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Successful African American Community College Students Perceptions on Sense of Belonging in Three California Community College Districts

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The University of San Francisco

SUCCESSFUL AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS
PERCEPTIONS ON SENSE OF BELONGING IN
THREE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICTS

A Dissertation Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
Organization & Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Nicole Y. Wise
San Francisco
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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

SUCCESSFUL AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS
PERCEPTIONS ON SENSE OF BELONGING IN
THREE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICTS

Roach (2009) indicates that "only 31 percent of public community college students go on to complete either an associate or bachelor's degree in six years" according to U.S. Education Department data (p. 14). In California the gap is even wider and the statistics more scarce for students of color. Whereas only 15 percent of African American students compared, to 26 percent of white students, complete their degree in six years of enrolling in a California Community College (Roach, 2009, p. 14). College retention as it pertains to success is a challenging issue in the United States, and the California Community College system is facing serious obstacles in defining retention in relation to success. In review of the definitions of retention and success a phenomenon appears indicating that a system or institution can be successful in retaining students, but at the same time unsuccessful in ensuring students achieve goals relating to academic success.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to explore the perceptions of successful African American students' sense of belonging at the community college level and (b) to identify the factors which influence completion of an academic goal. The factors, which influence a sense of belonging are defined as groups, associations, organizations or programs the student utilized to support their success while attending a community college in California. Academic goal is defined as a certificate, associate's degree or grade point average progress toward transfer to a 4-year college or university.

As part of his effort to build a stronger foundation that will allow Americans to lead in the global economy, President Barak Obama announced a historic initiative to strengthen our nation's community colleges, and called for five million additional graduates by 2020 (Brandon, 2009). Currently in the state of California roughly one out of two African American students successfully completes a course, and this trend has lasted for more than a decade (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2010). This study provides insight on the key factors that influence successful completion of a certificate, associate's degree or grade point average progress toward transfer to a 4-year college or university for African American college students enrolled in a community college. The significance of this study was to make a contribution to the knowledge on African American students achieving success at the community college level.

This dissertation was written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee and has been presented to an accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate solely.

Nicole Y. Wise   November 3, 2011
Candidate   Date

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Patricia Mitchell   November 3, 2011
Chair

Dr. Ellen Herda   November 3, 2011

Dr. Betty Taylor   November 3, 2011

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the amazing women in my life.

To my grandmother **Lorna M. Carr-Whyte,** who gave up her scholarship to college to ensure

her family would survive. I never met you but your loving and giving spirit lives in me.

To my MOM **Lila Marie Whyte–Wise,** who cashed in her retirement account to pay for my

college education! You have always loved me unconditionally and it fuels my soul.

This work is in your honor! I am humbled and blessed because of your sacrifices!

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the inspiring African American men and women who graciously gave their time and shared their stories openly and honestly to offer insight into the phenomena of African American retention.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee, first and foremost Dr. Patricia Mitchell, my advisor and dissertation chairwoman, who has mentored and encouraged me from the first day of this amazing journey to dissertation completion. Dr. Ellen Herda and Dr. Betty Taylor, thank you for serving on my committee and offering constructive feedback and input.

To my colleagues in the community college system who referred students and spread the word and always offered an encouraging word as I encountered this daunting task I salute you for the challenging job you do everyday. To my mentor and sister in Christ, Dr. Nina Patterson-Caldwell, who planted the seed and believed I'd receive my doctorate years before I made the decision. To my mentor, Dr. Mark Robinson, for being straightforward, honest and bringing fun and humor to this process, you said my research would be "HOT" and you were right!

Lastly, I want to thank my loving family, my mom (Lila), who was my research assistant and biggest cheerleader, my father (Leroy) who always has a story to put things in perspective, my brother (Leroy II) who has protected me since he saw me come into the world and my twin sisters (Lorna and Laura) who taught me to be resilient in the face of opposition. And to my 'children' (my 8 nephews and 1 niece) who because of their existence inspire me to educate future generations of African American children.

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CHAPTER I:

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of Problem

This study focused on the factors associated with success rates and investigates

students' sense of belonging in order to better design, develop, and deliver support

services that will increase academic success for African American students. California

Community Colleges have not developed a successful model for fostering a sense of

belonging and completion factors that lead to African American students receiving a

certificate, associate's degree, and/or transfer to a 4-year college or university.

Roach (2009) indicates, "only 31 percent of public community college students go

on to complete either an associate or bachelor's degree in six years" according to the U.S.

Education Department data (p. 14). In California the gap is even wider and the statistics

more scarce for students of color. Only 15 percent of African American students

compared to 26 percent of white students complete their degree in six years of enrolling

in a California Community College (Roach, 2009, p. 14). College retention as it pertains

to success is a challenging issue in the United States, and the California Community

College system is facing serious obstacles in defining retention as in relation to success.

According to the California Community College (CCC) State Chancellor's website,

retention is defined as "the number of enrollments with grade of A, B, C, D, F, CR, NC,

I, P, and NP;" while, the website defined success as "the number of enrollments with

grade of A, B, C, CR, and P."

In review of the definitions of retention and success a phenomenon appears

indicating that a system or institution can be successful in retaining students, but at the

same time unsuccessful in ensuring students achieve goals relating to academic success. As an example, in the spring of 2010 the CCC system enrolled 328,208 African American students and 78 percent of these students were retained in the 24 program areas statewide. In the same semester of 2010, the CCC system reported a 54 percent success rate for African American students in the same 24 program areas statewide. For the past 10 years the success rate ranged from 50-54 percent has been consistent and the fact that nearly 1 out of every 2 African American students in the CCC system fail should be aggressively researched.

<div align="center">Background and Need</div>

Considered to be a pioneer in retention for higher education, Vincent Tinto states "though some institutions have been able to make substantial improvements in the rate at which their students graduate, many have not. Indeed the national rate of student persistence and graduation has shown disappointingly little change over the past decade (NCES, 2005a). Despite our many years of work on this issue there is still much we do not know and have yet to explore" (Tinto, 2006-2007, p. 2).

Another well-recognized researcher within student retention, Astin, also states "the American higher education system can be described as large, complex, diverse and decentralized. There is no formal organizational properties and it exists as a part of our belief system" (Astin A. W., 1985, p. 4) in which every American has a constitutional right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and it is in this pursuit in which free public education is founded upon.

The American community college system dates back to the early twentieth century and one social force for the development of the community college was to train

the workers who would enter the nation's industries that were expanding rapidly (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 1). The great expansion of American higher education that occurred in the two decades following the end of World War II opened educational opportunities to many Americans who previously would not have been able to attend college (Astin & Oseguera, 2004, p. 321). Astin and Oseguera mention how notably the introduction of need-based aid in many states, the increases in federal aid which accompanied the Higher Education Act of 1965, and the amendments to the act passed in 1972, substantially enhanced the accessibility and equity of American higher education during the 1960s and 1970s. Many institutions also embarked on major outreach programs that encouraged members of the underrepresented groups, especially African Americans, to attend college (Astin & Oseguera, 2004, pp. 321-322).

The California Community College (CCC) system is the largest higher education system in the nation, with 72 districts, 112 colleges and an enrollment of more than 2.9 million students (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2010). The CCCs are at the bottom of the hierarchal public educational system in California, with the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) system being at the top, respectively. California Community Colleges serve a critical role in the education of thousands of underrepresented populations because of affordability and easy access (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In 2009-2010 over 195,000 African American students were enrolled in CCCs (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2010). This figure clearly shows that considerable African American students rely on community colleges as the pathway to a degree and/or vocational training. As a result, the California

Community College system is essential in granting students an opportunity to complete a post secondary degree and/or transfer to a 4-year institution to obtain a bachelor's degree.

Retention rates for students of color have become increasingly significant in California as the population of minorities increases. American society is ethnically diverse and the traditional face of college students is changing also. African American students preferred relational learning styles that emphasize personal approaches to instruction (Booker, 2007). Additionally, students responded approvingly to professors who were open, willing to share, and provided a safe and comfortable environment. When interactions between African American students and faculty take place the students feel heard, accepted, and valued as members of the classroom community (Booker, 2007).

For many students the community college open access policy makes higher education obtainable; however, "a sizeable percent of minority students would not attend any college if no community colleges were available" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 57). Yet, even with the challenging and seemingly insurmountable odds there are thousands of successful African American students that begin at a community college. The first year is critical to a student persisting to degree, therefore, colleges must not only recruit students of color, they must learn to retain them and support them toward their academic goals. Additionally, in order to experience success, students need to feel they are a part of the institution and they belong (Booker, 2007). African American students who have the opportunity to pursue higher education and begin at a community college are a key component in this phenomenon.

In higher education "a plethora of researchers (Dougherty, 1992; Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella &Terenzini, 1991, 2005) have conducted research exploring the effects of attending a 2-year community college versus a 4-year college or university and the consistent findings suggest students who attend 2-year community colleges are not as likely to earn a bachelor's degree" (Flowers, 2006). In agreement with Wilson (2000) "retention scholars have known for a long time that a student's fit or *niche* in the college environment has a direct impact on his staying power until graduation" (p. 176). Kelly, Kendrick, & Newgent (2007) state, "low retention rates has increased focus on academic programs and efforts to facilitate the success of students in this competitive academic environment; a current trend is to provide interventions for the students who are the most at-risk of not completing their education for academic reasons" (p. 1025). According to Fischer (2007) students who become more involved in various aspects of campus life not only are more likely to stay in college but also may perform better academically (p. 130).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to explore the perceptions of successful African American students' sense of belonging at the community college level, and (b) to identify the factors which influence completion of an academic goal. In this research study, the factors that influence a sense of belonging are defined as what groups, associations, organizations or programs the student utilized to support their success while attending a community college in California. Academic goal is defined as a certificate, associate's degree, or grade point average progress toward transfer to a 4-year college or university.

Theoretical Framework

Astin's (1975) theory of student involvement postulates that if students are not involved in their campus life they will have a higher risk of dropping out of school. Astin's theory states that students are most likely to retain and persist in college if they are active on campus. Astin defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin A. W., 1999, p. 518). Astin's theory allows the researcher and college administrators to assess a student's level of campus involvement by focusing on behavioral factors. The ability to measure if a student joined a club or engages in support circles and student affiliations is clearly measurable. Astin's developmental theory connects involvement to active terminology such as "takes part in" or "devotes oneself to." These verb forms are tangible and offer a simple and concrete way to assess student retention.

Astin's earlier works found that students have increased retention rates if they live on campus, work on campus, or join extracurricular activities. Astin also discovered students have an easier time being involved if the environment is perceived as comfortable and familiar. Astin (1999) concluded in his analysis that all forms of student involvement are associated with greater than average changes for students' persistence than entering freshman characteristics (p. 524) such as aptitude scores or high school grade point average. Astin's theory suggests if students are involved in activities like living on campus, or are involved in extra-curricular activities, their high school GPA will not be the leading factor in their successful retention in courses. This particular theory is important for African American students because it offers a way for students with poor high school performance to overcome their past and to succeed academically in

college. The theory postulates five areas of involvement. The five areas offer a way to

evaluate the amount of time and energy the student devotes to learning and therefore

measures the student's behavior in terms of involvement.

> 1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).
> 2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.
> 3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of students academic work, for instance can be measured quantitatively (how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (whether the student reviews and comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydreams).
> 4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
> 5. The effectiveness of and educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement. (Astin A. W., 1999, p. 519)

Astin's theory connects the amount of time and what a student does as involvement; thus,

the more time a student is involved in college related activities the likeliness of a lower

attrition rate, a higher percentage of retention, and ultimately more success in completion

rates. The theory of student involvement offers a practical and tangible way to view

students' amount of focus on the learning process by equating their concentration which

the frequency in which the student commits to academic endeavors. Astin's theory

speaks directly to students' involvement in extracurricular activities, clubs, groups and

associations. Students' chances to complete college can be greatly related to

participation in college and the environmental circumstances. One major finding from

Astin's theory is all forms of student involvement are associated with a stronger chance

of success than freshman characteristics like grade point average (Astin A. W., 1999).

Astin's theory illuminated that if students were involved on campus in areas such as sports, tutoring and other on-campus programs the increase of the time on campus also increased their retention rate greater than their high school GPA.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study focused on the perceptions of successful African American students. Specifically, the study examined students' sense of belonging and explored student reflections on how they were supported in completing their academic goal of a certificate, associate's degree, or grade point average progress toward transfer to a 4-year college or university.

1. What are the perceptions of successful African American students' sense of belonging while attending a California Community College?

2. What are the factors which influence African American students' completion of a certificate, associate's degree, or grade point average progress toward transfer to a 4-year college or university?

Limitations

African American students' perceptions of a sense of belonging at the community college and their experiences are the focus for this qualitative study. One limitation of the study was the small number of participants, which decreased the ability to generalize the findings and conclusions to all African American community college students. The researcher's background in the interpretation and analysis of the data through the interactions with the participants during the interviews could have been another limitation. Conversely, the researcher had an awareness of this possible limitation and considered this when analyzing the data and reporting the findings of the study. Each

students' unique lived experience and their perspectives of those experiences contributes to the conclusion and is emphasized in the results, thus the findings and conclusions are possibly open to further interpretation from the reader.

Delimitations

This qualitative study's goals were "to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 348). Therefore, to narrow the focus of this study of successful African American community college students, 20 participants were purposefully selected. The participants came from California Community Colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area. The study was delimited to only those participants who meet the criteria of successful students as defined by the research questions.

Significance

As part of his effort to build a stronger foundation that will allow Americans to lead in the global economy, President Barak Obama announced a historic initiative to strengthen our nation's community colleges, and called for five million additional graduates by 2020 (Brandon, 2009). Currently in the state of California only one out of two African American students successfully completes a course, and this trend has lasted for more than a decade (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2010). This study provides insight on the key factors that influence successful completion of a certificate, associate's degree, or grade point average progress toward transfer to a 4-year college or university. The significance of this study was to make a contribution to the

knowledge on retention and provided a complete understanding of key factors that lead to African American students achieving success at the community college level.

Astin's (1975) theory of student involvement focuses on the importance of students acclimating to the college environment. Involvement can occur in many behaviors from living on campus to participating in a learning community. Through understanding the student's view of retention, institutional strategies can be devised to support persistence for students with a low probability of retention. From the successful student's viewpoint strategies reside which can be ascertained to improve retention for all students. This will occur through understanding the student's sense of belonging to the educational culture. Accessing students' perceptions of retention and sense of belonging academically will significantly add to the current body of research. By understanding key factors that influence retention rates for African American students, educator's can use research-founded techniques to help improve retention rates for all students. In order to have a rich educational culture with diverse points of view and to be competitive within the global market, California must produce competitive graduates. A diverse population, which is inclusive of all cultures, is required because such an environment provides a multitude of views and perspectives that produce information that can help change and advance the current state of our society.

Summary

African American students are entering college at record numbers since the expansion of American education, and many do not complete an associate's or bachelor's degree. However, of the 15% that are successful (Roach, 2009) the phenomenon must be investigated further. The phenomenon of the successful African American student offers

a wealth of knowledge by providing key elements of success in assisting future students, those we retain, and those whom dropout. The opportunity to examine successful students' integration (Tinto, 1975) into the college fabric to form a sense of belonging in order to complete their academic goals is beneficial to the body of knowledge on retention and successful completion rates. The following chapter will review literature for the study covering these areas (a) historical perspective on the racial disparity in higher education and (b) key elements and issues related to college retention for African American students.

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The educational pipeline still remains challenging for thousands of African American students and "one of the main functions of community colleges has been to provide the academic preparation and college level courses necessary for students to transfer to a public or private four year institution in order to pursue a baccalaureate degree" (Santos & Melguizo, 2008, p. 35). A considerable amount of literature exists on retention in general (Tinto, 1975, Astin, 1984, 1993, Bean 1980 et al.) and many studies specifically focus on students of color. In order to identify the factors that influence the completion of an academic goal and a sense of belonging for African American students in higher education, pertinent literature related to each topic is explored in the context of this research study. The literature review examined the following: (a) historical perspective on the racial disparity in higher education, and (b) key elements and issues related to college retention for African American students.

Historical Perspective on the Racial Disparity in Higher Education

> The perception that African Americans do not value education is paradoxical and historically shortsighted when one considers that many African Americans fought, and in some cases sacrificed their lives, during the civil rights movement to ensure that future generations of African Americans could have the right to a quality education wherever they wanted" (Cokley, 2003, pp. 425-525).

W. E. B. DuBois best describes the struggle facing African American by describing that African Americans want to be both African and American without having the doors of opportunity closed. The ultimate goal is to become a truer self not the *double self*, which Africans are forced to live in America (DuBois, 1903). For hundreds of years, African slaves were not afforded a formal education in the United States. Racial

domination had been institutionalized and maintained by higher educational organizations; "many early university scholars provided an intellectual rationale and justification for racism" (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005, p. 16). Scientific racism emerged in the form of books and promoted beliefs in biological inferiority of African Americans. The universities' support of "intelligence tests" and the study of eugenics as the movement developed and rationalized in academic communities proved detrimental for African American students. Higher education became the training ground for indoctrinating students on the concepts of white supremacy and on the belief African Americans were to be servants of whites (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005).

The United States higher educational system was privately financed and governed until the passage of the 1862 Morrill Act when states began to play a greater role in creating and maintaining public college and universities (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005, p. 17; Kelly, Kendrick, & Newgent, 2007). The right to equal access in education for African Americans in the United States has been a challenge since the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Upon the freeing of the African slaves in the late 1800's many free public schools were established to educate African Americans throughout the south. Washington's article (as cited by Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005) states the second Morrill Act of 1980 created segregated public institutions for African Americans and other racial minorities. Although slavery was over, society was still dependent on the development of crops and the industrial revolution. Many African Americans became sharecroppers and suffered the same treatment as when they were enslaved. Little had changed for African Americans; the majority was still unable to attend school. African Americans sharecropped the land just as they had during slavery.

Many colleges were founded under this separate but equal mentality to educate Blacks only and separately, today they are known as the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). One of the most respected HBCUs in America, Tuskegee University, was established in the south during a time when one of African Americans' heroes, Booker T. Washington, was speaking out concerning the way of life during this industrial education time period (DuBois, 1903). Booker T. Washington stated "in all things purely social we can be as separate as the five fingers, and yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." Racism and prejudice have remained a reality in America during the past 100 years, with white and Black America struggling to work together within society.

After the Civil War (1861-1865), and as a result of the Civil Rights Movement (~1955-1968), laws were formed that ensured equal rights for African Americans. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments (1865-1870) were added to the United States Constitution which effectively abolished slavery, created due process and equal protection, and prohibited racial discrimination for voters (US Government). As a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 discrimination was barred in public accommodations. However, seven years later the Supreme Court declared the provisions of the act unconstitutional because Congress lacked the authority to curb private acts of racial discrimination (Howard, 1997, p. 21). A pivotal case, *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896),* would decide how government could make racial distinctions and not defy the equal protection clause in the Fourteenth Amendment for all Americans (Howard, 1997). The United States moved from a slavery system to a segregated one that was supported by the laws as long as "equal' services were provided for all Americans. African Americans challenge

to obtain an education reached a peak during the landmark case *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954. The result of this landmark case was the "segregationist educational system had an indelible destructive impact on black children and thus state-mandated separate could not be equal" (Howard, 1997, p. 27).

As the Civil Rights Movement began to take momentum in the 1950s, Justice Harlan's statement forty years prior that "the Constitution is color blind" would help fuel the moral and legal fight in America. African Americans knew this was the time to continue the push for justice; they boycotted many business and the freedom riders performed acts of civil disobedience against unjust laws.

> After the murder of President John Kennedy the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. Title II prohibited racial discrimination in public accommodations. Title VI barred discrimination in by educational institutions receiving federal monies. And Title VII provided a federal *cause of action* for plaintiffs alleging discrimination in employment. And The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was created to administer Title VII (Howard, 1997, p. 28).

The results of the Civil Rights Movement were clear; race could not and would not be the central focus or basis of legal distinctions and public accommodations. After years of racial injustice, America was on the dawn of fair laws for all citizens. Yet those who fought against the civil rights began to work to impose limits and set policies against the gains of the Civil Rights Movement.

At the end of the 1960's America saw race riots and the assassination of Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The institutional racism and discrimination of African Americans in all aspects from school to college and the work place was still rampant in the United States . As a result, "set aside" programs evolved as an attempt to level the playing field for African Americans on the federal, state and municipal levels (Howard, 1997). States, such as California, began to create programs to give access to

the disadvantaged students in order to increase the presence of minorities on campus. Californians move to consider ethnicity along with other factors in the allocation placement in both undergraduate and professional schools (Howard, 1997, p. 32) would serve to help increase African American enrollment on campuses over the next few decades. Affirmative action programs in higher education began to accept that diversity was valued and essential in the mission of educating students as the United States ethnically diverse society continued to grow.

African Americans continued to see opposition in the courts regarding the laws and policies being passed which supported the rights of minorities for a fair and inclusive society. Howard (1997) states the one major setback to the educational gains that addressed the issue of voluntary affirmative action plans was the *Bakke v. Regents* case (p. 36). Bakke, a white male, had been denied entrance into University of California at Davis medical school twice. His lawsuit argued that the 16 seats that were set aside in the first year class for minority applicants, that under traditional criteria he was better qualified for, was in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which offered him right to equal protection under the law. The California Supreme court prohibited the University from using race as a factor in the admissions process and ordered Bakke's admission to the medical school. The University of California medical school had not been charged with discrimination against minorities in either the admissions process or in this case. However, in 1978 America's court was still showing a division in its view and stance on racial issues and voluntary affirmative action in particular (Howard, 1997, p. 36). The Bakke case resulted in programs restructuring of their admissions policies, and thus minority enrollment plummeting.

The logic of the anti-affirmative action position is that quantitative measures are the basis for making admissions decisions and the academic community has not challenged this underlying premise of the typical "reverse discrimination" suits (p. 42). According to Howard (1997) admitting students in a linear manner utilizing test scores and grades is a conservative and flawed approach because such a system fails to take into account that these criteria are only a partial predictor of academic success (p. 43). This view fails to predict graduation rates and career success. During the Reagan administration in the 1980's, polarization continued on college and university campuses because the conservatives complained about the policies that were intended to ease the racial tensions (Ethridge, 1997, p. 60). However, in the late 80"s and early 90's Americans saw the passing of two laws, Civil Rights Restoration Act (1987), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). These laws supported the rights of protected-class, whom are persons protected from discrimination on the basis of race, sex, age, color of origin, religion, or disability, and shifted the burden of proof of discrimination to the respondent (p. 55).

The passing of these critical laws was unable to stop the attack on affirmative action that continued in the 90's. Race-based scholarships came under fire and some institutions were told if they distributed scholarships solely on race they would be in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and risk losing all federal funds (Ethridge, 1997). The confusion, misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the laws caused colleges and universities to interpret that race-based scholarships were illegal. The Department of Education "promulgated final policy guidelines in the February 23, 1994 issue of the *Federal Register* aimed at assisting colleges and universities in understanding

the applicability of the statute's nondiscrimination provision to financial aid programs that are based in part on the basis of race or national origin" (Ethridge, 1997, p. 58).

Now in the 21st century as Waldron's (2007) opinion article states, access to college is access to economic mobility for the underserved populations, which offers an opportunity to pursue the American dream for African American citizens. Access to the higher educational system is a necessity in order to succeed in today's technological and fast changing global economy; and for Americans to participate "in a vastly complicated and competitive world, human capital is a nation's most valuable resource" (Howard, 1997, p. 43). Therefore, a multi-level approach to college admissions using race as one of many factors offers an option of inclusion, fairness and a diverse enrollment. Educating a diverse student body is important not only to the campus community, but "expands to the larger social goals of decreasing inequality, improving race relations, and increasing economic productivity and civic participation among broad segments of society" (Hurtado & Navia, 1997, p. 127).

American community colleges began as a rigorous way for students to enter senior (4-year) colleges prepared and as a point of entry into the hierarchy of the American higher educational system while also offering a terminal associate's degree. Traditionally the students at this time were between the age of 18-24, males and of European descent. Access to college for African Americans has been realized with the open door policies since 1965 with the enactment of the Higher Education Act; however, attrition rates and graduation rates are still low for African Americans at many colleges and universities across the country. In the 1950's the transfer rate was high from community colleges to 4-year colleges, as this was the community college's essential

purpose. In the 1960's the shift of the community college focus moved to vocational institutions and the 1970's showed there was a decline in transfer rates. As society and racial issues change the fabric of the country the focus for educating community college students changed as well. Community colleges dropped their original focus and rigor to ensure transfer into the 4-year; subsequently, transfer rates to the 4-year colleges also dropped. This 25% decline in student enrollment was extremely significant (Lee, Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993). The current trends revealed limited gains for students of color in the past decade and a half and therefore a great need for colleges and universities to prioritize and commit to practices and programs that work for the minority population.

Astin's theory speaks to the importance of belonging on the college campus through campus involvement (1975). To create a sense of belonging students must build connections to groups and members of the college environment and "whether a student departs from an institution is largely a result of the extent to which the student becomes academically and socially connected with the institution" (Pan, Guo, Alikonis, & Bai, 2008, p. 90). The student must become a part of the college fabric and integrate (Tinto, 1993) into the academic and social culture of the college. Their background and characteristics must be confirmed and accepted into the college culture and when their attitudes (Bean, 1982) do not blend new ideologies must emerge. College and universities must offer clubs, organizations and opportunities for students to merge their attitudes, behaviors, and experiences in order to adjust to the college environment and ultimately persist.

Vincent Tinto's model of student departure was formulated in 1975 and applied Durkheim's theoretical concept of egoistic and anomic suicide to student dropouts from

college. The model was revisited in 1993 by Tinto, who compares the exit of students

from institutions of higher education to the factors of suicide in the wider society (p. 93).

The student's lack of integration into the social structure leads to Tinto's (1975) model,

which has been the foundation of discussion, policy, and research on student retention

and attrition for decades. Tinto created a longitudinal model designed to explain the

process of dropouts and their relationship to the institutions, which affects dropout rates.

Vincent Tinto in 1975 conducted a synthesis on the recent research on dropout from

higher education. He concluded that although there is extensive literature on dropout we

still know very little about the nature of the dropout process. He states there are two

reasons for this inferior knowledge, (1) the inadequate attention to the definition of

dropout because there are many forms of leaving, and (2) we do not clearly identify if

dropouts are due to failure, voluntary withdrawal, or whether dropout status is temporary

or permanent. Therefore, Tinto suggests findings will be contradictory and offer

misleading information.

Tinto's model explains the process between the individual and the institution that

leads to different forms of dropout. He used Durkheim's (1961) theory of suicide as the

root of the theoretical process with some concepts from the field of economics and

education. Tinto's (1975) main premise is "suicide's more likely to occur when

individuals are insufficiently integrated into the fabric of society" (p. 91). Thus, if one

views college as a social system with values and social structures then dropout from

college could be viewed as suicide as in the wider society. Therefore, it would be

reasonable to imply the conditions resulting in suicide would be similar to those

conditions that result in dropout. Insufficient interactions with others and insufficient

connection with value patterns of college would be examples of lack of integration into the social system (Tinto, 1975).

The system is divided into two domains: academic and social. A student may dropout due to lack of integration in either domain, which can be voluntary or involuntary. The individual's commitment to the goal of college completion and the commitment to the institution determine whether or not the individual will dropout as well as the form of dropout if they do not persist. Another factor affecting a student's decision to persist is the individuals' perception of the cost-benefits of staying in college based on their commitment to the goal attainment. Other factors that influence dropout from higher education are family financial status, family relationship, student's ability (specifically grade performance in high school), gender, faculty relationship, and more.

Vincent Tinto explored how student departure is longitudinal in character. The factors that affect why a student departs in the first six months are very different than why a student departs later in the educational process. The stages of student departure come from social anthropologists Van Gennep's rites of passage stages: separation, transition, and incorporation (Tinto, 1988). In this theory the individual moves as a known member of one group to a stranger in the new group. The college student must separate from the high school and family to a degree in order to transition and fully incorporate into the college environment and during this process they will face difficulties and adjustments (Tinto, 1988, p. 443).

Tinto's (1988) stages of student departure further suggests that in order for the student to stay in college and persist to a baccalaureate degree they must meet the first stage of separation from their former community. This separation, usually from the high

school, becomes critical not just physically but socially as well. As the student enters the transition stage they must begin to learn the traditions and ways of the new community as they let go of the old. During this stage they are not fully linked to the new community and have not fully disconnected from the old. The stress of the transition can often lead to student departure because they are unable to cope with the situation. Based on Tinto's stages of student departure as the student moves away from past norms and behaviors they must begin to adopt the current culture's norms and behaviors in order to establish competent membership in the social and academic communities. This happens through social interactions with both faculty and students, and if this connection does not develop, isolation and departure are possible (Tinto, 1988, p. 441). Since many students are left to their own devices to learn the unwritten rules of college life, those who cannot learn them may not incorporate themselves into college life, and thus depart. Tinto proposed that students dropout of college because of insufficient integration into the social system of the college.

In Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) extensive review of the literature their findings supported Astin's (1993), which propose "the level of student involvement and integration in any of the components of an institution's academic and social systems can be a critical factor in students' persistence decisions" (p. 426). As stated previously, Astin's (1975) theory of student involvement postulates if students are not involved in their campus life they will have a higher risk of dropping out of school. Astin's theory states students are most likely to retain and persist in college if they are active on campus. Astin defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin A. W., 1999, p. 518). Astin's

earlier works found that students have increased retention rates if they live on campus, work on campus, or join extracurricular activities. Astin also discovered students have an easier time being involved if the environment is perceived as comfortable and familiar. Astin (1999) concluded in this analysis that all forms of student involvement are associated with greater than average changes for student persistence than entering freshman characteristics (p. 524). Astin's theory connects the amount of time and what a student does as involvement; thus, the more time a student is involved in college-related activities the likeliness of a lower attrition rate, a higher percentage of retention, and ultimately more success in completion rates.

