition through cohort models in which students understand that their success is deeply tied to others and not merely a product of their own doing (p. 1).

In addition, the study showed that positive interactions with staff supported students academically and socially. Hardy’s (2019) study found that African American students who attend HBCUs have more social mobility and social capital than African American students who attend PWIs. Lastly, Bonner and Bailey (2006) stated, “a key consideration for these students is being connected to peers who will provide them with critical feedback related not only to their academic progress, but also to their nonacademic progress” at HBCUs (p. 26). Therefore, it is necessary that African American students
who attend HBCUs be provided with social supports that allow them to feel a sense of belonging and develop a supportive network which will assist in successful outcomes throughout their collegiate journey.

**Nurturing Environment**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are known for their nurturing and supportive environments. Tinto’s (1993) Theory of Student Retention indicated that, Students are more likely to stay in schools that involve them as valued members of the institution. The frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff and other students have repeatedly been shown to be independent predictors of student persistence (p. 35).

Mfume (2015) noted the mission of various HBCUs in which many of them have made a commitment to providing a safe, positive, and nurturing environment were all students thrive with the support of staff and faculty engagement. According to Harrell (2016) a nurturing environment involves “introducing students to supportive minority and non-minority groups through clubs and organizations, connecting students to encouraging faculty for possible internships and research opportunities, implementing regular advising appointments, and reinforcing the importance of building these support systems within the institution” (p.1). According to Stewart (2013) Black, Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Native American students “constitute those who have been racially minoritized in the U.S. society” (p. 184) as their numbers have increased with college enrollment (El-Khawas, 2003). Benitez (2010) explained that “minoritized” is a term used to denote students of color as the “process [action vs. noun] of student minoritization” (p. 131). Stewart explained that “racially minoritized students” is a term
used to understand individuals of “minority status as that which is socially constructed in specific societal contexts” (p. 184).

In Rachell’s (2014) study, the FGCS African American male students reported having a nurturing environment at their HBCU. The participants reported being nurtured in the areas of sense of belonging, academic preparation, having a supportive network, and early college summer bridge experiences. Similarly, Robinson’s (2017) of graduates showed that HBCUs have empowering environments that are culturally sensitive to their needs. Harper (2018) explained that HBCUs provide a nurturing environment for students which contribute to successful academic outcomes. In addition, the author noted that HBCUs have provided quality supports to low-income students for generations.

Favors (2015) wrote that nurturing environments within the HBCU system allow students to pursue their dreams and to experience Black liberation. Conway (2018) stated, “since their inception, HBCUs have been known to be nurturing environments for its students. This type of caring, other mothering is often the norm rather than the exception at HBCUs” (p. 170). Williams, Glenn, and Wider (2008) added that HBCUs are small spirited campuses where professors know students personally and the students refer to the faculty as their family. The authors stated, “for many HBCU employees, their career is more than a job; it is a service to the black community. Black colleges nurture black students” (p. 1).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities have a wealth of community support including the support of local churches which provide a nurture and care to students. According to State News Service (2019) HBCUs are important because more than 150 years they have been providing nurturing environments for their students including non-
African American students and faculty. In addition, HBCUs are a faith community environment that instill students with unique values. Likewise, Murray-Thomas’ (2018) study found that students were supported through local churches connected to their HBCU campus and had supportive networks which influenced their persistence rates. Moreover, Brown (2013) explained that MSIs have been proven to provide nurturing environments that include spiritual and ethnic identity development which contribute to academic success.

Yeakey and Henderson’s (2000) participants expressed that they were able to experience success due to the nurturing environment while attending HBCUs. Similarly, Hicks’ (2012) study of FGCS found that they were provided with a nurturing environment, which contributed to their academic success and social capital at HBCUs. Bleidt (2013) explained that HBCUs provide their students with a nurturing environment related to a rich African American traditionally history. Furthermore, Garrett, Huang, and Carter (2017) stated, “HBCUs have the power to bring together psychosocial and structural factors for positive effect. Invested faculty can tap into student drive and the desire students have to “make a difference” (p. 101).

Leadership

Knerl (2019) explained that leadership entails building relationships, which also exists outside of the classroom, in which these leaders are able to influence and guide students, toward a common education-related goal. The author elucidated that educational leaders are educators who assume leadership roles, which would include teachers, principals, administrators, and all staff who strive to prepare tomorrow’s leaders. According to Scott and Scott (2016), educational leaders demonstrate the
following traits of self-awareness, excellent communication skills, resourcefulness, modeling and leading by example, and the power of teaching and learning. Parrett and Budge (2012) explicated that educational leaders create thriving environments, which encourages impactful learning, promotes productivity, and ensure a sense of security. In the educational setting, the leadership frequently involves all those who are involved with and entrusted in process of positively working with all students to support them in reaching their academic goals. According to Pearson, Garcia, Fujimoto, Nguyen, Sanders, and Hoffman (2014) institutions of higher learning environments educational leaders endorse the developmental pathway and attainment of each and every student through guidance, advocacy, nurturing, and sustaining an educational cultural of cultural relevance, competence, and a quality learning environment conducive to student learning and growth. For most educational leaders, their overarching goal is to build connections with their students, to forge a trusting and respectful relationship to support not only the student success, but to also gain the trust and support of the community and stakeholders alike.

**Culturally Competent Leadership**

Williams (2015) described culturally competent leadership as the ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures other than our own. Clayton and Goodwin (2015) explained that culturally competent leadership is having a deep understanding of various cultural backgrounds, displaying a defined set of values and principles, demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally. According to Lehmann (2016), culturally competent leaders have an obligation as educational leaders to understand that students come to
school with an essential cultural identity that identifies who they are and that unless leaders are reflective about our own identity and how it creates a lens through which they view the world, they will not be able to honor the identities of their students to properly attend to their educational needs. Culturally competent leadership within the HBCU system, have a long history of guiding students, many of whom are first-generation college students, onto their collegiate journey, thus augmenting the graduation rate of African American students (Beazley, 2013; HBCU Campaign Fund News, 2019; Mathis-Lawson, 2017; Nicols, 2004; Woods-Warrior, 2014).

**Theoretical Foundations**

Tinto’s College Retention Theory (Tinto 1990, 1993) and Tinto Framework for Action (2012) is well grounded in the literature (Austin, 1984; Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson, 1997; Bourdieu, 1986; Tinto, 1975). The following are theories that provide theoretical foundations for Tinto’s College Retention Theory used as theoretical grounding this study.

**Cultural Capital Theory**

Bourdieu (1986) explained that cultural capital involves access to resources, values instilled into children by their parents, knowledge that is valued among teachers and taught to students whom they believe are capable to succeed, internal characteristics of higher socioeconomic individuals relating to academic achievement, lifestyles, and institutionalized resources that are offered to achieve success. Although, this theory relates to individuals who have a higher socioeconomic status, researchers have applied this framework to FGCS as it relates to factors that promote persistence (Adsitt, 2017; Lui, 2016; Mitchell, 2007; Ramos, 2018; Smith, 2017; Whitney, 2016). Smith’s (2017)
study explored the factors that allowed African American female FGCS to persist through their freshman year at a PWI. The study showed that cultural capital allowed them to persist along with their prior knowledge to college. The results showed that the participants had positive relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. The participants expressed that they had support from their family members. Most importantly, the participants highlighted that they utilized institutional resources and participated in extracurricular activities which contributed to their persistence. Likewise, McCorkle’s (2012) study found that although African American FGCS experienced racial discrimination at their PWIs, their positive self-identity allowed them to persist. The participants were 80% female and they reported having social support from other African American students which contributed to their persistence. Similarly, Edwards’ (2014) study showed that African American female FGCS experienced racism and being stereotyped at the PWIs. The participants expressed that their cultural identity and bonding with other African American students allowed them to persevere throughout college. Cultural capital is a factor that is needed among FGCS to support them throughout their collegiate journey as suggested by Lui (2016),

Cultural capital is unequally distributed. The students who are able to inherit cultural capital from previous generations in their family possess an advantage. The educational system serves as an equalizer of society and delivers cultural capital to families of different social classes. Thus, access to higher education provides historically marginalized students with an opportunity to acquire the social and cultural capital that they are not able to gain from the family environment with which they are familiar (p. 16).
The Cultural Capital Theory provides context to Tinto’s three factors that impact a student’s decision to drop out of college – family background, individual attributes, and pre-college schooling.

**Motivation, Commitment, and Self-Determination Theory**

Tinto (1975) indicated that “other things being equal, the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion” (p. 96). Reeves (2002) explained that the Self-Determination Theory can be utilized in higher educational settings to help “autonomously-motivated students thrive in educational settings” so that “students benefit when teachers support their autonomy” (p. 183). Although being low-income and a FGCS has its challenges, it is also found to be a factor which allows individuals to be motivated and committed to obtaining a college degree (Bethea, 2017; Evans, 2013; Glenn, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Lee, 2017). Reeves (2002) suggests that this type of motivation allows students to enjoy school, overcome challenges, and set high goals and accomplish them.

Mason-Matthews’ (2015) study examined that factors that allowed African American females FGCS to persist at their community college. Results showed that participants relied on their own strength and determination because they lacked support from their family members. The participants shared that although they experienced adversity, they were determined to obtain a college degree. Anderson’s (2013) study of African American female FGCS revealed that they were successfully able to complete their degrees due to interpersonal and intrapersonal motivation. The strongest predictors of success for the participants were self-determination, family, support, and strength. The
participants shared that they relied and their personal strength, commitment, and
determination to be the first in their families to obtain a college degree. Reeves (2002)
indicated that students who have positive relationships with the faculty and staff members
are more motivated to achieve their goals. Callan’s (2018) study of African American
female FGCS found that high school preparation was a factor that allowed the
participants to experience persistence at their PWIs. The participants have that their pre-
college experiences of positive relationships with staff and college preparatory classes
were positive influences needed to prepare them for college success. In addition, the
participants indicated that their own motivation was a factor that allowed them to persist.
The participants highlighted that their resilience which they referred to as “Black Girl
Magic” was what they had to access within themselves to make it through college despite
their adverse experiences. Johnson (2013) shared,

…first generation college women graduate from high school with a strong
academic sense of self, developed after years of parental encouragement for
academic achievement and positive precollege experiences with teachers and
counselors. This academic sense of self contributed to students’ ability to adapt to
the academic competitiveness and classroom expectations of their given major
upon matriculation. With time and self-reflection, students began to engage in
academic behaviors linked with success (i).

Although FGCS experience difficulties, challenges, and hardships, they can experience
success through institutional and non-institutional sources of supports and resilience.
Austin Involvement Theory

Austin (1984) explained that “student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). The author suggested that the more involved a student is the better academic outcomes they will have. Therefore, a student must be committed to being active in the life of their campus to experience increased levels of academic success. Austin (1984) stated, “…a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students” (p. 518). Gamm’s (2011) study examined the academic successes of African American students who attended HBCUs compared to those who attended PWIs according to their level of student engagement (involvement). The findings showed that the African American students who attended HBCUs were more involved in the life of their campuses which allowed them to perform better academically. Scott’s (2017) study investigated the factors led to the achievement of African American student-athletes at HBCUs. The study found that student-athletes who lived on campus, spent numerous hours preparing and studying for classes, and were involved in cocurricular activities performed academically better than those who lived off-campus. Austin (1984) explained that student involvement is a behavioral component rather than motivational in which the individual gives their time and energy to a task, continues this pattern of behavior for lengths of time and devotes their time to comprehending knowledge. The author indicated that students are more involved in the life of their campuses when institutions
are dedicated and committed to creating policies that allows them to engage activities that increase their personal development.

**Braxton Retention Theory**

Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) sought out to expand upon Tinto’s (1975) discovery of the factors that cause students to drop out of college. The authors found that individual characteristics and institutional commitment widely influence their decision to dropout of college. Braxton and Lien’s (2000) study showed that,

Student entry characteristics affect the level of initial institutional commitment; students’ initial levels of institutional commitments also influence their degree of subsequent commitment to the institution; students’ subsequent commitment to the institution positively affected their degree of social integration; the greater the degree of students’ subsequent institutional commitment, the greater the likelihood of their persistence in college (p. 11).

Tinto (1975) indicated that the individual characteristics of a student include their background such as socioeconomic status and family education, race, gender, and ability. Tinto (1993) explained that for effective retention to occur at institutions “the presence of a strong commitment to students” must result “in an identifiable ethos of caring which permeates the character of institutional life.” (p. 146). Therefore, there must be a holistic approach to student retention especially for racially minoritized students, FGCS, and students who come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2011) explained that effective retention involves providing students with financial aid who have socioeconomic disadvantages, institutions need to embrace Tinto’s (1990) recommendation of institutional commitments to student education,
university policies must involve a multi-faceted approach to retention and persistence, leaders must develop an integrated approach to student success, all students should be respected by faculty and staff, and university leaders must ensure that faculty and staff have activities to engage in informal relationships with students.

**Karlen’s Theory of Student Grit**

The term grit appeared in the literature about 13 years ago which is another word for resilience. Dent and Cameron (2003) explained that resilience is the ability to "bounce back from adversity, to cope with and manage major difficulties and disadvantages in life, and even to thrive in the face of what appear to be overwhelming odds" (p. 5). The term resilience can be applied to racially minoritized students who have been marginalized in society who have been able to overcome obstacles and hardships and still experience success. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) indicated that grit is “defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (p. 1087). Karlen, Suter, Hirt, and Maag Merki (2019) expanded upon this definition by asserting that grit is the “perseverance of effort…consistency of interest and on their achievement goals, learning motivation, and achievement in the context of a challenging academic task” (p. 1). The findings showed that grit is positively correlated with student motivation. However, perseverance of effort and consistency of interest have “different correlational paths with motivational variables” (p. 1). The authors suggest that students be provided with educational assistance to increase their interest on achieving their goals. Thus, institutions should be committed to meeting the academic needs of all students, especially those who experience adversity and challenges (Tinto, 1993, 2012).
Theoretical Framework

Literature has shown that FGCS are less likely to persist and dropout than non-FGCS (Cataldi et al., 2018; Hicks & Wood; 2016; Longmire-Avital & Miller-Dyce, 2015; PNPI, 2018; Redford et al., 2017). Sadly, African American FGCS have the most unfavorable outcomes compared to their counterparts (Redford et al., 2017, PNPI, 2018). Higher educational institutions have supportive services and programs that help meet the holistic needs of student which allow them to persist and successfully complete their programs. These supports include academic, social, emotional, financial, career, and psychological services (Tinto, 2012). Retention occurs when institutions are able to maintain continuous enrollment of year after year (Cotton, Nash, & Kneale, 2017; Ishler & Upcraft 2005, NSCRC, 2017; Tinto, 1993). Similarly, persistence occurs when students are able to maintain continuous enrollment and obtain a degree (NSCRC, 2017). Tinto’s retention theory and Framework for Institutional Action provide the theoretical grounding for this study. The following constructs- academic, financial, and social will provide the lens through which the perceptions of FGCS African American female seniors regarding will be amplified.

