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Students at the Table:
African American High School Students' Perceptions of What They Have
and What They Need to Make It to Four-Year Post-Secondary Institutions.

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

by

Lovell Devon Smith

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Students at the Table:
African American High School Students' Perceptions of What They Have
and What They Need to Make It to Four-Year Post-Secondary Institutions.

by

Lovell Devon Smith

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Robert Cooper, Co-Chair

Professor Eugene Tucker, Co-Chair

National and state direct matriculation rates from high school to four-year postsecondary institutions are disproportionately low among African American students. Although counselors play a major role in helping students get to college, barriers persist in high schools that limit the flow and quality of college information to African American students. Additionally, many practitioners perceive African American students as lacking the cultural capital necessary for four-year college matriculation. Persistent structural barriers and a lack of recognition of community cultural wealth often lead to the channeling of African American high school students into community colleges. While community colleges can be a viable path toward four-year institutions, African American students are most negatively impacted by low transfer rates.

The purpose of this study was to 1) explore the various forms of capital African American students reported to possess that current research suggests leads to college-going; 2) report the perceived needs African American students have that need to be addressed by their school site; and 3) engage African American students in action research in order to present an alternative pathway of college knowledge delivery through media.

This qualitative study was conducted as descriptive action research. African American high school students and alumni were surveyed and interviewed to gain their perspectives on their personal attributes, college-going knowledge, and preparation as well as their notions of what they yet needed from school staff and counselors. Data showed that African American students possess a wealth of resources in which Yosso (2005) deems community cultural wealth. As well, the data implies a need for practitioners to increase their expectations for African American students to be prepared to enroll directly into four-year institutions, employ more culturally responsive approaches in providing college information to African American students and preparing them for matriculation into four-year institutions. Finally, the study describes an alternative and culturally responsive process in which African American students may provide college information to their peers through media engagement.

The dissertation of Lovell Devon Smith is approved.

Tyrone Howard

Greg Leazer

Robert Cooper, Committee Co-chair

Eugene Tucker, Committee Co-chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

DEDICATION

In memory of my mother,

Marva Jean Smith

(1940-2007)

Mother.

Servant.

Visionary.

I hope I have made you proud. I danced one more time!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	II
DEDICATION	V
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	VIII
VITA	X
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	2
COLLEGE CHOICE.....	2
IMPORTANCE OF COUNSELORS	3
SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CRITICAL RACE THEORIES	4
LOCAL CONTEXT.....	5
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	6
RESEARCH SITE	7
RESEARCH DESIGN.....	8
KEY THEORETICAL TERMINOLOGY.....	9
CHAPTER TWO.....	13
LITERATURE REVIEW	13
INTRODUCTION.....	13
CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT).....	15
COLLEGE CHOICE.....	25
SOCIAL CAPITAL / COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH	29
SELF-EFFICACY AND ENGAGEMENT	33
CONCLUSION	36
CHAPTER THREE.....	37
METHODOLOGY	37
RESEARCH DESIGN.....	37
DATA COLLECTION METHODS.....	38
DATA ANALYSIS METHODS	42
SITE RATIONALE	43
SAMPLE RATIONALE	45
CREDIBILITY / TRUSTWORTHINESS	46
ETHICAL ISSUES.....	47
FEEDBACK TO CLIENTS	48
SUMMARY	48
CHAPTER FOUR	50
FINDINGS	50
ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE SITE	51
DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS.....	54

DEMOGRAPHICS OF INTERVIEWEES.....	55
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES.....	55
DEEPEDED AND UNEXPECTED LEARNING	84
SUMMARY	88
CHAPTER FIVE	90
DISCUSSION	90
INTRODUCTION	90
DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS.....	90
RECOMMENDATIONS / IMPLICATIONS.....	102
LIMITATIONS.....	110
EXTENDING THE RESEARCH.....	112
REFLECTION	113
CONCLUSION	114
LIST OF APPENDICIES	115
REFERENCES	165

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Finally, I am so grateful for my beautiful wife, Shelley, and my two wonderful sons. They have endured me with love and grace over the last three years. Boys, daddy is back! Sweetheart, you deserve whatever you ask for! I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Of the 27,072 African American students who graduated from California's public high schools in 2013, only 29.2% (7,900) emerged as eligible to enter the University of California (UC) or the California State University (CSU) (California Department of Education, 2014). Although a student's college-going aspirations may be high, if he or she has not passed the A-G requirements (required coursework by the UC, CSU, and the majority of four-year institutions) their college choice narrows dramatically. The most plausible option is to attend community college (a two-year institution that awards an associate's degree) with the intention to transfer to a four-year institution. While there are benefits to enrolling directly in community colleges, there are also potential pitfalls that statistically await African American students at many community colleges. There are also pros and cons to direct matriculation into four-year institutions. Given choice and opportunity, African American students are generally better off enrolling directly into four-year institutions. Regardless of which choice in college enrollment students make, they deserve adequate information about the realities, challenges, and benefits of enrollment in both community colleges and four-year institutions.

This research focused on the information and resources provided to African American students and the choices they make between direct matriculation from high school to community colleges or straight into four-year institutions. Community colleges can be beneficial for students in need of lower costs, closer proximity, and often-smaller class sizes. However, community colleges often have a higher-than-expected time frame for degree completion, high remediation and dropout rates, and low transfer rates

(Complete College America, 2011). Meanwhile, employment opportunity and salaries resulting from bachelor degrees attained from four-year institutions are generally more favorable than those afforded by associate degrees from community colleges.

Background

Looking deeper, researchers on the subject of college choice and college-going say that the greater students' capital¹, such as affluence and college educated family members, the greater their chances of attending college and even more selective institutions. Theorists use the term "channeling" to describe how environmental factors such as various forms of capital affect students' college choice. Theorists believe that schools also *channel* students into postsecondary settings through the curriculum, counseling services, and grades (Orfield et al., 1984; Morrison, 1989; Freeman, 1997). Many students tend to make their choices based on economic (cost of tuition, living expenses) and familial factors (proximity to home, influence / educational level of parents). Whatever choices students make, they must understand that *where* they begin their postsecondary education tends to have implications on their life outcomes.

College Choice

The 2010 Condition of Education Report (Aud et al., 2010) shows that individuals fare better in employment status and salary levels with at least bachelor's degrees versus associate's degrees. Specifically, those with bachelor's degrees or higher had higher employment rates; those with associate degrees had lower employment. Those with bachelor's degrees or higher had lower unemployment rates; those with associate degrees had higher unemployment. The trends were the same for African American students.

¹ Capital refers to the means that translate to social mobility. This involves, but is not limited to, knowledge about postsecondary education.

² Media Technology, for the purpose of this study, refers to the "end product" of

More interesting, is that the gaps were wider in employment and unemployment rates for African Americans when compared to the average, hinting that African Americans benefit from attaining at least bachelor's degrees to a greater extent than the average. Another study showed that African American men who enrolled in college at the community college level had a 9.3% gap in financial earnings when compared to their counterparts who enrolled in college at the four-year level (Levey, 2010). This means that many African American students are tracking into postsecondary scenarios that lead to professional and financial disadvantages compared to those students who matriculate straight from high school into four-year academic institutions. In light of these findings, direct matriculation into four-year institutions, for African American students, represents a greater opportunity for future academic and financial success.

Importance of Counselors

At the core of college choice lays access to information (McDonough, 2004; Perna, 2008) – especially provided by counselors. Counselors play a vital role in helping high school students with the college-going process (Gandara & Bial, 1999; McDonough, 2005; Perna 2008) – especially among students who come from families holding little information about the college-going process (McDonough & Jarsky, 2008). They can be instrumental in helping students develop college-going aspirations, provide guidance in course-planning, assist with applications and financial aid information, and identify career paths (McDonough, 1997). Schools with high populations of students of color tend to have fewer counseling resources than schools with higher percentages of White students. Without adequate college counseling, many African American students are less likely to attend college or become prepared to successfully complete a university degree.

Adding to the problem of information access is the fact that many students lack

opportunities to gain valuable college knowledge from their school counselors because of large counselor-to-student ratios. According to the most recent report on school counseling effectiveness, California has a 1:944 ratio – the highest in the United States (California Department of Education, 2011). This ratio is almost three times the national recommendation (American School Counselor Association, 2011), and almost twice the already inflated national average (1:477). High counselor-student ratios negatively impact students – especially African American students who need the college knowledge a counselor can provide (Griffin, et al., 2007; Hooker and Brand, 2010; Perna, et al., 2008).

Social Capital and Critical Race Theories

This problem of lower African American direct matriculation into four-year institutions can be viewed in two ways – one that says students of color, specifically those from lower SES backgrounds, may often lack the social capital that leads to college enrollment (Cabrera, et al, 2006; McDonough, 1997; Bourdieu, 1986). Perhaps an opposing view would be critical race theory, which recognizes that African American students often have capital that is different from what schools expect (Freeman, 1997; Mohammad, 2008). Furthermore many schools are not reaching all students to build on their cultural funds of knowledge (Kiyama, 2011; Muhammad, 2008; Yosso, 2005) to ensure each student gains equal access to college. This action research acknowledges that there is specific college knowledge (such as course requirements, deadlines, and admission requirements) that a student needs in order to gain acceptance into a university. However, this qualitative action research also seeks to understand, through a critical race theory approach, how one school might address its low matriculation rate among its

African American students into four-year universities.

Local Context

Locally, the Marva Beck Unified School District (MBUSD) has a proportion of African American students comparable to the state's enrollment of African American students. MBUSD shows high graduation rates for African Americans (California Department of Education, 2011); however, the A-G completion rate is quite lower (30%) for all underrepresented students (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2011). Furthermore, African American students only comprised 2.6% of the total population of students enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement course (advantageous for college matriculation) while White students comprised 59.9% of that population (Office of Civil Rights, 2009). Whether one looks at the problem from the state level or the local level, African American students may be graduating high school, but they are doing so disproportionately ineligible for most four-year institutions. Schools must find solutions to this problem in the face of strained, shrinking, or non-existent counseling resources.

Perhaps an answer can be found in the realm of media technology² with its popularity among students. "Generation M2", a 2010 study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, showed that young people (8-18 years old) spend over seven and a half hours per day consuming media, of which fifteen minutes is devoted to watching media on their mobile devices alone. It is also interesting that youth spend one and a half hours a day on their computers after school hours. Additionally, a 2010 report by the

² Media Technology, for the purpose of this study, refers to the "end product" of digital media – specifically video media stored, distributed, and consumed in a digital format.

Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (CHEPA) at the University of Southern California suggests that gaming and social media both have positive potential for teaching students about the college-going process. Furthermore, utilizing such technology directly assists counseling efforts (Mathis, 2010). The popularity of student engagement in media combined with the potential for increasing students' college knowledge through video media interaction presents a timely opportunity for this research.

I should note that videos about college information are not new. Students who are looking for information can access the internet and find a number of videos. However, these videos are mostly “talking heads” featuring corporate types that many African American students may not relate to. Zoe Corwin, researcher at USC’s Higher Education Policy Analysis, agrees with me. Speaking on the topic of websites that offer college information, he says that high school students “just look at these sites and they are not engaged” (eSchool News, 2010). Besides failing to engage African American students, many current college knowledge videos fail to utilize culturally responsive approaches such as communication styles, movement, family socialization, and relatable social contexts. Researchers believe culturally responsive considerations improve academic success among African American students (Gay & Howard, 2000; Gay, 2002, 2010). This action research study, therefore, seeks to collect information utilizing capital and critical race theory frameworks and to explore a method of presentation that could appeal to African American students in a culturally responsive way.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions that guided this research were as follows:

1. What information do African American high school students report to possess that will help them matriculate into four-year institutions?
2. What assistance do African American high school students perceive that they need from school counselors and staff in order to matriculate directly into four-year institutions?
3. What content and format do African American students say should characterize a video designed to inform them of the advantages of matriculating directly into four-year institutions?
4. How effective, if at all, was the script at increasing the college knowledge of African American high school students?

Research Site

I conducted the research at Westside High School (WHS), a large, urban school within the MBUSD. I chose this site for three reasons: high resources, a student ratio of African Americans comparable to the California's ratio, and disproportionate matriculation rates for African American students when compared to Asian and White students. First, WHS offered an opportunity to study low African American four-year matriculation at a school with above average counseling resources. The school had a counselor-student ratio of 1:360 (considerably more favorable than the state and national average). In addition to general counselors called "advisors", the school also had a counseling center with two full-time college counselors who primarily assisted students in getting to college. Both advisors and college counselors meet with students to plan students' college path. I was interested in finding out some possible reasons why a well-resourced school would still show such a disproportionately low matriculation rate for African American students and, more so, if an alternative means of information delivery

could be realized through an action research involving African American students. Secondly, WHS was ideal because the African American population (6.1%)³ was comparable to the state's overall African American student population (6.3%) (California Department of Education, 2011). Finally, I chose WHS because it followed the State's trend in disproportionately low African American matriculation rates into four-year institutions when compared to Asian and White students. WHS had a graduation rate of over 90% school wide and an African American graduation rate of 96%. However, the African American graduate population showed the lowest rate among all races (51%) for completing the A-G courses required by the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) systems.

RESEARCH DESIGN

I conducted a qualitative action research study to understand what information African American students with aspirations for higher education need to directly matriculate to four-year postsecondary institutions. The action research involved writing a script for a video that would impart research-based, college knowledge that is culturally relevant to African American students in assisting them in their college choice and their eventual postsecondary matriculation.

The process was grounded in the cycle of action research consisting of *diagnosing* the problem, *planning* the action, *taking action*, and *evaluating* the action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2007). After surveying and interviewing African American students and alumni of the site, I identified preliminary findings from the data to that point.

³ The population size of African American enrollment increased to 9% for the fall semester leading into this research study. However, the African American students still represented a small portion of the overall enrollment compared to other racial groups at WHS.

Specifically, I noted what students said they wanted to see in a video designed to deliver college-going information to other African American students. I assembled an action research team of African American students and presented them with the preliminary findings along with relevant college access literature. The team reviewed the findings and related literature, selected a relevant topic upon which a college knowledge video might be based, and collaborated to write the script. Finally, after evaluations and revisions by the action research team, an independent group of African American students evaluated the script for effectiveness in accordance with research question four.

Key Theoretical Terminology

Throughout the study, I reference numerous college access terms and concepts. Although I give short definitions along the way, it may be helpful to understand the context in which I reference key theoretical concepts up front. For instance, I speak of capital, as “resources” (economic, cultural, and social) that students may possess and that may help them get to four-year postsecondary institutions. Basically, economic capital refers to financial wealth. Cultural capital refers knowledge and degrees. Social capital refers to networks of people who have influence. I do not directly address economic capital. I contextualize *college knowledge* as an element of cultural capital and being all information related to college-going (e.g., deadlines, relevant tests, and procedures). I refer to other forms of capital through another framework (see below).

I also refer to efficacy and self-efficacy as key concepts in this study. By general definition, efficacy is the ability to produce a desired outcome. Drawing largely from Boden’s (2011) work with Latino students and Freeman’s (1997) work with African American students, I frame self-efficacy as one’s internalized ability and belief that he or she can achieve a particular intended result. I hold the assumption that these abilities and

beliefs can be developed using Boden's (2011) work with first generation Latino students who identified four themes involving successful postsecondary preparation: personal education planning, receiving support from guides, acquiring academic skills, and maintaining personal impetus (resolve and perseverance).

I utilize the terms of media, engagement, and media engagement. When I speak of media, I am generally referring to digital media that may be presented in DVD or downloadable formats. However, since the scope did not allow for the full production of a video, I have broadened my usage of media to include the script for the intended video. I frame engagement as the level of involvement and interest a one perceives participating or choosing to participate in an activity that is purposed to support or benefit him or her. For example, in this study, I discuss students' high level of engagement through their work on the action research team. Finally, when I refer to media engagement, I am referencing a realm of digital media (e.g.: video games, computer and mobile apps, videos, etc.) designed for consumer interaction.

I generally regard Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the accounting of the role of race in the distribution of resources in schools and communities. In this study, I utilize Yosso's (2005) work in identifying Community Cultural Wealth as a CRT framework to offset deficit model thinking of low capital often attributed to African American students. I frequently use terminology attached to four of the six findings from her work: *aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, are navigational capital*. In this study, I regard these concepts as capital that schools often undervalue. Although I discuss these forms of capital in chapter two, I offer, here, the framing in which I reference each form. Students with aspirational capital maintain their hopes for

postsecondary matriculation despite the odds or any perceived barriers. Students with familial capital are students who possess information and motivation from their family or close relationships in order to matriculate to postsecondary institutions. Familial networks extend to distant relatives, peers, church members, and anyone with whom a student may share a *kinship* bond. Students with social capital are those who have social networks in which they can access in order to help them navigate challenges and get to postsecondary institutions. Finally, students with navigational capital are those who have information, grit, and / or alternative means toward achieving postsecondary matriculation in the midst of hostile or unsupportive institutional forces.

Public Engagement

College knowledge is key toward affecting decisions concerning college choice. Furthermore, counselors play a key role in delivering such information and channeling students toward a “college fit”. As I mentioned earlier, counseling resources are stretched or altogether unavailable. The lack of counselor availability often results in a gap in service and/or college knowledge that students need to make the best choice. College access literature suggests that culturally responsive college knowledge, delivered through video media, may be helpful to students of color and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who lack such information and who traditionally suffer the most in the absence of counseling resources. Although the problems of low African American matriculation and stretched counseling resources are complex, the task addressing these issues can begin with a smaller step in the direction of media engagement.

An important goal of the research was to boost efficacy among African American students by directly involving them in a problem-solving process (action research) to create an alternative means for delivering college-going information to other African

American students in the face of strained or unavailable counseling resources. The research outcomes could also encourage greater collaboration between students and staff at school sites to produce culturally relevant media content that counselors could utilize in their outreach to students. This information may be of great assistance to counselors in the MBUSD and lower-resourced districts – or, perhaps, the estimated 29% of California districts with no counseling staff whatsoever (CDE, 2011).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

African American high school graduates in the State of California tend to matriculate directly into community colleges rather than directly into four-year institutions. Meanwhile, Whites and Asians are matriculating directly into four-year institutions at much higher rates than African American students. This literature review explores domains of literature associated with low African American matriculation into four-year postsecondary institutions. I begin with a discussion on Critical Race Theory with a distinct emphasis on three school barriers that make it challenging for African American students to matriculate to four-year institutions: *lack of college-sending culture*, *lack of college counseling*, and *the existence of neo-tracking practices*. Next, I discuss college choice as it relates to the realities of the community college route to four-year institutions and the benefits of direct matriculation into four-year institutions. Then, I discuss the domains of social capital and community cultural wealth, college knowledge, and the importance of college counseling. Finally, I conclude with a discussion about the importance of building self-efficacy and engagement among African American students with action research and media engagement as elements of a plausible step toward a solution.

Introduction

There are financial and academic advantages to beginning one's career at a four-year institution instead of at a community college. While it is generally understood that college degrees (such as those attained from four-year institutions) tend to afford higher salaries than associate degrees (those from community colleges), the impact of where one begins his/her postsecondary journey is an important issue in research that students,

parents, and school personnel cannot afford to ignore (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2010; Levey, 2010; Complete College America, 2011). Nevertheless, thousands of California's high school graduates who may be eligible to attend a four-year college enroll directly in community colleges each year, instead, with plans to transfer to four-year institutions (Lumina Foundation, 2008). Unfortunately, transfer to a four-year institution does not always work out. In fact, a large body of research confirms that many community college students do not finish their two-year degrees and/or fail to transfer to a four-year institution (Complete College America, 2011; Long and Kurlaender, 2009; Dougherty and Kienzl, 2006; Dowd, Cheslock, and Melguizo, 2008; Santos Laanan, 2007; Solorzano and Ornelas, 2004; Knapp, Kelly-Reid, and Ginder, 2010). For African American students, this fact is especially troublesome (Long and Kurlaender, 2009). African American students are channeled disproportionately into community colleges by familial (socio-economic standing, educational background) and school factors (lower resourced, non-college-sending culture, site and district neo-tracking) (Avery, 2006; Koffman and Tienda, 2008; Hill, 2008; Roderick et al, 2011). Next to family influence (Kiyama, 2011), counselors are widely regarded as having the most impact on students' matriculation decisions into postsecondary settings (Gandara & Bial, 2001; McDonough, 2005; McDonough & Jarsky, 2008). However, high counselor-to-student ratios, over-extended duties, staff cuts, and conflicting focuses create challenges for students in obtaining the college knowledge they need from counselors. However, providing college knowledge information through digital media technology and utilizing culturally relevant approaches could greatly assist counselors to reach African American students (Mathis,

2010) and help them make the best college choice. Such alternative sources of college information could also be an asset to schools with limited counseling resources.

