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The Future Is Now: Examining The Black Student College Selection Process

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THE FUTURE IS NOW: EXAMINING THE BLACK

STUDENT COLLEGE SELECTION PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

College selection factors is a subject that seemingly changes on an annual basis, largely due to

the shift in the importance of factors to each incoming undergraduate class. This qualitative

phenomenological study examined the factors that influence the decision of Black students over

a 15-year period, as well as the factors that influence current students. This study answered

questions related to which factors are important and revealed the results of college experiences

of Black students. Using survey and interview data from Black students who have completed or

who are presently attending college at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI), this study

identified and highlighted key factors that influenced the college selection process for Black

students attending a PWI. The study also uncovered details relating to the process involved as

well as the individuals that may typically be involved in the college selection process of Black

students. Those factors include cost, reputation of the university, and the concept of fit between

the university and the student, which ultimately ties the decision together and will result in a

positive experience if indeed the fit is correct. The goal of this study was to gain insight into the

prominent college selection factors and to determine if any single factor influenced the decision

to attend a PWI for Black students.

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DEDICATION

To my late parents, Ernestine Corbin and Johnnie Johnson, Jr., who indirectly and unknowingly influenced me to strive for excellence. You will never know how you impacted my life. I thank God for you being my parents. I also dedicate this to my entire family including my late grandparents, nieces, nephews and cousins, Godchildren and the Wills family; know that I love you all and carried your prayers and strength with me throughout this journey. I hope I made you proud.

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First, I thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for blessing me and allowing me to make it to this point. This is ultimately dedicated to you, as you continue to orchestrate messages and examples of the importance of African-American education. I pray the words in this document make you proud and achieves your will.

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inspirational books are made of. Your story must be told so generations of African-American girls and boys can continue to dream and have hope.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

College selection has an impact on an individual's life with reverberations that can last a lifetime. The institution that is ultimately selected can have an impact on many facets of an individual's life. Considerations such as the major the student selects (some disciplines of study are not available at every college), the quality of the education the student receives, the connections and friends with whom the student aligns himself or herself, as well as the geographical area in which the student ultimately resides must be weighed. These are a few of the decisions that will ultimately affect a young student's life (Plummer, 2018).

Clearly, college selection is extremely important and consequently, it must be considered carefully. A student has the option to either attend or not attend college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) or transfer to another college if he or she becomes disenchanted with the college of choice, particularly if it is not the right fit (Plummer, 2018). One problem that exists for the student is making the correct decision as an individual. From the college's perspective, staff need to understand how to reach and convince the student his or her selection is the correct one (Vedder, 2018). Despite the number of college-eligible students each year, several colleges face challenges with meeting enrollment projections and goals.

For example, the potential enrollment for the Black population can be classified as concerning. In 2011, Davis, Maramba, and Palmer explained that only 4.3% of total college enrollments were Black men, the same as it was in 1976. According to this report, the available potential college enrollment of Black men has remained the same without increase for a 35-year span. This static pattern for men is offset by the increase of Black females attending college and earning degrees. A 2017 report by the National Center for Education Statistics explained that, despite not having a significantly increased rate of enrollment between 2005-2015 for Black

females 18-24, Black females did enroll in college at a higher rate than Black males of the same age group during this same period.

The challenge of reaching potential Black college students and successfully enrolling them in one specific college becomes not only important, but arduous (Mason, 2006). Enrollment management professionals must compete with approximately 2,000 regionally accredited colleges (United States Department of Education, 2018) to increase Black college student enrollment within their own college. Moreover, the ability to connect with, engage, and retain the interest of the student is the challenge often not met by college leaders (McKinnon, 2016). As colleges seek to diversify their student body, the Black student is a prime target for non-Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's). To successfully enroll this group of students, college leaders will need to understand what is involved in Black students' decision-making process. The college selection decision is a complicated process that comes with many variables such as location, reputation, and social influences, to name a few (Merranko, 2005).

Colleges are attempting to become more diverse in terms of student population; however, they have not been able to consistently connect with targeted racial and ethnic groups to achieve this goal (McKinnon, 2016). To diversify the student community, colleges should rethink their approach on how to recruit Black students at PWI's (Predominantly White Institutions). PWI leaders and admissions officers may want to consider interacting with Black students with care and consideration like HBCU's, who have a direct connection to this population based on historical reputation and legacy (Scott, 2014).

Multiple factors go into a typical college selection decision (Strauss, 2016). According to Hockett (2015), potential college students tend to question the importance of how a college degree from a certain college will impact their career before ultimately deciding where to invest

their time with a college. Considerations such as availability of financial aid, athletics, cost of tuition, and scholarships play a pivotal role in the final decision, albeit multiple factors go into a typical college selection decision (Strauss, 2016).

Naturally, the student's academic performance in high school is the starting point for the entire process, as this factor either is not a barrier at all or is a major one in the decision process (Cresswell-Yeager, 2012). Aside from grades, another factor is how colleges recruit their students. Historically, college recruiters were able to enroll potential students solely based on the college's reputation of having a notable history with a strong and rich tradition (Cook, 2015). Recruiters who recruit students based on a college's reputation tend to recruit students who have always wanted to attend that college (Cook, 2015). While that remains a successful approach to some prospective students who have always dreamed about a specific school, recruiting solely based on a college's reputation may not work for other students. For example, prospective college students may research potential colleges using social media outlets to determine the college's reputation rather than hearing it from a recruiter (Cook, 2015).

Time and history have revealed that different methods of recruitment are necessary to sustain and grow enrollment (Hanover Research, 2014). No longer will mailing a catalog to a prospective student be sustainable or acceptable. Due to a shift in the stages of the enrollment process known as the *admissions funnel*, colleges over the 21st century have required admissions professionals to now enlist a variety of tools to successfully recruit students (Hanover Research, 2014). For example, college recruiters can invite potential students to visit their campus as well as visit them in their neighborhoods (Hanover Research, 2014).

Historically, if a potential student visited a college or university, that was a serious indication he or she would be matriculating at that college or university, provided he or she was

admitted (Hanover Research, 2014). Currently, colleges rely on social media and a strong

website presence to attract prospective students (Hanover Research, 2014), which helps both the

college and student find a fit. The search efforts are helped tremendously by technology, which

colleges are using at an increased rate to attract more prospective students' attention. Given the

presence of the Internet and the potential of its capabilities, the future promises an interactive

element to the recruitment and marketing efforts of colleges (Ciba & Kittle, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

There is a lack of research pertaining to how the institutional factors influence Black

students' college selection. If colleges desire to increase their enrollment of Black students,

understanding what is important to this population is essential (McDonald, 2011). This problem

is complicated by the fact there are numerous individual considerations in the decision-making

process and the weight of those factors shifts on a seemingly annual basis. The influences that

may affect a Black student's college selection today may not necessarily influence his or her

decision the following year. Additionally, research pertaining to college selection and choice

examines the issue from a collective ethnic and educational standpoint. This study examined and

considered the selection and choice of a specific institution, which much of the prior research

does not explore. An examination of the process through the lens of current and former Black

students, using their voices, can provide an increased understanding of the process of selecting a

college and reveal the important factors that guide this process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to document and analyze additional and current insights on

how Black students perceived institutional factors when selecting their college and how those

factors influenced their sense of fit and decision to persist. This study helped advance the

research in this area as college leaders seek to better understand how the Black student population chooses an institution.

Research Questions

Using Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) student choice model as well as Plummer's (2018) concept of student-institution fit as a conceptual framework, this study provided insight into the Black college student selection decision process while answering the following questions:

1. What are the institutional factors that influenced Black students to apply to and attend a specific PWI?
2. What is/was the experience of Black students at the PWI they chose?

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study is rooted in concepts pertaining to college choice and decision in addition to considerations related to fit between student and institution. Noted researchers who heavily influenced the concept of college choice are Hossler and Gallagher (1987), who created the student choice model, and Plummer (2018), who more recently expanded upon the concept of fit between the prospective student and the institution to explain how students select a college. Many of the researchers who examined this area of study or sought to contribute additional research to this area relied upon one or both concepts to help explain the process of college selection and varying factors that influence it.

For example, Plummer (2018) postulated that one of the most important considerations involving college selection is the institution being a fit for both the institution and the prospective college student, which also includes the consideration of race. Plummer continued to explain that it is necessary for the prospective college student and the college of choice to establish a relationship. Conversely, Clayton (2013) argued that when it comes to college

consideration, no prospective student is clear on what he or she is looking for prior to selecting a college.

Other noted researchers in the college selection model include Jackson (1982) and Hanson and Litten (1982, as cited in Okerson, 2016) who identified three phases involved in the student choice process, but with slightly different names and steps involved in the respective phases. These versions of the student choice model served as examples of what many researchers refer to presently Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) student choice model.

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model for student choice postulates there are three phases in the college selection process: (1) predisposition, (2) search, and (3) choice. Predisposition occurs when students contemplate if they want to attend college. Next, search occurs when prospective college students research their prospective colleges to determine which college they will apply to. Lastly, choice occurs when the prospective college student ultimately decides which college to attend.

Assumptions

Three assumptions guided the creation of this study. First, there was an assumption that PWI's would have interest in the results from this study. Second, there was an assumption the study participants held no bias against any institution, particularly their own. Lastly, it was assumed that all participants provided accurate and true details of their demographic information, college selection experience, and the factors that led them to attend a PWI.

Limitations

There were two limitations the researcher was concerned about when designing this study. First, due to the time of year when many students are difficult to reach, the sample size of the participants for this study was small. A small sample size limits the generalizability of the

study results. The second limitation was anticipated, which was the amount of information potentially provided from each participant within the study. This was not realized during the study as the participants provided ample information during the interview portion of the study, which allowed the researcher to answer the research questions formed in this study.

Scope of the Study

This study required eight to 10 Black college students who either currently attend or graduated from a PWI. These participants provided rich data about the common and comprehensive practice of how they selected their specific college. The participants' final enrollment reasons were very similar and displayed common themes. The selection of Black college students and an examination of their lived experiences in choosing a college is well-suited to the phenomenological approach to this study.