Student Dropout Model

Tinto’s (1975) original work on student retention began by investigating the factors that cause them to drop out of college. The author explained that in order to understand student departure from college, individual characteristics and dispositions must be investigated. The author suggested that the greater commitment to academic and social integration an individual has the more likely they will remain in college. Figure 1
displays the factors identified by Tinto that impact a student’s decision to dropout out of college.

Tinto’s (1975) Model of Institutional Departure provides an explanation that, to persist, students need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. Tinto (1975) suggested that these factors impact an individual’s goal commitment, as well which are summarized in Table 1.
Table 1

**Individual Characteristics of Student Dropout**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family background</td>
<td>A student’s socioeconomic status, social status, relationships within the family structure, and family’s interaction and expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual characteristics</td>
<td>A student’s ability, sex, and race,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-college schooling</td>
<td>A student’s high school performance, grade point average, and ranking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal commitment</td>
<td>A student’s commitment to educational plan, expectations, and career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional commitment</td>
<td>A student’s educational commitment to academic and social institutional integration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade performance and intellectual</td>
<td>A student’s integration, commitment to academic goal completion, individual ability, academic behavior, and personality development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer group and faculty interactions</td>
<td>A student’s increased positive contacts with peers, faculty, and staff, and the development of meaningful relationships outside of the academic environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic integration</td>
<td>A student’s grade performance, intellectual development, awareness of academic norms, and intrinsic rewards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social integration</td>
<td>A student’s participation in social activities, extracurricular activities, interactions with peers, friendships, and relationships with faculty and staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from *Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent literature*, by Tinto, 1975 (A Review of Educational Research, 45, 89-125).

First-Generation College Students who attend college are the first in their immediate family to do so. Obtaining a degree has its rewards as does its challenges. Due to their
low-income status, unpreparedness, low test scores, and lack of family support, FGCS endure many challenges while in college (Callan, 2018; Dugan & Vanderbilt, 2014; Green, 2017; Kirkman, 2018; Mack, 2015). Tinto’s (1975) model of student dropout provides an explanation regarding the factors that lead to student departure from college. This study is focused on the factors that allow students to persist rather than the factors that influence their decision to drop out. Tinto (1975) developed this model as a guide for K-12 and higher educational systems with ways to service students who are enrolled in their institutions. This model resulted in the development of framework for student retention (Tinto, 1990).

**College Retention Theory**

Tinto (1990) gave a speech to community college educators at a conference and offered them a framework as to how their institutions establish retention. He explained that the emphasis of retention is the institution’s commitment to all students. In addition, the author highlighted that retention happens when “…the development of effective educational communities which seek to involve all students in their social and intellectual life and which are committed to the education of students, not their mere retention” (p. 3). Tinto (1990) revealed that institutions can effectively retain students through structural programing that offers social and intellectual communities, institutional commitment, and educational choice which are described in Table 2.
Table 2

Factors Included in Effective Retention Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and intellectual communities</td>
<td>An institution can achieve this through continuous contact with students, faculty and staff members establishing relationships with students, providing equitable opportunities for students to be a part of the institution, meaningful contact between students and faculty outside of the classroom, mentoring, and activities that bring staff and students together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional commitment to students</td>
<td>An institution can achieve this through helping to support students’ holistic needs, personal choice of faculty and staff commitment to students, caring for students, orientation to student activities, and nourishment of staff and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational commitment</td>
<td>An institution can achieve this through a desire to educate students, intentional activities to improve social and intellectual growth, and dedication to the welfare of students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional commitment and educational choice</td>
<td>An institution can achieve this through creating a clear mission, serving all students, establishing a distinctive mission that mirrors its goal, informing all students about institutional goals, character, and commitment, and being non-discriminatory in education students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Tinto (1993) insisted that in order for higher educational institutions to achieve retention and persistence that they must offer student’s academic and social supports and be committed to the success of all students. This theory has evolved over the years and has provided institutions a blueprint for providing effective services that allow students to
obtain degrees. Tinto (2012) provided an outline regarding how colleges can offer supports to student’s successful program completion. The author described academic supports as resources that increase the intellectual ability of students. Social supports are resources that enhance relationships, improve the quality of life, and reduce stress. Financial supports are resources that allow one to afford for their necessities. These supports were derived from his earlier work on retention in which he coined the term Framework for Institutional Action which included social, academic, and financial support which are described in Table 3.

Table 3

*Framework for Institutional Action of Social, Academic, and Financial Supports*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Academic supports include tutoring, study groups, various academic programs, and basic learning skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social supports include social membership, social activities, peer relationships, friendships, opportunities that increase self-worth and commitment, counseling, mentoring, advising (peer and faculty), extracurricular activities, and learning programs and communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Loans, grants, scholarships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from *Completing College: Rethinking institutional action*, by Tinto, 2012 (Chicago, IL: Chapin Hill at University of Chicago).

**Academic Supports**

Tinto’s (1993) stated “the first principle of effective retention can be stated as follows: effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve, they put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals” (p. 146). In order to obtain a collegiate
degree an individual must maintain a 2.0 GPA. Therefore, academic supports are necessary for students to maintain good standing; especially for FGCS and African American students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Retention Study Group, 2004; Spady, 1971; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 1993, 2012). Tinto (1993) explained that the first year of college is critical because many students move away from home, must navigate college with little support, and must adjust to a new environment. The author indicated that for these reasons, colleges have increased academic supports to help assist students succeed. Historically Black Colleges and Universities offer programs such as Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), TRIO, and Summer Bridge that help first-time and low-income students to provide them with academic assistance that promote persistence (Bir & Myrick, 2015; Hinton, 2014; Hosley-Hyman, 2015; Pearce-Brady, 2019; Reichert & Absher, 2013; Rhodes, 2012). In Colson McLean’s (2013) study, academic assistance through participation in the TRIO program was a factor that promoted retention among African American FGCS who were enrolled at an HBCU. Similarly, in Pearce-Brady’s (2019) study, African American FGCS shared that they experienced successful outcomes due to their participation in the program and expressed their appreciation for the close connections they had with staff and faculty. Likewise, Mack’s (2015) study of African American female FGCS athletes indicated that their participation in the TRIO program was beneficial during their first year of college. The participants indicated that they were provided with resources like computers and summer jobs through the program which was allowed them experience persistence. Furthermore, Rachell’s (2014) study of African American male FGCS found that the TRIO provided them with academic preparation and a nurturing environment. Tinto (1993) explained that Urban Colleges have challenges to
persistence because they “devote a major share of their budgets to remediation” and that “the majority of their students are disadvantaged, often minority, and frequently attending college on a part-time basis while trying to provide for themselves and their families” (p. 198). Therefore, it is important that HBCUs be provided with proper funding to continuing providing academic services to their disadvantaged students in order for them to persist and obtain degrees. Most importantly, Tinto (2012) stated, “nothing is more important to student retention than academic support, especially during the critical first year of college…” (p. 25).

**Financial Supports**

Tinto (2012) stated, “…short-term institutional financial support is vital to students if they are to keep pace with the demands of classroom work” (p. 31). Historically Black Colleges and Universities are affordable for students to attend; especially FGCS (Safier, 2019). Financial assistance is available at every higher educational institution. Private colleges offer scholarships but mostly offer students loans in which accrue debt. Public two-year and four-year colleges offer more options of financial assistance through work-study jobs, scholarships, grant funded programs, grants, and stipend programs that allow students to pay for college without the stress and worry of accruing debt (Batman & Long, 2016; Leguizamon & Hammond, 2015; Lopez, 2013; Millea, Wills, Elder, & Molina, 2018). These options allow students to focus on completing their goals without having to work part or full-time jobs. Tinto (1993) explained that institutions must have a commitment to campus wide supports and programs that address student retention. He stated finances,
May led persons to initially enter relatively low-cost public two-year institutions as a means of lowering the overall cost of completing a four-year program, or to choose a second-choice less expensive public institution rather than the more expensive preferred private institution (pp. 65-66).

Therefore, financial assistance and supports are necessary and needed for African American FGCS to experience higher educational success.

Starke’s (2019) study focused on the outcomes of FGCS who were enrolled in the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) program. The results showed that African American FGCS were able to persist with the assistance of the grant monies they received through the program. In Green’s (2017) study, African American FGCS expressed that they had difficulties with filling out their FASFA applications to receive financial assistance at their HBCUs. The results showed that although they experienced such obstacles, the financial assistance was a form of support. Similarly, Kosses (2019) reported that finances are obstacles that African American FGCS face during college. The results showed that African American FGCS were able to be supported through finances while attending a New England University. Johnson’s (2013) study of African American FGCS showed that they experienced challenges at their campuses but was mitigated by their strong sense of self. The participants expressed that financial resources, strong support networks, and intrinsic motivation were factors that allowed them to persist throughout college. Although there is a lack of research of the effectiveness of financial support among African American FGCS as it relates to persistence, the studies mentioned above found that financial support is necessary for FGCS to experience successful outcomes during college.
Social Supports

Tinto’s (1993) third principle of effective retention states, “effective retention programs are committed to the development of support social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members” (p. 147). Social support is important for student to develop and maintain meaningful relationships among their peers and faculty members. Tinto (1993) explained that students learn best in environments that are supportive. In addition, programs that allow students to have social capital and feel connected is a factor that promote persistence. The author expressed the importance of students having formal and informal relationships with faculty and staff members. Literature has supported that HBCUs have nurturing and supportive environments (Conway, 2018; Harper, 2018; Harrell, 2016; Mfume, 2015; Robinson, 2017). Rachell’s (2014) study showed that African American male FGCS who participated in a pre-college summer program at their HBCU developed positive relationships with staff members. The participants expressed that they were provided with a nurturing environment, they had nurturing networks, and experienced a sense of belonging. Mack’s (2015) study of African American female freshman participated in extracurricular activities and were able to develop quality relationships with faculty through participating in sports and academic programs which contributed to their persistence at their HBCU. McCorkle’s (2012) study showed that African American female FGCS found support from other African American students on campus and African American administrators at their PWIs. Alexander’s (2017) study investigated the factors that influenced African American FGCS to attend a HBCU. The participants shared that when they visited the colleges the atmosphere was friendly, and they felt a
family atmosphere. In addition, the participants shared that they felt connected to the campus. Tinto (1993) stated, “programs for students of color also tend to stress the development on campus of viable community of students of similar ethnicity” (p. 186). Historically Black Colleges and Universities provide nurturing environments, opportunities for cultural expression, allow students to feel comfortable in their cultural identity, which allows students to feel supported and contributes to persistence (Hinton, 2014; Pennamon, 2019; Preston, 2017; Strayhorn, 2017; White, 2017).

Tinto (1993) agreed that students of color warrant more support than their counterparts and that institutions must remain committed to this population of student to maintain successful outcomes. The author indicated that students of color can receive emotional support through counseling, academic advising, and community membership (cultural organizations, programs, and services). In Kamasa-Quashie’s (2014) study, African American FGCS seniors at HBCUs expressed that a supportive environment, positive relationships with faculty, and academic advising were factors that contributed to their academic success. Floyd-Peoples’ (2016) study investigated the effectiveness of academic advising of African American first-year and FGCS at HBCUs and PWIs. The advisors expressed that they focused on providing students with tools to improve their self-efficacy. The participants shared that putting students at the center of advising and fostering their development led to their persistence. Similarly, Wilson’s (2015) study explored the factors that allowed African American FGCS to graduate from their community. College leaders as well as Africana American FGCS were interviewed in this study. The leaders expressed that the focus of counseling was a student-centered approach to increase levels of self-efficacy and confidence. The FGCS expressed that
counseling, mentors, motivation, and campus programs are factors that allowed them to graduate. Andrews’ (2017) study explored the factors that contributed to the success of African American male FGCS who were enrolled at HBCUs. The participants expressed that programs and organizations that they were enrolled in provided them with mentoring and support. In addition, the participants shared that the psychological services that they received through counselors were able to address their emotional needs. Tinto (1993) indicated that students of color need programs because “students of color are, on the average, more likely to be academically at-risk and to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds than are white students generally” (p. 185).

Therefore, it is critical for higher educational institutions to provide cultural relevant programs, services, and resources to African American female FGCS; especially to those who attend PWIs.

**Gaps in the Literature**

The researcher reviewed seven decades of studies regarding African American female FGCS who attend college and those who attend HBCUs. The literature search included typing in phrases such as “African American female First-Generation College Student seniors’ experiences at Historically Black Colleges and Universities” and “African American female First-Generation College Student seniors experiences at Universities”. This search was conducted on numerous scholarly database which included boolean search terms. Also, the search was conducted on google scholar and other internet sources regarding the experiences of African American female FGCS seniors at HBCUs. Most of the research found on these phrases included the experiences of African American female FGCS who had all class standings, African American female
FGCS ages 18-20, African American female FGCS who attended PWIs, and African American male FGCS at HBCUs and PWIs. There was only one article that related to the experiences of African American FGCS at HBCUs. This article included experiences of both male and females (Kamasa-Quashie, 2014). After completing a lengthy search of the literature, this researcher concluded that there were no studies in the literature that explored the perceptions of African American female FGCS seniors regarding institutional factors that supported their persistence at HBCUs.

