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HBCU 101: Understanding How Familiar Independent School College Counselors are With
Historically Black Colleges and Universities

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Jamon Patrick Pulliam

2024

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

HBCU 101: Understanding How Familiar Independent School College Counselors are With
Historically Black Colleges and Universities

by

Jamon Patrick Pulliam

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Eddie R. Cole, Co-Chair

Professor Diane Durkin, Co-Chair

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been staples in both American history and higher education, as they were created at a time when Black people were almost universally excluded from Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). While Black people now have wider access to PWIs, HBCUs still remain prevalent today, evident in their enrollment increases in recent years. Students often rely on their school-based counselors (or college counselors) for guidance on the intricacies of the college process, including which colleges to consider. This study explored how familiar independent school college counselors are with HBCUs and how they inform and educate Black students on HBCUs. Interviews with 15 independent school college counselors—ranging in years of experience, geographical location, and racial background—turned up four major findings. First, while levels of in-depth knowledge

of HBCUs varied, all counselors, irrespective of race, had some general understanding of HBCUs and referenced their benefits. Second, counselors expressed a wide range of reasons for why they thought students would attend an HBCU, as well as barriers in doing so. Third, as a group, they said that those who ended up at HBCUs are happy and enjoying their experiences. Lastly, despite the varying levels of knowledge, counselors, as a group, still sought more information on HBCUs. They cited the need for more conference topics, opportunities to visit HBCUs, and programming to learn more about HBCUs.

The dissertation of Jamon Patrick Pulliam is approved.

Robert Cooper

Eddie R. Cole, Committee Co-Chair

Diane Durkin, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2024

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Aunt Donnie and my grandparents whom I love dearly.

To my grandfather who was born during southern segregation in Mississippi, always encouraged the pursuit of education, loved me through and through, and would have thoroughly enjoyed addressing me as Dr. Pulliam. I could hear him now, “Dr. Pulliam, this is Mr. Pulliam. How are you today?”

To my grandmother, who taught me how to scramble eggs, made me love the movie theaters, always wanted me to be an upstanding young man, showed me unconditional love and was the greatest grandmother I could have ever asked for. I know she would have been praying for me to stay determined and focused. She, too, would be happy to correct someone that I am Dr. Pulliam now.

Whether they knew it or not, they taught me the importance of hard work. I am grateful for a distinct relationship with them both. I know they were with me every step of the way, and for that, I sincerely thank them. I miss you both, and I hope I made you proud.

To my Aunt Donnie, thank you for being a supportive aunt and making me laugh even when you did not mean to. My graduation from Tuskegee University made you immensely proud and I know you would feel the same about this milestone degree from UCLA. I will have a cold Coca-Cola as soon as this is over in your memory. You live forever through us all.

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me (sometimes at me) and allowed me to grow as their “little cousin.” To my cousin/aunt Michelle, your care in so many facets of my life has been more than I could have asked for. To David Lewis, I knew the moment we laid eyes on each other that there was some fun in store for us. To my writing buds through Year 3—Erin, Allison, Monica, Jeb, Carlos, and many others—glad we came together to find time to write. We did it!

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you though the college application process year after year. It is because of my students, my Black students in particular, that I was inspired to do this research. I hope to have touched your lives in the same way you have touched mine. I am grateful for you all.

This has been easily the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. There were times I did not know I could do this. During my interviews, one of the counselors said to me at the conclusion of our chat, "Just because it's hard, doesn't mean it's impossible. If getting a doctorate was easy, everybody would do it." Those words carried me to the finish line. My heart is full.

To my ancestors who dreamed of this for me, I never dreamed of this moment for myself and now it's here—we made it!

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CHAPTER ONE

This study investigated how familiar independent school college counselors are with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as college options for Black high school students attending those independent schools. Moreover, the study investigated how, if at all, college counselors inform Black students about HBCUs for students to further research. I interviewed a wide range of college counselors at various independent schools across the United States to assess how familiar they were with HBCUs, an HBCU education, and how they are sharing information about HBCUs with Black students. Results of this study can be used to provide better insight on how Black students at independent schools are learning about HBCUs.

Background

Many of the nation's HBCUs were founded after the Civil War, at a time when millions of Black people were unable to attain formal higher education. Several HBCUs were founded by formerly enslaved Black people and/or White people in small rooms or basements of churches as an opportunity to educate Black people (Freemark, 2015). Freeman (1999) noted the struggles that Black people have historically faced to engage in education. Namely, Freeman noted the restrictions from legislation which banned enslaved people in the United States from being able to learn to read or write during slavery times. As decades passed, African Americans accessed higher education by attending institutions of higher learning that were created specifically for them.¹ Cheyney University, initially named the African Institute, was founded in 1837, making it the first institution of higher learning for Black people (Brooks, 2011). Then, starting in the 1850s, more Black colleges were created (Fleming, 1981; Gurin & Epps, 1975, as cited in Freeman, 1999).

¹Although there are distinctions between the terms, I use *Black* and *African American* interchangeably.

The Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers, for example, as noted in Booker T. Washington's (1901) autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, was founded by Washington after the workings of a formerly enslaved man and slave-owner who both wanted to start some type of education system in rural Alabama and secured funding to do so. They sent word to Hampton Institute, where Washington was working, in search of an educational leader; Tuskegee University became Washington's life's work. Starting off in a dilapidated shanty, Washington, a formerly enslaved man, took the school and eventually moved it to a former plantation to educate recently freed Black people to be teachers who could help other Black people (Washington et al., 1901/2010).

Given this history, as an example, of dozens of other HBCUs, these institutions have historically been important beacons of light for Black students hoping to be educated. With notable alumni—Oprah Winfrey of Tennessee State University; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., of Morehouse College; Vice President Kamala Harris of Howard University; and Super Soaker inventor Lonnie G. Johnson of Tuskegee University—HBCUs have produced a wide range of engineers, scientists, and much more. Indeed, Freeman (1999) stated that HBCUs have been exceptional in producing African American leaders. Freeman quoted Wilson (1994) adding how HBCUs can produce these results “in the face of considerable obstacles, such as discriminatory public funding, hostility of the White power structure, low church support, and minimal response from the White philanthropic community and foundations” (Freeman, 1999, p. 93).

Black students currently have many more choices in terms of their higher education, but the numerous benefits of attending HBCUs are still prevalent. As noted by Tobolowsky et al. (2005), the importance of HBCUs is clear even though they tend to have fewer resources than their non-HBCU institution counterparts. They reflect a supportive social environment that is

helpful to both academic and personal development, outstanding student achievement, as well as high student persistence, graduation rates, and overall student satisfaction. Bracey (2017) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature showing that HBCUs are known for nurturing Black, underserved students, while offering specialized instruction, such as exploring the deepest questions about what it means to be a Black college student. Other benefits that Bracey points out include an emphasis on academics, training specifically in the education field, broad curriculum offerings, advanced degrees, and the nurturing environment provided by faculty and staff. Johnson (2017) concluded that African American students continue to choose HBCUs well into the twenty-first century most notably because of their interest in an educational environment that mirrors their culture, promotes their individual academic achievement, and promotes opportunities to interact and engage with other Black faculty, staff, and students.

Statement of the Problem

Despite only comprising 3% of all four-year nonprofit colleges and universities, according to the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) website (Sandra, 2021), HBCUs have been popular for Black students, as shown in the application trends since 1987. McDonough et al. (1994) noted that from 1987 to 1991, HBCU enrollment increased by roughly 10,000 students every year. In 1995, roughly 26% of African American students who were enrolled at a four-year college were at an HBCU (Jackson, 2001). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), between 1976 and 2010, HBCU students increased by 47% (from 223,000 to 327,000 students).

Despite these trends, NCES (2022) reported a decrease in recent decades in the number of degrees conferred to Black students by HBCUs. In 1950, roughly 90% of all Black college students enrolled at HBCUs; this has drastically changed to 9% in 2020, according to NCES.

Similarly, HBCUs conferred 35% of bachelor's degrees and 21% of master's degrees earned by Black students in 1976–1977, compared to roughly 13% and 5%, respectively, in 2019–2020. As noted by Palmer and Gasman (2008), HBCUs were an avenue to higher education for African American students during a time when other avenues were closed to them. In more recent years, various initiatives have made it more accessible for African American students to pursue higher education at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs; Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Despite these changes, in wide access, Dr. Walter Kimbrough opined in *The Washington Post* article by Strauss (2016) that because of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, coupled with protests to highlight social injustices, HBCUs recently began to receive an uptick in applications. Kimbrough noted that first-year enrollment started to increase in 2016 at several HBCUs, including Shaw University (up 49%), South Carolina State (up 39%), and Tuskegee University (up 32%). More recently, after the racial reckoning in this country sparked by the murder of George Floyd and a renewed call for social action and change (Simon, 2023), HBCUs saw a major increase in application numbers and overall interest among Black students more specifically. Prior to this, many headlines including the deadly White-nationalist rally in Charlottesville was another catalyst for students shifting their interest to HBCUs where they felt more comfortable (Jamison, 2019).

Despite all the perceived benefits of HBCUs, Black students are not always aware of the existence of HBCUs, and how they could impact their educational experiences. In 2005, Tobolowsky et al. concluded that there was some challenge for Black students and families to find information on HBCUs, but they noted the personal connection and contact like visits from HBCU representatives or the students' schools' connectedness to HBCU alumni helped with this

problem. They recommended that HBCUs find more ways to be more available and prevalent to their prospective students, to broaden African American students' opportunities.

Freeman (1999) pointed out that Black high school students from Predominantly White Institutions were more likely than Black high school students from predominantly Black schools to consider HBCUs in addition to PWIs. Freeman found that African American students who interacted more with White students and/or attended White schools more likely desired to “go back to their roots” (p. 356). Freeman’s data showed themes on why students wanted to explore HBCUs, like a lack of cultural awareness and having an HBCU connection.

Freeman (1999), in a study of the influences on students in choosing to attend HBCUs or PWIs, found that HBCUs could benefit from building relationships with White high schools in the areas of recruitment, as it may be a good long-term investment. Specifically, Freeman thought that even though the recruitment efforts may not yield immediate results, establishing relationships between HBCUs and the counselors and teachers at private schools and predominantly White high schools could provide access to some of the best African American students. Her research on the considerations Black high school students give to attend either an HBCU or PWI suggested that the students from White schools expressed some type of disconnect from Black culture and wanted to be more in tune with their culture, which they thought could be accomplished by attending an HBCU. While this study is 24 years old, it raises questions important in the independent school context.

Independent School Background

According to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) website, as of the 2023–2024 school year more than 1,200 independent schools, across the United States and abroad, provide high-quality education to more than 600,000 students, from pre-K through high

school. NAIS describes independent schools as close-knit communities that provide students with individualized attention, challenging students to stretch their minds and go beyond academics to develop into responsible, independent, and community-oriented individuals. A report published by NAIS in 2017 noted that nearly 100% of NAIS graduates attend college and more than half attend the most selective colleges and universities—but there is no reference of types of institutions beyond the “most selective colleges and universities” like HBCU-going rates. Nonetheless, independent schools have many benefits for the families who consider them and make the investment.

Research suggests that, starting in the 1960s, increased numbers of African American students began enrolling in predominantly White independent schools to prepare for positions of power and leadership (Cookson & Persell, 1985). While the increasing enrollment has been happening for decades, even in 2000 only 5% of the student population across independent schools was African American. That number has increased slightly over 20 years later, with African American students accounting for 6.9% of all independent school students in 2023–2024. Thus, African American students still represent a small amount of the student body at independent schools but continue to enroll for better long-term opportunities. They continue to be an anomaly within these predominantly White communities even though, based on an informal review of several independent schools’ websites, these institutions purport to strive for diversity and inclusivity. For example, The Dalton School in New York City, recognized as one of the top independent schools in the nation, notes on their website, “At Dalton, we believe that diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential to a healthy and vibrant school. We aim to be an institution where every member of our community feels valued in their differences and united in the shared belief that a diverse and equitable community is integral to academic excellence.”

According to the *New York Post* in 2021, The Dalton School has 10% Black students. Despite such school promotional statements, Black students still feel disconnected from their school communities.

DeCuir-Gunby (2007) uncovered that Black students in independent schools who participated in a study did not feel like members of their community and identified that they were a part of a “bubble” because it created an atmosphere that promoted White racial/cultural hegemony. For example, one study participant thought that because of their school’s elite status, it only catered to the wealthy while completely disregarding the perspectives of others. This closed system specifically excluded African American students. Participants further felt that their school communities did not represent reality in terms of racial and class demographics, despite feeling as though these communities represented an accurate picture of the real world in terms of race and power.

Study Overview

For this current study, I investigated college counselors in independent schools’ familiarity with HBCUs and the information which college counselors shared with students in their schools on HBCUs. This study resulted in recommendations for counseling programming, ways independent school college counselors could engage with HBCUs, and new opportunities to gain resources that will help counselors disseminate information on HBCUs to Black students in independent schools. I interviewed college counselors at independent schools to identify how familiar they are with HBCUs and/or an HBCU education and how they are sharing information with Black students about HBCUs. One of the goals of this study was to describe what college counselors provide to their Black families about HBCUs and identify ways to broaden knowledge and opportunities for Black students.

Research Questions

This study examined independent schools' and their college counselors' understandings of HBCUs and how they relay information about them to their Black students. Specifically, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. What do independent school college counselors understand about the history and benefits of HBCUs?
2. In what ways, if any, do independent school college counselors inform Black students regarding HBCUs as options for higher education?
3. What additional information and/or resources pertaining to HBCUs do independent school college counselors say they would like to receive?

Study Design

I employed a qualitative study to get answers to these research questions. Qualitative research is used when researchers are seeking to understand a meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I interviewed college counselors in various independent school college counseling offices by recruiting a small number of counselors, 15, from independent schools around the United States with a range of students who identify as Black in their upper school, from 0-5% to <30%. Percentage range of 0-10% is the number that is consistent roughly with the national averages of Black students in independent schools, according to the NAIS. Given the small Black student population at some independent schools, I recognized that this percentage may have been difficult to attain for some communities; I reassessed this goal as I identified counselors for interviews.

Site Participants

I strove for a mixture of urban and suburban, large and small, and geographically diverse schools as counselors' exposure to and familiarity with HBCUs may vary depending on where the school is located. Recruitment was based on responses to the initial screening questionnaire sent to the entire opt-in listserv of college counselors in independent schools requesting participation and seeking interest. The screening questionnaire stated the study's desire was to explore counselors' experiences supporting Black students' college choices and learn more about their school and the students they work with to determine if they are a fit for a follow-up interview. During the interviews, I examined counselors' familiarity of HBCUs as well as how they disseminate information to students about HBCUs. Because I was interested in examining college counselors to gauge what they know from a variety of perspectives, a qualitative study allowed me to examine this phenomenon of knowledge transfer about HBCUs within a particular context.

Study Significance

While not every Black student considering post-secondary options will choose an HBCU, being aware of such options is crucial. HBCUs are rich in history and continue to serve the population they were created for—Black students. This research will build upon the work that explores the Black student experience in independent schools and how Black students' college outcomes are a major component of their experience and often the reason they attend their independent schools to begin with. As parents and students noted from various studies like those conducted by Slaughter-Defoe (2012) and Arrington et al. (2006), college access is a significant benefit of attending independent schools. This research highlights whether Black students are aware of all their postsecondary options, specifically whether Black students are being made

aware of HBCUs. Given the importance of college counselors in the college planning process, it is essential that they share a full range of options with students. They can only do so if they are familiar with all the options themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I explore existing research on HBCUs: their history, the students who choose to attend them, and the continued importance of these institutions. I shift to explore independent schools and who typically attends these institutions as this research is centered on independent schools. I discuss independent school research as it pertains to Black students' experiences, the enrollment trends of Black students over time, and the counseling received at independent schools. As students make life-changing decisions through college choice, I examine the general factors that may impact where they decide to go to college. Social capital, students' counseling, and the relationship with the counselors are all discussed. I also consider these factors within the research regarding students choosing HBCUs.