Significance

Historically, Black students have been underrepresented in academia (Coker, Huang, & Kashubeck-West, 2009). The presence of this community in higher education and the factors leading to their college selection is why this study is important. Utilizing previous selection and decision theories coupled with providing student testimonies, this study provides additional insight into factors contributing to Black students' decisions to attend a PWI. Racial diversity at white institutions comes to be viewed as a nonessential item (Leong, 2013). There is little research on race and college choice overall, and even less in recent times that focuses on this subject, particularly from the Black student perspective. This study highlights the importance of racial factors in Black students' decision making. The participants' experiences provide current and relevant data to assist higher education leadership within a PWI to create and strategically plan for targeted recruitment activities geared toward Black students.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are used in this study:

Admissions funnel. Also referred to as the enrollment funnel, this is a metaphor used in admissions environments within the field of higher education to categorize the stages prospective students move through during their path to enrolling at a university (stonybrook.edu).

HBCU. Acronym meaning Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Institutions of higher learning created to focus on educating and serving the Black community (usnews.com).

PWI. Acronym meaning Predominantly White Institution; a PWI is an institution of higher learning where more than 50% of the enrollment is accounted for by individuals who classify themselves ethnically as White.

Retention. The act of retaining; to keep possession of; to continue to use, practice, etc. (dictionary.com). As it relates to the college selection topic, retention is part of the process once a student has made a decision on an institution. Retention involves factors and/or experiences that contribute to a student's decision to remain with an institution until completion of the academic program.

Conclusion

The process of college selection is not completely understood by any one person or group due to the differences in backgrounds and situations of each prospective college student. The ability to absolutely know where and why a student will enroll is low given the fact each individual student has different factors to consider and those factors resonate differently in terms of importance and coupled with the amount of schools available to compete for the student's attention. Whether cost, distance from home, or potential future employment prospects are the single or collective most important factor(s) to a student will be a variable each time student

choice is examined. Additionally, racial demographics and the cultural background of a prospective college may influence the decision-making process.

Theorists who developed student choice models such as Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Jackson (1982) have explained that the first phase concerns whether the student wants to attend college or not. The next phase involves the prospective college students researching prospective colleges. The final phase involves the prospective college student selecting a college that may ultimately lead to enrollment and end the decision-making process. Meanwhile, researchers such as Plummer (2018), while acknowledging the importance and necessity of these phases, contend the selection decision ultimately comes down to fit for the student as well as the university. Plummer (2018) points out that fit is so important in the overall process that absence of student-institution fit can lead to early departure or non-persistence. Outcomes of this study provide data and insight for college and university leadership to better understand the interests and common factors of the college selection process, specifically as it pertains to Black students. This improved knowledge and understanding will result in more productive initial discussions and communications with Black students by leaders and administrators at PWI's.

Chapter 2 of the study reviews the literature related to college choice and college choice factors as it pertains to Black students and further describes the conceptual framework of the study. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, population, survey and interview instruments used in data collection and explains how the data was analyzed and secured for authenticity and accuracy. Chapter 4 discusses the themes and subthemes resulting from the analysis of the data provided by the participants. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation with an interpretation of the findings, implications, recommendations, further study, and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examined the relevant factors that impact college selection by some members of the Black student community. Additionally, this study explored the available research and sought to add to the knowledge base of this subject within the field of education.

The purpose of this study was to document additional and current insight on how Black students perceive institutional factors when selecting their college and analyze how those factors influence their sense of fit and decision to attend and persist. The available research in this area is very prominent when it comes to the subject of student departure, class selection, and retention; however, the examination of the preliminary stages of the college journey (i.e., the selection process) has yet to receive the level of attention it deserves (Paulsen, 1990). This study began by examining institutional factors that are considered by students and how those factors influence their college choice decision.

Institutional Factors

The review of the literature related to college selection of Black students revealed some interesting details regarding the individual and institutional factors that influence the ultimate decision of prospective college students. The review provided common themes that apply to all prospective students, regardless of race and background, such as cost and reputation of the institution. Although much research has been conducted surrounding the factors of an individual student (family background, parental and peer influence, attitudes toward education, etc.), few studies have focused on Black students. Furthermore, there is limited research on how Black students perceive institutional factors such as reputation, location, cost, faculty, campus facilities, demographics and diversity, financial assistance, sports, and safety and security when selecting a college. Historically, Black students have been underrepresented in academia (Coker, Huang, &

Kashubeck-West, 2009), which is why this study and others related to it are vital to decision-makers in the higher education system. Efforts must be made to ensure that Black students continue their education and take advantage of opportunities where possible. While there are many components involved in the decision-making process, this study explored whether there are common themes amongst the Black population when considering institutional factors such as reputation, faculty, location, cost, facilities, demographics, sports, or safety and security, particularly when it comes to a specific institution and the selection of that institution.

Reputation

Terenzini and Pascarella (1994, as cited by Hayek, 2001) stated that prestige and reputation of a university being good indicators of educational quality is just a myth, yet, the reputation of the institution remains a significant factor in the overall decision of matriculating at an institution for any student, particularly for Black students according to McKinnon (2016). One of the objectives for Black students is to be competitive with their peers of other nationalities because of the limited number of job opportunities available after receiving a bachelor's degree, which is one of the reasons Black students seek to attend selective schools (Strauss, 2016).

Reputation and job potential were reported as the top two college selection factors according to Morse (2013). Interestingly, it was these same two factors that supported the importance of the concept of a college's perceived reputation by Hayek in 2001. Noel-Levitz's (2012) study ranked reputation of a college as third in the decision-making process. It is important to note Hayek's (2001), Noel-Levitz's (2012), and Morse's (2013) findings focused on the general population. The reputation of a university can be enhanced by employing faculty with highly impressive and noteworthy credentials (Furukawa, 2011).

Faculty

Faculty with terminal degrees who also have years of teaching and practical experience in their disciplines not only contribute to the status of a college (Quora Contributor, 2018), but are also extremely valuable to students in higher education. A major part of the college experience is the learning environment created by the faculty employed at each university. The faculty and their terminal degrees come with the experience, prestige, connections, and higher level of professional cache and exposure (Best Value Schools, n.d.). This level of cache is what prospective students gravitate towards (Paulsen, 1990).

Not only is the faculty's level of knowledge and expertise critical to the college selection process, but their ethnic background is as well. Having a diverse faculty is important to prospective college students and to the collective university community (Barrett & Smith, 2008). The ability for college students to connect with faculty and be able to feel comfortable within the university community is important to their success (Madyun, McGee, Milner, & Williams, 2013). The authors noted that faculty who look like the student population are vital because it encourages personal growth, learning, and a connection between faculty and students.

Location

In real estate, the mantra of *location, location, location* serves as a reminder that when considering purchasing a home, the first, second, and third factors to consider are all location. Similarly, during college selection, the location of the college can be either an advantage or disadvantage (Clayton, 2013). An institution can have the best program and faculty and have an inexpensive tuition rate; however, if the institution is in a less than desirable location, or more than a few hours away from home, the prospective student may ultimately choose not to attend that institution (Clayton, 2013).

Prospective students who have a yearning for friends, family, and familiar surroundings might select a college relatively close to their home. In this case, the undesirable quality of the college is simply that it is too far away from home (Clayton, 2013). A review of the literature included student reports and experiences of being homesick, particularly during their freshmen year. In fact, a 2015 survey conducted by the University of California-Los Angeles' Higher Education Institute found 69% of first year college students reported feeling homesick (Wong, 2015). Being close to home not only eases the potential for being homesick but would assist in college costs as a student could live at home.

Cost

The question of cost in education–specifically, cost as ultimately the net cost to the student and the family–comes down to every person's perspective and how he or she feels about the value of the education provided (EDventures, 2014). This value may come in many forms and experience many evaluations and tests to see if the value meets or exceeds the cost of the product. Institutions understand this concept also, which is why schools seek to enhance the value given to the student by being creative and innovative in their approach to adding value to the educational experience of their students (Alex-Assensoh & Ryan, 2008).

The affordability of community colleges makes the concept of college value more difficult for students considering college. Each year, more students are considering community college to reduce net-tuition expense for the college experience (Noel-Levitz, 2012). Community colleges have academic quality comparable to that of four-year colleges with nearly half the cost in tuition (Education Corner, n.d.). The major reason community colleges are cheaper than four-year univiersities is because community colleges lack high-cost infrastructure and extra-curricula programs that contribute to additional overhead at many four-year universities (Education

Corner, n.d.). Additionally, community colleges provide some benefits such as providing a direct path of entry into a four-year college for students who complete their associate's degree with a minimum grade point average. While helpful to individual students and the enrollment at community colleges, this agreement erodes the overall enrollment of a four-year institution as the leadership–and the students–continue to struggle to balance finances and future ambitions (Noel-Levitz, 2012). High costs lead to the need for students to seek various sources of financial assistance.

Financial assistance. Related to the consideration of cost is the financial assistance available to the student provided by the university. Black students largely do not have the wealth of financial resources available when compared to other racial communities (Paulsen, 1990); once the financial aid packages have been distributed, that will be a prominent factor in deciding which college the student will attend (Tekleselassie, 2010). Black families also have other dynamics, such as having a significantly higher level of single-family homes compared to other ethnic groups, which contribute to general struggles with navigating a child through college (Mulhere, 2015). Coupled with the rising institutional costs and aid funding shortfalls, Black students face a number of challenges with college selection (Felix, 2018).

Campus Facilities

No one seeks to live in poor conditions. Moreover, when the poor conditions involve an educational experience, it can detract from the learning and educational process (Strange & Banning, 2015). The landscape of an institution is an important factor when prospective students decide to enroll into that college (Strange & Banning, 2015). If a campus looks rough and ignored, students will make note of this and factor that into their decision; if the institution does

not take care of its landscape, there is a low likelihood it will take care of its students (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Modernizing campus facilities. Many higher learning institutions have installed innovative technology items such as touchscreens and message boards to modernize their campus. According to Okerson (2016), students want to attend an institution they can be proud of and one that believes in being forward-thinking as it relates to technology. These enhancements provide additional value to the student, which translates into a positive experience. However, if a campus shows little to no interest in these ideals, a different response may result from the student community.

According to Strange and Banning (2015), if a campus has less than desirable conditions in terms of housing, eating, or physical education, the world at large will know about it because of social media. Conversely, if a campus is beautiful, elegant, palatial, and modern, the world at large will know about this as well. The upkeep, or lack thereof, of a campus may influence a prospective college student's decision-making process (Strange & Banning, 2015).

Demographics/Diversity

Black students considering an institution will examine the institution's efforts and success in attracting other students who look like themselves as well as being able to relate to them from a social and economic standpoint (Elam & Brown, 2005). Therefore, the demographics of an institution are very important to Black students (Backes, 2012). Black students are concerned as to whether they will have to be exposed to racial outbursts or any other type of racial incidents by other nationalities if they attend non-HBCU's or predominantly-white institutions (Barrett & Smith, 2008). These concerns are informed in large part by, either positively or negatively, events experienced during the formative years.