**Summary**

African American FGCS experience barriers to academic success at higher rates than non-FGCS. Being the first in their family to attend college creates challenges such as stress, financial issues, and a lack of resources. These challenges often times are the reasons why they drop out of college. There are; however, African American FGCS who are determined to succeed despite of the obstacles and adversities they encounter. Literature has focused on the successes of African American male FGCS and the factors that allowed them to persist at their institutions. African American female FGCS can persist with institutional academic, social, and emotional factors; however, there is a gap in research regarding their experiences. There are no studies that solely focus on the perceptions of African American female FGCS seniors and national data does not exist for those who have successfully obtained degrees from HBCUs. Chapter IV will focus on the findings of the study.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III provides an in-depth description of the methodology to answer the research questions of this qualitative case study. The purpose statement and the research questions are repeated. The research design, population, target population, sample and sampling frame of the study, along with a description of validity and reliability are discussed in this chapter. Also, this chapter includes a discussion of the instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, limitations, and summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities as outlined in Tinto’s College Retention Theory (1990, 1993) and Tinto’s Framework for Institutional Action (2012).

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be academic institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?

2. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be financial institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?
3. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be social institutional factors that supported their persistence on at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?

**Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative case study methodology. Qualitative inquiry explores the experiences of individuals and seeks to understand the phenomenon of participants as they experience it. According to Pathak, Jena, and Kalra, (2013) “qualitative method is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions” (p. 192). Through qualitative inquiry, individuals are able to tell their stories from their point of view. According to Patton (2015) this type of inquiry allows for the “capturing stories to understand people’s perspectives and experiences” (p. 13).

Klenke, Martin, and Wallace (2016) stated, “qualitative research is a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting or context” (p. 6). In naturalistic inquiry designs, the research seeks to understand the social experiences of the participants in order to create rich descriptive narratives. Therefore, the social histories of the individuals in this study was explored to provide a rich descriptive narrative of their collective voices. Given (2008) explained “conducting research in participants’ natural environments is essential. Researchers must meet participants where they are, in the field, so that data collection occurs while people are engaging in their everyday practices” (p. 548).

A case study design is utilized to study a phenomenon that focuses its attention of the unit of what is being studied in order to bring to light the experiences of the
participants. Creswell (1998) defined a case study as an in-depth exploration of data supporting specific cases for study in a specific time and place. Yin (2013) explained that researchers select a case study method when they have no control over the events and “the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (p. 2). According to Ragin and Becker (1992) “at minimum, every study is a case study because it is an analysis of social phenomena specific to time and place” (p. 2). Yin (1984) posits that social scientists, in particular have made wide use of this qualitative research method to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for application of ideas and extension of methods.

In qualitative case study research, there are three forms of data collection – observation, interview, viewing documents and artifacts (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). This study utilized face-to-face interviews with FGCS African American females. Documents and artifacts were collected that provided evidence of academic, social and financial institutions supports. Semistructured interview questions were delivered by the researcher to individual FGCS.

**Population**

According to Given (2008), in qualitative research “population as a concept in research methods refers to every individual who fits the criteria (broad or narrow) that the researcher has laid out for research participants” (p. 664). Additionally, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that the population of the study includes a group of individuals that have similar characteristics that allow researchers to generalize the findings of the study.
According to the NCES (2018) there are 102 Historically Black Colleges
Universities (HBCUs) across 19 states. There are 51 private, as well as, 51 public HBCU institutions. In the fall 2017, there were a total of 298,228 students enrolled at public and private HBCUs (NCES, 2018). In 2017, there were 146,802 African American students enrolled at four-year public HBCUs and 64,142 African American students enrolled at private HBCUs for the academic year (NCES, 2018). There were 87,194 non-African American students enrolled at HBCUs during this time period as seen in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HBCU Total Enrollment</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students enrolled at all HBCUs</td>
<td>298,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American enrollment at public HBCUs</td>
<td>146,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American enrollment at private HBCUs</td>
<td>64,142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-African American (white, Hispanic/Latin, Asian or Pacific Islander, or Native American) Enrollment at HBCUs</td>
<td>87,194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Number of students enrolled at HBCUs. Adapted from NCES (2018).

Target Population

According to Schutt (2017) the target population is “a set of elements larger than or different from the population sampled and to which the researcher would like to generalize study findings” (p. 120). It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, due to time, cost or access constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the researcher chose population samples from within a larger group. In this study the researcher selected HBCUs where access was available. The target population was identified as African American females FGCS seniors that are currently enrolled at
Alabama State University, Spelman College, Texas State University, or Tuskegee University HBCUs. According to Spelman College Institution Research (2017), there were a total of 448 African American female seniors enrolled at Spelman College (SC) in the 2017-2018 academic year. In addition, there were 311 FGCS enrolled in that academic year. In Texas Southern University’s (2019) database there were 738 African American female seniors enrolled in the Spring 2019 semester and 179 African American FGCS (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The U.S. News and World Report (2019b) showed that there are 263 African American female FGCS enrolled at Tuskegee University and there are 535 African American female FGCS and 98 African American FGCS seniors enrolled at Alabama State University which is listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Total Population of African American Female FGCS and FGCS Seniors at ASU, SC, TSU, and TU.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Alabama State University</th>
<th>Spelman College</th>
<th>Texas Southern University</th>
<th>Tuskegee University</th>
<th>Total Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American female FGCS</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>2,335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American female FGCS seniors</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The target population consists of a subgroup of individuals who have similar characteristics that are relevant to answer the research questions of the study (McMillian
& Schumacher, 2010). The target population for this study included 821 African American female FGCS attending four Historically Black College and Universities.

**Sample**

Patton (2002) defined a sample as a group of participants in a study selected from the population which the researcher intends to generalize. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicated that sampling involves selecting a “group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). The sampling methodology used for this study was purposeful. A purposeful sample is a nonprobability sample selection based on characteristics of the target population and objective of the study (Creswell, 1998). The purposeful sample for this study included two African American female FGCS seniors from each of the four institutions in the target population. The purposeful sample included eight participants that met specific criteria. The eight participants that met the following criteria were included in the study:

- African American
- Female
- Current senior classification standing
- Currently enrolled at one of the following: Alabama State University (ASU), Spelman College (SC), Texas Southern University (TSU), and Tuskegee University (TU) Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
- First-generation college student
- Voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.
- 18 years old or older
The purposeful sample size of eight participants is appropriate for this study. There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research. Creswell (1998) recommended five to twenty-five participants and Morse (1994) suggested at least six participants when conducting qualitative studies. Qualitative sample size may best be determined by time allotted, resources available and study objectives (Patton, 1990). The purposeful sample used in this study is based on accessibility to the researcher.

The participants are accessible to the researcher because all study participants are 18 years of age or older and each participant self-identified as a student of senior status at an HBCU. Because participants were 18 years old or older and volunteered to participate in this study, the HBCUs select for the study did not require researcher to complete their IRB process. All recruits are 18+ and were recruited via social media. No recruiting was done on campus, in classrooms, via professors/faculty, whereas no violation of campus policy was committed. Each participant signed an informed consent form prior to participating in the study.

The following process was used to recruited study participants:

1. The participants of this study were recruited through the use of a flyer (Appendix A) that was posted on HBCU Buzz Facebook page: HBCU Buzz is a Social Media site that aims to enhance the HBCU experiences and uplift the perceptions of HBCU institutions as perceived by students and alumni, articles, and newsletters.

2. The flier was posted on the website at MyHBCUInterviews. The posting will last for eight weeks. My HBCU Interview webpage is a site whose objective is to
maintain the legacy of relevance and value found at Historically Black Colleges and Universities by sharing in depth interviews, discussions, and knowledge through the voices and experiences of alumni and current students.

3. Responses to the posting will be numbered 1, 2, 3, 4,… as they are received.

4. The researcher will select the first two confirmed study participants at each of the target population schools.

5. The researcher will maintain a list of alternates to be used if confirmed participants cannot complete interview process.

**Instrumentation**

Qualitative interview methodologies were used to record the perceptions of African American female FGCS seniors regarding institutional factors that assisted in their persistence at HBCUs. Gay (2019) stated, “an interview is a purposeful interaction in which one person obtains information from another” (p. 554). Interviews can occur through unstructured, structured and semi-structured techniques. According to Mills and Gay (2019) “interviews permit researchers to obtain important data they cannot acquire from observation alone… (p. 554). Semistructured interviews were utilized to capture the perceptions of FGCS African American female seniors regarding institutional supports that enabled them to persist. Patton (2002) posits that semistructured interviews refer to the fact that the interviewer need not only ask predetermined questions. The interviewer can ask clarifying and probing questions. This study used semistructured interviews questions based on this study’s research questions, review of the literature, and, Tinto’s College Retention theory and Institutional Action Framework. The alignment table (Appendix D) was used to ensure that all three of Tinto’s (2012)
variables were covered by the interview questions. The variables in Tinto’s (2012) framework are academic, social and financial institutional factors that led to persistence. The researcher also constructed an interview protocol consisting of written directions for conducting the interview (Appendix B).

**Interviews**

Patton (2015) stated “the fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms” (p. 442). All participants were asked the same semi structured questions to describe their perceptions of institutional factors that influenced their college success. At beginning of each interview, participants received the following:

1. Invitation Flyer (Appendix A)
2. Brandman IRB Approval (Appendix G)
3. Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix H)
4. Inform consent with audio release (Appendix E)

As Patton (2002) recommends, the interview questions used for this study was reviewed by an expert in the use of semi structured questions. The expert is a professor at a California University. The questions were also pilot tested. Questions were revised based on feedback from the expert and pilot test participant.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is considered an instrument of in qualitative inquiry. Patton (2002) stated that “the credibility of qualitative methods …hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork.” (p. 14). This means that the researcher has the sole responsibility of being well versed in interview techniques and
methodology. One role of the researcher is to develop rapport with study participants which allows them to share inside information about their experiences with institutional supports at HBCUs (Given, 2008). The researcher is considered an expert related to HBCUs. She has presented at national conferences, has adult children that attended a HBCU; and, has experience in mentoring students toward degree completion from HBCUs. The researcher works with high school students in assisting them in filling out applications to HBCUs. The researcher also takes students on field trips to visit HBCU campuses. The researcher creates workshops and designs and facilitates presentations to students to encourage them to enroll in HBCUs. Due to the researcher’s personal experiences with HBCUs there is a possibility for potential biases.

Validity

Qualitative research designs are required to utilize instruments that are trustworthy for data collection procedures. Mills and Gay (2019) stated, “if researchers’ interpretations of data are to be valuable, the measuring instruments used to collect those data must be valid and reliable” (p. 178). Validity is achieved by using a purposeful measurement to assess what it is set out to assess. Given (2008) explained that validity is “being dependent on the degree to which a study actually measures what it purports to measure—whether “the truth” is accurately identified and described” (p. 909).

The validity of this study was established through the triangulation of data. Triangulation of data involves using multiple sources for obtaining data (Patton, 2015). Interview questions will be the primary source of data. Artifacts will be collected to verify academic, financial, and social institutional supports at each school. Another credible way to establish validity is through having an expert panel reviewed the study’s
instrument. The experts used for this study were an African American female, who is the Dean of Student Life and Development at Tuskegee University and an African American male who is President at a HBCU. Both are familiar with retention theory, retention issues, and interview methodology.

One way to establish the validity of a qualitative study is through credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mills & Gay, 2019; Patton, 2015). Member checks is a method that researchers use to determine the credibility of data. According to Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer (2012) member checking is established when researchers allow the participants to check if their answers are an accurate reflection of their experience. After the interviews were transcribed, each study participant was provided a copy of their transcript to verify the accuracy of the data.

**Reliability**

Patton (2002) defined reliability in qualitative research as the degree to which the data is trustworthy. Reliability refers to “the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it is measuring” (Mills & Gay, 2019, p. 182). Test that are reliable are trusted to produce consistent and sound results that can be replicated by other researchers. Moreover, the greater the reliability of the instrument the greater the likelihood the results will be dependable in producing similar results with a similar population by different researchers (Lapan et al., 2012; Mills & Gay, 2019; Thyer, 2010). Thyer (2010) explained that reliability is “the degree to which other researchers performing similar observations in the field and analysis such as reading field notes transcribed from narrative data would generate similar interpretations and results” (p. 356). The researcher
used a handheld voice recorder to ensure detailed notes of each individual in the study to precisely document the uniformity of their accounts.

**Pilot Test**

According to Lapan et al., (2012) a pilot test or field test is administering the instrument of the study to a “test” individual who has similar characteristics to the participants involved in the study. The researcher conducted a sample interview with a FGCS female senior enrolled at an HBCU to gain feedback. The researcher invited an experienced interviewer, who is a former Brandman University Doctoral Program graduate, to observe the pilot test. Feedback regarding body language, tone, and overall interview style was provided for the purpose of refining the interviewer’s style and limiting potential researcher bias. Adjustments were made to the interview process based on the feedback from the pilot test participant and observer. At the conclusion of the conclusion of the pilot test; the subject was asked to complete a survey regarding the interview experience (Appendix I) with an observer present. The researcher made the necessary changes to the interview questions and instruments based on the feedback from the pilot test and the observer. The researcher also took the time to reflect on the interview process by completing the reflection survey (Appendix J). As well as, keeping a journal throughout each interview, expressing the over experiences, sentiments, understandings, and feelings observable regarding each part of the research process. The Research Design Review (2012) detailed self-reflection in qualitative research is important to take in order to address “the distortions or preconceptions researchers’ unwittingly introduce in their qualitative designs” (p. 1). The researcher made the
necessary changes to the interview questions and instruments based on the feedback from the pilot test and the observer.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethics are included in all research studies. Researchers are required to protect the participants in the study and ensure their information will remain confidential. Mills and Gay (2019) stressed, “the two overriding rules of ethics are that participants should not be harmed in any way—physically, mentally, or socially—and that researchers obtain the participants’ informed consent…” (p. 61). The researcher took the necessary steps to protect participant from experiencing any physical, mental, or social harm by explaining to them in detail the purpose of the study including the possible minimal risk and benefits. Each individual was provided with an informed consent form (Appendix B) prior to their participation in this study both through email and before the interview. The informed consent form further outlined the protection of human subjects and their confidentiality. A researcher can protect the confidentiality of their participants by not disclosing their personal information (Mills & Gay, 2019). Each individual was given a pseudonym and their real names were not used nor written down on any of the field notes or coding records (Mills & Gay, 2019). In addition, the researcher received a certificate of completion of the protection of human subjects from the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research (Appendix G). This study was approved by the Brandman University International Review Board (BUIRB) for adhering to the requirements of protection the human subjects in this study (Appendix H). A Bill of Rights document (Appendix I) was also provided to the participants of this study.
Data Collection

Eight individual face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect data for this study. Two participants were interviewed at each of the four HBCUs. The same interview protocol was used for all eight interviews (Appendix B). Interview questions were the same for each interview session. The interview lasted 45-60 minutes.