HBCU History

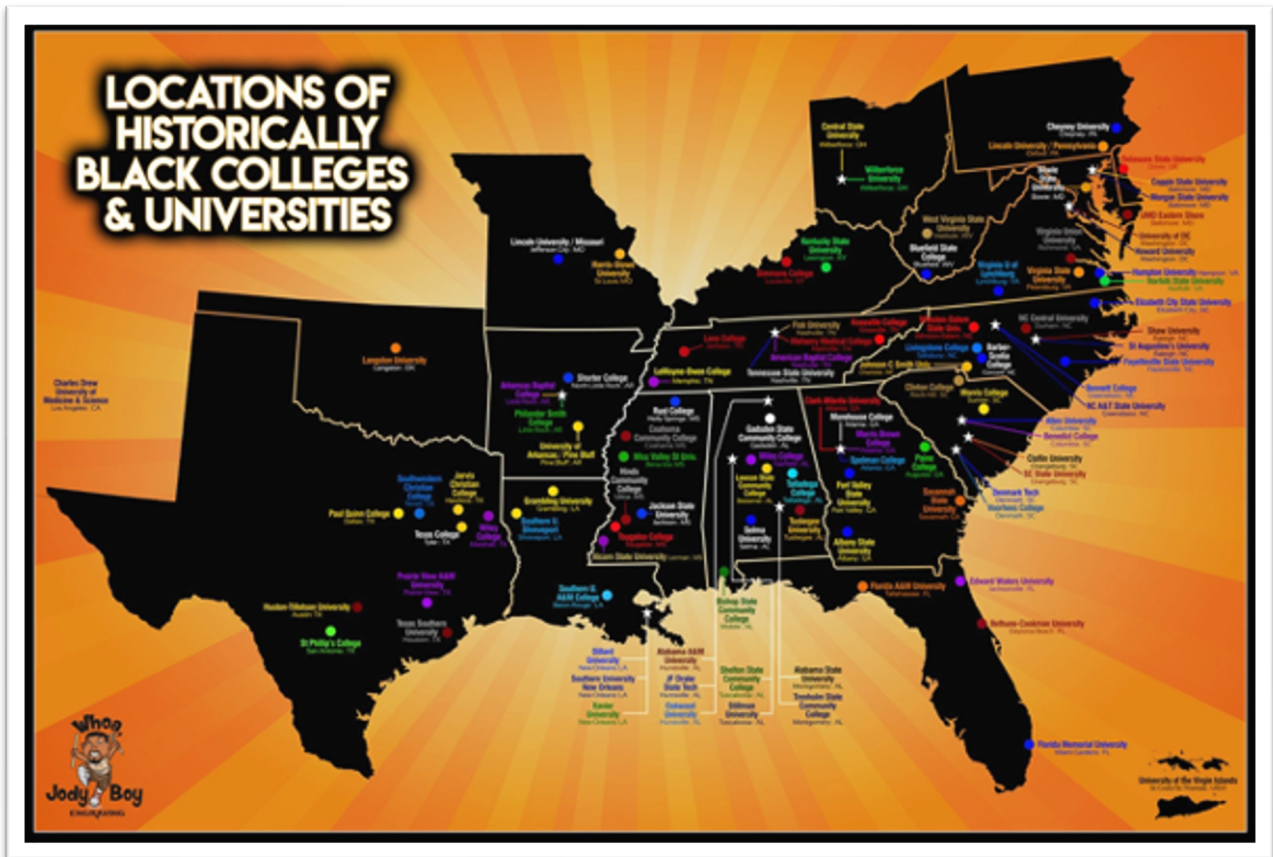
Scholars have written extensively about HBCU history. This history is important in framing my study about how familiar independent school college counselors are with HBCUs. While HBCUs are beacons of history, they have significance beyond American history, particularly in the context of higher education. Before I talk about the history, I must establish what HBCUs are. The Higher Education Act of 1965 explains HBCUs as:

any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation. (Higher Education Act, 1965)

According to NCES, in 2022 there were 99 HBCUs across 19 states, including the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Of those 99 HBCUs, 50 were categorized as public institutions and 49 were private nonprofit institutions (NCES, 2022). Killough et al. (2018) provided the names of 99 HBCUs that were, at that time, listed as being operational and had published course catalogues available at the time of their study. This list is provided in Appendix A. Figure 1 shows that the locations of HBCUs are largely congregated in the southeastern portion of the United States.

Figure 1

Locations of HBCUs



Note. Sell, D. 2021. (<https://whoajodyboy.com/products/hbcu-locater-poster>)

More than 90% of the HBCUs founded between 1865 and 1899 were in the South (Jackson, 2001). According to the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) website, 14 HBCUs are in the state of Alabama alone. Most of the HBCUs in this country are relatively small institutions. According to the Pew Research Center (Anderson, 2017), while there are a few HBCUs hovering around 5,000+ students, more than half of the country's HBCUs have 2,500 students or less.

As noted, HBCUs were created prior to 1964, when the Civil Rights Act improved access for Black Americans to other institutions, with the main goal of educating Black Americans, and this mission continues (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). HBCUs have advocated and upheld equal opportunity for the students who may not have had the opportunity to graduate from college; likewise, they have served as the custodians of the archives for Black Americans and as centers for the study of Black culture (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Bracey (2017) stated that many HBCUs were established solely to educate newly emancipated Black African slaves because these individuals were mostly banned at White colleges and universities, a practice that continued into the 1960s. Bracey concludes that HBCUs still have the primary goal of helping Black students graduate to better propel them in life and prepare them to be the leaders of today's society.

Even with those goals, the students who explore HBCUs have changed over time. According to NCES (2022), the overall number of students with degrees conferred from HBCUs has decreased. For example, as noted in Chapter One, in 1976–1977, 35% of all degrees conferred to Black students earned were from HBCUs, and by 2020–2021 that number had shrunk to 13%. Despite such drastic changes, Black students still find weighted importance in these institutions but there is less research on Black students in independent schools and their pursuit of an HBCU education. Given the lack of diversity in independent schools, it is worth

exploring why these students should explore HBCUs as college options and what variables they may consider as to why HBCUs could benefit their long-term development. Before exploring those factors, it is useful to establish what independent schools are and who typically attends. I explore these topics in the next section.

Independent Schools

Independent schools, which can range from Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade, are all over the world. According to the NAIS website, of which most independent schools are members, each independent school is driven by a unique mission. Further, independent schools are independent in their philosophy and the way they are managed, financed (primarily through tuition payments and charitable contributions), and the way they are governed by a board of trustees. Lastly, they are noted to be accountable to their respective communities and are typically accredited by their state-approved accrediting body.

As of NAIS membership in January 2024, there is a total enrollment of 619,702 students across U.S. independent schools. In contrast, according to NCES in 2021, there is a total enrollment of 49.4 million students in public schools. More importantly, according to NCES (2021), the student-to-teacher ratio in public schools is 15.4 students to each teacher, while the median ratio in NAIS schools is roughly 8.6 students to each teacher. The Los Angeles Independent Schools website lists various benefits to independent schools, including that they offer a mission-driven education, small class sizes, high academic standards, excellent teachers, and education for the whole child.

While the increasing enrollment in independent schools has been happening for decades, even in 2000, according to NAIS, only 5% of the student population across these schools was African American. As noted previously, that number has remained almost steady 20 years later,

with African American students accounting for 6.9% of students in 2023-2024. Of those 619,702 students, roughly 33.2% are students of color, but a small portion of that percentage is Black. In contrast, 50.4% of the students identify as White, with the remaining 16.4% making up international students and those who did not identify with a demographic group.

To give further contrast, according to NCES, in the fall of 2018, African American students made up 15% of public-school students, over double the percentage of African American students in independent schools. Though this was a 2% decrease within a ten-year span, White students made up 48% of students in public schools—comparable to their percentage in independent schools. Despite the make-up and diversity (or lack thereof), students of color continue to attend independent schools.

Black Students' Experiences in Independent Schools

Slaughter-Defoe (2012) discovered that in recent decades, Black parents' decisions to enroll their children in de-segregated private, independent schools has been a strategy for advancement in areas of intellectual, social, and economic domains. Rollock et al. (2015) described some Black middle-class parents as “academic choosers” because they perceive academic distinction to have greater importance than their children’s schools being racially or economically mixed (p. 49). Similarly, 30 years ago, Jones-Wilson et al. (1992) found that African Americans were enrolling in predominantly White, elite, independent schools in growing numbers for various reasons, including more educational resources, smaller class sizes, and better teachers than public schools. In fact, around that same time, Speede-Franklin (1988) found that many independent schools had enacted nondiscrimination policies and were actively recruiting minority students in their efforts to create more diverse student bodies on their campuses.

More recently, Arrington and Stevenson (2006) suggested that Black students chose independent schools because they valued relationships with teachers and peers, the resources that exist within the schools, the preparation for college admission and success, and training for future endeavors. Despite the perceived benefits of their children attending independent schools, there are various barriers that African American students face in these schools beyond college access that tie in with their overarching experiences. Independent schools remain predominantly White, as evidenced in the data presented on the NAIS website described earlier, and early research suggests that predominantly White independent schools are places where African American students have found it difficult to fit in (Brookins, 1988; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991).

DeCuir-Gunby (2007) revealed in a study with Black student participants from a wealthy independent school that, while students perceived that attending their school afforded them many opportunities, the politics of the school would not allow them full access to those same opportunities. The students in this study did acknowledge benefits to attending their school, like taking advantage of a strong academic program and, most notably, the school's name helping them get into college and acquire jobs after college. However, DeCuir-Gunby noted that this elite Southern school was created for and catered to wealthy Whites, and many of the wealthy White students held racist beliefs; moreover, the board of trustees, or governing body, was also largely made up of wealthy White men, and many of the policies were often influenced by wealthy White parents. De-Cuir-Gunby added that African Americans from middle-class to even upper-middle-class backgrounds (i.e., the participants of her study) were not a part of the majority in the school's population, and they encountered numerous problems within the school setting stemming from differences in race and class. Clearly, both benefits and concerns shaped the

overall experience for African American students in their independent schools, but their social interactions were also a component of their experiences. The Black student experience often is dependent upon how students are received by their White peers and how they interact with them.

Datnow and Cooper (1998) performed a qualitative analysis of the formal and informal peer networks of African American students in predominantly White elite independent schools and how these schools support Black students' academic success, create opportunities for them to reaffirm racial identities, and facilitate their adjustment to settings that are otherwise difficult for Black students to fit into. Datnow and Cooper conducted a three-year longitudinal case study of African American students enrolled in predominantly White elite independent schools in the Baltimore area with the assistance of BEST (the Baltimore Educational Scholarship Trust). In the first year of the study (1996) a total of 380 students were enrolled in 20 independent schools through BEST. A total of 422 African American students in Grades 10 through 12 in eight different schools were interviewed about their experiences. Most interviews were conducted in small groups and included questions about students' backgrounds, home lives, interests, academic course work and progress, social adjustment and peer groups, and students' perceptions of the school climate and faculty.

Black students often struggle acclimating to the predominately White environment of these schools although they find solace in their own communities. Black students find community in the students who look like them as evidenced in Tatum's book entitled *Why are the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*. Likewise, Simmons (2012) conducted a qualitative study to explore the experiences of African American male students from an urban community who were attending a private Jesuit high school. Ten participants took part in in-depth, one-on-one interviews, and six participants also participated in two separate focus groups

as a follow-up task. In reflections from 11th and 12th graders, Simmons found that African American students from the city sat at their own table in both the lunchroom and the common area in their elite private school—though these students could not necessarily attribute a reason as to why this phenomenon existed. Simmons (2012) also uncovered that participants identified athletics and the Black Student Union as their most significant activities. These social groups are often how students can build a sense of community within these spaces.

More recent research confirms such early findings from Datnow and Cooper (1998) and Simmons (2012) evident from Coleman’s 2017 study. Black male participants spoke about the low numbers of Black students who attended their respective schools, causing them to be aware of their Blackness within the school context. Their schools attempted to provide spaces where Black students come together with affinity groups or clubs most often used as a response to counter microaggressions which came in the form of inappropriate jokes, racial slurs, and negative cultural assumptions about how Black people experience life or the projection of negative stereotypes (Coleman, 2017). It was shown to be these types of experiences that may make being Black in independent schools difficult as Black students tried to fit in.

Datnow and Cooper (1998) concluded, in an early study, that despite the culture shock African American students experienced when entering these White spaces, they developed strong peer networks to overcome challenges. Those racial peer networks provided social and academic support while giving them a space to express and affirm their racial identities. Coleman (2017) posited that friendship was a key to survival. Coleman suggests that while it was evident that despite challenges faced by African American boys in the study, having a strong connection to school friends was important to the social and emotional success of the young African American men who attend these affluent, predominately White, independent schools. Coleman’s findings

of friendship show the conclusion of Datnow and Cooper's study where participants felt peer networks helped most.

Datnow and Cooper (1998) also explored the social relationships/friendships and bonds of Black students. From their research, though Black students noted closeness with Black friends and having some White friends, they rarely reported bonds with White friends. Participants emphasized that formal associations between African American students in their predominantly White communities evolved through Black Student Unions, Black Awareness Clubs, gospel choirs, and multicultural alliances.

Sense of Belonging

While affinity spaces and groups created for Black students provided some sense of community, some studies have noted students' sense of belonging also being a barrier in their independent school communities. Arrington and Stevenson (2006), for example, conducted a longitudinal, mixed-methods project focused on investigating and understanding the variety of social, emotional, and institutional factors that were thought to influence how Black students navigate the independent school environment. They revealed that a positive sense of self across contexts, but especially in school, social and emotional health, and racial identity would serve as resources as students develop—particularly when students encounter racism. The majority (75%) of Black students in the study said they had to make special efforts to feel included in their community. An even higher percentage (82%) reported that they had negative experiences at their schools, and 40% did not believe that the school treated all the students the same. Despite challenges, most students indicated a relatively positive school climate (Arrington & Stevenson, 2006). Thus, while Black students may feel they are equipped for success, they may also lack a strong sense of belonging and fit.

Arrington and Stevenson (2006) reported that while students' psychological sense of school membership was high, there were areas of concern indicating lack of belonging/community. Over two-thirds of their respondents once wished they were in a different school. Seventy percent reported it was hard for people like them to be accepted at their school. Further, 62% thought they did not belong at their school, though Arrington and Stevenson found in their study that most students responded relatively positively to school climate questions. There were statistically significant differences between the students' reports of school fit and their reports of learning satisfaction, teacher support, and quality of education, such that reported school fit was lower than students' reports in any other areas.

Datnow and Cooper's (1998) research supports Black students' feelings of disconnectedness as they found that despite schools' efforts to integrate students of diverse backgrounds into the school community, many students reported difficulty acclimating to their school environment. They further found that several Black students reported feelings of alienation, a lack of belonging, and difficulty fitting in. Despite the many struggles Black students' reference, they still attend these schools for the long-term benefits like college planning.

Independent School College Counseling

Independent schools typically offer a more involved and supportive college choice and application process, which is appealing to students and families. The Association of College Counselors in Independent Schools (ACCIS) is an international membership organization providing support, shared knowledge, and professional development programming for college counselors based in independent (non-public) schools around the world (ACCIS, 2020). This governing body has roughly 600 individual members schools, including over 1,900 counselors

and office assistants. At the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year, ACCIS surveyed its constituents. With 458 responses, 39% reported assigning between 30 and 40 students to each counselor. Only 3% of respondents reported having more than 70 seniors, which is vastly different from the national averages at public schools. According to the American School Counselor Association (2021) via reports in recent years, California public schools have an average of 509 students for each counselor.

Due to the sheer difference in student-to-counselor ratios, the experience in independent schools allows much more individualized attention. As one independent school's website notes, Aligned with the School's mission of promoting integrity, responsibility, and optimism in its students, the college counseling program recognizes the uniqueness of each child. We provide personalized attention, encourage confidence in students, and prepare them to thrive in college and beyond. (Viewpoint School, 2021)

Independent schools' approach to college counseling is just one way they remain unique from other educational institutions.

Black Students' College Planning in Independent Schools

While Black students and parents value the college admissions prospects of independent schools, the question must be raised whether the college culture is effective for Black students if they are not learning about a full range of college options. The research in this area is extremely limited but there is one study to draw from. Specifically, Horvat (1996) conducted an ethnographic study of three African American girls at three urban California high schools (two comprehensive public schools and one private college preparatory high school) and found they had different experiences with respect to their college outcomes. The students who attended a private college preparatory school stated that their college choice involved applying to a more

prestigious set of schools, like Ivy League options. She found that the college choices of the two students attending a public comprehensive school included state schools—like the University of California and California State University—along with several HBCUs. At one of the public schools attended by one of the students in the study, Horvat found that when students did go out of state, they more often attended HBCUs.

Although this was a small ethnographic study with only three students from three different school types, Horvat (1996) noted counseling trends at various school types were mostly impacted by the interaction with the counselor. The private college preparatory high school student was among 85 graduating seniors and was assisted in the application process by one of the two full-time college counselors; most of these students went on to attend some of the most selective colleges in the nation. The second student attended a predominately Black comprehensive public high school of roughly 800 graduating seniors. She was assisted by one full-time college counselor, and most students attended local community colleges, the state colleges, or if they did leave the state, HBCUs. The final student attended a more diverse comprehensive public school of roughly 750 graduating seniors and was assisted by one full-time college counselor; those students attended a wide range of colleges that included HBCUs.