John Bean is another author who conducted research on students' intentions to persist in an organization. John P. Bean's original model was devised in 1982 and "included student background as well as the environment inside the institution and outside of the institution" (Kiser & Price, 2007-2008, p. 423).

> The organizational process model in which Bean based his theory upon emphasizes the significance of behavioral intentions. Intentions to persist are influenced by students' attitudes, which are shaped by their experiences with the institution; the model incorporates background, organizational, environmental, attitudinal, and outcome variables (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003, pp. 46-48).

In Bean's (1982) model the core of the theory is that the student attends the college or university with certain attitudes and expectations. These attitudes and expectations are either confirmed or disproved through their campus experiences. The student must then use these expectations and attitudes to integrate into the new college culture. These new or confirmed behaviors affect students' intentions to leave or stay at the college (Fischer, 2007).

Bean's (1995) model was built upon organizational turnover theories and the interactions between students' behaviors and attitudes in their effect on students' satisfaction and persistence. Bean's approach assumes academic behaviors influence academic performance; consequently, the students' "attitudes resulting from beliefs affect the behavioral act of persisting in college or dropping out" (Kiser & Price, 2007-2008, p. 423). Eaton and Bean, in 1995, (as cited by Fischer, 2007) revisited Bean's model and took into account the students' background characteristics as they are related to integration. Bean and Eaton's (2000) psychological model of college student retention "determined when students are academically and socially integrated; they form positive attitudes about the institution which influences their intent to persist, and ultimately their actual persistence." (Rodgers & Summers, 2008, p. 173). Therefore, the students' attitudes and background characteristics prior to college, combined with the college's characteristics, influence the students' attitudes, which in turn directly affect their social and academic integration.

The reason students leave college is difficult to understand and for decades scholars have studied and researched this phenomenon. Major theories on the subject of college student retention have developed from years of studies; specific models include Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure, Bean's (1980, 1983) Model of Work Turnover to Student Attrition, and Bean and Eaton's (2000) Psychological Model of College Student Retention (Fischer, 2007; Kiser & Price, 2007-2008; Rodgers & Summers, 2008, Tinto, 1993). Many research studies are conducted on the typical or traditional college student, white and middle or upper class (Fischer, 2007, p. 130). This information suggests that further research into the process of college

adjustment should be conducted, specifically from the lens of nontraditional students. Students of lower socioeconomic status, first-generation students, African Americans, and other populations whom are often not afforded a fair and robust educational foundation may offer a different perspective on the reasons for attrition and retention. Retention programs were created on traditional models using research gathered primarily from white and middle class students. However, these programs and studies have produced key elements for retention, and serve as a foundation for future studies including non-traditional students.

Key Elements and Issues in College Retention for African American Students

For the past 25 years retention program models primarily have been developed from these theories: Tinto, 1975; Bean, 1980, 1983; and Astin, 1993. Retention programs "require the design of elaborate models that include mentoring, financial incentives, and other support services for students, but also leadership and faculty must become and remain involved beyond what they have in the past" (Jones, 2001, p. 17). Despite the limited research on African Americans students many successful retention programs have similar key elements. The key elements necessary in many retention programs are inclusive of the students and consist of advising, mentoring (Moore & Toliver, 2010), financial aid, (Guiffrida, 2005; Flowers, 2006; Pan & et al., 2008) and both academic and social adjustment (Fischer, 2007; Hausmann, Ward Schofield, & Woods, 2007). A review of literature concerning these key elements, partcularly in relation to African American student success, is outlined in this section.

Colleges use mentorship programs to "improve diversity, promote academic resources and address students' unique differences in an effort to improve retention and

graduation rates." Programs may differ in the approach to student success; nonetheless, mentorship programs have showed an ability to increase retention among African American students (Brittian, Sy, & Stokes, 2009, p. 89). Mentoring offers the student a leader to act as a sounding board and support system as the student makes major life decisions. African American and "most students want professor mentors who cared about their futures and who were interested in their education" (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p. 935). In order for African Americans to become engaged in the academic environment "the presence of African American faculty and staff on campus assist students in identifying individuals like themselves in positions of leadership" (Brittian, Sy, & Stokes, 2009, p. 89) provided the students with faculty to identify for mentorship. Mentorship "provides a more supportive environment for African American students" (Brittian, Sy, & Stokes, 2009, p. 89) on campus.

Finanicial aid is becoming increasingly a key link to retaining college students. Given the stress placed on students and their families by the economy, the need for financial assistance plays an important role in the recruitment and enrollment of desired student populations (Holley & Harris, 2010, p. 20). According to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, "well-funded universities such as Princeton, which has the nation's largest endowment per student and probably the nation's most generous financial aid program for low-income students, will undoubtedly claim an advantage in black student retention and, subsequently, in producing high graduation rates" (JBHE, 2005-2006, pp. 90-91). In many situations, financial aid is the number one reason students are not retained. College students "often need financial aid to pursue their educational goals"

(Tierney, 1999, p. 84). According to Jones, "financial aid is often the primary consideration in making the decision to continue or leave" (Jones, 2001, p. 9).

Fischer (2007) identifies "three factors which may affect adjustment and subsequent success in college: minority status, socioeconomic disadvantage and being a first generation college student" (p. 126). According to Hausmann, Ward, Schofield, & Woods, (2007) "social and academic integration, along with initial goal and institutional commitment levels, determine subsequent levels of goal and institutional commitment, which ultimately determine students' likelihood of departing from the institution before completing their degree" (p. 805). One agreed upon lesson from research states "all students need to be academically prepared" (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, p. 451). In order to "support students academic help programs include tutoring services to empower students to be independent learners and improve grades" (Pan, Guo, Alikonis, & Bai, 2008, p. 92).

The racial issues in America have essentially affected African American students and "race and ethnicity have a fundamental impact on how college is experienced by African American students; therefore their adjustment process cannot be assumed to be the same as the *traditional* student" (Fischer, 2007, p. 128). Booker's (2007) qualitative study examined the types of interactions that take place within the confines of the academic classroom to analyze African Americans perception of belonging and connection to the academic setting. There is little research on African American perceptions of belonging in post-secondary settings and this study is a catalyst for future research. Four themes emerged as the results of Booker's open-ended survey: instructional style, interpersonal interactions with faculty, affective states of connection,

and peer relationships. The results of the two top themes confirmed that when students were engaged and active in class they reported a stronger sense of belonging.

Booker's (2007) findings determined African Americans students' preferred relational learning styles that emphasize personal approaches to instruction. Students responded approvingly to professors who were open, willing to share, and provided a safe and comfortable environment. When interaction between African American students and faculty take place the students feel heard, accepted, and valued as members of the classroom community (Booker, 2007). However the effects on African American students who are not engaged with faculty and staff, or campus culture can have devastating results. Taylor (2000) states,

> Black students' experiences of stressors in predominately White colleges have been causally linked to academic failure. College–related stressors such as hostility and racism, poor rapport with faculty members, and inadequate social lives, along with, for students from poor and working-class backgrounds, social issues emanating from the student, family, and community such as poverty, unemployment, teen pregnancy, involvement with the criminal justice system, adolescent violence, over identification with special education services, and a range of academic problems, conspire to undermine college success. (as cited in Moore & Toliver, 2010, p. 934)

Taylor's work clearly illustrates that the key elements of retention programs are needed to help retain African American students.

Overall, several researchers have provided insight into the key elements and issues related to retention for African American students. In addition to Taylor, referenced above, Astin (1990) reports a variety of characteristics impacting retention for African Americans such as family background, financial aid, academic factors and the students' self-concept, values and attitudes (p. 9). Additionally, African American "students need the capital required to enable them to interpret and decode different

cultural objects, and they need objectified capital such as access to books" (Tierney, 1999, p. 84). Further, Glogowska, Young, & Lockyer, (2007) found "support networks and feeling a sense of belonging may also be crucial in students continuing their studies" (p. 73). African American students use of key retention strategies such as advising and mentoring offers information on students' use of support systems, as well as the effect on their sense of belonging in the California Community College system. As mentioned above, the key elements such as financial and academic support, social adjustment, and campus involvement play an important and vital role in the area of student success and students' belonging to the college environment.

Summary

The educational pipeline still remains closed to thousands of African American students and "one of the main functions of community colleges has been to provide the academic preparation and college level courses necessary" (Santos & Melguizo, 2007, p. 35) to complete an academic goal. The literature review examined two major areas (1) historical perspective on the racial disparity in higher education, and (2) key elements and issues in college retention for African American students. The historical perspective on race in America has been a struggle for African Americans. Racial issues as a result of slavery, Jim Crow laws and the Civil Rights Era changed the fabric of the country and the focus for educating community college students.

The limited gains for African American students regarding the relevant theories related to the study clearly showed a need to further research the impact on African Americans. The importance of a sense of belonging to the college environment for African American students and whether a "student departs from an institution is largely a

result of the extent to which the student becomes academically and socially connected with the institution" (Pan, Guo, Alikonis, & Bai, 2008, p. 90). The key elements in many retention programs are inclusive of the students and consist of advising, mentoring (Moore & Toliver, 2010), financial aid, (Guiffrida, 2005; Flowers, 2006; Pan & et al., 2008) and both academic and social adjustment (Fischer, 2007; Hausmann, Ward Schofield, & Woods, 2007). These key elements can be categorized in three areas (1) involvement, (2) academic and financial support, and (3) sense of belonging to the college environment.

A clear understanding of the multitude of reasons why students stay and persist is needed to deliver the most effective and efficient support for African American students. Data driven information is needed concerning students in these times of limited resources to provide the institutions with valuable proven information to develop and deliver effective resources and support systems as well as for the colleges to lobby the state for funds to support effective data proven programs. The results of this study will add to the existing research on retention and offer a human voice to the plight of African American students by discovering why some are successful.

CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to explore the perceptions of African American students' sense of belonging at the community college level, and (b) to identify the factors which influence completion of an academic goal. Through the exploration of researching this phenomenon, the study provides the voices of participants to add pertinent data to the current body of research. Data regarding factors that influence completion and the perception of what fosters a sense of belonging for successful African American community college students will aid in designing, developing and delivering critical information to close the achievement gap in the completion rates at California Community Colleges.

Research Design

A qualitative approach was used in this study to explore the research questions and identify emerging themes and lived experiences of the participants. According to Creswell (2009) "qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Marginalized current and former African American students described their experiences in the California Community College system; as a result, this process offered another perspective to the phenomena adding to the existing research. In a qualitative approach the researcher can "identify the essence of the human experiences about the phenomena as described by the participants and understand the lived experiences" (Creswell, 2009, p.

13). The intent of this study was to identify the key factors, elements, and support

systems that retained the students and which of these led to their success.

According to Patton (2002) "methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly

capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon; how they perceive

it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, and talk about it to others, one must

undertake in-depth interviews" (p. 104). Therefore the research design was comprised of

in-depth interviews. A qualitative research design provides focused in-depth and

comprehensive analysis of the data. After the data was gathered, a comprehensive

analysis of the one-on-one interviews examines the students' perceptions of what support

systems served in their successful completion of a self identified academic goal while

attending a California community college. The students' stories provide rich descriptive

data, which offer original perspectives on retention and give a voice to this lived

experience. A sample of the 11-item interview questions is provided in Appendix A and

the demographic questionnaire in Appendix B.

<div align="center">Research Setting</div>

The California Community College (CCC) system is the largest higher education

system in the United States. The system is comprised of 72 districts, 112 colleges, and

enrolls more than 2.9 million students. Community colleges provide basic skills

education, workforce training and courses that prepare students for transfer to 4-

year universities. There are over 15 community colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area

alone (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2010). In the 2009-2010

academic year over 194,000 African American students were enrolled in California

community colleges. Three districts in the San Francisco Bay Area are the setting for this

study, San Francisco Community College District (SFCCD), San Mateo Community

College District (SMCCD) and Peralta Community College District (PCCD). Almost

22,000 African American students attended these three districts in the 2009-2010

academic school year (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2010).

Population and Sample

Former African American students who attended the California Community

Colleges (CCCs) from the (1) San Francisco Community College District (SFCCD), (2)

San Mateo Community College District (SMCCD) and (3) Peralta Community College

District (PCCD) in the San Francisco Bay Area are the population for this study. The

research design consisted of 20 interviews from various age ranges of students identified.

The target population was African American students who had completed a self-

identified goal and were over the age of 18 from a CCC. This study focused on African

American students who completed a certificate, associate's degree, or grade point

average progress toward transfer with the minimum number of transferable units to be

eligible to attend a 4-year college or university. A close examination of the state

California Community Colleges Chancellor's office (CCCCO) Data Mart (see table 1

below) shows that 77.71% of African Americans were retained.

Table 1.

Statewide Retention Rate Spring 2010 adopted from CCCCO Data Mart website

ETHNICITY	TOTAL Enrollments	RETAINED	RETENTION RATE (%)
African-American	**330,652**	**256,940**	**77.71**
American Indian/Alaskan Native	30,805	25,618	83.16
Asian	466,345	401,986	86.20
Filipino	135,636	114,477	84.40
Hispanic	1,316,936	1,095,010	83.15
Multi-Ethnicity	70,213	57,320	81.64
Pacific Islander	31,546	25,640	81.28
Unknown	466,904	396,643	84.95

White Non-Hispanic	1,394,938	1,200,287	86.05
Grand Total	**4,243,975**	**3,573,921**	**84.21**

However, of the total enrollment in the spring of 2010 only 53.96% (see table 2 below)

actually had success according to the California State Chancellors Office.

Table 2.

Statewide Success Rate Spring 2010 adopted from CCCCO Data Mart website

ETHNICITY	TOTAL Enrollments	SUCCEEDED	SUCCESS RATE (%)
African-American	**330,652**	**178,407**	**53.96**
American Indian/Alaskan Native	30,805	19,933	64.71
Asian	466,345	345,396	74.06
Filipino	135,636	95,223	70.20
Hispanic	1,316,936	844,130	64.10
Multi-Ethnicity	70,213	44,022	62.70
Pacific Islander	31,546	19,616	62.18
Unknown	466,904	324,893	69.58
White Non-Hispanic	1,394,938	1,013,093	72.63
Grand Total	**4,243,975**	**2,884,713**	**67.97**

African Americans at the CCC had the lowest retention and success rates of all the

ethnicities identified. Therefore, the African American population in the CCC system is

the central focus of this study because for every two students approximately one will

dropout and one will successful complete.

A snowball sample was selected from prospective participants who responded to

either an emailed letter and/or flyers (see Appendix C and D) distributed by the

researcher's colleagues at the aforementioned college sites (SFCCD, SMCCD, PCCD)

and on social networks LinkedIn and Facebook. According to Creswell (2009)

"purposeful sampling is used so that individuals are selected because they have

experienced the central phenomenon" (p. 217). There are a number of different types of

purposeful sampling. This study used snowball sampling and according to Creswell

(2008) "qualitative snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling" (p. 217) in which "the researcher asks participants to identify others to become members of the sample" (p. 155). The email and flyer briefly explained the purpose of the research study and asked willing participants to contact the researcher via email or phone. Letters (see Appendix E) were sent to possible successful students who self –identified and expressed interest in volunteering for the study in order to secure 20 participants via professional contacts and Facebook. The 20 selected participants were used because they lived the experience and can speak to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009) and the resarecher verified through documentation the selected sample they fit the participant criteria.

<div align="center">Protection of Human Subjects</div>

In addressing the research problem and interviewing the participants selected the researcher was sensitive to the participants as they shared their experiences and perceptions while attending a California Community College. First, permission to conduct the research from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) of the University of San Francisco was ascertained. Participants were recruited through the researcher's colleagues working in the California Community College districts identified. The recruitment flyer and invitation letter were also distributed through professional contacts using social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook.

The participants were purposefully selected from those who responded and met the following criteria:

1. Must be African American and have attended a California Community College (CCC).

2. Must have been successful at the CCC level: i.e. certificate completion, associate's degree completion, or the minimum 60 units with grade point average progress to transfer to a 4-year college or university.

3. Must have completed goal at the age of 18 years or older.

4. Must have attended a community college in one of the following districts: San Francisco (SFFCD), San Mateo (SMCCD), or Peralta (PCCD).

Before the interview, the researcher informed the participants of the purpose of the study, and assured them of their anonymity and confidentiality if they chose to participate (see Appendix G). The participants were given an opportunity to select a pseudonym to protect their identity and provide anonymity. The participants were also informed they have the right to refuse participation at any point in the research process and end their participation even once they began if they so choose. All contact with colleagues from the community colleges and participants used unbiased language and was free of jargon as to not disrespect or confuse the participants.

Interviews

The researcher conducted 20 interviews, which were semi-structured using both open and closed-ended questions, to gather insight into the students' perceptions of the issues indicated in the research questions. A "standardized open-ended interview consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words" (Patton, 2002, p. 342). The purpose of this approach "is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 341). Each interview lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded on a Sony IC

Recorder to provide a detailed record of the interview, and the researcher also took brief

field notes during the interview. The digital recordings of all interviews were transferred

to MP3 files onto the researcher's computer and then played through iTunes and

transcribed verbatim. The researcher used Survey Monkey as a tool to organize the data.

The questions and responses were manually inputted into the database of the on-line tool

Survey Monkey by the researcher to generate statistical data and give a visual

representation of the verbal text resulting from the responses. Currently seven million

individuals and 100% of fortune 100 companies have used Survey Monkey for a variety

of research purposes (Survey Monkey, LLC, 1999-2011). Also, each participant

provided unofficial transcripts as documentation to verify their academic success and

proof of completion of their self-identified goals. This documentation supported the data

collected from the interviews and validated the findings. The researcher completed a

demographic questionnaire for the participants, as well. Follow-up conversations took

place via phone and email on case-by-case bases to clarify responses to questions, the

verbatim transcriptions, and the researcher's evaluation of the unofficial transcript

documentation. Patton states, "by using a combination of observations, interviewing, and

documentation analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate

and cross check findings; using a combination of data types, also know as, triangulation

increases validity" (Patton, 2002, p. 306).

<div align="center">Validity and Reliability</div>

Both descriptive and interpretative validity was accomplished from the accurate

collection and reporting of the data. The accurate account of information was collected

from one-on-one interviews, transcript documentation, and field notes written during the

collection process. A review of the interview transcripts was used to engage the participant in validating the data. Interview protocol was established and followed through the collection and coding process and field notes where taken during every interview. To determine reliability a review of the transcripts and recordings was conducted by the researcher to assist in accuracy and provide feedback and clarification opportunities in any follow-up conversations. The digital recording of the interviews allowed for verbatim transcription and supported the reliability of the transcription. Triangulation of the data through digital recording, written notes, and member checking the transcripts from the participants aided in the researcher's accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009). This process offered an opportunity to deal with bias and beliefs through rigorous field procedures and protocols.

<div align="center">Researcher's Profile</div>

Ms. Nicole Wise was born and raised in San Francisco's Bayview/Hunters Point district, a medium income urban neighborhood. Ms. Wise attended private and public academic institutions. One of her educational career goals was to be an educator, specifically an elementary school teacher in San Francisco. Upon graduation from high school, Ms. Wise enrolled in City College of San Francisco where she majored in general studies. After completing her Associate of Arts degree Ms. Wise transferred to Spelman College in Atlanta Georgia where she majored in Psychology and soon after graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with Cum Laude honors. In order to pursue her original educational goal of becoming a teacher Ms. Wise began her graduate education by enrolling in San Francisco State University were she received her Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential and Master of Science degree.

Ms. Wise achieved her goal of becoming an elementary school teacher for San Francisco Unified District (SFUSD) in 1995. Ms. Wise taught kindergarten for seven years in SFUSD and as a result of the effectiveness of her teaching strategies and approach to student success Ms. Wise was recruited to work for City College of San Francisco as a part-time faculty member. While working as a part-time faculty member Ms. Wise worked in the African American Scholastic Programs as a counselor and mentor. In 2003, Ms. Wise was hired as a full-time tenure track faculty member and earned tenure status in 2008.

Throughout Ms. Wise's academic development she was involved in a number of activities such as campus clubs and organizations, athletics as well as community development during her academic studies. Currently, Ms. Wise works in the New Student Counseling Department at City College of San Francisco and teaches College Success and Prejudice for the Interdisciplinary Studies department. Ms. Wise continues her community development in San Francisco and is a proud Diamond-Life Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

Ms. Wise fully acknowledges her role as researcher and understands her career, life experience, and passion for college success is intertwined in the study. The connection to Perceptions of African American Students on Community College Retention as an African American woman and alumni of the California Community College system cannot be one she ignores but embraces. The ultimate goal for Ms. Wise is to present the data as it actually exists, not as she perceives it to exist, but truthfully through the eyes and voice of the participants (Patton, 2002). Ms. Wise has focused on the lens of the theoretical framework and the reliability of the rigorous data collection

process in order to illuminate the findings and to eliminate any bias or preconceptions that might influence the interpretation of the data.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

The data for the study was conducted under the guidelines and approval of the University of San Francisco's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS). A copy of the IRB approval is located in Appendix F. The data collected consist of in-depth interviews. The researcher sent participant recruitment letters to CCC faculty at the three community college districts identified for the study. Faculty from the three districts identified forwarded the recruitment flyer requirements to possible participants. The researcher also posted the recruitment flyer on Facebook. Interested participants contacted the researcher via phone, email, and Facebook to volunteer for the study. The researcher asked interested participants a few questions via phone and email to determine if they fit the criteria for the study and those that did were invited to participate. The researcher contacted faculty and possible participants a few times via phone and email to secure participation. From the possible participants 20 were purposefully selected from the snowball sampling based on the research criteria. The scheduling and coordination of participants took place over a three-month period to accommodate the participants' availability.

The researcher used a general interview procedure that consisted of demographic and open-ended questions for the interviews. The same interview procedures were used for all interviews, although follow-up conversations differed. The participants were asked questions in the same order allowing for clarifying questions and open-ended dialogue to fully gather the participants' perceptions of their experience while attending a

California Community College. Survey Monkey was used as a tool by the researcher to create a principal location to input the responses to the interview questions. The interview questionnaire was printed out and provided 15 minutes prior to the interview for each participant to read to allow the participants time to formulate meaningful answers and to reflect on their experience at a California Community College. All interviews were digitally recorded on a Sony IC Recorder. Upon completion of the digitally recorded interviews the responses were entered into the Survey Monkey questionnaire manually by the researcher.

The researcher used Survey Monkey as a tool to input answers from the interview questions in order to organize the data collection, illuminate reoccurring themes ad provide statistical data to support the emerging themes, which developed from the study. Currently there are seven million individuals and 100% of fortune 100 companies have used Survey Monkey for a variety of research purposes with customer satisfaction being number one (Survey Monkey, LLC, 1999-2011). All digitally recorded interviews were transferred from the Sony IC Recorder to the researcher MacBook Pro laptop as MP3 files. The MP3 files were played through iTunes software and the researcher transcribed all interviews verbatim into a word document.

The theoretical framework and information gathered during the literature review on retention of African American students were utilized to devise and develop specific interview questions to answer the research questions. The research questions focus on the students' perception of their successful completion of self-identified academic goals while attending a California Community College and how their experiences relate to a sense of belonging in higher education. The interviews were the main source of data

collection. The interview questions, designed to gather the data for each research question, are below:

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of successful African American students' sense of belonging while attending a California Community College (CCC)?

The specific interview questions to obtain the data were as follows:

For the past 10 years in the CCC system for every 100 African American students who enroll in classes only 50 successfully complete the courses. Did you feel welcomed when you went to the community college?

Should retention programs focus on ethnic background or individual academic departments? (i.e. math, business)

Did you participate in any special programs, Learning Communities, groups or organizations while in the California community college system?
What type of programs or activities did you participate?
What services did they provide?
How did the programs services help you?

When you were having challenges (academic/personal) was there someone at the college or a program that you used to assist you?

In what you know about the California Community college system today do you feel African American's students feel a sense of belonging?

Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your success in navigating the California Community College system?

Research Question 2

What are the factors, which influence African American students' completion of a certificate, associate's degree, or grade point average progress toward transfer to a 4-year college or university?

The specific interview questions to obtain the data were as follows:

Why did you attend a California Community College, for how long?

Please prioritize your academic goals when you began with one being most relevant; GPA obtainment, certificate, Associate degree and/or transfer to 4-year?

Did you complete your original goals or did they change? Why?

What or whom do you attribute to your academic success?

What role did financial aid play in achieving your academic goals? Did you work while pursuing your goals?

Why do you believe you were successful in achieving your academic goals?

The interviews were transcribed for common themes and analyzed in their connection to the research questions. Three themes were loosely identified to begin the coding and analysis; they were (1) academic assistance, (2) financial aid, and (3) support systems/sense of belonging. As needed, follow-up conversations took place via phone and email to verify the transcription and clarify the emerging themes. The in-depth interviews with each participant were designed "to capture how those interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 348). The researcher's understanding of the rich lived human experience of the participants and the researcher's natural bias were acknowledged through the entire process.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The researcher conducted interviews as the main source of data collection with the intended purpose of analyzing the data to find reoccurring themes. According to Creswell (2009) "data analysis involves collecting open-ended data, based on asking general questions and developing an analysis for the information supplied by participants" (p. 184). First, the data was prepared for analysis. In preparation for the data analysis the researcher conducted the following steps, (1) read through the responses

from the filed notes for all interviews, (2) analyzed unofficial college transcript from all participants, (3) listened and transcribed the interviews from the digital audio recordings, and (4) entered the data into the online tool Survey Monkey database. On completion of these steps, 20 files were created for each participant that consisted of the demographic questionnaire, the unofficial college transcript, and the interview transcription. The files are located under lock and key in the researcher's private library. Next, the data results were manually entered into the Survey Monkey questionnaire and printed in order to give a visual representation of the data, provide a statistical breakdown of the data and create figures and tables of the participants' results.

Upon completion of the preparation stage the researcher used the Survey Monkey reports to begin the analysis. To begin the analysis in order to discover the relevant themes the researcher reviewed the initial themes created during the literature review, which were academic assistance, financial aid, and support systems/sense of belonging. As a result of the initial analysis and the theoretical review involvement became a major theme in the data findings. The data revealed the three common themes were (1) Involvement, (2) Academic/Financial support and (3) Sense of belonging.

The final steps in the data analysis were the coding of the transcripts. The researcher re-reads the transcriptions and reviewed the statistical data several times in coding the text into the three major themes. A shorthand process of coding the text into the themes was utilized. For example the money symbol ($) was used to identify financial support, the letters (SB) were used to identify sense of belonging. During this process the researcher was able to see the similarities and differences in the participants

perceptions of their experience in the CCC system. The results, which emerged from the

data analysis, are outlined in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This research study explored the perceptions of African Americans on community college retention. Specifically, the study examined the views and reflections of the successful student's journey in completing a self-identified goal at a California Community College (CCC) and their perspective of African Americans' sense of belonging in the CCC system. The participants view of why and how they were successful in navigating the system in which historically only one in two African Americans complete courses was ascertained. Data was gathered from in-depth interviews and analysis of transcripts as documentation of their success at a California Community College as outlined in the previous chapter.

This chapter provides a brief description of the 20 participants in the study utilizing both individual and aggregated analysis. Participants are discussed using their first name or the pseudonym they chose to offer some level of anonymity. Findings from the study are presented by research question and the interview questions, which were designed to illuminate the major themes. As mentioned in chapter 3 this research was conducted using interview questions. The interview questions were divided into three sections (1) participants profiles and background information (2) perceptions and participation, and (3) factors which influence completion and success.

Participants Profiles and Background Information

Twenty African American current and former community college students participated in this study. The participants attended a California Community College

(CCC) in the San Francisco Bay Area and were identified due to the success they achieved at the community college level. Participants were allowed to select pseudonyms if they so chose; however, many elected to reveal their identity with the knowledge their story may bring a voice and face for future generations of African Americans and the millions which do not have an opportunity to receive an education.

At the time of the interviews all participants had completed one of the self-identified goals; a certificate, associate's degree, or transferred to a 4-year college or university. The gender breakdown for the study was 55% female and 45% male. The participants were over the age of 18 when they completed a self-identified goal; 30% were 18-21, 40% were 22-25, 10% were 26-29 and 20% were 30 years or old upon completion of their goal. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the population attended SFCCD, 20% percent attended SMCCD and 5% percent attended PCCD. In completing a self-identified goal at the CCC, 70% took three or more years; and of the total population 5% received a certificate, 20% received an associate's degree, 50% transferred with a degree, and 25% transferred without a degree. Of the reasons why the participants chose to attend a California Community College the number one reason was the low cost of tuition, second was the student not being eligible to attend a 4-year college after high school, the third reason was the proximity of the college (i.e. close to home), and lastly having a low high school grade point average was another central reason students attended a California Community College.

Table 3 provides an overview of the participants' goals, which community college district they attended, their current age, age upon completion and the length of time they took to complete their goal.