Interviews were conducted in a location selected by the participants.

According to Mills and Gay (2019) “an interview is a purposeful interaction in which one person obtains information from another. Interviews permit researchers to obtain important data they cannot acquire from observation alone…” (p. 554). The following steps were taken to collect data for this study:

1. The participants in this study were interviewed about their experiences of being African American female FGCS seniors.
2. Each individual was asked 12 semistructured open-ended interview questions regarding academic, social, supports that were derived from Tinto’s College Retention Theory and institutional Action Framework. There were additional probing questions asked to illicit their responses to answer the research questions of this study.
3. The questions were asked through the interview protocol (Appendix B) in which they were emailed to each participant prior to their contribution in this study.
4. The interviews were conducted in-person, except when prohibited by distance. FaceTime a video telephone application that allows you to have face-to-face interactions with individuals, was used to interview study participants that were geographically separated from the researcher.
5. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was recorded with the consent of each individual.

6. Once the interviews were transcribed by the researcher, the transcription was emailed to the participant to verify the accuracy of the data. Some participant’s added information to their transcripts which increased the accuracy of the data collected.

The following steps were utilized to collect data:

1. Face-to-face interviews, using semistructured interview questions as a guide, were conducted. The interviewer will discuss all aspects of the interview, then begin to establish a rapport with participant prior to interview. Logistical formalities will be established prior to the interview to ensure the comfortability of the participant.

2. Virtual electronic medium FaceTime was used to interview study participants that were unable to have a face-to-face interview due to distance.

3. The identity of each participant was maintained by giving each participant a unique pseudonym.

4. A confidential transcriptionist transcribed each interview session.

5. The researcher identified themes and patterns in the transcripts.

6. From the theme and patterns, common categories were identified and coded for interpretation.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis process was taken to determine the credibility of the findings and involved the “transformation of raw data into a final description, narrative, or themes
and categories” (Ryan, Coughlan, & Orin, 2007, p. 742). The researcher employed a three-step model for analysis of the data which emerged and was collected from the participant interviews. In this model, Creswell (2013) outlined a process of organizing and preparing, reading and reviewing all the data, and coding and data. Data analysis followed the following steps:

1. The researcher reviewed the raw data searching for themes and patterns.
2. The researcher read and organized data from observation logs and notes into themes and patterns.
3. Audio recordings were transcribed by the interviewer.
4. Study participants reviewed the transcript of their interviews for accuracy.
5. The researcher read and organized data from observation logs and notes into themes and patterns.
6. The interview transcripts were uploaded into NVIVO 12 computer software program. Qualitative researchers use NVIVO 12 computer software to identify the frequency of codes, themes categories.
7. The frequency codes indicate the strength of a theme emerging from the raw data. The researcher used the NVIVO 12 computer software analysis to understand the perceptions of African American FGCS female seniors regarding institutional factors that allowed them to persist.
8. Once the theme and patterns were identified, they were linked to the appropriate research question. Data was recorded and entered on frequency tables.
9. Artifacts were analyzed as to the fit with each of Tinto’s constructs – academic, social, and financial institutional supports at the study HBCUs.
An expert reader was used to decode on the transcripts. The purpose of the expert reader was to control for rater bias. The reader looked for themes and patterns in the data. When compared with the researcher analysis of themes and patterns, the interrater reliability was .08 or greater. McHugh (2012) indicated that an interrater score of .08 or greater indicates reliability in the findings.

**Limitations**

This study included a few limitations. All of the participants were African American females. The participants were FGCS. Each individual was self-identified as having a senior standing in college. The study sample was limited to only four of the 102 HBCUs. The study was limited to the perceptions and experiences of the study participants. The small sample size of eight participants may not adequately represent the perceptions of the larger population.

**Summary**

This chapter included a restatement of the purpose statement and research questions. It outlined the research design, methodology, population, target population, sampling frame, and instrumentation. It described the validity, reliability, and ethics in detailed. Chapter III explained the data collection procedures and data analysis and concluded with the limitations and summary. Chapter IV will present the participants and findings of the study.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV begins with a restatement of the purpose of the study, and research question, followed by a brief review of methodology, population, and sample. The major portion of the chapter is devoted to presentation of data. The data describes the perceptions of African American female First-Generation College Students regarding academic, social, and financial support, at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, that study participants utilized to successfully persist through their senior year. This chapter includes an analysis of the data that was collected from the eight participant’s interviews. Each participant’s data is organized into themes and patterns that emerged to answer each research question and is represented in tables, followed by a narrative.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities as outlined in Tinto’s College Retention Theory (1990, 1993) and Tinto’s Framework for Institutional Action (2012).

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be academic institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?

2. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be financial institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically
Black Colleges and Universities?

3. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be social institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?

**Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative multiple case study methodology. Qualitative inquiry explores the experiences of individuals and seeks to understand the phenomenon of participants as they experience it. According to Pathak, Jena, and Kalra, (2013) “qualitative method is used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions” (p. 192).

In qualitative case study research, there are three forms of data collection – observation, interview, viewing documents and artifacts (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). This study utilized one-on-one interviews with FGCS African American Females. Documents and artifacts were collected that provided evidence of academic, social and financial institutions supports. Semi structured interview questions were delivered by the researcher to individual FGCS.

All of the participants were asked 13 questions and additional probing questions that were aligned with the research questions. Research question 1 focused on the academic supports the participants accessed and utilized, while research question 2 focused on the financial supports, and research question 3 focused on the social supports received from their institutions that allowed them to successfully persist to their senior year in college.
The participants were recruited through purposeful sampling who met the study’s criteria. All of the participants were recruited through the utilization of a flier that was posted on HBCU Buzz Facebook page. HBCU Buzz is a social media site that aims to enhance the HBCU experiences and uplift the perceptions of HBCU institutions as perceived by students and alumni, articles, and newsletters. The flier was also posted the website at MyHBCUInterviews. My HBCU Interview webpage is a site whose objective is to maintain the legacy of relevance and value found at Historically Black Colleges and Universities by sharing in depth interviews, discussions, and knowledge through the voices and experiences of alumni and current students.

There were eight individuals who contacted the researcher via telephone or email to partake in this study. All of the participants were provided with an informed consent form (Appendix E), interview questions (Appendix B), and the Bill of Rights (Appendix H) documents via email before participating in the study. The participants selected a date and time to be interviewed. Due to the participant’s location, each interview was conducted via FaceTime. Each interview was recorded using an iPhone recording device. All participants consented to being recorded as they provided the researcher permission when they signed the informed consent form (Appendix E) prior to their participation in this study.

The researcher transcribed all of the interviews and participants were emailed a copy of their responses for their review. Participants were asked to make any necessary changes in which a few of them added to their responses. The data collected from the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The NVivo 12 computer software program
was used to identify frequency coding of theme categories. The frequency code indicated the strength of a theme emerging from the data.

**Population/Sample**

The population for this study was 298,228 students enrolled at four-year public and private HBCUs in the United States (NCES, 2018). The population was made up of the following subpopulations, 146,892 African American students enrolled at public HBCUs, 64,142 African American students enrolled at private HBCUs, and 87,194 non-African American students enrolled (NCES, 2018). A purposeful sample was taken from the target population of 821 African American female FGCS seniors attending Alabama State University, Spelman College, Texas Southern, or Tuskegee University.

Patton (2002) defined a sample as a group of participants in a study selected from the population which the researcher intends to generalize. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) sampling involves selecting a “group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). The purposeful sample group in this qualitative case study were eight African American female FGCS with the classification of senior status who were enrolled at one of the following HBCUs, Alabama State University, Spelman College, Texas Southern, or Tuskegee University.

A purposeful sample is a nonprobability sample selection based on characteristics of a population and objective of the study (Creswell, 1998). The purposeful sample included eight participants that met specific criteria. The eight participants that met the following criteria was included in the study:

- African American
- Female
• Current senior classification standing

• Currently enrolled at one of the following: Alabama State University (ASU), Spelman College (SC), Texas Southern University (TSU), and Tuskegee University (TU) Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

• First-generation college student

• 18 years old or older

• Voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

The purposeful sample size of eight participants is appropriate for this study. In qualitative research studies, Creswell (1998) recommended five to twenty-five participants and Morse (1994) suggested at least six participants be included to conduct a study. There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research.

**Observations Regarding Interviews and Interview Process**

Interviews for each of the participants were conducted on different days. There was a total of eight participants, two from each institution. The participants participated in the interviews via telephone and FaceTime, following the same interview script, and were audio recorded. All participants were notified prior to the commencing of each interview of audio recording. Each participant consented to being audio recorded for transcription purposes only. At that time, the informed consent and audio release form was reviewed. The researcher reviewed with each participant their rights to ensure understanding of Brandman University’s IRB Bill of Rights. All participants signed all necessary forms prior to interviews and were sent to researcher electronically.
The researcher advised all participants that all information would be used for data collection and analysis purposes only. Each researcher at the time of the interview was notified that their responses would be anonymous, and that their names would not be used. A scheduled time was set for each individual participant interview, in which all participants were ready and prepared to be interviewed on time.

Each study participant interview lasted approximately 44 minutes with the exception of one participant interview, which lasted 68 minutes. All study participants were delighted to be a part of a study that focused on their stories as FGCS at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Each participant articulated the lived experiences at their respective HBCU in a vivid and eloquent manner, which exhibited sheer pride and a sense of belonging. Each participant attentively listened to each question prior to answering each question. All participants were knowledgeable of their HBCUs programs and supports and all proclaimed that their HBCU was the best institution of higher learning. All eight participants expressed an undeniable love for their HBCU and would not have chosen another institution. All participants were friendly and used affirmations such as, “Yes, Ma’am.” The term “Ma’am” was regularly used from each participant when answering a question. Each participant appeared comfortable and freely shared their HBCU experiences with the researcher. None of the interviews appeared stressed or forced. There was laughter and a sense of familiarity with each interview which made the interviews easy and comfortable. Each participant showed a great deal of emotion when sharing information about how their HBCU molded them as a person and the support that she received from the school. When speaking about the culture of their campus, each participant spoke with passion and enthusiasm. The pride that the
participants expressed showed no regret for the educational choices they made. Only one participant expressed some apprehension when discussing the difficulties of being away from home and having to work challenges out on her own. Participants were less emotional when speaking of finances. They described the hardships of paying for college and hardships imposed on their families due to the cost of tuition.

At the end of each interview, pleasantries were exchanged, as new bonds were formed with each participant with two participants extending invitations to the researcher to their graduation. Five of the participants expressed that they would like to keep in touch with the researcher. The researcher assured each participant that they would receive a copy of the study outcomes.

**Presentation of the Data by Research Question**

**Research Question 1 – Institutional Academic Factors**

*Research Question 1 asked,* “*What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be academic institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?*”

Institutional academic factors are considered services that increase academic knowledge of students which can be offered through basic skills training, tutoring centers, remedial courses, study groups, summer bridge programs, peer-to-peer tutoring, teachers, advisors, professors, faculty, volunteer mentors, supplemental courses, and summer learning experiences. Study participants identified the following academic factors that supported their persistence at HBCUs, faculty, staff, and professors, labs and centers, peer-to-peer tutors, academic programs, internships, and university tutoring
services. Table 6 presents the frequency of study participant responses regarding academic factors that supported participants in persisting through their senior year.

Table 6

*Institutional Academic Factors of Persistence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty, staff, and professors</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labs and student support centers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-peer tutors</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic programs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University tutoring services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Faculty, Professors, and Staff.** This theme was referenced 22 times among seven out of the eight participants. The participants expressed their gratitude for having professors that cared about the wellbeing of students. Kendi stated, “All the departments on Texas Southern campus make a sincere effort to make everyone feel involved, succeed, and assist with finding ways to upgrade their resources and educational opportunities.” Amari added, “I’m a biology major, and all of the professors in my department are Ph.D. holding researchers who are very passionate about the education we receive, our research and resume as a scientist, and post-graduation plans.” A few of the participants expressed that the faculty were very helpful in providing support to students, which allowed her to stay on track academically. Akachi stated, “We have a strong faculty network, we always met for workshops and seminars, and other faculty and staff that invite other colleges of the school to events in their departments.” Some of the participants indicated that the faculty care about the students and have a desire to help them academically. Issa stated, “The faculty and staff do not want to see any of us fail.” The participants were thankful for having faculty who went the extra mile to help them
succeed. Imani highlighted the importance of having a consistent relationship with her advisor and explained that their relationship has been beneficial throughout her collegiate journey. Imani stated, “As a college student it is most important to me that I have a good relationship with my academic advisor because she makes sure I am enrolled in the right classes and on track for graduation.” Asha added, “The academic supports that have been beneficial to me are working closely with my advisor… I can say they are the only reasons I have come this far and am on track to graduate.” Attending faculty office hours was highly recommended among the participants. Kendi stated, “I am a STEM Major, so access to office house for help with Laboratory work is much needed.” The participants highlighted that the faculty and staff wanted them to be successful. Asha stated,

I am a Sales & Marketing major and my business professor has been working with me since my first semester. He even assisted in helping me choose my major freshman year (I came in undecided). Between him and my advisor I will never fall behind, they ensure I am enrolled in the correct classes and have the help I need with any assignments.

**Labs and Student Support Centers.** This theme was referenced 18 times among six out of the eight participants. The participants expressed an appreciation for having the computer labs being an academic support. Dalia stated,

At ASU we have a lot of learning centers. For example, there’s the Writing Lab, History Lab, Math Lab and Reading Center. Each of these centers have professionals and students who are there to help you when you’re having difficulty in those 4 main subjects.
One participant indicated that she received an abundance of help from the academic labs and centers throughout her collegiate journey. Issa stated,

The Student Support center has been most beneficial to me. It has kept me in the know of important dates and calendar deadlines. The tutoring that the center provides has greatly helped me to stay on top of my grades. I also like the student center because they always have up to date scholarship opportunities. They [Student Center] also places you with other students in your same major so that we are able to work with and help each other out.