Horvat (1996) concluded that one student's school, the predominantly Black comprehensive public school, had pride in African American heritage that was intertwined with the mission of academic excellence, and this resulted in students applying to HBCUs at a much higher rate than the other two students and their schools. Horvat noted that the counselor of the private school worked to define the college choices of the Black seniors by instilling in them the socially and academically elite sensibility that favors highly selective institutions while also seeking a college environment that laid claim to a greater degree of racial diversity and

inclusiveness than their high school (Horvat, 1996). Unlike students in the private school, the students at the two public schools tended to apply to schools that were closer to home and less competitive in terms of admission which included HBCUs. These findings beg the question of whether Black students attending private schools have access to information about HBCUs and underscore the importance of the counselor. Likewise, they raise questions about the factors students consider when selecting their college choice—a topic I turn to next.

Factors That Impact College Choice

Millions of students embark on the college search and college application process every year. With thousands of colleges around the world, students have many options in deciding where to enroll. Much research has explored the factors that students consider when starting and going through this process. Some research has explored the factors that Black students consider when selecting college options—and more specifically selecting HBCUs—to attend or apply to. While some factors play a larger role than others, certain ones are important in framing my study about what students know about HBCUs as they start their process.

Some research indicates that the sociopolitical climate plays a role in students' decisions about HBCUs. Williams et al. (2021) interviewed 80 Black students who were engaged in the college-choice process between 2016 and 2018. They sought to answer whether the racial climate under President Trump influenced interviewees' decision to enroll in HBCUs. Many of the participants were enrolled at predominantly White high schools. They shared with researchers that, due to the ongoing racial microaggressions in their respective high schools, as well as their White peers' support of Trump, they were motivated to apply to HBCUs. Participants also noted that concerns for their physical safety on PWIs led to their interest in applying to HBCUs. Lastly, students shared that attending HBCUs was their opportunity to learn

more about and lean into Black culture more completely. Williams et al. concluded these factors were indications of the continued importance of HBCUs for the American higher education system. As Bennett and Xie (2003) noted, the distinct history, positive campus environment, and open opportunity structure at HBCUs may combine to attract and retain Black high school graduates.

Research has shown that Black students who choose HBCUs not only recognize the financial feasibility and strong reputations of the institutions, but also particularly value being in an environment that is predominantly Black. Johnson (2019) found that both HBCU students and HBCU alumni made a case for the importance of HBCUs. Most notably, the desire to be in a predominantly Black environment was the catalyst for students filing applications to HBCUs, regardless of whether the desire started much earlier in their lives or in high school. Johnson concluded that Black students pursued HBCUs for these various reasons but also mentioned the limitations on research around student-choice processes, which are often largely impacted by a student's experience with the counselor.

Counselor Impacts

School counselors² have played and continue to play a major role in students' choices of course selections and postsecondary pathways including college options. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), founded in 1937, is an organization of more than 26,000 professionals from around the world dedicated to serving students as they make choices about pursuing postsecondary options. On the organization's website, NACAC notes that by collaborating with school administrators, teachers, community representatives, government officials, and parents, school counselors can be significant assets throughout the

² School counselors and college counselors are both terminologies to describe the professionals who may help with college admissions processes.

college application and admission process. In fact, a NACAC study found that high school seniors who talked one-on-one with a school counselor were 3.2 times more likely to attend college. They also found that counseling departments in private schools spent 51% of their time on the task of postsecondary admission counseling. Thus, students relying on counselors for assistance makes sense.

McDonough (2005) noted that nine out of 10 students feel their counselor is knowledgeable about colleges. Thus, it is vital that counselors are familiar with many types of postsecondary options for students. McDonough's study revealed that school counselors play a vital role in college counseling. McDonough added that in private schools, counseling programs are focused only on college counseling. Some research has shown that high school counselors greatly influence the college planning of Black and Latino students (Bryan et al., 2011). Black students across different types of school environments likely look to the counselors for added support.

Gast (2021) researched Black students and their experiences in college counseling; Gast interviewed various working class and middle-class families with 9th-and 11th-grade students who all aspired to go to college. The school site was a medium to large high school with two full-time counselors who had caseloads of 500 each—vastly different from the independent school experience—making it hard to really get to know students. In the Gast study, students depended largely on posters and general announcements via email and loudspeaker to receive college information. They reported that the school lacked individualized attention and instead relied on mass messaging that was not always helpful. Further, Gast found that even though Black students had high expectations for going to college, they were often at a disadvantage by their senior year because of the lack of individualized attention and information they received

early on in their high school careers. More individualized attention, typically through the school counselor has a major impact on students' decisions.

Clayton et al. (2022) explored some of the motivational factors behind Black students' decisions to attend either an HBCU or a PWI after applying to both. Clayton et al., in their case study, took a holistic approach to identify how Black students made their final choices in the college decision-making process. The importance of discussing college options with family and school/community members was pivotal, as often students' ideas are shaped by the adults around them, especially related to the college-choice process. Students noted that their college options were shaped by their families, community members, alumni, and school counselors. Again, college counselors are an important piece of the process for students and families alike.

The high school context influenced counselors' work in significant ways. Holland (2015) found that the diversity of the student population led counselors to feel pulled in opposite directions: More advantaged students and parents demanded personalized attention, while less advantaged parents and students were difficult to get in touch with and contact and required more assistance. In essence, the social capital that students have access to is a determining factor in what they are exposed to, and it remains a driving force in their college readiness which is the next topic I explore—social capital.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The concept of social capital refers to the resources that are transferred through relationships (Coleman, 1988). While families are believed to be the primary source of social capital for students in relation to their education (Hetherington, 1998), the school is the dominant extrafamilial institution for K–12 students, making it the primary source of social capital. School-based social capital (Lin, 2001) relates to the social relations in school settings that can

be used to improve one's life outcomes. Social and cultural capital provide access to higher education through those social relations.

The school counselor plays a pivotal role in any school's college-going culture but also in disseminating relevant social capital. Put another way, college exposure can come from a wide range of mediums, but some students particularly rely on knowledge from their school counselors or college counseling programming. Bryan et al. (2022) reported that, whether implicit or explicit, counselors' beliefs as they pertain to the students along with the students' goals and priorities affect students' college decisions. Thus, the impact of what counselors know can have a lasting impact on students.

Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) suggested that small schools and smaller learning communities, like independent schools, have the potential to provide the conditions that engender social capital—that is, how social networks establish expectations, reinforce norms, and provide opportunities for the exchange of valuable information highlighting more strengths. They further suggested that when school personnel have consistently high expectations, all students will attend college after high school graduation. They reported that students who have access to, and benefit from, school-based capital are more likely to be engaged in activities that promote their school involvement and postsecondary options. Individuals develop social capital based on their relationships with other individuals as well as the resources those individuals possess (Häuberer, 2011). Students who are exploring their college options, for example, are reliant on their college counselors.

Social capital theory is an optimal lens through which to explore issues related to students' college planning because it accounts for the relationships that students and counselors can build with one another. Social capital theory has been explored by numerous scholars over

the years. Notably, Bourdieu and Coleman are cited as the founding fathers of social capital theory notably since they coined the term *social capital* (Häuberer, 2011). While there are various sub-theories of capital—economic, cultural, and social—most relevant to this study is the beginnings of social capital, which is Bourdieu’s early work. Bourdieu believed that social capital is the

aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned-capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 248-294; 1983, pp. 190-191)

Social capital, from Bourdieu (as cited in Häuberer, 2011), is believed to be a relationship that gives useful support as needed. In the context of college counseling, as noted by Lin (2001), school-based social capital related the social relations or social networks in schools that can be used to improve one’s life outcomes. Moreover, the idea of social capital involves stable relationships that are believed to be the most effective tool for both building and maintaining trust. Bourdieu also believed that the amount of social capital for any one person is largely determined not only by the number of relationships they have built but also by the resources and capital held by those individuals (i.e., the number of family members plus their resources and relationships; Häuberer, 2011). In private and independent schools, which tend to have more resources, this is paramount.

Coleman believed that social capital theory was complete with some other ideas integrated. Ultimately, Coleman believed:

Social capital is defined by its functions. It is not a single entity, but a variety of entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure (Coleman 1990, p. 302).

Coleman (1988) believed that social capital is what comes through the changes in relations among people that facilitate the action. The current study is grounded in social capital theory as social capital in a young person's development goes beyond the social capital from their family. Coleman believed that social capital was met through the resources that are made available through relationships with others. While families are most notably viewed as the main source of social capital, there are other factors that play a role. This can include school counselors.

Over the years since Coleman's (1988) publications on social capital, *school-based social capital* has emerged as a related term (Lin, 2001). Lin described school-based social capital as the social relations or social networks in the school setting that could improve outcomes for students. Over time, school counselors were viewed by students and families as a main social resource for students (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). In keeping with this understanding, in the current study, social capital theory provided the lens through which I explored the extent to which students' familiarity with HBCUs could be rooted held by their college counselor.

Conclusion

HBCUs remain important options for Black students to explore and consider throughout their college application process. As the numerical minority in independent schools, Black students have experiences that differ from those of their peers, and this may extend to their conversations in the college counseling office. As such, their exposure to HBCUs is an area worth further exploration, with particular attention paid to how independent school college

counselors can help more with this process. As I explored in this chapter, social capital is a central factor in any consideration of a student's overall college application process.

Understanding what college counselors know about HBCUs helps them better understand what information they must share with students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The purpose of my study was to learn how familiar independent school college counselors are with HBCUs and how they inform Black students about these institutions. I interviewed college counselors at independent schools to explore these issues and to answer the following questions:

1. What do independent school college counselors understand about the history and benefits of HBCUs?
2. In what ways, if any, do independent school college counselors inform Black students regarding HBCUs as options for higher education?
3. What additional information and/or resources pertaining to HBCUs do independent school college counselors say they would like to receive?

Research Design and Rationale

I was interested in examining college counseling offices from a variety of perspectives, using multiple data sources. A quantitative study would not allow me to examine this phenomenon of knowledge transfer about HBCUs within a particular context. Rather, a qualitative study was the best way to investigate the research questions. As noted by Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is established by using words through open-ended questions and qualitative interview questions as opposed to numbers derived through quantitative research. Creswell and Creswell further argued qualitative research is the necessary approach to see and understand a response from a group of people on a particular social problem. Moreover, two of the goals of qualitative research, as described by Maxwell (2012), are to “understand the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are

involved with or engage in” and “identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences and generating new “grounded” [Glaser & Strauss, 1967] theories about the latter” (pp. 40-41). It is through these lenses that I sought to understand college counselors’ familiarity with HBCUs and how that familiarity informs the resources and information their Black students receive.

Recruitment

The Association of College Counselors in Independent Schools (ACCIS), a national association within NAIS, is an international membership organization providing support, shared knowledge, and professional development programming for college counselors based in independent (non-public) schools around the globe. According to a recent survey, 609 schools are part of ACCIS, and this includes 2,130 college counseling staff. (This number includes office assistants, who often may support day-to-day office tasks like preparing transcripts, overseeing office schedules, leading testing administration, but who do not work directly with students).

To seek interest in the study, I reached out through the ACCIS listserv via email, which includes all members who have opted in to receive emails from the organization. I sent an initial demographic screening questionnaire to the college counselors who work directly with students applying to college and navigating the search and application process. My message included the screening questionnaire which sought to understand the type of school in which the respondent works and learn more about other components of their counseling philosophy (see Appendix B. At the time, the listserv held by ACCIS had an active count of about 1,200 individuals; I received 130 (10.8%) responses. A total of 114 (87.7%) of these counselors indicated they would be interested in participating in a 45-minute Zoom interview regarding supporting Black students in pursuing higher education.

Population and Sample

The screening questionnaire included questions about the counselors' school to obtain information about their school's makeup to get a better understanding of their upper school. I also collected some demographic information via the screening questionnaire, like the counselor's racial/ethnic identity, years of experience in college counseling, the number of Black students in the school, and where their independent school is located. Tracking these demographics was important to gather a group of counselors with myriad experiences and backgrounds to interview for this study. The screening questionnaire also asked participants if they would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview to better understand the ways in which students may explore HBCUs at their school.

I sought a range of participants from various independent schools across the United States. Before moving forward with a purposeful sampling approach, I made sure to eliminate any counselors that I knew personally to avoid any bias during the interview process. Thirty-seven counselors were eliminated as a result. From the remaining pool, I used purposeful sampling to make sure I selected a mix of counselors based on the region their school was in, their years of experiences, and their race. Specifically, I followed up with people from a mixed distribution of independent schools geographically (from the Midwest, the Northeast, the Southeast, the Southwest, the West). The interview sample ultimately included 15 college counselors from 15 different independent schools. The demographics of the screening questionnaire and the interview sample can be found in Table 1.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics of Questionnaire and Survey Sample*

Characteristics	Questionnaire Sample		Interview Sample	
	n	%	n	%
Region				
Midwest	12	9.3	3	20
Northeast	44	34.1	5	33
Southeast	24	18.6	2	13
Southwest	9	7	2	13
West	40	31	3	20
# of students in the upper school				
0-100	4	3.1	0	0
101-250	22	17.1	2	13
251-400	44	34.1	5	33
401-599	41	31.8	6	40
600+	18	14	2	13
Race				
White/Caucasian	80	61.5	6	40
Black/African American	27	20.8	3	20
Hispanic/Latinx	10	7.7	3	20
Asian	7	5.4	3	20
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	1.5	0	0
Chicanx				
Multi-Racial	5	3.8	0	0
Declined to state	1	0.8	0	0
% of students identifying as Black				
0-5%	30	23.8	4	27
6-10%	42	33.3	4	27
11-20%	39	31	4	27

Characteristics	Questionnaire Sample		Interview Sample	
	n	%	n	%
21-30%	8	6.3	1	7
>30%	7	5.6	2	13
Years of experience				
<1-5	25	19.2	4	27
6-10	38	29.2	3	20
11-15	22	16.9	3	20
16-24	31	23.8	2	13
25+	14	10.8	3	20

Note. One response is missing from the region question.

In the 130 responses to the questionnaire, the region in which the school was located had the greatest variation. Overall, 9.3% of the counselors were from the Midwest, 34.1% were from the Northeast, 18.6% from the Southeast, 7% were from the Southwest, and 31% were from the West. They most often had 6-10 years of experience (29.2%), followed by 16-24 (23.8%). Overall, more than half of the respondents (51.5%) had 11 years of experience or more. Most questionnaire respondents were White (61.5%), followed by 20.8% identifying as Black or African American, 7.7% identifying as Hispanic or Latinx, 5.4% identifying as Asian, 1.5% identifying as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 3.8% identifying as multi-racial, 1.5% identifying as Middle Eastern, 0.8% identifying as Chicax. Since most respondents to the questionnaire identified as White or Caucasian, I interviewed twice as many White or Caucasian counselors.

In the questionnaire sample, the counselors tended to work at schools where 10% or fewer of the students were Black (57.1%). Roughly one third of the schools represented (31%)

had 11% to 20% Black students. Most of the schools had between 251–400 or 401–599 students in the upper school (34.1% and 31.8%, respectively).

Data Collection

In the interviews, I asked open-ended questions about what programming is offered to students, counselors' familiarity with HBCUs, what college counselors suggest to students for college options, and what resources are available to underrepresented students, particularly Black students. The interviews were designed to understand what tools counselors use to begin the college search process with students and what resources they use to present the various types of colleges like HBCUs to students. The interviews specifically aimed to clarify what college counselors understand about HBCUs, and how familiar they are with HBCUs, how they inform Black students on these options, and what counselors would like to know about HBCUs that they do not know already. (See Appendix C for the interview protocol.) The interview protocol began with questions to learn more about the college counselor and their background and how they became a college counselor to orient them to the interview. The protocol then covered areas from the counselor's HBCU familiarity to the counseling programming in their office. I also asked questions about their school, particularly their upper school community and the college counseling office. Transitioning into HBCU knowledge, I went on to ask questions such as:

- How would you compare your level of knowledge about HBCUs to that of other college options (i.e., more than average, average, less than average) and why?
- How would you describe an HBCU to a Black student who is starting the college process for the first time?
 - Think of the most recent Black student you worked with and talked to about an HBCU.

- What do you think are the main reasons Black students choose to attend an HBCU?
- What do you think are the main reasons Black students choose not to attend an HBCU?

This primary data was helpful as background information for Research Question 1. To further explore Research Question 2, I asked questions about the college counseling programming in the office: the type of college counseling programming they have at each grade level; what types of opportunities, if any, they create for HBCUs to engage with their school community; if there is specific HBCU programming at the school or shared with students and families; and how they engage with Black students interested in HBCUs. To explore Research Question 3, I asked questions about helpful resources that would assist counselors in exploring HBCUs with and for their students and what additional information they would like to receive about HBCUs to help support Black students in making college choices.

Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and took place virtually via Zoom. I used the recording and closed-captioning feature on Zoom to accurately gather everything shared in the interviews. The interviews were also recorded with permission from the participant and transcribed by an online company, Rev.com, to ensure clarity and accuracy to what is recorded by Zoom. I also checked the transcripts for accuracy before starting the coding process.

Role Management

Since I am a college counselor at an independent school, I did not use my school as a site of study, but I did position myself as a fellow college counselor. I made sure not to use these interviews as an opportunity to highlight the various ways in which my school site engages with an HBCU as a post-secondary education college option, but instead focused on their school and what they are doing to inform Black students about HBCUs. I limited my disclosure about

HBCUs from my own experiences as an alum and former HBCU admissions officer, and I limited the information I provided about HBCUs. Since the purpose of these interviews was to explore and learn more about what the counselors understand directly, it was not appropriate to provide information about HBCUs.

Data Analysis

The interviews were administered and reviewed individually. I used an inductive approach to analyze the interview data. Following the process outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), I organized and prepared my data by reviewing transcripts. I read all the data to start developing analytic memos. Next, I started coding all the data, generating a description of themes that emerged from my initial reading. Creswell and Creswell further advised thinking of codes as falling into three categories: expected codes, surprising codes, and codes of unusual or conceptual interest. The coding schemes allowed me to note various patterns throughout the interviews that may help inform the research questions.

For Research Question 1, I looked for codes to get a sense of how much information the college counselor had about HBCUs as an educational institution or individual HBCUs themselves (specific HBCU campuses). For Research Question 2, I looked for coding schemes that indicate the college counselor themselves or their office was actively disseminating information on HBCUs or providing opportunities for Black students and families to learn more about HBCUs.³ For Research Question 3, I looked for themes around the resources and information counselors noted they would like to receive. Since I interviewed a smaller sample size, I looked for trends among all the interviews and analyzed this data.

³ “Active” refers to HBCU seminars, HBCU tours, HBCU specific programming, etc.

Positionality and Ethical Considerations

One ethical issue of concern was confidentiality. Since there are only so many independent schools in the United States, how I describe them could reveal the identity of the independent schools. For example, if I describe an interview with a college counselor from a large independent PK–12 independent school in the city of Atlanta, it may be easy for one to determine the school through the process of elimination. To take that a step further, if I were to say I was talking to a Black man who works at an independent school in southern California, one may have a short list of who that could reference, since few Black men in southern California are college counselors. As such, in Chapter 4, I use pseudonyms for participants and their schools. When necessary, I disguise specific details that could identify either participants or their institutions.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

As an HBCU graduate and former admissions officer at an HBCU, I already had ideas formed on what I believe are the benefits of going to an HBCU as a Black student and the importance of these options for Black students. Furthermore, as a college counselor in an independent school, I have a good sense of the day-to-day work of many of the interviewees. That said, I ensured that these personal biases were not framed or shared in any way, so I did not share any of the work that is being done at my independent school. Additionally, I did not share any of the initiatives that have been created for Black students to learn more about HBCUs in my school community. To also help with avoiding inserting my personal bias, I carefully documented interviews through data collection and immersed myself in the data through systematic data analysis. These are some steps that allowed me to mitigate the threats against trustworthiness and credibility issues.

Another threat to credibility was reactivity, specifically through social desirability. As I began this study, I worried about counselors only identifying themselves as interested in being interviewed if they felt knowledgeable about HBCUs. As responses to the screening questionnaire came in, it was clear to me that counselors were interested in sharing the ways in which they support Black students' pursuit of higher education. As I found people to interview, I underscored the study's desire to simply learn about how counselors support Black students in that pursuit of higher education. Further, I probed in interviews for concrete examples about their own experiences as counselors with HBCUs and reiterated the goal of the study. Another threat to the credibility was my personal bias, which I have discussed, and the small sample size which I discuss next.

Study Limitations

A potential limitation of the study is insufficient evidence because of the small sample size. There are 600+ independent schools with college counseling offices; a total of 15 interviews represents roughly 2.5% of the membership. Despite the small size, I took a deep dive into the interviews, analyzed the data, and looked for trends among various independent schools to report the findings. Further, the small sample size could still be helpful—even if not generalizable—to get a sense of counselors' views of the added support needed for college counselors in independent schools to better support Black students to learn more about HBCUs.

Conclusion

A qualitative research design will help reveal what some independent schools' college counselors are sharing with their Black students. Studying how familiar college counselors in independent schools are with HBCUs can provide better context on the options made available to Black students and families. It is most important to understand the college counselors'

perspectives and understandings, as so much is dependent on their relationship with students, which I explored in my discussion of social capital theory in Chapter Two. The findings of this study—which I discuss in the next chapter—will help promote a better overall college application process for Black students as counselors aim to ensure they are aware of all the options available to them.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with 15 college counselors from independent schools across the United States concerning their familiarity with HBCUs. This study revealed what independent school college counselors know about HBCUs and the avenues they use to relay information about HBCUs to their students.

Participants

The participants who were interviewed and their demographics are included in Table 2. The table shows their name (a pseudonym), race, years of experiences, region, and number of students identifying as Black in their school.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Interview Sample

Participant Pseudonym	Race	Years of Experience	Region	Number of Students Identifying as Black
Essie	Asian	25+	Northeast	0-5%
Addie Bea	Asian	<1-5	Southwest	0-5%
Mary	Asian	<1-5	West	11-20%
James	Black/African American	<1-5	Southeast	6-10%
Donna	Black/African American	11-15	Northeast	>30%
Pat	Black/African American	25+	Southeast	>30%
Stella	Hispanic/Latinx	11-15	Midwest	6-10%
Willene	Hispanic/Latinx	<1-5	West	0-5%
Flo	White/Caucasian	25+	Midwest	11-20%
Rosie	White/Caucasian	11-15	Northeast	21-30%
Estelle	White/Caucasian	6-10	Midwest	6-10%
Lou Ann	White/Caucasian	6-10	Northeast	6-10%
Butch	White/Caucasian	6-10	Northeast	11-20%

Participant Pseudonym	Race	Years of Experience	Region	Number of Students Identifying as Black
Bealinda	Hispanic/ Latinx	16-24	West	11-20%
Diane	White/Caucasian	16-24	Southwest	0-5%

Throughout the study, I aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What do independent school college counselors understand about the history and benefits of HBCUs?
2. In what ways, if any, do independent school college counselors inform Black students regarding HBCUs as options for higher education?
3. What additional information and/or resources pertaining to HBCUs do independent school college counselors say they would like to receive?

The sections that follow explore the four major findings that address these questions.

First, my study revealed that while levels of in-depth knowledge of HBCUs varied, all counselors had some general understanding of HBCUs and referred to the benefits they perceived. Counselors who were the most familiar with HBCUs tended to be those where their independent school community was located near HBCUs. Proximity tended to be those who worked in a city that also had an HBCU. Second, counselors associated various reasons—like finding a sense of belonging and community for why they thought students would attend an HBCU. Counselors perceived several barriers, like finances and perceived prestige—they thought students faced in doing so. Third, even though counselors noted the barriers students faced, they said that those who ended up at HBCUs are happy and enjoying their experiences. Finally, the study revealed that, despite the varying levels of knowledge, counselors generally still sought more information on HBCUs, such as conference topics, opportunities to visit HBCUs, and programming to learn more about HBCUs.

Finding 1: All Counselors Described Benefits and/or Referenced the History of HBCUs

Irrespective of race, school location, or years of experience in college counseling, all college counselors interviewed had some baseline knowledge and information about HBCUs. This baseline knowledge included why HBCUs were created and who they were created to serve—both reasons being largely because of segregation in this country. Many of the counselors described what the U.S. Department of Education (1991) described: “HBCUs were established to serve the education needs of Black Americans. Prior to the time of their establishment, and for many years afterwards, Blacks were generally denied admission to traditionally White institutions.” Further, they all referenced benefits of attending an HBCU, an HBCU education, and/or the historical context of these institutions.

One distinction, however, was counselors who had an HBCU near their campus, meaning their independent school was in the same city as an HBCU or a nearby city; these counselors were more knowledgeable about HBCUs, especially being able to reference more HBCUs by name and categorize how a specific HBCU may be a good fit. Their school location and proximity to an HBCU perhaps allowed them to engage in ways other counselors could not. These counselors spoke with more confidence and had physically been to an HBCU campus, despite having no formal HBCU programming, in the form of HBCU panels or HBCU-only college fairs, at their school. While some counselors lacking proximity to an HBCU still had been to an HBCU campus, counselors in closer proximity referenced regular visits and sometimes took students to visit HBCUs as well. Thus, geographic location clearly affected familiarity. One counselor spoke in detail about the HBCUs in the state and admitted not knowing much beyond those (along with the predictable top HBCUs in the country). Combined

with proximity, race was still a factor. Two of the three Black counselors—both located near HBCUs—were able to speak at great length about HBCUs.

General Knowledge of HBCUs

All counselors had general knowledge of HBCUs. For example, they were asked how they would describe an HBCU to a Black student who was starting the college process. This question allowed me to see how counselors were informing students about HBCUs. Several counselors said they would use this description as an opportunity to provide students with background on what HBCUs are, the history of these institutions, or simply defining the term for students where needed. Since few schools had formal HBCU programming at their school, they used their individual conversations with Black students to inform them about HBCUs. One counselor, Willene, said she starts broadly and makes sure to describe the historical context:

I think if I'm talking more broadly...I would first tell them what the name means, because I think sometimes students don't know that it stands for "Historically Black Colleges and Universities." So, starting there and explaining what that means, that once upon a time, again, these were schools that were founded with a certain mission: to create opportunities for students that identify as Black. Because there was a world where colleges looked different than what they look like now, and who was being accepted and who was ending up at schools. So that there are places that were historically built with that foundation, and wanting to provide opportunities for students that maybe wouldn't have found them elsewhere.

Willene explained what Bracey (2017) detailed—how many HBCUs were established solely to educate newly emancipated Black African slaves because these individuals were mostly banned at White colleges and universities, a practice that continued into the 1960s in the South. Willene,

who was a Latinx counselor, underscored the historical context of HBCUs and noted the importance of making sure students were aware of it. She specifically highlighted the history of how these institutions were created for Black students.

Overall, the 15 counselors referenced the history of HBCUs, no matter their racial, geographical, or experiential background. They noted the history to ensure students were aware of how these options were different from PWIs and how the history makes these schools relevant today. Butch, a White counselor, described the additional context he gives to students when he talks about HBCUs, noting the importance of being part of a larger community of Black students:

So usually when I'm talking with students about HBCUs, it's Historically Black College or University, meaning that since its founding, it has been designed to support Black students in their pursuit of higher education. ... Are you interested in spaces where you're not subject to the microaggressions that we know our students are, where they don't feel necessarily being the representative of their identity at a table? You're not the only student who looks like yourself in an advanced STEM class. These are sort of the things – to be in a larger community.

This White counselor used the opportunity, in which they introduced HBCUs to students, to contrast their experiences at their predominantly White independent schools to the different experiences that are possible at an HBCU: No longer being the only Black student, no longer experiencing microaggressions, in contrast being part of a larger community that mirrors their identity.

In addition to distinguishing HBCUs broadly in terms of history and experience, Estelle, another White counselor, explained the importance of checking in with students to understand their level of knowledge about HBCUs:

I just always ask what they know first, because I'm not going to presume to educate a student who might actually be very well-versed in what an HBCU is, as a White person and be like, "Well, these are schools that historically have been put together to support students of color." So, one is to start with, "What do you know? What have you heard? What are your viewpoints on what an HBCU is?" I'm also not going to assume that a student knows what an HBCU is, or what the term means. So, it's helpful to know what their prior knowledge is before I open my mouth.

Estelle specifically highlights her desire to not appear to be the White person informing the Black person about Black colleges as it could appear to be belittlement of the student's knowledge. However, she also recognizes that students may not have the acronym knowledge, so she starts with what they do know offering the student respect. Estelle noted how students may or may not know what the term HBCU stands for. As a counselor, Estelle knows she may be the first person to inform a student about an HBCU, so it is important to check-in to gauge what they already know. She used these individual conversations as an opportunity to share information with students in a private setting since they do not have official HBCU programming. In terms of disseminating information, counselors mostly informed students individually in one-on-one conversations. It was these conversations that could also explore benefits and barriers of HBCUs. Some of these counselors' reports mirrors some of Gloria Ladson-Billings work on culturally relevant pedagogy. The white counselors modeling in how they convey knowledge to Black students is no coincidence. In an *Education Week* article by Will (2022), Ladson-Billings noted

that even in 2022 the work of culturally relevant teaching is the same as when she originated the work. The main three points, Ladson-Billings cites is: student learning, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Here our counselors are ensuring they have the competence to relay information about HBCUs to their Black students. Evident in counselors' ability to convey general knowledge about HBCUs to their Black students. As counselors explored more of what history they knew of HBCUs they shifted into benefits of attending these institutions as well.

Social Benefits of HBCUs

Counselors noted what they perceived as the benefits of attending an HBCU to be—for example, some social benefits of being with other Black students, as Butch described in his quote in the previous section. Similarly, Estelle described some more subtle benefits and the differences in attending an institution like an HBCU, including what she referred to as “rest and celebration”:

I then will talk a little bit, depending on their answer, about just the history, like why do they exist? Then we'll say, "One of the things that I have heard from the majority of students that I've had that have gone to HBCUs, is the idea of both rest and celebration. The idea that it can sometimes be very tiring to be one of the only or one of the few, in an environment where you're the only person or where you're one of the few people that is different than everybody else." I said, “I can imagine that if you're the only Muslim student at a Catholic school, I can imagine that if you are the only guy on an all-female team.” I try to make some examples with other identities. It doesn't necessarily mean that anybody is being unkind. It doesn't necessarily mean that anybody is being purposefully exclusive or unwelcoming, but just this idea that you have a different layer of what you bring into a place, and that that can be tiring.”

Being the minority in any environment can be both difficult and exhausting. Estelle referenced how being the only Black student or one of a few Black students can be “tiring.” She noted how she conveys that understanding that this fatigue could be a reason a student may be interested in an HBCU. What Estelle expressed is much like racial battle fatigue coined by Smith et al. (2007). They described racial battle fatigue as “the physiological and psychological strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism” (p. 555). This type of fatigue wears on Black students in independent schools pushing them to explore options where they can find more community.

In her statement, Estelle also attempted to make the connection to identifiers other than race, like religion and gender, to help a student understand the comforting experience of an HBCU. This connection could be helpful for a student to better contrast the experience of attending an HBCU with other types of schools they may be considering. Estelle thus helped them contextualize the fatigue they experience as high school students, indicating how they may want a different type of experience. Overall, Estelle used the analogies as an opportunity to highlight one of the benefits of no longer having to be one of few, or the only one, by attending an HBCU.

Donna, a Black counselor, shared her idea of why students tend to lean towards HBCUs that also highlighted social benefits:

They want to be there. They want to be at an HBCU. That's it. I wouldn't say the kids who are going there have vast financial resources. I wouldn't say they have a lot of money, but I will say they want to be in a community of people of like-minded scholars. And for them that is important. And there's a sense of pride in where they go to school,

and that is why they choose to go. It's really, I would say just being part of a community of people who are like them.

As other counselors have shared, the difficulties of being the only Black student in their independent school communities can be straining. An HBCU gives them an opportunity to fit in socially in a way that they have not been able to do in their independent school. It gives them the chance to be in a community of other Black students and engage socially in new and vital ways. It is the ability to be in an environment where students look like you. Another counselor, Addie Bea, an Asian counselor, highlighted her thoughts on some of the social benefits:

I think wanting that supportive environment where again, everyone doesn't have that same upbringing, but at least physically on the surface looks like you or has the same similar social struggles as you, and so you can kind of bond over that versus... We had an incident a couple of years ago at a nearby, what was it, Sonic, where the manager was rude to two of the students who were Black versus the rest of the students, they were with who weren't Black. And the White students just didn't understand, or have the knowledge, or the maturity frankly to talk about that situation. So, they want to have these conversations. Not just in the classroom obviously, but I would say even more so outside the social network that is there.

The bottom line presented by counselors around social benefits is that Black students' desire to attend an HBCU lies in their desire to be in an environment that is more inclusive of who they are. Independent schools and their lack of diversity takes its toll on Black students, and they are hoping to get a different experience for college. Social benefits were just one type of benefit highlighted by counselors that students presented as reasons to attend an HBCU.

Academic Benefits of HBCUs

Pat, a Black counselor, had a slightly different perspective on one of the key benefits to attending an HBCU; she said she focused on an area beyond social connection and a more relaxed environment. Specifically, she highlighted some of the academic benefits and postgraduate opportunities:

With Morehouse, there were Fortune 500 companies that would come to Atlanta and only interview at the [Atlanta University Center]. They wouldn't go to Emory, they wouldn't go to Georgia Tech, they'd only come for Morehouse. And so, I think students understand the value and the opportunities that come for going to HBCUs.