For a student to be eligible for enrollment in a California four-year institution, he/she must complete a series of courses with a specified grade-point-average. This series is known as the A-G course requirements. Students must complete these courses with a GPA of 2.0 or higher in order to advance directly into the California State University or the University of California systems. One may believe that the problem of disproportionately low African American matriculation to four-year institutions is due to their not meeting entrance requirements and this is partly true. In Los Angeles County 48.6% of African American students and 32.9% of African American students in the State complete the A-G course requirements while the rates for Whites and Asians are considerably higher. However, in many cases, enrollment of African American students in four-year colleges falls short of the number of students who *are* eligible (Hill, 2008; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011).

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

To underscore the importance of this study, it is appropriate to consider the literature surrounding Critical Race Theory. CRT is concerned with how political and social policies and practices often provide an impact on racial equality and the lack thereof (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Duncan, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Lopez, 2003; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). In the context of this study, we could fairly define CRT as *which students are getting the best opportunities to matriculate into four-year institutions*. An examination of the barriers that exist for African American students would offer reasonable explanations for the

disproportionately low matriculation rates. CRT charges institutions to take greater responsibility for removing barriers of inequality that limit postsecondary opportunities for students of color.

In the following section, I discuss three barriers existing in schools that negatively impact African American college matriculation: neo-tracking; the lack of a college-sending culture; and the lack of counseling resources.

Neo-tracking

Tracking in schools has foundations deeply rooted in the racial darkness of American history. From as early as 1850, school officials in Boston justified different curriculum for African Americans and Whites based on what they believed were inherent differences in intelligence. In *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896, the Supreme Court upheld the legalization of assigning African American students to schools that were expected to be “separate, but equal” to the schools that White students attend. Then, the 1954 landmark Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* made it illegal for schools to be segregated by race. Many thought that the *Brown* ruling would bring racial equality in schools, but real change often comes slowly if at all. For instance, many school districts in the southern U.S. failed to integrate until the early 1970s. Academic tracking began to show strong evidence of internal racial and class segregation in schools. More and more, African Americans were assigned to lower academic tracks while Whites were assigned to higher tracks.

Another factor deepening the racial inequity is the tracking of entire schools through re-segregation (Orfield & Gordon, 2001; Oakes, 2004, Pino and Smith, 2004) resulting from residential segregation. By the 1980’s school assignments were based on neighborhoods in which students lived. Individuals and groups with power who sought

to increase segregation in schools would work to keep neighborhoods “White” or “Black”. Hence, residential segregation combined with neighborhood school assignments created a similarly racially segregated effect on school enrollment as the blatant separation of the pre-*Brown* era (Nettles et al, 2003) and, therefore, reinforced racial inequity in schools (Pino & Smith, 2004; Orfield and Lee, 2005; Jordan, 2010). According to a 1996 Department of Education report, 90% of White public school students in America attend schools in majority White school districts, while over two-thirds of African American students attend schools with a majority of students of color. Moreover, one-third of African American students attend schools with over 90% minority enrollment. More recent data show race/ethnicity breakdowns for enrollment in high poverty schools⁴ as indicators of racial segregation in schools. For the 2007-08 school year, 10% of White high school students attended high poverty schools, while 46% of African American and Hispanic high school students attended high poverty schools (Aud et al, 2010).

As mentioned, the re-segregation of neighborhoods led to similar effects as the failed “separate, but equal doctrine” of the 19th century. Inequity was seen between public schools with higher resources and those with lesser resources. Higher resourced schools tended to be mostly White, while lower resourced schools had mostly minority student enrollment. Higher resourced schools tended to have textbooks for every student, more functional facilities, and a higher percentage of qualified teachers than those in lower resourced schools (Oakes, 2004; 2008). The *Williams v. State of California* case

⁴ A high poverty school in the context of this review constitutes a school where 51% or more of its students receive free or reduced-price lunch (Aud et al, 2010).

of 2000 was filed in direct complaint of California's failure to provide millions of its students with the necessary materials, facilities, and human resources required for a basic and equal education. The Williams plaintiffs won the case and California public school administrators were required to comply and place notices of the ruling and parents' rights on display in each classroom. Yet, the tracking continues through the policy of "student choice"

Nowadays, many schools have eliminated the formal process of tracking and students are allowed to choose their classes. However, students now often choose their track of curriculum as a result of the physical, social, and racial separation that exists in schools (Nettles et al., 2003). Even in suburban, well-resourced, racially diverse schools officials "steer" students toward general, college prep, honors, and advanced placement curriculum – creating a tracking effect. A disproportionate number of White and Asian students end up in honors and advanced placement classes (Planty, Provansnik, & Daniel, 2007). Meanwhile, a disproportionate number of African American students end up in college prep, general, or remedial courses (Ogbu, 2003) and the African American student enrollment in honors and advanced placement classes is lower. Since college enrollment probabilities are stronger when transcripts show honors and advanced placement courses, this type of neo-tracking weakens African Americans' college-going opportunities. The segregation also robs African American students from an equal opportunity to develop the higher-level thinking skills provided by honors and advanced courses that are needed for college-level success (Ogbu, 2003). The internal segregation is also seen when English Language Learners are all placed in one class (Gandara and Orfield, 2012). So even though a suburban school may have ethnic and social diversity,

internal segregation may very well exist and the tracking of students can be seen even in a system of choice.

Students caught in the neo-tracking of impoverished schools and districts, and/or those who are segregated within their schools through remediation or according to language development are more likely to dropout of high school. If they do graduate and move on to college, they show low likelihood of finishing college (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Swanson, 2004; Gandara & Orfield, 2012). Somehow, African American students must be informed of the benefits or limitations of their ‘student choice’ as it relates to their college-going aspirations. Moreover, schools must present equal opportunities and commit equitable resources for all students to make it to college.

Lack of a College-Sending Culture in Schools

A second barrier to African American students college-going opportunities is often the culture of the school they attend. Many qualified African American students are channeled away from four-year institutions by default of attending schools with little or no culture of sending students to these institutions (Avery, 2006; Koffman and Tienda, 2008; Hill, 2008; Roderick et al, 2011). Furthermore, the high school a student attends is very important in determining *if* a student will attend college and, furthermore, *what kind* of college that student will attend (Boyle, 1966, Orfield et al, 1984). Areas with wealthy populations tend to have high schools with more advantageous resources (qualified staff, facilities, funding, instructional materials, etc.) than those schools found in lower income areas (Oakes, 2004). Specifically, higher resourced schools tend to have more advantageous resources devoted to helping their students get to college (e.g.: college counselors and advanced placement courses). Considering that America’s lower income, urban, public high schools are often attended by high percentages of students of color,

many African American students are disadvantaged merely by *where* they go to high school and the culture that exists in a given school (Hill, 2008; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011).

In understanding this disparity it may be helpful to review the traditional purpose of high schools up through most of the 20th century. High schools were expected to be places where the majority of students were prepared for the labor force, while only a small segment of students were expected to attend college (Hill, 2008). Schools did very little, if anything, to inspire or assist the general student to make it to college. However, the world has changed since then, and American job projections demand that future workers be college educated. Thirty-five years ago only 12% of jobs in the U.S. required postsecondary education; however, in the next 10 years, 80% of jobs will require postsecondary training (Achieve: American Diploma Project Network, 2010). The need to supply a qualified workforce for the future has prompted President Obama to propose that every American commit to at least one year of postsecondary training (Obama, 2009). Hence, the current call for schools is to, as a primary goal, prepare all students for postsecondary education. To achieve this goal, schools must develop a college-going culture.

However, the college-going culture (resources and commitments) of high schools vary making the purpose to getting students to college an often more challenging venture for some high schools (Jarsky, McDonough, & Nunez, 2009). McDonough (nd) defines a “college culture” as one in which “all students are prepared for a full range of post-secondary options through structural, motivational, and experiential college preparatory opportunities.” There are nine principles (McDonough, 1997; 2008) toward creating and

maintaining a college culture: 1) College Talk – the school must develop a culture of clear communication about what it takes to get to college; 2) Clear Expectations – the school’s explicit goals must be clearly defined for all students; 3) Information and Resources – students must have comprehensive, up-to-date, and easily accessible information and resources related to college; 4) Comprehensive Counseling Model – all counselors turn interactions with students into opportunities to talk about college. All counselors must be well informed about college issues; 5) Testing and Curriculum – students must be knowledgeable and aware of standardized testing dates; 6) Faculty Involvement – school faculty must be active and show complete “buy-in” to the school’s college culture; 7) Family Involvement – students’ families must be informed partners about the college culture; 8) College Partnerships – forming collaboration between the school and local colleges and universities is vital; 9) Articulation – the college message should be seamless from kindergarten through 12th grade. These nine principles are vital to a school’s successful creation and maintenance of a culture that heavily supports a high level of college matriculation.

A school’s college-going culture can only be as strong as the school’s level of college-linking⁵ activity (Hill, 2008; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). In relation to college linking, schools can be categorized as *traditional*, *clearinghouse*, and *brokering* (Hill, 2008). Schools that show little activity are likely to send a small portion of their students to college and a large portion into the workforce. Because their college effect is closely aligned with the traditional industrial age purpose of schooling, these schools are considered *traditional* in their college-linking strategies. High schools that offer

⁵ College-linking refers to the strategies that schools employ to help students matriculate into postsecondary institutions.

resources for college planning, but do not engage in planning with students and families, act merely as *clearinghouses* for resources. Although clearinghouse strategies may seem more effective than traditional strategies, students and parents in clearinghouse schools must take the initiative in the college planning process – which may vary considerably according to a student’s background. Finally, high schools that devote a high degree of resources to assisting students and their families through the college-going process are considered *brokering* schools. These schools “broker” by facilitating parent and student access to their own resources. According to Hill (2008), “brokering” schools are less likely to serve minorities and lower-income populations; “traditional” schools tend to be schools with high minority populations.

Therefore, in light of college culture research, it is reasonable to assume that schools that utilize a traditional strategy of college-linking maintain a weak (at best) college culture which disadvantages African American students who aspire to enroll in college. When students get adequate assistance from adults in the college-going processes (brokering strategies) students’ college enrollment is more likely as well as their chances of enrolling in four-year institutions (Plank and Jordan, 2001).

The disadvantage of attending schools with weak college-sending culture is further illustrated through the research of Melissa Roderick, Vanessa Coca, and Jenny Nagaoka (2011). The researchers focused on how public high schools play a role urban students’ participation in the college application, enrollment, and matching process by tracking the matriculation of high school graduates from Chicago Public Schools in 2005 that aspired to four-year degrees. CPS is the third largest school system in the United States and serves a predominantly low-income, minority population (53% African

American). Roderick, et al (2011) found that, of the total sample population in CPS, 28% of students planned to attend community college, technical schools, had other plans, or had no post-secondary educational plans. While 72% of the students had plans to attend a four-year institution, only 59% actually applied, 51% were accepted, and only 41% ended up enrolling in a four-year institution. The research on CPS students agrees with research suggesting that low-income and minority students' postsecondary plans are largely determined by the extent to which their high school guides them through the college application process (Avery, 2006; Koffman and Tienda, 2008; Long, Saenz, and Tienda 2010).

Roderick, et al (2011) also confirms research that shows that low-income, urban students often engage in a limited college search and are channeled (Barnes, 1992; Morrison, 1989; Orfield et al., 1984) to enroll according to the traditional patterns of their high schools – namely two-year or large institutions with lower levels of selectivity rather than being properly matched. ‘College Match’ occurs when a student enrolls in an institution with a selectivity level that matches his/her qualifications. Of the CPS students who aspired to four-year institutions, 15% were qualified for admittance into very selective institutions. However, only 38% of these highly qualified students were considered “matched” by enrolling in “very selective” colleges. Ten percent of them did not enroll in any college whatsoever after graduation. This means that over half of the students in CPS who aspire to attend a four-year institution and are considered highly qualified students, enroll in schools they are considered over-qualified for. This is consistent with research that shows that lower income students with qualifications comparable with their higher advantaged peers (like those in higher resourced schools)

are less likely to attend four-year institutions, are more likely to attend two-year institutions (community college), and are less likely to apply to more selective institutions (Hanson 1994; Hearn 1991; Kane 1999; Pallais and Turner 2006).

Lack of Counseling Resources

A second barrier to African American students' college-going opportunities specifically has to do with the nature of their school's counseling resources. Strained counseling resources, high counselor-to-student ratios, and decreases in staff are major factors in the disproportionality in college matriculation between African American and White students. High school counselors provide a tremendous amount of support for students who aspire to enroll in college (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 2004). As established, those schools with greater resources are able to provide the necessary counseling staff to assist students with the application process, financial aid forms, and guiding students to an appropriate college match. Unfortunately, poorer schools and districts (where a higher concentration of students of color attend) have a greater strain on their counseling resources than higher resourced schools (Oakes et al, 2002). Lesser-resourced schools often assign high administrative demands on their counseling staff, thereby rendering their counselors unavailable for college guidance. Additionally, counselor-to-student ratios at lower-resourced schools tend to be considerably higher than those in wealthier districts. Finally, counseling staffs may be non-existent all together, leaving the counseling burden to principals and/or vice principals, thus making college-going assistance even more difficult to achieve. A more detailed discussion about the importance of counselors occurs later in this chapter. However, it is important to note, here, the disadvantaged state of college counseling that exists in schools with traditionally high populations of low-income students and students of color.

College Choice

The college choice model first introduced by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) showed three phases to a traditional-aged student's college decision-making—*predisposition, search, and choice*. In their model, students move from college-going aspiration to selecting an institution that *fits* their life goals and measured ability. Predisposition happens between grades seven and nine. In the predisposition phase, the family (academic background and socio-economic status), school curriculum, peers, extracurricular activities, and proximity to a postsecondary institution all influence students' desire to go to college. However, race and ethnicity as factors are not present in their explanation of predisposition. The second phase is the search phase and it generally happens somewhere between 10th and 12th grades. During the search phase, students receive and discern information about college and financial aid. Students in this phase begin to think about specific institutions to which they will apply. Finally, in 11th or 12th grade, students navigate through the choice phase. In the choice phase, students decide whether they will enroll in college, and, if so, where they will enroll. Students usually base their enrollment decisions based on financial aid, overall impressions of the institution, and *college fit*.

Where a student decides to begin his/her postsecondary career has implications on his/her life outcomes. The choice between direct enrollment in community college and direct enrollment in a four-year institution is a vital choice in which African American students must be specifically and adequately informed. Students rely on the availability, clarity, and quality of college-going information as they navigate through the college choice process (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2012). Other factors such as the level of education in a student's family, socioeconomic status, students' perceptions of

college cost and financial aid, academic preparation, and career aspirations also impact the choice process for students (Cabrera and La Nasa 2000). In the end, African American students must choose a postsecondary path that will inevitably impact their future.

The Community College Route to Four-Year Institutions

Community colleges offer a number of potential advantages to students. For lower income students, community colleges often present a more cost effective postsecondary option than enrolling directly into a four-year institution. For academically underprepared students, community colleges may be a beneficial place to further develop their academic skills (reading, writing, math). Today's older student who seek career changes or job retraining, or may have children of their own, often find the community college route attractive (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005, Complete College America, 2011). Students who enroll in community colleges tend to do so at institutions in close proximity to their homes, thus these students tend to reside at home to save more money and/or maintain familial connections. Finally, many students prefer the smaller class sizes often found in community colleges rather than the very large class sizes found on the undergraduate level at four-year institutions.

However, there are also pitfalls that students must avoid – among them being longer-than-expected time frames for degree completion, high remediation rates, high dropout rates, and low transfer rates (Complete College America, 2011). A large number of community college students never finish their two-year degrees and/or fail to transfer to a four-year institution (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2010; Complete College America, 2011). Only about ten percent of students who directly enroll in community colleges complete a bachelor's degree within six years (Berkner, He, and Cataldi, 2002).

Furthermore, only about one-third of all community college enrollees ever attain any sort of degree at all (Calcagno et al, 2008). Perhaps those most negatively impacted by direct matriculation into community college are the highly qualified students who choose community college enrollment over four-year institutions. (Goldrick-Rab, Pfeffer, and Brand, 2009) estimate that students who are qualified to attend a selective four-year college, yet enroll in a community college, decrease their chances of completing their bachelor's degrees within six years by 77 percent to 87 percent.

Finally, although remediation occurs at community colleges and four-year institutions alike, African American students at community colleges self-report a higher degree of negative effects associated with remediation such as ostracism, powerlessness, and ambiguity about how to meet their academic goals (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002; Parker & Richardson, 2005; Callahan & Chumney, 2009). Despite the issues, low-income students with qualifications comparable to their more advantaged counterparts are more likely to attend community colleges versus four-year colleges (if they attend college at all), and are less likely to apply to more selective institutions (Pallais and Turner 2006).

Benefits of Direct Enrollment into Four-Year Institutions

African American students who are eligible to attend four-year institutions directly after high school are academically and financially better off doing so rather than enrolling in community colleges. Academically speaking, students are more likely to complete their bachelor's degree if they begin at a four-year college rather than transferring from a community college (Goldrick-Rab et al, 2009; Long and Kurlaender, 2009). Furthermore, those seeking bachelor's degrees are three times more likely to do if

they enroll directly into four-year institutions versus transferring from a community college (Berkner et al. 2002).

Financially speaking, degrees attained from a four-year university provide for a more secure future than an associate's degree from a community college (Aud, et al, 2011; Levey, 2010). With potentially greater job and financial security in mind, many students may plan to attend community college and then transfer to a four-year institution. Even those that do transfer statistically earn less than their counterparts who enroll directly in four-year institutions (Levey, 2010).

Levey (2010) examined the long-term returns to schooling measured by longitudinal data of earnings and occupational prestige of individuals in their late 30s and early 40s. Levey surveyed a cohort of over 12,000 respondents who were between 14 and 22 years old when the study began in 1979; the last survey was given in 2000. Respondents could enter college at any time during the survey period. Levey found that out of those students that enrolled in college 44.8% did so at the community college level. Of this group, slightly more tended to be women and students of color and came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Although Levey found little qualitative difference in occupational prestige between those who immediately enrolled in community college compared to those that immediately enrolled in four-year institutions, the difference in earnings was noticeable. For full-time workers, the mean earnings was \$42,792 for respondents who enrolled directly in community colleges, compared to \$58,654 for those who enrolled directly in four-year institutions. This is especially concerning for African American students as many of them are channeled

disproportionately into community colleges by familial and school factors (Freeman, 1997; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011).

Certainly there are many reasons why more African American students are not enrolling in four-year institutions at a higher rate than we currently observe. However, one strand of literature that addresses this phenomenon is social capital theory.

Social Capital / Community Cultural Wealth

Social capital is a widely applied sociological term that was mainstreamed in the late 70s largely by Pierre Bourdieu. He defined it as the aggregate of resources that are linked to a durable network of institutionalized relationships and posited that the upper and middle classes possessed the knowledge that is valued in a hierarchical society (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). An unfortunate assumption follows in education when applying Bourdieu's idea. The assumption is often that students of color who do not come from upper or middle classes carry deficiencies into the classroom. From there, the charge is that schools must make up these deficiencies in order to level the playing field.

The issue is that students of color often have capital that is traditionally undervalued by schools (Freeman, 1997; Yosso, 2005; Mohammad, 2008). Although schools may purport to help all students matriculate to college, schools' success or failure in that effort – as it relates to students of color – results from the cultural capital that is valued by school officials and staff (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Rather than viewing African American students through a deficit model, we should approach social capital through a critical race theoretical framework called “community cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2005) which maintains that students of color access knowledge through networks of people and resources available in their community.

The “undervalued” forms of capital existing in community cultural wealth theory

are: *aspirational*, *familial*, *social*, *navigational*, *resistant*, and *linguistic*. Aspirational capital refers to the dreams, hope, and resiliency that students of color maintain in the presence of actual and perceived barriers. The *familial* and *social* forms of capital can include family members, fellow members of one's religious community, peers, and close family friends (Yosso, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Specifically, social capital has to do with the utilization of one's social networks to gain support and guidance. Familial capital is similar to social capital, but it refers more to the knowledge produced through close kinship and community connections and influences the individual to maintain historical and cultural ties. *Navigational* capital is important, as students of color must often navigate through various social situations – for example, racially hostile environments or inequitable policies and treatment. *Resistant* capital can be active or passive responses of survival in oppressive situations. Finally, *linguistic* capital involves the language skill attained by speaking two or more languages.