Contrary to the experience by Black students at non-HBCU's, non-Black students who attend HBCU's report, for the most part an entirely different experience both inside and outside the classroom (Carter & Fountaine, 2012). Black students are embraced more by the college community within the confines of an HBCU and treated just like every other student on campus (Backes, 2012). Additionally, non-Black students are educated about history from a Black perspective, and learn from others about the experiences, lifestyle, and culture of the Black community, so there will ideally be more tolerance and attention given to the plight of the Black community group (Gasman, 2012).

Sports

Intercollegiate athletics play a part in the decision-making process of Black students, who are or are not deemed athletes with opportunities to play at the collegiate level (Beamon, 2008). Whether a student attends an institution because he or she will be a student-athlete or participate in sports in an ancillary manner, feeds into a social angle of consideration because of the television presence held by collegiate sports (Popp, Pierce, & Hums, 2011). Although focused on Urban Universities, Vermillion (2012) used the framework of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) student choice model to understand the college decision-making process. For example, Black students who seek to continue athletics at the college level will consider many of the similar factors as non-athletic students but will have additional factors relating to athletics taking priority (Vermillion, 2012). The enjoyment and experiences gained from collegiate sporting events continues to live on within students even once they have departed and become alumni of the institution (Popp, Pierce, & Hums, 2011).

Safety/Security

Safety and security are basic human rights. Safety and security are basic concerns for any human's decision-making, whether it is comes to selecting a school, a home, where to work, or even where to vacation (Stotzer & Hossellman, 2012). Safety and security of a student are a great consideration when it comes to deciding on a college to attend for Black students or any other student (Stotzer & Hossellman, 2012). Colleges who have had their safety compromised due to heinous acts such as sexual assault, violent racial episodes, gun fire, and/or deaths lend themselves to having their recruiting efforts compromised and overall student enrollment affected (LeBahn, 2009, p. 44). Colleges are taking steps toward mitigating potential violent issues to instill and preserve confidence in the spirit of safety for their student communities (LeBahn, 2009, p. 142).

Black students tend to particularly look at the number of race-related episodes experienced on campus of a school they are considering (Stotzer & Hossellman, 2012). The violent history of the United States, as it pertains to Black students, has taught this community to be aware and vigilant in matters of race. This vigilance means not placing oneself in the path of potential harm (Stotzer & Hossellman, 2012). For instance, students may choose not to attend an institution in an area of the country that has a reputation and history of being racially insensitive.

Conceptual Framework

Given the research themes and models related to college choice and student-institution fit, the framework of institutional factors that impact Black student choice have served to frame this study. The first student choice model is noted as being created by Kolter (1976) (as cited by Okerson, 2016). Kolter's model is based on marketing theories being integrated in the college selection process. Kolter's (1976) model involved seven phases: (1) decision to attend; (2)

information seeking and receiving; (3) specific college inquiries; (4) applications; (5)

admissions; (6) college choice; and (7) registration.

Jackson (1982 and other theorists such as Hossler and Gallagher (1987), have built upon

and simplified Kolter's model to explain the many facets of the college selection process.

Jackson's (1982) and Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) versions, while simplified, still manage to

cover the spectrum of the decision-making process in an adequate manner. It should be noted

that Jackson's (1982) and Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) versions are slightly different from

each other's, but still contain three phases. For example, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) referred

to the first phase as the predisposition phase, whereas Jackson (1982) referred to the first phase

as the preference phase. Both theories affirm the student is essentially considering a school or

schools to attend while evaluating factors important to the specific individual (Okerson, 2016).

The overall well-being of a student as well as feeling accepted within a university's

academic, social, cultural, physical, and socioeconomic environments are factors that contribute

to what Plummer (2018) detailed as a fit between a student and their ultimate college choice.

Selecting a college where the fit is missing can have negative consequences for the student

including departing early to another institution, not to mention enduring an overall negative

educational experience (Plummer, 2018).

Conclusion

Important college selection factors in this chapter such as cost, reputation, faculty,

facilities, sports, location, safety, and demographics stem from the Black student perspective of

what the institution has in terms of fit and interest to the student. These factors are highlighted

and affirmed in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-phase student selection model: (1)

predisposition, (2) search, and (3) choice and the examination of student-institution fit (Plummer,

2018). Student-institution fit for Black students does not necessarily equate to attending an

HBCU. Rather, a complete examination and consideration of a variety of institutional factors

will lead Black students to select the college of their choice. Chapter 3 details the methodology

used to collect and analyze the study data.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides insight into the methodological approach and design of the study. Using a qualitative approach of the phenomenology variety (Roberts, 2010, p. 161), this study focused on participants' experiences, which were provided from their individual perspectives. The design of the study included surveys and interviews where Black students shared their experiences related to choosing and attending a PWI. Each participant was empowered to share his or her experience to let readers of this research and other external Stakeholders, such as institutional leaders, know what the participants were thinking that ultimately drove their decision to enroll at their selected institution. This study provides insight for PWI's leaders into the following research questions:

1. What were the institutional factors that influenced Black students to apply to and attend a specific PWI?

2. What is/was the experience of Black students at the PWI they chose?

Setting

As this study sought to highlight factors related to the college selection process and to the overall experience of Black students, the setting involved Black students who were attending or had graduated with a Bachelor's degree from a PWI. Using an anonymous online survey, students identified their respective institutions. Students who opted in for the interview in this study were assigned pseudonyms as were their institutions. The institution's pseudonyms were assigned PWI A-1 through PWI A-8. The pseudonyms were created and assigned to protect the identity of the participants and to provide anonymity for each specific institution the students attended.

Participants

All study participants identified themselves as Black or African-American in the survey. Additionally, each participant indicated they were between the ages of 18-38. They were either in the process of completing a bachelor's degree (i.e., they identified as freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior) or had graduated with a Bachelor's degree between 2004-2019 from a PWI. The researcher's social media outlets (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn) were used to recruit survey respondents. Anyone who viewed the social media posts was encouraged to share the survey links with their friends and colleagues.

The survey respondents totaled 52, of which 35 opted-in for the interview. Twelve of the respondents were randomly selected and invited to participate in the interview, of which, 10 responded for an appointment to interview. There were not enough male respondents to the survey or interview to ensure an even representation of gender. The researcher made every effort to bring representative balance to the study in terms of gender with the hope of discovering possible similarities in thought processes and trends in college selection factors. The gender breakdown of interview participants was five females and three males. Overall, out of the 52 survey respondents, 43 were female, and 9 were male.

Participant Rights

The rights of the participants were fully considered throughout this study. Their rights and privacy disclosures were provided at the start of the survey and read again to each participant at the start of the interview. These rights included the ability to not answer any question and the right to stop the interview completely at any time. Additionally, each participant was reminded their identity would be assigned a pseudonym that would be shared with them for future reference and reading of the study.

Data

This study used two approaches to collecting data:

1. Surveys: A survey was developed and distributed using REDCap software to gain insight into important college decision factors of Black students.

2. Interviews: A scripted interview with participants was constructed and conducted via telephone on a secure conference line at the convenience of the participants.

Using interviews and surveys, data collection was conducted securely and privately. The source of the data used in this phenomenological study consisted of the student survey form (Appendix A) and interview questions (Appendix B), which generated the responses from study participants.

Surveys

The survey questions were developed to be in concert with the themes presented throughout the literature review and the conceptual framework. The surveys were generated and administered for students to use via an electronic link using REDCap software.

The surveys were available for completion for an initial period of 72-hours on the researcher's social media outlets. After receiving an inadequate number of survey responses during the initial period, an additional 72-hour window was provided, and a reminder notice was posted on the researcher's social media outlets. Using what is known as the snowball concept, where research participants recruit other participants for a test or study (Statistics, 2019), there were finally enough responses received to complete the survey and draw participants for interviews.

Interviews

Each interview lasted a minimum of 30 minutes but did not exceed 60 minutes. Each interviewee was provided a phone number and password to call into a secure conference number and each audio session was recorded using freeconference.com. The interviews were then uploaded to a secure cloud-based security service that is password protected with a 256-bit encrypted password. The recordings were then sent to Maestra Suite for transcription. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to fully describe the experience from their point of view (Grand Canyon University, n.d.). The interview questions were developed using a qualitative research interview strategy guide from Harvard University's Sociology Department (harvard.edu). Drawing creative inspiration from this guide, the questions were developed to address the research questions. They were dervied from literature and framework discussed in Chapter 2.

The first portion of the interview sought to discover information about the student's background and higher education influences. This phase would potentially reveal initial college selection factors important to the student as well as any individuals close to the student. The next phase of the interview sought to discover any colleges that were considered by the student and what factor(s) led to their ultimate enrollment decision. The final portion of the interview examined the overall college experience as well as a reflection on their process to gain insight into their decision process to determine if they are satisfied with their selection and what, if any, advice they would like to share with future college students.

Analysis

The data from the surveys was analyzed using the REDCap software tools. Survey responses were tallied and organized by date received and using the Very Important variable as

the sort benchmark. The results were then placed electronically into REDCap software for statistical analysis and exported to Microsoft Excel for validation and accuracy. The data from the interviews was analyzed by performing a thorough reading of the transcripts for accuracy and validity. Four interview participants were provided their transcript to confirm accuracy and they acknowledged the accuracy of the transcript. The transcripts were coded using a combination of hand coding and QDA Miner Lite software to extract common themes to understand and compare the most important factors for college selection amongst the interviewees. Additionally, statements and key words were highlighted to create more narrow themes, which helped form the common factors of this study and answer the research questions.

Each participant involved in the interviews was assigned a pseudonym for privacy and security, and the data was placed into a matrix to illustrate the themes related to their college selection factors. These emerging themes were used to answer the research questions posed in this study. Given the researcher identifies as a Black student, the opportunity for bias was present in each interview. To minimize the potential for bias and to ensure the researcher's thoughts and suppositions did not influence the study participants, the researcher developed an interview script. Like the emerging themes, the script was developed to extract details that would answer the research questions to this study truthfully as well as make the interviewees feel comfortable during the process.