One participant indicated that her institutions offers quiet spaces where she can get her work complete. Imani explained that the Wesley Foundation has computers and study rooms that she can work “where its quiet and peaceful when getting work done.” Imani indicated that the Wesley Foundation has also allowed her to complete community service work. She stated, “I am also an active member of the Wesley Foundation where we reach out to students during the semester to make sure they have basic needs such as food, clothes and other resources to encourage academic success.” One participant admitted to using the labs and centers but indicated that she hasn’t taken full advantage of the academic supports offered by her institution. Dalia stated, “Truthfully, although there are a lot of resources on campus, I haven’t really taken advantage of them.”

Overall, the six participants were thankful for having this academic support. Akachi’s indicated that the writing lab was helpful in completing the rigors of her academic work and Hasina specified that the “free” computer labs and tutors have been the most beneficial support that she has received at ASU.
**Peer-to-Peer Tutors.** This theme was referenced nine times among six out of the eight participants. One participant expressed that peer-to-peer tutors was the most beneficial academic support she received. Akachi was assigned a tutor during the Summer Bridge Program and upon completion, she received eight credits. She expressed, “This program allowed us to be ahead of other freshman and I was grateful for that.” A few participants expressed that they were grateful for participating in study groups and they helped them stay focused academically. Imani stated, “The support factors that are important to me is study groups, group messages with classmates that keep you updated on assignments. They also keep you updated on class discussions and notes that you might have missed.” Issa added that having study groups with peers has been “key” to completing her courses. Amari explained, “A lot of the time, we as students form groups and host study sessions to understand topics that will be tested on for each class.” Kendi added, “some of the other accommodations I utilize are: study groups, and peer tutor groups, as well as the academic lunch & learn workshops offered by the various university departments.” One of the participants expressed being a tutor and expressed the value in receiving tutoring services. Hasina indicated, “being a tutor myself, I know how much time tutors spend in a room and how knowledgeable they are when it comes to what they do.”

**Academic Programs.** This theme was referenced five times among three out of the eight participants. Akachi explained that she was enrolled in Spelman on provisional acceptance because she entered with a 2.9 GPA from high school. Akachi stated, “I had to attend a summer bridge program to prepare me for the rigorous coursework because I really didn’t have a very high GPA when I applied.” She expressed her gratitude to the
program because it taught her how to “learn and study.” One participant explained that her campus has an academic program specially designed for FGCS which has an abundance of resources to help them succeed. Issa explained,

One program that is very beneficial is the First – generation Scholars program that helped students who identify as first-generation college students to navigate through their first year of college. This program allows for one on one assistance with student advisors, tutors, workshops, and support for people that are in your same situation. It makes you feel less alone and more comfortable.

Issa expressed that through this program she also received emotional support. One participant indicated that she is an honors student and the academic programs she’s enrolled in has allowed her to achieve academic success. Kendi stated, “The academic support that were most beneficial to me are the perks of the Honors College programs.”

**Internships.** There was only one participant that made one reference to the theme internships. Hasina explained, “my professors suggested that I take advantage of the academic supports through internships.” She also indicated that although the internships were helpful the study groups were most beneficial to her academically.

**University Tutoring Services.** There was only one reference made to the theme university tutoring services by one participant. Amari explained that she was grateful for having access to the university tutoring services because they helped her with the rigors of college. Amari indicated that the university tutoring services were helpful because her classes required “a certain amount of effort to build our resume for post-graduation plans of any kind.”
Research Question 2 – Institutional Financial Factors

Research Question 2 asked, “What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be financial institutional factors that supported their persistence on at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?”

Financial support is considered any type of financial assistance by means of scholarships, stipends, grants, loans, and work study programs that help students in paying for college (Tinto, 2012). Study participants identified the following financial factors that supported their persistence at HBCUs, scholarships, loans, grants, financial counseling, and campus programs. Table 7 presents the frequency of study participant responses regarding financial factors that supported participants in persisting through their senior year.

Table 7

Institutional Financial Factors of Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial counseling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scholarships. This theme was referenced 22 times among six out of the eight participants. The participants expressed how grateful they were for having received scholarships through their institutions. Hasina stated,

All the scholarships and programs that I have been offered has been so beneficial. When I first started college, I was having to take out loans. By the end of my college career, I am getting paid to go to school, and couldn’t be more blessed.
Dalia expressed her gratitude for the scholarships she has received because it has allowed her family to save money. She stated, “My scholarships have been most beneficial to me. Although I receive a decent amount of financial aid, my scholarships have allowed my parents to keep up with my tuition and fees.” Amari added, “At Tuskegee University, I am a Merit Scholar- a scholarship recipient of the merit scholarship (tuition & book stipend)”

Issa expressed the joys of having scholarships to pay for tuition. She stated, 

Financially, The most beneficial has been the various scholarship opportunities that I learned about through my counselor, department and the needs-based opportunities offered by the college that are offered specifically to Spelman Students who meet certain criteria’s, such as family financial hardship or living in certain areas or states.

Kendi voiced her appreciation for scholarships that she has received which has prevented her from taking out loans. She stated, 

The university has access to an abundance of scholarships; however, you have to maintain 3.0 or greater GPA. So, I have multiple scholarships. Some I found on my own and others I learned about through the STEM department at Texas Southern University.

One participant expressed that through family help and scholarships she is blessed to have not taken out any loans. Akachi explained that her family “saved up” so that she could attend college and she has been “making it” off of their financial support. She stated,
We haven’t really had to take out any loans which is a blessing. But after undergrad I’m really on my own. My family said you have four years that’s all we can do. So I had to make sure to get in and out in four years.

**Grants.** This theme was referenced six times among four out of the eight participants. The participants acknowledged how supportive the grants were to their education. Hasina stated, “I am also on a program funded through…that pays me every semester if I tutor, mentor a classmate, and conduct/present research at least once a year.” Kendi explained that she received a grant that waived all her enrollment fees. She stated, “I was also blessed to have me out of state fees waived due to being an honors student.” Asha indicated, “Without the student loans and grants I received from Tuskegee I would not be able to continue with school.” Amari shared that if she did not have the grants, she would have had to take out extra loans to cover the cost of tuition. Amari explained that she is grateful for all of the financial assistance that her institution has provided to her.

**Loans.** This theme was referenced five times among four out of the eight participants. Hasina indicated that the majority of her schooling has been funded through scholarships and grants; however, she had to take out loans during her first semester of college. Although Amari has been provided with financial assistance through TU she has had to take a large amount of loans to pay for her schooling. Amari stated, “At this point in the process, I have spent well over $60,000 to get my bachelors, I will never get that money back- I might as well finish!” Asha explained that the majority of her education has been paid for through loans. She stated, “I applied for several loans through Tuskegee. I am currently receiving financial aid - Perkins loan and Stafford loan.”
Campus programs. There was only one reference made to this theme made by one participant. Imani made one reference to the theme campus programs throughout her interview. Imani indicated that she was enrolled in a campus program that offered her financial support. She stated,

We also have a program at my school called “Project Success” that I’ve utilized where they support students in need of emergency funds. I had the opportunity to receive financial support. I am so appreciative of this program and would recommend each student stay connected with them.

Financial counseling. Only one participant made one reference to this theme. Imani explained the importance of having financial counseling while attending college. She stated, “Communicating with student accounting and financial aid services is important to make sure you don’t have any balances that will affect your academic progress. They are available to support you and answer questions you may have about financial etc.”

Research Question 3– Institutional Social Factors

Research Question 2 asked, “What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be social institutional factors that supported their persistence on at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?”

Institutional social support is considered “…social forces internal and external to campus, especially those that influence students’ sense of belonging and membership in the social communities of the institution” (Tinto, 2012, p. 27). It includes things such as social groups, peers, friends, campus fraternal organizations, alumni groups, networks, and motivational groups that improves student and campus connectedness, which
grounds the students’ availability and willingness to take part in support services such as, tutoring, learning communities, and other helpful academic policies, supports, and practices. Study participants identified the following social factors that supported their persistence at HBCUs, on-campus organizations, friends, classmates, peers, and roommates, campus activities, faculty, mentors, and extracurricular activities. Table 8 presents the frequency of study participant responses regarding social factors that supported participants in persisting through their senior year.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-campus organizations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and mentors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classmates, peers, roommates</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus activities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**On-Campus Organizations.** There were five participants that referenced this theme 21 times. One participant explained that on-campus organizations give her the opportunity to meet people who are like-minded in which after while become her friends. Amari stated, “The on-campus organizations have been more beneficial since I get the opportunity to hear the perspectives from other majors and relate to other women and men who have similar and different struggles. I also meet friends!” Dalia highlighted that she is a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and it is an experience that she “will never forget.” One participant explained how involved she is in campus organizations at her HBCU. Ackachi indicated that she is a member of the mentoring program, an HBCU initiative, a political organization, and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority,
Incorporated. Akachi also explained that she has been the President of the dorms for a few years and she has had a great experience through her role. Imani explained that she participated in various on-campus organizations that allowed her to network with people from different backgrounds and have fun. She stated,

I am also an executive board member of the “Underground Fashion Society” where we are a group of students who love fashion and love to be fashionable. We present fashion shows and host classes that help aspiring designers, models, and artist.

One participant indicated that her experience was more valuable due to her participating in clubs and organizations. Asha stated,

The one most beneficial to me is my state club, because they are the most relatable people at school, we all are coming across country mostly not knowing anyone or anything about Tuskegee and no matter what happens you know you have that support system of people to lean on if you need anything, from advice to a recommendation on where to get the best hair products in town.

**Faculty and Mentors.** This theme was referenced 14 times among five out of the eight participants. One participant expressed the value of the social support she received from faculty, professors, and staff. Hasina stated, “being able to go to their office and talk about any stress from school and get help has been the most beneficial aspect to me.” One participant explained that she is grateful for all of the connections that she has made at ASU. Hasina expressed that her mentors “really care” about her and the other students. Dalia added, “I feel as though the friends and mentors I’ve met on my college journey have been the most beneficial to me.” She also indicated that her mentors have
“opened up their home” for her and that she feels like she is a part of their families. She stated, “socially, I have received some of the best friends and mentors. There are people that I have met while being at ASU that have changed my life forever.”

**Friends.** This theme was referenced 12 times among six out of the eight participants. One participant explained that her friends care about her and it makes her feel good knowing that she is not alone. Dalia stated, “I have met so many wonderful people and I have made connections that I wouldn’t have received if I did not attend ASU.” Another participant expressed how grateful she was for having friends; especially the friends she met through her sorority. Akachi stated, “My Friends were the biggest supports. We make sure each other are succeeding. We keep each other aware of things going on in school.” A couple participants expressed great appreciation for their friends. Hasina indicated, “Alabama State has given me lifelong friends that are considered as my family now. They have been some of my biggest supporters since I started school.” Amari added, “I also turn to friends who help me spiritually and help to relieve the stress I might be under.” She expressed the importance of having social support to help cope with school and life issues. One participant shared that she left her home in California to attend an HBCU and had to adjust without having friends when she arrived at TU. Asha stated, “After a while everything came together and I loved every second of it, while being out here on my own I became a lot more mature, organized and I feel like the relationships I built will last a lifetime.” One participant shared her gratefulness for having friends during stressful time. Issa stated, “Our student wellness center has a gym where there are sometimes personal trainers or workout groups that we
can work with. I will sometimes go to the gym with friends on campus to workout and relieve stress.”

Classmates, Peers, Roommates. There were three participants that referenced this theme nine times. A couple of the participants expressed that they received an abundance of support from their classmates, peers, and roommates. Imani stated,

Being involved on campus is very important because that's where you meet people who will support you socially. It not only connects you to people from all different states, but it allows you to be comfortable with speaking to your peers and networking where you will find so many people with the same social interests.

Amari’s added,

My friends and classmates have been more beneficial because not only do we learn the material, we grow into a group of individuals with a main goal and focus. We also have the ability to network with each other given that we are in the same major and have similar plans. It’s a fantastic way to meet great lifelong friends! That’s how I am still so close to my first roommate at Tuskegee!

One participant highlighted the importance of establishing connections and making relationships with others on campus. Kendi indicated, “I am very active on campus. I lead study groups and I also participate in group study with peers.” Another participant explained that she is grateful for the assistance that she has received from her classmates. Hasina stated, “I couldn’t be happier with all the support that I get from my professors, classmates…”
**Campus Activities.** This theme was referenced six times among three participants. The participants shared about their amazing experiences at the perspective HBCUs regarding campus activities. Dalia expressed her gratefulness for the campus life and expressed that ASU has an abundance of activities that she has participated in such as football games, café mixers, and yard shows. She highlighted that she enjoys the marching band at the football games. Akachi explained that she is on the quiz bowling team and that they won the championship this year. She stated, “I absolutely loved being on the Quiz Bowl team. I wasn’t that good, but I learned a lot and enjoyed challenging myself and learning new things.” Asha shared that her campus has an abundance of social activities that are designed to network with other students and build relationships. Asha stated, “there is something for everyone,” as she expressed the importance of campus involvement.

**Extracurricular Activities.** There was only one participant that referenced this theme four times. Issa indicated that participating in extracurricular activities has been a life changing experience. She stated, “I have learned so much about discipline, dedication and working with as and a team through being a part of the Marching Band. It has transformed the way I live.” She also expressed her appreciation for Morehouse College allowing Spelman students to participate in their marching band. Issa participates in color guard and she really enjoys dancing and just being on the team with the other members.

**Data Analysis by Common Themes and Patterns in Research Questions**

Included in this section is an analysis of each interview that was collected and transcribed into themes and patterns which is followed by the total response frequency
from each participant that answered the study’s research questions. There were at least four participants that provided references for a response rate of 50% or more regarding the common themes and patterns.

**Research Question 1 Common Themes**

Research Question 1 asked, “What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be academic institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?” All eight participants provided a total of 46 responses to this research question; however only three themes are displayed within this question due to the response rate totals and number of participants who answered within the theme or pattern. Faculty, professors, and staff were the most cited sources that the participants perceived being the academic institutional factor that supported their persistence at their HBCU; which is displayed in Table 9.