The acknowledgement of community cultural wealth is not unlike the *funds of knowledge* that Kiyama and others endorse (Kiyama, 2011; McIntyre, Rosebery, & Gonzalez, 2001; Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005). These funds can be thought of as the historical and cultural knowledge and skills passed from the home culture to the individual. The cultural support that students of color receive from their families and community is important to a student's college choice (Muhammad, 2008; Perez & McDonough, 2008). However, because the networks exist mostly on the middle school and high school levels, these funds may be insufficient as resources for the college level success (Kiyama, 2011). Hence, in order to get African American students to four-year institutions *and* persist toward degree attainment, schools must value and build upon

community wealth and funds of knowledge by increasing the *college knowledge* among students of color. I propose a means of doing so at the end of this literature review and in chapter three.

College Knowledge

Students receive an advantage in their college-going process depending on the amount of college-going knowledge that is possessed by the social networks available to them. Students who live in middle class areas with network members who have gone to college receive important information about college (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), while students in lower-income areas tend to have less access to networks possessing important college information (Lee and Bowen, 2006). So, generally, wealthier students hold an advantage over lower-income students when it comes to access of important college information. Such important information about college is often referred to as *college knowledge*⁶.

College knowledge includes the vital procedural knowledge about the processes of universities (Burlison, Hallett, & Park, 2008). Therefore, students who desire to be successful in their efforts to matriculate into well-matched, four-year universities must have a good understanding about the qualification, application, enrollment, choice, and financial aid aspects of the college-going process. Others expand the notion of college knowledge beyond what it takes for a student to merely make it to college, but also the mastery of management and navigational skills and the social and intellectual development students need to complete college and attain their degrees (Conley, 2005; McDonough, 1997).

⁶ Burlison et al (2008) defines College Knowledge as “a specific skill set – social, academic, and cultural – necessary for successful transition to postsecondary education and degree completion.”

College knowledge is important to college matriculation and degree attainment. For those disadvantaged students who lack college knowledge from family or community members, they must rely more heavily on school officials (like counselors) for college-going support.

Importance of Counselors

For students from families with limited knowledge of how to help their children matriculate into college and attain their degree, assistance from counselors is vital (McDonough & Jarsky, 2008). College counselors play a large role in the lives of high school students who aspire to postsecondary education (Boden, 2011; Gandara & Bial, 2001; McDonough, 1997; McDonough, 2005). They are influential in helping students find a good college fit, keeping students on track with A-G requirements, and guiding students through the admission and financial aid processes. Students – especially those from households lacking high degrees of college knowledge – depend heavily on counselor support. Unfortunately, far too many students lack access to counselors due to overwhelming high counselor-to-student ratios. Ratios recommended by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) are 1:100 and 1:350 respectively. Yet, nationally, the student-to-counselor average ratio is almost 1:500. The ratio is much worse in California schools. According to the California Department of Education (2011), the average California high school student must share his/her counselor with 944 other students – reflecting the worst counselor-to-student ratio in the United States. High school counselor-to-student ratios often reflect over-stretched counseling resources and prohibit students from attaining the critical college knowledge necessary for college admission (Griffin, et al., 2007; Hooker and Brand, 2010; Perna, et al., 2008). The lack of counselor

availability negatively impacts students of color who need vital information about postsecondary options (Venezia and Kirst, 2005). The enrollment rate for African American students at four-year universities is already disproportionately low when compared to their White counterparts (US Department of Education, 2010).

Clearly, something must be done to boost the African American matriculation rate into four-year institutions. Schools need to ensure that African American students gain vital college knowledge that is useful toward matriculation into four-year institutions. At the same time due to thin counseling resources, most schools need additional, cost-effective support to convey such valuable information. Meanwhile, African American students cannot afford to wait for schools to provide solutions to the problem. Instead, boosting African American students' self-efficacy presents a positive and empowering step toward a solution to the problem. Through Action Research, I propose facilitate a high-engagement experience for African American students through digital media as a means to boost college knowledge among their peers.

Self-Efficacy and Engagement

Students frequently know what they need and want in regard to their postsecondary hopes more than adults give them credit for (Freeman, 1997; Boden, 2011). In a qualitative grounded theory study conducted to learn about first generation Latinos' beliefs regarding their academic preparation, Boden (2011) discovers four themes that could potentially serve as a useful framework for approaching African American students sense of what it takes to make it into four-year institutions. The four themes were: *personal education planning, guides, academic skills, and personal impetus*. The first theme, personal education planning, involves a decision-making sequence that leads to college enrollment and degree attainment. The second theme

refers to securing a guide (school personnel, family or community member, or friend) to assist the student in mapping out the steps to fulfill the educational plan leading to college. The third theme, academic skills, refers to the student's need for attaining the time management and organizational skills, plus the academic aptitude to make it to college and attain his/her degree. The fourth theme, personal impetus, is the student's resolve to put their plan into action and persist in the steps toward college enrollment. Even with very little knowledge about college, students perceive they must possess some level of self-determination and independence to succeed in college (Boden, 2011).

Student Engagement

It is my assumption that students are valuable resources in solving problems that impact them. Freeman, 1997, states: "African American high-school students are rarely, if ever, asked for their perceptions of the problems or, more important, for their ideas about possible solutions." Similar to Boden's (2011) study on first generation Latino students' sense of efficacy toward college matriculation, (Freeman, 1997) explored African American high school students' perceptions of school barriers which prohibited greater African American participation in higher education. African American students across geographic regions, school types, gender, and socioeconomic status were asked to suggest programs they thought would boost African American college matriculation. The responses fell into four categories: A) improve school conditions; B) provide interested teachers and active counselors; C) instill possibilities early; and D) expand cultural awareness.

Both Freeman (1997) and Boden (2011) present useful findings for this study that highlights students' understanding of the importance of self-efficacy and engagement. In both studies, students were consulted and the students provided information and insight

helpful for increasing college enrollment among African American and Latino students. However, neither study made active use of students as a team engaged in providing a solution. Through the action research cycle of *diagnosing, planning, taking action, and evaluating* (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007), African American students could work together with counseling staff members to create a solution designed to boost the college knowledge among other African American students. This can be accomplished with the help of digital media.

Media Engagement

A final framework guiding this research is the importance of students' engagement with media. A report published for the University of Southern California ("Decreasing the Digital Divide: Technology Use for College Preparation Programs", 2006) suggests that video media could enhance in-person instruction such as in college counseling. For instance, a video about how to fill out financial aid forms would assist parents who are most likely to fill out forms on their child's behalf. The engagement intensifies when the media becomes interactive like a game. Mathis (2010) concludes that interactive games are a beneficial means for college counseling because the college admission process, itself, is a game. Like in all games, students must learn the parameters, or rules, and then strategize to achieve. Thus, in the "game" of college-going, a student gains aspirations to attend college, but must figure out how to get there (achieve the objective). They learn the "rules" (college knowledge) through interaction with parents, peers, teachers, and counselors. They make "moves" (decisions) based on the information they receive. Their overall goal is to match their college-going aspirations with the reality of college enrollment and degree attainment. Interactive video media could assist students along the way as students engage with this media form

along with other college knowledge providers (parents, peers, teachers, and counselors).

Conclusion

This research on African American students' perceptions on what it takes to matriculate into four –year institutions is important because current internal structures and cultures of public high schools, by large, are not allowing for the equitable access of college-going resources to its African American students – who traditionally are among the students who need these resources the most. Although, the problem is not simplistic, it is also not insurmountable to conceive greater ratios of African Americans enrolling in four-year institutions. Instead of being channeled into “no school”, “open” community colleges, or non-selective institutions, due to a lack of information or guidance, African American students could be partners in building their own self-efficacy through their engagement in the transfer of college knowledge through digital media.

As shown, issues within high schools such as varying college-sending cultures, inequitable resources, vanishing or non-existent college counselors, and neo-tracking practices all present barriers to the direct matriculation of African American students into four-year universities. At the same time, schools' devaluing of cultural wealth possessed by many students of color presents an additional wall that African American students must climb in order to make it to four-year institutions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In the preceding chapters, I argued the benefits of involving high school African American students in designing their own college knowledge information video targeting the value of direct matriculation into four-year postsecondary institutions over community colleges. The goal of this study was to contribute to the body of research on college access by conducting qualitative action research that builds on previous studies on college choice and makes use of recent findings in digital media and engagement in collaboration with African American students at the research site. The following four questions guide the study:

1. What information do African American high school students report to possess that will help them matriculate into four-year institutions?
2. What assistance do African American high school students perceive that they need from school counselors and staff in order to matriculate directly into four-year institutions?
3. What content and format do African American students say should characterize a video designed to inform them of the advantages of matriculating directly into four-year institutions?
4. How effective, if at all, was the script at increasing the college knowledge of African American high school students?

Research Design

I conducted a qualitative action research study to understand what information African American students with aspirations for higher education needed to matriculate to

four-year institutions. I created a team of individuals at Westside High School (study site) that included six students, one college counselor (session three only), and myself. The action research team had the responsibility of writing a script for an interactive video to impart research-based, culturally relevant, college knowledge to African American students that could assist them in their college choice and their eventual postsecondary matriculation.

Because I sought to know African American students' perceptions concerning college matriculation and the college knowledge they possessed, a qualitative design was more appropriate than a quantitative approach, which is more geared to measuring growth or comparing variables (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, I was engaging African American students to explore a solution – not just a means of understanding the problem. Being mindful of the strain on counseling services and the aspiration-to-matriculation gap that was reflected by the site's data and counselor reporting about African American students, this study presented an opportunity to foster greater efficacy among African American students by involving them in the action research (Freeman, 1997). However, I wanted to take Freeman's notions further in this study by collaborating with students to put forth a possible solution to the problem of lower African American college matriculation.

Data Collection Methods

In order to address my first three research questions, I collected data from three groups: current students, alumni, and the action research team. I administered two separate qualitative survey instruments – one to current African American students of Westside High School and one to the site's African American alumni – to explore the constructs of African American students' knowledge of (1) the personal attributes they

had; (2) what they believed was required of students in order to matriculate into to four-year postsecondary institutions; and, (3) their perception of the extent to which their school helped them matriculate into four-year postsecondary institutions. To get a deeper understanding to answer question two I conducted qualitative interviews (focus groups and individual interviews) with a small selection from both groups (current students and alumni). I recorded and transcribed the meetings with the action research team in order to answer research questions three and four. To specifically answer research question four, I surveyed a group of African American students who were charged with evaluating the script. These students were not part of the action research team. The data collection ended with an exit survey with the action research team in order to gain their perspectives on the process and the script.

PHASE ONE: Qualitative Surveys

For my study, I surveyed 111 African American students and alumni from the site. In order to obtain these surveys, I sent out a recruitment letter (see Appendix A), self-introduction letter (see Appendix B) and consent forms (see Appendices C and D) via email to the parents of school-identified African American students. Students who obtained parent consent and signed the teen assent took a “paper and pencil” survey consisting of 18 questions (see Appendix G). Similar recruitment materials (see Appendices E and F) were sent to African American alumni via email addresses provided by parent networks and administrators of the site. Alumni completed a similar online survey (see Appendix H) consisting of 20 questions. Both the student and the alumni surveys took approximately ten minutes to complete. I offered incentives of food, drawings of (10) \$10 gift cards, and one grand prize \$50 gift card in order to secure the

necessary student surveys. Similarly, I conducted a drawing of a grand prize \$50 gift card for the alumni participants as an incentive.

In order to qualify for the study, students had to self-identify as African American. The site provided me with a phone list of all pre-identified African American students. Alumni participants also had to self-identify as African American and they were asked to do so at the beginning of the online survey. Additionally, alumni needed to have enrolled in a community college or four-year institution within 16 months of high school graduation.

PHASE TWO: Qualitative Interviews (Focus Groups)

In order to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of need, I conducted a 60-minute interview with a group of students (see Appendix I). To qualify for the focus group, students had to be on-track for A-G completion. I placed the names of the survey participants into bags according to their grade levels and randomly selected 15 students. From there, site administration and the counseling department helped me identify ten qualified students who would go on to participate in the focus group. I integrated freshmen students with sophomores, juniors, and seniors in order to gain a diversity of perceptions from the least experienced students to those on the verge of graduation. Additionally, since college counselors generally began their college planning with the tenth graders, having a tenth, 11th, and 12th graders in the focus group presented an opportunity to learn more specific information about counseling practices at the site. The questions were designed to gain a more focused understanding of students' perceptions of the school's barriers to four-year college matriculation and information they need to make a more informed college choice.

The purpose of the alumni focus group was to gain a deeper understanding of African American students' college preparation through the perceptions of former African American students of WHS. I invited local alumni who completed surveys to participate in a 60-minute focus group or individual interview (see Appendix J). As a result, I interviewed five alumni who were currently attending a local community college and two local four-year postsecondary institutions.

PHASE THREE: Action Research

In order to answer research questions three and four, I audio recorded all sessions regarding the action research process and looked for patterns set forth in the action research and self-efficacy literature. There were four sessions (see Appendix K). The first three sessions included discussions about the preliminary findings of the survey data, an examination of data-related literature, and a creation of a script for disseminating college knowledge (see Appendix L). For the final session, I recruited an additional group of six to eight African American students (across grades) from those who had completed surveys. I assessed their current knowledge about the information contained in the script through a pre-test (see Appendix M). They watched a live read of the script and, afterward, took a post-test (see Appendix N) that asked questions concerning their assessment of the script's effectiveness and whether or not they gained additional college knowledge. Meanwhile, I conducted an exit survey (see Appendix O) with the action research team in order to learn about their experience with the action research process and their ideas about self-efficacy for African American students through this research.

I followed the action research cycle of *diagnosing, planning, taking action, and evaluating* (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007) in the course of the study. I reviewed the literature, conducted informal (course-sanctioned) interviews with students and

counselors of the site in order to diagnose the problem for the initial phase (*diagnosing*). I used the research literature and informal interviews to design my survey instruments (*planning*). I *took action* by analyzing the data resulting from the previously mentioned methods. I then presented the findings to the action research team, which, in turn, *evaluated* the information. The cycle began again as the team chose, from the findings, the content they believed (based on their experience and research that I provided them) should be the basis for a college knowledge video (diagnosis). Next, we collaborated to write the script for a video (plan). After writing the script, the team performed table reading of the script, *evaluated* it for improvements, and made final revisions. Although the actual production of the video was not part of this study, I plan to work with students to shoot the video, edit it, and make it available to counselors and students at WHS.

Data Analysis Methods

I analyzed the data from the surveys and the focus groups by coding and examining the responses to look for patterns predicted by the literature. I also looked for patterns and frequencies of responses compared across grade-level, student status (current or alumni), and postsecondary choice (community college or four-year institution) (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). I adapted my MS Word 2011 word processing software (Hahn, 2008) to organize the data into thematic categories related to research questions one and two. Specifically, these categories were: (1) *community cultural wealth* (possessed by African American students); and (2) *perceived needs* (from counselors by African American students). Subcategories for community cultural wealth were *aspirational*, *familial*, *social*, *navigational*, *resistant*, and *linguistic* (Yosso, 2005). I created other subcategories (e.g.: “parent expectation” and “financial aid”) as they emerged (Altheide, 1987, p. 68). Additionally, I organized findings about which content qualities and

characteristics that African American students believed should be included in a video designed to inform other African American students of the advantages of matriculating directly into four-year institutions (research question three). I presented these findings to the action research group in order for the group to narrow down its choice of which information to actually infuse into a script for a video. Finally, I coded and organized the data from the transcripts of the action research team meetings, the script evaluation, and the exit interviews of action research team members through the MS Word software. I applied qualitative content analysis to these data to identify key phrases that revealed meaning applicable to research question four.

Site Rationale

I conducted the research at Westside High School (WHS), a large, urban school in the Los Angeles area within the Marva Beck Unified School District. I chose this site for four reasons: 1) its African American population size; 2) a disproportionately low A-G⁷ completion rate among its African American students despite its above average counseling resources; 3) a high counselor-to-student ratio; and 4) counseling staff and administration had expressed an interest in having a college information video created as an outcome of this study.

Conducting the research at WHS offered familiarity since the African American population (6.1%) was comparable to the state's overall African American student population (6.3%) (CDE, 2011). Furthermore, WHS followed the state's trend in disproportionately low African American matriculation rates into four-year institutions when compared to White students. WHS had a graduation rate of over 90% school-wide

⁷ A-G course completion with at least a "C" average is generally required for admission into four-year postsecondary institutions.

and an African American graduation rate of 96%. However, the African American graduate population showed the lowest rate among all races (50.9%) for completing the A-G courses required by the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) systems. WHS's A-G completion rate among African American students was disproportionately low, which was similar to the county and the state's average for African American students (48.6% and 32.9% respectively) (CDE, 2011). Like most every California high school, students at WHS who fail to meet the A-G requirements generally do not matriculate directly to four-year universities. Rather, they are compelled to enroll in community colleges as their pathway toward a four-year college.

I also believed WHS offered a unique opportunity to study low African American four-year matriculation at a school with above average counseling resources. The school had a counselor-student ratio of 1:360 (considerably more favorable than the state and national averages – 1:944 and 1:500 respectively); the school had a staff of general academic counselors (called “advisors”) and a college counseling center with two full-time “college counselors” who primarily assisted students in getting into college; both advisors and college counselors meet with all students to plan their college path. With such favorable resources, I was interested in finding out some possible reasons why a well-resourced school would still reflect such a disproportionately low matriculation rate to four-year colleges for African American students.

Finally, counselors indicated that a college knowledge video created from the script could be useful for their students. Counselors had worked extremely hard to meet

the students' needs; I believe the counselors' openness to a video indicated that they, themselves, would not mind some assistance.

Sample Rationale

Students selected for the study were African American high school students at WHS or African American alumni of WHS who were currently enrolled in a two-year or four year institution and who enrolled at that institution within 16 months of high school graduation. They voluntarily participated in the initial surveys with the signing of proper consent (parent and individual consent from high school students; individual consent from alumni). However, for the focus groups (second phase), I used a stratified non-random approach for selecting high-school students based on course tracking and grade levels (9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades). It was important to select students who were on-track for A-G completion. Furthermore, I believed it was important to interview "college eligible" students since research suggested that African American college-eligible students often do not matriculate to four-year institutions, but rather into two-year colleges (Hill, 2008; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). It was important to get students from each grade-level because the school had a practice of applying different college readiness approaches according to which grade a student was in. For instance, some counselors chose to meet with 9th graders while others chose not to. Additionally, counselor efforts took on varying focuses according to students' grade-levels. A counselor may have focused on college aspirations with a freshman student. On the other hand, that same counselor may have focused on choosing potential colleges with a junior. Inevitably, counselor approaches created varying perspectives for African American students according to grade-levels.

For the selection of alumni participants, I relied on the faculty advisor and the counselor from the action research team to help me recruit former African American students of WHS. As previously stated, I believed it was important to match my alumni sample with the sample (students that enrolled in college within 16-months of high school graduation) set forth in the California Department of Education 2008-09 data for consistency and a basis of comparison. I selected participants of the alumni focus group based primarily on the criteria of proximity. I invited only African American alumni whom resided within a reasonable driving distance (suggested 10 miles) to the study site to participate in the focus group phase, as those who lived far away were less likely to show up to the focus group. I was curious if the findings would reflect a channeling to local colleges. However, I also recruited alumni who attend schools out of the southern California area. I was also curious about some of the factors that may have led some African American students outside of the local area to attend college.

Credibility / Trustworthiness

Potential threats to the credibility of my study had to do with sample size and generalization. First, one might doubt that the sample size is large enough considering there were only a total of about 300 African American students at WHS. My goal was to survey 30% of the African American enrollment. Expecting inherent challenges with a three-week data collection window – along with students’ academic schedules, extra-curricular activities, and general reliability – I considered it a success to have collected data from 29% of the population (just missing the target by 1%).

The second concern regarding credibility was that findings from WHS may not accurately represent the perceptions or the nature of information that African American students at other urban schools report. WHS was higher-resourced in regard to staff,

facilities, and programs than most other urban schools in the county and state, and, thus findings may be somewhat limited in their transfer value. Additionally, although the WHS African American population percentage were similar to the state's African American student population size, there may be distinct differences in the experiences and perceptions reported by African American students in schools consisting of a majority population of African American students. To address this potential limitation, I needed to avoid overgeneralizing the findings. I also needed to remain grounded in the conceptual framework upon which the research questions were based. I wanted to know what African American students at WHS said about their college preparation experience and how their involvement in action research and the creation of a media piece designed for building efficacy and engagement might offer a helpful solution to low African American four-year college matriculation. Further study with the current design in other school settings would offer a more complete understanding of African American students' perceptions.