Data Security

Given the phenomenological approach used for this study and the fact that participants' personal and private details were involved, the utmost security and care was employed to maintain the trust and confidentiality of the process as well as the outcomes. A secured laptop with a 256-bit encrypted password contains the recordings, data, and transcripts involved in this

study. Additionally, the composite findings from the study have been backed up in a personal cloud-based storage system, which is also protected by a 256-bit encrypted password system. The researcher is the sole individual with knowledge of the password to the cloud system and that password was stored on the researcher's iPhone on a note pad application that also contains a 256-bit encrypted password. Access to that app is protected and that locked password can only be unlocked with the researcher's biometric information (i.e., fingerprints). This added level of security was implemented to prevent mishandling of any sensitive data.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included (1) potentially limited or untruthful information being shared from the participants despite the confidentiality notices provided on the survey and at the start of the interview; (2) the quantity of participants in this study as participation in both the survey and the interviews was completely voluntary and contained no compensation for participating; (3) lastly, any negative memories of the interviewees that were recalled during the individual sessions, which may have limited the level of detail shared with the researcher.

As a researcher who also identifies as a Black person, potential for bias was present. However, the researcher remained cognizant of the potential ethical issues and limitations encountered with the observation technique of research (Roberts, 2010, p. 180). The researcher listened to the recorded conversations generated by the interview and refrained from interjecting any ideas. The researcher allowed the evidence received from the interviews to speak for itself and treated the process of the study as a learning opportunity. Mitigating bias in this study was paramount. To ensure the researcher's bias was kept at bay, the researcher engaged in the practice of bracketing (Newman & Tufford, 2010). Conducting pilot interviews or interviews with an outside source that had no vested interest in the study, and creating a reflexive journal

helped ensure the researcher's suppositions were not introduced into the research process. This process also provided a comparative tool for the actual outcomes of the study versus the researcher's own thoughts (Newman & Tufford, 2010).

Conclusion

This chapter described the method of constructing and executing this study. This study sought to examine the factors that contributed to the enrollment at PWI's by Black students, which also included re-living some of their college experiences once the enrollment decision was made. The literature provided details of institutional factors that resonate with students and served as a guide for driving the direction and subject matter of this study. Chapter 4 presents results of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

As research and innovation continues in the area of college selection factors, the ability to significantly and consistently increase enrollment continues to elude enrollment management leaders (Jaschik, 2018). Additionally, the factors that lead to Black students selecting PWI's continue to be difficult to determine, particularly given these factors seem to shift on an annual basis. Based on the findings from the participants that were interviewed as well as the research uncovered in the literature review, this unpredictable pattern is supported.

Methodology Review

To ensure all the requisite information was provided and to assess those who opted-in for the interviews, the researcher conducted an examination of the survey data files. The researcher made notes of those files that included individuals' names and omitted additional contact data to complete the interview process. These individuals were excluded from the pool of potential interviewees as part of the check for data integrity process. After a complete check of the data, the researcher determined the survey data was viable and could be reported in the study.

The number of individuals responding to and participating in the online survey totaled 52 (Figure 1); 12 of the 35 participants who opted in to be interviewed were randomly selected for interviews, and eight actually participated in an interview. The gender breakdown (Figure 2) of the 52 respondents was 83% female and 17% male. The data from the survey was used to help drive the line of questioning of the interviews as some of the participants were still in school, while others had graduated within the 2004 through 2019 timeframe. The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participants as comfort of each participant was paramount to the researcher.
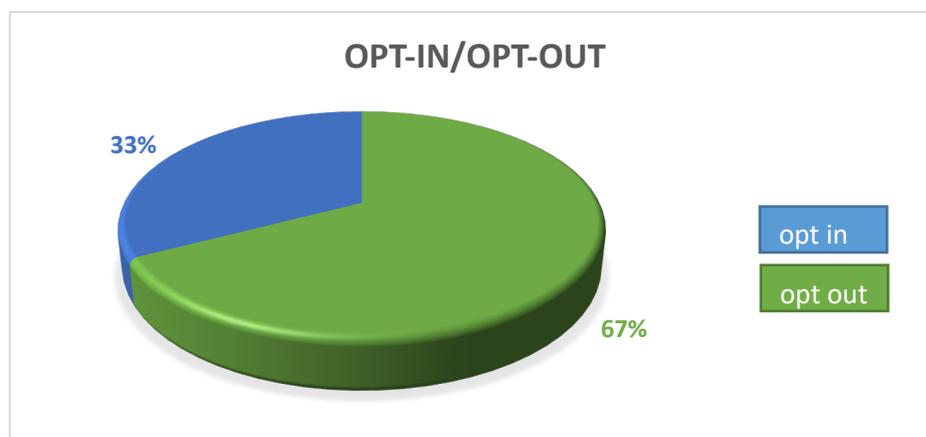
OPT-IN/OPT-OUT

33%

67%

opt in

opt out

Figure 1. Breakdown of respondents opting-in for the interview versus those who did not opt-in
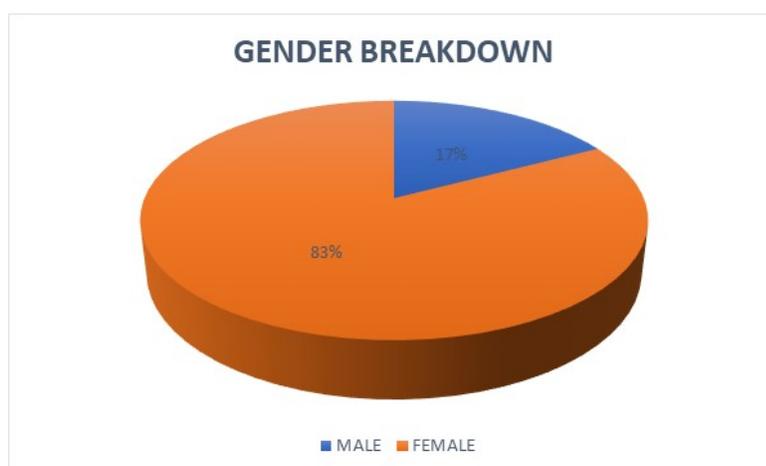
GENDER BREAKDOWN

17%

83%

■ MALE ■ FEMALE

Figure 2. Breakdown of respondents by gender.

The REDCap tool, used to construct the survey, was helpful with identifying variables such as age or college. Age, college attended/attending, city/state of college, and college factors extracted from research within the literature review were part of the survey, asked in the form of a question or rating. Additionally, the overall college experience was asked of each participant in the interview to draw comparisons and gain insight into the comfort level each participant had with their college selection. Each interview participant was reminded of their rights and confidentiality guaranteed before the start of the interview, so the process could be performed naturally and with the utmost level of comfort and confidence in the researcher and the process.

Each interview was transcribed then placed in QDA Miner Lite for assistance with coding; manual coding was performed on some of the transcriptions, so the researcher could work with the data throughout the process. Each participant and school were assigned a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of each participant and their associated college.

To familiarize the researcher with the details of each transcript and the emergent themes contained within each interview, each transcript received a significant number of reviews. The themes were listed in the right margin of the transcript while other notes and some coding were placed in the left margins. The streamlining of the notes and themes were then placed into a single, yet separate, document so the main details of the interviews could be viewed at a glance.

Using QDA Miner Lite, the researcher discovered some of the themes could be eliminated and condensed into simpler, more effective themes through the coding process. Finally, the researcher was able to make a more accurate and detailed presentation of the information shared by each participant once the coding process and themes were solidified.

Discussion of Findings

Using the data collected in the survey and interviews, common selection factors were revealed. Some of the factors were anticipated based on the literature review, but some of the revelations from the data were unforeseen. For example, the researcher hypothesized in his reflexive journal factors receiving the highest level of positive responses would be cost and reputation of the university. Interestingly, in noting the reputation of the faculty, 27% of those who completed the survey indicated the reputation of the faculty was Neutral to their decision compared to 63% of the survey responses indicating the reputation of the faculty was either Very Important or Important in their college selection decision (Figure 3).
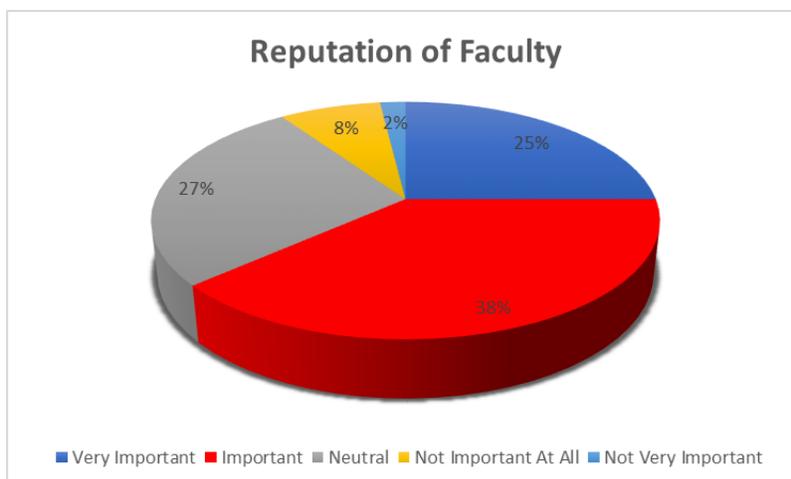
Figure 3. Breakdown of Faculty Reputation.

Data in the surveys supported similar findings that were revealed in the interviews with respect to the college selection factors. Each factor represented a variable as listed in the REDCap survey. For example, each student was asked to rate the importance of a college selection factor taken from the literature review and how that factor impacted their decision to enroll at a specific PWI. The surveys were constructed asking the participants to evaluate the importance of each factor on a scale from Very Important (5) to Not Important at All (1) as it relates to college selection and how vital these factors were in their respective college selection process. Each factor has been pulled from the literature and statistically categorized and tallied to show level of influence based on results of data from surveys completed (Table 1).