Table 9

*RQ1: Common Themes and Patterns by Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/pattern</th>
<th>HBCU respondents</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty, professors, staff</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labs and centers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-to-peer tutors</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Common Theme 1: Faculty, Professors, and Staff**

There were seven out of eight participants who responded 22 times to the theme faculty, professors, and staff as an academic resource that helped them persist on to their senior year. The participants agreed that the support that they received from the faculty, professors, and staff fostered their academic success. Issa stated, “I also believe that the support I received from my professors…is key.” The participants expressed the
importance of taking advantage of faculty office hours. Amari stated, “professor office hours were beneficial to me.” The participants also shared that utilizing professor office hours allowed them to talk about their grades and gain social support. Imani indicated that she made sure to go to her professor’s office hours to “communicate about my grades.”

**Common Theme 2: Labs and Centers**

This theme was referenced 18 times from five out of eight participants who utilized academic supports within their institutions. All of the five participants expressed that the labs and centers at their institutions was an academic support that allowed them to persist on to their senior year. Issa stated,

I have also utilized the Student Support Center. This center is a place that covers all aspects of student needs, from academic to emotional supports. I generally go there to make sure I am academically on track to graduate and to see advice on sources, but students can also go there to seek social emotional support as well.

The participants expressed the benefits of the centers and explained that they were able to access multiple free services within the center. Akachi stated, “and they also have a writing center and through this center they have peer-to-peer tutoring for English and papers and I also have utilized that as well.”

**Common Theme 3: Peer-to-Peer Tutoring**

There was a total of nine responses related to the theme peer-to-peer tutoring that were referenced by six out of the eight participants. All six participants shared how peer-to-peer tutoring was beneficial to their academic success. Imani stated,
My major is Human Service and Consumer Sciences with a Concentration in Child and Family Development and in our department we are very close we all make sure that if we need support academically we will create study groups and constantly communicate with each other.

The participants agreed that peer-to-peer tutoring is a necessary academic support needed for persistence. Issa stated, “The tutoring that the center provides has greatly helped me to stay on top of my grades.” Additionally, the participants highlighted the importance of forming study groups to stay “on top of assignments.” Amari explained, “We (friends and classmates) also have the ability to network with each other given that we are in the same major and have similar plans.

**Research Question 2 Common Themes**

Research Question 2 asked, “What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be financial institutional factors that supported their persistence on at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?” All eight participants provided a total of 29 responses to this research question; however only two themes are displayed within this question due to the response rate totals and number of participants who answered within the theme or pattern. Scholarship was the most cited source that the participants perceived being the financial institutional factor that supported their persistence at their HBCU; which is displayed in Table 10.
Table 10

*RQ 2: Common Themes and Patterns in all Respondents by Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Pattern</th>
<th>HBCU respondents</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Common Theme 1: Scholarships**

There were six out of the eight participants who responded 22 times to the theme scholarships throughout their interviews. All six participants expressed their gratitude for having been provided with scholarships to pay for their tuition. A few participants were thankful for their hard work and persistence in finding scholarships to fund their schooling. Hasina stated, “All the scholarships and programs that I have been offered has been so beneficial.” A few of the participants expressed that they were in academic programs that awarded them scholarships which they had to maintain a high GPA to keep their scholarship. Kendi explained that her honors program, “allotted…the most in Scholarship opportunities” in which she “also received a Book reserve which is a book credit of $700.”

**Common Theme 2: Grants**

This theme was referenced six times by four out of the eight participants. The participants expressed their appreciation for receiving funding to offset the cost of their tuition and so that their parents did not have to pay enrollment fees. Hasina indicated that she was “blessed” to be a part of a program that pays for her tuition. Kendi also highlighted that she was “blessed” to have her out-of-state fees waived due to her
academic abilities. Asha attends a private school and expressed that although she had to take out loans, she received a grant that helped offset some of her tuition fees.

**Common Theme 3: Loans**

This theme was referenced six times by four out of the eight participants. Although the participants expressed appreciation for having loans to fund them throughout their education, they indicated that they will leave school with a lot of debt. Amari explained that she is leaving school with over $60,000.00 in student loan debt. Asha indicated that the majority of her financial aid consists of loans.

**Research Question 3 Common Themes**

Research Question 3 asked, “What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be social institutional factors that supported their persistence on at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?” All eight participants provided a total of 56 responses to this research question; however only four themes are displayed within this question due to the response rate totals and number of participants who answered within the theme or pattern. On-campus organizations was the most cited sources that the participants perceived being the social institutional factor that supported their persistence at their HBCU; which is displayed in Table 11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/pattern</th>
<th>HBCU respondents</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-campus organizations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and mentors</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classmates, peers, roommates</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common Theme 1: On-Campus Organizations

There were five out of the eight participants that provided a total of 21 responses to the theme on-campus organizations. There were a few participants that expressed that they were drawn to HBCUs because of the activities they witnessed that were facilitated by organizations during their initial visits. Kendi stated, “I will say that that campus was the full actual HBCU experience where everyone had pride for the school, many parties and events…” Some of the participants explained that they were involved in multiple on-campus organizations. Amari stated, “At Tuskegee University, we have many on-campus organizations that help to support my end goals and current matriculation through Tuskegee. I am involved in Inspirational Girls who works to help empower women on campus.”

Common Theme 2: Faculty and Mentors

There were five out of eight participants that referenced the faculty and mentors for a total of 14 times. Kendi indicated that the faculty and staff care about the students and that go the extra mile for student achievement. She stated, “I would say the overall support from my colleagues and department faculty and staff. They always make sure that we are aware of opportunities coming to our campus.” Hasina explained that her professors have been a “tremendous help” in which some are now her mentors. Amari indicated that her mentors guided her throughout her schooling and that she appreciates the time and resources they provided her with. She stated, “I also have mentors who I am forever indebted to who have helped support my dreams, my goal changes, and have been a great source of inspiration and knowledge!”
Common Theme 3: Friends

This theme was referenced 12 times by six of the eight participants regarding social supports that were necessary to their persistence in college. A few of the participants explained that the friends that they have met during their collegiate journey have become their family. Imani explained that her involved in organizations allowed her to meet friends that has supported her and will “soon become family”. Akachi explained that her friends are her, “biggest supporters.” Hasina and Kendi expressed that their friends are their social and spiritual support which is a big stress reliver.

Common Theme 4: Classmates, Peers, and Roommates

There were four out of eight participants that referenced the theme classmates, peers, and roommates a total of nine times. A few of the participants indicated that their classmates and peers provided them with valuable social support which was needed for their persistence. Imani indicated that her involvement in on-campus organizations has allowed her to receive social support from her peers. She stated,

We support each other because most of us are away from home for the first time and can feel alone at a University where we don’t know anyone. This organization allows us to become family and relate to each other’s culture.

Kendi expressed her appreciation for colleagues and explained that they “made sure” she had access to opportunities that were important to her success.

Summary

The data in this chapter reflected the perceptions of African American female FGCS regarding academic, financial, and social institutional supports at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, that study participants utilized to successfully persist
through their senior year. In order to provide criteria in determining which institutional factors should be considered as a major finding, the researcher established the following; factors that received a respondent rating of five or greater and a frequency rating of 10 or greater was considered a major finding. Based on the established criteria, Table 12 shows the major findings that met the criteria.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Institutional Factor/Support</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Academic Supports</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Faculty, staff, professors</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Labs and centers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Financial Supports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scholarships</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Social Supports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• On-campus organizations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Faculty and mentors</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Friends</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The academic institutional supports that met the criteria related to research question 1 were student support centers and faculty, professors and staff. Students indicated that attending office hours helped them communicate with faculty about their grades and other academic issues. Some of the faculty and professors became their mentors and became like family. As shown in Table 12, labs and student support centers received a respondent rating of five out of eight and a frequency rating of 18. Study participants expressed that they needed the labs and student support centers to persist through their senior year. The labs and centers included resources such as peer to peer
tutoring, access to computers, a safe quiet space to complete work, books for classes, and academic assistance for specific courses.

Research question 2 focused on financial institutional supports. Scholarships received the strongest response from study participants. Six out of eight participants expressed the importance of scholarships to their collegiate success. The majority of the study participants received scholarships to pay tuition fees. Study participants expressed their gratitude and appreciations for the monetary support provided through their institutions. Interestingly, other institutional financial supports, such as, loans and grants were mentioned less than half the frequency of Scholarships.

Research question 3 focused on social institutional supports. On-campus organizations and friends met the criteria to be considered major findings. On-campus organizations received a respondent rating of five and a frequency rating of 21. Study participants indicated that on–campus organizations and activities such as marching band, sororities, football games, and café mixers made their HBCU experience remarkable. The on–campus organizations added significance to their personal and interpersonal experiences, as they were able to make friends that they now call family. Study participants related that relationships built during their collegiate experience was valuable and integral to their persistence. Faculty and mentors were indicated to be the second social support that was most needed for persistence among five out of eight participants with a frequency rating of 22. The participants felt that their faculty and mentors cared about their wellbeing. While not as strong as on-campus organizations, friends received a respondent rating of six and a frequency rating of 14. Participants
expressed their appreciation for their friends and explained that they have become a part of their families.

Chapter V concludes this study with a restatement of the study purpose, research questions, methods, population and sample. Followed by major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research. The chapter ends with concluding remarks and reflections.
Chapter V: Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

“I will never ever regret attending an HBCU. It’s hard to explicitly explain how beautiful it is to be at an HBCU... The HBCU culture is extremely rich and there is nowhere in the world that you can mix hip-hop, gospel, Christ, education, parties, and history and still produce the “creme of the crop” engineers, scientists, doctors, veterinarians, and even artist!” (Amari)

Chapter V consists of the purpose, research questions, methods, population, sample, and major findings are also included in this chapter. Also included in this chapter are the conclusions, implications for actions, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with remarks and personal reflections of the researcher.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities as outlined in Tinto’s College Retention Theory (1990, 1993) and Tinto’s Framework for Institutional Action (2012).

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be academic institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?

2. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be financial institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically
Black Colleges and Universities?

3. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be social institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?

Methodology

A qualitative case study methodology was utilized for this study. Feagin, Orum, Sjoberg (1991) explained that case studies explore the experiences of individuals that are “conducted on the past experience of a group and that seek therein to elicit discoveries and insights that can illuminate the experience of other, or similar groups” (p. 5). This study sought out to explore the collegiate experiences of eight African American female FGCS seniors regarding the academic, financial, and social intuitional factors that allowed them to persist through their senior year. Yin (2013) indicated that case studies are conducted because the primary “focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context” (p. 2). The participants are currently in their senior standing at their perspective HBCUs and have displayed sheer self-determination to finish their college education despite of their FGCS status.

Purposeful sampling was utilized to select the participants for this study. A flier was created and posted on the HBCU Buzz Facebook page and the MyHBCUInterviews website to recruit the participants. The semistructured interviewing technique was used to collect data from each participant regarding their personal experiences at their perspective HBCU regarding the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that allowed them to persist through their senior year. The participants were asked open-ended and probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. Some
interviews occurred over the phone and others occurred via FaceTime and were audio recorded with consent of each participant prior to the interview. The interviews were transcribed and coded through the NVivo 12 computer software program and then was merged into themes and patterns to answer the research questions of this study.

**Population and Sample**

According to the NCES (2018) there are 102 Historically Black Colleges Universities (HBCUs) across 19 states. There are 51 private, as well as, 51 public HBCU institutions. In the fall 2017, there were a total of 298,228 students enrolled at public and private HBCUs (NCES, 2018). In 2017, there were 146,802 African American students enrolled at four-year public HBCUs and 64,142 African American students enrolled at private HBCUs for the academic year (NCES, 2018). There were 87,194 non-African American students enrolled at HBCUs during this time period. A purposeful sample was taken from 821 African American female FGCS attending the four universities.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that sampling involves selecting a “group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). The sample group in this qualitative case study were eight African American female FGCS with the classification of senior status who were enrolled at one of the following HBCUs, Alabama State University, Spelman College, Texas Southern University, and Tuskegee University. The sample included eight participants that met specific criteria. The eight participants that met the following criteria was included in the study:

- African American
- Female
- Current senior classification standing
Currently enrolled at one of the following: Alabama State University (ASU), Spelman College (SC), Texas Southern University (TSU), and Tuskegee University (TU) Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

- First-generation college student
- 18 years old or older
- Voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

The purposeful sample size of eight participants is appropriate for this study. In qualitative research studies, Creswell (1998) recommended five to twenty-five participants and Morse (1994) suggested at least six participants be included to conduct a study. There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research.

Major Findings

This study included three research questions that allowed the participants to describe the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that allowed them to persist at the HBCU. Findings related the research questions had to meet criteria set by the researcher to be considered a major finding. In order for an institutional factor to be considered as a major finding, the factors must receive a respondent rating of five or greater and a frequency rating of 10 or greater.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be academic institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?”
Major Finding 1: Faculty, professors, and staff provide academic support necessary for persistence. Academic support from faculty, professors, and staff is an academic support needed for persistence. There were seven out of eight African American female FGCS seniors who indicated that faculty, professors, and staff were an academic factor that allowed them to persist through their senior year. The participants expressed that attending office hours allowed them to gain understanding regarding their assignments and receive academic support. Tinto (1987) indicated that the goal of the institution should not merely focus on retaining students but ensuring that they are educated. Additionally, Tinto’s (2012) Theory of Institutional Action declares that, “…in no place is support more needed than in the classroom where success is constructed one course at a time” (p. 7). Notably, the participants also explained that some of the faculty, professors, and staff became their mentors and that they are appreciative for the relationships they have established with them. Tinto (2012) highlighted that students are able to succeed in their college courses through formal and informal interactions with faculty, professors, and advisors that can develop into mentoring relationships.