While students should consider the social aspects of college, one of the most important parts of a college education is long-term goals like finding a career and other opportunities after graduation. This is referenced by Tobolowsky et al. (2005) when they talked about how HBCUs reflect a supportive social environment that is helpful to both academic and personal development. Being able to interview with companies and possibly receive internships or job opportunities is a way to help the student with academic development as well as personal development. As students consider their future interests and goals, Pat used the opportunity to highlight the fact that companies are specifically coming to Atlanta to interview students at the Atlanta University Center (AUC), made up of Morehouse School of Medicine, Spelman College, Morehouse College, and Clark Atlanta University.

If companies are coming to the AUC to interview students it means they are bypassing other schools in the Metro Atlanta area like Georgia Tech, Georgia State, and Emory to name a few, which are all Predominantly White Institutions. This is an important distinction to make for a Black student to help them think about the opportunities that await them at an HBCU.

Another counselor, Mary, an Asian counselor, referenced the academic benefits of attending an HBCU:

Yeah, so I know when we were talking to her, she was interested in applying BioSci. So, one of the things we had originally talked about was with Xavier and how they have a really strong medical program and how they really have really strong ability to create Black physicians in the workplace.

A key academic benefit shared here was the connections this HBCU has in creating Black physicians. Pat mentioned earlier the job market and, in this example, Mary, discusses the graduate school route for some students. Noted on Xavier University of Louisiana's website, via a report compiled by the Association of American Medical Colleges (2019), Xavier University of Louisiana was first among the nation's colleges and universities in the number of African American graduates who went on to complete medical school. The conversation Mary had with her student highlights this point and shows how academic benefits are a key priority for students which they can gain from attending an HBCU.

Even though, HBCUs are known to have less resources, they are still able to create opportunities for students. Kim & Conrad (2006) found that despite significant underfunding, HBCUs are having no less of an impact on academic success than Black students who attend PWIs. Moreover, they found that HBCUs were taking great strides to have students conduct research for example, to advance the success of African American students (Kim & Conrad, 2006).

Many Counselors Believed Their Knowledge of HBCUs was Less Than Average

Counselors were specifically asked how they would compare their level knowledge of HBCUs to that of other college options like PWIs. Eight of the 15 counselors felt their

knowledge was less than average. The less-than-average responses served as an avenue to gather more information on the reasons why counselors felt this way. Some counselors felt they lacked the institutional support to engage with HBCUs, some felt they did not have the students interested to engage and learn more about HBCUs, and some felt they simply lacked the knowledge themselves personally. One White counselor, Butch, noted that his level of knowledge of HBCUs is less than average compared to other options because his Black students are not applying to HBCUs; therefore, he and other counselors in his office are not as exposed to these schools as often as they are to other schools:

In comparison to other schools, I would say it's probably less than average. I think for me it's been a case of I can look into them online but haven't had the opportunity to engage with representatives or visit campuses a lot. I think one of the things that we run into with proactive outreach is a bias towards, well, where do our students usually apply? And so HBCUs aren't necessarily high on the list, and so we end up in this cycle of not a lot of students apply, so we don't know as much about them. So, I would say on average, yeah, a little less than I know about some of the other types of institutions you listed.

Black students more often choose PWIs, so counselors learn less about HBCUs, and counselors' reduced knowledge produces few students who choose HBCUs, so it becomes a continuous loop of no productivity. When probed about ways in which he could increase his knowledge, Butch explained that the problem existed across the department:

You would think given the amount of money we have, that we would have a great [professional development] and travel budget, and I think I alluded to this a little bit earlier, right? Yes, we can do fly-ins. We are also encouraged to individually do one sort of self-planned trip per year, but it is very much kind of dictated by the, well, where do

our students apply? Where will they look? Which has made it hard. I haven't pitched it myself, but I had two colleagues who have in the past sort of pitched, "I would love to do a group of HBCUs." And it was sort of met with, "Well, even our Black students, that's not a priority for them. So why don't you do X, Y, and Z instead?" So, the resources are kind of there. I honestly don't think the willingness is.

Butch can look up information online but has not been able to engage with HBCUs personally; he even shared that he has never physically been to an HBCU campus himself. The interviews revealed that only six of the 15 counselors had been to an HBCU campus themselves in their role as a counselor. Institutionally, Butch shared that his school has not had the willingness to support the efforts of counselors learning more about HBCUs. So not only are students not interested in HBCUs, but the institution is not willing to support counselors in learning more because students are not applying. This creates an ongoing cycle, though. Students lack interest and yet counselors are not knowledgeable enough to create interest. Nor can counselors learn to create interest if administration fails to support counselors getting more information.

An Asian counselor, Essie, shared a similar cause for her level of knowledge of HBCUs piling in comparison to her level of knowledge of other institutions: Her Black students lack the interest in HBCUs. She also noted, though, that despite her personal interest, HBCUs and their admissions offices/admissions representatives do not reach out to her:

And I personally, again, do not have the depth of knowledge. There are a lot of HBCUs, not just the ones that we all have heard about, but they're just... On the one hand, I would personally just out of curiosity, learn more, but I don't have the students interested. And so, it's hard to figure out how to get out there and learn more because these are not schools that are also reaching out to us.

What Essie described is what Tobolowsky et al. (2005) concluded—that there is some challenge for Black students and families to find information on HBCUs. Twenty-five years ago, Freeman (1999) recommended that recruitment at private schools and or predominantly White high schools would be a good investment for HBCU admissions offices as they would have access to the top Black students. Little seems to have changed. Despite her interest and motivation, since Essie is unable to make connections with HBCU representatives, the students go without information.

While students' lack of interest in HBCUs and weak support from their independent school was a common thread for some counselors, some simply put the blame on themselves for a lack of personal knowledge. Another counselor, Stella, a Latinx counselor, shared that students don't know more about HBCUs because she does not know about them:

I probably need to be more educated on starting the conversation, instead of being reactionary. But I don't start the conversation, to be honest. I don't. And I think it's because I don't know enough about them. And then, we have all these other schools that everybody applies to every year, and I'm really familiar with them, and those are easy for me to talk about and get them excited about or know if they're a fit. And I just don't know what's a fit. I feel kind of bad about that, but I just don't know enough.

Stella recognized her discussion of HBCUs happens when asked, but students would likely not ask about them unless they know about them to begin with. There is constantly a need for discussion with students when exploring their potential college options. Students are disadvantaged discussing the same schools just because the counselor can discuss them, and that really limits their options.

One thing that was clear is that counselors know about the better known HBCUs and could not reference any other HBCU campuses. Essie, for example, mentioned Spelman and Howard and indicated that her students generally don't apply elsewhere: "And of the ones who apply, it's usually the top ones, the Spelman's, the Howards. That's about it."

As counselors were probed, they could easily reference some of the same schools like Howard University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College. According to the US News and World Report 2024 rankings, these three schools are all in the top five best HBCUs. Every counselor referenced these institutions at some point during the interview. However, there are many more to offer and discuss. According to NCES, in 2021 there were 99 HBCUs across 19 states, including the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Counselors were specifically asked if students apply to HBCUs and if so, which ones do they apply to and they all at least referenced the "top ones" like Essie's point. It is important to note that this subset of HBCUs was likely more well-known well before the rankings of HBCUs became relevant.

Counselors who Were More Confident in Their Knowledge Were Often Near HBCUs

The counselors who knew more about HBCUs—seven of the 15—were a mixed group, with various backgrounds. This group included Black and White counselors, from all around the United States, and with a range of experience from <1-5 to 25+ and some in between. One distinction, though, was that many from this group were near HBCUs. One Black counselor, Pat, felt her knowledge of all schools was the same:

No, it is all the same to me, and that's one thing that I do also appreciate about our school.

There are some independent schools you go to, if you look at that profile where their students go, it's like 20 schools. Everybody's going to the same schools. Because for me, I get every bit as excited when I have a student who's excited about going to Hampton as I

do that student who's excited about going to Harvard. It's the same because I know this reflects that student's vision, and these schools are going to offer them the same great opportunities. It's the same.

Since students at her school are exploring all over, Pat is familiar with all types of schools. Again, it is worth noting that the two schools referenced are both higher ranked schools: Howard and Hampton. As mentioned, there are many more HBCUs in the country than the ones counselors referenced so easily. Another connection Pat makes, though, is her school's location being so close to HBCUs: "I think part of it is it's Atlanta. So, even in terms of all students, everybody has to see historically Black colleges." All their students must see HBCUs, no matter their background, because the school and college counseling office has created those opportunities due to their proximity to these campuses. She continued:

And so, I think we're really spoiled in terms of that. So pre-pandemic, something that we did as part of College Knowledge Day, it was a day-long thing for the morning, and then in the afternoon we would put students on buses to go visit different types. Students didn't get a real choice of where they went, but we would take students to Spelman, Morehouse, let's look at single-gender schools.

Since they are in Atlanta and can access HBCUs in their backyard, that allows them as counselors and students to be more exposed to HBCUs. A White counselor, Rosie, also felt her level of knowledge was the same based on her ability to engage with HBCUs due to her school's location:

I would say, I know as much I think about HBCUs as I do PWIs, I feel like I can speak pretty confidently and pretty accurately and pretty thoroughly on both. In part because I've made it a point to go and visit and be on the campuses. Baltimore has two HBCUs.

Maryland has four. So, we've got a lot here. And so, I've had a lot of actual on-the-ground experience, both talking with and visiting the HBCUs we have here and doing a lot of research and outreach when I'm advocating for my students.

No matter the counselor's background, if they were within proximity to an HBCU campus, they spoke in greater detail about the HBCUs in their respective city. They also could speak to the HBCU experience more than counselors who had not visited an HBCU campus or were not near an HBCU. This is somewhat of a confirmed finding as it relates closely to what McDonough et al. (1997) found—that the region and high school location can lead to variations in the information available to students.

In summary, all counselors could speak generally about HBCUs. While their background was not indicative of how much they thought they knew, proximity to an HBCU campus proved to be a factor of the counselors' familiarity. Regardless of how much they knew about HBCUs, all counselors had their perceived reasons for why students would attend an HBCU, or what they believed were barriers that hindered students from attending an HBCU. Assessing counselors' knowledge by their ability to name HBCUs beyond the three (Howard University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College) also showed what counselors knew as only a few counselors knew more information beyond those institutions. Few counselors could also refer to specific programs that certain HBCUs could offer. This showed that counselors were true to their assessment of their knowledge. A counselor's level of knowledge is imperative as a student may rely on it. This coincides closely with McDonough's (2005) finding that nine out of 10 students feel their counselor is knowledgeable about colleges. But counselors not being knowledgeable about colleges hinders students from knowing more if they are looking to counselors to provide information.

Finding 2a: Counselors Pointed to a Sense of Belonging, Community, and Identity as Reasons to Attend an HBCU

While counselors' perceived knowledge, and my assessment of their knowledge, of HBCUs was on a spectrum, those who had students attend HBCUs, or even apply, shared many reasons why they felt a student may decide to go this route for their postsecondary education. Like the benefits they identified in Finding 1, one of the main reasons they cited was students' desire to be in a place that is most reflective of who they are. This is supported by Williams et al. (2021) who similarly noted that attending an HBCU was students' opportunity to learn more about and lean into Black culture completely.

Importance of Being Part of a Majority-Black School

I asked counselors the main reasons they thought a student would decide to attend an HBCU, and the responses were the same no matter where they were in the country—they focused on the importance of being part of a majority-Black school. Bealinda, from the West Coast, shared, “They want to be in an environment where they don't have to worry about being the only one. They want an environment where they can be in a community of other Black students.” This counselor noted after being in their predominantly White independent schools, Black students may have a desire to be a part of the majority. This type of environment can be achieved by attending an HBCU. Many students may have experienced being the only Black student in their classes, sports teams, etc., so attending an HBCU would give them a different type of experience.

HBCUs Representative of Students' Identity

One common theme was Black students' desire to be in an environment that is more representative of their identity. Most of these students have been the minority in their independent school; many counselors shared how the students wanted this experience to change.

One counselor from the Midwest, Flo, shared a sentiment like Bealinda and noted Black students' particular interest in HBCUs:

I think certainly the desire to be in an all-Black community. It's funny, because we are a PWI, there are some Black students who say, "After being here, I would now like to go to a place where I am not going to be in the minority anymore and where I'm going to be supported as a Black student specifically," and that's really important to them and to their families. There are a fair number of kids who when they look at HBCUs, it is because they have been at a PWI, and they would like to spend the next four years not at a PWI.

Other studies have found that Black students who attend predominantly White high schools have a particular investment in attending an HBCU. Freeman (1999) found that Black high school students from Predominantly White Institutions were more likely than Black high school students from predominantly Black schools to consider HBCUs in addition to PWIs. Freeman noted that African American students who interacted more with White students and/or attended White schools more likely desired to "go back to their roots" (p. 356). Students recognize they are in the minority attending their PWI independent schools, so understanding they will not be a minority in an HBCU community is of great interest.

A counselor from the Northeast, Lou Ann, expressed a similar sentiment where students hope to find comfort in a community with more students who look like them:

Yeah, I think, well, we're a predominantly White institution in a predominantly White part of the state. There aren't a lot of Black students in our community, so I completely understand that this cannot be a place that feels comfortable for them all the time.

Looking toward college to be able to be at an institution that is predominantly Black and has just a different setting than what they're used to. I think that the interest in HBCUs

comes from a desire to be in a community of like-minded individuals that they haven't really found here.

Counselors noted that there often comes a point when a student desires to be in an environment that mirrors their own identity. Lou Ann and other counselors recognized this important point that students are looking for more reflection of themselves in the world. It became evident that counselors understood some students' desire to attend an HBCU or even file applications at HBCUs. Many of the counselors had similar thoughts around their wanting to be in a space that had more students that look like them, especially since their independent schools lacked this opportunity. Donna from the Northeast gave her ideas of why she thought her students would attend an HBCU today:

They were kids who probably would have not made it at College Park UMBC, they would have not made it at any other public school other than Morgan State. And it was an absolutely perfect fit for them, and it changed their lives... And the fact that they go to Morgan State, and they are embraced and loved on and then poured into, that's Morgan State. Then, I have other kids who after being in our Black and Brown space, are like, "I need to be in another Black space. I don't think I'm going to make it in a PWI. I need to be amongst my people.

What Donna describes is what Bracey (2017) concluded after conducting a comprehensive review of the literature showing that HBCUs are known for nurturing Black, underserved students, while offering specialized instruction, such as exploring the deepest questions about what it means to be a Black college student. This is also confirmed in the study Johnson (2019) conducted where he concluded that Black students who chose HBCUs recognized the value of being in an environment that was predominately Black. While counselors could speak to the

reasons for students wanting to attend an HBCU, I also asked them what they perceived as the main barriers to applying or attending an HBCU. As I discuss next, counselors, irrespective of location again, had similar responses that students reported on why they would not attend an HBCU.

Finding 2b. Counselors Pointed to Cost and Perceived Prestige as Barriers

While it was important to explore what counselors understood about the reasons students decide to apply to or attend an HBCU, it was also important to explore the barriers that might lead a student to decide against applying or attending. Once again, there were consistent ideas across counselors, regardless of location, for why a student may decide against attending an HBCU. Counselors referenced that many students felt the cost of attending an HBCU or lack of financial aid was a barrier as well as students' perception that HBCUs lack prestige.

Finances, Financial Aid, and College Choices

The rising cost of college makes it unattainable for many families, especially lower income families. Often, counselors said that cost and lack of financial aid offered at HBCUs compared to other college options was a barrier to students' interest. It is worth noting, though, that based on a survey of HBCUs and neighboring PWIs, generally HBCUs are less expensive than other four-year private and public nonprofit institutions (Wood, 2021). But students still cited cost as a major barrier for them to attend. For example, a counselor from the Midwest described a past student who was unable to attend Spelman College due to cost:

I think the other thing that has been an issue at some places, and again, I work with a very small population, so I'm not necessarily suggesting that this is universalizable, but it has been finances. I had a student just anecdotally, she was phenomenal, a couple of years ago, applied early action to Spelman, got into Spelman. Her [Expected Family

Contribution] was zero, and Spelman offered her nothing, and she would've loved to have gone to Spelman. That was her heart's desire, and it couldn't happen. They offered a Parent PLUS Loan that was overwhelming for a parent with an EFC of zero. So, I would say the finances are probably the most significant issue because a lot of our students, again, the whole class, despite the fact that we're an independent school, have a fair number of families who are here because we have a very generous financial aid office.