Table 1

Breakdown of Important and Very Important Survey Responses by Factor

Factor	Total Responses	Percent of Responses
Cost	46	88%
Amount of Aid Received	46	88%
Academic Resources (library, course help)	42	81%
Campus Facilities	41	79%
Reputation of University	40	77%
Professional Resources (jobs)	39	75%
Location of University	38	73%
Sense of Safety	36	69%
Diversity of Students	34	65%
Reputation of Faculty	33	63%
Modernization/Technology	32	61%
Influence of Family/Loved One(s)	31	60%
Social Resources (nightlife, attractions)	21	40%
Sports	14	27%

Additionally, those who elected to participate in the interviews responded to questions that were constructed with these factors in mind to get honest recalls from the interviewees. Based on the data collected from the survey and using only the variable rating of "Very Important", the top three college selection factors were: (1) Cost (Figure 4); (2) Financial Aid Received (Figure 5); and (3) Reputation of the University (Figure 6).
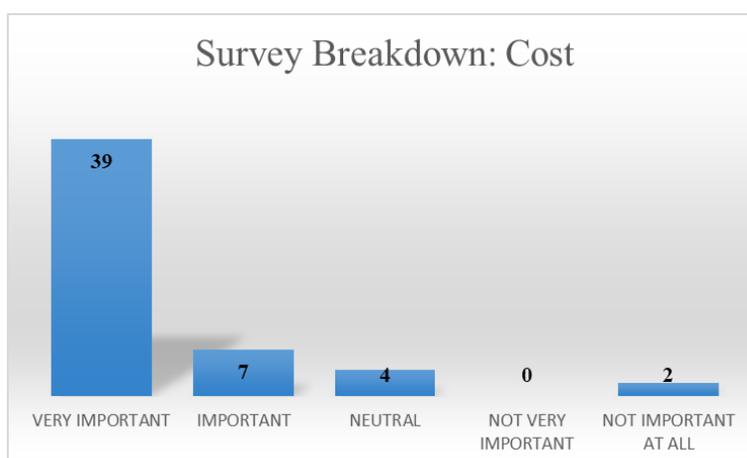

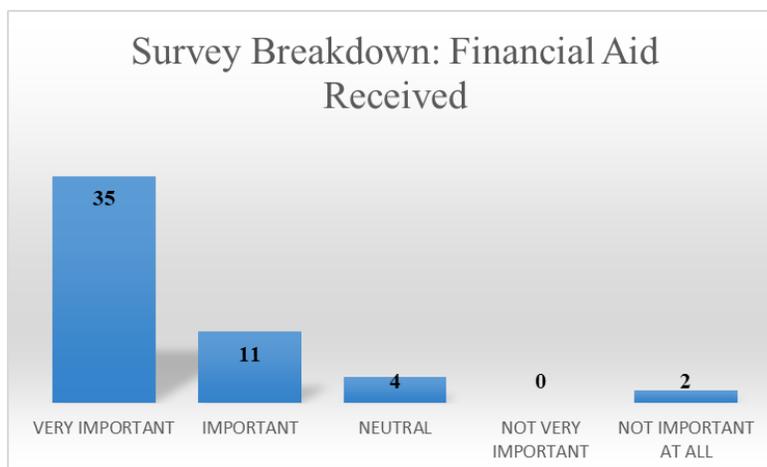*Figure 4.* Breakdown of Cost Responses.

Figure 5. Breakdown of Financial Aid Received Responses.
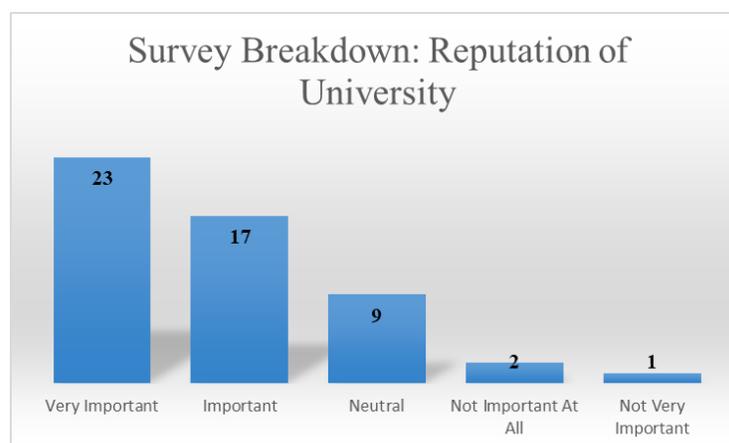
Figure 6. Breakdown of University Reputation Responses.

Interview Participants

Twelve respondents were randomly selected for the interview portion of this study with 10 responding to arrange for the interview. Technology difficulties resulted in the loss of two interviews. After multiple attempts to schedule an interview with the other two individuals selected, time became a constraint, therefore, the other two individuals were not able to participate in the study. The final number of participants participating in this study was eight.

The eight individuals were each assigned a pseudonym and have been identified as: Adam, Stephanie, Lillian, Gerald, Christina, Debra, Albert, and Molly. No consideration was given for the geographical location where they presently live. The individuals were considered

completely at random, which resulted in varying ages, locations of schools and insights. These variations led to interesting conclusions of the study given the similarities of the college selection factors as well as their respective college experiences. Table 2 provides details about the interview participants as well as their demographic information.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Grad. Year	PWI
Adam	Male	2017	PWI A-1
Stephanie	Female	2012	PWI A-2
Gerald	Male	2020	PWI A-3
Molly	Female	2019	PWI A-4
Lillian	Female	2004	PWI A-5
Christina	Female	2012	PWI A-6
Debra	Female	2022	PWI A-7
Albert	Male	2017	PWI A-8

Interview Responses

Each interview revealed a level of clarity and in some cases, surprise, when it came to the motivation for selecting their specific college. Additionally, the interviews added to the body of research through the detailed anecdotal responses. The responses served as descriptive data given everyone who interviewed also completed the survey, which was another level of data contributing to the body of research. While the students were each looking for something different from the college they considered, each student nevertheless experienced each phase of the process outlined by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) (Table 3):

Table 3

Interviewee responses corresponding to Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three phases of the college selection process

Name	Phase 1: Predisposition	Phase 2: Search	Phase 3: Selection/Choice
Adam	"I began thinking about college early because of my parent's influence."	"I looked at schools who offered track."	"I selected [PWI A-1] because I got more bang for my buck and financial aid [offered]."
Stephanie	"My parent's influence is why I considered college."	"I knew I wanted to go to a state school not too far away from home."	"I selected [PWI A-2] because it fit in terms of distance and cost."
Gerald	"I was in high school and talking with my guidance counselor about schools."	"I listed tiers of schools [of interest] and applied to them."	"I went to [PWI A-3] because of the location. It is close to New York, but not New York."
Molly	"I was in 9th grade; my mom works in education and it was discussed in the house."	"I looked at some schools and my parents had opinions about where I should I go."	"I was set on [another PWI] for months but selected [PWI A-4] because I knew I could get a job in my field with that degree."
Lillian	"Recruiters came to my high school."	"I looked at schools in many different places and considered HBCU's also."	[PWI A-5] offered me a scholarship and that's why I enrolled."
Christina	"It started early in high school."	"I began sending inquiries to different schools. I also visited a few of those schools"	"When I visited [PWI A-6], I got to see the beautiful campus and see the diversity of the campus...it felt like home"
Debra	"My family started me thinking about college in high school."	"I did not want to be close to home, so I looked at schools in areas I liked."	"I selected [PWI A-7] because they were the only school who accepted me and offered me money. Other schools accepted me but did not offer money."
Albert	"I completed my Associate's degree long before my bachelor's. I was not serious about my education then."	"Once I got serious about my education, I looked for schools who would accept the majority of my transfer credits."	"I selected [PWI A-8] because they accepted most of my transfer credits because cost was a factor to me."

College Selection Process

Adam. Adam completed his bachelor's degree in 2017 from PWI A-1 in Connecticut. Adam described his overall college experience as a good experience. Adam explained that his parents were the influence behind him attending college. This influence began at an early age as Adam is the youngest of his siblings and his parents focused on the importance of attending college: "I went to private school my entire life. So it was embedded in me at a very young age that education was important." Adam shared that his parents were not concerned about where he attended college. They just wanted him to attend a good school that he was comfortable with and that would provide him a solid education. Adam had his sights set on a few colleges because of his love of sports, particularly track, and he wanted a college that emphasized both. Adam explained: "I got into a car accident my senior year which really messed up my running flow. So, I had to look at other options." Adam considered a few schools, but as he explained, "The reason I chose [PWI A-1] was because I got more bang for my buck." Cost and the ability to not have a large amount of debt after college were very important to Adam. Although PWI A-1's financial aid package was attractive to Adam, it was the track coach wishing him happy birthday during his senior year in high school that helped with his final decision. This innocuous greeting and expression of well-wishes meant a great deal to Adam, and he felt as if this school and the community would treat him well. Adam's instincts appeared to have been accurate. He ultimately attended the same college for his graduate degree which he completed in December of 2018.

Stephanie. Stephanie is a 2012 graduate from PWI A-2 in California. Her family influenced her and her siblings to look towards college while they were still in middle school. Both of Stephanie's parents have master's degrees, so growing up, education was, as Stephanie

described it, "pretty important in our home." Stephanie has two other siblings, one of whom is a fraternal twin, who also went to college. Her college experience was very different from that of her siblings. Stephanie attended community college for two years before moving on to a four-year college to complete her bachelor's degree, whereas her twin brother went straight to a four-year college. Stephanie and her family resided in a white neighborhood. While this experience may not have been the primary factor in their respective decisions, this experience did contribute to their respective decisions on which college to attend. Interestingly, she decided on a PWI, where her twin brother decided to attend a HBCU.

Stephanie also mentioned cost was a heavy factor in her decision. "Fifty percent of the reason I selected [PWI A-2] was definitely the money." Stephanie was aware a state school would cost her less money, but she also considered other schools both near and far. Stephanie explained there are 26 state schools in California, so she had many choices to consider. Stephanie shared, "Some schools were eliminated because many of my high school friends went there, and I wanted to meet new people and not re-live high school."

Other factors such as sports and facilities were not critical in the decision-making process for Stephanie. She essentially looked at cost and location. While she ultimately remained close to home, she did consider looking at going away to school, but in the final analysis, she found a school that had a little distance, but was close enough in the event she may need to get home quickly.

Stephanie's overall college experience was described as a good experience. She mentioned her first year at PWI A-2 was a bit tough as there were some administration challenges. She did not receive the best academic advice, which caused her to delay her graduation date. Overall, she had a good experience. Because she describes herself as motivated

and a self-starter, she recounted that she was able to overcome the obstacles she experienced. She also mentioned that if someone is not that type of person, PWI A-2 would not be a good fit for them.

Gerald. Gerald currently attends PWI A-3 in Maryland where he is a rising senior. His family was supportive of his college decision and left it up to him to make. Gerald explained, "I was working with my guidance counselor to decide on the type of schools I would apply to. I applied to about 12 schools and my guidance counselor thought it was a good idea I considered different tiers of schools." PWI A-3 was one of the first schools he was able to speak with in person and one of the first schools to accept him.