Ethical Issues

There were some important ethical issues that I had to keep in mind in order to protect the students involved. First, since I was working with minors, I needed to remain mindful of legal matters and IRB policies. For instance, I obtained signed parental and student consent forms for African American students who desired to be part of the study. Secondly, I maintained propriety and professionalism at all times. My involvement presented a relatively low risk.

In order to protect students from any harm related to the study, I coded the surveys to protect their identities. Also, I expected that some students would share negative responses about specific faculty or staff during the data collection phase of the

study (e.g.: “Counselor Susie Q. never seems to care about what I think. She only tells me what to do.”). To protect faculty or staff members (and the students), I did not share the raw data (especially names) with the action research team. Instead, I shared the findings minus any reference to a specific faculty or staff member. Finally, I ensured the confidentiality of all participants at the beginning portion of each survey (paper and on-line) and focus group interview.

Feedback to Clients

It was my hope that this action research study would produce valuable insights for school staff in their efforts to assist African American students in the college matriculation process. Furthermore, my aim was to provide a model that could lead to a useful source of information for African American students and a product that would assist counselors in their college counseling efforts. Although not part of my research study, I have planned to work with the action research team to shoot the video to present to other African American student groups on campus. Finally, I have arranged to provide recommendations to the site’s administration that I believe, based on the findings, could enhance counseling efforts – especially with African American students.

Summary

This study was not about assigning blame to staff for lower African American college matriculation. Rather, it was about learning what African American students at WHS had and perceived that they needed in order to matriculate into four-year colleges. Furthermore, this study was also about involving African American students in the action research process to discover greater efficacy and a possible solution to the problem through video media. Since this study inherently involved the nature and effectiveness of the school’s efforts to serve African American students, it was important that site

administration and staff maintain openness to the findings. Furthermore, as a fellow-stakeholder and partner-educator in the district, I shared our district's goal to narrow the achievement gaps and boost achievement for all students. This study could have a positive impact toward that goal as it relates to the district's efforts with African American students. Finally, it was my hope that the study would provide a means for assisting counselors in doing their jobs.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this chapter I present qualitative data from 111 surveys of African American students and alumni as well as interviews with ten students and five alumni of Westside High School. I also provide data taken from five meetings with an action research team made up of seven African American students from the research site. The fifth action research team meeting also included pre and post questionnaires completed by nine other African American students of WHS. Finally, I include some data from field notes taken from interactions with counselors and administrators.

The purpose of the surveys, focus groups, and interviews was to learn what information African American students at WHS have and need to receive from the school that could lead to direct enrollment in four-year universities upon high school graduation. Such information was vital in addressing the problem of disproportionately low African American direct matriculation into four-year postsecondary institutions. I used the theoretical frameworks of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), Efficacy and Engagement (Boden, 2011) and Critical Race Theory (Freeman, 1997; Hill, 2008; Mohammad, 2008) as my primary lenses to analyze the data.

Survey and interview responses and field notes allowed me to investigate African American students' perspectives, as well as their college knowledge in a school with above average resources, yet whose Black student population fares no better in direct four-year college eligibility than the state or national average. The questions guiding this research were as follows:

1. What information do African American high school students report to possess that will help them matriculate into four-year institutions?
2. What assistance do African American high school students perceive that they need from school counselors and staff in order to matriculate directly into four-year institutions?
3. What content and format do African American students say should characterize a video designed to inform them of the advantages of matriculating directly into four-year institutions?
4. How effective, if at all, was the script at increasing the college knowledge of African American high school students?

Ethnography of the Site

As highlighted in chapters one and three, WHS was a large, urban school (over 3000 students) in the Los Angeles area within the Marva Beck Unified School District. According to the American Community Study (2008-2012), the research site was located in a community in which the median household income was over \$11,000 higher than the state of California's median household income. Moreover, 61% of the community had an annual household income beyond \$75,000.

The racial make-up was 41% White, 36% Latino, 9% African American, 7% Asian, 5% two or more races, and 2% other races. A large portion of the African American population qualified for free or reduced lunches according to the site's self-reported 2010 data. Of the total population of free and reduced lunches (30% of the total population), 16% of these students are identified as African American. However, 45% of the total African American population received free or reduced lunch.

Overall, WHS could be considered an above average school in academic performance and student achievement. The site had an API⁸ score of over 800 meeting the State of California's API goal for all schools. The site exceeded its 2012-13 growth target for the "Black or African American" subgroup (California Department of Education, n.d.). The site reports a daily attendance rate of 95%. According to 2012 CDE data, the site had a truancy rate of 2.2% compared to the county's rate (32%) and the state's rate (29%). The CDE also reported that the site's suspension rate (5.9%) was slightly higher than the county (4.4%) and roughly the same as the state's rate (5.7%). Additionally, the California Department of Education (2011) reported that WHS had a graduation rate of over 90% school wide, with African American students showing the highest rate of graduation (96%). The majority of WHS students (77%) graduate having completed the course requirements ("A-G" courses) for admission into California's four-year institutions. However, the A-G completion rate among African American students was low and disproportionate to other subgroups. The African American graduate population showed the lowest rate (51%) among all races at WHS for completing the A-G courses required by the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) systems.

African American students at WHS fared better in A-G course completion compared to the rates for African American students at the county and state levels. The African American "UC/CSU course completion" rate was slightly higher than the site's

⁸ The Academic Performance Index (API) was created by the California State Department of Education in 1999 to gauge schools' year-to-year improvement in student achievement in the areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The index combines scores from schools' standardized tests into a single score ranging from 200 to 1000. Higher API scores generally indicate higher achievement on standardized tests.

county rate (49%) and the State of California African American rate (33%). Although African American students achieved greater A-G completion rates than the county and state, the margin of percentage difference (2% higher than the county and 18% higher than the state) was not as high as it was for Whites and Asians at WHS. The A-G completion rate for White students at WHS was 82% (29% higher than the county and 37% higher than the state's rate for White students). For Asian students at WHS the A-G completion rate was 92% (26% higher than the county and 29% higher than the state's rate for Asian students).

WHS generally promoted a college-sending culture. Remedial courses had been eliminated and the base level offerings for all courses began at the "college prep" level. The next level was "honors", and then "advanced prep". Furthermore, students were divided into small learning communities (SLCs) with separate principals and supporting staff. Each SLC tended to promote college-going with college signs and banners, college inspiration activities, and posters highlighting students who had been recently accepted to colleges.

The site's counseling staff consisted of ten advisors and two college counselors. Advisors were split up between the SLCs and were assigned two grade levels of students. College counselors were housed separately in the College Counseling Center – a space that was decorated with college banners and inspirational posters geared to motivate students toward college enrollment. The center also had plenty of informational flyers about financial aid, specific colleges, steps involved in various college-related processes, seminars, and deadlines. The center was divided into four distinct areas: private offices for the college counselors, a computer area students' college-related usage, an open area

with chairs for informational and recruitment seminars, and a large adjacent room for more private meetings or seminars.

In regard to the counseling duties, advisors were primarily responsible for course enrollment and general advisement while the college counselors were responsible for assisting students with the college choice and application process. WHS provided a hopeful example of counselor resolve and commitment, but at the same time, a consistent reminder of the “ratio/access” problem at hand both nationally and statewide. The school had a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:360 - more favorable than the national or state averages, yet 44% higher than the ASCA recommendation. Even though WHS had above average counseling services, their challenges were similar to most schools nationally. For instance, school administration expected each of its five counselors to have meetings with every student and his/her family about college planning. However, according to one advisor, she and the other counselors only achieved this through great sacrifice of personal time and energy on a daily basis outside of school hours. She also mentioned that other aspects of her job, such as paperwork and balancing classes, took up much of their time, leaving even less time to impart college knowledge to the students. Furthermore, even though the school had a college counseling center, the advisors assumed the task of inspiring students about college, explaining opportunities, and life-outcomes.

Demographics of Survey Respondents

I surveyed 92 students (29% of the total sample population) at the site whose families identified them as African American. Respondents covered all grade levels (Freshmen, 17%; Sophomores, 32%; Juniors, 25%; Seniors, 26%). Of 86 respondents,

females (52%) slightly outnumbered males (48%). In order to triangulate the data, I sent similar online surveys to 25 African American alumni of WHS who had enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 16 months of their high school graduation. Nineteen alumni completed the survey. Twelve respondents reported being enrolled in four-year institutions; five were enrolled in a community college; two students did not report their status. Most (17) alumni students reported being enrolled full-time while two alumni declined to report their enrollment status. A more pronounced gender gap was seen in alumni respondents (N=16) than in students who responded. 75% of alumni respondents were female, while 25% of alumni respondents were male.

Demographics of Interviewees

In addition to surveys, I conducted interviews with students and alumni. Specifically, I held a group interview with ten students (five freshmen, two sophomores, and three seniors); a group interview with two local community college students; three individual interviews (two students attending local four-year universities, and one attending a local community college. In all, I conducted 15 interviews (ten students, five alumni). Finally, the action research team had four meetings. Its members included six students (one freshman, one sophomore, two junior, and two seniors), one college counselor (session three only), and myself. Finally, the panel of students who were brought in for the script evaluation consisted of nine students (one freshman, one sophomore, four juniors, and three seniors).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

As a pre-step to data collection, I developed survey questions to thematically address each research question in light of the theories that have framed this study. After coding consent documents and surveys that I received from student survey respondents, I

manually inputted the responses into the online program in which the survey was produced. In order to maintain a reference, I coded the paper surveys to match the date code given by the online program. The same program automatically recorded the alumni responses and the corresponding date of completion; however, no identifying code was assigned to alumni surveys. I used the online program to produce descriptive statistics for each sample. For the interviews and meetings, I audio recorded each session with two devices and took written notes as well. Then, I sent audio notes out for transcription by two independent services. From there, I copied and distributed the transcribed data into thematic categories aforementioned in the relevant literature (e.g.: community cultural wealth, college knowledge, importance of counselors, etc.). I used these categories to identify common themes like “pushed by familial forces”, “peer advice”, and “social network”. Ultimately, I synthesized the themes into the following eight findings:

1. Students possessed college information in the forms of aspirational, familial, and social capital.
2. Students possessed knowledge of *distinctions* and *procedures* as well as *navigational capital* pertaining to how students may matriculate to four-year institutions.
3. Students possessed knowledge of the value of counselors, but a gap existed concerning their utilization of college counselors.
4. Students perceived a need for greater urgency in imparting college knowledge.
5. Students perceived a need for greater engagement through culturally responsive approaches.
6. Students perceived a need for a clearer message of efficacy.
7. Students were passionate about efficacy and college fit.
8. The script-making *process* provided a dynamic opportunity to pass along college knowledge.

In the remainder of the chapter, I address the four research questions through the data emerged from the survey and interview responses as well as the script creation and evaluation accomplished through the action research team. I conclude by discussing the *Deepened and Unexpected Learning* that emerged from the metacognition produced by

the action research process itself. Since it has important implications for students and staff, it is worthy of discussion.

Research Question #1: What information do African American high school students report to possess that will help them matriculate into four-year institutions?

To find answers to this question, I administered the survey instruments and interview protocols (see Appendices G-J) for students and alumni. I wanted to begin my collection by first learning what students' postsecondary hopes and plans were and then finding out what information or capital they might have that could help them get to four-year postsecondary institutions. The first question on the student survey (Appendix G) was designed to learn what students' postsecondary plans were. Sixty-nine percent (N=86) of students reported their intention to matriculate directly from high school into a four-year postsecondary institution. By contrast, 22% of students reported an intention to attend a community college and then transfer to a four-year institution. Similarly, question four on the alumni survey (Appendix H) asked alumni students (N=17) to report on their aspirations for attending four-year institutions, community college, and technical schools and when those aspirations developed. Ninety-three percent (N=15) reported plans for attending four-year institutions; 81% of those students developed those aspirations prior to entering high school. Three alumni planned to attend community college and all three of those students reported that this plan developed in high school. None of the respondents reported plans for technical schools or "other" choices.

During the interviews students and alumni offered vivid examples of their postsecondary desires as they reasoned that college was a means to greater success. Gia, a senior at WHS reported:

“I’m the only one in my household that’s ever going to college, and the way that my family’s living right now isn’t really positive, so I know the only other way I could get a positive outcome out of my life is if I get an education.”

Renee, an alumna currently attending a university, continued this narrative by sharing her own challenges of being raised by a single mother. When Renee’s mother became pregnant with her, she dropped out of college. Since then, her mother has struggled to make ends meet as she went back to college to earn a degree while Renee was in middle school. Although they had struggled financially all of her life, Renee developed high aspirations for a four-year degree and maintained them thanks to the example and explicit information from her mother.

“I knew it since middle school that I was going to go (to a four-year school). And my mom and I always kept it in the forefront of my mind, because she said, ‘It starts now. You have to think about it early.’”

Renee enrolled at the four-year college of her choice in hopes to make her mother proud and build a more stable financial future.

I also asked current African American students why they thought more of their peers were not making it directly into four-year institutions. Students cited a *lack* of aspiration by many of their peers. According to Darlena, a WHS freshman, “...most of them don’t try to aim higher or they don’t expect a lot for themselves.” Sophomore student DeShawn agreed: “I feel like they don’t have the motivation or ambition to go to college.”

Other students echoed this sentiment, but added that many African American students were lacking *encouragement* to aspire to college. Charon, a freshman at WHS, said that many African American students believed they could not make it to four-year

colleges because of the high costs involved. Furthermore, she said, “no one is really pushing them to strive.” Vincent, a sophomore, cited family and environmental factors: *“Because they grew up with family members that didn’t go to college and they grew up in the hood so they’re not expected to go and don’t really care.”*

Vincent’s beliefs were not completely in sync with the data from the student surveys. When I asked students to report the highest level of education attained by a member of their household 18 years or older (Appendix G, Q18), 46% of the responses reflected baccalaureate degrees or higher. Thirteen percent were categorized as unknown; 21% reflected high school diplomas or equivalency certificates; nine percent reflected associate degrees (community colleges); and seven percent reflected technical school certificates. Additionally, interview responses showed evidence of familial capital that helps to propel African American students toward four-year colleges.

Personal Attributes

After finding out what students hopes and plans were after graduation, I wanted to know what kind of personal attributes and family support they had since Yosso (2005) spoke of the importance of students’ cultural wealth in helping them matriculate to postsecondary institutions. *Appendix P* reports on question three on the student survey and shows students’ perceptions (N=88) about the effectiveness of their immediate family’s efforts in five areas that are important to four-year college enrollment (inspiration, course planning, college selection, completing applications, and navigating the financial process). Students reported the highest area of effectiveness as being “inspiring (their children) to go to college”. Seventy-four percent of students responded in this area that their family’s efforts were “extremely effective”. This may provide some

insight to the fact that 68% of students responded that they expect to enroll directly in a four-year school after high school graduation. Although the majority of students rated their family's efforts in each area as "extremely effective", the remaining four areas showed broader distribution. *Appendix Q* illustrates survey responses of alumni students (N=14) for the same question (number 11 on the alumni survey). Alumni responses followed the students' trend for each rated area for the most part. Sixty-four percent of alumni responded that their family members were "extremely effective" at inspiring them to go to college. However, regarding the financial aid process, alumni reported a slightly lower rating of "very effective". The students that I interviewed agreed with the survey responses. Six of the students specifically reported being pushed toward college by their parents. Of those students, three of them have parents who had not attended or completed college degrees. For instance, Vincent's parents did not attend college and they did not know (according to Vincent) how to help him get there. Yet, they were insistent that he attend a university (four-year college) and become a doctor or lawyer. Eve, a freshman, had parents who were also pushing her toward a four-year college. However, they encouraged her to figure out what she wants to do when she gets there. By contrast, (senior) Karon's parents and stepparents *did* attend college and attained postsecondary degrees. Like others, she gained the notion that college was the "only way to go". Her comments introduced evidence of the passing along of capital in the form of college knowledge learned by her parents. "They all push me to go to college and talk to me about what I want to do and how to get there."

These stories showed parental expectations for their children to attend college as a means to success. (Alumni) Tori's statement offered insight into the saliency of parents'

expectations for their children and the power of that influence on their children's decision-making regarding college.

“My mom made it very clear that I had to go to college, whether that was community or four-year, it didn't matter, I had to go to college. It was not an option to not go to college.... Also, with me, my mom or dad didn't go to college, so they both were like, 'No. You have to go to college.' It was important that I would be the one to go to college.”

Perhaps no one's story of this parental influence was illustrated as clearly as in the case of Jasmine, an alumni of WHS currently attending a community college. Although she aspired to go directly to a four-year college on the east coast, her mother did not want her to attend a school faraway. Instead, her mother reasoned with her to stay and attend the local community college where she could receive services and accommodations for her special academic needs. Though a painful decision, Jasmine decided to forgo the direct route to four-year institutions and to trust her mother's academic information.

Siblings were also influential members of the family who provide valuable college-going information to students. Nicole (alumni) is currently a senior at a four-year college who took the community college route. She claimed that when she was a student at WHS she made some mistakes related to course selection, rigor, GPA, and qualifying exams. She vowed to train and guide her younger brother who is now a senior at WHS. She made sure that he enrolled in advanced placement and honor classes, continued taking extra math courses in his senior year all the way to physics, and completed the SAT and ACT exams. “I kind of catered his high school career so that he would have a better chance to get into better schools,” Nicole says.

As defined, familial capital is not confined to blood relatives. It also extends into the African American community and friends. Student survey data showed that most

students generally agreed with the notion of community members and friends providing them with support. When asked to respond to the statement that members of the community give support and guidance in students' academic efforts, 33% of students "completely agreed"; 30% "mostly agreed"; 28% slightly agreed; 3% "mostly disagreed"; and 6% "completely disagreed". Furthermore, 78% of students "mostly" or "completely" agreed that their friends support their academic efforts and plans.

The saliency of extended familial influence was also seen in the interviews as students reported being informed about college due to their desire to be connected to their peers and others in their community. Gia, a senior, was on her way to an HBCU (Historically Black College or University) because she "felt good" being around other African American students who were success-driven. By contrast, Renee chose to *not* go to an HBCU because she wanted to be in a more diverse population. Yet, she chose her current school largely because they had a strong African American community, engaging programs in which other peers were involved, and a BSU (Black Student Union) organization similar to the one she was involved in at WHS.

In connection to this theme of community, I observed activities of organizations at WHS in which African American students attended for peer connection and formalized dissemination of college information. One was a talent show to raise funds for BSU activities. African American students worked in conjunction with parent groups to problem-solve and organize the event in order to support the organization. I observed the second event as a chaperone in charge of eleven African American students from WHS to the Black College Expo in the downtown Los Angeles area. Students attended lectures,

took notes, made contacts, collected literature and materials, and interacted with college representatives on-hand.

During the interviews, students cited coaches, teachers, peers, administrators, and counselors as valuable assets in helping them to navigate through barriers, challenges, and instances where students may otherwise lack college information.

Renee took the initiative to meet Mr. Mathews, a key African American administrator at the college she visited as part of a high school field trip. Mr. Mathews gave her his business card and told her to contact him if she was serious about applying. She contacted him during her junior year. Renee recalled:

“I met with him multiple times to review my application, to talk about what would be the best way for going about applying for the school and what major, and he really helped me with financial aid, he helped me with the common app, he helped me with trying to look my best, look competitive for LMU, looked at my resume, and he was really instrumental”

Eve aspired to own her own business someday, so her network (family friends) informed her that majoring in business would be the best route toward her goal. DeShawn cited his athletics coach as a chief resource. Darlena named her school counselor and her English teacher as the members of her network that help her. Jasmine’s network included her two English teachers who helped her in writing. Specifically, one teacher explained to her the expectations of college professors in regard to college level writing.

College distinctions

Interviews with students and alumni revealed that African American students understand some of the distinctions between community colleges and four-year schools. Furthermore, students had a general understanding of the procedure in which one matriculates into a four-year postsecondary institution. Students recognized that

community colleges were less expensive and had smaller class sizes than most four-year colleges and universities. They also interpreted that transitioning from high school to community college would be less challenging than transitioning from high school directly to four-year schools. Tori attended a community college and said that she chose her school because it was least expensive. “The transition is easier instead of just going to a four-year, which could be a way bigger transition,” she said. “The class sizes are way bigger at a four-year.”

Students also interpreted community college to be a default for those who either could not afford tuition at a four-year institution or could not academically qualify for enrollment at a four-year school. Furthermore, students believed community college to be a viable option for the student who wanted to be closer to home or who may lack confidence in immediately attending a four-year school.