Table 3.
Description of Participants

Participant	Goal Completed	Current Age	Completion Age	# of Years to Complete	Year of Completion
Joe	Transfer w/degree	42	37	2 years	2007
Byrena	Transfer w/degree	26	21	3 years	2006
Aliyah	Transfer w/degree	28	23	3 years	2004
Solomon	Associates	22	21	3 years	2010
Lidia	Transfer	40	26	4 years	1996
Leon	Transfer w/degree	23	22	4 years	2010
Melissa	Associates	25	24	5 years	2010
Maurice	Transfer	25	21	2 years	2008
Ariel	Certificate	20	19	14 months	2010
Chris	Associates	23	23	4.5 years	2010
Derick	Transfer w/degree	31	28	3 years	2007
Tracie	Transfer	34	25	2 years	2002
Teana	Transfer w/degree	35	31	2 years	2008
Michele	Transfer w/degree	57	41	5 years	1996
Evangela	Associates	24	23	5 years	2011
Otis	Transfer	25	21	3 years	2007
Akeem	Transfer w/degree	24	21	3 years	2007
Valesca	Transfer w/degree	35	32	4 years	2009
Kim	Transfer w/degree	41	23	2 years	1996
Mark	Transfer w/degree	43	21	2 years	1987

Note: Information for Table 3 was gathered from college transcripts and participant interviews.

Overview of Participants

The 20 current and former students who participated in the study were selected

because they were self-identified African Americans who attended and completed an

academic goal at one of the three California Community College districts in the San Francisco Bay Area selected for this study. A brief profile of each participant in the order of his or her interview is below. The first names or pseudonyms of the participants were used in the study per their request.

Participant 1: Joe

> You know a support group that you could actually talk to, or hang out. At times you could talk to individuals about what you experience. That gave me an opportunity to help others as well that's basically almost in the same shoes that I was in and kind of explain to them what I went through to kind of umm help them was in to have a stay positive and umm a good transition back into society (Joe).

Joe is a recent college graduate from San Francisco State University and conditionally accepted to begin graduate school in the Fall 2011. He attended a CCC because after being incarcerated he was no longer eligible to attend a California State University (CSU). However, he shared during his interview that the year prior he had been accepted, yet due to a change in regulations he was required to attend a CCC before a CSU. He attended community college for two years and transferred, he was 31 when he completed his self-identified goal and transferred. He credits the Second Chance Program, a program designed to support formerly incarcerated individuals, with assisting him in navigating the CCC system.

Participant 2: Byrena

> I believe I was successful in achieving my academic goals because I was determined and persistent from the start. I also was successful because I had support and encouragement from family, friends, old teachers, and academic counselors (Byrena).

Byrena is a current college student in the California State University (CSU) system. She completed her Associate degree with transfer in 2008. Byrena took three years to complete a CCC and she was 21. Her major at community college was Speech

and she is fluent in Mandarin. She attended a CCC because she was not eligible to attend

a 4-year college or university. In retrospect she realizes she needed to improve in certain

areas of her academics. She is the first in her family to complete a college degree.

Participant 3: Aliyah

> So a lot of times we come here we don't know why we're here. And I didn't even
> believe that I was capable of even… If you'd asked me back when I first started,
> graduate school, I would have just laughed at you because I would have thought I
> wasn't smart enough to do something like that. Um, so the community college in
> terms of my success was really about me sort of building up this self-belief and
> realizing that I deserve to be here and that my ideas were worthy and that I was
> worth something so it's that acculturation (Aliyah).

Aliyah is an English Tutor and part-time instructor at the community college. She

attended a California Community College because although she had the grades for a

university she did not take the SAT. She said lack of support from family in regards to

pursuing a college education is why she decided in the fall of her senior year to go to City

College of San Francisco, which was up the street from her high school. Aliyah began

community college right after high school in a Summer Bridge Program. Her father has

his high school diploma and her mother as well; however, her mother also has some

college courses. Aliyah completed her Associate degree and transferred to a CSU in

2004 after four years of attendance at the age of 24.

Participant 4: Solomon

> I think I was successful because not only did I have the support of my parents to
> do great in school but also I did not want to quit from achieving my goal, even if
> that meant failing a few times in certain classes so, as long as I didn't give up. I
> know I could get my degree. I have a drive to my best in everything I do and will
> continue to have that because that's what it takes to achieve anything my heart
> desire (Solomon).

Solomon is a student at City College of San Francisco and is 22 years old. He

attended a CCC because he did not receive any scholarship offers after high school, his

grades and overall GPA were not high, and the cost of tuition was low. He completed his

Associate degree in 2010 and studied Science. Solomon's parents both have Master's

degrees. Solomon said he was familiar with community college and as a youth he was at

the college often because his father works for a California Community College. This

experience made the college very welcoming because he personally knew the faculty and

staff. He said many people from the community college assisted him in completion and

remain supportive as he prepares to transfer and study Kinesiology at a CSU.

Participant 5: Lidia

> Must be luck. It certainly wasn't well planned. Although there was a plan to go to
> a 4-year right after high school, it wasn't executed very well. I know that I am an
> intelligent person, had the right schooling that should have prepared me to finish
> my academic goals more quickly than I did, but at 18-22 I probably lacked either
> self confidence, or discipline, or something, that it takes to be a full-time college
> student with a declared major (Lidia).

Lidia is the Associate Dean of Matriculation and Enrollment Services at a CCC.

Her parents both have some college experience. She attended community college after

not successfully completing her freshman year at the University of California at

Berkeley. She transferred in 1996 to San Francisco State University when she was 26

years old. Although she worked as a student employee and received lots of advice and

support from faculty and staff she did not consider getting her associate's degree. She

said "I always saw myself as a university student". While attending a CSU, one year

later, Lidia petitioned for her Associate degree.

Participant 6: Leon

> I believe that the support from family and the encouragement from teachers and
> staff helped very much, when I needed it the most. It helped having someone
> believe in what I want to do, instead of just being another student in a class
> (Leon).

Leon is currently a student in the California State University system. He attended

community college for more than four years. He transferred to a CSU without his degree

to study Cinema. He attended a CCC because he was not eligible for a 4-year college

after high school. He was 22 years old when he transferred. While attending community

college he utilized Disabled Student Program and Services, the writing labs and

continued to participate in Tae Kwon Do. He credits his success to his supportive parents

who both have their Master's degrees.

<div align="center">Participant 7: Melissa</div>

> Uh I can honestly say once I… I did want to give up. There were times that I did
> want to give up but…but uh, there was always a sense of I had to finish. And at
> City it wasn't, you know, I …there were people there to encouraged me to
> continue to go, but at the same time it was okay I'm here at this community
> college for a reason and so let me finish what I needed to do (Melissa).

Melissa works as a substitute teacher. She studied Child Development and Dance

while attending community college. She graduated in 2005 with her Associate degree

after attending for more than four years. Her parents are high school graduates and both

have taken some college classes. She attributes her tutoring, finally finding a counselor

who actually "tried to help her and not just rush her out the door" and participating in

cheerleading and dance as elements that led to her success. She shared how passionate

she is about dance and how dancing allowed her to relieve her stress. Also, she expressed

how support from the coach who always showed concern for them to perform well

academically was also relevant to her success (Melissa).

<div align="center">Participant 8: Maurice</div>

> And because, and because I had already signed up for it…cause I had just moved
> on the spur of the moment from Atlanta. One day my mom came downstairs, and
> she was like, "Maurice you want to move California?" And I was like "I don't
> have anything else to do today so might as well." So we just hopped in the car

and left and drove out here. And then I had already been thinking about going to school, and so I had already signed up for school out here so I just, I just…since I was already enrolled I just went ahead and went here so… (Maurice).

Maurice is recently unemployed as he looks for a job "he really wants" after receiving his Bachelor degree in 2010 in Economics. Maurice attended a California Community College because he and his mom decided one day to move to the San Francisco Bay Area from the south. He said he went on-line and filled out the application and was accepted so he decided he would go to a CCC. He was about 19 at the time and had gone to Savannah State for a year after graduating high school. Maurice finished community college in two years over a three-year period because he stopped attending for a year while he became a California resident to save money for tuition. He believes his father finished high school in Jamaica and his mother did attend a CSU when they came to the Bay Area, however she did not graduate. He transferred without his Associate degree because in his words, "I felt like if I tried to get a degree I felt like I would have…I felt like I would of thought that I had already accomplished something, and I didn't want to feel like I accomplished anything by finishing a 2-year school" (Maurice).

<div align="center">Participant 9: Ariel</div>

Um, it was cheaper than going to a private school for cosmetology so…and it was actually one of the best when we looked it up like what the…what private schools and the rest of the community colleges, it was actually one of the best and they had the most, the highest um passing rate for State Board (Ariel).

Ariel currently attends a California Community College. She completed a Certificate in Cosmetology in 2009. Her mother has a Bachelor degree and she believes her father completed high school, but is uncertain. She chose to get a Certificate in Cosmetology because she wanted to attend Florida A&M and study Nursing, and she

figured with a license in Cosmetology she could work in the on-campus salon to help pay

her way through college. Currently, she is completing her general education

requirements to transfer but is not certain if she wants to major in Nursing or Child

Development. She believes she was successful because of her support system, in

particular her mother.

Participant 10: Chris

> One day something just hit at me and I was like "I can't be like…I can't be like some of these people." Cause I was doing security and also did the Information center so I'd sit at a desk and work for all these people but I was working with people that was like thirties and forties and fifty making ten, eleven dollars an hour…So that I was like… "Whew!" I said I told myself…I really told myself this not gonna be me. I can't do this and when I was looking for jobs, better jobs so I could move out they all required a B.A. So I was like…"Man I can't find no job", you know cause they all require a Bachelors degree and so I was like whatever. And so after a while, you know, I was like you know what I got to go back to school. I got to get my education, you know (Chris).

Chris works for a local retail store as a loss prevention agent.   He completed his

Associate degree in Liberal Arts in 2010. Chris will be transferring to a CSU in the fall

of 2011 to study Communications. He began a California Community College because

as he shared he wanted to play football. He was 23 years old when he finished at

community college and he attended for more than four years. His mother did complete

some college at a CCC however he is unaware of his father's educational level. Chris

said he was tired of school and just wanted "some free time" but when he saw people

twice his age working the same part-time job and watching his sister finish her Bachelor

degree he was motivated to complete community college.

Participant 11: Michele

> The Achievement program was just it was fun, okay! And we're learning about our selves and what's out there, it was fun! [sic]…I think people can be more self conscious and, but if its just us we can talk to them a little bit, like oh shit you

didn't do the work and you know and you're not going to be able to just skate like this once you leave here so I think its more, its helpful (Michele).

Michele is an Administrative Assistant. She received her Associate degree in 1996 from the SFCCD. She completed Community College at the age of 41, after four or more years of attendance. She transferred with a degree to the California State University system. Michele also has a Bachelor of Arts in Social Science and her Masters in Public Administration. Her mother and father both had some college.   She attended a CCC because she "wanted to go back to school and it was convenient" (Michele) because she worked for the community college.

Participant 12: Derick

Um, I just never really was thinking of a 4-year… degree. I know I was thinking of you know just working after high school, and then eventually I wanted a better job and I knew I had to go to school to get a degree first to get a you know a better paying job. So I gave college a try (Derick).

Derick is a counselor for the Juvenile Hall. He completed his Associate degree in 2007 with honors. He was 28 years old and attended a community college for three years. Derick also has a Bachelor degree in American Studies and Public Policy from the University of California at Berkeley where he transferred after completing community college. Derick said in his family completing high school was a success. His father has a high school diploma but 'barely graduated' and his mother only completed her junior year of high school. Derick did not consider college until he wanted a better paying job. He decided to attend a CCC because of the low cost of tuition and because he had a fiancé who had attended community college.

Participant 13: Tracie

I believe I was successful in my academic goals due to my determination, preservation and my support system. Determined because I, at that time, was a

single parent and also, an African American woman (odds were definitely against me). I could not have done it without my strong spiritual connection and my family support system (Tracie).

Tracie is a licensed Registered Nurse. Her parents are high school graduates. She attended a California Community College because she heard the school had one of the best training programs for associate's degrees in Nursing and one of the highest passing rates for the state licensing board. Her goal was to attend community college for two years and receive her ASN. However she learned she might not get into the Nursing program because enrollment was impacted, admittance was not on merit but a random lottery, and students often took four or five years to complete the associate's degree. Tracie did the research and made the decision to transfer to a private institution after two years at the community college and completing her nursing prerequisites, in 2002. She was 25 years old at the time and a single mother.

Participant 14: Teana

I believe I was successful because I had a very strong support team. My family and cohort in the Program for Accelerated College Education (PACE) program helped push me and kept me motivated. I think that my children played a huge role in my success. The need to provide for my children and to be a positive motivating factor in their lives help push me and give me the drive to be successful in achieving my academic goals (Teana).

Teana is employed with Alameda County as an Eligibility Technician. She completed her Associate degree in Liberal Arts in two years. Yet when she finished high school she did go to two other community colleges briefly before working full-time. Her parents have their high school diploma but supported her and encouraged her to attend college. She returned to a California Community College to provide a better life for her two children. She had a family member who used the Program for Accelerated College Education (PACE) program, which is how she learned of the program. Teana credits the

flexibility of the adult working program, PACE, with being able to finish her degree and

transfer to a CSU to study Health Science.

Participant 15: Evangela

> Um I didn't have the grades to go to a 4 year, and also I didn't really know about
> college so trying community college seemed like the best thing to do anyway.
> Five years… Well, yeah I was giving up but you know people pulled me back,
> and it was like if you really want to do it, get it done. You can get it done so… I
> have a great support system (Evangela).

Evangela is a college student. She recently completed her Associate degree in

May 2011 in Liberal Arts and is accepted to two universities in the California State

University (CSU) system to study Child Development for the 2011-2012 academic year.

She and her older sister are the first in their family to complete post-secondary education.

Her mother has her high school diploma and took some classes at the local community

college. Her father does not have a high school diploma but is currently working toward

his GED. Evangela attended a California Community College for five years and was 23

years old when she finished. She stated she attended a CCC because she "didn't have the

grades for a 4-year and she really didn't know about college" (Evangela).

Participant 16: Akeem

> I guess it was just a slow process cause each semester my…I got influenced by
> more and more things, and I started actually I would take the little career test.
> And each time I would, my mind would open up to more things. Umm I like this
> idea, and I like this and I just started shifting about. Like I took Mr. Clark's class
> and he's like write down everything you like, dislike, what you want, plans for
> your future and everything. I did all of that. And then I noticed I liked Science
> (Akeem).

Akeem is a student in the California State University system studying Biology.

He works part time as a food server. He attended a community college because his father

told him to go to school or move out. His father has his Associate degree and his mother

completed her Bachelor degree last year. After high school, he joined a Summer Bridge

program and wanted to study science and go to medical school, however after challenges

with Chemistry he shifted his goal earned his Associate degree in Liberal Studies. He

transferred in 2007 after three years at the age of 21.

Participant 17: Valesca

> I personally wanted it, I did the research, found websites and talked with other
> nursing students and met people willing to help (Valesca).

Valesca is a community college student studying Nursing. Her mother had some

college and her father did not finish high school. She first attended Bryman where she

received her Certificate in Nurse assistance. She is a single mother of two and has

attended a California Community College for over four years. She worked full-time and

went to school in the evening at several colleges just to complete the pre-requisites for

Nursing. Valesca completed her Associate degree in Allied Health in 2009. Her goal is

to become a Registered Nurse but with the impact of programs she was not accepted after

she finished her Associate of Science degree, so she enrolled at a CSU to study Public

Health. After a year she was accepted into a Nursing program at a CCC and is now

working toward her Associate degree or ASN.

Participant 18: Otis

> I definitely should give a lot *(of my success)* to my parents because they really
> supported me through college and they helped me out with tuition and stuff and
> just helping me stay motivated throughout college (Otis).

Otis works part-time as a student assistant for the State of California Department

of Industrial Relations in San Francisco. He attended community college because he was

not eligible for a 4-year based on his SAT scores. His father has a Masters degree and his

mother has a Bachelor's degree. He attended a college prep high school and knew he

would attend college. Not being eligible for a 4-year and wanting to stay near home he attend his local community college. He attended community college for three years and transferred without a degree. He has his Bachelor of Arts in American Studies from a CSU.

Participant 19: Kim

It played a big role because I mean I had a paycheck coming in and I had skills but I knew that I didn't always want to be at the level were I was, I wanted more. Umm my father said to us you shouldn't have to work as hard as I have worked. And that meant you had to go and get your education (Kim).

Kim is a California Community College counselor. She is a transplant from the rural south and attended a CCC for better opportunities and because the tuition was lower than she was accustomed to paying. Kim received her Associate degree in 1996 and transferred to a CSU after attending for two years. She was 25 years of age at the time. Kim shared that her motivation to complete her education were the facts that her mother has a high school diploma and her father never completed high school but always told his children to receive an education and not work harder than he had to work. Besides completing her Associate degree, Kim has a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Master of Science in Counseling, and is currently pursuing her Doctorate in Addictive Disorders.

Participant 20: Mark

I was successful in my academic pursuits because I had a support system in athletics that mapped out what I needed to know and showed me the help I needed at the time to graduate and transfer, more importantly they showed me the results if I did not complete the necessary coursework (Mark).

Mark is the CEO of a non-profit organization and community college faculty. He received his Associate degree and transferred out of state in 1987, after two years of attendance, when he was 19 years old. He studied Criminal Justice in the San Francisco

Community College District and later received his Master's degree and his Ph.D. His

mother completed graduate level of college and his father a Bachelor's degree. Mark

stated he attended a CCC because his high school GPA was low and for athletics, "the

basketball team, they were very good" (Mark).

<div align="center">Findings: Research Question 1</div>

This research question explored the perceptions of successful African American

students' sense of belonging while attending a California Community College. This

research question was designed to gather the students' perceptions of the services that

aided in their completion and how their perception and involvement at the CCC system

may or may not have supported their successful completion. The themes that emerged

from the data collection were the participants' perceptions of *Sense of Belonging* and

their *Involvement* in programs, which may have supported and fostered this sense of

belonging.

<div align="center">Sense of Belonging</div>

When reflecting on their experience in a California Community College seventy

five percent (75%) of the participants perceived a welcoming feeling (see figure 1). The

participants spoke of college programs, and current CCC students and faculty who

supporting their academic goals and encouraging them to persist to completion. Solomon

commented, "I kind of knew the programs. Some of the programs I had access to already

and um in the most part of it uh I was able to find people who I can communicate with,

you know and also get help from as well." Aliyah shared a similar experience.

> Uh I did because I actually started off City College of San Francisco through the
> African American Scholastic Program's Summer Bridge Program which was a
> program that essentially gave… was designed for African American students
> coming into college to transition in. So having already taken classes and people

that I identified with helping me really helped me to just feel welcomed here. You know on top of the fact that a lot of my friends also were coming to City College of San Francisco so that that helped. Um, however, a lot of my friends were coming here but you know by mid semester a lot of them were kind of falling to the wayside. So it really was having that extra support of the retention program I think too that helped me still feel welcomed even while the reality of college wasn't something that um everybody can handle. So… (Aliyah).

Byrena reflected on when she first began community college. "Yes I felt absolutely welcomed. I felt welcomed like in the classes with the teachers. It just felt welcoming like "Come on in and if you don't know something just ask." I felt welcomed by the teachers, the professors, even students (Byrena).

Maurice exclaimed, "Yeah, actually I did feel welcome now that I think about it. Yeah, I felt pretty welcome. Yeah, I definitely felt welcome" (Maurice). Chris reflected on the ease of meeting other community college students, which offered a welcoming feeling at the CCC.

Yes. Uh people were friendly and it was easier for me to make friends there because I …Well, I didn't know nobody there because you know I was coming from over here, and then I went over there and I already had a friend that was actually already over there who was playing football so it was kind of easy for me to start meeting people. And people was nice. (Chris)

When reflecting on why they felt a sense of belonging at the CCC participants talked about being involved in programs that gave them a support system and welcoming feeling. Tracie recalled,

I had learned about the Triple AP Program… I was definitely welcomed. If I didn't have that, if I didn't see like familiar faces then you know probably would be different like it was much different at Dominican than it was at City College. So um but I think the Triple AP Program kind of helps cause when I first came in, I didn't know what to do, you know…hadn't been in school in years, you know (Tracie).

Teana also participated in a program at the CCC, which she said provided an environment that was welcoming.

> Yeah actually I did and like I said I think it was because I was part of the Pace Program…and there were a lot of people just like me, single, working mothers that were trying to uh get their degrees so we developed like…it was kind of like a little family, my little cohort…everybody helped each other. You had problems with your homework, you needed, you needed some help we would have little study halls or you could call somebody or email somebody (Teana).

Mark found an easy transition into the community college environment because he was apart of a sports program and was familiar with faculty and students through this relationship.

> Yeah I felt welcome because I had spent the summer in China with the basketball team. So I had a little thing with the basketball team and I knew the players so when I started school it was easy. Easy transition. (Mark)

Programs like EOPS have been supporting underrepresented students in acclimating to the CCC. Joe's welcoming feeling was a direct result of being involved in the Second Chance Program through EOPS at his CCC. "Yes, I did. Umm, because the people that umm actually helped me or at least the program that I actually went in at EOPS second chance they actually made me feel welcomed" (Joe).

The majority of the participant's shared how their adjustment to a CCC was predicated on their connecting to someone in the college environment who could explain how to navigate the educational system. However, the 25% of participants who did not feel welcome expressed the challenges of not perceiving the CCC as supportive. Leon stated, "It was mixed because it was particularly about teachers…some made people [you get] involved with the class, the structure, and some was just straight lectures. And I don't know I can't…without some type of connection I don't feel like I need to work as

hard." Michele reflected on not feeling a sense of belonging in this way, "I just simply couldn't relate to the instructors, I mean …I felt out of place."

Lidia discussed the importance of the CCC reaching out to the students and creating a welcoming environment,

> No I was not welcomed at all when I went to the college. I actually had never set foot at that community college campus before. But I also didn't really see myself as being a part of that community because since I had been at a UC I did think I was better than the students at the community college who in my opinion really didn't have anywhere else to go. Um, and so although they didn't welcome me, I wasn't really trying to be a part of that group so it was sort of a mutual lack of… *welcoming*…but I think that that but that's still a bad thing. I mean I think that they didn't know that about me when I set foot on the campus so it was sort of their responsibility I think to welcome me as a student to the college. (Lidia)

Melissa expressed how the time restraints when seeing a CCC counselor was limited and she left feeling like her academic goals were not addressed. In her words, "Honestly, not really. The counselor that I had first talked to seemed like she was just trying to get me out the door, like she didn't really want to talk to me, and so it was kind of hard to try to figure out what classes I actually needed" (Melissa). Derick spoke of the challenges of being an older student whose parents did not attend college. He found school challenging and unwelcoming and had no prior knowledge of the CCC system.

> Um at first it was a little tough, I guess my first year but after that I began to meet mentors and you know get familiar with my professors and uh and I started to meet more and more people, and I began to get more comfortable especially after that, after that first year. That first year was just a little rough, and you know I didn't really know what was going on. I was out of school for a few years so it was a little confusing in the beginning. But after that second semester things began to flow. When I first got there I was just I guess, you could say no because I was confused I really didn't know what was going on. Uh, I was seemingly older than a lot of my students that were there, a lot of my peers so in the beginning it was kind of scary. It was kind of unwelcoming to me just because I just didn't know anything. And like I said my parents didn't go to college no one I knew went to college besides Tracie, my fiancé at the time. But uh besides that it was just a whole new environment for me. So very confusing, very scary! (Derick).

Valesca expressed the dismal numbers of African Americans attending a CCC in comparison to other populations. She shared how the lack of seeing more African Americans attending community college, as an African American student one has to have a strong desire to complete their academic goals because of the lack of support from students with similar cultural experiences and backgrounds due to simply the number enrolled.

> Um no. If you go with the…with that desire to want to gain and get education, you kind of have to go in there [with the desire] in you…because you don't see a lot of African Americans there. It's dif…you just don't see it. You see people from foreign countries, and you just don't…you can count basically probably with one hand. Because you acknowledge when you see another African American you're happy like "Oh, okay." No, right and then you acknowledge them, and you want to support them like "Okay we're here together. We're doing the same thing" (Valesca).

Figure 1. Welcoming Feeling at Community College Yes 75%, No 25%
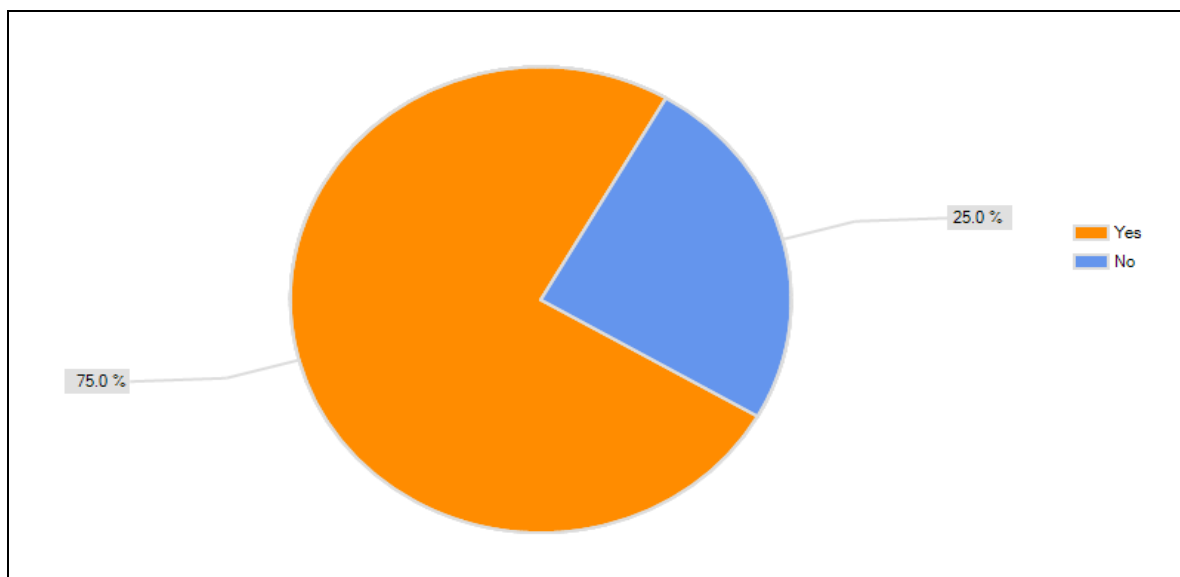For the past 10 years in the CCC system for every 100 African American students who enroll in classes only 50 successfully complete the courses. Did you feel welcomed when you went to the community college?

The African American California Community College students in this study were selected because of their successful completion of academic goals. Many shared that

there were challenges along the way and 85% were able to receive support from faculty

and students at the CCC to handle the difficult times (see figure 2). Joe spoke

consistently about his peers assisting him, "My Peers! In the EOPS program, the whole

EOPS, its like a family."   Aliyah expressed how the little things helped a great deal,

> Um I feel like there was a network of people, there wasn't one person. There were definitely people who helped more than others, but it would be maybe one professor or counselor that I would talk to. It would be somebody else who would buy me that book. It would be somebody else who would ask if I was hungry and I wanted to go to lunch. And so it was a lot of different people doing little things that I think really got me through (Aliyah).

Lidia was able to receive support from faculty as a student employee, when asked who at

the college assisted her with challenges she replied, "Yes, my boss the Dean of

Matriculation. She always made a point of checking in with us. And, you know,

checking in on how our lives were going."

> You know the dean was always very supportive. She was an African American woman, um forty years old at the time, and she had a Masters. And she was always very encouraging, very supportive about you know… "Make sure you guys go to class", and "Make sure you guys get your degree." …And always talking to us about the importance of having that and of being able to be independent, successful people. (Lidia)

Lidia said the entire all female office staff became like "big sisters" to her always

offering an opinion on her academic goals. Leon had a different experience. He received

support from the disability services department to receive academic help with taking tests

and writing papers. He also shared when he was depressed the college resources assisted

tremendously, "the psychologist…? I'm not sure what he is, but I used that service…

Cause I got stressed out and depressed. And they're also the ones that helped guide me to

what I needed." Melissa found support from her community college counselor. She

stated,

> Uh my counselor, She was there most of the time if there was anything I was having a hard time with. Like, she was always there academically. Uh she was actually the one who helped me see what classes I needed to take uh to get back on uh track with my academics. And she was, always had an open ear if I ever needed to talk. (Melissa)

Derick excitedly shared how his mentors assisted him with his career choices.

> Oh yeah, definitely. Definitely, yeah! Umm Dr. ------- Um and a Dr. ----- was one of them. They helped me… And then I had uh others you know helping me with you know my degree in finishing up and taking the right classes and getting done with City College so like I say it was kind of like twofold, I had the best of both worlds. (Derick)

Derick explained how their feedback and advice was essential to him meeting his goals and actually going beyond what he originally planned for this education. "So you hear good. You hear bad. And then that just kind of keep you going and I try to just keep my eyes on the prize" (Derick).

Many participants talked about having another college student to offer support. Maurice stated, "I had a girl friend back then and…she was whew she was smart." *So she would help you academically if you needed help?* Yep! But most of the time we just did homework together." Ariel was in a cohort and she expressed the help students gave each other in this way, "we all kind of helped ourselves and helped each other…like if somebody didn't learn something and somebody got it better than the other person did that's how we [kind of looked out for each other]." Chris agreed with the others sentiment, "Oh yeah, I, I more so a lot of friends we…I mean you know just getting into study groups." He shared about one class in particular,

> I, I remember this one class so all the students in the class, most of the students in the class got together we said like whenever we had a test we all studied, we'd talk to each other, we'd read the books to each other. I mean I've never seen myself do that much studying. (Chris)

Teana received support from her CCC counselor. Teana reflected, "Actually my

counselor, she was really good. Anytime I was getting frustrated she would always

encourage me." Yet Teana also expressed how her classmates were a source of support

"even my cohort too they were very encouraging too and supportive…so yeah between

my cohort and my counselor." And Akeem said he had a friend who went to his CCC

that he would talk to.