Distance was an important factor for Gerald. He considered other PWI's that were equal, if not better, in terms of reputation; however, he did not want to be too far away from home. Gerald shared, "One of the reasons I went to [PWI A-3] is because of the location." He applied to and was accepted at PWIs in nearby states but did not want to be that close to home as the college experience and all it includes were important to him. Gerald stated, "I applied to [a school] that's upstate, but that's not the same [given the distance]. I definitely wanted to go somewhere else, but not be too far from home." He visited PWI A-3 and based on a composite standpoint of academics, location, and ancillary interests he had, such as tennis courts and ping-pong facilities, this college fit all those requirements and felt right to Gerald.

Gerald has described his experience in college as a great experience. He loves where he is and what he is learning and is confident he made the correct choice.

Molly. Molly graduated in 2019 from PWI A-4 located in Maryland. Molly's mother and father emphasized education and pointed her towards college once she reached high school. Molly's mother was the driving force of the focus as her mother is an educator. Both parents had

a particular college in mind for Molly to attend but left the ultimate decision of any college she wanted to attend up to her. Molly shared, "My mom and dad both indicated which school they would prefer I attend, and I liked both schools. It just so happened I selected the school my father wanted, not because he's my father or anything like that, it was just because it fit. My mother is happy as long as I graduated." She also shared she had considered "the fact the school has one of the strongest academic reputations in the country, so I knew with this degree, I could get a job anywhere in my field."

Molly said she also wanted to attend a PWI because

The world is not made up of just Black people and Brown people, and I knew I would have to get used to interacting with people who did not look like me or think like me, so [PWI A-4] was a great place to gain that experience. I met a lot of people with many different backgrounds in terms of race and religion, and we bonded and formed really great relationships.

There were some unfortunate aspects to Molly's time at PWI A-4. "There were some publicized racist incidents that happened on campus, and I was able to see that up close. When President Trump was elected, there were hate speeches all across campus, which showed you the type of world we live in today." Molly was not terribly concerned about this atmosphere given she understood people are not going to always be in concert with one another. As the researcher touched on the subject of why this college, particularly in light of potential racism, Molly shared, "I applied to 12 or 13 colleges and was accepted to all of them, but [PWI A-4] was ultimately the best option for me given my desire for a competitive program and location. I visited most of the colleges I applied to, including [PWI A-4], and this college ultimately was the best fit for me. I

was not too concerned with the facilities or even sports. They just were not important to me.

Both schools I strongly considered have plenty of sports options, but that did not matter to me."

Overall, Molly had a great college experience, but in addition to the racist examples she

shared, there were other things she was unhappy with during her time at [PWI A-4]. Molly

stated:

> There were certain situations our President handled that did not go over well with the
>
> Black [student] community. It shed light on how corporations get away with certain
>
> things and sweep them under the rug and get away with it. Now, I pay attention to certain
>
> behaviors or how an email sounds. I did not like the way the staff handled the situations
>
> – things the public did not hear about. But, it leaves room for change and new ideas and I
>
> like that.

 Despite these negative experiences, Molly had many great experiences to go with a great

academic foundation. Molly said, "I had a great experience overall and do not regret my decision

to attend [PWI A-4]."

Lillian. Lillian graduated from PWI A-5 in Mississippi in 2004. She considered a few

colleges and universities, including HBCU's, before making her decision. Lillian shared

revealing facts about how she made her decision about which college to attend.

> I visited several of the schools I applied to, but they felt out of my element. I was later
>
> visited by a recruiter from [PWI A-5] while I was in high school, who was familiar with
>
> me. I think he must have looked at my application materials and remembered my name
>
> or something, but that was impactful. He also really sold the school to me, but it was not
>
> until I received the offer of the full scholarship that I was sold. I really started to pay
>
> attention to the cost of colleges after that. I visited other colleges and noticed how

expensive some of them were and [my decision] really boiled down to money. [PWI A-5] was the only school to offer me that amount of money where basically the entire education would be paid for, so that is where I went.

As for Lillian's support system, she shared:

My parents wanted me to go to college, but it was not necessarily a point of emphasis. We did not discuss it much, but it was left up to me. I had a counselor in high school who was not very helpful [in the process]. I saw my peers going through their selection process, but I was not familiar with what they going through. I just knew I wanted to study things like Sociology and that college was the place to make that happen. So my inner nerd [said] go for it, but it was up to me. I don't recall having many discussions with my parents about the process or the decision. I just told them I made it and when I was ready to go.

Lillian's college experience was a good experience overall. It provided a foundation for her to grow and serve. Since completing college in 2004, Lillian has joined and served in the Peace Corps and is working towards the next chapter of her life.

Christina. Christina is a 2012 graduate of PWI A-6 located in Arkansas. She had the support of her family and a guidance counselor when looking at colleges, but it was, as she described it, "more of a self-involved process". She looked at a few colleges that were close to home, including an HBCU. She also looked at colleges outside of her home state because she did want to go away as well. She eliminated some of the colleges, including the HBCU, because of the amount of high school friends that were attending some of the schools, and she wanted to meet a new and diverse pool of people. Christina had many choices when it came to selecting a college, and she took her time and was judicious with her process. Christina stated, "I chose not

to go to the [PWI flagship school] because when I did my tour there, I just didn't feel like it was a fit just through walking around on the tour and talking."

Christina selected PWI A-6 because as she mentioned, "when I arrived on campus, it just felt like home." Additionally, she mentioned after making her decision, she was informed she received a full scholarship. She indicated money was a factor as the scholarship helped in her decision knowing she would attend college for free or mostly for free. When the researcher asked her to expand on the feeling of fit she experienced, she explained,

I guess there was there was more that went into the fit. We were there during a school day, and one thing that did draw me to the campus besides [the scholarship], they just had a great atmosphere. It's a very beautiful campus, too. We got to see the students going to and from classes and different things like that. And I really appreciated how even though it is a PWI, the visual presence of students. I saw a lot of Black people, sprinkled with international students, so just visually surveying the campus, it didn't look like a PWI. So, I was quite happy with like the diversity of the campus…

Debra. Debra is a rising sophomore who attends PWI A-7 located in Washington, DC. She began looking at colleges during her sophomore year in high school. While she had the support of her family, particularly her older brother, the search and the decision process was self-motivated. Debra stated,

Home is the Virgin Islands and I did not want to go anywhere where people [from high school] in general go. [PWI A-7] was not on my list of serious colleges I considered at the start of my process. Yes, it helped because of the location because I have family near DC, and I like the area, but I was looking at other schools in other areas besides DC. I

started looking at tuition costs and there were schools whose tuition was not bad, but

[PWI A-7] was the only school that accepted me that offered a scholarship.

Debra further shared,

I applied to 10 other schools and half of them wait listed me and more than a few more

rejected me. I did receive three acceptances without being wait listed, but I ultimately

selected [PWI A-7] because it is in DC as well as the reputation of the school, but mostly

because of the amount of aid I was offered.

So far, Debra's college experience has been good. One thing she shared in terms of her

frustrations with her experience is,

It is a little frustrating to see the low amount of activity from a political or human-interest

standpoint from fellow political science students. Being a student in the nation's capital

and close to Capitol Hill is a unique opportunity, particularly given the current state of

the country, and students should be more engaged and active in real-world concerns.

Albert. Albert graduated from PWI A-8 in 2017. He took a very non-traditional route to

degree completion. When Albert was asked about his ultimate college selection and the process,

he stated,

I started in community college a decade ago and never really committed to completion

until some friends began to encourage me to get serious about my education. I selected

[PWI A-8] because this was the only institution near me that would accept most of my

credits from my Associate's program. I was not looking at if the school was a HBCU or

PWI. I was looking for a college to fit what I needed and that was close so I could

complete my Bachelor's degree as quickly and as inexpensively as possible. As it turned

out, [PWI A-8] was that school.

Albert also mentioned,

> I did look at cost to complete the degree but given the amount of credits I needed to
> transfer, which could have been lost going elsewhere, cost was not necessarily a primary
> consideration in my decision. I did want to attend a reputable school so I could get into
> the field of business (Finance) I wanted. [PWI A-8] fulfilled all of those requirements, so
> that's where I went.

Common Themes

Through the practice of coding and re-reading the transcripts of the interviews, there were common, intersecting themes that were apparent from the interviewees as well as the survey data. Those themes were: (1) Cost; (2) Fit; and (3) Reputation of the university.

Theme 1: Cost

Cost was by far the most common theme that appeared throughout the survey and the interviews. Out of the 52 survey responses received, 39 (75%) indicated cost as being a *very important* factor in the college selection process and seven others (13%) indicated it as important. While each interviewee indicated there were other factors that weighed into their decision, cost absolutely factored into each person's decision. In the case of Stephanie, Lillian and Debra, it clearly helped sway their college selection choices. Lillian shared the fact that she considered other schools but her decision boiled down to money. She said she made her decision based on the scholarship being offered to cover her costs of obtaining her degree. Stephanie disclosed the fact that 50% of her decision was based on the cost of the school coupled with the amount of aid she received.

Financial Aid. Schools were able to successfully enroll Black students based on the data provided by the interviewees. Stephanie, Lillian, Debra, and Christina all stated the scholarship

or financial aid award made all the difference in their decision to attend their specific college. To further illustrate the point, Albert stated, "I considered costs, but the amount of transfer credits to be accepted and the reputation of the school were more important." Adam noted, "Cost and the ability to not have a large amount of debt was important to me." These students and former students explained through their testimonies that they examined other aspects of the decision process and other considerations weighed in their decisions.

Theme 2: Fit

As Plummer (2018) stated, *Fit* involves characteristics that mean different things to different people, and what is an important characteristic for one person may not even be considered for another. This concept was visited in the literature review and was the common intersecting theme apparent in all eight interviews. Adam mentioned the combination of having a school support his athletic interests as well as giving him "more bang for his buck" fit what he was looking for in a college. Stephanie shared she was seeking a college that was reasonably priced stating, "50% of my decision was based on cost", being academically sound, relatively close to home, and where she felt comfortable. Once she found that school, she was able to make her choice. Gerald had a similar requirement, in addition to his academic interests "I wanted to be close, but not too close to home." Molly wanted a college that would not only meet her academic interests, but expose her to a diverse community that, as she stated, would help her gain experience "interacting with people who do not look or think like me."