Still, one alumnus, Renee shared a different view. She was reluctant to say anything negative about community colleges because she, too, recognized that they are a viable option for some students. However, she felt that it would be more beneficial for students to go directly to a four-year institution if they had the opportunity. She said:

Nowadays, I've heard even the classes (at community colleges) are so impacted because of budget cuts that some people aren't able to graduate in the two year timeframe they were expecting and I feel that when you come to a four-year institution, the counselors, the programming they have, everybody, even financial aid, they make it possible that you get out in those four years—that you go and leave with the tools to go into the profession you desire.

Renee's insight agreed with the current research concerning the low transfer rates that exist from community colleges to four-year schools.

Procedural College Knowledge

In the interviews, I asked participants what they would tell another African American student in order to help them enroll directly in a four-year college. Senior, Karon, wanted students to begin by believing that there is a college out there for *everyone* and that all can go to a college. Eve shared that freshmen should find their passion, consider their career interests, and then begin looking at colleges that offer majors to match their interests. “If you figure out what you want to do earlier,” she said. “It’s easy to figure out what college you want to go to, what you want your major to be, and it makes your whole process easier in the long run.” Aaliyah, Darlena, and DeShawn advised students to excel academically by managing time well, complete all assignments, enroll in advanced placement courses, earn “good” grades (DeShawn qualifies “good” as at least a 2.7 grade point average), and take qualifying tests (ACT and SAT) multiple times. All students imagined themselves speaking to freshmen.

As discussed in chapter two, the “A-G” courses are an important factor in matriculating to four-year institutions. When I asked students about their familiarity with the A-G requirements, survey data (N=87) showed that 30% were “very familiar”, 32% were “somewhat familiar”, and 38% were unfamiliar. I sensed from the surveys that students may not have recognized the term “A-G” as being the widely used term by schools for the set of courses most four-year institutions require for enrollment. So I asked interviewees if they understood the requirements to enroll in a four-year school upon high school graduation. Of seven students who reported, five students were freshmen, one was a sophomore, and the other a senior. The sophomore and senior students were confident that they understood the requirements. Of the five freshmen, two students “kind of” knew the requirements; one “need(ed) to know them better”; one “did

not” know them. While each respondent’s earlier advice was focused on freshmen, only one freshmen student, Eve, reported to understand the requirements toward four-year college enrollment. She, furthermore, shared that she had heard WHS’s requirements for graduation often exceeded what most four-year institutions require.

Self-Advocation

Alumni students did not disagree with students’ procedural knowledge about how to make it to four-year colleges, but they emphasized more *self-advocating* knowledge they learned by personal experience. Boden (2011) may refer to this as *personal impetus*. Renee offered that once African American students become passionate about what they want, they will “make things happen to make it a reality.” An exchange between Jasmine and Tori illustrate the resiliency and “bootstrap” sentiment that the alumni students added to the body of college knowledge among African American students interviewed.

Jasmine:

You can’t depend on anyone when it comes to yourself. Nobody knows what you want. Nobody knows what you want to do. Only you know that. You just need to take that and make it a reality for you. You need to make something happen for you, because only you know how successful you want to be in life. So you push yourself and you hold yourself accountable for the things you do and the grades you want to get and the work that you produce, you’ll be a better student and you’ll succeed.

Tori:

But don’t expect anyone to help you. Don’t expect anyone to do anything for you. Don’t expect that... First, I would tell them to take APs, because even if a counselor says, “No, you’re not going to do good,” take it anyway. Because I never got the opportunity to do that. I never got to take an AP. And then I would tell them to apply to four-years, no matter what. Even if you don’t think you’re going to get in, apply. Because I didn’t even apply.

Here, the alumni expressions could very well be categorized as *navigational capital* since they described self-empowering means to navigate through a system or environment that may disadvantage African American students.

Survey responses for students appeared to back up the notion that WHS African American students possessed navigational capital. For instance, 89% of students “completely agree(d)” or “mostly agree(d)” that they overcome racial, gender, and economic barriers. Additionally, 68% of students “completely agree(d)” or “mostly agree(d)” that they quickly recover from tough situations, while 28% “slightly agree(d)”.

Utilizing Counselors

In general, students spoke positively about the site’s publicized desire for all students to go to college. Seventy-two percent of students either mostly or completely agreed that the site expects all students to go to college; 86% either mostly or completely agreed that the site tries to inspire all students to go to college. However, the data suggest a discrepancy related to African American students’ perceived knowledge of the counselors’ value and the frequency in which the students utilized⁹ them.

Students and alumni were able to articulate the importance of counselors – especially college counselors – and their role in helping African American students get to four-year schools after high school. Survey data from students agreed with the research that says counselors are instrumental in helping students make it to college. Students reported a “high need” for counselors’ assistance with *communicating college information* (63%; N=86), *course planning* (51%; N=87), and *filling out applications for admissions* (48%; N=87). Students had more varied perceptions of need for counselors’ help in *choosing a college* and *completing financial aid applications*. I asked alumni (N=15) to rate how effective they perceived WHS’s counseling staff to be in many of

⁹ By “utilization” of counselors, I am referring to students making appointments with counselors and following through by meeting with them in order to access college knowledge.

these areas. *Table 4.1* shows that alumni perceptions of counselor effectiveness at WHS were slightly lower than the students' perceptions.

Table 4.1: Alumni Perception of WHS Counselor Effectiveness

	Extremely Effective	Very Effective	Moderately Effective	Slightly Effective	Not at all Effective	TOTAL
Developing College-going aspirations	20% 3	27% 4	33% 5	13% 2	7% 1	15
Course planning and selection	7% 1	40% 6	33% 5	7% 1	13% 2	15
College selection	7% 1	53% 8	27% 4	7% 1	7% 1	15
Guidance in completing college applications	20% 3	40% 6	33% 5	0% 0	7% 1	15
Financial aid process	20% 3	27% 4	47% 7	0% 0	7% 1	15

Although students knew the value of counselors in regard to college matriculation, a “utilization gap” existed between African American students’ perceived knowledge of the *value* of college counselors and their *utilization* of the college counselors as a college-going resource. *Appendix R* shows how often students reported meeting with their college counselor for each academic year up to the present. These data show a high rate among freshmen for students who had never met with their college counselor. The rate decreased from sophomore to senior years. Of students who reported for their freshman year (N=84), 73% said they never met with their college counselor. For their sophomore year (N=79), 57% said they never met with their college counselor. For their junior year (N=69), 26% said they never met with their college counselor. For their senior year (N=57), 12% said they never met with their college counselor.

Alumni students report similar data in their survey. Out of 14 alumni who

reported for their high school freshman year, 11 students (79%) said they never met with their college counselor. Out of 14 alumni who reported for their high school sophomore year, nine students (64%) said they never met with their college counselor. Out of 15 alumni who reported for their high school junior year, four (27%) said they never met with their college counselor. Out of 16 alumni who reported for their high school senior year, one (6%) said he or she never met with his or her college counselor.

Adding to the gap was the issue students not knowing counseling personnel. As discussed in chapters one and three, the site provides students with advisors *and* college counselors who operate as part of one counseling department. According to the site, advisors generally help students plan their schedules, while college counselors generally guide students through the college application process. In the survey, I asked students if they knew their college counselor. Forty-nine percent of current African American students (N=87) reported that they knew who their college counselor was. However, 51% of African American students did *not* know their college counselor.

For the interviews, I wanted to explore if students recognized the distinction between the advisors and the college counselors. Nine of the ten students who responded in the interviews said that they knew the difference between their advisors and the college counselors.

Findings, thus far, have reported the information in the various forms of cultural wealth that African American students at WHS *possessed* that can lead to successful matriculation into four-year postsecondary institutions. However, African American students and alumni also reported vital information about the assistance they perceived to *need* from counselors and staff. In answering research question two, I present students'

and alumni's perceived needs for more culturally responsive engagement and urgency by counselors, and increased support in raising African American students' sense of efficacy. However, in chapter five, I will discuss how their perceived needs may explain the apparent "utilization gap".

Research Question #2: *What assistance do African American high school students perceive that they need from school counselors and staff in order to matriculate directly into four-year institutions?*

I continued with the same data collection instruments in order to answer research question two. Interview questions six through nine on the student and alumni focus group protocols (Appendices I and J) were particularly key in helping to identify students perceived needs of the site in order to matriculate directly to four-year postsecondary institutions. Students perceived that they needed school counselors and staff to provide more urgent outreach, culturally responsive approaches, and efficacy-building among African American students.

Earlier College Planning

Students and alumni perceived a need for greater urgency by the WHS staff and counselors in imparting college knowledge information to African American students. A common sentiment among alumni was the regret they had as students for not having college plans sooner. Specifically, alumni often wished they had begun their formal college planning during their freshman year by visiting their college counselor. At the same time, students and alumni shared their desire to see WHS counseling staff take greater initiative to reach out to African American students earlier. Regarding the frequency of the students' meetings with the college counselors, interview responses from students and alumni underscored the survey data and reported on students' need for

college information from counselors sooner rather than later. As previously mentioned, nine of ten students I interviewed knew the *distinction* between the advisors and the college counselors. However, six of the eight students who responded here did not know *who* their college counselor was and, hence, had not met with their college counselor. Five of those students were freshmen; one was a sophomore. The remaining two students of the eight respondents were seniors – both of whom knew who their college counselors were *and* had met with them. However, both seniors reported that they found out who their college counselor was toward the close of their junior year. Gia shared, “*our college counselors that are on campus like they don’t really start informing you or anything until your senior year. ...I didn’t meet my college counselor until like the end of junior year.*”

Karon shared being overwhelmed:

“Similar to Gia, I found that at the end of last year. We had a big meeting, and they kind of threw all this information at you and it was really overwhelming. Then, coming to senior year, in the very beginning, you didn’t really think about it. Then come time first semester was about to end, they had another meeting telling you all the deadlines, and everything was within like a month, and it was crunch time, and we didn’t really know what to do.”

The lack of African American freshmen involvement at the college counseling center may have been due to WHS’s general policy. One counselor reported that the college counselors generally do not begin seeing students until their *sophomore* year. Therefore, it traditionally has been left up to the individual college counselors to accept or delay an appointment with freshmen who wished to begin formal college planning sessions in the College Counseling Center. Perhaps related to this policy was Gia’s belief that the college counselors could not focus one-on-one with anyone *but* seniors because

the counselors were outnumbered and overwhelmed by the large population of students at WHS.

However, regarding counseling staff's outreach to African American students, one freshman student took a more critical view. Vincent, a freshman, said that he did not think that counselors at WHS offer help to African American students in any way because he had not heard of any of his African American peers gaining any special assistance. He believed that the counselors did not focus specifically on African American students at WHS because the African American population was small (9%) in comparison to the rest of the student body. Other students were less inclined to take such a view. Instead, they viewed the lack of African American-to-counselor interaction as an issue of African American students not taking the initiative to meet with the counseling staff regarding college planning. (WHS alumni) Jasmine's story supported students' theory in part. She believed that the college counselors had the tools students needed and wanted to see students successfully transition into college. However, Jasmine believed that she began using them (college counselors) too late. Tori agreed. They both regretted not having visited the college counseling center during their freshmen year. Furthermore, they believed their college transition would have been more favorable had they begun meeting with their college counselor sooner. Although Jasmine and Tori took responsibility for not going to the college counseling center earlier, they also lamented that the college counseling staff did not, in their opinion, play a more active role in recruiting African American students into the College Counseling Center. They believed college counselors should have held a seminar specifically for freshmen. "Something more than just 'go to the college center'," they urged.

Additionally, interviewees believed that the counselors (and some students) did not want to single out African American students in a negative way. For instance, freshman student, Charon, defended the counseling staff. “I think they want to make it seem more equal, like they’re giving the same treatment as any other different race,” she said. “I think it’s a positive thing so we can feel more like a part of society.” Karon, a senior, countered this sentiment accordingly:

“Being admitted to colleges is becoming or is a problem for African-American students, and as shown through test scores at our school, I feel as if our counselors should take special interest in this group of students—and not in a way that would single them out and isolate them, but maybe reaching out in a way like sending out call slips or making it more available and known to the African-American student population that the option to come and talk about the future is here, and not feel like there’s nothing that they can do, and I feel like our counselors here don’t really do that and they only focus on the students sometimes that have higher GPAs or come in more often. I think it needs to be a little bit more widespread. Their focus needs to be spread out a little more.”

WHS senior, Jalen, and alumni, Jasmine, shared a perception that not only college counselors at WHS were lacking focus for African American students’ college-going plight, but that the school’s administration was also lacking focus for African American students’ academic priorities. Both respondents believed that the school over encouraged participation in social and athletic events (e.g.: pep rallies and basketball games) to the point where many African American students have lost sight of academic goals. Additionally, Jasmine believed that the school, during her time at WHS, did not do enough to make college an exciting concept for African American students. She expressed that had they (the school) made college more exciting (to African American students), she would have gone to the College Counseling Center sooner.

The students' responses reflected the desire that the alumni and students – especially senior students with greater experience – had to see more urgency among the site's staff and counselors for the postsecondary futures of African American students. Furthermore, the responses showed the students' perceived need for college counseling assistance in their freshmen year.

I specifically asked students and alumni what the counseling staff at WHS could do to help more African American students matriculate directly to four-year postsecondary institutions (Appendices I and J, question eight). African American students responded with perceptions of need for the staff to provide culturally responsive assistance in the form of: 1) promoting HBCUs; 2) providing specific African American guides; and 3) partnering with community-based organizations.

Promoting HBCUs

Students wanted the counseling staff to promote Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Students believed that the school and the counseling staff had a propensity for promoting big colleges and universities. However, African American students reported never hearing of HBCUs or seeing any literature promoting HBCUs around the campus or in the College Counseling Center. The site's calendar of college visits to the College Counseling Center for 2013-14 appears to support the students' report. Of the 115 institutions scheduled, none were considered HBCUs. Students believed that if the school promoted HBCUs, African American students would have a better chance of learning about HBCUs. Furthermore, students believed that the school would boost engagement among African American students and drive more African American student traffic into the center if they promoted HBCUs. Eve asserted that if counselors advertised HBCUs, African American students would feel more welcomed

and attracted to the center, and, in turn, students would find it easier to ask for college-going assistance from the college counselors.

Providing Guides

Students and alumni also perceived the need for the site to bring in more African Americans to serve in specific roles as guides. Namely, students mentioned the need for an African American counselor. Interviewees believed that African American students could better relate to and be more encouraged by the guidance of an African American provider. DeShawn added his belief that an African American counselor would also be more alert to and informed about financial aid opportunities for African American students.

Furthermore, respondents also perceived the importance of bringing recently graduated African American alumni who have earned college degrees (or who are currently in college) back to WHS to lead seminars and share their insights with African American students. Notably, Melvin, an alumnus currently attending a community college, said that the returning alumni could inspire the students with what they have gone through to be successful.

Partnering with community-based organizations

Jalen urged another form of culturally responsive guidance. He perceived the need for the site to strategically partner with community-based organizations that demonstrate success in building college-going capacity among African American students. Specifically, Jalen suggested an organization whose mission is to: 1) boost capacity in caring mentors of African American youth; 2) provide support for said mentors in creating culturally responsive learning environments that engage and inspire African American youth to embrace their natural intelligence and leadership capacities;

and 3) as a result, develop youth who are rooted in their history, responsible, and demonstrate achievement gains and promise to succeed in college, career, and community.

In addition to perceiving a need for WHS staff and counselors to take more culturally responsible approaches, the students also perceived a need for the staff and counselors to provide a clearer message of efficacy for African American students through: 1) providing greater assistance with financial aid, and 2) raising expectations and support. Students claimed that, by WHS staff and counselors boosting their efforts in these two areas, WHS would promote a greater sense among African American students that they *belong* at four-year colleges and that they *can make it* to four-year colleges.

Greater assistance with financial aid / scholarship information

Students were in agreement on their perceived need for greater promotion of financial aid and scholarship information by the counseling staff. Vincent's comments captured the essence of students' perception in this area. He said that he believed many African American students do not push to go to four-year colleges because of the financial burden it may place on their families – especially if they come from a family of lower economic means. “So I think there should be people to talk about scholarships and how to get them, because that would help,” he claimed.

Nicole echoed this notion as she mentioned that, had she known about the availability of funds, she would have gone directly to a four-year college instead of to a community college first. She said that the school should know or find out students' economic status to determine each student's financial need for college and narrow down colleges that could be “financially tailored” for them. From there, she charged that the school should offer workshops to teach students how to get financial aid. She said:

“Definitely workshops. I feel like we never had that. Like them sitting us down and showing ‘this is how you do this.’ It’s like: ‘we’re high school students. We don’t know what to do... I feel like it was just ‘go figure it out yourselves.’ I would definitely do a lot more workshops.”

Eve agreed and believed that it was the school’s responsibility to produce greater hope in students that they could make it to four-year colleges. Eve thought that one way to help students have greater hope was to teach them how to find money for college. She asserted that if African American students knew more about financial opportunities for college-going, they would be more apt come to the College Counseling Center and get help.

Eve also assured, “there are scholarships for everything, like there are scholarships for people with blue eyes. There are scholarships for just African-American students.” Karon added that there are scholarships specifically for students of multi-racial backgrounds. However, Renee pointed out that, although the counseling staff does the best they can, they generally post information about scholarships of which they are familiar. Moreover, she claimed that there are many scholarships that go unawarded simply because students do not know about them and, therefore, do not apply.

Even though students may learn that funds exist for their college tuition, Karon and Renee both expressed the need for easier access to the applications. Students described being overwhelmed with the process of finding financial aid. Karon shared that it took her two weeks of navigation through websites to research the scholarship information. She further said that her search cost her valuable time she should have been spending on applying to other colleges. Hence, she claimed that the process was harder than it needed to be and that the process could be fixed in some way. Renee’s comment

offered a solution: “If there was an opportunity to make accounts for different scholarships engines and how to go about applying for these (scholarships), that would have been nice.” As it was for Renee, she applied for the scholarships that the counselors posted on the bulletin board in the college counseling office that were local and that the high school promoted. But when it came to outside scholarships she felt too overwhelmed to apply for them.

Increased expectations and support

Students and alumni also perceived a need for WHS staff and counselors to raise their expectations and support for African American students. Specifically, interviewees believed that the lack of African Americans in advanced placement courses was at least in part due to teachers and counselors sharing lower expectations for African American achievement and a general lack of support for students who aspired toward success in such rigorous courses.

Even though course selection at WHS is generally regarded as a student’s choice, students and alumni reported that counselors (advisors) often subtly channel African Americans away from taking advanced placement courses. Jasmine recounted her experience trying to enroll in an AP course with her advisor. Her advisor’s response was “are you sure you want to do that?” She thought to herself:

“Well, I came out of my way to tell you that I wanted to take an AP class. I didn’t think there was any uncertainty in my voice or the way I said it. I want to take an AP class, and I know the benefit of being in AP classes toward college.”

As she explained it, African American students reported that they have come in (to their advisors’ offices) with the intention of enrolling in an AP course, but somehow were made by the advisor to doubt their abilities, and so emerged from the meeting with

enrollment in a less rigorous course. “They kind of turn it around to make it sound like it was your idea,” Jasmine said. Tori reported that her experience with her advisor had a similar outcome with a less-than-subtle approach. “(My advisor) was just kind of like, ‘No.’ I don’t know if it went just like that, like a *flat-out* ‘no’, but I got rejected.” Melvin agreed with Tori and Jasmine, but added that he believed some counselors had a predetermined notion of which student would go to college and which would not. When I asked these students why they thought there were so few African American students enrolled in AP courses, Jasmine’s response was: “If they (advisors) discouraged as many white students as they did black, there would be more black students in the AP classes.”

As passionate as these students were about perceived counselor interference in African American students enrolling in AP courses, students, alumni, and counselors also reported on instances of African American students *unenrolling* in rigorous courses or steering clear of such courses in order to have an easier load. According to these reports, students and their parents often reasoned that an easier course load would make it easier to boost their child’s GPA, which, in turn would make him/her look more competitive on college applications. One college counselor disagreed with this line of reason and pointed out that colleges looked for students to challenge themselves and go the extra mile by continuing to take “hard” classes during their senior year.

Students recognized that expectations, alone, would not be helpful. In fact, they perceived that there were staff members who express high expectations for achievement, but may lack the capacity or desire to couple their expectations with adequate support of African American students to better ensure their success.

Gia asserted:

“Besides the help of coaches I feel like no one really aims to help us get to a four-year. They pretty much treat us all the same. They give us requirements and expect us to meet them if we are trying to go to a four-year.”