Evangela shared the insurmountable odds she faced being a first generation

college student. She shared how the faculty in her retention program became like a

second family and she could always find a kind ear when she had challenges in not only

school, but also life. She reflected,

> Yeah. Um, just through it all I've always found somebody to help me, everything if
> I needed talking to, um if I couldn't express myself to somebody else and I needed
> to cry I was able to do that. Um if there were other students that I knew that needed
> help, I was able you know to bring a student in and be like "they need your help,
> you know, it's urgent so…" Anything that I threw at them, they caught. (Evangela)

Kim also found a family-like support system from two faculty members at her CCC:

> Those two basically became I like to use the term shadow parents for me. Umm
> and they just gave me the necessary support that I guess being so young that I
> needed. They instilled something like "You know you're not out here to play, you
> handling your business but you fall off the rock sometime so okay you skin your
> knee. Get up! You got to have tough skin okay so get up and keep moving!" And
> that was the two people who really inspired me to okay get focused and do what
> you need to do. (Kim)

The eight-five percent (85%) of students who found help at the community colleges all

had similar experiences such as the CCC faculty providing information and moral

support. They were guided to resources, which they stated assisted in their academic

success. The fifteen percent (15%) that did not find help at the CCC either (1) did not

perceive a sense of belonging at the CCC, (2) did not feel they needed assistance, or (3)

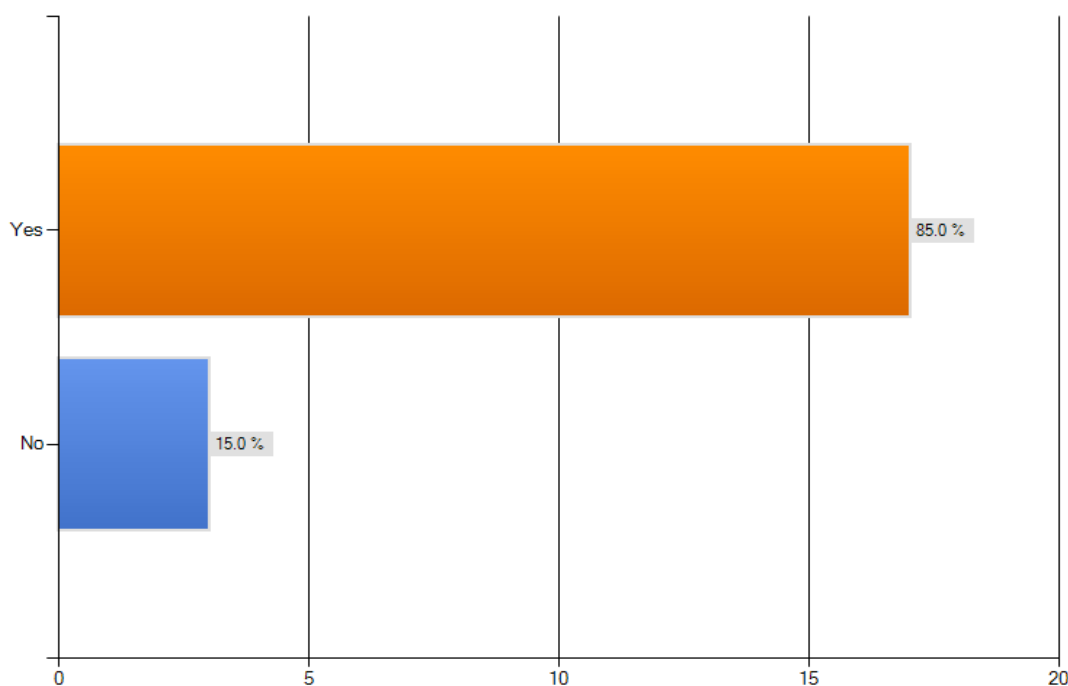they found the necessary help outside of the college.

Figure 2. Who Assisted You with Challenges: Yes 85%, No 15%
When you were having challenges (academic/personal) was there someone at the college or a program that you used to assist you?

The participants were asked if they felt that African American students in the CCC system feel a sense of belonging and 65% believed they did and 35% felt they did not have a sense of belonging (see figure 3). One participant shared when she attempted community college after high school she did not feel a sense of belonging she stated "I felt isolated I was maybe a little shy, and I didn't want to venture out. I wasn't using my resources at that time" (Teana). She dropped out and later returned as an adult learner with a family and job. Interestingly, her response to the question if she believed African American students felt a sense of belonging changed with time and experience. "Based on my experience I would say yes. And that's because of the program that I was in. It was like a sense of community, kind of like family so yeah" (Teana). Melissa shared a similar response,

Yeah. Hum, it seems like that there are more programs that might be opening up for not even just African Americans but for everybody. But there's a lot…a lot…I see a lot more African American students now going to college. Uh, and I feel like that they do have a sense of belonging cause if they didn't feel they had a sense of belonging then they wouldn't be there. And they wouldn't be trying to go pursue their goals. (Melissa)

Maurice took a middle ground position on the question. He perceived African American students' sense of belonging was conditional on their own intrinsic perception of education and academic success.

When I think of belonging I think, okay I belong here…so…so I'll say this. If they do feel a sense of …if they didn't feel a sense of belonging it wouldn't be because of the school because they themselves didn't feel like…do you see what I'm saying…it would be…it would be because they didn't feel like they belong in school themselves like…You know they just didn't have that type of personality. (Maurice)

Kim also saw the pros and cons of the current state of Africans Americans at the community college system.

You know today and when I attended its so- the generational gap is so different-and the purpose so I would have to almost say it's dwindling. And it's harder. So it's a struggle. You want to say they can have a sense of belonging but if they don't go out and look for it tis not going to reach them. But if they get the right person the right counselor then yeah they're going to get lined up with the right resources and services. But it there that shy timid student that don't put in or don't ask then they won't get the services they need. So it's like uh, it's a Catch 22. (Kim)

Ultimately, she said if she had to choose "I'll say yes because I know that the services are available but you have to reach out for 'em" (Kim).

Derick said on a campus level he perceived African American students felt supported and a sense of belonging; "Um I think in the specialty programs like Triple AP, definitely. We definitely feel that" (Derick). Yet, in the overall CCC system this was his position on the question.

Um overall in a big community college it's kind of tough, but I think it's good because it's real diverse um but you have to be on it. You have to be serious

because if you're not serious you could take it all for granted and kind of just, you know, drift off and kind of just you know fall on the wayside. It's kind of scary and I think a lot of youth kind of get you know caught up in a madness and kind of begin to drift off because they don't really feel welcome. But I think like I say from the first day…when you get there its…Where do I go? Where do I go? (Derick)

Aliyah looked at sense of belonging from a historical position and expressed how the change in laws and policies has impacted the community college experience for African American students. "I think that at one point that they did, but I think that, that feeling of belonging is declining as prices get higher, um as the community college begins to bear the weight of the backlash of the UC's and the State schools" (Aliyah).

Michele works at a campus in the CCC system and she interacts with African American students every day. Her perception of their feeling of belonging was predicated on that experience.

No. The student population that I see on a daily basis has absolutely no idea what they want to do. There's no sense of --- (sighs) what do you call it, college spirit. They're not involved in any of the student associate, Associate Student organizations or clubs or whatever. And they don't seem to understand that, you've, this is a very specilis…what's the word, umm, specialized world now. You've got to have some kind of skill you know ---otherwise what are you going to do. So it scares me that they don't get that. (Michele)

Lidia too has been with the CCC system from her time as a student to her current position as an administrator. She also expressed she did not believe African Americans have a sense of belonging.

No, they do not feel a sense of belonging. I think um the community college doesn't realize that for an African American student to um take that step and come onto campus and to make that initial first step, we really need to reach out to them because we don't know what they've had to go through to get to that point. And um there aren't very many African Americans in offices where they visit or um African American professors. Um there aren't… there isn't any sort of organized effort to promote African American students being on campus, and I think it shows. It shows that the staff isn't diverse. The faculty aren't diverse. Um there's no way to welcome a person onto the campus who doesn't already know how to navigate that system. And for most African American students if they haven't had that

experience, they're a little bit green, a little bit lost and they could benefit from extra support. And that isn't available. (Lidia)

Mark also did not see a sense of belonging for African Americans in the California Community College system today. He shared a number of reasons why he saw this phenomenon, one being college choice and another being their preparation for college level classes.

> I'm gonna say no. I don't think they feel that there's a sense of belonging. Because they're coming to…they're coming in the system in which other than from a vocational standpoint they really wouldn't probably want to enter. Meaning if they had a choice of going to a community college or a 4-year institution, everything being equal, they would probably choose a 4-year college. One because if it was… If you had a choice, you wouldn't have gone there. (Mark)

> And I think number two in looking at the retention rate and the success rate that we have per course, you can tell that they're not coming here for the right reasons. It's more of this is what I'm gonna do because this is what they tell me to do. Is go to community college? I don't feel as though…it's not as if from a social standpoint when you see African American students congregate on campus together you are under the impression that yeah they feel comfortable on campus, but they only feel comfortable when they're with their own. Uh…because they're not in classes with their own on that same level. (Mark)

The successful African Americans participants in this study viewpoints on African Americans students' sense of belonging was mixed. Many saw a multitude of challenges African Americans face in the CCC system; however, 65% did believe these students could and do find a sense of belonging if they seek a support system while navigating the CCC educational system.
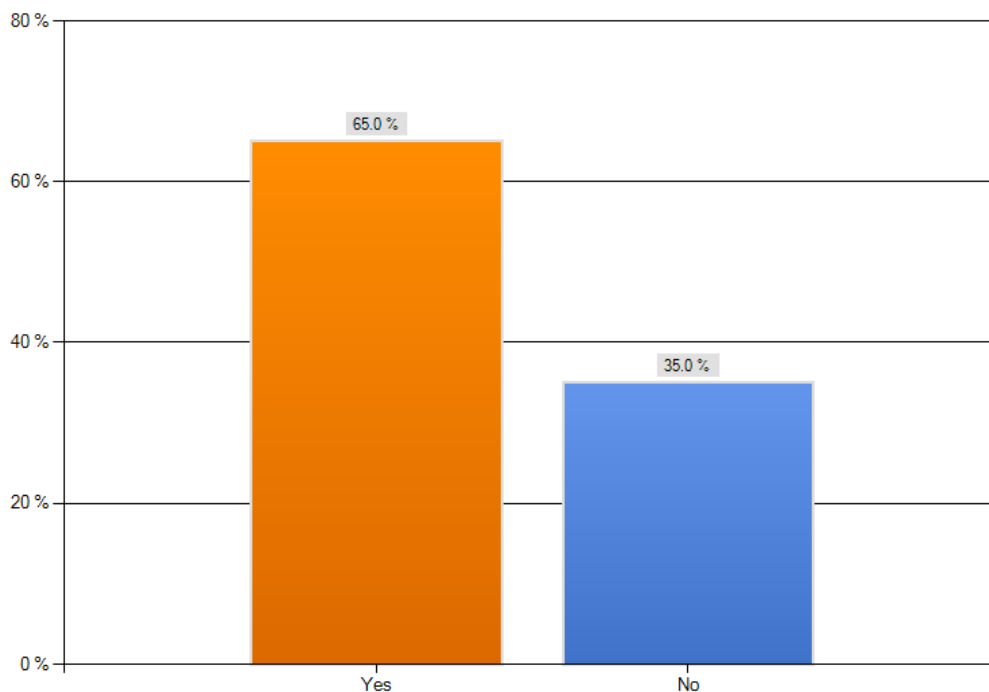
Figure 3. Do African American Students Feel a Sense of Belonging? Yes 65%, No 35%
In what you know about the California Community college system today do you feel African
American students feel a sense of belonging?

Involvement

The African American students in this study were selected to share their

perception of involvement and how participating in on-campus or off-campus

organizations supported their academic success (see figure 4). When reflecting on their

perspective of retention programs the responses were very mixed, 35% of the participants

felt programs should be department-based and focus on a student major and career choice

and 65% believed retention programs should have an ethnic focus to provided cultural

relevancy and support for underrepresented populations in CCCs, like African

Americans.

In reflecting on retention programs' focus, one participant who supported the idea

of academic departments being the focus for retaining African Americans, Mark stated:

Academic departments. Um, yeah because you don't --- I think you don't fail or you're not successful in a subject because… and you're not successful in the subject…you don't fail… your successes and your failures aren't predicated on being around other people like you. I think your successes and your failures can vary and I think that the retention programs don't vary in the types that they offer. I think that they are pretty much ethnically based to make you feel comfortable but academically you're still feeling...a feeling…of you're inferior. (Mark)

Melissa's perspective was that when it comes to coursework, at some point ethnicity should not be the focus for retention programs, but instead academic areas. She responded,

Uh, the academic part… I mean I think the, you know, the programs that they have like the different kind of counselors they have for the different ethnicity is okay, but at the same time I feel like when it comes to academics we all going to have to be together either way it goes. So like you gonna have to get to know somebody whether you know you like the color or their skin or not. But I mean we have to come together someway. (Melissa)

Solomon spoke of wanting to major in math and felt an academic-based retention program could have helped him to stay with his original major because he found little connection, support and assistance in his math courses. He expressed his feelings in this way,

Um…I would say academic department because in some cases um how can I say it um everybody's on different levels…but I do believe the Academic department could be a little bit better at that cause I know with calculus that's when I stopped doing math, and like I said I was probably the only black in there, and if they would have you know focused on you know keeping me in that program I think that I would have probably stayed in and did my best and then also probably also would have got a pass in class as well. But um knowing that it wasn't…at the time knowing that it wasn't a lot of people my color plus the teacher wasn't you know really wasn't connecting there…I didn't see you know any reason to be in the class plus uh I didn't understand anything he was saying…didn't make no sense so I was like okay time for me to change my major. (Solomon)

Many successful students felt a focus on their cultural ethnicity would be beneficial in meeting their own and other African Americans academic goals successfully. They talked about the comfort-ability with having someone from the same

ethnic background. They expressed the need to see role models that looked like them and

they perceived a sense of family with those who were involved with ethnic based

retention programs. Kim expressed the involvement in retention programs in this way,

> I think if I had to choose I would look for ethnic background. Because a sense of having a place of my own that would-could, to help me to, to better relate to me and my culture and be sensitive to my needs I think would definitely make me succeed in college. (Kim)

Valesca expressed the need to see others succeeding and having programs that focused on

ethnicity would allow students to see successful African Americans for encouragement.

She stated,

> I would say ethnic background. I think you would see more of us succeed. You would see maybe more African Americans in college trying to do something and feel that they can do it. (Valesca)

Teana and Derick had similar responses having parents who were not college educated

and knowing very little about the college experience. They saw the value in having

ethnic based retention programs.

> Um I would say ethnic because…why do I want to say ethnic…I say ethnic because…this is just me and my opinion…as a minority I feel that it would be nice to have a retention program that focused on minorities like my parents…they didn't go past high school and that's because they had me. So for…for me I don't think it like was really a big push like…they wanted me to go to college and they've been very supportive but I don't think that…what do I want to say…I don't think education in minority communities maybe in some minority communities may be such a big…what do I want to say… Yeah! If you see somebody that looks like you that gives you encouragement like yes I can do that. And I think that's important especially for youth to have that role model, to have somebody to look up to like okay she looks just like me or he looks just like me. I can do that too. (Teana)

> I guess ethnic background because like a lot of us like myself like my parents didn't go to college, none of my friends really went to college so um you know looking at a lot of African Americans especially growing up in San Francisco in the Western Addition in which I grew up, we don't know anything about college. So if there was a program that you know looked at us, you know saw us and could really just help us along the way, I think that would really help. (Derick)

Lidia expressed her response a little different than the other participants in the study who

also felt ethnic background should be the focus for retention programs. She spoke of how

age is a factor in decision making and how many students after high school are undecided

on their major and thus having an ethnic based retention program would be more

beneficial than one which is department based.

> I would say ethnic background. Um, I think that some students…I think the reason it should not be based on academic departments is that some students still don't know what department they want to focus on, what their course of study is going to be. So if you were to focus accounting for example, you wouldn't really capture everybody that eventually having a degree in business because they might not have made that decision yet. If you base it on ethnic background, I think that no matter what um there's always going to be a certain comfort level of being around people that are more similar to you. Um, even though there's diversity in any ethnic group, I mean you have people from different socio-economic backgrounds, you have all sorts of different makeup in people's families but I think that if you go with the ethnic backgrounds at least people will see something that is familiar to them. (Lidia)

Aliyah reflect on how race and class also impact our socialization and therefore she

believed ethnic background should be the primary focus so African American students

will feel welcomed in the community college environment. She shared this perspective,

> In choosing I do think that it is important to focus on ethnic background. Um, and I say that because regardless of how great your programs are if people don't feel welcomed, then they're not accessible to people, especially people like myself who… You know, college is something that certain people from the time that they're born are socialized for. So I do think that when you come into an academic environment, especially if you do have these great departments and the rigorous…people don't feel entitled and people don't feel welcomed so knowing where your students come from I think is important so that they can feel included because I think any good curriculum or any good educational system tries to make its students feel inclusive so that they can engage in that process, you know. (Aliyah)

Overall, many of the participants saw the value in having retention programs that

could focus on both areas as the key. They expressed how cultural relevance and finding

someone to relate to their circumstances was important. Yet, many also shared the value

in having help and assistance that could centrally focus on their major and department. As Aliyah exclaimed, "I feel like there are a set of circumstances that you know kind of transcend ethnic background." and Michele shared, "I think it should be a combination of both."
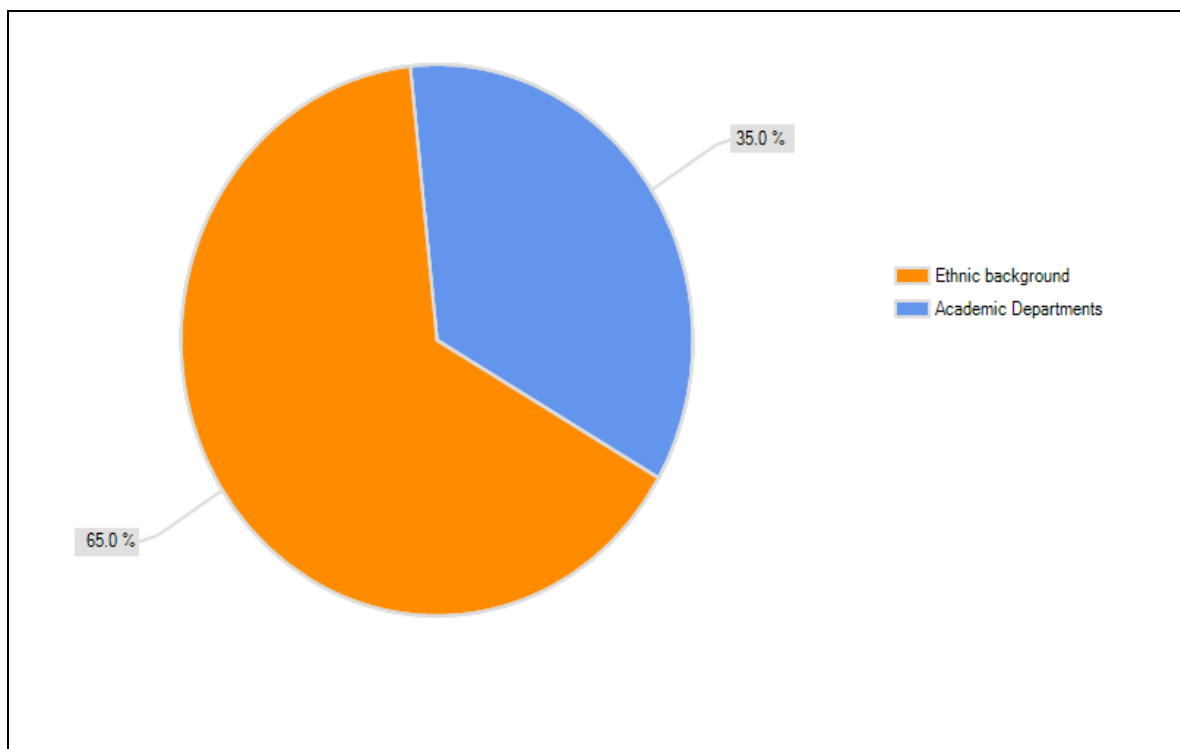
Figure 4. Academic Department or Ethnic Background: Ethnic 65%, Academic 35%
Should retention programs focus on ethnic background or individual academic departments?

Students in the study participated in programs on campus such as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), Program for Accelerated College Education (PACE), retention programs and competitive sports programs. Seventy five percent (75%) participated in programs and twenty-five percent (25%) did not participate in any groups or programs while in community college (see figure 5). The participants reflected on the support they found in being a part of on and off-campus programs. Aliyah attended City College of San Francisco and reflected on how the Grow Your Own

program assisted her in considering teaching as a profession. Aliyah participated in the

"Grow Your Own Program, African American Scholastic Programs, and Poetry for the

People program. I did the "Poetista", a program, which is going out to high schools and

teaching poetry workshops." Solomon shared he participated in the Black Student Union

(BSU) at his CCC. Melissa utilized the Learning Success Center and participated on the

cheer squad. Evangela was the president of the Black Student Union during her time in

community college. The seventy-five percent (75%) of students in the study who

participated in programs and organizations expressed in the next interview questions how

those organizations and programs helped them as they sought their goals.
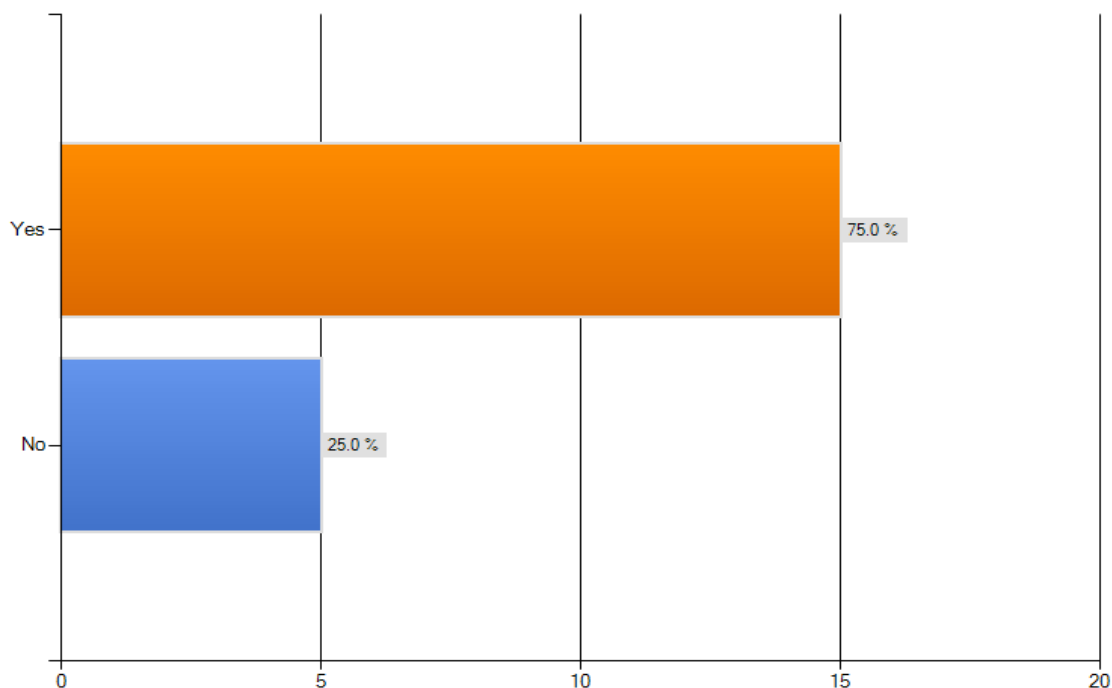

Figure 5. Participation in Programs or Groups: Yes 75%, No 25%
Did you participate in any special programs, learning communities, groups or organizations while
in the California Community College system?

Many students in the study participated in both on and off-campus organizations.

Sixty percent (60%) participated in programs outside of the college environment and

twenty percent (20%) credited their church members (see figure 6) for offering moral

support and motivation to complete their academic goals at the community college.

Byrena participated in church-related programs; EOPS and she "worked on campus at

the African American Scholastics Program." Joe was a part of the EOPS program also

and "I was a peer advisor through the Second Chance Program." Aliyah found solitude

through dance, in her words, "I think dance got me through um college." Leon joined

various clubs on campus, he was in the "Anthropology, Cinema club and there was a

Filipino club, and then I just, I don't know I guess I just went around recruiting people

for clubs." Maurice shared his experience how he "started an investment club." Melissa

"did participate in the African American Scholastics program. Umm, I did do like the,

the Learning Success in like the Help Center." Lidia herself didn't participated in any

clubs but said many of her friends did,

> I didn't really seek out being a part of any group. But I had classmates um that
> participated in things like working on campus and so I had a friend in an accounting
> class that took me over to Conlon hall, and I became a student worker in the
> General Counseling office. (Lidia)

Overall, the majority of students in this study participated in some type of program or

organization either on or off-campus. They overwhelming talked about receiving

support, information, academic help and information from someone at the college or a

friend or family member which led to their academic completion.
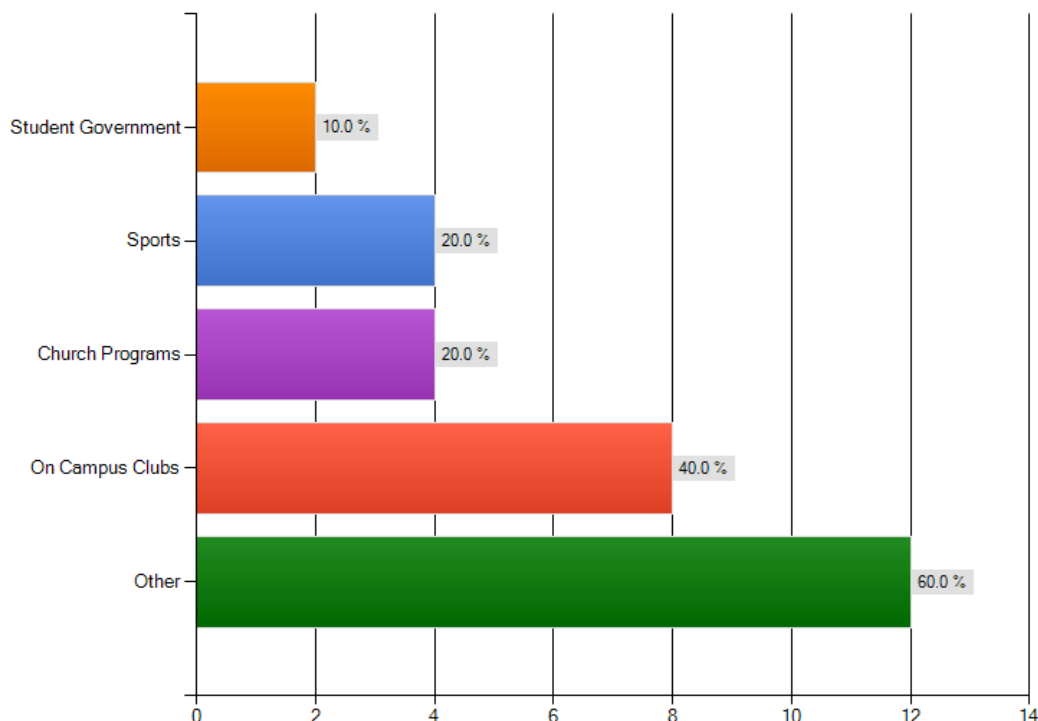
Figure 6. Types of Programs or Groups: Student Government 10%, Sports 20%, Church Programs 20%, Campus Clubs 40% and Other 60%
What type of programs or activities did you participate? What services did they provide? How did the programs services help you?

Findings: Research Question 2

This research question examined the factors that influence success like financial aid, academic assistance, and counseling services. The following are the interview questions designed to explore factors that influence completion and success. The factors, which influenced successful completion, fell into two major themes, which emerged from the data analysis; they were *Academic* and *Financial Factors*.

Academic Factors

There were a multitude of reasons and stories behind why the students in this study attended a CCC (see figure 7). Many participants were attracted by the low cost of tuition, which made college affordable for them and their families. Other students in the

study shared how their parents were not college educated and completing high school

was considered successful. Others attended not for one reason, but multiple reasons

ranging from not taking the SAT or a low SAT/ACT score combined with their high

school GPA, to being interested in a particular degree or certificate program offered.

Solomon had a few reasons for attending community college including not getting

scholarships, and, in his own words "I didn't get the grades I needed to go" to a 4-year

(Solomon). Leon also was not eligible and shared, "I was still kind of confused on what

to do" (Leon) for his major. Byrena was not eligible for a 4-year either. She reflected on

her decision to attend a CCC in this manner,

> Well it was close to home…and I wasn't eligible for a four year at the time. Um I
> think my SAT scores wasn't as high as it could have been. And then I had a
> teacher write a reference letter to like the school I wanted to attend. And in the
> reference letter he said that I wasn't strong in certain areas, and they just said well
> I don't seem like I'm ready to attend a four-year. (Byrena)

Joe also was not eligible for a 4-year college or university, but for a very unique reason.