Each of the eight interviewees visited their college prior to enrolling and were able to establish the notion that the college they eventually selected was in fact the best fit. It should also be noted that out of the 52 survey responses received, 31 of them indicated the college in which they enrolled was *not* their first choice. As nearly 60% of the survey respondents enrolled in a

college other than the one originally desired, it appears as if fit is highly important to students deciding on a college to attend. For example, Albert's meaning of fit-or characteristics-involved a school who would take his credits, was located near him and possessed a solid academic reputation. Whereas in the case of Christina, her visit to campus and the feeling she experienced while she was on campus and the diversity she witnessed helped her determine fit. Gerald's fit involved a school that was not close to home and contained a solid academic reputation.

Theme 3: Reputation of the University

The reputation of the university was clearly important with most of the students surveyed and interviewed. The surveys indicated that 23 of the 52 respondents (44%) stated the reputation of the university was *Very Important*; 17 of the 52 (32%) indicated it was *Important*. Notable quotes from those interviewed included Debra, who said, "[PWI A-7's] reputation helped with my decision especially since they were the only school to accept me and offer money." Molly said, "[PWI A-4's] reputation helped my decision because I get a job anywhere in my field." Similar to Molly, Albert said, "[PWI A-8's] reputation was important because it will help me get a job in the field of Finance." Gerald also shared that while he was looking for a location some distance from home, he was "looking for a school with a solid reputation."

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

Chapter 4 presented the student perspective of the college selection process through the shared experiences of both current and former Black students who attended a PWI. The details of these results were uncovered and organized using interviews, surveys, and common themes. Each individual interview shared details of the common themes and how it impacted each student's decision-making process. The results from these interviews contributed to answering the research questions posed in this study. Chapter 5 will provide details related to the

researcher's interpretations of the information discovered in the study as well as

recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

As colleges continue to seek creative and innovative methods to increase and sustain enrollment, enrollment management leaders strive to accomplish this goal using a tool such as the wait list earlier in the admissions cycle (Jaschik, 2018). Prospective college students have many additional resources at their disposal than in years prior in part because of technology and the ability to research institutions. Further, colleges now come to visit students as college visits have proven to be a factor of influence (Hossler et al., 1990, as cited by Ming, 2010)

This study sought to discover what factors influence the college selection process of Black students, particularly when it comes to selecting PWIs. The literature on this subject points to factors such as:

- Cost (Tuition, Room & Board, Fees, Incidentals)

- Reputation (School/Faculty) (Student's perception of how the school would impact their professional prospects)

- Safety (The ability to remain safe and secure while attending school)

- Location (close to home versus far from home coupled with student's level of comfort)

- Sports (the importance of sports to educational experience)

- Facilities (the impact of the look of infrastructure and architecture to a student)

- Demographics/Diversity (more of a balanced mixture of different races and cultures)

It is nearly impossible to conceive that all of these factors influence all students with the same level of importance. Surely, some more than others truly make the difference for a student, particularly a Black student, when it comes to their decision to attend a predominantly White institution.

Using the experiences of Black students who have completed or who are presently attending PWI institutions, this study examined their recollections to identify the factors that lead to successful college selection (i.e., enrollment) of Black students in PWIs. Two research questions were posed in this study:

1. What are the institutional factors that influenced Black students to apply to and attend a specific PWI?

2. What is the experience of Black students at the PWI they chose?

Based on those interviewed, cost was the factor considered to be the most impactful when it came to college selection by Black students. The researcher set out to discover what other factors may potentially sway Black students to select a college, specifically a PWI.

This study used a phenomenological approach to identify the influences on college choice. The data comprised responses of 52 current and former students who answered the survey, of which 35 opted-in to volunteer an account of their process. After random selection and scheduling of those who opted-in for the interview, eight individuals ultimately were able to share their accounts of an important time in their lives. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) refer to this process as college selection phases: (1) thinking about, (2) considering, (3) selecting a college.

Three factors emerged from the interviews and surveys as factors that heavily weighed into the college selection process by Black students attending a PWI:

(1) Cost (including financial aid)

(2) Professional Resources Available (job potential, internships)

(3) University's Reputation

These factors and rankings are close to being consistent with Noel-Levitz's (2012) study that ranked factors in the college selection process across all institution types. Noel-Levitz's

2012 study found the following factors influenced student's decision to enroll: (1) Future employment opportunities; (2) Financial Aid; (3) Academic Reputation; (4) Personalized attention prior to enrollment; (5) Cost. It is important to note Noel-Levitz's 2012 findings involved students from all backgrounds and from all institution types. As indicated in the literature research, there is an indication of a slight shift in the factors that motivated student's decision to enroll in a college. Despite the sample size in this study compared to Noel-Levitz's 2012 study, similar findings in the factors are highlighted. A distinguishing element in the selection process emerged from the survey and interview data. The concept of fit emerged in this study where the data implies students begin their search process with a school and factor in mind, but through the consideration phase of the process, another factor grows in importance. This chapter's interpretation of findings will connect the research questions and literature, discuss implications of this study, and make recommendations for future study related to this subject.

Interpretation of Findings

Institutional factors of cost, university reputation, and job potential influenced the participants' decision when they selected their college. Based on relevant selection factors from previous studies identified in the literature review, a survey was administered on social media. The survey was completed by 52 current and former college students. The students were either in the process of attaining or had attained a bachelor's degree within the previous 15 years. The literature review findings imply the top reasons impacting college selection change annually. Based on the small sample size of this study and drawing comparisons from the Noel-Levitz (2012) study, it appears not much has changed in terms of impactful factors. Nonetheless, the factor that appeared to have changed with the participants from this study and the participants

from Noel-Levitz (2012) study was the importance of cost. According to Noel-Levitz (2012, cost was the fifth most important factor in college selection; however, the select population in this study found cost to be the most important factor in the college selection process.

Additionally, this study found a recurring theme of fit to be part of the decision-making process. Data from the interviews suggested students were seeking a sense of fit to assist in their college decision-making process. Additionally, data from the surveys also suggested fit played a role in the decision-making process as 31 of the 52 responses indicated the college selected was not their first choice. The concept of fit is specific to everyone considering a college. Plummer (2018) defines fit [of a college] as having the characteristics constituting the right college for one person, but not even being considered by another person. Plummer continues to point out examples of characteristics such as the amount of aid offered or even the distance from college to home as being characteristics aligning with the concept of fit.

Research Question #1

As this study sought to answer the first question: "What are the institutional factors that influenced Black students to apply to and attend a specific PWI?" the researcher examined the details provided by the survey and interview participants, which all contained intersecting factors. Based on the research, Cost, which includes consideration of financial aid provided by the institutions, is the strongest influencer of Black students in this study when selecting a specific PWI. It is important to note there are other institutional factors that influence Black students to select a specific PWI. The cumulative effect of which can be attributed to what Plummer (2018) detailed as fit. Plummer summarized that a student's college selection decision will ultimately come down to fit between what the student needs and/or wants and what the university has to offer.

Those most significant factors influencing college selection of a specific PWI by Black students, based on the research, are: (1) Cost. 39 of the 52 responses on the survey rated this factor as the most important factor in their selection process. The amount of financial aid provided by a college is implied in this factor. Each of the interviews also included data regarding the importance of cost to further validate the importance of this factor; (2) Professional Resources available. 25 of the 52 responses rated this factor as the second most important college selection factor. There were two interviews containing data referring to career options based on their college selection; (3) Reputation of the university provides the third most important based on the survey data. 23 of the 52 responses rated this factor as very important in their college selection process.

Molly and Lillian indicated the school they ultimately selected was low on their initial list, but by visiting the campus and/or speaking with a recruiter, they gave the college further consideration. It was during the visit that students such as Christina found the school's fit. For others like Debra, their considerations changed once the financial aid package was confirmed. Lastly, for students like Adam, it was a combination of the reputation of the college coupled with the campus visit or the reputation coupled with the amount of financial aid awarded. The factors selected by each student answered this study's first research question, and also provide contributions toward answering research question two. Additionally, the factors these students indicated as being critical in their selection process align with the framework of Fit in this study (Plummer, 2018) and align with Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three steps involved in the college selection process.

Research Question #2

Using Plummer's (2018) framework of fit, which explained selection of the correct college would result in an overall good experience as well as propel students forward in life, this study sought to answer the second question: "What is the experience of Black students at the PWI they chose?" That said, the data collected from the interviews suggests each student has made the proper college selection in terms of fit. Each student who was interviewed indicated their college experience as positive overall. Of the eight interviewees, Stephanie and Molly were the only ones to articulate any level of negative experience. Stephanie said, "I made a bad decision regarding my major and it caused me to graduate a year later." Molly explained there were racist incidents that occurred on campus during her time in college.

Adam, Stephanie, Molly, Lillian, Christina, and Albert have all completed their bachelor's degrees and have since moved forward in positive directions in their respective professional endeavors. None of the interviewees report having any regrets as it relates to their respective college experiences. Debra and Gerald, who are both presently in school, have expressed similar sentiments. Thus far, they have enjoyed their college experience overall and look forward to the next chapters in their lives. All interviewees have made and sustained healthy relationships from their time in college and have in the process, been exposed to more diverse set of individuals. This aligns with Plummer's (2018) concept of fit where she asserts that choosing the correct college can result in positive and invaluable academic and social experiences they will treasure for life. Interview data suggests the students were diligent in their research and by all measures made the correct decisions in their college selections using both similar and different characteristics of fit to drive their respective decisions.

Implications

This study used the framework of fit (Plummer, 2018) and the college selection process (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987) to provide a primary understanding of the Black student college selection process, particularly when a PWI is being considered. Given the dates of attendance reported by study participants and the similarity of experiences they had before college, their college selection process, and overall college experience, it can be concluded that many Black students not only seriously consider PWIs but will likely decide to enroll if cost and reputation are favorable.

Moreover, the results from the data in this study align with Plummer's (2018) framework where she suggested students have no idea of what college fits them until they explore and research the school to discover what will make them comfortable. Additionally, Plummer explained the discovery of fit is often not concluded until a visit of the campus has occurred. Christina's process and discovery were a prime example of Plummer's assertion when she explained her visit to the campus of PWI A-6 culminated in the discovery of fit. Christina said, "When I visited the campus and saw the beauty of the campus and the diversity of the students, I realized I was home."

Implications of this study for college recruitment include an understanding of what the institution has to offer and effectively marketing those elements to prospective students. Each college should take careful account of their interactions with each student to see what enrollment strategies were successful and which ones were not. For example, if a college decides to employ a strategy of providing a certain level of financial assistance to a particular community of students, the college should carefully monitor the amount of money provided to each and match it against the collective and specific community student enrollment figures from previous years.