Major Finding 2: University labs and student support centers are important to student persistence. Academic support received through university labs and student support centers is an academic support needed for persistence. There were six out of eight participants that expressed labs and centers were an academic support that allowed them to persist through their senior year. The centers were a safe and quiet space for the participants to complete their work and receive tutoring as needed. Literature suggests that in order for students to succeed academically, they must have access to computer labs, libraries, tutoring, and printing services that are free (Azmitia, Sumabat, Cheong, &
Covarrubias, 2018; Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2013; Bean, 1990; Mosely, 2016; Tinto, 1993). The labs allowed the participants to get assistance with certain courses they experienced difficulties in and to enhance their writing skills. Karabenick and Newman (2013) explained that academic supports such as labs and centers allow students to succeed because they have “…staff and volunteers who help students with their writing by proofreading drafts, conducting workshops, and providing one-on-one tutoring in grammar and editorial services” (p. 207).

**Research Question 2**

*Research Question 2 asked, “What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be financial institutional factors that supported their persistence on at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?”*

**Major Finding 3: Financial support in the form of scholarships are needed for persistence.** Financial support in the form of scholarships are needed for persistence. There were six out of eight participants that indicated that scholarships were a financial institutional support they needed to persist through their senior year. The participants expressed their appreciation for receiving scholarships due to not being able to afford college because of their generational and economical status. Tinto (1993) insisted that institutions provide students of color; especially those from low-income backgrounds with financial support to prevent them from leaving college. A few of the participants received a large sum of scholarships and others were provided with academic scholarships which allowed them to focus on their academics. Research has found that removing financial barriers and providing financial support for students reduces psychological stress and increases academic performance (Bowen, McPherson, 125
Research Question 3 asked, “What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be social institutional factors that supported their persistence on at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?”

Major Finding 4: Participation in on-campus organizations is a social support needed for persistence. Participation in on-campus organizations is a social support needed for persistence. There were five out of the eight African American female FGCS who highlighted that their participation in on-campus organizations allowed them to persist through their senior year. The participants indicated that their involvement in on-campus organizations shaped their HBCU experience and the social capital they acquired through these experiences were valuable. Tinto (1975) explained that student involvement is positively correlated to retention and persistence. Likewise, literature shows that participation in campus clubs and organizations is a predictor of academic success; especially among first-time freshman (Bean, 1980; Falcon, 2015; Kimbark, Peters, & Richardson, 2017; Landry, 2018; Palmer, Maramba, & Dancy, 2011; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, students who attend HBCUs who participate in on-campus organizations receive added support from faculty and their peers that results in academic achievement (Brown & James, 2001; Gasman & Palmer, 2008; Palmer, Maramba, Ozuna Allen, Lee, Fountaine Boykin, & Arroyo, 2017; Shafter, 2016).

Major Finding 5: Faculty and mentors are critical to having the social support needed for persistence. Having faculty and mentors are a social support that is
needed for persistence. Faculty and mentor institutional social support is reflected in the relationships that the participants were able to develop throughout their collegiate journey. There were five out of eight participants that indicated faculty and mentors were a social institutional factor that allowed them to persist through their senior year. Participants expressed that informal and formal relationships with faculty allowed them to feel supported throughout their collegiate journey. A few participants explained that their formal relationships with faculty resulted in a mentoring relationship that will last “forever”. Tinto (2012) stated, “student retention is also shaped, directly and indirectly, by social forces internal and external to campus, especially those that influence students’ sense of belonging and membership in the social communities of the institution” (p. 28). Furthermore, literature has found that students who attend HBCUs who have informal relationships with faculty outside of the classroom is a motivational factor that increases academic achievement (Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; Golden, Bogan, Brown, Onwukwe, & Stewart, 2017; Langley, 2017; Kamasa-Quashie, 2014).

**Major Finding 6: Friends are a social support system that is necessary for persistence.** Having friends is a social support needed for persistence. Six out of eight participants expressed that social support from their friends is a factor that allowed them to persist through their senior year. Having friends allowed the participants to feel supported, loved, and cared for. Research has shown that having friends in college prevents loneliness (Henninger Eshbaugh, Osbeck, & Madigan, 2016), reduces stress (Çivitci, 2015), increases well-being (Ratelle, Simard, & Guay, 2013), improves communication (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012), and increases academic achievement (Seon, Prock, Bishop, Hughes, Woodward, & MacLean, 2019). Fleming
(1985) found that friends are instrumental in the lives of Black college students as it increased their persistence rates. Similarly, Brown (2018) found that students who are from low-socioeconomic backgrounds who attend HBCUs experienced success when they had an increase in social capital such as friends and interpersonal relationships. According to Seon et al., (2019) “social capital refers to a person’s social networks and relationships that promote healthy development” which includes friends, peers, family, and faculty (p. 23). Furthermore, research has shown that having friends creates social capital among college students which increases their likelihood of obtaining a degree (Malecki & Demaray, 2006; Meadows, Brown, & Elder, 2006; Salazar, 2012; Seon et al., 2019).

Conclusions

The following conclusions were derived from the major findings of this study.

Conclusion 1: Relationships with faculty, professors, and staff are critical to persistence in college.

It is concluded that institutional academic supports such as formal and informal relationships with faculty, professors, and staff are needed for African American female FGCS to persist in college. Each participant expressed the value and necessity of having academic supports. Academic assistance received from faculty, professors, and staff was the most utilized academic support. It is important that faculty have the proper knowledge and training to provide FGCS with academic assistance. Tinto (1993) explained that faculty must be committed to student achievement in order for students to persist. Academic supports are also offered to students via programs and initiatives that
are facilitated by faculty and staff to assist with skill building. Pitre and Pitre (2009) stated,

Fifty years ago, the Federal Higher Education Act was passed, and the U.S. Department of Education instituted the first federally supported education programs designed to increase the college enrollment and completion rates of economically disadvantaged and underrepresented ethnic background students” (p. 96). Faculty commitment to the success of these students is essential to their persistence.

Along with faculty commitment, academic programs such as Summer Bridge, TRIO, and Upward Bound can increase the likelihood of success among FGCS. Most importantly, students who are from low-income backgrounds and those who are FGCS need academic supports to reduce the postsecondary gaps in education.

**Conclusion 2: Labs and student support centers are critical for students to succeed academically and persist in college.**

It is concluded that labs and student support centers are vital for African American female FGCS to persist in college. Having access to labs and centers was beneficial among study participants because it provided them with the support that was needed to overcome the academic rigors of college. Tutoring services were provided in the labs and centers, which allowed the participants to understand and complete their assignments. Research has consistently shown that FGCS are unprepared for college upon their arrival (Evans, 2016; Royal, 2017; Falcon, 2015; Feldman, 2018; Kizart, 2014; Reed, 2017); which has resulted in the advocacy for academic supports such as tutors to provide FGCS with equitable educational outcomes (Hébert, 2018; Ives & Castillo-
Montoya, 2020; Nicols & Islas, 2015; Tinto, 1993, 2012). Studies have also shown that students from disadvantage backgrounds are able to persist with adequate academic supports (Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Falcon, 2015; Manzoni & Streib, 2019; Pitre & Pitre, 2009).

**Conclusion 3: African American female FGCS would not be able to persist in college without financial aid.**

It is concluded that African American female FGCS students would not be able to persist in college without financial aid. Financial aid is absolutely a necessary institutional support that allows FGCS to persist through their senior year. Scholarships were the most mentioned form of financial assistance received among the participants. The Thurgood Marshall Fund (2015) indicated that a large percentage of individuals who attend HBCUs are low-income; thus, needing financial support to pay for their tuition. The fund also found that the majority of FGCS leave college with debt due to their socioeconomic status. A debt-free education would be ideal for individuals from disadvantaged and marginalized backgrounds. Likewise, having the financial means to pay for college through scholarships and grants reduces stress and allows students to focus on their coursework (Goldrick-Lab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017; Scholarship of America, 2019).

Although the participants were able to persist with financial support from their institutions; some will leave college with debt. College debt prevents individuals from acquiring assets, increases stress levels, and detours them from continuing their education (Campbell, Deil, & Rios, 2015; Cox, 2019). Having debt will only continue to leave FGCS and those who come from low-income households at a disadvantage. First-
Generation College Students need to receive debt free financial supports to have a quality life after completing college.

**Conclusion 4: Student involvement in campus activities, clubs, and engagement in college life is essential to persistence in college.**

It is concluded that student involvement in campus activities, clubs and college life is essential to persistence in college. The activities in which the participants engaged in on their HBCUs campuses were life changing experiences. Tinto (1993) explained that student involvement in the campus activities increase retention and persistence rates. Studies have found that students who are involved in college activities are more likely to experience success than those who are not involved (Fischer, 2007; Hicks, 2012; Offurum, 2019; Tinto, 2012). Students who participate in extracurricular activities gain a wealth of social capital from their peers and faculty (Alicea, 2015; Kinakin, 2009; Storey, 2010; Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto (1993),

Fraternities, sororities, student dormitory associations, student unions…extracurricular programs, and intramural sports, for example, may all serve to provide individuals with opportunities to establish repetitive contact with one another in circumstances which lead to the possibility of incorporation into the life of the college (p. 99).

Individuals who attend HBCU unanimously highlight that participating in extracurricular activities is a valuable experience (Cooper, Hawkins, Cavil, & Carter-Francique, 2015; Hall, 2018; Mack, 2015; Scott, 2014). Involvement in campus activities allow students to develop relationships, reduce stress, increase wellness, and stay connected with others (Moore, Lovell, McGann, & Wyrick, 1998; Strayhorn, 2018;
Most importantly, students who are involved in the life of their campuses experience increases in self-efficacy and a sense of belonging, which has a positive impact on achievement (Falcon, 2015; Sommerfeld & Bowen, 2013; Strayhorn, 2018; Tinto, 2012).

**Conclusion 5: Formal and informal relationships with faculty and staff are important to persistence senior African American female FGCS.**

It is concluded that informal relationships with faculty and staff are important to persistence among senior African American female FGCS. Most of the participants spoke about the value of having relationships with faculty and staff. Tinto (1993) stated, “communities, educational or otherwise, which care for and reach out to their members and which are committed to their members’ welfare are also those which keep and nourish their members” (p. 205). The participants explained that they knew the faculty and staff cared about them, which resulted in informal mentoring relationships that will last for a lifetime. First-Generation College Students need relationships with faculty and staff to guide them through college. Also, they need relationships with faculty and staff to be connected to caring adults which produces social capital. Furthermore, FGCS need relationships with faculty and staff to feel a sense of belonging and to know that they matter to others.

**Conclusion 6: Friendships that include informal peer relationships and adult connections are essential to persistence.**

It is concluded that friendships; including informal peer relationships and adult connections are essential to persistence. Having friends and being able to connect to others are forms of social capital that is needed to persist in college. Tinto (1975)
explained that a lack of sense of belonging and connectedness is one factor of early departure from college. Friends provide a wealth of social support that is necessary to get through the obstacles of navigating college. The participants described their peers as being both an academic and social support. The social support that was received outside of the classroom allowed the participants feel a sense of belonging. Studies have shown that having social supports such as having friends and peers enhance the self-efficacy of individuals and promotes retention (Baldwin, Towler, Oliver, & Datta, 2017; Cassidy, 2015; Skahill, 2002; Tinto, 2012). Additionally, having friends and peer support during college is positively correlated to student success (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Falcon, 2015; Feldman, 2018; Heiss, Cabrera, & Brower 2008). Moreover, peers can connect other peers to resources and supports on campus that they have knowledge of and access to (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, study and support groups can be created within peer relationships that increase academic achievement.

**Implications for Action**

Implications for action were formed based on the major findings and conclusions of this study.

**Implication 1: Increase the Availability of Faculty and Staff to Provide Academic Assistance to First-Generation College Students**

Historically Black College and University Presidents must provide the funding and resources needed for ongoing faculty and staff training and implementation of strategies needed to meet the needs of senior African American female FGCS. Specifically, institutions should require all faculty, including the President, to participate in a 3-year professional development program related to providing culturally appropriate
instruction, appropriate instruction to students with learning disabilities, and academic coaching. The first year of the professional development program will require 40 hours of training and 20 hours of classroom peer observation and feedback. The second and third year will consist of 20 hours of training and 10 hours of peer observation and feedback per year. Union contracts, institutional policy, and institutional feedback loops will be revised or written to support the increased time, people, and funding needed to implement ongoing professional development outcomes. All institutions will use a 360-degree assessment instrument or similar tool, on a regular basis, to ensure that the perceptions of the faculty and staff align with perceptions of FGCS as to the impact of the professional development program on meeting the academic needs of senior African American FGCS females.

Implication 2: Extend Labs and Student Support Center Hours

The extension of lab and student support center hours would be required by contract and/or policy changes. By order of the President or Board, all labs and student support center hour would be extended to 24/7 availability. All electronically based services, such as Zoom, archived webinars, tutoring will be available 24/7. Hours and satisfaction of human provided services will be based on the need identified by .80 of students in and annual survey. African American female FGCS who have a senior class standing that have academic gaps will be required to attend basic skills workshops provided by the student support center. The center will assign a tutor to students to assist with basic skills work and college assignments. This assistance will be available 24/7.
Implication 3: Increase Funding and Financial Aid for First-Generation College Students

To increase funding and financial aid to FGCS, both public and private sectors must be explored. Economically disadvantaged college students receive funding through a federal program entitled PELL Grants. Through changes in federal statues, economically disadvantaged FGCS would receive 100% of their college tuition and books covered by PELL Grants. The Grant program would fund student need on a sliding scale, based on parental income of $100,000 or less. Each HBCU President will establish an endowment program through the major departments of the university. Music, Engineering, Art, or Business departments, to name a few, would fund scholarships for FGCS, based on need, that are funded by alumni from those departments or public at large. HBCU Presidents and Department Deans will annually approach industry leaders to support scholarship programs in specific departments. As well as, specific industries, will partner with HBCUs to fund industry specific paid internships.

Implication 4: Encourage Student Involvement

First Generation College Students will be required to take a 1.5-unit course that connects them to life on their HBCU campus. Students would be required to participate in at least one campus activity during the course. Student will be offered opportunity to earn money by working university sponsored activities.