> In my situation its ---I was actually --- was --- released from a prison I was trying
> to go straight from my incarceration to San Francisco State but they had changed
> the rules that you had to go to a community college first. And I ended up going to
> the Second Chance Program at City College

Aliyah shared this reason for attending a CCC,

> Well, in high school I knew I was a smart person, and I knew school was a way
> that I could sort of elevate myself out of my circumstances, financially, socially
> etcetera, etcetera. Uh, but I didn't really have a lot of support in terms of getting
> to the 4 year school like a lot of people around me were which discouraged me
> from doing oh SAT prep and all these other things cause I didn't have a parent
> who was paying for that or you know preparing me or even faculty that reached
> out. Uh so I decided to just apply to the community college myself. Because it's
> like you don't have to take the SAT, it's twenty dollars. I could pay that, twenty
> dollars per unit I could do that myself. And then I found out you could transfer as
> a junior so I was like, "Oh this is perfect for me." So that's why I went to
> community college. (Aliyah)

Lidia shared she had "transferred …I attended a community college because I was on probation at a UC campus" (Lidia). Maurice reflected on his decision, "Oh uh yeah cause, cause of tuition and because, and because I had already signed up for it, cause I had just moved on the spur of the moment from Atlanta" (Maurice). Kim, too, relocated to California and as she shared, "I had moved to San Francisco looking for better opportunities." Ariel selected the community college because of the cost of attendance and "it was one of the best when we looked it up" and "it was actually one of the best and they had the most, the highest um passing rate for State Board"(Ariel). Tracie stated her "major thing was the cost and because it was a…actually I wanted to attend their nursing program. They had the number one nursing program especially coming from a community college. And um that was my initial goal."

Michele and Derick attended because as mature students with jobs they wanted to receive a degree and have opportunities for a different career. Derick said,

> I know I was thinking of you know just working after high school, and then eventually I wanted a better job and I knew I had to go to school to get a degree first to get a you know a better paying job. So I gave college a try. (Derick)

Evangela shared how she did not have the grades to go straight to a 4-year college but also how she "didn't really know about college so trying community college seemed like the best thing to do anyway." Akeem also knew little about what higher education had to offer; he attend because of the following reason,

> I didn't know anything about college. Uh, my dad said…well I knew I didn't have to do anything for here so then my dad was like after I graduated he said you got two months either find a job or get in…no he said get in school or get out. So I came here. (Akeem)

Valesca attended because she worked full-time and needed a program to accommodate her family she selected "community college…because it was more flexible in time. And

the pay, the tuition is cheaper." The successful African American students in the study

attended for a number of reasons and one of the main factors they shared was the cost of

tuition and open admission policies. Once enrolled, many students attended for more

than two years.
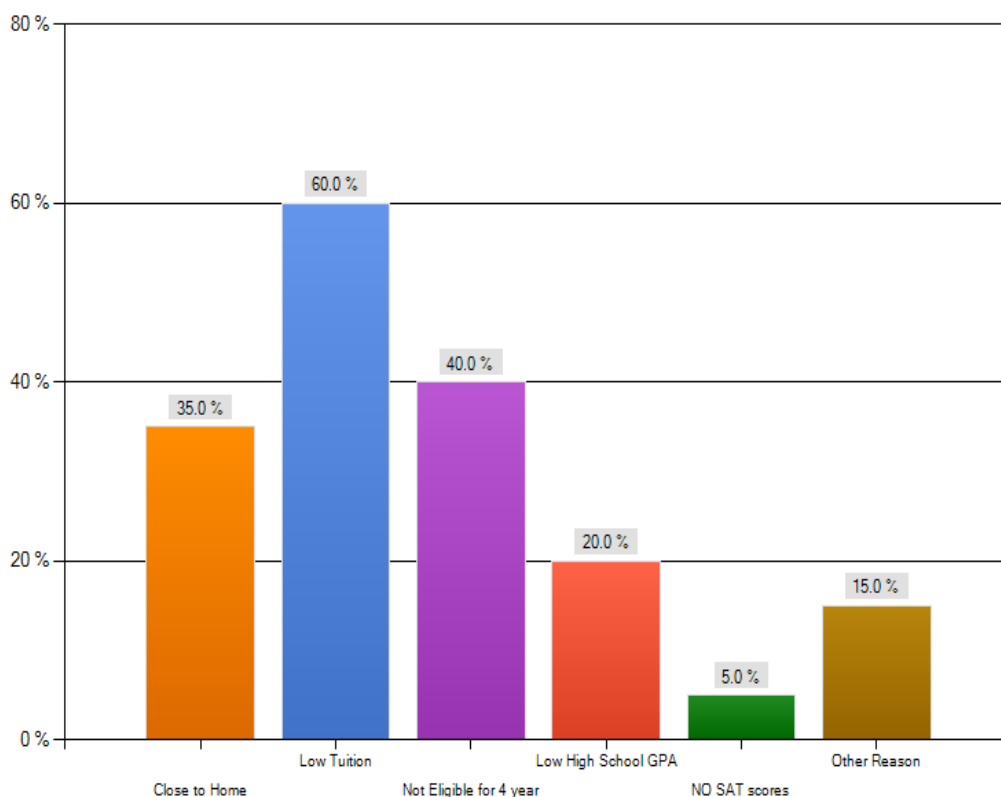
Figure 7. Why Attend a California Community College:
Close to home 35%, Low Tuition 60%, Ineligible for 4-year 40%, Low High School GPA 20%,
SAT Scores 5%, and Other Factors 15%

In this study only 25% of the participants completed their goal in two years (see

figure 8). Many of the students shared how they believed they would attend for two

years and then go on to work in their chosen career or transfer to complete a bachelor's

degree. Community college for many was viewed as a 2-year institution and the students

in the study shared how they were not aware of the challenges in completing their goals

in this timeframe. Some of the reasons 70% of the participants reflected they completed

their goals in three or more years were they changed majors, were undecided majors,

attended part-time, and others were not able to get classes and or did not complete

classes. Other students in the study began at remedial levels in English and math and

reaching college-level coursework took two years alone. There were numerous factors in

why the participants attended community college for more than two years, but all the

students in this study completed either a certificate, associate degree or transferred to a 4-

year college.

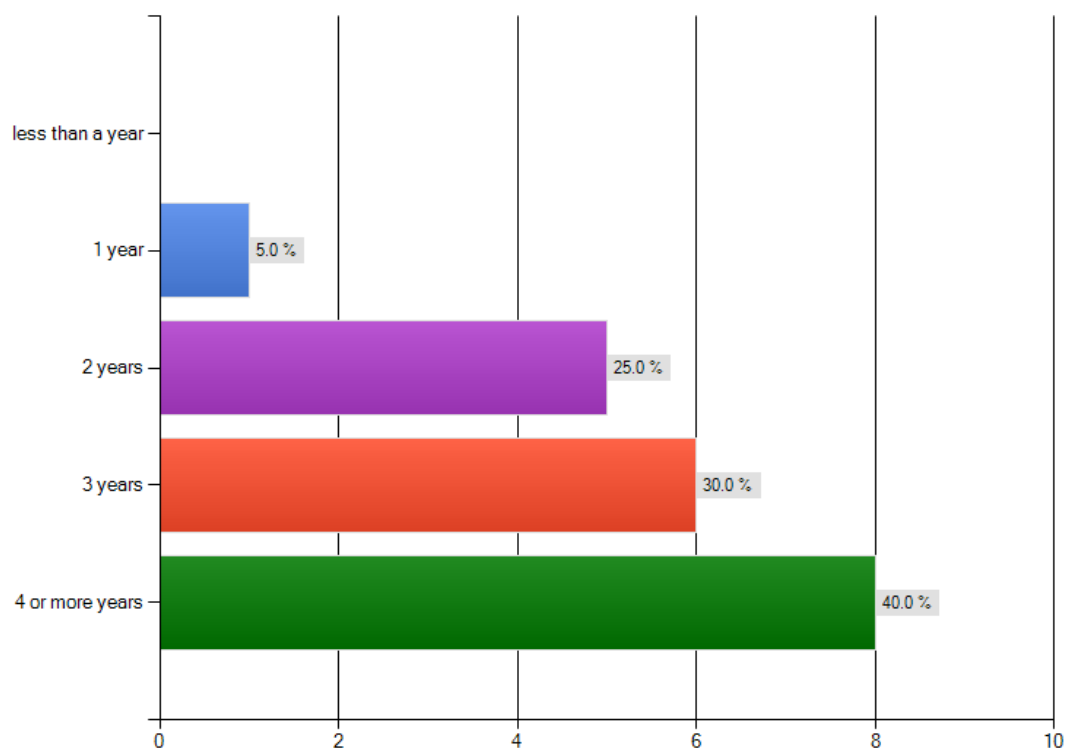*Figure 8.* Length of Time Attended a California Community College:
5 % went 1 year, 25% went 2 years, 30% went 3 years, and 40% went four years or longer.

The students in this study were asked to prioritize on a Likert scale from 1 to 4

what was their most relevant academic goal (see figure 9). Of the participant responses

45% stated the most relevant reason to their academic goals for attending a CCC was

grade point average obtainment and to transfer to a 4-year college or university. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the participants' least relevant academic goal was to earn a certificate. Many of the students shared how their goals changed as they learned more about majors, gained knowledge about the transfer process, and made decisions regarding their career choice.
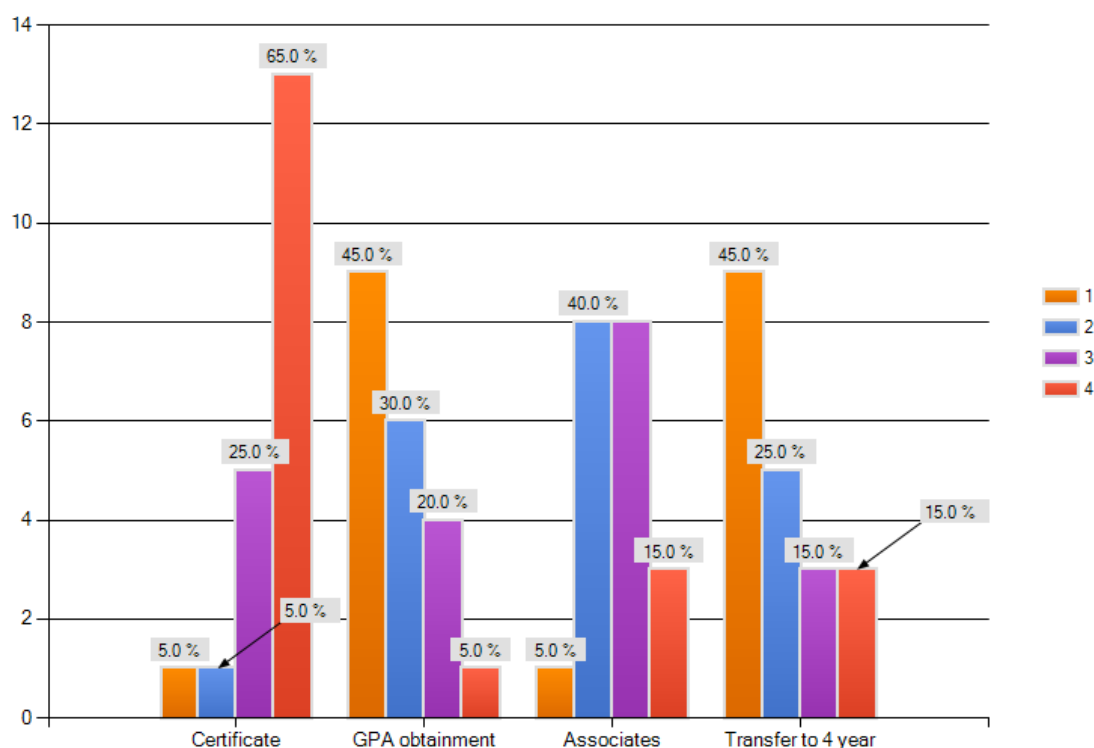
Figure 9. Priority of Academic Goals
Please prioritize your academic goals when you began with one being most relevant; GPA obtainment, certificate, associate's degree and/or transfer to 4-year?

As a result of their knowledge and information gained, seventy-five percent (75%) were able to complete their original goals and actually many participants shared how they surpassed their original academic plan (see figure 10). Byrena and Joe completed their original goals and received an associate's degree and transferred to a CSU. Leon shared that he "kept coming back to his original goal" and ultimately completed and transferred to study Cinema. Lidia reflected on her process,

> Um, well in a round about way I did complete my original goal, which was to get the Bachelor's degree, and I did get the Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. But I think that during my time at the community college it changed only to come back to the original point. So um I think anytime you're at a community college or anytime you're going through um all of the courses that you do in a general education pattern, it's a time when you're sort of trying to figure out what you like and what you don't like. Um and in my case I had started working first on a part time basis, then later full time and so I had to learn to juggle working and going to school so um I think you just …because you're exploring a lot of things you end of changing your goal, and I guess it's just a natural part of the process. But I ultimately did stick with the original goal, which was to get a Bachelor's degree in business. (Lidia)

Tracie shared how she exceeded her goals.

> Um I completed it. I definitely did. But it did change along the line. I mean I wasn't thinking as…I wasn't thinking as far as a Bachelors degree. I just wanted to get you know the AS and then take my boards to be a nurse. I mean that was my ultimate goal, and yes I did complete that. (Tracie)

Derick also shared how he went far beyond his original goal. He began with a "try it out" attitude and eventually completed his associate and bachelor degrees. "I exceeded my original goals by far. See my original plan for going to school was it's the first semester so let's just give it a try" (Derick). Mark talked about how his goals changed during his time at the community college.

> Yes I completed my original goal. Um…no I just wanted to get a good GPA and I didn't think about the Associates until after I started thinking about transferring. So the number one thing was just to keep my GPA above water so I could play, and then I wanted to transfer. But then I realized that you know I was on par to get an Associates degree and everybody said "Oh get a Associates degree! You don't want to just transfer!" So that's what I did. (Mark)

Chris also had an interesting path in reaching his goals.

> Um, I guess I completed my original goal but it all kind of changed, you know. After going there for a while you start to realize like that you know transferring is a big thing and Associates was the big thing. Cause after my first two years there my GPA was not in good standing, you know. I had to…they disqualified me from financial aid and everything and that was because I wasn't focused. I was just thinking about playing football or just leaving and leaving school and just chilling, you know. My focus wasn't there. (Chris)

Although successful in the completion of a certificate, associate degree, or transfer, 25% of the participants said their original goals changed. Solomon shared, "Um… It, it changed cause I changed my major uh two…three times" (Solomon). Maurice expressed how originally he planned on studying Accounting but he talked to a family member, who helped form his outlook.

> I talked to my sister and my sister is an accountant and she was like…I said so tell me about how accounting is and she was like it's boring. I was like *(laughter)* Ooh uh ooh! And then I took an accounting class. (Maurice)

Akeem also had an up and down path as he figured out his academic plans. "I first came here just to come here then after a year I said Science. And then I started taking Science classes, and then I failed the Science class. I uh failed out of that Chemistry class. And so once I failed that I just decided to transfer" (Akeem). Kim expressed how she had an open mind regarding her goals at the CCC.

> Well my original goal I thought I was going to go into nursing. But not being really, not really being sure what I wanted to do. Umm so I didn't go in saying I'm gonna be a Nurse. I went in to say I going to find me some skills to better service myself, to better live. So, I honestly think I did complete my goal. I got my AA transferred and got my BA and kept going. (Kim)

The stories of the students completion include interesting paths, which led to their ultimate success at a California Community College. One student described reaching this goal, which summed up the experience for all the students in the study, "Um, I did yeah. I was really happy about that I was able to still stick it out in college, you know, and do whatever I needed to do to" (Otis).
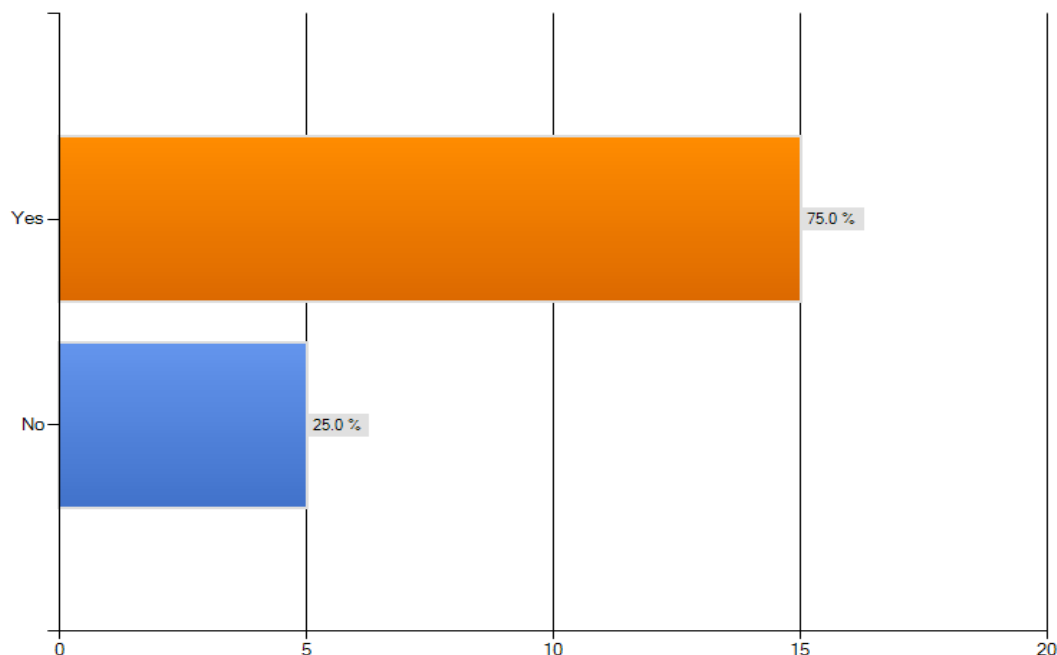
Figure 10. Completion of Self-Identified Goals: Yes 75%, No 25%
Did you complete your original goals or did they change? Why?

Participants rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being very supportive and

5 being not very supportive, various people and groups whom they attributed to their

academic success (see figure 11). Eighty percent (80%) of the participants credited his or

her success to a family member, more than 50% attributed success to a counselor and

40% of the participants to a professor or a learning community, which supported their

academic pursuits. The students shared there were many people who they attributed to

their success. Solomon ranked his pastor as being very supportive to attributing to his

success at the CCC. He shared he received emotional support from his pastor and church

members.

> We do celebrate uh people getting their degrees at our church but we normally
> whenever uh a person you know graduates or get their degree in something we
> normally celebrate that at the end of the year. Um, we have programs to help out
> with uh our actual schooling but more so we encourage and um uplift uh those

who are either…you know who have made it and also those who, who struggle. (Solomon)

Lidia found support from college staff that she attributed to her academic success.

In her words, "there are other people at the college not necessarily counselors who knew me and who I got to know over the years because I was there for more than four years and so they gave me counseling and academic advice" (Lidia). Leon credited "both my parents," whom have graduate level degrees and work in the educational field, with his academic success. Otis, too, had college-educated parents and he credited them in helping him succeed academically. "I definitely should give a lot to my parents because they really supported me through college and they helped me out with tuition and stuff and just helping me stay motivated throughout college" (Otis).

Melissa specifically said her dance teacher from her cheer squad "always made sure we were doing good in school" (Melissa). Maurice received valuable information, counseling, and class placement from a retention program at his community college but interestingly he was not aware that the service was a retention program. He shared,

> Well now that I know…one. Shall I explain that one? Well, apparently there's this group that I didn't know that I was you know being assisted by… (*Laughter)* that a down there in what is it bungalow 200? Bungalow 500 that was pretty helpful. (Maurice)

As Maurice explained, he was told to go to "Bungalow 500" and they will help you by an employee of the college. Ultimately, he credited his academic success at a CCC and transferring to the assistance of the retention program. Teana also attributed her PACE learning community to being very supportive. She reflected on her time at the CCC,

> Um I would have to say all of my professors…in the Pace Program. Yeah! All of my professors were very supportive. And they understood that we were all working so the classes I wouldn't say they were easy, but at the same time they tailored the classes for, you know work…(Teana)

Ariel reflected that an advisor from her high school provided information and moral support while she was in community college.

> Uh, my…actually my high school advisor. He actually still checks up on us till this day like when we were in school he made sure that I was actually you know getting my stuff done. Um, we actually have a, an advisory dinner coming up…In two weeks so he kind of like still checks in with us to make sure that we're on track and if we're not if we need something he still helps us like he'll reach out and like "Okay let me know what you need and I'll try to figure it out or find somebody who can help me with it to help you." So he's actually, he's very supportive. (Ariel)

The findings from this interview question revealed that these successful students had someone in their life to assist and encourage them while they were attending a CCC. They received academic support, information, and various services like tutoring, which were valuable in their successful completion of their self-identified academic goal.
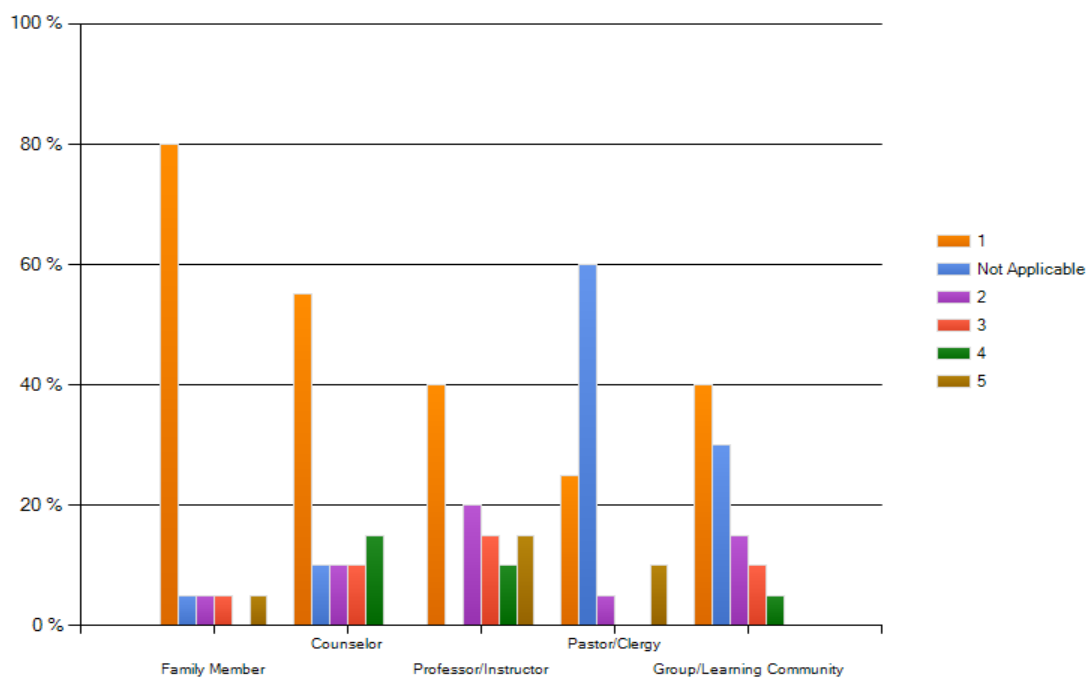

Figure 11. What/Whom Attribute to Academic Success
What or whom do you attribute to your academic success?

Financial Factors

Funding their college education is one factor that many students in this study

considered when selecting a California Community College. Participants stated that one

of the reasons for attending a CCC was the low cost of tuition.   However, financial

assistance is still needed for many to be able to afford a college education. The

participants shared their experience with financial aid, in this study 55% received at while

attending the CCC system and 45% did not receive aid (see figure 12). Byrena shared,

"Yes I received it. It helped me get things I needed for school and other necessities that I

needed outside of school." Joe explained, "Umm You know, I didn't worry much about

the fees because at City College they actually helped me with financial aid, I figure out,

or they, EOPS peer advisors, explained to me that I'd get the same at a 4-year university

as well. Aliyah expressed how financial aid was essential in her success.

> It's the reason why I was able to even be where I'm at. Without federal assistance
> um and, you know, the legislation that was set in the 70's that expanded the
> community college system and made it available and programs like "Grow Your
> Own", I literally would not be able to do school. (Aliyah)

Tracie exclaimed, "Yes, it was the biggest help. I couldn't have done it with out the aid."

Melissa shared how much receiving aid helped her too,

> When I…it at first I didn't receive financial aid. But uh once I was old enough to
> receive it and it wasn't on my parent's income. It helped a lot because I was
> able…I was always coming out of my pocket, and I…sometimes I wouldn't always
> have it because I wasn't working or whatever, but with the financial aid it was
> easier cause I had something to help pay for school. (Melissa)

Maurice and his mom reflected on the importance of financial aid for middle and low-

income families.

> Aw that was, that was that was the most important thing. Yep. I got the Pell Grant,
> uh and some other thing. Yeah, and so I didn't have to pay for school… like my
> mama…I was just talking about that with my mom today. She was like "Yeah you
> know not many kids can graduate with uh…(little or no debt)" I had, I took out a
> loan when I was at Savannah State so I had like twenty seven hundred dollars worth
> of debt total. But you know that's really…that's so small. Most kids are
> graduating with like fifty thousand dollars worth of debt and, and to be honest with

you like I…yeah that was really important for me. Like I didn't want to leave school with a house note so…and the thing is in my family…like my mom she doesn't have money like that so you know it's not like I could… I could…if I didn't have financial aid I probably couldn't have paid for it, for anything. (Maurice)

Mark excitedly stated his experience with financial aid.

Oh I received financial aid. ---Oh it helped. It helped. Obviously, I received the financial aid. I got a fee waiver. I was on work-study. So, yeah, financial aid was big because it helped you buy your…things you need. (Mark)

In this study 25% of the participants did not receive any financial aid. Two of the participants expressed how they did not believe they were eligible for federal aid. "No I didn't receive financial aid at the time. I am now, but at the time I was able to pay for my classes…when I was going to the community college," stated Teana. Lidia shared an interesting point, "Um at the community college I never applied for financial aid so I did not receive aid." Solomon shared he was ineligible for grant assistance due to his parents' income. Ariel shared, "I didn't have financial aid at the time." Valesca shared her experience in paying for community college, "I tried to apply for financial aid when I worked full time, and I was denied. I paid for it myself or my job paid for it."
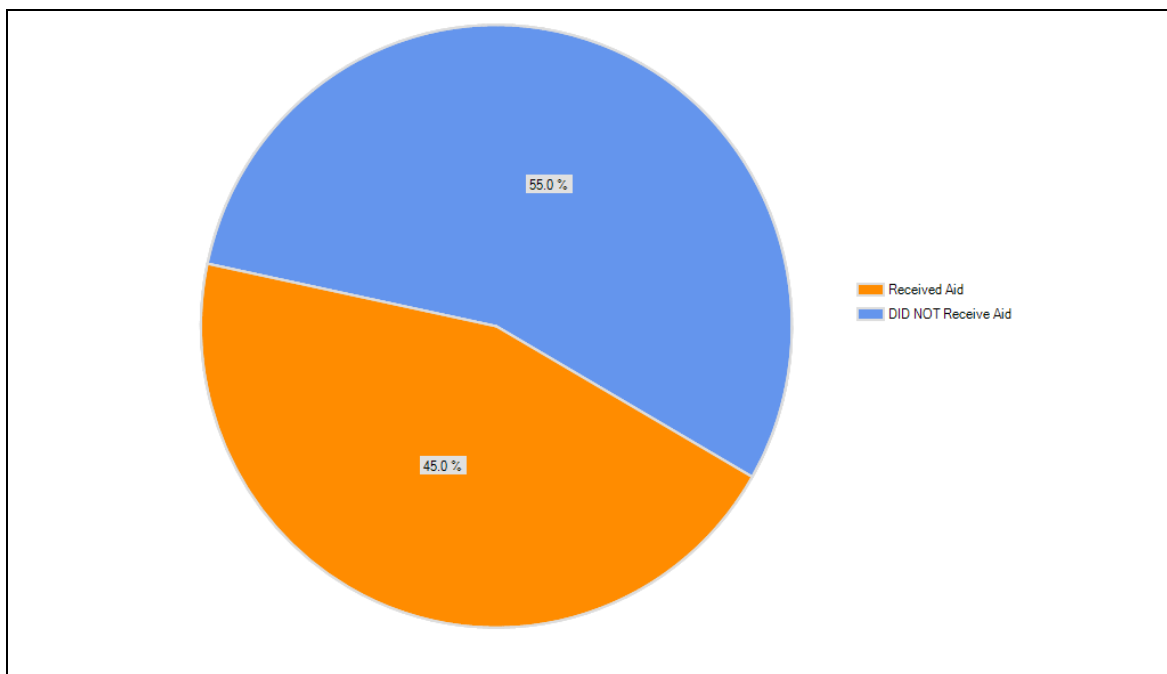
Figure 12. Receive Financial Aid: Received Aid 55%, Did Not Receive Aid 45%
What role did financial aid play in achieving your academic goals?

Although only 55% of the students received financial aid, astoundingly 90% of the

participants worked at least part-time during their time at the community college (see

figure 13). Some participants shared they worked on campus because they received

federal work-study funds and others secured on-campus jobs that were not funded

through the federal work-study program. The students shared their experience working

and going to college. Mark reflected, "I was on work study. You know every other

Tuesday, you got your check coming…you go…at that time you had to pick up your

check"(Mark). He shared he also worked part-time for Burns Security company. Kim

worked part-time on campus as well and seasonally in a local shopping mall.

Otis was fortunate to still be working at the same job all through his college

experience. He shared, "I did, yeah. I worked uh part-time at the same place, yeah. Like

I've been able to keep the same job for so long, you know. It's helped me. It's also

helped me to get through college. You know…tuition and such" (Otis). Valesca and

Teana are parents so it was imperative for them to work full-time as they pursued their

academic goals. "Yeah. Full time. And actually my employer at the time they helped

pay for my classes" shared Teana. Derick also has a family so he had to balance school

and work, "Oh yeah. I never stopped working" while I was "at City, full time" (Derick).