Karon claimed to have visited her counselor’s office multiple times to get help figuring out what college would be the best fit for her and where she should apply. She perceived her counselor to have a propensity toward focusing on her statistics and grades rather than regarding the “whole picture”, or her character and background. She believed that it would be helpful for counselors to take a more holistic view of African American students (rather than just focusing on their grades and school performance) when offering support.

Students also charged teachers to raise their expectations. They perceived that teachers of non-AP courses often did not expect the higher level thinking that teachers of AP courses expected. Hence when African American students *did* enroll in AP courses, they were often shocked by the complexity of thought that AP courses demanded. However, Jasmine shared that she would have appreciated greater support by her AP teacher. She claimed that the materials were not culturally engaging to her, so it was difficult for her to connect with the subject matter. By contrast, she reported that her English teacher took a deeper interest in her and supported her writing development. She claimed that the teacher truthfully shared with her some key tips on college level writing standard and coached her to that standard. Jasmine said that she has done well academically at community college where she has earned a 4.0 GPA and has been accepted to the Phi Beta Kappa honor society.

Research Question #3: *What content and format do African American students say should characterize a video designed to inform them of the advantages of matriculating directly into four-year institutions?*

Interview data from current and alumni interviews (Appendices I and J, question ten) showed that students believed that the most important content to include in a video designed to inform their peers about the advantages of direct four-year college matriculation concerned building *efficacy* among African American students. Students interviewed believed it was vital for African American students to have a sense of confidence that they can make it four-year institutions. A close second choice was *finding the “right” college*. Students wanted to educate other peers about some of the schools, namely Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which were, by their perception, rarely mentioned at WHS. Furthermore, they wanted to encourage peers that there is a four-year school for everyone.

Students and alumni shared responses that fell mostly into the realm of student efficacy, that is, a student’s belief that he or she has the ability to successfully reach his or her goals. Words such as “determination”, “confidence”, and “belief” were common in the responses. Students and alumni also shared notions about the power of positive attitude, vision, and effort in their ideas for the script’s content.

Finding the “Right” College

Interviewees also felt strongly about including content related to college fit, that is, students finding colleges that fit their passions and plans. This was where respondents emphasized students’ need to begin with their passions, consider a major that would match their passion, and then find a college that offers that major. (Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice model regards students’ notions here as “college fit”.) Respondents also wanted to use the script as an opportunity to expose their peers to

HBCUs since they perceived the site to be lacking the initiative to expose African American students to such schools.

The action research team was charged with the job of selecting the final content that they would write into the script. I urged them to consider the interview data mentioned previously, the survey data, and literature that I selected as a result of the data collected to that point. I presented the team with excerpts from my literature review and Boden's 2011 article highlighting his thematic framework for academic preparation among first generation Latino students. After an overview of the data and literature, the team debated which content to include in the script. They were divided between focusing on efficacy or college fit (primarily HBCU exposure). Those who wanted to focus on efficacy believed that, without personal confidence, it did not matter what type of school African American students chose. However, those who wanted to focus on college fit argued that proper engagement of African American students using information about HBCUs could lead to greater efficacy. In the end, the team chose to create a script that primarily focused on efficacy, but also included a mention of HBCUs. The team, furthermore, chose to craft the script with Boden's four themes in mind.

Research Question #4: *How effective, if at all, was the script at increasing the college knowledge of African American high school students?*

After the action research team completed the cycles to produce a final script, it was time to test its effectiveness in accordance with research question four. At this point, the team performed a live reading of the script in front of the evaluation panel. The nine students that comprised the evaluation panel took a pre-assessment (see Appendix D) prior to observing the reading of the final script (Appendix F). After the reading, the

same panel of students took the post-assessment (Appendix E) to evaluate the effectiveness of the script. Students were asked on the pre-assessment how much they knew about *efficacy*. Seven students reported having no knowledge of the subject; two students reported having “little knowledge”. All nine students reported an increase in their knowledge of efficacy as a result of listening to the script. Specifically, seven reported having their knowledge increased “quite a bit”, while two reported having their knowledge increased a “little bit”. Students were also asked to report on how effective they believed the script might be at informing *other* African American students about efficacy. All believed that the script would be effective on some level. Seven students reported “quite a bit”; two reported “a little bit”. No one reported that they believed the script would be *ineffective* at informing other African American students about efficacy.

To develop the concept of efficacy, the script included specific information about the importance of (students) pursuing extracurricular passions, time management, getting help from college counselors, HBCUs, and dealing with potential barriers to college matriculation. In the panel’s evaluation of the script for each of these five areas, students reported an increase of knowledge. After hearing the script, eight of nine students reported that the script increased their knowledge of what kind of student colleges seek for admission. Seven of nine students said the script increased their understanding about the importance of time management for a student; the remaining two students had reported in the pre-assessment that they had “quite a bit” of understanding already, hence, this may explain their post-assessment response of “not a bit” (of growth). Five students on the pre-assessment reported to have not met with their college counselors this school year. However, on the post-assessment, all nine said that, as a result of the script, they

would make an appointment with their college counselor *prior* to the end of the present school year. Slightly more students reported to know what HBCUs are than those that did not know. Five students said they knew what an HBCU is while four students claimed not to know. However, in the post-assessment, eight students of the nine claimed that the script increased their knowledge about HBCUs. Six students out of nine reported to be aware of potential barriers toward college matriculation. However, as a result of the script, all nine said they were interested in gaining assistance from various guides like experienced family members, knowledgeable friends, school counselors, and trusted community members.

Since peer engagement and media were part of the theoretical framework for this study, I asked the panel to report on how, if at all, the script would interest or engage African American students. In general, the panel believed that the script and a potential video would engage African American students in preparing for college. One respondent shared, “Kids are very captivated by media. Something like this (script) would be a great way of getting the message across.” Others said that the script got them engaged, was informative, “in (their) language”, and used “things that African American students would say”. Still another claimed that the script would help other African American students overcome common barriers toward college matriculation.

Deepened and Unexpected Learning

The qualitative data from interviews and field notes produced for me some deepened and unexpected understandings related to students’ eagerness and readiness for peer-to-peer guidance and sharing of college knowledge. I found this to be most evident in the creative process experienced through the action research team. As mentioned in

chapter two, action research provides opportunities for inquiry and metacognition (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007). Our experience in the action research process also provided those points of deeper and broadened learning.

Extended and Authentic peer-to-peer guidance

Students on the action research team were engaged and eager to share college information in the form of a script that could lead to a video. In fact, they were so engaged in the creative process that it was not until our fourth session that students clearly realized that their efforts were connected to a research study for a doctorate candidate. They expressed that they thought it was solely a project to help African American students to advance to four-year colleges. Many of the students on the action research team saw their efforts as an extension of what they naturally do – share college information with their peers. For instance, the script's main character, Michael, was based on Jalen, who actually does take the time to guide students and share what he has learned about colleges. Jalen was a campus leader and saw the script as another means to channel his passion for guiding peers.

Throughout the data collection period, I discovered that students authentically share information they have learned from experience or heard from other peers. Students shared information, whether negative or positive, about the courses and teachers to take and avoid; college planning tips; deadlines for applications; and financial aid opportunities. While working together on the script, the action research team spent time discussing school and academics in an authentic, real time setting. They debated which courses to take and by which teachers. During the discussion an issue arose concerning Kyle's grades. He was a sophomore who was achieving low grades in two classes and his mention of it created an opportunity for impromptu peer-to-peer academic guidance.

The group appeared to be moving on to the next topic, but Margaret, a senior, would not let it go:

Margaret: *Wait! How are you failing in math?*

Kyle: *Not getting the assignments done. Can't understand him...*

Margaret: *That's not acceptable. You got to get that stuff done!*

The team revisited this exchange as an example of the peer-to-peer truth-telling that needed to be the spirit of the script. Team members' authentic desire for peer-to-peer academic conversation and guidance validated the survey data that said students support each other academically.

Application of college access research in the revision process

There were multiple instances in the revision process in which students on the action research team discussed and applied research relevant to college access. For instance, Margaret led us toward greater promotion of gender access. She was the sole female on the action research team. Although she was instrumental in conceptualizing the script, she was not present for the creation of the initial draft. However, at the revision meeting, she called to the group's attention that there was no female presence in the script. We agreed that we needed to change the Ricardo character to Regina. Our revision here was a means of countering our gender-centric tendency and Margaret guided us to this understanding during the revision process.

Also, we noticed that our original script negatively represented African American parents because we failed to promote parents' aspirational power. We were so focused on portraying the challenges students of color often have, that we, by default, failed to give a nod of praise to the parents in these situations. We revised the script to reflect the desire that parents of African American students have (even in challenging situations) for their kids to excel academically.

Finally, during the revision process, the team confronted the issue of audience and message. In the following exchange, Margaret challenged the team to consider for *whom* we were writing the script and, perhaps, *why*.

Margaret: *Is this for African American students who want to go to college and who are already planning to go? Or is it for those that don't want to go?*

Jalen: *Or what about junior college?*

Margaret: *No, it's not about junior college, remember? It's not the best way.*

This exchange hearkened back to Renee's comments on her understanding about the benefits of direct four-year college matriculation over direct community college enrollment post high school. Moreover, the exchange helped the team to clarify that "Regina" generally represented an African American student with a potential barrier to matriculating directly into a four-year college. For this character, her primary barrier was economical. Her challenge was to grow in her efficacy (as the data suggested) to overcome her barriers. Referring to Boden (2011), we clarified that, in the script, "Michael" would encourage Regina to grow in her efficacy toward matriculating into a four-year college by accomplishing four things that coincide with Boden's four-point thematic framework: 1) volunteering where she is passionate (*planning*); 2) limiting her time on her iPhone in exchange for more time in the books (*academic skills*); 3) realizing that there is a school that fits her and, therefore, scheduling time with her counselor (*guides*); and 4) drawing inspiration from Michael. Michael's story of overcoming provided *impetus* (in a sense of efficacy) for Regina.

CRT in informal conversation

The creation process also provided an opportunity for discussing critical race theory. One particular informal conversation occurred between Jalen, a senior who is college bound in the fall, and myself:

Jalen: The education system is backwards if you ask me. ...Everybody ain't meant to go to college!

Me: But who gets to decide that?

Jalen: I don't know.

Me: Perhaps it should be: "college *is* for all students," but "all *students* may not be for college." As an educator, I want to thoroughly inform everybody about college so that they have the opportunity to go. Then, what they do with that opportunity would be *their* choice.

The process of creating a script with students produced numerous "touch points" of the college access research that were opportunities for metacognition in the areas of gender access, CRT, parent engagement, and peer guidance. Such opportunities became rich, real-time peer-training sessions that stretched students' (and the researcher's) understanding about college access and, in turn, make them more effective "guides" for their African American students.

Summary

In this chapter I have highlighted reported perceptions of African American students and alumni about the specific knowledge they have and the site assistance they need in order to matriculate directly into four-year postsecondary institutions upon high school graduation. Findings from this study show that African American students possess the community cultural wealth of which Yosso (2005) references. Additionally, students report a need for the site's counselors and staff to raise their expectations, employ more culturally responsive approaches, and take greater steps to build the efficacy among African American students. In the following chapter I discuss the importance of these

findings in light of cultural capital, critical race theory, efficacy and engagement literature. Also, I discuss implications for practitioners and reflect on lessons I learned through this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Evidence found in this study shows that African American students possess capital that research confirms is vital in helping them matriculate to four-year postsecondary institutions. Furthermore, this study highlighted African American students' perceptions of need and a deficit in the fulfillment of those needs by the site. Despite limitations, the data imply that, with increased expectations and cultural responsiveness among the site's staff and counselors, African American students would be more effectively informed and prepared for direct matriculation into four-year colleges.

In this final chapter, I discuss the findings in light of the study's framework of cultural capital and critical race theories as well as the domains of college choice, college knowledge, college counseling, efficacy, and engagement. From there, I discuss the implications for practitioners and make recommendations based on the data. After a discussion on the limitations of the study, I offer suggestions on how the research might be extended. I close with a reflection on the personal understandings I came to as a result of my effort to study the problem.

Discussion of the Findings

Yosso (2005) highlights that students of color often possess resources and attributes called community cultural wealth that are vital in helping students get to college. As discussed in chapter two, schools often devalue and fail to capitalize on these forms of capital which African American students possess. As a result, school staff and

counselors tend to underprepare and inadequately inform African American students about four-year colleges. In this section, I present themes in which to discuss the eight findings of the study against the backdrops of cultural capital (community cultural wealth) and critical race theories.

Recognizing and accessing community cultural wealth

I pointed out in chapter two that schools often fail to recognize the capital that African American students bring from their community context (Freeman, 1997; Yosso, 2005; Mohammad, 2008). This “community cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2005) is instrumental in helping students of color matriculate into four-year postsecondary institutions. In fact, the success of schools in helping students of color is dependent on staff members ability to access students’ community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). The data revealed evidence of four of the six sub-categories of undervalued capital that Yosso set forth as well as various levels of college knowledge. The thematic categories of community cultural wealth seen in the data were *aspirational*, *familial*, *social*, and *navigational*. This study did not produce evidence in the *linguistic* or *resistant* categories for the alumni and current student samples. The data provided evidence that students possessed a general understanding of some challenges and distinctions between four-year schools and community colleges and a procedural knowledge of how to get to four-year universities.

Finding #1: Students possessed college information in the forms of aspirational, familial, and social capital.

The evidence presented in chapter four was saturated with students’ aspirations to attend four-year institutions while overcoming difficulties in the home, their communities, and at school. Students were able to articulate their strengths and valued

assets of family and extended family support systems. Muhammad (2008) and Perez & McDonough (2008) pointed out that these cultural support systems were important to college choice. However, Kiyama (2011) pointed out that these support systems existed mainly on the middle school and high school levels; hence, schools needed to build on these supports in order for students of color make it to four-year colleges and earn degrees.

The forms of capital in Yosso's community cultural wealth could be seen as progressive in sense that one capital could fuel another. Furthermore, evidence in the study was not always seen as clearly belonging to one form of capital. Rather, some instances of information that students reported to possess could have been classified under multiple forms simultaneously. Renee's story provided an example of Yosso's community cultural wealth being progressive and diversified. Her mother's high postsecondary expectations for her, the connection she maintained to her mother, her desire to make her mother proud by going to a four-year school were clearly indicators of familial capital. Renee developed aspirational capital in the seventh grade when she got her own vision to attend a particular four-year university. Because of her great hope in the face of her family hardship (single parent household, low socioeconomic status) she developed greater social capital through her networking with her college counselor at WHS and the administrator from the university of her dreams. Her utilization of the university administrator is where her capital could have been diversified in multiple forms (or, perhaps, multiple forms converging at once). She kept her hopes and dreams alive by building a relationship with an administrator from the institution she fell in love with as a seventh grader (aspirational); she leveraged her relationship with that

administrator who held power and valuable knowledge that helped her successfully matriculate to that school (social); finally, she went outside of the conventionally prescribed pathway of college matriculation which was to work through the WHS counseling staff as the primary means of college information, guidance, and support (navigational). Because she utilized a source from the school she aspired to, who powerfully positioned, and was an alternative to the spread-thin counseling staff, she was exercising multiple forms of capital.

Finding #2: Students possessed knowledge of distinctions and procedures as well as navigational capital pertaining to how students may matriculate to four-year institutions.

The procedural knowledge that students in this study reported was perhaps telling of the high amounts of college knowledge that students learned from college degree holders in their homes. Fifty-three percent of respondents (N=85) reported having at least one member of their household to be a holder of a bachelor's degree or higher. Data from a 2011 household demographic survey showed 26% of African American householders in the local metropolitan area of the study site had attained bachelor's degrees or higher (US Census Bureau, n.d.). The students reported a considerably high rate of degree attainment in their homes compared to the Census data. As mentioned in chapter four, the study site exists within a wealthy community with above average household incomes. The high education attainment that students reported as present in their homes, combined with the average income within their school's community, may have been reasons for the students' wealth of college knowledge (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

However, it remains problematic that, even with the high amount of community cultural wealth and college knowledge reported among the African American

respondents, the data still showed evidence of barriers that limit African American students' opportunities for matriculation into four-year postsecondary institutions. Students identified barriers of a lack of culturally responsive practices and low expectations for African American students creating the reasonable assumption that the site is not accommodating the success of African American students at the levels it does for its White and Asian students. This notion is triangulated with the site's profile data that shows that African American students at WHS graduate in high numbers, but with low rates of A-G course completion. Many students had not visited their college counselor or did not know who their college counselor was. Many reported that the school was at fault for not supporting African American students in the enrollment of advanced placement courses. These persistent school barriers, perceived or real, are cause for African American students to develop and utilize navigational capital in order to circumvent the systems that disadvantage them. I believe Boden (2011), Mathis (2010), and Yosso (2005) would agree that an alternative process of college knowledge delivery like demonstrated in this study would be advantageous for building students navigational capital.

Addressing school barriers that disadvantage African American students

In chapter two, I gave a simplified definition of Critical Race Theory as *which students are getting the best opportunities to matriculate into four-year institutions*. I also discussed three barriers within the CRT literature that often contribute to low direct matriculation rates among African American high school students: *a lack of college counseling, a lack of a college-sending culture, and the existence of neo-tracking practices*. In this section, I reference these barriers as I present my explanation for the

existence of the “utilization gap” – that is the gap between students’ *knowledge* of the value of college counselors and the students’ *utilization* of (as in actually meeting with) the college counselors.

Finding #3: Students possessed knowledge of the value of counselors, but a gap existed concerning their utilization of college counselors.

The “utilization gap” was a barrier that existed at the site because it limited the college knowledge for African American students. As shown in chapter four, most respondents believed that the counselors were valuable assets for college matriculation, however, many African American students reported not utilizing their college counselors until their senior year. The “utilization gap” made obtaining college information from the college counselors problematic. Even though the research said that counselors possess valuable information about college (Boden, 2011; Gandara & Bial, 2001; McDonough, 1997; McDonough, 2005), students, generally, must meet with the counselors in order for the information to be transferred from the counselor to the student.

My conclusion on just *why* students in this study were not utilizing the counselors has been formulated on the data that lead to findings four, five, and six which detail the students’ perceptions of need.

Finding #4: Students perceived a need for greater urgency in imparting college knowledge.

The site showed evidence of a college sending culture. Students have a college counseling center with counselors dedicated solely to helping students with college planning. Each student receives some level of information about college beginning formally in 10th grade with a group meeting. College counselors meet with each parent

as well. Hill (2008) refers to such schools as having a *brokering* culture. Supporting this notion of a college culture at the site, the majority of African American students surveyed believed that the school desires and expects all students to go to college. However, the interviews revealed that the college sending culture for African Americans is such that is more specifically geared for sending them to community college rather than directly to four-year institutions. This apparent disparity is also addressed by Hill (2008) as he discussed that, although brokering schools are more advantageous in helping students get to four-year colleges, they often fail to adequately serve students of color. Reasons I conclude from the data in this study have to do with the quality of information and preparation African American students receive from the site. African American students reported never finding out who their college counselor was until the end of their junior year. Many also report not coming into the College Counseling Center until their senior year. Although most interviewees agreed that the school needs to reach out to African American students sooner (freshmen year), students also reported that the counselors were stretched too thin to meet their needs earlier than their junior or senior years. So even though the school provides specific college counselors (naturally reducing the strain on the general counselors that would ordinarily persist at lesser-resourced schools (Oakes, 2002), these college counselors are still over loaded according to students' perceptions. The result is that the lack of college counselor availability is negatively impacting African American students' postsecondary options (Venezia and Kirst, 2005).

Finding #5: Students perceived a need for greater engagement through culturally responsive approaches.

As I have discussed, the site in this study can be categorized as a “brokering” college-sending culture. I also pointed out how brokering schools can disadvantage students of color. By the data, it is my conclusion that, without culturally responsive approaches, imparting college information to African American students may be problematic. Note that a high percentage of students perceived that the school expected all students to go to college after graduation and they believed that the school tried to help students make it there. However, interviewees reported problems related to being uninformed about Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); the lack of African American information providers (guides); and a desire to work with community-based organizations that boost African American achievement.

Finding #6: Students perceived a need for a clearer message of efficacy.

Students pointed out two areas where the site needed to send a clearer message of efficacy to African American students: *financial aid* and *course enrollment*. First of all, students’ suggestions about how the site could research and promote more scholarship opportunities was important as “help with the financial aid process” is one of the major assets provided by counselors (Gandara & Bial, 2001; McDonough, 2005; McDonough, 1997; Perna 2002).