The cost of college can be a major factor for students making a final decision. While this student had identified an HBCU as their dream school, she was offered no financial aid, scholarships, or assistance from the college. Johnson et al. (2019) evaluated the shifts in financial aid and how it impacted the enrollment at HBCUs after the U.S. Department of Education made changes to the credit history requirements needed to obtain Parent Loans for Undergraduate Students (PLUS). They found that PLUS loans declined substantially at HBCUs in 2012-2013 and these decreases did not lead to other types of financial aid for students. These changes show HBCUs were impacted as they saw large declines in enrollment, more than other institutions, and for two consecutive years. As more students shared the inability to afford an HBCU education, lack of funding is seen as a major barrier.

That would make it hard for any student to be able to attend, especially if they receive more generous financial aid from other institutions. Another counselor similarly shared finances being a reason that deters students from choosing HBCUs:

It's just like I want them to know that there are schools out there that are going to really fund their education and they can graduate without loans. It's just, I think that's been the biggest barrier for me is really not getting a sense of the financial feasibility of a lot of the

HBCUs that our kids are interested in. But yeah, I think it's definitely something to work on, but I'm not sure what to do about the financial piece.

In this example, like the one before it, students must make difficult decisions when it comes to funding their education and viewed HBCUs as financially unattainable. This counselor helps students identify that there are schools that can fund their education so students can graduate without loans, but those institutions have not been HBCUs in her experience.

Perceived Prestige of HBCUs

Finances were not the only barrier counselors identified to attending an HBCU. As students navigate the college process, they often compare themselves to friends, classmates, and others who have gone through the college application process before them. Counselors shared that another reason that served as a barrier for Black students to attend an HBCU was a concern that others would perceive the school choice as less reputable. A counselor in the Southeast, James, noted:

I don't think they face any real barriers. I think they are perceived barriers. The social cache of what college did you get accepted to is really strong, and is a point of discussion amongst students, faculty, parents. So, I think that there is some hesitancy that students have about HBCUs, because it's not always the group of schools that their peers are talking about, and any misperception, misinformation they may have that the HBCU that they're interested in is not a good school.

Some students perceive that HBCUs do not carry the same prestige as, for example an Ivy league institution or a top-25 college in the *US News World and Report* rankings. James noted that these are concerns that students and parents have voiced so they decide against HBCUs all together.

Several counselors believed that students are more concerned about the name of the school—having bragging rights about where they are attending—and less so about attending a school that is a good fit for them. Another counselor, Addie Bea, from the Southwest indicated the students may even be embarrassed, noting they might “get mocked a little for it.” Addie Bea explained how students will discuss acceptances to HBCUs in a way that is not celebratory of their accomplishments:

The social side being here at school, they get mocked a little for it. So, these are not the schools that [the student] I mentioned—he's proud and he doesn't care that he's applying to Morehouse, and Howard, and A&T, and so on. So again, maybe it is class to class. But this class, it's just hard socially. They will always talk to me one-on-one about it, but it's not something they're going to be like, "Oh my god, I got into Howard," to the whole class. They will say that to us as college counselors. And the student, I don't think he'd be opposed to going to an HBCU. I could see a lot of others hoping for something better, more accepting in the PWI range or definitely in our student body.

Several counselors shared points like Addie Bea, but this underscored that students are not being celebrated for attending an HBCU. They perceive that they are not being accepted to the same caliber of schools as their peers that will allow them to feel good about themselves and where they were admitted. This idea of “hoping for something better” says that an HBCU is not of the same rank as some of a student’s PWI options.

Diane, a counselor from the West coast, noted that finances and prestige were likely a barrier for Black students to just apply to HBCUs as well. Regarding prestige, she said, “Kind of prestige and value out here in the West, they’re [HBCUs] not necessarily known names for what that matters.” Donna, from the Northeast, also felt similarly, “I think our kids were just very

different. They were definitely thinking more about prestige and really saw that in Predominantly White Institutions and spaces.”

Why do Black students have this perception that an HBCU is less than a PWI option? Flo, from the Midwest, framed the issue in a slightly different way, noting that HBCUs may not have the same “brand recognition”:

We have a lot of students who are excited about the idea of Spelman, and many of them are not academic fits for Spelman. So, this idea that, even within this subset, if you talk about an HBCU that isn't Howard or Spelman, that either families turn off or that students turn off. That in their minds, that may be the only two options that are available to them as it relates to HBCUs. Obviously, that's entwined with prestige and brand recognition and all of that kind of stuff, which isn't dissimilar to our wider population with other PWIs.

This notion echoes a discussion earlier in the chapter where all the counselors referenced Howard University, Morehouse College, or Spelman College. Counselors may discuss a certain subset of HBCUs, even though there are dozens of them, to keep the attention of students and families at times. Even if the more recognizable HBCUs are not a good fit, students will still pursue them because of the name.

College Counselors Uninformed About HBCUs

Like Flo, Pat, in Atlanta, mentioned some of the main reasons brought up by several other counselors, like perception from peers, but added some other reasons, such as the lack of information provided by their college counselors, especially if the college counselor is White:

Sometimes I think a barrier is actual college counselors themselves who are not informed, and yes, they may know Howard, Spelman, Morehouse, maybe Hampton, but not much

beyond that. So, I think an uninformed White college counselor who maybe has a bias about, "Oh, they don't have money. Oh, they don't have scholarships. Oh, you're better than that," so I think sometimes it is peers. Sometimes I think it is uninformed college counselors, but I also have to be honest, but the top ones that I sometimes think it is students' peers and then uninformed college counselors.

Pat, like many of the other counselors interviewed, referenced cost as a reason that may serve as a barrier to students attending an HBCU which was supported by the findings of Johnson et al. (2019) shared earlier in the sub-finding. Also, the stigma around attending an HBCU, especially for their White friends was a barrier. Interestingly, Pat also references how White college counseling colleagues may know some of the main HBCUs—Howard, Spelman, Morehouse—but possibly nothing beyond that. This could be perceived as a disservice to students who may be relying on their college counselor to inform them about different colleges available to them. On one end, it could be the prestige of these more well-known HBCUs, but it could also be the wealth, marketing, and branding that helps as well.

Finding 3: Students at HBCUs are Happy, Successful, and Enjoying Their Experiences

While counselors discussed the barriers, they perceived students faced when applying to HBCUs, they also shared the main reasons they think students decide to attend an HBCU. They conveyed that students who have decided to attend an HBCU are overall enjoying their experiences. Pat, in Atlanta, shared:

And so, for my students who have opted to attend historically Black colleges, I've never had anybody want[ing] to transfer and go someplace else. I have seen them graduating and finishing in four years, just like I see at Predominantly White Institutions. And as

they come back and they visit, the stories they share, how they see themselves, how they've grown, I think it's a beautiful thing, but I know it's not right for everybody.

Pat highlighted the importance of students having access to all their options for postsecondary education. She emphasized how well students are adjusting in their HBCU communities and the growth they experience when they return. While she notes that the growth that HBCU students experience is “awesome” to see as they adjust to these new communities, it is also not the right option for every student. This is an important distinction that no other counselor referenced. Pat wants to ensure that students are aware of all their options and give them the opportunity to explore for themselves the next step in their education. The focal point of this study is understanding that while HBCUs were created for Black students, Black students have much choice in the college process today. As noted in Chapter One, various initiatives have made it more accessible for African American students to pursue higher education at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). But the importance of exploring HBCUs remains.

Students Report Being Happy With HBCU Choice

These sentiments of students being happy about their choice of an HBCU as they transition into college were shared from counselors all over the country. Every counselor who had a student who attended an HBCU reported positive outcomes of this experience. Of the 15 counselors interviewed, 11 had sent at least one student to an HBCU in the last three years. Flo, in the Midwest expressed:

I would say anecdotally that when we send students to HBCUs, they are happy there. I don't get requests for transfer. I think they persist at those schools, which is great, so that makes me pleased...I think what I have heard anecdotally from them is that there is a

culture of acceptance and belonging that they feel when they get on to campus. I think they feel supported as well with what it is they want to do.

This is confirmed by Bennett and Xie (2003) who noted that the [HBCU] positive campus environment was attractive to Black high school graduates. Often a student's happiness is centered around the supportive experiences they have in college. Flo perceived that from her experience as a counselor, the students that have decided to attend HBCUs are happy, and persistence is evident. Likewise, Rosie from the Northeast shared, "All of my students who have chosen to go to HBCUs have had really great experiences. If you invest in it, it's going to be excellent and it's going to be a match, and you can be yourself." While Rosie and her school community have more accessibility to HBCUs due to their location, Bealinda on the West coast had a similar experience: "Those that have gone are having a really wonderful time, it's a really great thing."

Several scholars have highlighted how HBCU students enjoy their experience. Some of the earliest research of Allen (1992) showed how HBCUs provide social and psychological environments for African American students. Allen found at that time that Black students found an extensive network of friends, numerous social outlets, and supportive relationships (Allen, 1992). Psychologically, Allen noted that Black students were feeling boosts to self-confidence and self-esteem, feeling of psychological comfort and belonging, and a sense of pride in their campus. Studies like those of Bennett and Xie (2003) and Johnson (2017) highlighted similar findings. Overall, students have reported back to their counselors the experiences that have left an impression on them. Counselors reflect this enthusiasm in their reports but also the signs of student growth. Through all the perceived barriers and reasons why students choose not to attend

an HBCU, counselors underscore students' confidence in their decisions to attend an HBCU as evident in their positive experiences.

Finding 4: Counselors Wanted More Resources on HBCUs

As already discussed, counselors' familiarity with and knowledge of HBCUs was on a spectrum and based on various factors according to the responses from interviews. This current study suggests that the location of a counselor's school could make a difference in what they knew about HBCUs. McDonough et al. (1997) similarly found that location could play a factor in a student's exposure to HBCUs. No matter the level of knowledge, most counselors were interested in and open to learning more about HBCUs through various mediums, like webinars and conferences, visits to HBCUs, and visits from admissions representatives to their high school.

Counselors Reference Value of Online Seminars

With so much online information accessible for all, many counselors desired to have additional resources, available online as webinars. They felt that the pandemic resulted in a good opportunity to use this space to learn about multiple colleges at one time. One counselor from the Midwest, Stella, referenced the capabilities of an online seminar format:

It doesn't have to be in person, but if there were webinars where we could hear a little bit from the schools... to educate me, not just about... I mean, I guess, educate me about the school and the academics, but why somebody should choose it and how it's going to really change somebody's life, or the impact there, how being there would be impactful, and just literally general education.

As noted earlier, not all counselors can engage with HBCUs in person. Stella's alternative was engaging online and using that as an opportunity to learn more about why a student would

explore an HBCU in the first place. Stella highlighted the range of information she could gain from this one online opportunity. Another counselor from the Northeast, Lou Ann, shared a similar sentiment:

I did watch a lot of the material that was online, particularly during COVID. All of those colleges get together and tell us about their stuff. Those were helpful, I think. Bummed that a lot of those went away. I think that format was really useful. Just a representative from each school [HBCU] talking about who they are, what makes them different, what's their philosophy, et cetera.

Again, counselors identified virtual space as allowing them to learn a lot about HBCUs at one time.

While the online seminars were the most recommended, counselors also wanted to connect in person to a school [HBCU]. For example, Butch shared his desire to combine the two approaches:

In exploring HBCUs in particular, I would love the funding to actually visit campuses and get a stronger understanding of them. [And maybe this already exists and it's a point of ignorance for me, but any of the online, even group travel that other institutions do, to have a handful of those on a webinar or something that we could sit in.] We've invited some HBCUs to our college fairs in the past and they haven't been able to come. That would be a great opportunity. But I think a mix of boots on the ground and the webinar experience would be really ideal.

Physically visiting the campuses remained a goal, if given the funding. Earlier in the chapter, I discussed that only six of 15 counselors interviewed had visited an HBCU campus, and three of the six were the Black counselors. Similarly, in the 130 responses from the screening

questionnaire, 76, or about 58.9% of respondents, had visited an HBCU in their role as a college counselor. In contrast, 125 respondents, or about 97%, had visited a PWI in their role as a college counselor. So, college counselors have not visited HBCUs in the way funding enabled them to visit other campuses. Funding thus could impact how much counselors know about these institutions and how they recommend an HBCU, if a counselor has never visited.

Visit HBCUs and Have HBCUs Visit the School

Despite most of the counselors interviewed noting the lack of visits to HBCUs, the second most common request made by counselors when asked about what would be useful to assist them in exploring HBCUs was the opportunity to visit campuses or have HBCU admissions officers visit their independent school. Counselors understood how HBCUs may not have the resources to conduct a counselor program where they sponsor counselors to visit, but they still saw an in-person opportunity to either visit the HBCU campus or meet with an admissions counselor at their high school as a good chance to get more information.

Visits from HBCU admissions officers allows them to interface directly with students and counselors; a visit to campus allows the counselor to get a sense of the school community firsthand and share that information with students. Counselors knew this was pivotal for them to learn more about the HBCU campuses and their offerings. Flo, for example, described the value of a combination of the two:

So, I think nothing is more beneficial to me than being able to set foot on campus. I did a visit, there was a tour a number of years ago, it's called the Peachtree Tour, so you can imagine where it is. It's in Atlanta. So, we saw a bunch of Atlanta schools and one of them was Spelman. As much as I knew about how good Spelman was, I did not realize how good Spelman was until I was on that campus and got to hear from students. I got to

see Morehouse at the same time, but we didn't spend as much time there, but we really got the sense of what kind of school Spelman was and that's enormously helpful. I know all about Howard because I had an uncle who worked there, and I've sent enough kids there, and I went to college in the D.C. area, so I've got a handle on that. I know a little bit about Morgan State because again, it was in the Baltimore area, so I got to see Morgan State. But setting foot on campus and inviting counselors in and making it possible for us to travel is just huge. I can't even explain how important that is. For our students, I think reps coming in and on to campus, excuse me, that's an amazing opportunity. It's amazing for our kids to be able to meet with admissions representatives, but I also spend time with them as well.

Flo highlighted the importance of visiting HBCUs by offering her own account of having visited HBCU campuses through a counselor tour and from living near HBCUs. These are the types of experiences that set a counselor apart when they are describing institutions to students. She also referenced the importance of having admissions representatives visit their school to meet directly with students:

For our students, I think reps coming in and onto campus, that's an amazing opportunity. It's amazing for our kids to be able to meet with admissions representatives, but I also spend time with them as well. So, coming into a school like ours, I think sometimes a lot of folks don't necessarily understand that independent schools, especially schools like ours, have substantial diversity relative to the rest of the area. And we make efforts to try to be a diverse place and to support our students of color. So I think sometimes maybe colleges don't necessarily have an understanding of how independent schools work and the fact that we are places where they can meet students who are going to be really

interested in their schools and that they're going to walk into a place where there's going to be a cohort of students...So having those reps come on campus, like the years that we had our Howard rep and our Spelman rep who would do visits and sit with students and talk about those schools, that was so important, and I loved that. So that is really helpful. Admissions officers at some colleges and universities spend a lot of time in the fall traveling to various areas to meet with students directly, chat with counselors, attend college fairs, and conduct the business of college admissions recruiting. What Flo described is like references from earlier research. Tobolowsky et al. (2005), for example, noted that personal connection and visits from HBCU representatives could help Black families get information about HBCUs. It is an opportunity for students to connect with admissions professionals directly. While these were the two biggest asks by counselors as it pertains to resources, a few counselors felt they had a strong hold on HBCUs already. I discuss this finding next.

Resources Counselors Already Have Regarding HBCUs

Counselors were asked what resources they wish they had. While most counselors wanted to visit HBCUs, have admissions counselors from HBCUs visit their independent school, or receive educational opportunities in the form of online seminars, not all counselors felt they needed resources. One counselor responded that she did not need anything when it came to resources. She further felt that her office provides opportunities for the counselors to engage with HBCUs. But because the whole office can partake in these opportunities, it does not fall on one specific counselor to educate the entire office on HBCUs.

So, I kind of feel like I'm good. So, I have them [HBCUs] in my family. I live in Atlanta, I lived in DC, and I also work at a well-resourced school that I'm able to visit. So, for example, Highpoint did a fly-in, so I went on their fly-in and I was able to add in a day or

two before, got a rental car, and I'd never seen Winston-Salem State before. I was like, "Oh, let me go see." So, I'm fortunate that I work at a school where I'm able to do that. Last year I went to the ACCIS conference in Charlotte, and I was like, 'Well, I'm going to add in time and let me go look at Johnson C. Smith. I've never seen it before, I'm here.'