Chris reflected he worked part-time and full-time at various times during. "I was

anywhere from twenty eight to thirty nine hours. But I was so used to my job I mean you

know. So I didn't trip. I actually did some homework there" (Chris). The 20% of

participants who did not work while pursuing their academic goals were both full-time

students that attended right after high school. One participant shared this, "Cosmetology

was too stressful. Yeah I know it was eight to five so I couldn't…I mean I couldn't go to

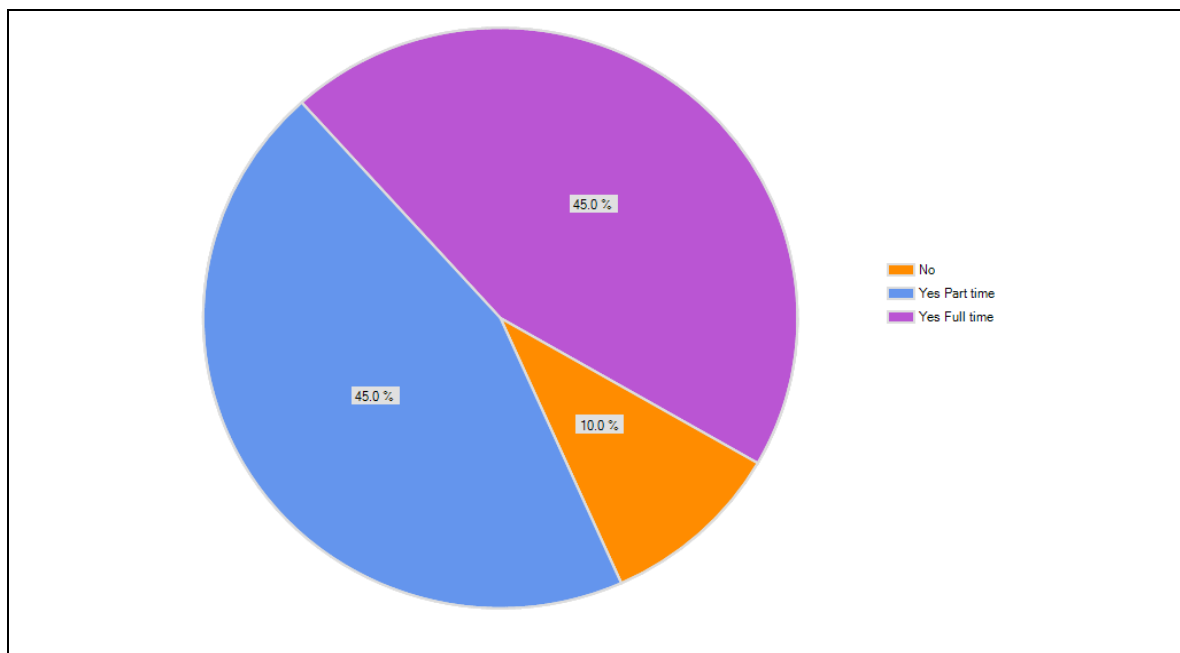work after I was just too exhausted" (Ariel).

Figure 13. Work While Pursuing Your Goals
Did you work while pursuing your goals? No 10%, Part Time 45%, Full Time 45%

The final interview question was *why do you believe you were successful in achieving your academic goals?* The question was designed to assess the students' overall perceptions of their completion of their self-identified academic goals in the California Community College system. Many participants believed they were successful in achieving their academic goals because they were lucky to find someone at the college who was supportive in their pursuits. They also spoke about having a support system outside of the college that encouraged and motivated them during challenging times. "I believe I was successful because I had a support system to help me get back up if I failed, not just, only get back up but tell me about why they think I failed" (Evangela). Mark shared this perspective on his academic success,

> I was successful in my academic pursuits because I had a support system in athletics that mapped out what I needed to know and showed me the help I needed at the time to graduate and transfer, more importantly they showed me the results if I did not complete the necessary coursework. Tutors, lab time and my work-study job were the foundations that help me achieve my goals. (Mark)

Byrena shared a similar experience.

> I believe I was successful in achieving my academic goals because I was determined and persistent from the start. I also was successful because I had support and encouragement from family, friends, old teachers, and academic counselors. (Byrena)

Solomon found support from his parents.

> I think I was successful because not only did I have the support of my parents to do great in school but also I did not want to quit from achieving my goal, even if that meant failing a few times in certain classes so, as long as I didn't give up. I know I could get my degree. I have a drive to my best in everything I do and will continue to have that because that's what it takes to achieve anything my heart desire. (Solomon)

Aliyah, like Solomon, talked about not giving up, even through the failures and mishaps. In her words "I was successful because regardless of how I messed up I always tried to

recover. I tried and tried again looking back at all the work I had done. I did not want it

to be in vein because I had too much to loose" (Aliyah). Michele reflected on having a

supportive circle to provide her with encouragement.

> I was successful because I hung in there - I didn't drop out - and I had a very
> supportive circle of friends and family to encourage me when I became
> discouraged. Without those shoulders to lean and cry on I don't think I would
> have finished my programs. (Michele)

Leon was fortunate to have parents who are college graduates and their support was

important to his success.

> I believe that the support from family and the encouragement from teachers and
> staff helped very much, when I needed it the most. It helped having someone
> believe in what I want to do, instead of just being another student in a class.
> (Leon)

> Some participants also shared their belief in a higher power was essential in

completing their goals.

> I think what made me successful is that I stay focused on my goals and I knew
> what I wanted. I knew God was going to bring me through and I knew that I had
> family behind me pushing me even when I wanted to give up. (Melissa)

Otis' parents are also college graduates and their knowledge of the educational system

and guidance was essential to his motivation to be successful in college. He also shared

about his families' faith and the essential role faith played in his staying motivated.

> Um, this…like I said like the support systems, yeah with family and friends and
> stuff. And this, this…they helped me stay motivated. Because in college is very
> you know it's very hard at times to be motivated…Um so definitely, definitely
> motivation…um I'd also say my belief in God as well you know have that faith
> that God will help you get through as well so…so I would say all of these aspects
> for sure. (Otis)

> Other students credited their success to their own motivation, determination, and

persistence to complete their self-identified academic goals. "I am really determined and

when I have my mind set to do something I will do it. This has helped me to be

successful in achieving my academic goals" (Joe). Maurice expressed this reason for his

success "because I told myself, because it was something I wanted to do for me. I am a

focused person, very focused person. And I'm really competitive. So that's the main

reason" (Maurice). Valesca explained, "Because I personally wanted it. I did research. I

found Web sites. I talked to other nursing students. I talked to students that were in the

same position I was. And that's how I learned" (Valesca). Kim reflected on her will and

desires to succeed.

> I was successful because I had a will, desire to do better than my parents. I didn't
> want to work hard, I wanted to work smart and support myself with a career not just
> a job. I had an obligation to myself to do better despite my life mishaps and
> obstacles. (Kim)

Tracie talked about how the odds were not in her favor being a single mother with a

child. Yet her internal motivation to complete her goal and spiritual belief is why she

perceived herself meeting her academic goals.

> I believe I was successful in my academic goals due to my determination,
> preservation and my support system. Determined because I, at that time, was a
> single parent and also, an African American woman (odds were definitely against
> me). I could not have done it without my strong spiritual connection and my
> family support system. (Tracie)

Teana contributed much of her success to the working adults program and her family.

> I believe I was successful because I had a very strong support team. My family
> and cohort in the PACE program helped push me and kept me motivated. I think
> that my children played a huge role in my success. The need to provide for my
> children and to be a positive motivating factor in their lives help push me and give
> me the drive to be successful in achieving my academic goals.

Derick creates much of his success to the mentors he acquired at the CCC. He shares

how he is still on his quest for success as a result of these relationships and the

information he gained.

> I believe I am successful in achieving my academic goals -I am still on my quest

to complete my goals is the reason I say I am successful- is because of my spiritual connection to God, my lovely family, who has seen me through this journey, and t he support/guidance from my mentors, who I have met during my journey at City College of S.F. Without the above mentioned, I do believe that none of this (my success thus far) would have been possible. (Derick)

Lastly, a few participants reflected that pressure and luck were driving forces to push them to completion. Akeem reflected on his parents demand to go to school and work; along with assistance from college faculty, the pressure to complete was a strong factor.

Um constant pressure from those around me…um…they stayed on my case about graduating and accomplishing at least a Step One. I just, I just figure it was that, and I got lucky sometimes and that's about it. (Akeem)

Lidia expressed how luck and fear kept her moving toward her academic goals.

Must be luck. It certainly wasn't well planned. Although there was a plan to go to a 4-year right after high school, it wasn't executed very well. I know that I am an intelligent person, had the right schooling that should have prepared me to finish my academic goals more quickly than I did, but at 18-22 I probably lacked either self confidence, or discipline, or something, that it takes to be a full-time college student with a declared major. And at some point, after semesters and years of taking classes, and repeating classes, and taking different classes, little by little I inched towards the finish line. And then of course, there is also peer pressure. It would have been too embarrassing to not finish after going to school for so… many years. Friends, family, coworkers, everybody knew I was in college. I transferred twice. To sum it up, I would say for me it was luck and fear of embarrassment. (Lidia)

The participants were internally motivated and spoke of wanting to achieve their academic goals. Many of the participants talked about wanting to change their circumstance to acquire better job opportunities for their future. Ultimately, the most common reason was having someone who supported the student throughout their academic career as well as having a support system of family, friends, and/or college faculty.

Summary

The results of the research study are presented in this chapter. Data from the participatory interviews were transcribed and along with supporting documents were analyzed into three themes, which emerged. Twenty current and former community college students who completed a self-identified goal participated in the study. An overview of each participant and a quote, which summed their viewpoint, was presented in the Chapter VI profile section. Through the participants' voices the findings to the research questions of African American students' sense of belonging and the key factors that supported success was presented.

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of African American students' sense of belonging at the community college level and to identify the factors that influence completion of an academic goal. There were a number of reasons these successful African American students attended a California Community College, however, ineligibility for a 4-year college or university and the cost of tuition were the main reasons these participants attended a CCC. In this study, 75% of participants participated in special programs, learning communities, groups and organizations while they attended a California Community College.

Participants revealed they became involved in groups or programs mainly because of 3 specific factors: 1) support systems, 2) academic assistance, and 3) information and resources to navigate the college. Those factors all lead to a student feeling welcome as well as experiencing a sense of belonging. According to this sample sixty-five percent (65%) believed involvement in community college retention programs should be ethnic-based as opposed to academic-based retention programs. Students reported ethnic-based

programs welcome their identity and provided a comforting familiar environment. Participants shared involvement in these programs allowed them to connect with others who have a similar or the same background, specifically, students who are first generation and underrepresented in the community college system.

Thirty percent (30%) of this sample completed community college in three years. This portion of the sample achieved a greater completion rate than California state averages. The sample in this study's completion rate over four years is 70%. If we consider the disproportionate success rate for African Americans in the CCC system compared to the majority of students this completion rate is phenomenal. The extraordinary success of the students participating in this study proves how valuable their insight on student success and belonging can be to other student groups. Most participants in the study expressed their plan to complete their academic goal in two years. However, surprised by the reality of attending longer, 70% of the population attended past the intended two years in order to complete their self-identified goals. The individuals in this study discussed changing majors and continuing beyond their original self-identified goal and with gained knowledge and academic success they made the decision to persist.

Eighty-five percent (85%) of the participants reported they were given assistance and support when needed from faculty at their institution, which likely explains why 75% of respondents reported they were able to complete their goals. The participants found assistance from student's on-campus, peers who worked for the college, and faculty and staff. They expressed the guidance and information was invaluable in completing their goal.

The participants stated they perceived a welcoming environment in which they could easily communicate with peers and faculty. Sixty-five percent (65%) of students that took part in this study reported that they believed African American students feel a sense of belonging on California Community College campuses. The participants also shared that African Americas students are academically challenged and that the CCC system needs to make a conscious effort to provide programs to assist the thousands of underprepared students who attend annually, even during these challenging economic times. Another perspective of the participants regarding African American students feeling a sense of belonging today was the decision for many African American students to attend college in light of the educational disparity in higher education. This perspective may explain the 35% of participants who did not believe African American students today feel a sense of belonging on community college campuses. Ironically, 75% of the participants in the study personally felt welcomed at their community college, indicating that at least 10% of the participants who reported they did not believe African American students feel a sense of belonging actually felt welcomed themselves. It can be assumed that previous perceptions of African American students regarding sense of belonging on campus have been mischaracterized.

The participants in the study were successful in completing their self-identified goal at a CCC. Eighty percent (80%) of the participants attributed their success to a family member, more than 50% attributed success to a counselor, and 40% of the participants to a professor or a learning community that supported their academic pursuits. These findings represent the multiple ways an African American student at the community college level receives support and experiences a sense of belonging in order

to successfully complete their academic goals. The results from the study will be

discussed further in the Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to describe the perceptions of African American students' sense of belonging at the community college level and (b) to identify the factors which influence completion of an academic goal. The discussion for the research findings have been grouped into three categories (1) Involvement, (2) Academic and Financial, and (3) Sense of Belonging.

Involvement

As mentioned in chapter two, Astin's (1975) theory of student involvement postulates that if students are not involved in their campus life they will have a higher risk of dropping out of school. Astin's theory states that students are most likely to retain and persist in college if they are active on campus. Astin defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin A. W., 1999, p. 518). The college environment and "whether a student departs from an institution is largely a result of the extent to which the student becomes academically and socially connected with the institution" (Pan, Guo, Alikonis, & Bai, 2008, p. 90). The key elements necessary for students' inclusiveness consist of advising, mentoring (Moore & Toliver, 2010), financial aid, (Guiffrida, 2005; Flowers, 2006; Pan & et al., 2008) and adjustment both academic and social (Fischer, 2007; Hausmann, Ward Schofield, & Woods, 2007).

In this study, 75% of participants participated in special programs, learning communities, groups and organizations while they attended a California Community College. These organizations range from student government, sports programs, church

programs, campus clubs and other activities. The research found that 75% of successful

African American students examined in this study participated in organizations, which

supports Astin's theory that involvement promotes success. The participants in this study

that reported involvement included a variety of on and off-campus activities:

> *Mark stated, "You have people---who are on the team. You have people who have one common goal, which is to win. And --- you had a coach, an assistant coach, and the trainer and the counselor and you had all this support and all these different people. So at any given time during the day you will see them, you could go to them, you could talk to them. And because you're dealing with a small population of maybe 10 to 15 athletes and you've got 15, it's like you've got 15 kids in a class and you've got 1, 2, 3,4...and you've got 4 teachers in the class. So with that kind of odds, you're always going to get the attention that you need."*

Although 25% of the participants did not engage in the college environment outside of

the academic classroom they did still achieve their educational goals. Those that did not

participate talked about the need to work full or part-time, or were in intensive academic

programs, which did not afford them the time to participate outside of the academic

classroom. However, the findings from the interviews clearly show that higher success

rates of participants was in part due to their involvement in social and academic activities

on campus.

With regard to retention programs, 65% of participants reported retention

programs should be based on ethnic backgrounds of the students. One of the main

reasons is because students are able to interact with faculty and peers of a similar

background. One participant spoke highly of his involvement in an on-campus learning

community:

> *Derrick stated he was involved in a learning community called, The Triple AP program, as well as, student government my last year… I was elected student trustee. I did work with Speaker Pelosi. I was on one of her youth advisory boards, doing a lot community work for her, community work for the Boys and*

> *Girls Club as well umm some of…on a bunch of different counsels and*
> *committees.*

This finding may suggest the need for retention programs to focus on ethnic backgrounds

of students as opposed to academic department based programs. These findings may not

be strong enough to confidently conclude, however, schools and/or researchers should

examine this further.

<div align="center">Academic and Financial</div>

Astin's (1975) earlier works found that students have increased retention rates if

they live on campus, work on campus, or join extracurricular activities. Tinto proposed

that students dropout of college because of insufficient integration into the social system

of the college. Tinto's model explains the process between the individual and the

institution, which leads to different forms of dropout. Participants in this research study

attended community colleges that do not provide on-campus housing, which could

possibly explain one of the reasons California Community Colleges have a higher

dropout rate than community colleges outside the state of California. More importantly,

California Community College students take an average of 6 years of study (Roach,

2009, p. 14) before transferring or degree completion. In this study, 60% of participants

completed in a three year time frame which is higher than the current average for this

population. One participant shared her frustration when she learned completing her self-

identified goal would take longer than two years:

> *The timing I felt like not enough time, I got to get out of school so I'm only going*
> *to do the two-year…I thought it was going to be two years. And I thought I was*
> *going to be okay done. Like I can do the first year of the prereqs of whatever*
> *they…and you know the second year I'm doing the nursing program. Because it*
> *was a two year college! So why am I going to be here for four years. So that was*
> *you know and it just didn't sound right to me. But if I'm going to be in school*
> *four years, I'm going to get my Bachelors degree. (Tracie)*

According to Hausmann, Ward, Schofield, & Woods, (2007) "social and academic integration, along with initial goal and institutional commitment levels, determine subsequent levels of goal and institutional commitment, which ultimately determine students' likelihood of departing from the institution before completing their degree" (p. 805). One agreed upon lesson from research states "all students need to be academically prepared" (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, p. 451). In order to "support students academic help programs include tutoring services to empower students to be independent learners and improve grades" (Pan, Guo, Alikonis, & Bai, 2008, p. 92). Research findings clearly show that participants in this study received institutional commitment and academic support in pursuit of their educational goals. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents' prioritized GPA attainment and transfer to a 4-year college as their most relevant academic goals. In response to the question, *When you were having challenges academic or personal was there someone at the college or a program that you used to assist you?* Eighty-five percent (85%) of the participants reported they were given assistance and support when needed from the institution, which likely explains why 75% of respondents reported they were able to complete their goals.

As students matriculate into higher education, academic support is fundamental. California Community Colleges can use a more effective approach to provide academic support for African American students. Utilizing learning styles and offering course-specific tutoring as an integral component of classes would be a more direct and effective approach. Tutoring options, such as one-on-one or small group, which offer an academic and ethnic focus, will give African American students the foundation to receive support academically. This support may help to improve the approximately 50% retention rate

for African Americans in California which has existed for over 10 years (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2010). African Americans and "nonwhite students at community colleges are more likely to stay in classes and to earn higher grades if they have instructors of their race or ethnicity" (Jaschik, 2011, p. 1), according to a study released by the National Bureau for Economic Research, titled *A Community College Instructor Like Me: Race and Ethnicity Interactions in the Classroom*. Robert Fairlie of the University of California at Santa Cruz, Florian Hoffmann of the University of British Columbia and Philip Oreopoulos of the University of Toronto conducted the study. Their analysis is based on a large data set (more than 30,000 students in more than 21,000 course sections) provided by De Anza College, a community college in Northern California" (Jaschik, 2011, p. 1). Jaschik's article continues the "positive impact of having a same-race instructor appears to be the greatest on black students, and on younger students. This study arrives at a time of intense interest from educators and politicians in finding ways to increase completion rates and the academic performance of community college students" and supports the findings of this study. This study found 65% of participants felt support programs should be ethnically based as opposed to academic department based programs to assist in African American students academic completion and persistence of self-identified goals.

As presented in the literature review according to the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, "well-funded universities such as Princeton, which has the nation's largest endowment per student and probably the nation's most generous financial aid program for low-income students, will undoubtedly claim an advantage in black student retention and, subsequently, in producing high graduation rates" (JBHE, 2005-2006, pp. 90-91). In

many situations financial aid is the number one reason students are not retained. College

students "often need financial aid to pursue their educational goals" (Tierney, 1999).

According to Jones (2001) "financial aid is often the primary consideration in making the

decision to continue or leave" (p. 9). In this study, 60% of the participants attended a

community college due to the low cost of tuition and 55% received financial aid.

Although a large number (45%) did not receive financial aid, 45% of the participants

worked full-time while attending college. The participants explain the importance of

financial aid best, "Yes, it was the biggest help. I couldn't have done it with out the aid.

(Tracie)" and Byrena shared that financial aid and a work study job on campus "helped

me get things I needed for school and other necessities that I needed outside of school."

<div align="center">Sense of Belonging</div>

Astin (1975) also discovered students have an easier time being involved if the

environment is perceived as comfortable and familiar. In agreement with Tinto students

must become a part of the college fabric and integrate (1993) into the academic and

social culture of the college. Their background and characteristics must be confirmed

and accepted into the college culture and when their attitudes (Bean, 1982) do not blend

new ideologies must emerge. Sixty-five percent (65%) of students that took part in this

study reported that they feel African American students feel a sense of belonging on

California Community College campuses. College officials need to examine statistics to

further explain the 35% of the African American students who did not feel a sense of

belonging on the college campus. Further investigation and review of the best practices

is needed on ways to increase the sense of belonging statistic of 65% to determine an

approach for improving the welcoming environment both academically and socially for

African American students. In this study, 75% of participants felt welcomed:

> *I feel like it gave me a sense of belonging. It gave me an extended academic family*
> *where it's important because if you're coming from a place where maybe you're*
> *going you're… I've gotten mix reactions from my four sisters, mixed levels of*
> *education. Everybody doesn't always support you when you go to school, and then a*
> *lot time you make people feel insecure once you actually start to get higher education*
> *than maybe they did. (Aliyah)*

Further investigation is needed to understand why 25% of the participants in this study

did not feel welcomed at their community college.

Bean and Eaton's (2000) psychological model of college student retention

"determined when students are academically and socially integrated; they form positive

attitudes about the institution which influences their intent to persist, and ultimately their

actual persistence." (Rodgers & Summers, 2008, p. 173). Although 65% of participants

reported they felt retention programs should be ethincally-based, 35% believed the

programs should be academically-based in structure. One reason for this result favoring

ethnic-based programs over academic department programs might be due to students'

reluctantcy to pick a major and commit to an academic department. Retention programs

are created to support students persistence in college to completion and in this study 65%

of the particiapnts felt retention programs foster a sense of belonging and therefore

should have an ethnic-based foundation. As one participant reported:

> *I think the reason it should not be based on academic departments is that some*
> *students still don't know what department they want to focus on, what their course*
> *of study is going to be…and if its based on ethnic background I always think there*
> *is going to be a certain comfort level of being around people that are more*
> *similar to you. (Lidia)*

Mentoring offers the student a leader to act as a sounding board and support

system as the student makes major life decisions, "most students want professor mentors

who cared about their futures and who were interested in their education" (Moore & Toliver, 2010, p. 935). One participant shared how support from mentors, tutors, and other faculty aided in his decision to complete his original self-identified goal and go beyond what he envisioned for his career and life:

> *If I wouldn't have met my mentors, I would have just did a couple of years and then that would have just been that, and I still would have been kind of lost like okay do I go back to school, do I do a graduate degree? But since I had the mentors to help me and kind of guide me then I was able to see and I could say okay I can go the law route, I can go the business route and I could do things like that. And they really broaden my horizons as well. (Derick)*

Booker's (2007) qualitative study examined the types of interactions that take place within the confines of the academic classroom to analyze African Americans perception of belonging and connection to the academic setting. For the past 10 years in the California Community College system for every 100 African American students who enroll in classes only 50 successfully complete the courses (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2010). Of the total sample population, 75% of the participants completed their original goals and 25% of their goals changed, some even found new goals like transferring, completing a 4-year degree, or new majors and careers. Derick excitedly shared,

> *I exceeded my original goals by far. See my original plan for going to school was it's the first semester so let's just give it a try. Then I discovered a position at Juvenile Hall and I saw that you know all you need is an AA degree and at least a couple of years of experience working with youth so I said, "Man that's what I can do. I can do that then." So here I was you know my goal I knocked it out in two years and I had the position that I wanted. And I was still hungry, and I said you know what I'm going to keep going. (Derick)*

Participants spoke of various reasons for achieving their goals and beyond. Maurice explained why he believed he completed his goal, "I told myself, and because it was something I wanted to do for me" (Maurice). Eighty percent (80%) of the participants

attributed their success to a family member and more than 50% attributed success to a

counselor and 40% of the participants to a professor or a learning community, which

supported their academic pursuits.

> *I mean cause I wouldn't have got this far without mentors, without counselors, without instructors that really just believed in me. I wouldn't, I wouldn't have done it. (Derick)*

> *I believe I was successful in my academic goals due to my determination, preservation and my support system. Determined because I, at that time, was a single parent and also, an African American woman (odds were definitely against me). I could not have done it without my strong spiritual connection and my family support system. (Tracie)*

Participants believed they were successful in achieving their academic goals

because of personal motivation, support from family, and college faculty. They found a

sense of belonging and support system in the California Community College system:

> *I was successful in my academic pursuits because I had a support system in athletics that mapped out what I needed to know and showed me the help I needed at the time to graduate and transfer, more importantly they showed me the results if I did not complete the necessary coursework. Tutors, lab time and my work-study job were the foundations that help me achieve my goals. (Mark)*

Perceiving a supportive environment from faculty, those who were invested in the

success of the student participants, aided in the completion of the self-identified goals.

As the researchers stated, "support networks and feeling a sense of belonging may also be

crucial in students continuing their studies" (Glogowska, Young, & Lockyer, 2007, p.

73).

Lastly, students' perception of support and sense of belonging is a major key

element in persisting to completion of self-identified goals. African American students

need to receive support from faculty and staff through mentoring and extrinsic

motivation. A supportive academic environment with wrap-around support services such

as mentoring, ethnic-based retention programs, counseling services, and knowledgeable

advisors of the college world is a necessity for African American students. As one

student pointed out:

> *I believe I was successful because I had a very strong support team. My family and cohort in the PACE program helped push me and kept me motivated. I think that my children played a huge role in my success. The need to provide for my children and to be a positive motivating factor in their lives help push me and give me the drive to be successful in achieving my academic goals. (Teana)*

Personal and academic wrap around services provide counseling and advisement

to assist African American students in making informed life decisions regarding their

college education. Further, these services foster an inclusive and welcoming

environment, which in turn affords students with not only an academic connection, but

also a personal and social investment into the college world.   According to one

participant,

> *I think from history, from a historical perspective uh the…the educational system…it seems as though they're constantly trying to make up for the beginning of not wanting minority students in the system. They're constantly trying to come up with best practices or retention programs or new standards to show oh we're really trying, really trying, really trying but they're really not. (Mark)*

African Americans have historically been underrepresented in higher education, yet,

community college offers an opportunity to educate and train millions of African

American students to increase an educated society for all Americans.

Conclusions

This research study explored the perception of 20 current and former African

American community college students. California Community Colleges offer a lower

cost educational opportunity to students. With a large percentage of African Americans

being economically disadvantaged, CCCs provide a bridge to higher education and

career/vocational training to increase African Americans success in the global work force. This study linked involvement, academic and financial assistance, and sense of belonging in relation to African American California Community College students' completion and success rates. Based on the research presented in this study, existing efforts in the CCCs can be successful in retaining students, but at the same time unsuccessful in ensuring students achieve goals relating to academic success. The historical impact of African Americans' struggle to equal rights and access to education in America still has a direct effect on the success of African American students in CCC system. The enactment of laws mandating equal education for all still has made little progress in the social scares of slavery or leveled the educational playing field for African Americans. The 54% success rate for African American students at California Community Colleges has been consistent for the past ten years and the fact that about 1 out of every 2 African American students are successful (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2010) in completing courses highlights the need for improvement in the education process. Findings from this research indicate that higher success rates experienced by African Americans in this study was in part due to their involvement in social and academic activities on campus. This experience is supported theoretically by Astin's work, which shows students are most likely to retain and persist in college if they are active on campus and are supported by faculty, staff and peers.

The literature review outlined the importance of social and academic involvement for students. Student's connections to on-campus groups directly relate to a student's decision to dropout or persist. The findings in this study suggest African American community college students require academic support in pursuit of their educational

goals. One effective approach is to utilize learning styles of African Americans to provide institutional assistance. For example, participants expressed how the instructors who they perceived cared about them and had high expectations for their academic success was important in their academic involvement. Other participants articulated classroom environments were they could ask questions and used kinesthetic learning and or multiple learning styles increased their focus and connection to the classroom subject and the college environment. Overall, the participants found college environments, which showed interest in educational achievement was most beneficial to academic success.

Most of the participants in the study were involved in clubs, programs and organizations on campus and this involvement aided in their development of feeling welcomed and creating a sense of belonging to the CCC system. This study maintained African American students believe success in achieving academic goals is due to their personal motivation as well as support from family and college faculty which aided in fostering a sense of belonging. The research findings from this study clearly support that fostering a sense of belonging and providing faculty support in key areas. Key areas include involvement, financial and academic assistance, which are strongly recommended to support the successful completion of African American students in the California Community College system. This study introduced the Wise IAS model, which is one researcher's pathway approach towards helping close the achievement gap for African Americans. The W-IAS is a model that consists of involvement, academic/financial assistance and sense of belonging. These three elements combined in all areas of the enrollment process from pre-enrollment, through orientation, to

matriculation and completion leads students to success. As a whole or using key parts, the Wise model should be considered when institutions of higher education desire to improve retention and success rates particularly as they pertain to African American student achievement.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

There are several implications that arise from the research findings and conclusions of this study. First, CCC outreach programs need to have a larger responsibility in the success and retention efforts for African American students. Retention and success are more effective when students are engaged before they arrive on a college campus. In order to increase the success and completion rates for African American students, California Community College employees will have to play a larger role in mentoring, development of life skills, and coaching in order to prepare prospective CCC students for college. Second, on-going programs on CCC campuses must capture student interest early. Use of technology and social media such as Facebook and Twitter can be used to connect with CCC students to provide information and invaluable resources regarding the value of involvement in programs to increase academic success and completion. Media tools can be utilized to connect students virtually and allow involvement beyond the physical campus environment.