The second area in which students report a need for the site to send a greater message of efficacy to African American students was concerned with course rigor. Specifically, interviewees made reference to neo-tracking in the form of the disproportionately low number of African American students in rigorous courses. Students were talked out of, or steered away from, enrolling in AP courses. Some students even felt like the lack of support from teachers could be a form of neo-tracking

out of those rigorous courses and back into less rigorous courses. While the site's district has eliminated "remedial" courses, the site appears to still lack a push for African American students to enroll in higher rates in AP courses. The disproportionality of African American students in (general) "prep" courses, rather than AP courses is indicative of what Ogbu (2003) spoke. AP courses improve students' chances of admission into four-year schools and better prepare them for success at the postsecondary level. The tolerance of a disproportionately low rate of African American students in AP courses is one way that schools channel African American students into community colleges and, by default, away from four-year institutions.

Hill (2008) and Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka (2011) discussed how where African American students attend school affects their postsecondary opportunities. This site has a higher graduation and A-G completion rate among African American students than the county and the state numbers. Furthermore, the site's course completion requirements for graduation are inclusive of the A-G courses. Therefore, if a student graduates with "C"'s in all of his/her courses, they would have naturally completed the A-G requirements. Since the rate of A-G completion among African American students is about 50%, it is my assumption that although most African American students are graduating (90%), a large portion (up to 40%) are graduating with less than a C's in the necessary courses to enter into 4-year schools. The low rate of A-G completion may well be why the rate of African American students going into community colleges, if at all, is disproportionately high. So, although African American students may fare better at this higher resourced site compared to African American students at less resourced sites, these same students may still be disadvantaged compared to other subgroups at this site.

In sum, the “utilization gap” existed for students at this site largely due to school barriers identified by the students. Despite African American students’ belief in the high value of college counselors, these students did not visit their college counselors until their senior year because the college counselors were not explicitly identified, nor were these students told that it was important to visit them sooner. Additionally, the students perceived the quality of information and approach offered by the site as lacking in engagement and / or cultural responsiveness. Finally, the students reported that site personnel implied in various ways that they (African American students) lacked the capacity toward four-year postsecondary matriculation. It is not a stretch to imagine that, with such barriers (perceived or actual), students would find little motivation to pursue time with a counselor to obtain college-going information.

It is at this juncture where I believed a new approach must be employed in order to intervene and close the “utilization gap”. It was my assumption that bringing students together to collaborate in a research-based, script-writing process that could culminate in a digital media project would be engaging and effective at disseminating the college knowledge (Mathis, 2010). While not positing that such a video would take the place of college counselors, I did believe that it could provide some vital information and motivation to African American students in the absence or lack of availability of college counselors. Finally, I held that action research would be a great means of getting students to problem-solve and build efficacy among their peers.

Building efficacy through media engagement

I used action research as an approach to create the script-making process. I was convinced that it would be an ideal format since scripts almost always require revisions.

Additionally, the cycle of diagnosing, planning, taking action, and revising were a research-based approach that I believed was applicable to a group of people engaged in problem-solving. Additionally, I was attracted to the opportunities for meta-cognition and reflection inherent in action research. I trusted that what we would learn together through the action research process we could apply in further problem-solving opportunities. I have merged the discussion of the last two findings because I am focusing on the *engagement* the students on the action research team showed as a result of both the process and the content of the script.

Findings #7 and #8: Students were passionate about efficacy and college fit; The script-making process provided a dynamic opportunity to pass along college knowledge.

I expected, based on Freeman (1997), that if I got African American students to the proverbial table to work on a problem that impacted them and in an engaging format, they would show high engagement. Information that I collected from the team of six members present during the exit interview showed that such engagement – even *transformation* – was accomplished through this action research process. First of all, students reported evidence that the process, itself, was engaging to them. They described their experience as “priceless”, “enjoyable”, and “fun”. Perry and Margaret specifically mentioned a high value they perceived in coming together, brainstorming, and then producing a solution. Malcolm found that the value of the process was informing other students about the possibilities for college.

Secondly, the process led to transformation among the team members. Students mentioned emerging with a greater desire to be “more involved and concerned” about others, to inform, and to be helpful to younger friends who are

interested in college. Malcolm said, “(the action research) has changed me because now I want to be more involved with the process for other students getting to college and to help them know they have possibilities to go to a four-year college.” Such transformations came about because this process gave students a voice and offered them a leadership role in solving an important issue. Through being engaged in the action research process of this study, Kyle reported coming out of his comfort zone. In turn, the team expressed that this process would be an ideal way for the school to engage African American students and hear their voices on issues.

As an important postscript to how the process affected Kyle, he recently sought me out to share how being challenged through the work of the action research team motivated him to put forth a greater effort in school. Whereas he was previously earning four “F”s, he reported that he had raised them to “D”s. When I asked him if he were to put forth such an effort from the beginning of school next year what he would expect, he replied confidently, “I would get ‘B’s for sure!” For Kyle, engaging with his peers to solve a larger problem became a transformative and personally successful experience. His story is another example of the benefit of this study.

Furthermore, students were engaged beyond the process and offered a variety of next steps. They wanted a video produced from the script that can be used by the school in order to educate future African American students. Specifically, the students wanted to put it on YouTube for students to view and/or have students watch it in the College Counseling Center. A further suggestion was to use it to begin a dialogue with students about college choice. The team also wanted

to take the issue of low direct matriculation into four-year colleges to the site's school board and present the video (and its process) as a possible solution.

The engagement of African American students in problem-solving revealed that the students did not have to be experts in the relevant subject of college information. The issue, data, and background research that I presented to the students provided them with a foundation for discussion. Their personal passion and commitment to dialogue, share information, and find a solution, together, was the engine that moved the process along. Furthermore, they emerged as more informed about college choice themselves. As Margaret said: "It (the engagement with the process of writing the script) made me consider going to an HBCU."

All six students believed that the school could benefit from students involving themselves in helping to solve school problems. Jalen's reasoning was that the students needed to know *how* the school could help them get to college. However, as the data in the study showed, African American students at this site perceived they were not engaging with their college counselors early enough. This process allows students to serve as guides (Bowden, 2011), be less reliant on college counselor availability, and thus increases African American students' opportunities to gain valuable college information sooner than later.

Recommendations / Implications

In response to the data which addressed the four research questions of this study, I recommend four areas for action for the site and its staff: 1) institute a peer-to-peer college knowledge sharing process; 2) practice more authentic engagement of parents of African American students; 3) create a culture of high expectation and achievement

among African American students; and 4) employ culturally responsive approaches toward serving African American students. The first two recommendations build on students' navigational capital and directly support the development of an alternative pathway of college-going information that could help African American students directly matriculate into four-year postsecondary institutions in higher numbers. Although I strongly believe in the viability of recommendations one and two, it would be optimal for them to be implemented within a community that is growing in student expectations and cultural responsiveness. The third and fourth recommendations directly effect African American students' college preparation and choice.

Institute Peer-to-Peer College Knowledge Sharing Process

As demonstrated in earlier chapters of this study, counselor ratios nationally are extremely higher than the recommendations of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) that are 1:100 and 1:350 respectively. California's average ratio of 1:944 is abysmal. Based on high counselor-to-student ratios, low counseling / college counseling resources, and urban neo-tracking trends also outlined earlier in chapter 2, it is my strong assumption that barriers to four-year postsecondary matriculation will continue to persist for African American students at the local, state, and national levels. Hence, schools must institutionalize a peer-to-peer college knowledge sharing process as an alternative means for the delivery of college-going information to African American students. This study demonstrates that peer-to-peer college knowledge sharing can be beneficial in the face of strained or non-existent college counseling resources that are currently prevalent in schools.

There are numerous positive outcomes to this recommendation. First of all, the recommendation makes good use of the power of students to solve problems that directly impact their futures. To the present, schools have done little to empower students to stem the negative impact of low, unavailable, or ineffective college counseling resources or programs. This recommendation helps college counselors' efforts without a large impact on their schedules. Counselors, who may be occupied with helping seniors, could (at the least) require freshmen students to interact with student-created digital media as part of their mandated visit to the College Counseling Center. Furthermore, as seen with the findings of students' reported needs, empowering students with current data and research helps counseling staffs identify "blind spots" in their services to students. Such information will hopefully sensitize counseling staffs and cause them to take action to close existing gaps.

Secondly, students regarded the peer-to-peer sharing process in this study as an engaging and effective means of communicating college information. Students who were part of the action research team expressed an eagerness to help peers in their college preparatory journey as a result of participating in the process. Based on this study, I believe that students who are involved in similar action research will likely transform into peer-college counselors and distributors of current, research-based, college-going information to other African American students. Those students who participated in the script evaluation said that, after hearing the script, they would plan an appointment with their college counselor prior to the end of the year. Likewise, I expect that African American students will be more likely to engage with their college counselor sooner than their senior year as a result of watching a video in which their peers encourage them to do

so. Based on the responses of the script evaluation panel in this study, I expect that students who gain research-based, culturally responsive, college knowledge from their peers in an engaging format such as digital media, will respond favorably to the content.

Next, both students who produce the media and those who consume it can grow in their knowledge as a result of this recommendation. Both the action research team and the script evaluation panel reported an increase in knowledge as a result of working on the script or hearing it read. In the case of the script produced within this study, students learned the meaning of the word “efficacy” and how important it is to believe in one’s own ability to make it to college. Both groups also learned about HBCUs and the added options and value they provide to African American students.

Finally, African American students who participate in creating digital college knowledge solutions and / or act as peer-to-peer college knowledge providers increase their college competitiveness. Postsecondary institutions, especially selective ones, look for students who demonstrate leadership in solving problems. Additionally, students who collaborate with adults to solve problems that impact communities impress these schools.

While the recommendation is beneficial, it is also practical. Specifically, schools can institutionalize a peer-to-peer sharing process in four phases: 1) Selection; 2) Action Research; 3) Production; and 4) Distribution. The first phase involves selecting an effective team. Start by charging a passionate administrator, staff leader, or parent to lead the effort and provide him or her with access to current, peer-reviewed articles on college-going information. Next, empower a group of students (most likely the Black Student Union or similar club purposed with academic advancement of the targeted population) to form a team of six to eight students to work with the chosen adult leader.

The second phase calls for the adult leader to engage the team of students in action research. They should *diagnose* what information students need through examining and discussing current research and data. The team should then *plan* what content should be included in a video through rigorous debate. Then they should *take action* by collaborating to conceptualize a narrative in which to deliver the information. Finally, they should gain feedback through table reads, live reads, and surveys to *evaluate* the script for effectiveness. The process continued in cycles until the script is deemed effective and ready to be shot as a video.

The third phase would be to produce a digital video from the final script of the action research team. The production could be carried out by the action research team (or a media club under the supervision of the action research team) by shooting the script, editing it, and uploading the product to a digitally stored medium such as a DVD, flash drive, or a cloud-based site).

The fourth and final phase would be to distribute the video by means decided by the site. I recommend that the site make each video a mandatory viewing task for each freshman student. Site counselors could maximize their availability while creating a more accountable counseling opportunity for students by including follow-through tasks connected to the content of each video. Students could then complete these tasks prior to meeting with their college counselor.

Practice More Authentic Parent Engagement

I recommend that the sites devote resources of time, staff, and funds toward *engagement* of parents as valued partners rather than merely *endorsement*. While many school sites may publicize that they engage parents, they may just be “endorsing” parents. By endorsing, I mean merely verbalizing their support for the existence and

operation of parent groups. Schools may advertise parent-sponsored events. Administrators may attend parent meetings and even provide limited funding. However, some parents of African American students in this study and school community showed evidence of disenfranchisement. Sites would do well to push past “endorsing” parents and on toward true *engagement* by identifying African American parent leaders, establishing goals with parents, planning *with* parents, learning alongside parents through inquiry, providing parents with office space on campus, and securing a portion of the budget or grant money directly for the execution of agenda items set forth by the collaboration of school administrators and African American parents. At the crux of this recommendation lies my expectation that, if schools truly empower African American parents in ways prescribed, schools would be better positioned to value and tap into students’ familial capital to increase the four-year college matriculation rate among African American students. Furthermore, I expect that empowering parents will promote the leadership development and school connection needed to support students in the peer-to-peer college knowledge sharing process previously recommended.

Although not part of my intended data collection, I took note of some trends that were part of many conversations I had with parents during the consent process. Comments generally fell in two categories: 1) experiences of disengagement or disillusionment; and 2) an eagerness to gain opportunities for their children. Parents who shared negative experiences about the site referenced their students not being valued or being treated unfairly. Those in this category also referenced counselors channeling their children away from rigorous courses, similar to the responses given by the students in the interviews. Parents who were eager to gain opportunities for their children tended to be

highly appreciative that their children were being recruited for the study. They perceived their children's involvement in the study as an opportunity for their children to gain more information and inspiration to attend a four-year college. Even those parents who were self-identified (or student reported) as college-educated, information providers in their homes were eager for their children to participate in the study.

Both groups of parents appeared to me to be engaged and desiring to assist their kids in getting to college, even though they represented homes of varying degrees of postsecondary experience. Hence, I recommend that school sites embrace, engage, and empower parents of African American students as they are sources of familial and aspirational community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). For instance, when I asked one parent if her child might be interested in participating in this study, she quickly responded: "First of all, John is a child. He will do what *I* say. He will be at the meeting Wednesday." Needless to say, John was present at the meeting that Wednesday and he filled out a survey. Two things were apparent to me as a result of this outcome: 1) where school announcements and emails were largely ineffective at securing students' participation, direct parent engagement was quite effective; and 2) her comments were typical among parents who saw the acquisition of information and participation in discussions involving the topic of college-going as non-negotiable. The parents were passionate for their children's success. Schools that publicize a desire for students to graduate college-ready should embrace such parents as assets toward achieving their goals.

Focus on a Culture of Expectation and Achievement for African American students

As mentioned in chapter four, students perceived the site in this study to have low expectations and / or urgency for African American achievement. Based on the students'

responses, I generally recommend that schools be vigilant to demonstrate that academically aligned activities hold a higher value over social activities. Since the focus of this study is on the college information and perceptions of need held by African American high school students, I recommend that administrators and counselors push for increased enrollment and support of African American students in advanced placement courses. The students in this study reported that they were often steered away from enrolling in academically rigorous classes by counselors. Students also reported that the instruction they received in their “college prep” classes did not prepare them for the rigors of advanced placement courses or college-level work. Schools must examine and raise the level of rigor and depth of thinking in their curriculum, while building teachers’ capacity to support African American students through more culturally responsive pedagogy.

I also recommend that schools (especially those with “brokering” cultures as they tend to underserve African American students) intensify their outreach to African American freshmen students. Specifically, schools must inspire them toward a vision for four-year college matriculation. At the same time, schools must help them develop a four-year plan that involves regular meetings with their counselor to specifically discuss their postsecondary matriculation upon high school graduation. Many students in this study reported regret for not getting college information earlier. Many did not know or meet with their college counselor sooner than their junior or senior year. I recommend that the site in this study and other sites with college counseling resources, normalize – even mandate – attendance for all students, especially African American students, at the

College Counseling Center. If students gain college aspirations early, develop plans early, and receive guidance to stay on said plans, then goal attainment should be more likely.

Employ Greater Cultural Responsive Approaches

As I have alluded in each of the previous recommendations, school sites must employ greater culturally responsive approaches toward helping African American students matriculate directly to four-year postsecondary institutions. Following the recommendation of students in this study, I urge high schools to make every effort to provide African American students with African American guides. Specifically, schools should provide students with African American counselors, teachers, and community-based organizations devoted to imparting college knowledge to African American students and guiding them through the various stages of college choice.

I also recommend that counseling offices and college counseling centers to hold seminars and recruit Black alumni and community leaders to serve as speakers. Additionally, counselors should bring in representatives from HBCUs to explain the benefits HBCUs provide. Students at this site reported that the school did very little to promote HBCUs. I logically assume that the school's lack of promotion of HBCUs was a direct contributor to many African American students having little or no knowledge of HBCUs. Students in this study perceived that had the College Counseling Center promoted HBCUs, more African American students would have visited their college counselors.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study that should be discussed. To begin, I surveyed a small sample size of the alumni. The MBUSD does not officially track

students once they graduate. Instead, contact is maintained through networks of teachers, administrators, and parents who are still connected to the district. Still, I had hoped for 30 alumni participants, but ended up with 19 instead. One administrator sent out a Facebook request on my behalf to 100 alumni from her “friends” list. This was not successful because many people their age no longer (or rarely) use Facebook. The administrator reasoned that once they (students) leave the school, they “move on” mentally.

Additionally the smaller sample size led to a smaller sample of participants in the alumni focus groups. By design I intended to have two separate focus groups: one for those attending community colleges and one for those in four-year schools. Because of the lack of availability and the timing in relation to these students’ academic responsibilities, I was only able to interview students who were attending local post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, much of my data had to be collected via individual interviews (rather than through focus groups) to accommodate the students’ schedules.

Another limitation was that diversity within the African American population was not a focus of this study. Students in this study were classified as “African American” while they could have been considered under the other official district category “Two or More Races”. Also, some students in my study were Ethiopian. My questions were not geared to explore the varying experiences between subgroups of Black students. Nevertheless, had diversity been a focus, responses between subgroups may have varied and yielded different findings.

Finally, I did not include parents or other student populations in this study due to the scope of time allowed. Although I included some remarks and generalities I

concluded from the parents of participants, these data were unintentional and not part of my design. Data collection from parents of African American students may have added a valuable perspective to the study. Additionally, collecting data from students of other racial groups could have allowed for a comparative analysis of the quality of information that African American students receive versus other groups.

Extending the Research

This study focused on the postsecondary information that African American high school students had and needed. However, my sample came from one high school in a medium-sized district possessing above average resources. I also collected my data during a brief window of time. Additional research could involve multiple schools of similar districts to further triangulate the data. Another suggestion would be to study multiple sites of districts with differing levels of counseling resources to also examine the perceptions of need between the samples.

In either case, it would be valuable to do a longitudinal study to track a cohort (or cohorts) of students into college to examine the ideas, practices, and usefulness of the college counseling received in high school. This will also provide helpful assessment of the school's effectiveness at getting African American students to four-year postsecondary schools. For instance, it would be beneficial to a school with expressed expectations for all students to go to college, and one who's graduation requirements match or exceed the A-G requirements, to know how many qualified African American students are choosing to enroll in four-year schools. It would also be beneficial for such a site to know how many qualified African American students choose to enroll in community colleges instead and why. The feedback may be helpful in determining

where a school's culture of college-sending may be ineffective, skewed for some, or non-existent for others.

Reflection

After identifying the problem and then framing the surrounding discussion, I sought a metaphor that could serve as a vehicle to present a possible solution. It was at this point that I imagined students – not just adults – coming “to the table” to craft a solution. Furthermore, I pictured them engaging as writers at the table to tell a story – their story – in a way that only they could tell it. I deeply believed that students would engage with media to create a solution to the lack of college information due to stifled or nonexistent counseling resources. My notions were confirmed and my expectations were exceeded through this study. I witnessed students synthesizing research, challenging others' thinking about college choice, collaborating in action research, and committing themselves to sharing their knowledge with their peers.

Motivated by the lack of college-going information *I* received in high school, I was passionate about this study from the earliest stages. Hearing the stories of students and alumni only fueled my passion for social justice in this area of college access. I remain concerned about the cultural capacity of educators and information providers who serve African American students. Moreover, in my discussions with students, it was clear to me that there is much work to do regarding information impacting college choice.

While I observed the counselors in the College Counseling Center to be helpful and accommodating, their schedule appeared to me to be overloaded much like the literature described. When I considered that this site had above average resources, I was reminded of the disadvantages for the majority African American students who attend schools with fewer resources and less access to college information and counselors.

This study has also positioned me to produce a video using the script created by the students in this study. Even though the video was beyond the scope of the study, digital media remains the linchpin (in my opinion) to boosting students' college knowledge and engaging students in peer-to-peer college information sharing. Producing the script is an important follow-through that will serve the future students at the site and bring the students efforts in this study full circle.

Conclusion

When considering the low direct matriculation rate among African American students, we should not view them as deficient in their effort; rather we should seek to build on their strengths. With their community cultural wealth in mind, we should plan culturally responsive approaches that meet their current academic and post-secondary preparatory needs – which include providing them with timely, practical, and complete information that equips them for direct, four-year matriculation. While doing this, we must actively and intentionally work to raise their level of efficacy to have confidence that they have what it takes and can make it directly to four-year schools. This is our responsibility as educators: to provide engaging opportunities such as what was described in this study. Then, I believe, students may be more apt to make *their own, well-informed*, college choice.