The Association of College Counselors in independent schools host regular conferences throughout the year and one of those opportunities allowed Pat to visit some schools while in the area. Pat shared the effort she has made to visit HBCUs in the area when visiting other colleges. As an office, Pat and her team have made various attempts to engage with HBCUs by visiting as an office. This way, Pat, as one of the Black women in the office, is not the resident expert on HBCUs because of her background. She is Black, yes, and her school is located near HBCUs, yes, but the most significant thing here is that she made the effort, took the time, and had a collaborative school supporting these efforts. As she noted, the entire office should be able to talk about HBCUs and everyone should be "culturally competent." Pat said:

So, it's not just me as the Black person, and again, I'm very fortunate in this office, there are five college counselors. Two of us are Black, but again, everybody has to be culturally competent. Everybody has to be able to talk about all of these schools, just like you got to be able to talk about MIT and Amherst. Well, you need to be able to talk about North Carolina A&T and Xavier. You've got to feel comfortable. And guess what? Google is free. Perhaps some of my colleagues don't have family members who are alums, but like me, I think I am motivated to help students find best fits and best matches and to be able to talk about those places. So, I do, I trust that, but yes, they are having the same kind of conversations with students and families, so I think they do.

Few college counseling offices are staffed by only one college counselor. From the screening questionnaire, only 6.2% of 130 respondents worked in an office where they were the sole counselor. Pat explained that regardless of their background, everyone should be equipped to talk to any student about any type of institution. The onus cannot be on the Black counselor to be knowledgeable especially when many independent school college counseling offices go without Black representation in their staff. In survey data collected in 2022-2023, of 379 respondents, 319 identified as White where 27 identified as Black or African American. Pat's office ensured professional development opportunities were offered to the entire team of five to visit colleges, and in this case HBCU campuses. The main point here is the effort Pat, and her office, put in to learn more about HBCUs. Some counselors referenced the desire to be more knowledgeable but did not talk about the effort they made to achieve this goal.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of interviews with 15 college counselors from independent schools across the country concerning their familiarity with HBCUs and how they communicate with students about these institutions. Counselors were all familiar with HBCUs to the point they could share some history and/or perceived benefits of attending an HBCU. The findings generated several themes and subthemes such as some of the barriers counselors perceive for not attending HBCUs as well as the reasons students decide to attend HBCUs. The barriers include cost and the perception of prestige from their peers; the main reasons students choose to attend HBCUs is students' desire to be in a more accepting place that had students that reflected their own identity, especially after the struggles of being in all-White communities like their independent school. This was underscored as counselors noted that their students who have attended HBCUs are happy and having great experiences. Lastly, the findings generated

resources that college counselors said would help them explore HBCUs. In the next chapter, key findings and their significance will be discussed in greater detail.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Several key findings and sub-findings emerged from the data. Here, I highlight three key findings that address my research questions. With respect to what independent school college counselors understood about the history and benefits of HBCUs, the findings suggest that college counselors could all reference general history and perceived benefits of HBCUs irrespective of race, years of experience in the college counseling profession, or geographic location. This is important to note, given the spread of participants interviewed. Counselors were also able to share the reasons their students chose to apply to and/or attend an HBCU, namely seeking a sense of belonging in their college community. Counselors were also able to share students' barriers to applying to or attending an HBCU as well, namely cost and perceived prestige of an HBCU compared to non-HBCU college options.

Some differences appeared in this study. First, more knowledgeable counselors tended to be in closer proximity to HBCUs, meaning an HBCU was situated in the same city, or a nearby city, as their independent school. This group of counselors identified ways to create opportunities for themselves and their students to engage with HBCUs due to their proximity to an HBCU campus. This included visits and campus tours. Second, counselors' assessments of their knowledge and my own assessment of their knowledge was not always the same. Five of the 15 counselors interviewed were able to identify detailed information about programs at specific schools such as key academic programs and offerings at certain HBCUs. Further, several counselors referenced the same subset of three HBCUs when asked what types of HBCUs their students apply to. This response shows limited knowledge, since there are 99 institutions designated as HBCUs (NCES, 2021).

The research question on the ways in which college counselors inform Black students regarding HBCUs produced further concerns. My analysis of interviews revealed that disseminating information to Black students about HBCUs was mostly in individual conversations with students and families. Thus, it relied on personal knowledge and the time available to have those conversations. Most independent schools did not have specific HBCU programming where they could educate all their Black students about these institutions at one time as a result the information was given individually and at times only at the request of the student. Such a conveyance of information can be unhelpful to students, especially if they don't know how to inquire about HBCUs.

The research question on what additional resources college counselors wanted on HBCUs generated an openness and reflectiveness on what training is still needed. No matter the level of knowledge, most counselors were interested in learning more information and identified gaps in their knowledge for a variety of reasons. Some of those reasons included a lack of support from administration to learn more about HBCUs as well as not having Black students show interest in HBCUs. But as mentioned before, this keeps the cycle going: students do not show interest because there is no knowledge available and/or HBCUs are not promoted at the school. Thus, counselors do not put in effort to have more information due to what counselors believe is students' lack of interest. How can counselors create more avenues?

The counselors shared being open to additional information and resources in the form of online seminars, more engagement with admissions officers from HBCUs—either visiting their independent school or physical visits to campus—as well as more conference topics and programming to learn more about HBCUs. This finding is important because counselors were

both vulnerable and candid about what they did not know about HBCUs and how they hoped to receive more information.

In what follows, I discuss the significance of these findings, share implications, and make recommendations for both college counselors in independent schools and admissions officers at HBCUs. I also highlight some of the limitations of the study. I conclude with my plans to disseminate the study's findings and a reflection on how this study has affected me as a college counselor.

Significance of Findings

As noted in Chapter One, parents and students from both studies conducted by Slaughter-Defoe (2012) and Arrington et al. (2006) pointed to college access as a benefit of attending independent schools. For Black students, there are benefits to attending independent schools, but several studies revealed many of the struggles that Black students face in doing so (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). Black students have reported a lack of sense of belonging and fitting into their independent school environments and finding community (Arrington & Stevenson, 2006). The only community most students reported were in affinity groups (Coleman, 2017). Simmons (2012), for example, noted that participants shared the Black Student Union as their most important activity. The benefit of HBCUs is that Black students from predominantly White independent schools would no longer have to search for community in affinity spaces since they would now be a part of the majority.

Knowing that college access is important to Black families in choosing independent schools, the first goal of this study was simple: to learn what counselors know about HBCUs. Thus, my study's findings add to the limited research on supporting Black students' college choices in independent schools. Another point of significance; this study allowed conversations

about schools most people do not usually talk about—HBCUs—while also exploring how the information on HBCUs is presented to students. It also provided an opportunity for counselors to reflect on and digest how much they know about these institutions and how they can better support Black students in selecting college options.

Importantly, counselors' reflections revealed the importance of the location of their schools in their level of knowledge about HBCUs. In a similar vein, McDonough et al. (1997) found that regional variables were a key factor in helping with college choice: the number one predictor of HBCU attendance was geography. Researchers reasoned that Black students from southern states were most likely to attend HBCUs because of both the proximity of the school and the availability of information on the experience and existence of these schools. As I reported in Chapter Two, more than 90% of HBCUs founded between 1865 and 1899 are in the south (Jackson, 2001). Further, according to the Thurgood Marshall Foundation website (2020), approximately 89% of all HBCUs are in the southern region.

The reasons counselors noted for students applying to and/or attending HBCUs confirmed the similar points found by Allen (1992), where African American students reported being accepted, encouraged, and engaged in all aspects of campus life at HBCUs. Counselors in the current study reflected on many moments when they perceived that a student's desire to attend an HBCU was connected to a desire to be in an environment that reflected who they were and be in a place where they were no longer the "only" [Black student]. Freeman (1999) also found that students from predominantly White schools wanted to get back to their roots: Johnson (2017) confirmed this as well, noting that students in the twenty-first century were interested in HBCUs because they sought an educational environment that mirrored their culture, promoted individual academic achievement, and provided an opportunity to interact and engage with other

Black faculty, staff, and students. Over thirty years of research still yields the same responses from Black students.

Counselors play an integral part in students' choices. Since HBCUs were created, they have had the main goal of educating Black Americans (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). While not all Black students will end up at an HBCU, it is important that they are aware of these critical options in their college planning process. Indeed, Hetherington (1998) found that the school is the dominant entity of social capital outside of the family, making the resources students gain at school a driving force in what they know. McDonough (2005) found that nine out of 10 students felt their counselor was knowledgeable about colleges. Thus, this study was developed out of the idea that students would benefit from the information they are able to gain from their counselors.

This research was grounded in social capital theory and the idea that resources are transferred through relationships (Coleman, 1988). Social and cultural capital provides students access to higher education through those social relations. McDonough et al. (1997) used Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in their work on why students choose HBCUs. This framework correlates to the information students are privy to based on information they receive from their counselors. As noted, school-based social capital is related to the social relations in school settings that can be used to improve one's life outcomes (Lin, 2001). Findings show that counselors who categorize themselves as having less knowledge or not being as knowledgeable about HBCUs are unable to inform their students about HBCUs.

Research Limitations

This research study has limitations. As I reflect, it is notable that the sample size was small, with interview data from only 15 college counselors. With more time, I could have interviewed more college counselors, to see if other trends appeared. In addition, due to time

constraints with each interview, I was not able to fully assess each counselor's knowledge of and familiarity with HBCUs; rather the questions were focused on their perceived knowledge. There were some opportunities to pinpoint and assess for myself their level of knowledge, but the questions allowed counselors to assess their own perception of their knowledge.

The study was also only one-sided, as I heard directly from college counselors only. It would have been interesting to hear from students as they are the ones mostly affected by their counselor's knowledge of HBCUs. Students' perception of what counselors know and what their school offers them in terms of HBCU knowledge could differ from what counselors reported. Another key stakeholder in the college process are parents/guardians. It would have also been interesting to hear parents' and/or guardians' voices in some of this exploration as they have a huge stake in where their student goes off to college. Especially, since early research suggested that Black families were pursuing independent school communities for long-term goals like college outcomes. Another potential limitation is I did not speak with HBCU recruiters/admissions officers. Those conversations could have explained what information they provide to independent schools, determine if they visit independent schools, and gauge their relationships with independent schools from their lens.

Recommendations

Research Recommendations

As I started this study, I realized there was limited research on this topic. Much of the research that has been conducted in independent schools focuses on the experiences of the adults like faculty and staff of color and their experiences. As described in Chapter Two, some research has focused on the experiences of Black students in independent schools. Early research showed that predominantly White independent schools are places where Black students have found it

difficult to fit in (Brookins, 1988; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991). Other studies like DeCuir-Gunby (2007) showed Black students encountered problems within the predominantly White independent school setting stemming from differences in race and class. But not enough is known about Black students' college outcomes in independent schools. I recommend additional studies be conducted on this topic. This will allow more focus on the way in which Black students explore their college options. Future research could also focus on the higher education side of this from the lens of recruitment since the focus of this study was on the K-12 side from the lens of college counselors.

Practitioner Recommendations

I have gone back and forth with this question: Whose responsibility is it for college counselors to know more about HBCUs? In other words, who should take the lead? I believe the responsibility falls on more than one party. Independent school college counselors are potentially the first line of information for students, so they should have some knowledge and information about HBCUs or at least be able to direct students to information. At the same time, admissions officers at HBCUs should work to build relationships with independent schools, or at least be able to share information. Previous research from Tobolowsky et al. (2005) concluded that Black students and families faced some challenges in finding information, but also said that personal connection and contact like visits from HBCU representatives helped with this problem. So, the relationship between the two parties: HBCU admissions representatives and college counseling professionals is pivotal.

This study offers two avenues to explore: recommendations for independent school counselors and recommendations for admissions officers at HBCUs. First, independent school college counselors must make a more concerted effort to engage with HBCUs where possible.

Some college counselors talked about inviting HBCU admissions offices to visit but also understanding they may not have the bandwidth to visit or see the value in visiting. Independent school college counselors, with the resources to do so, should create opportunities to visit HBCUs themselves or take students on tours to visit HBCUs. Some counselors referenced that the interest in HBCUs was not present at their school from Black students. Because of this lack of interest, their schools were not supportive of counselors putting in the resources. Yet they are not creating opportunities for Black students and thus remaining unknowledgeable, and the cycle continues.

Counselors could add visits to HBCUs when visiting a city for a counselor tour or conference that may also have HBCUs nearby. College counselors can also investigate other ways to engage HBCU admissions officers by inviting them to a program at their school or partnering with other neighboring schools (independent and not) to allow HBCUs admissions officers a chance to engage with more students that may be more worthwhile.

Second, HBCUs should try to build relationships with independent schools. Many HBCUs do not have the personnel in their office (along with limited resources and travel budgets) to visit high schools and may not see the value in visiting if they will meet with no students or very few. As HBCU representatives travel, they must maximize their ground by visiting schools with more Black students who are likely to show interest in a visit from an HBCU. In these cases, HBCUs should get creative in how they can still cover ground with independent schools: attending college fairs that may garner more attention for them, dropping off materials to independent schools, offering virtual options to meet with independent schools, or inviting independent school visitors to on-campus events. These are all opportunities that will allow a more meaningful relationship to develop with independent schools.

Personal Reflection

When I first started working as a college counselor in an independent school, my knowledge base was HBCUs, and I had to learn about a host of other higher education institutions to be familiar with the types of schools my students might be applying to, especially since many of my students were White. While there were Black students at my school, my knowledge of HBCUs went untapped, as they did not ask about HBCUs, have them on their college list, or seem remotely interested. As an HBCU graduate who was just transitioning from an HBCU admissions office, I saw this as a missed opportunity. Whether or not the few Black students in the senior class applied to HBCUs, it was important they at least knew they existed.

When I got to a new independent school, it was during the school year of racial unrest in this country. It was during this time that I realized Black students were often feeling unseen and unheard. Some colleges and universities had started anonymous “Being Black@” Instagram handles. Independent schools followed shortly after. An anonymous post was created from my school:

During a meeting with my college counselor I (a Black woman) asked for more information about HBCUs. My college counselor didn't know what an HBCU was. It was a very awkward meeting, and I didn't end up going to a historically black college. I wonder how different my college experience would be if I decided to go to an HBCU. I made a point to ensure HBCU education was integral to our college counseling programming. We invited an HBCU admissions officer to our annual case studies program, made sure at least one HBCU visited our school during the fall admissions visitors season, and took a bus to the annual Black college expo. And I had the opportunity to propose and execute the school's first-ever HBCU tour.

On the tour it became evident that students yearned for an opportunity like this. One student reflected:

I have siblings that went to this school, and I just know my college experience and looking for college experience is different from theirs. When my sister was here, she didn't even know HBCUs was an option at all. But, like, right now, we have those resources—to know what that is, know how we're going to apply, know information about them. And that by itself completely changes how we think about colleges. Because before it wasn't on my siblings' radar—they had to make decisions based on things that they half knew. But now we have all the information and we're able to make educated decisions and really weigh all our options when it comes to college and make more informed decisions on where we go. I think having the information and being able to go completely changes how you apply for college.

Now I recognize the importance of bringing more awareness to HBCUs in this independent school community. I know my students have had a personal HBCU advocate but that is not true at all independent schools.

This study taught me a lot about research, method and understanding the relationships between different entities that come together to better support students. This study was developed by my experiences in independent schools and sense of the lack of awareness of HBCUs for Black students. Understanding how much my students rely on me for college recommendations, I knew college counselors were a good place to start for this research.

As the Black counselor in the office, this work cannot fall on me alone. The three Black counselors interviewed, none of whom were HBCU graduates themselves, all were knowledgeable of HBCUs, and all had them near their independent schools. But they should not

be the area resident experts on all things HBCU. Pat offered this piece of context in one of her last interview responses:

And I wish that all our students of color, Black students at all these independent schools, have those same opportunities, but I know that they don't. And that makes me sad because their parents are paying their good tuition dollars just like everybody else. And to think about our students are not being afforded, not being told about all the full range of the opportunities, that saddens me.

This study was developed for these reasons: to help Black students in independent schools become aware of all the options available to them as they consider their college options. I am in awe at the response thus far to this work and interest from educators in K-12 and higher education alike. I think the research will start a conversation in our independent schools as well as the admission offices at HBCUs to better bridge the gap between the two entities.

As this project ends, I think back to some of the life-changing experiences I had as a student at Tuskegee University. One that comes to mind is being a university ambassador giving tours to prospective students and families. No tour ever looked the same, but they all started something like this:

Good afternoon! My name is Jamon Pulliam, a junior from Detroit, Michigan majoring in psychology, and I welcome you to Tuskegee University. Let me start with the monument behind me. In the late 1800s, there was a slave by the name of Lewis Adams and a slave owner by the name of George Campbell. Together, they worked to secure funds to start some educational systems down here in rural Alabama. They sent word to Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, where Dr. Booker T. Washington was educated and working. And the 25-year-old traveled down to take on the charge. Standing behind me is

the Lifting the Veil of Ignorance monument. Shown here is our founder and first principal (president), Dr. Booker T. Washington lifting the veil of ignorance from a Negro man. The inscription reads, 'He lifted the veil of ignorance from his people and pointed the way to progress through education and industry.'