Lastly, in this study there is a clear implication that if CCCs resist early engagement and student involvement in the campus environment African American students completion rates may very well decrease further because of a lack of a perceived sense of belonging. Completion rates among African American students, which have remained at a dismal 50% for over ten years, will not begin to improve until community

colleges implement strategies proven to assist African American students. This 10-year trend of only 50% percent of African American CCC students completing courses must be changed. The failure to improve completion rates for African American students in the CCC system will have a direct impact on a diverse and educated workforce, which includes African Americans.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Practice</div>

In order to effectively join President Barak Obama's Community College Initiative to strengthen our nation's community colleges, specifically in California, the areas of focus must be student involvement, academic and financial assistance, and the way we support students with a positive perception and sense of belonging. The findings of this study show these elements are particularly important when working with African American students. The following section will present a theory for students as well as recommendations specifically related to supporting African American success.

Astin's (1975) theory states students are most likely to retain and persist in college if they are active on campus. Astin defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin A. W., 1999, p. 518). According to Fischer (2007) students who become more involved in various aspects of campus life not only are more likely to stay in college but also may perform better academically (p. 130). In order to better design, develop, and deliver support services that will increase academic success for African American students this study suggests community colleges should focus on involvement plus academic and financial support to foster a sense of belonging, or the Wise IAS Model (W-IAS).

Fischer (2007) identifies "three factors which may affect adjustment and subsequent success in college: minority status, socioeconomic disadvantage and being a first generation college student" (p. 126). The California Community College system is essential in granting students an opportunity to complete a post secondary degree and/or transfer to a 4-year institution to obtain a bachelor's degree. The W-IAS Model combines the importance of on-campus involvement, plus academic and financial support programs to equal a sense of belonging for African American students, which will ultimately increase retention and success rates.

The W-IAS Model is designed to provide African American students with support systems beginning in their sophomore and junior years of high school to develop and support the matriculation process into a community college. This model is designed to connect CCC faculty with African American students in local unified high school districts through a faculty-student mentor program in which clubs and organizations are presented to peak an interest of on-campus involvement for the students prior to enrollment. The involvement phase allows students to learn the advantages of participating in on-campus activities and provide opportunities to interact with faculty and communicate with community college students.   In the academic and financial phase the model encourages workshops on how to choose a major prior to college as well as financial aid preparation. This phase of the Model also has a focus on employment opportunities on-campus and in the community. Further, the academic/financial phase will assist students in setting goals related to academic success, selection of a major, and career opportunities. This phase is linked together to offer realistic information for students as they develop their future plan and prepare for college life.

Lastly, the W-IAS model consists of involvement + academic/financial support, which will equate to a positive affect on sense of belonging for African American community college students. When interactions between African American students and faculty take place the students feel heard, accepted, and valued as members of the classroom community (Booker, 2007). Astin's (1975) earlier works found that students have increased retention rates if they live on campus, work on campus, or join extracurricular activities. Astin's theory also discovered students have an easier time being involved if the environment is perceived as comfortable and familiar. Therefore, the W-IAS Model offers a complete program of constant communication regarding involvement in on-campus activities, academic/financial support programs that ensures African American student success at the community college.

The following sections are specific area recommendations from the W-IAS Model for community colleges. The W-IAS recommendation areas are involvement, financial, academic, and sense of belonging:

<center>Involvement Recommendations</center>

1. Involve students in campus activities by promoting clubs and organizations to African American high school juniors and seniors. The results of this study show that three out of four African American students participated in programs, groups or organizations.

2. When students apply, and prior to enrollment, prospective African American students should receive information about the benefits of campus programs and how to get involved. This will provided information to the 25% of students that were not involved on campus and could possible increase the types of

involvement because in this study only 10% participated in student government, 20% in sports programs, and 40% in on campus clubs.

3. CCCs should use social network media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube to promote "Community College Days" were students could receive in-person and or virtual tours and meet current African American students and/or faculty to learn about the benefits of participating in campus activities such as clubs, sports activities, and student government. In this study, one out of two participants reported attributing their success to a CCC faculty member. Through connecting the students to faculty early in the process, CCCs may increase student involvement.

Financial Recommendations

1. When students apply to a CCC they should receive electronic information regarding various types of financial aid and receive dates to attend mini workshops with how to apply for aid. In this study, 55% of participants received some form of financial aid and 45% did not. Thus African American students may benefit from learning about how and when to apply for financial aid options once they apply to a CCC.

2. During enrollment or orientation have faculty and staff on hand as resources to provide information regarding the various types of financial aid to assist students in applying for various types of scholarships and grants. In this study, 90% of the successful African American students worked while pursuing their academic goals. By providing information on various types of financial aid such as grants and scholarships this can support students in paying for their education.

Academic Recommendations

1. African American students in the California Community College system complete courses at approximately a 50% rate. Therefore, providing students with tutoring for individual classes in an inclusive and supportive manner is essential. Mandatory tutoring should be built into the classroom model to allow professors and students to devise a plan for academic success. In this study, 45% of students attended a CCC to increase their grade point average in order to transfer to a 4-year university. Yet, 85% reported that they received assistance when they were having academic challenges. This result supports the recommendation to provide academic assistance.

2. Academic programs such as Biotechnology, Engineering and Math should consider experimenting with ethnically based programs targeting African Americans to increase retention. In this study, 65% of the participants recommended retention programs should be based on ethnicity. A student stated, "The ethnic programs that are there you definitely feel a sense belonging."

Sense of Belonging Recommendations

1. There is a surge for many CCC to have Grow-Your-Own (GYO) programs for students to return after degree completion for employment. As a component of such programs the students should act as mentors for current community college students prior to the GYO participants receiving employment.

2. During new student orientations African American students should be introduced to faculty and students from various departments as well as be provided with information about various services and communicate with faculty and current

students, preferably of the same ethnicity or similar academic interest in order to foster a sense of belonging at the time of enrollment.

3. Community colleges should start a faculty-student mentor program as a part of the colleges' counseling/faculty work load to support students as they make decisions in selecting a major and career choices while in high school and during their time at the community college.

Recommendations for Future Research

As in all scholarly research, questions are answered, yet many more questions and topics emerge. The following suggestions for future research studies are based on areas that emerged from the findings and are suggested in order to add to the robust research on retention for African American college students:

1. African American students shared they perceived support programs would benefit if they were based on the students ethnic background opposed to an academic department. However, a study comparing students in academic programs to ethnic-based programs in terms of success. Regarding completing both a bachelor's degree or associate's degree would be a fruitful extension of the current findings. This study analyzed students' perceptions whereas future studies could compare and contrast academic-based retention programs versus ethnic-based retention programs. Specifically, a study could examine the level of student success at the CCC level and their associations to bachelor degree completion.

2. Examining the perception of a sense of belonging for African American students who transfer successfully after they matriculate with an associate's degree level

and complete the bachelor's degree. The perceptions of transfer students' would add great insight into the overall success of African Americans students' retention in higher education. As an example, how students find a support network at the 4-year institution.

3. Compare African American students who receive merit-based and need-based scholarships to determine which group is more successful in completing academic goals, i.e. vocational certificates, associate's degree and/or bachelor's degree.

4. This study examined African Americans' perception of their sense of belonging in the community college setting. Similar studies should be conducted with other ethnicities with similar attrition rates such as Latino or Pacific Islander populations.

5. Lastly, a research study that compares the success of African Americans who attend community college which offer on-campus housing versus those which do not offer on-campus housing and whether living on-campus fosters a sense of belonging would be a great addition to the conversation on community college retention.

<div align="center">Concluding Thoughts</div>

One of the objectives in taking on this study was to capture the voices of successful African American students, more specifically community college students. The current research and data on African American success in education mirrors the historical educational state from America's pre or post Emancipation era with very little advancement. According to Carter G. Woodson "blacks have no control over their education and have little voice in their other affairs pertaining thereto" and "blacks are

always such a small minority that they do not figure in the final working out of the educational program" (Woodson, 1990, p. 22).

President Barak Obama announced a historic initiative to strengthen our nation's community colleges, and called for five million additional graduates by 2020 (Brandon, 2009). For President Obama's historic initiative to become a reality California Community Colleges must do their part, and one component is to utilize the best practices to increase successful completion for the majority of historically underserved populations. Currently in the state of California approximately one out of two African American students successfully completes a course, and this trend has lasted for more than a decade (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2010). Another objective of this study was to design, develop and deliver information that is pertinent to policy and practice with a focus on African American students. President Obama's historic initiative should be applauded however specific attention should focus on the success and completion of African American community college students.

The last objective was to investigate the key elements of a students' sense of belonging in the California Community College system. When academic and financial support is combined with a students' involvement on the college campus a sense of belonging to the institution emerges. This sense of belonging for African Americans provides the foundation to persist in their academic efforts and offers a structure to successfully complete community college.

Finally, retention has and will continue to play a major role regarding the success of African American students; however, it has been a trend for sometime in higher education to equate retention with success. Although retention and success are

intertwined and rely on each other they should be investigated separately. Success should be based on academic achievement. Many California Community Colleges experience success as it pertains to retention, in that the institution manages to convince the student to stay in a class although the student will not ultimately successfully pass the class. This practice and others must change and institutions must redefine what it means to be successful in a California Community College. Only when these practices begin to change will success and completion among African American students finally begin to increase.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did you attend a California Community College? For how long?

2. For the past 10 years in the CCC system for every 100 African American students who enroll in classes only 50 successfully complete the courses. Did you feel welcomed when you went to the community college?

3. Should retention programs focus on ethnic background or individual academic departments? (i.e. Math, Business)

4. Please prioritize your academic goals when you began with one being most relevant; GPA obtainment, certificate, Associates degree and/or transfer to 4 year?

5. Did you complete your original goal or did it change? Why?

6. Did you participate in any special programs, Learning Communities, groups or organizations while at the California community college system?

   a. What type of programs or activities did you participate?

   b. What services did they provide? How did the programs services help you?

7. What or whom do you attribute to your academic success?
   Why do you believe you were successful in achieving your academic goals?

8. What role did financial aid play in achieving your academic goals? Did you work while pursuing your goals?

9. When you were having challenges (academic/personal) was there someone at the college or a program that you used to assist you?

10. In what you know about the California Community college system today do you feel African American's students feel a sense of belonging?

11. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your success in navigating the California Community College system?

APPENDIX B

Demographic Questionnaire

Name: _____ Pseudonym: _____

Ethnicity (how you identify yourself)	
Current Age	
Gender	
Current Occupation	
Highest degree/level completed in college	
Major in community college	
Cumulative GPA upon completion of your goal	
Age when completed academic goal	
Highest education level of your mother (female legal guardian)	
Highest education level of your father (male legal guardian)	

Please list any additional information you would like to share about yourself or your experiences in the California community college system.

_____
_____
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APPENDIX C

COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY CONTACT LETTER

April 13, 2011

Dear Colleague:

I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco. I am conducting a study on the successful retention of African American students in the California Community College system (CCC). The study seeks to identify the factors and support systems, which aided in the completion of the students' self-identified academic goals. I am requesting your assistance in helping me generate a sample of twenty students that meet specific criteria for participation in this study.

If you would assist me by disseminating the attached letter (Appendix E) or flyer (Appendix F) to students whom you identify to fit the following criteria:

5. Must be African American and attended a California community college.
6. Must have been successful at the CCC level: i.e. Certificate, Associates degree or the minimum 60 units with grade point average progress to Transfer to a 4 year college or university
7. Must have completed between the ages of 18-30
8. Must have attended a community college in one of the following districts: San Francisco (SFFCD), San Mateo (SMCCD) or Peralta (PCCD).

If the identified student agrees to participate in the study the flyer instructs them on how to contact me via email at retentionstudy@aol.com or by phone at (415) 239-3617.

Thank you for your assistance!

Nicole Y. Wise
Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Participants Needed for Research Study

**African American Students who attended
California Community College**

I am looking for African American current or former students to participate in
a study about **African American retention** and success in community college.

The purpose of this study is to find out what support systems assisted
African Americans in **completing** their self identified academic goals in a California
community college.

**As a participant in this study you would be asked to participate in two interviews.
Your total time commitment will be about 2 hours or more.**

For more information about the study or to volunteer for this study,
Please contact: Nicole Wise at (415) 239-3617 or email retentionstudy@aol.com

---

This study has been reviewed by and received clearance from the IRBPHS-University of San Francisco

Source of picture:
*http://www.qacps.k12.md.us/ces/clipart/Carson%20Dellosa%20Clipart/Carson%20Dellosa%20Seasons,%20Holidays,
%20and%20Celebrations/Images/Color%20Images/Summer%20Clip%20Art/GRADUATE2.jpg*

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Nicole Y. Wise and I am a doctoral student in Leadership Studies Program at the University of San Francisco.

I am writing to request your participation in a study I am conducting for my dissertation on African American student's experiences in the California community college system. I am trying to understand the retention factors and support systems, which supported your successful completion. Please consider participating if you completed your academic goals in a community college from one of the three college districts, San Francisco (SFCCD), San Mateo (SMCCD) or Peralta (PCCD).

1. Must be African American and attended a California community college.
2. Must have been successful at the CCC level: i.e. Certificate, Associates degree, or the minimum 60 units with grade point average progress to Transfer to a 4 year college or university
3. Must have completed between the ages of 18-30
4. Must have attended a community college in one of the following districts: San Francisco (SFFCD), San Mateo (SMCCD) or Peralta (PCCD).

Your voluntary participation in this study will include two separate interviews and you will be asked to provide an unofficial copy of your transcript or proof of completion. The interviews will be schedule at a time and place that is convenient for your schedule. The initial interview will last about 60 minutes but no more than 90.

Participation is voluntary and at any point during the study or interviews you may decline to respond or withdraw your participation. Your decision to participate or not participate will have no adverse effect on your relationship your college campus or the California community college system. There will be no cost to you or payment for participating in the study.

If you have questions about the study or are interested in voluntarily participating in this research study, please contact me at retentionstudy@aol.com, or 415 239-3617.

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,

Nicole Y. Wise
Doctoral Candidate
University of San Francisco

APPENDIX F

Copy of IRB Email Approval to Conduct Research

IRB Application #11-038

May 5, 2011

Dear Ms. Wise:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #10-038). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS.
Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research

APPENDIX G

RIGHT TO CONFIDENTIALITY/PSEUDONYM

As a participant in the research study please indicate your preference for confidentiality.

_____ Please use my legal name in all documentation required to complete the study.

OR

_____ Please use a pseudonym in all documentation required to complete the study.

 Please use _____ as my pseudonym - OR-

____Please select a pseudonym for me.

Please read, sign and date:
 I understand that I can speak candidly for this study and confidentiality of my identity will be held however I may request to use my legal name or a pseudonym by checking my choice above.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

APPENDIX H

RELEASE FORM FOR
TAPES AND TRANSCRIPTS

I agree to have my interviews with Nicole Y. Wise audio taped and transcribed into written form. I realize that it is the responsibility of both Nicole Wise and me to ensure the accuracy of these transcriptions.

I am aware that the original audiotapes and transcripts will be kept safe and secure in the residence of Ms. Wise in San Francisco for a period of one year, after which they will be destroyed. I do not require a copy of the tapes or transcripts.

Signature_____ Date _____
                Research Participant

Signature _____ Date _____
                Researcher/Interviewer

APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Perceptions of Successful African American Students
on Community College Retention

Nicole Y. Wise
University of San Francisco

Purpose and Background

Nicole Y. Wise, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is conducting a study on the retention of current or former African American students who were successful while attending a California Community College (CCC) and completed their self-identified academic goals. This study is being conducted as the final completion of the doctoral dissertation at USF.

I am being asked to participate because I am an African American current or former student who completed my self-identified academic goals between the ages of 18-30 at a California Community College in SFCCD, SMCCD or PCCD.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will occur:

1. I will complete a short questionnaire with basic information about myself and my academic accomplishments.
2. I will participate in an interview with the researcher, during which time I will be asked about my experiences while at a California community college which support my successful completion of my goals.
3. I will participate in a follow-up interview/meeting to collaborate with the researcher and review the transcript, and to elaborate on the themes that emerged from the first interview.
4. I will complete the questionnaire and participate in the interview at a place of my own convenience.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. There is a risk of discomfort or anxiety due to the questions jarring memories of your experiences.
2. I am free to decline to answer any questions that I do not wish to answer or that make me feel uncomfortable.
3. There is a risk of loss of privacy that may be reduced through confidentiality. Confidentiality will be maintained as I participate in the

study. Records will be kept confidential and no individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study without my written consent. The information will be kept in locked files at all times at the researcher's place of residence. Only the researcher (Nicole Wise) will have access to the tapes and transcripts.

4.   You may choose a pseudonym that will be used in the transcript and in the text of the research to protect your privacy and identity.

Direct Benefits

There will be no direct benefit for my participation in this study.

Cost/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

I will not be paid for my participation in this study.

Questions

I have spoken to Nicole Wise about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may contact her at (415) 239-3617 or by email at retentionstudy@aol.com.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should talk to the researcher. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact her dissertation chair, Dr. Patricia Mitchell (415) 422-2079 or by e-mail mitchell@usfca.edu. I may also contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research studies. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

Consent

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no effect on my current of future relationship with the community college district I attended or the California community college system. My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Signature _____Date of Signature_____
                    Research Participant

Signature _____Date of Signature_____
                    Interviewer

Appendix J:
Definition of Terms

Achievement gap
    Achievement gap in this study is defined as the educational differences between
    the European Americans and the African Americans or any other historically
    disadvantages ethnic groups in terms of educational success and completion rates.

Academic goal
    Academic goal in this study is defined as a certificate, associate's degree, or grade
    point average progress toward transfer to a 4-year college/university.

Adjustment
    Adjustment in this study refers to a students' social and academic adaptation to
    the college. The adjusted student accommodates to a particular set of
    circumstances and environment in the rigors of higher education.

African American
    African American are persons having origins of African descent that were born
    and are living in the United States of America also referred to as Black.

Associate's degree
    The awarding of a degree by an accredited institution based on the completion of
    60 units/credits, which are degree applicable in liberal arts or a specified major.

Attrition
    Attrition in this study is the decrease or reduction of student enrollment usually as
    the result of dropout or the opposite of retention.

California Community Colleges
    California Community Colleges' is the largest higher education system in the
    nation. The system is comprised of 72 districts, 112 colleges, and enrolls more
    than 2.9 million students. (California Community College Chancellors Office,
    2010)

Certificate
    The completion of the required number of units/credits of study in a specific field
    in which an award or certificate is granted for specialized training in a vocational
    field; for example, Biotechnology or Child Development.

Community College
    Community colleges are publically supported and locally operated colleges that
    provide basic skills education, workforce training that can be used toward a
    certificate or associate's degree, and courses that prepare students for transfer to
    4-year universities. The colleges also offer opportunities for personal enrichment
    and lifelong learning. (California Community College Chancellors Office, 2010)

Disparity

    Disparity in this study is defined as the educational gap between two ethnic groups in terms of educational completion or achievement.

Dropout

    Dropout is defined as one who abandons or leaves a chosen path and in this study a dropout is anyone who does not compete his or her academic goal, including the completion of a certificate, associate's degree, or grade point average (GPA) progress toward transfer to a 4-year college or university.

Factors

    In this research factors, which influence a sense of belonging were defined as groups, associations, organizations or programs the student utilized to support their success while attending a community college in California.

Grade Point Average (GPA) Obtainment

    Grade point average obtainment is one who maintains or achieves a desired GPA to reach their self-identified academic goals, the GPA must be between a 2.0 to 4.0.

Matriculation

    Matriculation in this study is defined as being enrolled in at least 1 unit/credit of course work in one semester of the academic year while working toward a certificate, associate's degree or the required units to transfer to a 4-year college or university, and maintaining a satisfactory grade point average of a 2.0 on a 4.0 grading scale.

Persist

    Persist is defined as a student who has completed the academic requirements toward a certificate, associate's degree, or the minimum requirements to transfer to a 4-year college or university.

Retention

    Retention is defined as a student who completed their courses at the community college and stayed enrolled at least one semester during each academic year as they completed the required courses based on their self-identified academic goal; i.e. GPA obtainment, certificate, associate's degree, or transfer to a 4-year college or university.

Sense of Belonging

    Sense of Belonging in this study is defined as students' perceived connection or relationship to any self-identified group that supported their successful navigation of the community college system. For example, a debate club, sports team, mentors or texting group.

Success

Success in this study is the completion of a certificate, associate's degree, and or transfer to a 4-year college or university from a California Community College.

Transfer

Transfer is the completion of a minimum of 60 units/credits before going to a 4-year college or university to work toward a bachelor's degree.

Appendix K:
Sample of Interview Transcription

Interview: Derick
May 29, 2011

Q. Brief Info about yourself:
Name: **Derick**
Current Age: 31
Gender: **Male**
Current Occupation: Counselor at Juvenile Hall in San Francisco

Highest Degree Completed: Bachelors in American Studies & Pubic Policy
Major in Community College: criminal justice/ general studies
Year completed goal: 2007

Q. Highest educational level of parents or guardian:
        Mother/Female: A Junior in High school
        Father/Male: High School diploma

Q. What is your ethnicity?
        Black/African American

Q: What type of goal did you complete?
Um, I completed my A.A. …With transfer? … with transfer. Where did you transfer to? U.C Berkeley. And what year was that? Um, '07.

Q: How long did you attend CC?
3 years

Q: Why did you attend a CCC?
Um… Was it close to home…? It was close to home. …tuition was low.   Tuition was low. I had a fresh start. I didn't have to worry about my high school grades, like I was just able to come anew, and start fresh. So did your GPA out of high school or SAT scores or any of that play a weight against going directly to a 4 year? Um, I just never really was thinking of a 4 year… Okay. … degree. I know I was thinking of you know just working after high school, and then eventually I wanted a better job and I knew I had to go to school to get a degree first to get a you know a better paying job. So I gave college a try. Okay. Yeah.

Q: Age completed the self-identified goal?
Um, what around what 28…

Q: For the past 10 years in the CCC system for every 100 African American students who enroll in classes only 50 successfully will complete the courses? Did you feel welcomed when you went to the community college?

Wow, I didn't know that. Did you feel welcomed when you went to the community college? Um at first it was a little tough, I guess my first year but after that I began to meet mentors and you know get familiar with my professors and uh and I started to meet more and more people, and I began to get more comfortable especially after that, after that first year. That first year was just a little rough, and you know I didn't really know what was going on. I was out of school for a few years so it was a little confusing in the beginning. But after that second semester things began to flow. So would that be a no when you first got there? When I first got there I was just I guess, you could say no because I was confused I really didn't know what was going on. Uh, I was seemingly older than a lot of my students that were there, a lot of my peers so in the beginning it was kind of scary. Um hum.   It was kind of unwelcoming to me just because I just didn't know anything. Right!   And like I said my parents didn't go to college no one I knew went to college besides Tracie, my fiancé at the time.   But uh besides that it was just a whole new environment for me. Right! So very confusing, very scary! Um hum.

Definitely! Um hum.

Q: Should retention programs focus on ethnic background or individual academic departments? (i.e. Math, Business)

Um, I'd say both. You got to pick. I guess ethnic background because like a lot of us like myself like my parents didn't go to college, none of my friends really went to college so um you know looking at a lot of African Americans especially growing up in San Francisco in the Western Addition in which I grew up, we don't know anything about college. So if there was a program that you know looked at us, you know saw us and could really just help us along the way, I think that would really help. Okay. You were kind of saying both at first, but what do you think the advantages are with the program with academic focus. With both if you have someone or a program focusing in on that as well and helping you navigate and helping you, you know pick out a certain area to navigate in that would really help. Um hum. For myself, that's what helped me. Um, like for instance The Triple AP Program helped me because I was an African American male coming up to City College, but then I began to meet mentors that can really help me as far as business and other things that can really, you know, show me the way, um, and so I kind of had the best of both worlds at City College. And I was able to flourish and that's why I say both. If you have both, it's phenomenal. Yeah because I don't think the programs really necessarily have that central focus sometimes. No, no. So they're not looking at if you're trying to go the business route let's connect you…if you're trying to go the law route let's connect you… No…and that's probably and I would think currently where the changes take place. Yeah definitely! Because if not then they're gonna, we're gonna get put out too. Yeah, exactly! Yeah! You're right! Then you're gonna…Oh you have a little degree but then you're still lost…and then that's it…but then you have to be so specialized and you don't know…Um hum, definitely… specialty, yeah…And that's what happened to me. If I wouldn't have met my mentors, I would have just did a couple of years and then that would have just been that, and I still would have been kind of lost like okay do I go back to school, do I do a graduate degree? But since I had the mentors to help me and kind of guide me then I was able to see and I could say okay I can go the law route, I can go the business route and I could do things like that. And they really broaden my horizons as well. So that's why I say both would be great. Um, but if a program focuses on ethnicity that would be great too because that would get you in the

door and that would help you out because we need that help. We need any kind of help we can get. Yeah, because if you first get there and you don't know sometimes it's just cause they look…a person looks like you and comes from your culture gives you enough support…Exactly…but then you have to have that extra … extra little help…to figure out….Um hum…even if…to me I think what happens…sometimes you have a person who says they want to do something a certain major but they don't have the skill set for that. Right…so if you say like yeah, yeah just go ahead cause you know…Yeah, cause okay I'll just do that. But it's like you need that extra little oomph. You need the extra little help. Um, and like I say the one thing I loved about City you know we had great counselors; we had great mentors there. We had a great professor so everyone kind of worked together. But that was, you know, my story, and that's why I can say…Do you see it for other students that way, though? No. A lot of students that I was there with, a lot of them were lost. A lot of them had the kind of help to navigate as well. A lot of them were picking my brain to see what I was doing. And I was leading them to other people, but a lot of people they get discouraged like for instance that first semester or so they don't do too well and then they say okay schools not for me. Because one thing that I went through was when I was going to City College the first semester, second semester people looked at me and said, "What! You're going to school? " "Why?" "Man I tried that stuff. Man it was nothing. I didn't like it." It was this; it was that. But the reason why they said that because when they came here to City College they were lost, got discouraged, walked away and did not come back. Yeah. So you know and that's one thing that I didn't experience that because I had…Do you think your age helped you with that though…Yeah…Because if you're eighteen and someone tells you that, you're like yeah bye…Yep, yep you're right. And I think my age, see that's why like I took what five or six years after high school to go to college, and I think that helped me because when I was there I was older, I was mature, I was more wiser and I was able to see different things. I was able to see things that I wouldn't have seen…I wouldn't a saw them since…if I was eighteen years old. If I was eighteen years old, and like for instance, if I met someone like Dr. Mark and you know he was lacing me. He was trying to tell me. I would say, "Man, who is this cat?" Right! "I'm not listening to you. Man I'm trying to have fun and do my thing." Yeah. But because I was a little older and you know I seen an older black man trying to lace me and teach me about the game and teach me about the world and I was able to …you had lived it for a while. See when you're eighteen you come right out of high school you don't realize how much protection you have from the outside world. Right, right, yeah. You think you do…yeah… but then…you're protected, you're sheltered, yeah…You are but then you don't think you're sheltered…No you think you're grown, you think hey this is nothing. I know it all but really you don't. You're just getting started. Yeah. And I think that's one thing that helped me was my age. Um hum. You know my experience as well, my experience in the community, my experience in the world, my experience, you know, having kids and you know just living life and so I was able to appreciate certain things that an eighteen year old probably wouldn't…Right…appreciate. Um hum definitely. Yes, that's one of my concerns as a counselor. Yeah. Because I know when they're young they're like you don't know. Yeah. And they don't realize that that person was your age too. Yeah exactly, it's like they're in a whole other world, a whole other bubble where they just don't get it. Like I see a lot of youngsters kind of falling off sometimes. They think they

know it all but then they're having a tough time in school…Hmmm…and really don't know which way to go and they end up don't coming back. You know like a lot of kids, a lot of students I've seen come a semester or a year and they just disappear. I don't see them no more. And then they go out in the world. And then a few years later I run into them and they like, "Yeah man I'm back at City." I'm like, "Okay, okay you back. That's good man. Well keep it up." Then they're a little more focused, a little more hungry, and a little more ready. Definitely, so that time definitely makes a difference. Yeah.