Such monitoring can identify the impact of the strategy on enrollment. Additionally, colleges should survey their current students annually as well as the students who apply but do not enroll to see what areas could be improved or what areas (factors) are of concern. This information could help colleges achieve the enrollment results they desire, provided strategic action is taken to improve the areas recommended in the feedback. As this study discovered, students have made their selection decision based on a few factors and not just any one factor. If an institution believes a student will select them based on solely their reputation or history, for example, that would be an error in judgement.

Recommendations

This study examined the factors related to how Black students make college selections when it involves going to a PWI. During this examination process, a glimpse of at least one reason some of the interviewees decided not to attend a HBCU came to light. If many Black students from a concentrated population of high schools are attending a particular HBCU, some could perceive that pattern as a detriment. For example, Stephanie, Lillian, and Christina shared part of their decision-making process involved not considering [HBCU's] where many of their classmates were attending. Christina also stated she was looking for diversity on campus. It was during her visit to PWI A-6 when she witnessed the number of diverse students walking around as well as the beauty of the campus, she felt at home. Although this was a small sampling size of Black students who elected to attend a PWI, this data should serve as a reminder of the potential that other like-minded Black students will likely employ similar processes to make a college selection.

Recommendation #1 – Establish and maintain positive relationships with prospective students

PWIs who seek to increase their population of Black students should begin by first establishing positive relationships with each student they encounter as mentioned by three of the interviewees: Adam stated he was moved by the track coach at PWI A-1 simply wishing him happy birthday. Lillian said, "Recruiters came to my high school and the recruiter from [PWI A-5] knew who I was and sold the school to me." Christina explained the diversity and beauty of the campus provided a feeling of fit and acknowledged the role of her initial interaction: "When I visited the campus at [PWI A-6] and went on a tour, everyone [I met] was very nice."

Similar to these examples, having this open line of communication helps establish a level of comfort that falls into the realm of establishing fit. Additionally, gaining an understanding of who the student is as well as maintaining an understanding of what the institution is will help the university community create the atmosphere that attracts a particular type of student. Colleges and universities must be willing to acknowledge some students will simply not enroll based on what the university stands for and how it is perceived from a community standpoint.

Recommendation #2 – Understand who you are and what you offer, then communicate those positives to prospective students

While there are some colleges that do not offer the same majors as others, there are institutional characteristics and expectations that lend themselves to being attractive to a prospective student (Plummer, 2018). Interview data from this study suggests that when Black students are considering college, they are looking at a variety of factors and any of them could be the major influence of their decision. For example, if distance is a consideration, students like Stephanie, Gerald and Debra, explained during the interview that they had considered colleges

that were not close to home. Conversely, there is data from the interview that indicates distance

is not necessarily a factor if the college is the right fit. Christina and Lillian both considered

schools that were not close to home, but when other characteristics were considered and

discovered (i.e., money, diversity, and campus appearance), their respective fits were also

discovered. To ensure prospective students can evaluate which factors potentially create a fit,

PWI's need to communicate broadly and honestly about their positive characteristics such as

academic offerings, student post-graduation outcomes, diversity-related initiatives, and other

details that could influence student selections. A visit to the college may still be required to

affirm the fit or lack thereof by students; however, without the clear communication of the

institution's positives, a decline in prospective student visits may result. As Plummer (2018)

postulated, the right college can result in a positive and invaluable academic and social

experience that will carry them for life. Plummer's (2018) theory was demonstrated during the

interviews when Stephanie and Molly attributed their satisfaction, happiness, and the

relationships they have cultivated to their college selection. Although Gerald is still in school, he

explained he has enjoyed his experience and feels he absolutely made the right college choice

based on the institution having the characteristics he was seeking such as location and

academics, as well as his overall personal and academic experiences at PWI A-3.

Recommendation #3 – Make more funding available to Black students

If a PWI seeks to increase the population of Black students, one of the best methods is to

make substantial funding available for this population. While some colleges cannot afford to do

this because of limited or no endowments or insufficient financial aid resources, the colleges

who can afford to earmark funds for this population would be wise to make this a priority.

During the interviews, Adam, Lillian, and Debra each stated the money provided to them by their

respective schools impacted their decision to the point that each enrolled in those specific schools. This decision and the selection factor were further validated by their survey responses indicating their selected schools was not their first choice. PWI's can designate a portion of their endowment to award to incoming Black students who meet specific criteria such as a high grade-point average. The criteria would be determined on an institutional basis.

Additionally, part of a PWI's endowment or budget can be designated as need-based specifically for Black students who have documented limited financial resources and are therefore deemed to have financial need. The dedication of this funding can be a short-term process to measure the impact on enrollment and retention of these students, or it can be a permanent process that will now be part of the university's business practice. In either event, the expenditures would have to be documented in the university's budget and approved by leadership. The research uncovered in this phenomenological study suggested that money alone would not secure the commitment from the student, but it will place the college higher on the list of serious possibilities.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study provided updated and additional information related to the college selection process by Black students who decided to attend a PWI. There are many areas related to college selection that can be pursued for additional information and insight. Further research warranted in this area is understanding why Black students did or did not decide to specifically attend an HBCU. Because the sample size in this study was small, it may not accurately depict the results that are representative of all PWI's across the country. Further exploration of this subject with an examination by specific geographical regions or individual institutions could potentially uncover some trends of Black students' college selection process. Additionally, examining this subject

matter with other ethnicities and cultures will likely uncover additional trends and insight into college selection factors.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study set out to gather updated and additional insight into factors that are likely to influence college selection by Black students who have decided to attend a PWI for their undergraduate college experience. Additionally, this researcher set out to gain insight into students' respective college experiences to discover if fit was involved in the decision to align and further test Plummer's (2018) assertion that if a student selects the correct college, and it fits for them, their academic and social experiences will be positive and carry them forward in life. During the interviews, Stephanie shared since her undergraduate experience, she has completed graduate school and has a thriving career. Molly explained she been able to get into graduate school and looks forward to her future. Lillian shared she has discovered her penchant for service during her undergraduate experience and has served in the Peace Corps since she completed her Bachelor's degree.

Interview data from this study shows the students affirmed their college experiences as positive. Additionally, based on the study's survey data, 31 of the 52 responses indicated the college selected and attended was not their first choice, once again indicating that fit played a role in their decision. As Plummer (2018) explained, what is considered a fit for one student, is not necessarily the same for another student. It is time for colleges and universities to understand their respective identities so they can market themselves in terms of fit to the prospective student community.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT SURVEY FORM

1. What is your undergraduate classification?
   ☐Freshman ☐Sophomore ☐Junior ☐Senior ☐College Graduate
2. What year will you graduate or what year did you graduate?
3. How old are you?_____
4. What is your ethnic background (check all that apply)?
   ☐ Black/African-American ☐ Caucasian/White ☐ Native-American
   ☐ Latino/Hispanic ☐ Asian
5. Please indicate on the scale the importance of each item influencing your decision to attend this university.

   (For all questions using a scale on this survey, please note the following):
   5 = Very Important; 4 = Important; 3= Neutral; 2= Not Very Important; 1 = Not Important at All

	5	4	3	2	1
Location of university	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Influence of family/loved one(s)	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Sense of Safety	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Campus Facilities	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Modernization/Technology	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Sports	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Diversity of Students	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Reputation of University	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Reputation of Faculty	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Cost	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Amount of Aid Received	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1

Resources available:

	5	4	3	2	1
Professional (internships, job potential)	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Academic (help with courses, library)	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1
Social (Nightlife, attractions, museums)	☐5	☐4	☐3	☐2	☐1

6. Was this university your first choice?   ☐YES   ☐NO

7. Did you visit the university prior to enrolling?   ☐YES   ☐NO

8. Was your visit in person, via virtual tour, or both?   ☐In-Person ☐Virtual   ☐Both

9. What was your impression of the university during and after your visit?

    _____

If you are willing to participate in the follow-up study, please provide your email address and phone number so the researcher, Johnnie Johnson, can contact you to set up an appointment.

Email: _____

Phone: _____

APPENDIX B

Interview Script – Johnnie Johnson

Hello. Thank you for participating in this study. My name is Johnnie Johnson and I am doctoral student with the University of New England.

I would like to have a discussion with you relating to your college selection process as well as a little bit about your experience to help draw some conclusions about this overall experience.

This conversation will be driven by some questions I have for you. You are able to talk freely and openly with me. Please remember your information will be safe and known only by me.

You can also choose not to answer anything you do not want to.

Ok? Great! Let's begin!

1. So tell me, about yourself. What college do you attend?/What college did you graduate from?
2. When did you graduate from college? *[Only ask if student is out of college]*
3. What is your undergraduate classification? *[If student has graduated, skip this question]*
4. How did you end up attending college at this university?
5. What are you majoring in?/What was your major?

[If student is has graduated]

6. How has life been since completing college?

Ok. That's a great start. So far so good? Great! Let's start to discuss your college selection process a bit. Ok? Great!

1. When did you first start thinking about going to college?
    a. Follow-up: Who or what encouraged you to think about going to college?
2. Who else was involved with your decision about going to college and which college to go to?
    a. How important was their input to the decision?
3. Once you decided to go to college, how long did it take you to figure out which college you wanted to go to?
    a. Can you tell me how you went about finding colleges you wanted to go to?
4. How many colleges did you consider?
5. How many did you visit or watch a virtual tour about?
6. Counting this school, do you recall how many schools you applied to?
    a. How many "yes'" did you receive?
7. How did you finally decide this school was the one for you?

Ok. You are doing great. I appreciate your energy! We are about halfway through this ok? Great! Now, let's chat about your college experience a little and then you will be able to ask any questions of me you want. Ok? Great!

1. As I have started to learn more about how students make the decision to choose a particular college, I've learned there are several things about the colleges themselves that are important to students, and that is the focus of this study.

      a. When you were researching colleges, what things were you looking for in a college?
         i. Which of those was the most important?
         ii. Which of those was the least important?
         iii. When you were rating the choices in the survey, were there any things about the college you wish had been on the survey that wasn't?
            1. How would you have rated it?

2. What has it been like so far at your school?/Was your overall experience like at your school?
3. What is there about this institution you appreciate the most?
      a. Is there anything you are unhappy with at this institution?
4. Are there things you wish you had considered when deciding on a college that you didn't think about then?
5. What advice would you give to future college students when selecting a college?
6. Is there anything else you would like to discuss about the college selection process?

Well. Guess what? That concludes this interview. You did great! Again, I appreciate your time and energy.

Now, you get to ask me any questions you may have about this study or the process. Feel free to fire away with your first question!