If you look over to your left, my right, you will see the Wilcox buildings which house the Robert R. Taylor School of Architecture and Construction Science. Robert R. Taylor was the first African American graduate from MIT and constructed many of the buildings on our campus, mostly hand-built by students. If you walk near Wilcox E, you can see handprints on the bricks. This very campus was built by the hands of its own students. Booker T. Washington believed in the importance of students using their hearts, minds, but most importantly their hands. Many students, at its founding, paid their way through school by working for the institution while also being students. This is what he believed in. Are there any questions? If not, let's move on to the start of our walking tour.

I stepped foot on Tuskegee University's campus by sheer coincidence, but one thing that stood out to me was the history of the school.

Broad Context for This Study: A Personal Story

This study takes place in the context of my personal background. When I was in high school, I spent maybe ten minutes with my school counselor every year to talk about my courses for the following school year—nothing more, nothing less, beyond the occasional quick meeting to discuss an alternate class if needed once the school year began. We did not take a deep dive into my interests, involvement, or what I envisioned for my life beyond high school. And with 500+ other students at my large public high school, I guess I cannot blame her. Since we did not become acquainted and talk about my future, my mother took on that role. She always told me

that people told her to go to college, which she did, but she wanted me to realize the idea beyond that advice. She wanted to make sure I had support to explore colleges in the way she did not.

I will never forget the first time I stepped on Tuskegee University's campus. The history of the school, the camaraderie among Black students who looked like me, and the welcomeness I felt from the moment my mother and I walked into the admissions office completely unannounced is still hard to put into words. While I had known about HBCUs (thank you Mrs. Mays for the project on HBCUs in 8th grade!), an admissions officer visited my high school in junior year and reignited my interest in HBCUs. My mother and I flew down to Atlanta, Georgia to visit several HBCUs in Georgia and then Florida and Alabama. On our way to visit a family friend at Alabama State University, my mother noticed the sign for Tuskegee University, suggested we stop, and the rest is history. The things I learned, the love I felt, the connections I made, Tuskegee remains the best decision I could have made for my college experience. I always say if I had to do it 100 times over, I would choose Tuskegee University every time.

While I had the opportunity to connect with Tuskegee University and visit the campus for myself, not all students are that fortunate. I was also able to meet with an admissions representative from an HBCU because they visited my high school. However, college representatives cannot visit all high schools in the country. Without both of those opportunities, I would have relied on my school counselor or the schools my friends talked about—which were largely in-state options. I did not have the resources to think about my future in the way many of my White classmates did. Their parents and older siblings had gone away to college, so they had insights I was not privy to as no one in my immediate family had gone away to college.

This study emerged from a culmination of many of my own experiences: my own college search process as a Black student at a large, predominantly White high school; the lack of input

from my school counselor; my personal experiences as an HBCU student at Tuskegee University and working in admissions at Morehouse College (another HBCU), which were both life changing experiences; and, more recently working at an independent, college preparatory PWI helping students navigate the college process for themselves, where the lack of visibility of HBCUs for Black students disturbed me. HBCUs continue to be a haven for the students who decide to attend, providing a nurturing environment for Black students (Bracey, 2017). As I discussed in this chapter, the findings of my study could provide the impetus for a community of college counselors in independent schools to better support their Black students and explore all options available to them for postsecondary education and educate themselves when necessary. I am hopeful that this research will inspire college counselors in independent schools to add more to their college counseling toolbox about HBCUs so all students can have the information to have an opportunity like I did, to attend an HBCU.

APPENDIX A

List of HBCUs

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| (1) Alabama A&M | (35) Hinds CC | (69) Selma |
| (2) Alabama State | (36) Howard | (70) Shaw |
| (3) Albany State | (37) Huston–Tillotson | (71) Shelton State CC |
| (4) Alcorn State | (38) Interdenominational
Theological Center | (72) Simmons College of Kentucky |
| (5) Allen | (39) Jackson State | (73) South Carolina State |
| (6) Arkansas Baptist | (40) Jarvis Christian | (74) Southern and A & M (Baton
Rouge) |
| (7) Arkansas–Pine Bluff | (41) Johnson C. Smith | (75) Southern–New Orleans |
| (8) Barber–Scotia | (42) Kentucky State | (76) Southern–Shreveport |
| (9) Benedict | (43) Knoxville College | (77) Southwestern Christian |
| (10) Bennett | (44) Lane | (78) Spelman |
| (11) Bethune-Cookman | (45) Langston | (79) St. Augustine’s |
| (12) Bishop State CC | (46) LeMoyné–Owen | (80) Stillma |
| (13) Bluefield State | (47) Lincoln, Missouri | (81) Talladega |
| (14) Bowie State | (48) Lincoln, Pennsylvania | (82) Talladega College (Talladega,
Alabama) |
| (15) Central State | (49) Livingstone | (83) Tennessee State |
| (16) Cheyney | (50) Maryland, Eastern Shore | (84) Texas College (Tyler, TX) |
| (17) Claflin | (51) Meharry | (85) Texas Southern (Houston, TX) |
| (18) Clark Atlanta | (52) Miles | (86) Tougaloo (Tougaloo, MS) |
| (19) Coahoma CC | (53) Mississippi Valley State | (87) Tuskegee |
| (20) Concordia Alabama | (54) Morehouse | (88) UDC (University of District of
Columbia) |
| (21) Coppin State | (55) Morehouse School of
Medicine | (89) UVI (University of the Virgin
Islands) |
| (22) Delaware State | (56) Morgan State | (90) Virginia State |
| (23) Dillard | (57) Morris | (91) Virginia Union |
| (24) Edward Waters | (58) Morris Brown | (92) Virginia University
(Lynchburg) |
| (25) Elizabeth City State | (59) Norfolk State | (93) Voorhees |
| (26) Fayetteville State | (60) North Carolina A&T | (94) West Virginia State |
| (27) Fisk | (61) North Carolina Central | (95) Wilberforce |
| (28) Florida A&M | (62) Oakwood College | (96) Wiley |
| (29) Florida Memorial
University | (63) Paine College | (97) Winston-Salem State |
| (30) Fort Valley State | (64) Paul Quinn College | (98) Xavier (La.) |
| (31) Gadsden State CC | (65) Philander Smith | |
| (32) Grambling State | (66) Prairie View A&M | |
| (33) Hampton | (67) Rust College | |
| (34) Harris–Stowe | (68) Savannah State | |

Note: This list is limited to the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) currently in operation and having published course catalogs readily available on-line at the time of the study.

APPENDIX B

UNIT OF MEASUREMENT

Research Questions	Data Collection	Units of Observation
<p>What do college counselors in independent schools know about HBCUs as a group and about individual HBCUs and their programs?</p>	<p>Interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Counselors know that HBCUs were created to provide higher education opportunities to freed slaves who otherwise would not have access to higher education. ● Counselors know that there are 99 HBCUs across the US ● Counselors know that HBCUs accept _____ percentage of Black students who apply. ● Counselors know that HBCUs have higher rates of graduation for Black students than comparably sized public and private non-HBCU institutions, etc. ● Counselors know some of the benefits (perceived) of attending an HBCU. ● Counselors know some HBCUs by name that specialize in certain programming.
<p>In what ways, if any, do independent school college counselors inform Black students regarding HBCUs as options for higher education?</p>	<p>Interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One-on-one meetings with students about college options ● Informing students about HBCUs ● Parent programming around minority serving institutions ● Student programming around minority serving institutions ● Admissions officers visits from HBCUs ● Flyers/information circulated around HBCUs ● Opportunities to tour HBCUs ● Assisting students with financial scholarship opportunities for HBCUs

APPENDIX C

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this screening questionnaire is to gain a better sense of the school you work in and the students you work with. It will take less than no more than five minutes to complete.

Your answers to these questions will help me determine if you may be a fit for an in-depth interview about your experiences with Black students' college choices. In addition to looking for fit for interviews, I will use responses to gather some broad understanding of supporting Black students' college choices. Respondents selected for an interview will be contacted directly.

Name

School name

Email address

1. What region is your school located in?
 - a. Midwest
 - b. Northeast
 - c. Southeast
 - d. Southwest
 - e. West

2. How many students are in the Upper School (Grades 9-12)?
 - a. 0-100
 - b. 101-250
 - c. 251-400
 - d. 401-599
 - e. 600+

3. What percentage of your Upper School students identify as Black, African American, or biracial/mixed?
- a. 0-5%
 - b. 6-10%
 - c. 11-20%
 - d. 21-30%
 - e. >30%
4. How many college counselors are in your office (including yourself)?
- a. 1
 - b. 2-3
 - c. 4
 - d. 5+
5. How many students does each counselor work with on their senior caseload?
- a. 1-10
 - b. 11-20
 - c. 21-30
 - d. 31-40
 - e. 41-50
 - f. 51-60
 - g. 61-70
 - h. 71-80
 - i. 81-90
 - j. 91-100

- k. 101+
6. What are your primary responsibilities (i.e., only college counseling, social-emotional, academic advising, testing coordination, etc.) (Select all that apply.)
- a. College counseling
 - b. Social-emotional support
 - c. Academic advising
 - d. Testing coordination
 - e. Administrative
 - f. Registrar
 - g. Residence life/dorm duties
 - h. Class dean
 - i. DEI role
 - j. Teaching responsibilities
 - k. Coaching
 - l. Students with Disabilities (SSD) coordinator
 - m. Admissions
 - n. Senior project/capstone
 - o. Other
7. How many years of experience do you have in college counseling?
- a. <1-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 11-15
 - d. 16-24

- e. 25+
8. When suggesting colleges to Black students, what factors do you consider? (Select all that apply.)
- a. School size
 - b. Geographic location
 - c. Academic programs/majors
 - d. DEI initiatives on campus
 - e. Campus life
 - f. Graduation rate
 - g. Housing options
 - h. Financial aid/affordability
 - i. Safety
 - j. School spirit
 - k. Student demographics
 - l. Athletics
 - m. Political climate of campus/region
 - n. Other
9. When advising Black students about college options, what resources have you been able to access or share?
- a. Information about Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs)
 - b. Information about Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs)
 - c. Information about Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)

- d. Information about Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions (AANAPISIs)
 - e. Information about Tribal Colleges/Universities
 - f. Information about single-sex colleges
 - g. Information about community colleges
 - h. Information about career colleges/trade schools
 - i. Information about art schools
 - j. Information about international institutions
 - k. Other
10. If you host admissions representative visitors on your campus, what types of schools do you host?
- a. Admissions Representatives from PWIs
 - b. Admissions Representatives from HBCUs
 - c. Admissions Representatives from HSIs
 - d. Admissions Representatives from AANAPISIs
 - e. Admissions Representatives from Tribal Colleges/Universities
 - f. Admissions Representatives from single-sex colleges
 - g. Admissions Representatives from art schools
 - h. Admissions Representatives from community colleges
 - i. Admissions Representatives from international institutions
 - j. Admissions Representatives from career colleges/trade schools
 - k. We do not host admissions representatives
 - l. Other

11. If you take students on school-led college tours, what types of schools have you taken students to visit?

- a. PWIs
- b. HBCUs
- c. HSIs
- d. AANAPISIs
- e. Tribal colleges
- f. Community colleges
- g. Single-sex colleges
- h. Career colleges/trade schools
- i. Art schools
- j. International institutions
- k. We do not host any school-led college tours
- l. Other

12. In your role as a college counselor, what type of institutions have you been able to visit (select all that apply)?

- a. PWIs
- b. HSIs
- c. HBCUs
- d. AANAPISIs
- e. Single-sex colleges
- f. International institutions
- g. Tribal Colleges/Universities

- h. Small liberal art colleges
- i. Large research institutions
- j. Community colleges
- k. Career colleges/trade schools
- l. Other

13. What is your race and/or ethnicity?

- a. White/Caucasian
- b. Black/African American
- c. Hispanic/Latinx
- d. Asian
- e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- f. Chicax
- g. Multi-Racial
- h. Declined to state

14. Would you be interested in participating in a 30–45-minute Zoom interview regarding supporting Black students in pursuing higher education?

- a. Yes
- b. No, thanks

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Background information

1. I would like to first get more information about you as a counselor and the work you bring to college counseling. Where were you born and raised? Please note if those two places are different. Where do you currently live? Where did you go to college? And how did you come to select your college of choice? Lastly, I would like to know if you worked in college admissions, where did that take place?

Counseling Programming

2. Now let's talk about counseling programming at your school. Give me an idea of the type of programming you do for students, and at which grade levels (i.e., parent nights, family nights, student meetings, etc.)
 - a. What kind of programming do you have for underrepresented students?
 - b. Do you have any programming specifically for Black students?
3. How do you disseminate information or opportunities for specific groups of students?

HBCU Knowledge

4. How would you compare your level of knowledge about HBCUs to that of other college options (i.e., more than average, average, less than average) and why?
5. How would you describe an HBCU to a Black student who is starting the college process for the first time?
 - a. How would you describe an HBCU to Black parents?

6. Of your Black students, do any of them apply to HBCUs? If so, which schools do they apply to? Do you know of any Black students who have matriculated to HBCUs from your school?
 - a. What percentage of Black students from your school attend HBCUs?
7. Do you have any HBCU specific programming? If so, please describe.
8. What, if any, barriers do you believe students in independent schools face in selecting HBCUs to apply to or attend?
9. What do you think are the main reasons Black students choose to attend an HBCU?
10. What do you think are the main reasons Black students choose not to attend an HBCU?
11. What would be useful resources to help you in exploring HBCUs with and for your students?
12. What more information would you like to have about HBCUs to help you support your Black students in making college choices?
13. Is there anything else you can share about your experiences or your students' experiences with HBCUs?

APPENDIX E
CONSENT FORM

Introduction and Consent Language

I appreciate your willingness to participate in my research. I want to start with the verbal consent information. The purpose of this study is independent school college counselors' support of Black students' college choices, including how counselors share information about specific institutional types like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The content of the interview will be confidential, and your identity will not be disclosed. My research is not dependent on how much information you are able to provide on HBCUs. Furthermore, I want to clarify that I am serving as an objective researcher during this interview rather than a colleague or supervisor. The interview should take 30-45 minutes.

You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and remain in the study.

Our conversation will be audio recorded, so I can make a transcript of our conversation and I will be recording our Zoom session. After our Zoom session recording is available, I will immediately delete the video recording and keep the audio recording on a secured device for transcription purposes. Any quotes I use from our interview will be assigned a pseudonym and no participant names or identifying features (such as school name) will be used in writing up the study.

I will do my best to make sure your private information is kept confidential. Information about you will be handled as confidentially as possible, but participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach of confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security. Your data, including de-identified data, may be kept for use in future research.

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP (Office of the Human Research Protection Program) by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

May I record this interview with captioning? [Pause for verbal consent]

Do you have any questions you would like me to answer before we begin? [Pause for answer.] [Start Zoom recording.]

APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Colleagues,

I hope this email finds you well after a restful long weekend! My name is Jamon Pulliam, an Associate Director of College Counseling at Viewpoint School in Calabasas, California. Currently, I am a doctoral candidate at UCLA in the Educational Leadership Program in the School of Education and Information Studies. As I race to graduate with my current seniors, I need your help!

I am recruiting participants who are current college counselors at independent schools in the United States. Participation in the research includes completing an initial screening questionnaire, which will take no more than five minutes (you read right – *less than five minutes of your time!*), and a 45-minute Zoom interview *if selected* after the screening questionnaire. The study focuses on Black high school students' college choice process and information provided to those students and their families.

Those interested in participating can fill out a short screening questionnaire (less than five minutes!).

Link to Survey

If interested and selected, you will be invited to participate in a 45-minute interview scheduled via Zoom at a time that is convenient for you. After the conclusion of the interview, participants will receive a \$25 Amazon e-card.

If not selected for an interview, your responses to the questionnaire are still greatly appreciated (so go ahead and press this link to complete it)! I am available to answer any questions or concerns potential participants may have about the study. I can be reached directly via email at jamonpull@g.ucla.edu.

Wishing you all a great spring semester!

Best,

Jamon

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION EMAIL

Dear NAME,

Again, my name is Jamon Pulliam, an Associate Director of College Counseling at Viewpoint School. Thank you so much for filling out the initial screening questionnaire. As you know, I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA. My dissertation is focused on independent school college counselors' support of Black students' college choices, including how counselors share information about specific institutional types like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Based on your questionnaire responses, I would like to invite you to participate in a Zoom interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. Through this interview, I am hoping to learn more about your background, and the college counseling office in which you work including various programming you offer for Black students.

If you are willing to participate in an interview, please use this link to find a time that works for you by January 30th. I know your time is precious and as a small token of gratitude for your participation, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

If you are no longer interested in participating and being interviewed, feel free to reply via email.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

Jamon Pulliam
Doctoral Candidate, UCLA

[Link to schedule interview](#)

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