Q: Please prioritize your academic goals when you began with one being most relevant; GPA obtainment, certificate, Associates degree and/or transfer to 4 year?
So you're first, second, third and fourth…Grade Point Average…Was your first choice? Um hum…transfer… Um hum…and what were the other two? Associates degree or certificate….Associates degree…the third? Okay…

Q: Did you complete your original goal or did it change? Why?
I, I, I exceeded my original goals by far. So what was your major… did you like did your major change was that the same? See my original plan for going to school was it's the first semester so let's just give it a try. Um hum. And I began to do well and then I started looking into psychology. And I said okay let me give that a try but I really didn't know what I wanted to do. Then I discovered a position at Juvenile Hall and I saw that you know all you need is an AA degree and at least a couple of years of experience working with youth so I said, "Man that's what I can do. I can do that then. I can get my AA degree and then get a position at Juvenile Hall in San Francisco. Um hum. I end up achieving that um you know right before I finished school. I did three years but after like two years, two years and a half I had enough units, sixty units, to transfer or to go to Juvenile Hall because I had…they wanted either sixty units or an AA. Right! So I had that. So I was… I was…just imagine this is my last year I was student trustee. I was on fire doing my thing, meeting people. Then I got the position at Juvenile Hall. Um hum. So here I was you know my goal I knocked it out in two years and I had the position that I wanted. And I was still hungry, and I said you know what I'm going to keep going. I going to keep fighting and you know the sky's the limit. And then I began to meet more mentors and then that began to help me kind of you know shift my goals and expand on my goals. And then a mentor of mind said I was UC Berkeley material, which I never heard that before. And he was an older, African American male. Um and I said, "Damn, okay. Well if that's what you think I'm going to give it a try." And I, you know, bust my butt doing well, got into Cal easily. And now my goal is just growing. I'm just knocking out things left and right. And like the position that I am now at Juvenile Hall I've been there for several years but it's kind of just, I'm kind of just doing it for fun. It's something that I enjoy, but it's not the end goal. It's just something that I'm doing right now. I'm also doing consulting work for the Boys and Girls up in San Francisco. So I get a chance to help them create programs for teenagers so a lot of stuff I'm doing I'm getting paid well, I'm enjoying it but it really doesn't feel like work. Yeah! But it's just for right now because I'm working on other things, and in the next few years it's no telling what I'm going to be doing. But um with the help and support of City College and my supporting cast, I mean the sky's the limit. But I have definitely exceeded my goal

which was first get your two year degree…try it out… and just try it out. I mean I just gave it a try and surprised myself… Um hum…you know getting on the dean's list and honors and all this…As you were going through those different you know meeting those goals, meeting those you know how did you feel? What was going on for you? I didn't feel. I just felt just elated. I just felt like I was floating on clouds. Yeah! The whole experience at City College was just amazing. I mean everything was just falling into place. I was trying different things…um hum…and winning and doing…Were you shocked by maybe your academics? Oh, oh I was…my first report card I was blown away. I mean that was the highest GPA I have ever received. Like for instance, when I was in high school I graduated with an overall average of around two ten, two twenty…Um hum…so you know to see a three point oh. I probably saw a three point 0 one time in high school. Right! So my first semester I easily got a three and the second semester did well and then made the national dean's list. I shocked myself. Right! And I couldn't believe it. And I'm like "Okay, well let's do it." Yeah! "Come on, feed me feed me." But that's when my goal still was only just to get go two years and be done and then get into my dream job at Juvenile Hall. Um hum…But like I said I just exceeded that and began to do well and uh transferred easily and you know went to Cal and…What did you study at Cal? Uh American Studies and Public Policy… Um hum…So…So what made you select that major? Um it was…it was a blend between um politics and uh-legal studies so um that's one of my goals as well to, you know, become a lawyer and also get into politics. So I figured I'll choose a degree that, you know, something I could have fun with, learn and then I could use it in graduate school as well. So um and then I end up doing extremely well, graduated at the top of my class at Cal and uh it was nothing. I mean it was really…I had to work hard but my foundation was set from City College, and I was just whew on fire, going. But so when you got to City College did you feel that you already had the intellect that gave you that? No, no. Or did you…No, see it's crazy because I don't know where it came from I mean I kind of always knew that I wanted to be smart. I wanted to do well but in high school, you know, it's not cool to be smart. You gotta be cool so I was the cool guy. But I knew deep down, I mean I knew I was intelligent. So you knew you were intelligent. Yeah, I knew I was intelligent but at City they helped bring it out of me, you know. The counselors like yourself, Clark, you know Dr. Mark Robinson, Chancellor Griffin, you guys helped, helped bring it out of me.   You know I didn't have to, you know, be shy or timid that….At that age too you didn't have to be the cool guy anymore, huh? Yes! You were like I can be the smart guy now. Yes! So it was crazy…It's cool to be the nerd…Exactly. So it was like "Hold on man, don't, don't…I'm 23…I'm 24…I'm like come on man I'm about to be focused. I have a family. I have a goal in mind. So you know what I coming to class everyday. I was sitting in front. I was paying attention, raising my hand, getting to know the instructors and, man, did extremely well. But I didn't care. I didn't care about anybody in the classroom.   I would go to class, sit in front and be ready. Read, do my homework, do my essays and I was ready. Yeah. So like I said if I was eighteen naw, that probably wouldn't have happened. Yeah! (laughter) I'd a continued to be the cool guy, like I was in high school, and then barely finished and barely graduated and probably just would have stopped at a AA if I would have even received that. So you know those few years of you know maturing and growing up and working and you know being in the real world that that really helped me because when I got there I just didn't care. I knew I had a goal

and I had to get there and…So peer pressure I guess does make a major difference…Oh…at eighteen…definitely! for a young man. Definitely! He acts like it doesn't …no, no it' like…I have five nephews …see…I'm trying to pick your brain a little bit …you have to…see being an African American male especially in high school you gotta be cool, you gotta be tough, you gotta be the big shot. You can't be no little square and a nerd. You can't be any of that. You can't be no sucka so you gotta do what you gotta do…Isn't there a way to be both, though! Naw, not that I've seen. It's tough. Like I said once you get to college it's a little different. But in high school nowadays too, you got to be the tough one. Unless you got a lot of will power which I didn't have a lot of will power. I was, you know, got caught up you know being out you know growing up where I grew up and then going to high school. You know having nice cars and trying to get my money I was, you know, I was a cool guy and cool that was that was my world. My world wasn't you know doing homework. You know I had some females doing some homework for me and turn it in. I wasn't really tripping off that. So like I say you know I graduated with you know a two point ten, two point twenty overall GPA in high school but that was considered phenomenal me graduating. Take in consideration my mom didn't ever graduate from high school. My dad barely graduated high school. So I graduated, and it was like you did it! And that's why okay I did it. I'm done with school. I don't want to touch school again. It's over. What made you even consider going back? Was it because of work or something…trying to find? Um, I was getting sick of my position at the Boys and Girls of San Francisco which I was running teen programs for teenagers at one particular club, and my programs were phenomenal. I was getting a lot of teens coming in. I was running great programs, but I began to get bored. Um hum. Bored with it and also the money, I wanted to make a little more money. Um but I knew the only way I could make more money working with youth was I had to go to school. I had to get a degree at least an AA. Um hum. And I looked into a position at Juvenile Hall and I said okay I'm going to get that…So that was the target the job and to get that you had to have the AA so okay City close to home…low tuition…There you go…got that AA …I could knock it out and get financial aid…get an extra little change. Oh I could do that. Let me knock that out, and then I saw Tray was doing her thing too. And I'm like okay, okay we can do this. She can knock out her stuff. I can go to school. I can bang it out, but I figured you know City's close, it's cheap, you know. I get financial aid. Hey I'm rolling with it. Right, right! I'm doing it. They're going to pay me to go to school. They're going to pay me to go…what are you serious…That, that was the whole game plan, that first year I was focusing on that and you

Q: Did you participate in any special programs, Learning Communities, groups or organizations while at the California community college system? No   So what made you go into the programs and stuff? I'm way off my questions and stuff…No, no! I'm kind of off…Which programs? Which programs you talking about? You mentioned the African American Scholastic. What made you even go into that program? Because like before I even got started Tracie brought me to Clark…Oh, okay…in the Triple AP program. And you know I saw an African American male, you know, talking about education and really lacing me and showing me how, I mean, "You can knock this out. Take this take that. You're done in two years." I'm like it's that easy. I'm like okay. And, and what I thought…he was a familiar person and so I would

just go down there you know and just talk to Clark. "What's going on man, you know? How am I looking as far as, you know, this semester?" You know run into different people that look like me, you know, that was in school as well. Right! So that was my introduction to that program so it was kind of like a safe place to go uh like when I first got started cause City is huge especially when you don't know what's going on. So that was…It's easy to get lost in that place. Exactly, exactly! And that was the perfect place to go. I could go hop on the computer, you know, crack some jokes with some of the students, and it was just like a cool little hangout. Um Hum…That I could go to um throughout like my first semester or so.

Q: What type of programs or activities did you participate?
So besides the African American Scholastic Program did you work with any other groups or organizations while you were attending community college?
Just student government my last year… I was elected student trustee. What about programs outside of the community college? Um, outside? See I did a lot of work with um I was a …I did work with Speaker Pelosi. Um hum. I was on one of her youth advisory boards, doing a lot community work for her, community work for the Boys and Girls Club as well um some of…on a bunch of different counsels and committees. And had you started that before you started going to City College? No, no. I didn't do like I say I was at the Boys and Girls Club working…Um hum…that was it. Right! That was it and then I started school and when I started school then that's when I started doing different things counsels, committees, boards…Um hum. And that's when I started to discover a lot. I didn't know any of that stuff existed. Oh okay! I didn't know it was even around. I didn't know you could do anything like that. Like I say but it wasn't until I met my mentors at City and they began to say "You know what I see some potential in you. Won't you check that out? Check this out." I'm like "Check what out? Okay, let me look at this! Ummm okay let me give this a try. Let me give that a try. You won't to do this; no I don't want to do that." So then my wheel started going... Yeah! …started kicking and then that's when I people started to discover me and ask me join counsels and boards and committees… Oh, okay…and come here and speak at this and come here and do this and…What made you run for student government? Oh um it was crazy because Dr. Mark…Um hum…um called me into his office one day and uh he was just telling about you know student counsel, and you know running for this, running for that and I'm just like, "Man, what are you talking about? Man, I don't know any of this." Um hum. And he showed me uh the dynamics of the school and you know, looking at you have the board and you have the deans and you have the chancellors and kind of just break down the structure…the organization…Yeah, yeah! This is all new to me. I don't know any of this. And he was saying that, you know, the board has a student representative, and he started talking to me about what they do and what they could do, and you know how they would really benefit from somebody like myself and he thought I had the potential to do great. But he didn't say, "Okay I want you to go for it." He just said you know do your homework and do your research, and just check it out. Um I went home, thought about it, talked to Trace about it and um we said "Hey let me just try it." Um hum. You know, I didn't know anything about it; but let me try it. And make a long story short I ended up putting together a campaign team, you know, won by a landslide and just the rest is history. I went onto that board and I was able to just do my

thing. You know and just really create change and do different things and you know and really just lead by example and be a voice for the students at City so…But it was like I say it was all fluke it was just all…Right…But the thing is I had someone like a mentor that was able to say, "Okay I see your potential, won't you give this a try." You know cause I had several mentors to say, "Won't you try this, won't you try..?" And to some of them I said, "Naw I'm cool." And to others I said, "Okay let me give this a try." Um hum. But others you know I just saw …What appealed to you about the Student Trustee position? Um man, just running something that big, having that authority, having that power, having that control and just being that person, you know, that students can speak to, that the board members can speak with. And really just be an advocate of change. And it had never really been an advocate of change like that and just to see that a student can do something like that meet great people and really make it happen I just…Right…I was just… You read about it in history…Yeah! Yeah! I cannot be one of those type of people…Yeah! Like no I'm not a king…Yeah! Yeah! So it was like I never thought I could do anything like that. Um hum. But getting that position opened up so many doors. Opened up so many doors and doors are constantly opening. I'm meeting with different politicians. I'm hanging out. I'm traveling. It's, it's insane. It's just insane. The world you never envisioned... For real! I believe you! It's crazy! It's so crazy. I mean I'm having you know breakfast with Willie Brown, with Speaker Pelosi you know Schwarzenegger we hanging out. It's just so crazy. I mean the traveling. I'm seeing the world. I'm speaking. I'm telling my story, and it's just incredible. I'm mean I got that foundation at City College. And it's because mentors saw my potential, you know, voiced different things and I was able to try different things. Um hum. And from here on out I'm trying different things, you know. I'm doing well. I applied to UC Berkeley. It was one school I applied to. I didn't apply to any other school. Oh really! At all but…You said that's my school huh…I said that's where I'm going. I mean that's where I'm going and I made a point to go there. You know I made sure that I set myself up, you know, to go there. And I made sure that they couldn't turn me away. You know I set it up as far as extra curricular activities, GPA. I mean I was putting it down. I mean no one…they wasn't going to tell me no…that wasn't even…No! …every reason you could say no…No, no…I made sure I put it down at City College…Um hum. And I did it and I applied to one and only school. A lot of people thought I was crazy. Uh huh. But when I got accepted, you know, I showed them all my letter, and they were just, just amazed. Um hum. Amazed by it and…It's crazy because when I got accepted, um even before I started school, you know Channel seven was trying to contact me, the school was contacting me, they did a profile on me. I was on the news, and the papers and all kind of stuff. And they just…it was just crazy. It was…just been a whirlwind and it was just…It was also wonderful because so much do we see our young black men doing something else right? Yes…They're many…you're not the only one…there're hundreds of thousands. Can we show some of that….Exactly! Maybe we can change the trend…Exactly! Which shows you…do we really want to change the trend? See…you're right! And that's the one thing I advocate is I'm not the only one. It's so many more students like myself. And I go around they say, "See we need more people like you." I say "It's plenty. It's plenty." Go get them. It's plenty of them. It's plenty of them. And that's one thing I'm....It's almost like is that just the rhetoric. Exactly! It's crazy….Um hum. It's like the things I see and the places I travel…I mean…It's crazy.

But it's like its so many people like myself and I'm constantly trying to help more and more people… Is it also kind of humbling when you sometimes say why not…not necessarily "Why me?" But, "I'm the one…Yes! That's exactly. It's crazy. Because I sit back and I look at my accomplishments and I see I'm just getting started though. Um hum. And I sit back and I do say "Why me? What did I do to deserve…how?…" You know, I just feel I'm so fortunate enough to be in the position I'm in. And you know I have a great family. I'm putting it down here and just, just blossoming. And it's so, it's so…It's humbling sometimes. It is. It is….and it's so crazy…And to go back to think of things in your… as you're getting to your points, anything could have happened. Yes. Yes. Just like.. Sometimes it makes you go like wow. Yeah and it's crazy. And it's like sometimes like I'm doing so much to where I don't even say too much. I don't even…I can't even tell people a lot of things that I'm doing and, you know, the people that I'm with because people tend to get you know get…It's a lot of similarities in those worlds. Yeah, yeah! So it's like….say this is the legal one… like you can see a lot of the same personalities as far as stuff that happens. Definitely, definitely! It's a trip…It is, definitely. I'm just fortunate. I'm just, you know, just holding it down, you know, holding down my family, holding down school and just doing the best I can and just taking advantage of my opportunity. Um hum. You know and that's it. Tomorrow's not promised but a…we've got to get these young brothers and sisters see it that way. For real and that's why…especially out here in California…Oh yeah, oh yeah. And a lot of them they just…they so consumed with what's going on in the media, what's on TV. They want to be tough. They want to be cool…they want…and it's like, "Go to school." Go to school you can make so much money, you know, getting your degree, get into your profession and really make it happen. And really… one thing like I'm trying to show you this…okay, I did my thing out in the streets, got some cool money, did my thing. But it's nothing compared to how I'm doing and how I'm about to be doing it with a degree. You know being in my profession, and they need to see that. They need to see you can be in your profession and have nice cars, nice homes being able to travel and do your thing. And you don't have to look over your shoulder and don't worry about it. Right! Just live man! Just do what you want to do. It's a certain…that level of peace that you can have. Exactly! Yeah! Exactly! And that's one thing that a lot of youth they lack that, you know that peace. And I'm trying to show them you can have it all, definitely. I constantly… But if you never experienced it sometimes it's hard to…and if you don't like you said find a mentor or someone you can trust…Yeah! You need that. You need it. To show you that, "Trust me there is something else over there on the other side. Yeah, yeah you need that. I mean cause I wouldn't have got this far without mentors, without counselors, without instructors that really just believed in me. I wouldn't, I wouldn't have done it. Um hum. I would not have done it! I mean just like in my high school I really didn't have that. Right! But when I went to City College I had all of it, all of it and... They sat right down there, huh! In the bungalow…Yeah! Right in the bungalow, yep! In the bungalow! Yeah, yeah in the bungalow…right down there

Q: What services did they provide? How did the programs services help you?
Refer to previous questions: Counseling services, mentors, computer lab, courses toward completing general studies, i.e. English (Triple AP)

Q: What or whom do you attribute to your academic success?
So what or whom do you attribute to your academic success, so a family member…this is not a ranking so…one is the most supportive and five is the least supportive and then there's also not applicable. Okay. So a family member…? Yeah, Tracie that's one ...so one…? I'm sorry there's one through five. Oh it's one through five! You can do one, two, three, four or five. Okay. So family member is one your fiancé and your children okay, and then a counselor? Is it counselor slash mentor or is it…It's just counselor. Okay, well that's just… I guess that's the same thing then. Yeah, well if you had mentors that counseled you they don't have to give them a title… Yeah, okay. So a professor or instructor…? Yeah! But what number, one, two, three…What's the other two besides that one? Um the other question…uh people…Can all of them be?…They all can be whatever numbers you want them to be.   They all can be…It's not a ranking so you don't have…Oh, oh so that's one. That's one too. Okay and then a professor or instructor? That's one. Okay, and a pastor or a clergy? Ummm…One through five and then there's "not applicable". At the time you were at community college. At the time I was? Right! Naw, I really wasn't…So "not applicable"? Not applicable. Okay. A "group or learning community"…? Yeah I'd say um I say one. A "one"? Yeah. Cause everyone you…well the majority of the people you mentioned came out of the program…Yeah…but then in the beginning you started meeting more people…Yeah…in the college system…Definitely…Okay.

Q: What role did financial aid play in achieving your academic goals?
  So you said you did receive financial aid….Oh yeah, yeah, definitely! Did you receive it the entire time? Oh yeah. Okay. The whole time, um hum.

Q: Did you work while pursuing your goals?
But did you work while you were… Oh yeah. I never stopped working. Part time!   At City full time… You worked full time? Um hum.

Q: When you were having challenges (academic/personal) was there someone at the college or a program that you used to assist you?
Oh yeah, definitely. Definitely, yeah! You want to explain…Um Dr. Mark Robinson…Okay. Um and a Dr. Griffin was one of them. Okay. So would you say they kind of helped you where the more…They helped me…the more specificness of what you wanted to do not like "Oh here's a major". Naw. But where you could take it to a career and things like that. Yeah that's what they helped me with, yeah. And then I had uh others like yourself, Clark kind of you know helping me with you know my degree in finishing up and taking the right classes… Um hum… And getting done with City College so like I say it was kind of like twofold, I had the best of both worlds. You had the academic and the ethnic background…I did. You're like they need to design the program this way, huh? For real, you ain't lying. But honestly, each student comes in and they do some kind of assessment of them, they really could do that and then you…through the program could be hooked up with mentors in science, or math or whatever to give you opposed to just doing it the way it's done now with the class. Yeah. That's how they should do it. Yeah. Cause you need…like I had that extra oomph and that helped me because I had the academics all together and I had that help. And then I

had the extra help with you know taking it to the next level and kind of helping you know navigate that and that…I was able to keep going with it. And that's, that's…And I think too it makes a student like you…it's easier to do it when you start seeing it and running with it. Right. When they're running with it you're like did you do… "Okay let me tell so and so!" It's easier when they're running with because you're like you said you were looking at my choices and options and you know… Um hum…but if they're not running with it you sometimes spend so much time trying to go …See and that's the thing. And it's like I look back and I tell all my mentors I thank them for the things that they have done, and a lot of them say, "No, no you're doing it. We might be throwing some things out there but you're doing it." Right. You're doing it….some information… Exactly, exactly that's information well taken. But from your view…I love it. But when you first get in there you didn't even know…the fact that somebody even shared that information with you and guided you…Um hum. But that it reminds me of …like with your children. The first you start to show them and then a point when I want to step back and let them just…I want to throw it at you and you keep running with it…and run with it, exactly. You …and that's exactly like it happens and like now that's how it is, you know they kind of throw things out…Um hum. If I like it I like, if I don't I don't and they respect me for saying no; they respect me for saying yes. And it's cool! You know I can come at them and say, "I'm really having a tough time today." And they, "That's okay don't worry about let me help you with this." Or if I…or I could be saying like… I be thinking I'm complaining but they say, "Man hold on, stop…No, no, no this is how you need to do it. Man up, make it happen. "I mean cause you need to hear that sometimes too. Right. So you hear good. You hear bad. And then that just kind of keep you going and I try to just keep my eyes on the prize but…I think it's harder when they're younger because that ego's so…yeah.. attached to it when you're trying to tell them, they're like "You don't understand!" It's like… Say yeah. That's tough, that's tough. How do I…Yep. Cause you know that age eighteen to twenty five age range…Oh yeah…especially for young people…Um hum. They're not as mature as they think they are. Yeah! You're right. You're not gonna…so something in you made you listen to them to a certain extent. It wasn't just because they were black men…No, no!...It was something else that made you go…something in your assessment of them said you know they know what they're talking about. Yeah. Or I'm going to listen to them. It's like how do you…Yep. It's like…Yeah, cause I know like with me…my mentors I saw them and I was like…like I saw Griffin one day when I was in the Tripe AP and um you know we were on the computer and stuff and then um Dr. Augustine was saying. "Oh, we got Griffin coming by. We got to make sure everybody have, you know, good things on the computer, nothing inappropriate." And everybody was running around getting ready. And I'm sitting here like, "What's going on man?" Everybody trying to get on their p's and q's…Right! And I'm just kicking back, and then he come in with his suit, you know, black man and I'm like "Damn, okay." And he's just talking; he's walking around and I'm just watching. And he talked to Dr. Augustine for a little bit, and he walk around making sure everything is cool and he walks out. And I'm saying like "Who is that?" Right! And how you do something…And everybody…Yeah, yeah! It's like when daddy comes home with the kids start cleaning up…Yeah! And so I'm like, what is this and who is this. Right! And he walked out, and I ran out and I said, "How you doing? I'm Derick Brown. Nice to meet you and you know chat with him for a quick second, and he

went on about his business. And I was like damn…I said damn that's it. I got to get to know that cat, but you know that was just it, you know, I didn't see him for months and then um eventually…then I wrote a paper and I began to get a little exposure at City. And then I seen him again and we began to talk and then I met Dr. Mark, and it was just it was just crazy because then I began to meet them and then they began to show me "Okay this is how you need to elevate your game. And this is what you need to shoot for, and this is how you need to do it." And, and I just started taking heed to all of that and I was saying like "I want to do that too! I want to wear a suit!" Right! I want to go to meetings! I want to I want to call shots! Right! Right! And I was able to do that. Um hum. And I was ready for it at the time, but it was something in me and I think also…You were willing to do the work too. Yes, I was willing I bust my…It seems like this generation they want it but …cause they want it easy. I'm like you think…You got to work. …the people you see on TV aren't doing some work for that! You know so and so he made it big. He's been doing some work to get there. Exactly! And that's one thing that like I'm still right now to this day doing so much work and this and this. But you have to work. You have to do it and it can be frustrating at times. It can be tough especially having a family. But I know that's one thing that motivated me, you know having a family. You know I had my daughter. She was a few months old at the time when I started City College. I wanted to you know set an example for you know both the girls, and I said you know what I want to go to college because how can I tell daughters to go college if I never been to college. Right! So I had… How can they get the man that went to college…For real, for real…your daddy's not that man…Exactly, exactly…And now they know when they get out of school. When they get out of high school they're going to college, period. The only question is: Where am I going to go? not if I'm going to go or not. No, no they're going. So we're getting a chance you know to change tradition and show them a new world, so and that's, that's what it's about. And it's on now so now it's like they know about college. You know my little one is seven but she knows about college. I bring her up to Cal. We walk around, bring her to the dorms. Now both of them they can't wait to go to college and do the dorm life and just live. You know do study abroad and just live you know, and just graduate out from high school and just go off and do your thing. And we support you, you know. So they love it so we got them set up where they need to be and we just going to continue to support them, definitely. But you know Tracie and I got our experience through college and life and now we can lace them, definitely. That's great. So the last question is actually,,,

Q: In what you know about the California Community college system today do you feel African American's students feel a sense of belonging?
Um I think in the specialty programs like Triple AP, definitely. We definitely feel that. In other ethnic programs there at the community college they definitely feel a belonging. Um overall in a big community college it's kind of tough, but I think it's good because it's real diverse um but you have to be on it. You have to be serious because if you're not serious you could take it all for granted and kind of just, you know, drift off and kind of just you know fall on the wayside. But as far as the ethnic programs that's there you definitely feel a sense belonging, but just an average student just being dropped there it can be a little overwhelming because it's so many students, so many things going on, so many programs um that…but you don't really know about the programs when you first…

first kind of get there but um…You think there's opportunity but when they show up do you think?...Like when they come out of high school and they go to a California community college?...Yeah, I say it's… it's there but the community college has to be welcoming like for instance the first day it needs to be…do you feel they feel that sense of belonging…When I was there…Not that they find it cause there's somebody who didn't find it. Yeah…it…Do you feel like they get there they feel a sense of belonging? Um for me, for my experience when I first got there I really was just kind of confused. I didn't really know what was going on. Um hum. But it wasn't until like my first semester of school, second semester I began to really feel you know that I really belonged there. Like for instance, my first semester I was always in Triple AP, always talking to students there, always talking to counselors, trying to see what was going on because that was kind of like a safe haven for me because I was kind of scared to kind of go out there cause I really didn't know what was going on. So and I think like a lot of African Americans they kind of feel that way as well and it's easy to you know have them gravitate towards Triple AP but as far as a overall just where to go at City it can be tough. It's kind of scary and I think a lot of youth kind of get you know caught up in a madness and kind of begin to drift off because they don't really feel welcome. But I think like I say from the first day…so no in the…No from where I came…I'm just saying in general and even like the ones you met past the Triple AP program that maybe weren't involved do you think they felt a sense of belonging? I mean you probably were in some classes where…   No I …they weren't necessarily connected to a program…No, no a lot of them, a lot of them were kind of just there…did they feel… Not, not really they were kind of just there. Just like I said you either saw, I either saw the students that was kind of a little older, focused…Um hum…or someone that came from a cool family and that was young and like eighteen, nineteen but they knew what they was doing because their parents were kind of driving them to max out a couple of years even transfer or you had a lot of people that was just kind of just there trying to get a little money, you know trying to learn a little bit, you know and kind of fall off after that first semester…was that more like no you think and then they have to find it…Yeah! I say no and then they have to find it, yeah. Yeah. Yeah! Cause like I say unless it was something the first day…Do you think the community college though present themselves in the sense of belonging to African Americans…Oh, yeah definitely. Do you think they, they… African Americans know go to community college a sense of belonging there. Yeah. But when they get there do you think…When you get there it's… it's not…Where do I go? Where do I go? It's like a fantasy that you're told. Yeah!

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your success in navigating the California Community College system?
I'm wondering this question because…majority of black students start at the community college…that's what I'm doing my research on…Wow! Wow! And so if only half finish their classes…if you don't finish your class you…we retaining you but you're not successful…and that's half the thing…how are we helping you are so are we presenting like we're helping you…Yeah! Like I didn't realize until years later that that was the case…but like you say I was the kid who had the family that was like college, college, college…See…So it was kind of oh and met with Clark…See…which was just by luck…See they…Because I happened to be an athlete…there you see…there with a

friend….It wasn't like…the program at that time was only for men. Wow! So this kind of happen to me that he was the counselor I went to because he was also the athletic counselor. See… So therefore "Oh you should go to black college." Then he saw my grades, "You should go to a black college." "Oh, okay." "What about Spelman?"   "Oh, okay." See same thing…But I still had that parent support like how you had your family support just happened to be your fiancé yeah, do this yeah…Yep same thing…But when they show up do it's like do they even feel…Naw you don't…it's like…like I said if I wouldn't have had the Triple AP and if I didn't meet the people I met I would have just kind of just knocked out a couple of years…and be…and like hey this is my like. This is what I'm suppose to be doing. But it wasn't until that…until I met you know people at Triple AP, until I met you know mentors…and you weren't afraid of those bigger things too… Naw I… Sometimes I'll meet students and I feel like when we're trying to like put things in front of them I get a sense of fear in them. Um hum. You know? Yeah. And sometimes they let that…which there…it's always a little scary about it…it's like they let that fear cripple them. Yeah, you right. You know? Yeah and I see…you see…I see so many people that start off and that fear get to them and they don't do nothing…Yeah! …I don't see them in my class…I don't see them on campus and they really get scared and like myself, for instance myself…. You thought City was…For real…Aw man, but I went there man…so many people I saw fell off, it's not even funny. Like I saw so many people get in and was surprise but that semester began to go on and they began to fall off and not only that like the classes I was in I was like one of the only cats that looked like myself… Right! And anytime I would see somebody look me it's like, "Hey man, what's going on?" Yeah. Yeah, like "Man what's up?" It was cool and it was just…we had our own little community…but even about…you weren't by yourself…like you know what I mean..Yeah…You have to have a strong…You do…a strong sense of self…you do…I mean if you don't know yourself …confidence that…yeah… … not…you will get swallowed. I mean and at City I had that confidence. I was running with it. I went to Cal and it kept on going. Right. and I didn't care. But it was something that already…it was already a part of who you are…Yeah. It wasn't something you developed. You know? Yeah, definitely, definitely, cause it's like I always wanted more, but I didn't really know how to get it. You know I didn't know education was the key. I just didn't know so…but something was in there but the people that I met through my journey you know I was fortunate enough for them to help me open up and blossom and bring it out. Right. And now I was… I could just run with it. I'm learning different things every day. And it's just you know a great feeling. Definitely, every day.

Q: Why do you believe you were successful in achieving your academic goals?
I believe I am successful in achieving my academic goals -I am still on my quest to complete my goals is the reason I say I am successful- is because of my spiritual connection to God, my lovely family, who has seen me through this journey, and the support/guidance from my mentors, who I have met during my journey at City College of S.F. Without the above mentioned, I do believe that none of this (my success thus far) would have been possible.