Implication 5: Provide Opportunities for Faculty Mentorship for African American Female First Generation College Students

Historically Black College and University leaders need to ensure that FGCS have mentors that will provide formal and informal support. Every HBCU will create
mentoring programs that are specifically for FGCS. First-Generation College Students will be assigned a faculty mentor and student mentor from the senior class, at the beginning of their freshman year. Before being assigned, a strength-based assessment will be completed by both the student and mentor, to assess compatibility. The mentoring program will include academic tutoring, counseling, wellness counseling, and student involvement activities. Mentors must complete a yearlong training program focused on the holistic needs of FGCS before starting to serve as a mentor. Counseling, tutoring, wellness, and campus activities are supports that are confirmed in the literature as needed for student collegiate success (Azmitia et al., 2018; Azmitia et al., 2013; Mosley, 2016; Tinto, 2012). The effectiveness of the mentoring program will be assessed yearly with a 360-degree instrument or similar.

Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendations for further research are as follows:

1. It is recommended that a mixed method study be conducted to assess the effectiveness of academic institutional supports provided by faculty and professors as perceived by FGCS and faculty and professors.

2. It is recommended that a qualitative study be conducted that focuses on the successes of African American female FGCS at HBCUs to provide a blueprint for institutions regarding the factors that contribute to academic achievement.

3. It is recommended that future phenomenology studies focus on the lived experiences of African American female FGCS in higher education to add to the body of knowledge of this population.
4. It is recommended that case studies be conducted to explore the differences in collegiate experiences of African American female FGCS who attend HBCUs vs African American females who attend PWIs during their freshman and sophomore years.

5. It is recommended that future qualitative studies explore the causes of dropout among African American females FGCS who attended HBCUs.

6. It is recommended that future empirical studies examine the self-efficacy of African American female FGCS who attend private vs. public HBCUs.

7. It is recommended that future case studies explore the experiences of African American male FGCS who attend HBCUs.

8. It is recommended that future studies should include a mixed methods investigation of the self-determination of African American female FGCS as it relates to academic success.

9. It is recommended that future research include a mixed methods examination of the perceptions of family support among African American female FGCS.

10. It recommended that a future case study be conducted to explore the noninstitutional supports that allow African American FGCS to persist through their senior year.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of the academic, financial, and social supports that African American female FGCS need in order to persist through their senior year at HBCUs. The resilience of these young adult women in this study are proof of their hard work, drive, dedication, and determination.
Therefore, it is possible that other African American FGS and FGCS to achieve the same milestones. One participant shared that she had a village of individuals in high school who provided her with love, care, nurture, and support and that she could not have come this far without them. The African Proverb continues to reign true that “it takes a village to raise a child.” Historically Black Colleges and Universities provide that very village that African American college students need to achieve their goals. Every African American child should have the privilege of stepping foot on an HBCU campus. Every Black life is valuable and every Black life matters! Thus, there is more work to be done to provide African Americans with the opportunity to live quality lives so that they can be empowered to keep the faith and to pursue excellence.

Growing up, my father always taught my siblings and I the importance of knowing who we were, where we came from, and the tenacity, strength, and resilience of the people whence I came. He taught about those greats of African descent such as, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, and the Honorable Louis Farrakhan. In addition, he spoke of those great and influential African Americans like, Ida, B. Wells, Mary McCloud Bethune, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Langston Hughes, and Marian Wright Edelman, and Thurgood Marshall, of whom all are graduated from Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

It was important for my siblings and I to understand and visual representation of people who look like us that overcame obstacles, accomplished great things, and left an indelible mark on the world. They are representations that are not mentioned in school textbooks, seen on mainstream television, and often hidden from history. Which is the reason my father instilled in us at an early age that we “WILL” go to college and attend a
Historically Black College and/or University. As a single mother of two sons, I instilled these same values and sentiments with my sons. My sons know that college was not an option, it was a must and they would obtain that education at a Historically Black College and University. Both of whom are proud products of and graduates of Alabama State University, an HBCU in Montgomery, Alabama. This institution was constructed and created by nine former slaves in 1867 with a total of $500.00.

Resilience, greatness, tenacity, and foresight of a people who had the impetus to ensure that future Black girls and boys would have an institution they could call home, build for them, by them. Although I am the only one of my parents four children that did not attend an HBCU (due to unforeseen circumstances), I still knew the value and impact these institutions have on Black students. I was able to learn first-hand how viable these institutions are in providing the quality education, through the uplifting, supportive and nurturing environment that HBCUs provide. From visiting my siblings during their HBCU college years, listening to their stories when they would come home for break, and years of researching and visiting HBCUs, I knew that I had a duty to share my knowledge of these treasured institutions. Most parents want better for their kids than they had for themselves. As an educator, I not only look as my biological children as my kids, but my students as well. This is one of the reasons I have spent the last twenty-three years of my life educating others on the efficacy of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. These universities have played an integral role in providing the type of equitable education that Black children need to flourish, build their self-esteem, develop a sense of pride in an academic and social environment they need to persist and matriculate through college. From my observations, research, and dialogue with students and
graduates, HBCUs have succeeded in providing opportunities to students who may have been overlooked by other four-year institutions and instilled them with leadership skills, self-confidence, and the skills to make them career ready. I have seen first-hand, through my two sons, former students, and family members, how they entered their respective HBCU as impractical teens and leave these institutions as responsible self-assured young adults ready to tackle the world.

For the past twenty-eight years, I have spent my summers visiting as many Historically Black Colleges and Universities as I can. Each time I do, I am able to pay homage to and my foremothers and forefathers that were able to find strength through struggle. For that, I am able to draw upon that strength. As an African American, I take pride in value in knowing that it was my African Ancestors that were the first educators of the world. It was the Africans that taught the world mathematics, astronomy, and even hygiene. Birthed out of Ancient Africa civilizations more than 35,000 years ago, the Sphinx, raised the pyramids, the world's first library was produced by the Kemetic people in Kemet, known today as Egypt. It is also documented that out of Kemet, the world's first physicians, created geometry and astronomy and were among the first to explore the nature of our existence. This information they passed and share their knowledge to the Ancient Greeks (Blatch & Sydella, 2013). Acknowledging the sacrifices and the intellect, and ingenuity of my ancestors plays a fundamental role in my commission to shedding light on these remaining 102 Historically Black colleges and Universities. I am forever grateful and indebted to my foremothers and forefathers who had the strength and determination to pave the way for so many prominent minds of the past and current and future students who will grace the halls and obtain the finest education attainable.
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APPENDICES
Greetings, my name is Tamara Frazier and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Brandman University in Irvine, California. With your permission, I would like to invite two African American First-Generation college students who are seniors, to participate in my dissertation study entitled, “The Voices of African American Female First Generation College Student Seniors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.”

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe the academic, social, and financial institutional factors that African American female First Generation College Student seniors perceive supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Criteria:
1. African American Females
2. First Generation College Students at an HBCU
3. Over 18 years of age

If Interested, please contact me or my dissertation chair Dr. Davie @ gernaldavie@comcast.net
APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

My name is Tamara Frazier and I am currently a teacher with Riverside Unified School District. I’m a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the area of Organizational Leadership. I’m conducting research on the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that allowed first-generation African American female college seniors to persist on at their prospective Historically Black College and University. You will be asked to identify the above-mentioned factors that you feel allowed you to achieve your senior class standing.

I am conducting interviews with African American female who are college seniors that attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities who are first-generation college students. The information you give, along with the others, hopefully will provide a better understanding of the institutional factors that are needed to help first-generation college students persist on to obtain their degrees. The information that you provide will be able to help Historically Black Colleges and Universities develop programs and services for first-generation college students. Also, the information that you provide will fill the gap in the literature regarding first-generation African American female college seniors.

Each interview question will be asked in the same manner for each participant in this study. This is to guarantee, as much as possible, that all of the interviews are conducted accurately.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

As stated on the informed consent form, all of the information collected from the interviews will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

Did you receive the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy, I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let’s get started, and thanks so much for your time.

1. Tell me about your decision to attend college?

   **Probe:** *Do you have more to add?*

2. Why did you choose and Historically Black College University?
3. Describe your HBCU experience?

**Probe:** *How you do feel about it?*

4. What academic supports have you utilized from your HBCU?

5. What financial supports have you accessed from your HBCU

**Probe:** *Can you elaborate on (support)?*

6. What social supports have you accessed from your HBCU?

7. Explain which of the academic supports have been beneficial to you?

8. Explain which of the financial supports have been beneficial to you?

9. Explain which of the social supports have been beneficial to you?

10. In your experience, what were the factors that were most important that kept you in school?

**Probe:** Why do you feel that these factors are necessary?

11. How would you describe your institutions commitment to student achievement?

12. What information is beneficial to know as an African American female first-generation college student?

**Probe:** Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

“I really appreciate you taking time to participate in this interview. I will send you a copy of the findings once the dissertation is completed.”
# Synthesis Matrix

## Overarching Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Overview of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>African American First-Generation College Student Outcomes at HBCUs</strong></td>
<td>HBCUs enrolled a higher number of first-generation College students (FGCS) than most other institutions in the United States. These students are more likely to persist if they participate in summer college programs and or orientation programs, than FGCS who did not. Literature shows that academic, interpersonal skills, and social activities were factors that led to successful outcomes among FGCS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges Experienced Among African American First-Generation College Students</strong></td>
<td>First Generation College students who are from impoverished neighborhood or who have attended under-performing high schools upon entering college are more like to experience challenges and barriers to collegiate success such as finances, lack of family support, lower motivational and self-efficacy levels, family responsibilities, being academically unprepared, lack of positive interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factors that Promote Persistence for African American First-Generation College Students</strong></td>
<td>The factors that support persistence for FGCS, mainly females were reported as playing a major role in their collegiate matriculation. These factors, but not limited to include motivation, positive relationships with faculty and staff, tutoring and mentoring resources, academic advising, accessibility of staff, intrinsic motivators, institutional, leadership and various</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Overview of References

- Alexander (2017)
- Arroyo & Gasman (2014)
- Bethea (2019)
- Gasman et al. (2017)
- Green (2017)
- Hardy, et al. (2019)
- HBCU Digest (2018)
- Mack (2015)
- NCES (2018)
- PNPI (2018)
- Wilbur & Roscingno (2016)
- Woods-Warrior (2014)
- Alter (2015)
- Berry (2019)
- Callan (2018)
- Damaske et al. (2017)
- Doherty & Craft (2011)
- Green (2017)
- Hanks et al., (2018)
- Kirkman (2018)
- Lynch (2017)
- Mack (2015)
- Pruitt (2017)
- Saleem et al., (2016)
- Sharkey (2013)
- Williams et al., (2017)
- Andrews (2017)
- Bethea (2019)
- Brady (2019)
- Goings (2017)
- Golden-Battle (2017)
- Hardy (2019)
- Harlow & Bowman (2016)
- Jackson (2017)
- Jett (2013)
- Jones, & Johnson (2018)
- Kamasa-Quahie (2014)
- Kirkman (2018)
- Nicols & Islas (2015)
- Pierce-Beady (2017)
- Rachel (2014)
- Strayhorn (2013)
- Tyson-Ferrol (2009)
- Wilson
Factors That Promote Success Among African American Female First-Generation College Students

Although African American female first-generation college students experience negative outcomes they also experience success. Literature has shown that factors such as positive relationships, financial assistance, spirituality, family, cultural capital, determination, and various institutional supports allow them to experience higher educational success.

Factors That Promote Persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

HBCUs have been noted as providing a safe, positive, and nurturing environment were all students thrive with the support of staff and faculty engagement. These factors along with academic, social, and financial supports allow students to experience success.

Theoretical Framework: Vincent Tinto’s College Retention Theory and Framework of Institutional Action

Most students leave or drop out of institutions when they do not feel supported or valued. According to Tinto’s Theory (1975), students leave institutions when various needs are not met. Thus, Tinto (1990, 1993) suggested that institutions provide students academic, financial, and social supports that institutions can offer to students to assist them in successfully completing college.
APPENDIX D

Alignment Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Corresponding interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be academic institutional factors that supported their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?</td>
<td>Questions 3, 4, 7, 10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be financial institutional factors that supported their persistence on at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?</td>
<td>Questions 3, 5, 8, 10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What do African American female First-Generation College Student seniors perceive to be social factors that supported them their persistence at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?</td>
<td>Questions 3, 6, 9, 10, 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: The Voices of African American Female First Generation College Student Seniors at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Tamara Frazier

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Tamara Frazier, M.A., a doctoral student in the organizational leadership program at Brandman University. The purpose of this research study is to describe the academic, financial, and social institutional factors that allowed African American female first-generation college seniors to persist on at their prospective Historically Black College and University. This study will provide a blueprint to Historically Black Colleges and Universities regarding how to support and provide services to African American first-generation students. There is only one other study that focuses on the experiences of African American first-generation college seniors. Therefore, this study will add to the literature and fill the gap in the research regarding how to best support this population.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in a 45 to 60-minute one-on-one interview with the responsible investigator. The interview will be conducted in person, over the phone, or through “Virtual” FaceTime. Interviews will occur December 2019 through February, 2020.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the investigator will protect my confidentiality be keeping any identifying information on a password protected computer, online using password protected applications (i.e. Google Drive), or in a locked filing cabinet only available to the researcher.

b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings, transcripts and notes taken by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be destroyed.

c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input will add to the research on how to best support first generation African American females. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, feel free to contact Tamara Frazier at tfrazie2@mail.brandman.edu; or Dr. General Davie (chair) at gdavie@brandman.edu.

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not
participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also know that I may ask questions about the study before, during, or after the interview.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_________________________________________       ________________________
Signature of Participant                        Date
_________________________________________       ________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator             Date
APPENDIX F

Protection of Human Subjects

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Tamara Frazier successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/17/2017.

Certification Number: 2397022.
APPENDIX G

IRB Approval

BUIRB Application Approved: TAMARA FRAZIER

MyBrandman <my@brandman.edu> to me, Douglas, General • Sat, Dec 21, 2019, 11:41 AM

Dear TAMARA FRAZIER,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.Brandman.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

BUIRB
Academic Affairs
Brandman University
18855 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618

buirb@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu
A Member of the Chapman University System
APPENDIX H

Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX I

Field Test Participant Questions

Field Test Participant Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview you should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation. Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

Before the brief post interview discussion, give the interviewee a copy of the interview protocol. If their answers imply that some kind of improvement is necessary, follow up for specificity.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked? If the interview indicates some uncertainty, be sure to find out where in the interview it occurred.

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview... (I'm pretty new at this)?
APPENDIX J

Field Test Participant Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your ‘observer’ after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your prospective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

1. How long did the interview take? _____ Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?