LIST OF APPENDICES

- A: EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – STUDENTS**
- B: Letter of Self-Introduction**
- C: Parent Consent Form**
- D: Teen Assent Form**
- E: EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – ALUMNI**
- F: Alumni Consent Form**
- G: High School to College: Current Students Survey**
- H: High School to College: Alumni Survey**
- I: Student Focus Group Protocol**
- J: Alumni Focus Group Protocol**
- K: Action Research Team Focus Groups Protocols / Meetings**
- L: Final Script**
- M: Script Evaluation Pre-Assessment**
- N. Script Evaluation Post-Assessment**
- O: Action Research Team Exit Interview Protocol**
- P: Students’ Perceptions of Family Effectiveness**
- Q: Alumni’s Perceptions of Family Effectiveness**
- R: Students’ Frequency of Visits With Their College Counselors**

APPENDIX A: EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – STUDENTS

Greetings Westside High School parents...

A UCLA Research Study is happening at the school that could lead to more African American students enrolling in four-year colleges. The researcher (see “letter of self-introduction” attached) is looking for African American students of Westside High School to participate in the research study. You are receiving this email because you have been identified as a family with a potentially qualified student living in the home.

If your child meets these qualifications, and is interested in sharing his/her knowledge and opinions about what it takes to get to college, please share with him/her the attached ***information sheet***. Furthermore, he/she should attend a brief meeting on Tuesday, 2/18, at 3pm at the College Counseling Center (Room C226), have some **food**, and fill out a short survey!

Besides offering valuable information, he/she could win a gift card for participating!

If you have questions, or would like more information, please contact the study team at 424-625-8590.

Participation is completely voluntary. Involvement is not tied to grades or extra credit. There are no direct benefits or negative outcomes resulting from your decision to be involved, decline, or cease being involved in this study.

APPENDIX B: Letter of Self-Introduction

Hello Parents,

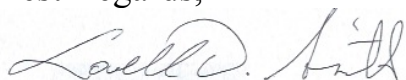
My name is Devon Smith and I am a 5th grade teacher at Aldebaran Elementary School in the Coastal Hills School District. Since 1997, I have had the wonderful opportunity to play a role in students' educational journeys. Over the years, I have made a point of providing all students with college information and experiences in hopes to build their aspirations for the future. My goal is for all students to gain as many opportunities as possible along their educational paths.

Three years ago, I decided to take my own medicine and go back to school to pursue a Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) through the Educational Leadership Program at UCLA. I am passionate about increasing the college-going and degree-earning rates among African American students. To this end, I am seeking to understand, in part, what it takes to get more African American students directly into four-year institutions after they graduate from high school.

The attached parent permission sheet and the "Teen Assent Form" will provide you and your child the necessary information about the research study. Participation is completely voluntary. There is no penalty or negative outcome if one withdraws from the study. If your child is interested in participating, he/she would need to sign the "Teen Assent Form".

I hope this letter builds your interest. Regardless of your decision, I thank you for your time and consideration.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Devon Smith".

Devon Smith,
Ed.D. Candidate, UCLA

APPENDIX C: Parent Consent Form

University of California, Los Angeles

PARENT PERMISSION FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

“At the Table: African American high school students’ perceptions on what they have and what they need to matriculate to four-year postsecondary institutions.”

Devon Smith, M.Ed., under the direction of Professors Dr. Robert Cooper and Dr. Eugene Tucker, from the Department of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because *he/she has been identified as an African American student of Westside High School, the research site of this study.* Your child’s participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

African American students are not enrolling in four-year universities at the same rate as other groups. The purpose of this study is to learn what information African American students already have and what they might need in order to enroll, if they wish, directly into four-year universities or colleges after they graduate high school.

What will happen if my child takes part in this research study?

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, we would ask him/her to:

- Complete a survey (paper format) during non-school hours. The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. Questions will be centered on his/her personal attributes, information, expectations, needs, and desires as they relate to going to college and the school’s role in helping him/her get there.
- If selected, participate in a 45-minute group interview during non-school hours at the school site. He/she will be asked for permission to have the interview audio recorded. Questions will be centered on his/her personal attributes, information, expectations, needs, and desires as they relate to going to college and the school’s role in helping him/her get there.
- If selected, participate in a discussion / decision-making group (action team) that will meet for a series of four sessions outside of class time.

He/she will be asked for permission to have the meetings audio recorded. The purpose of this group will be to create a script for a video based on the information collected in the study.

- If selected, participate in a 45-minute group meeting to evaluate the script during non-school hours at the school site. He/she will be asked for permission to have the interview audio recorded. He/she will take a short pre-assessment of his/her knowledge about college, listen to a table read of the script, and then take a post-assessment.

How long will my child be in the research study?

- Participation in the study will take a total of about 15 minutes for the survey.
- If he/she is selected, and chooses to participate in the focus group, he/she will meet once with other participants approximately one hour.
- *If he/she is selected, and chooses to participate on the action team, he/she will meet for one hour, once a week, over a period of four weeks, for a total of four hours outside of class time.*

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that my child can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts. No negative outcomes will result from his/her involvement or non-involvement in this study.

Are there any potential benefits to my child if he or she participates?

You may not directly benefit your participation in the study.

The results of the research may lead to more effective ways to assist students, especially African Americans, in enrolling directly in four-year colleges after high school.

Will my child be paid for participating?

He/she may receive no payment for his/her participation. However, all participants will be entered into a drawing to receive a \$10 gift card (one award for every ten participants) and a chance to win a grand prize \$50 gift card to a local retailer.

Those who are selected and participate in the focus group will receive refreshments at the meeting.

Those who are selected, and participate in the action research team will receive refreshments at each session. They will also get a \$5 gift card at the end of the final session.

Will information about my child's participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that identify him/her will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms and number codes. His/her real name and responses will not be identified or shared with anyone. The researcher will keep all information safe in a location off-site and only the researcher will have access to it.

What are my and my child's rights if he or she takes part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want your child to be in this study, and you may withdraw your permission and discontinue your child's participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you or your child, and no loss of benefits to which you or your child were otherwise entitled.
- Your child may refuse to answer any questions that he/she does not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**

Devon Smith
424-625-8590
devonsmith67@gmail.com

Dr. Robert Cooper
(310) 267-2494
cooper@gseis.ucla.edu

Dr. Eugene Tucker
(310) 206-1879
etucker@ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your child's rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

Please keep copy of this information for your records. If you give your consent for your child to participate in this research study, please sign, detach, and return the following page with your child's signed teen assent form and completed survey.

I have read the Parent Permission Form and I give my permission for my child to participate in the study: “At the Table: African American high school students’ perceptions on what they have and what they need to matriculate to four-year postsecondary institutions.”

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN

Name of Child

Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

Date

APPENDIX D: Teen Assent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

ADOLESCENT (Ages 13-17) ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

“At the Table: African American high school students’ perceptions on what they have and what they need to matriculate to four-year postsecondary institutions.”

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by *Devon Smith, M.Ed.*, under the direction of Professors *Dr. Robert Cooper* and *Dr. Eugene Tucker*, and associates from the *Department of Education and Information Studies*, at the University of California, Los Angeles. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because *you are identified as an African American student of Westside High School, the research site of this study*. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

African American students are not enrolling in four-year universities at the same rate as other groups. The purpose of this study is to learn what information African American students already have and what they might need in order to enroll, if they wish, directly into four-year universities or colleges after they graduate high school.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your parents say “yes” you can still decide not to do this.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Complete a survey (paper format) during non-school hours and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided by the researcher. The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. Questions will be centered on your personal attributes, information, expectations, needs, and desires as they relate to going to college and your school’s role in helping you get there.
- If selected, participate in a 45-minute group interview during non-school hours at the school site. You will be asked for permission to have the interview audio recorded. Questions will be centered on your personal

attributes, information, expectations, needs, and desires as they relate to going to college and your school's role in helping you get there.

- If selected, participate in a discussion / decision-making group (action research team) that will meet for a series of four sessions outside of class time. You will be asked for your permission to have the meetings audio recorded. The purpose of this group will be to create a script for a video based on the information collected in the study.
- If selected, participate in a 45-minute group meeting to evaluate the script during non-school hours at the school site. You will be asked for permission to have the interview audio recorded. You will take a short pre-assessment of your knowledge about college, listen to a table read of the script, and then take a post-assessment.

How long will I be in the research study?

- Participation in the study will take a total of about 15 minutes for the survey.
- If you are selected, and you choose to participate in the focus group, you will meet once with other participants for 45 minutes to 1 hour.
- *If you are selected and choose to participate on the action research team, you will meet for one hour, once a week, over a period of four weeks, for a total of four hours outside of class time.*

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts. No negative outcomes will result from your involvement or non-involvement in this study.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You may not directly benefit your participation in the study. However, your involvement may lead to more effective ways to assist students, especially African Americans, in enrolling directly in four-year colleges after high school.

Will I receive any payment if I participate in this study?

You may receive no payment for your participation. However, all participants will be entered into a drawing to receive a \$10 gift card (one award for every ten participants) and a chance to win a grand prize \$50 gift card to a local retailer.

Those who are selected and participate in the focus group will receive refreshments at the meeting.

Those who are selected, and participate in the action team will receive refreshments at each session. They will also get a \$5 gift card at the end of the final session.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms and number codes. Your real names and responses will not be identified or shared with anyone. The researcher will keep all information safe in a location off-site and only the researcher will have access to it.

- **Withdrawal of participation by the investigator**

The investigator may withdraw you from participating in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. For instance, if your parent(s) or guardian(s) withdraw their consent, you may have to drop out, even if you would like to continue. The investigator will let you know if it is not possible for you to continue.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

You may withdraw your assent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.

You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may leave the study at any time without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving any of your legal rights if you choose to be in this research study. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can answer questions I might have about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, please contact the researcher:

Devon Smith
424-625-8590
devonsmith67@gmail.com

If you wish to ask questions about your rights as a research participant or if you wish to voice any problems or concerns you may have about the study to someone other than the researchers, please call the Office of the Human Research Protection Program at (310) 825-7122 or write to Office of the Human Research Protection Program, UCLA, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694.

(Please sign and return the following page...)

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING ASSENT

In my judgment the participant is voluntarily and knowingly agreeing to participate in this research study.

Name of Person Obtaining Assent

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent

Date

APPENDIX E: EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – ALUMNI

Greetings Westside High School alumni...

A UCLA Research Study is happening at Westside High School that could lead to more African American students enrolling in four-year colleges. The researcher is looking for individuals to participate in the research study. You are receiving this email because school staff recommended you as one who may potentially qualify.

Besides offering valuable information, you could win a **gift card** for participating by filling out a short on-line survey!

To qualify, you must:

- Be a graduate of WHS.
- Have enrolled in a college within 16 months of graduating high school.
- Identify as African American due to the nature of the research study.
- Be currently enrolled in a technical school, community college, four-year public or private college or university.

If you meet these qualifications, and are interested in sharing your knowledge and opinions about what it takes to get to college, please read the attached ***information sheet*** and complete the survey (takes about 15 minutes) by accessing the link below:

(link to online survey)

If you have questions, or would like more information, please contact the study team at 424-625-8590.

Participation is completely voluntary. Involvement is not tied any coursework, grades, or credit. There are no direct benefits or negative outcomes resulting from your decision to be involved, decline, or cease being involved in this study.

APPENDIX F: Alumni Consent Form

University of California, Los Angeles

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

“At the Table: African American high school students’ perceptions on what they have and what they need to matriculate to four-year postsecondary institutions.”

Devon Smith, M.Ed., under the direction of Professors Dr. Robert Cooper and Dr. Eugene Tucker, from the Department of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because *you are identified as an African American former student of Westside High School, the research site of this study.* Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

African American students are not enrolling in four-year universities at the same rate as other groups. The purpose of this study is to learn what information African American students already have and what they might need in order to enroll, if they wish, directly into four-year universities or colleges after they graduate high school.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Complete an online survey that takes about 15 minutes to complete. Questions will be centered on your personal attributes, information, expectations, needs, and desires as they relate to going to college and your high school’s role in helping you get there.
- If selected, participate in a 45-minute group interview during non-school hours at the school site. You will be asked for permission to have the interview audio recorded. Questions will be centered on your personal attributes, information, expectations, needs, and desires as they relate to going to college and your high school’s role in helping you get there.

How long will I be in the research study?

- Participation in the study will take a total of about 15 minutes for the survey.
- If you are selected, and you choose to participate in the focus group, you will meet once with other participants for approximately one hour.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts. No negative outcomes will result from your involvement or non-involvement in this study.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You may not directly benefit your participation in the study.

The results of the research may lead to more effective ways to assist students, especially African Americans, in enrolling directly in four-year colleges after high school.

Will I be paid for participating?

You may receive no payment for your participation. However, all participants will be entered into a drawing to receive a \$50 gift card to a local retailer.

Those who are selected and participate in the focus group will receive a \$10 gift card to a local or online retailer.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms and number codes. ***However, should you be involved in a focus group, understand that the researcher can not guarantee complete confidentiality due to the group setting. The researcher will urge respect and confidentiality to be upheld by each participant within the focus group.*** Your real names and responses will not be identified or shared with anyone. The researcher will keep all information safe in a location off-site and only the researcher will have access to it.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**
Devon Smith
424-625-8590
devonsmith67@gmail.com
- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

By completing the online survey referenced in this document and linked to the email you received, you give your consent to participate in this study. Please keep a copy of this document for your records.

APPENDIX G: “HS to College – Current Students Survey”

**High School to College Survey of Current Students
**

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Please read the attached information sheet BEFORE you answer the following questions. Your participation is voluntary. There are no direct benefits or negative outcomes resulting from your decision to be involved, decline, or cease being involved in the study. By submitting this questionnaire, you are providing your consent to being involved in the study.

In this questionnaire you will be asked about your personal attributes, academic beliefs, and views about how your school is preparing you for college. The questionnaire consists of 18 questions and should take you approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Again, thank you for your participation.

High School to College Survey of Current Students

Please answer the following question regarding your expectations for after high school graduation.

1. What do you plan to do IMMEDIATELY after you graduate high school?

- Get a job / Work and not further my education
- Attend community college and no further education
- Attend community college and transfer to a four-year college / university
- Enroll directly into a four-year college / university
- Attend a technical or trade school
- I don't know
- Other

Other (please specify)

High School to College Survey of Current Students

Please answer the following questions regarding personal attributes that you may have.

2. How much do you agree/disagree with the following statements about yourself? (Please select one bubble for each statement.)

	Completely agree	Mostly agree	Slightly agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree
I recover quickly from tough situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I overcome barriers (racial, gender, economic, etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My family members support my academic efforts and plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My friends support my academic efforts and plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Members of my community give me support and guidance in my academic efforts and plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Considering the areas below, how effective do you believe your family's efforts are to prepare you for enrollment into a four-year institution?

	Extremely effective	Very effective	Moderately effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Inspiring you to go to college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course planning and selection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
College selection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guidance in completing college applications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The financial aid process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

High School to College Survey of Current Students

Please answer the following questions regarding potential assistance from college counselors.

4. Do you know who your COLLEGE counselor is?

- Yes
 No

5. How frequently have you visited your COLLEGE counselor at your present school? (Choose the best answer for each year.)

	At least once per month	At least once per semester	At least once per year	Never	Does not apply to me
Freshman year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sophomore year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Junior year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. For each area below, please indicate the level of help you need from counselors in order to make it to college.

	High Need	Moderate Need	Slight Need	No Need
Emotional support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
College information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Choosing a college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career advise	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Help with Teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Filling out financial aid applications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Filling out college applications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

High School to College Survey of Current Students

Please answer the following questions regarding your high school academic coursework and achievement.

7. Who most helps you choose your classes?

- Me
- My parents
- My sibling(s)
- My friends
- My teacher(s)
- My advisor / college counselor

Other (please specify)

8. How familiar are you with the A-G course requirements?

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Not at all familiar

Other (please specify)

9. Do you have a plan for completing the A-G course requirements?

- Yes
- No (if you marked "no", please skip to question 15)
- Other

Other (please specify)

High School to College Survey of Current Students

10. If you have a plan for completing the A-G course requirements, who most helped you create that plan?

- Me (no one helped me)
- My parent(s)
- My sibling(s)
- My friends
- My teacher
- My advisor / college counselor

Other (please specify)

11. How closely are you following that plan to complete the A-G course requirements?

- Very
- Moderately
- Barely
- Not at all

Other (please specify)

12. Were you (or are you currently) enrolled in advanced placement (AP) courses?

	Math	English	Science	Other
Freshman Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sophomore Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never enrolled in AP courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

please specify other AP courses

High School to College Survey of Current Students

13. Were you (or are you currently) enrolled in honors courses?

	Math	English	Science	Other
Freshman Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sophomore Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never enrolled in honors courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

please specify other honors courses

14. Were you (or are you currently) enrolled in college prep ("P") courses?

	Math	English	Science	Other
Freshman Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sophomore Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never enrolled in "P" courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

please specify other college prep courses

High School to College Survey of Current Students

Please answer the following question regarding what you believe about your high school's college culture.

15. How much do you agree/disagree with the following statements about the college-going culture of your school? (Please bubble in one response for each statement.)

	Completely agree	Mostly agree	Slightly agree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree
My school expects all students to go to college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school tries to inspire all students to go to college after graduation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school helps each student find a great college that fits their interests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school helps each student plan coursework that will lead to college	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school helps each student find a great match for their academic level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school guides each student through the application process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments?

High School to College Survey of Current Students

Please answer the following questions about yourself.

16. What grade are you currently in?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

17. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

18. Please share the HIGHEST DEGREE reached by anyone 18yrs. or older living in your household.

- High school diploma
- High school GED
- Associate's Degree (community college)
- Technical Certificate/Degree (trade school)
- Bachelor's Degree (four-year college/university)
- Master's Degree (four-year college/university)
- Ph.D / Doctorate Degree (four-year college/university)
- I don't know
- Other

Other (please specify)

APPENDIX H: “HS to College – Alumni Students Survey”

High School to College: Alumni Survey

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Please be sure that you have read the consent form that was attached to the email prior to beginning this questionnaire. Your participation is voluntary. There are no direct benefits or negative outcomes resulting from your decision to be involved, decline, or cease being involved in the study. By submitting this questionnaire, you are providing your consent to being involved in the study.

In this questionnaire you will be asked about your personal attributes, academic beliefs, and views about how your school prepared you for college. The questionnaire consists of 20 questions and should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Again, thank you for your participation.

*** 1. I have read the consent form for this study and...**

- I understand and agree with the terms set forth in the consent form.
- I understand, but disagree with the terms set forth in the consent form.

High School to College: Alumni Survey

Please answer the following three questions regarding your postsecondary enrollment.

2. In what type of institution are you currently enrolled?

	Within 10 miles of your high school	Between 10 and 20 miles from your high school	More than 20 miles from your high school
Community College	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Four-year College / University	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technical Institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

3. Which of the following categories best describes your status as a student?

	Not working a job	Working a part-time job	Working a full-time job	Other (specify below)
Part-time student	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Full-time student	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

4. Considering the following institutions, choose the response that best matched your postsecondary aspirations.

	"From birth" (before I could remember)	Since elementary school	Since middle school	Since high school	After high school graduation	I have had no aspirations
Four-year college / university	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community College	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technical Institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (specify below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Specify the postsecondary institution:

High School to College: Alumni Survey

Please answer the following four questions regarding your high school coursework.

5. Were you enrolled in advanced placement (AP) courses in high school?

	Math	English	Science	Other
Freshman Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sophomore Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never enrolled in AP courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

please specify other AP courses

6. Were you enrolled in honors courses in high school?

	Math	English	Science	Other
Freshman Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sophomore Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never enrolled in honors courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

please specify other honors courses

7. Were you enrolled in college prep ("P") courses in high school?

	Math	English	Science	Other
Freshman Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sophomore Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never enrolled in "P" courses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

please specify other college prep courses

High School to College: Alumni Survey

8. What was your cumulative grade point average in high school?

- 4.0 or higher
- 3.3 - 3.9 (B+ or higher)
- 2.3 - 3.2 (C+ or higher)
- 2.0 - 2.2 (C or higher)
- Below a C

Comment?

High School to College: Alumni Survey

Please answer the following questions regarding your pre-college information

9. While in high school, how frequently did you visit your COLLEGE counselor? (Choose the best answer for each year you were enrolled.)

	At least once per month	At least once per semester	At least once per year	Never	Was not enrolled during this year
Freshman year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sophomore year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Junior year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

High School to College: Alumni Survey

10. Considering the areas below, how effective do you believe your high school counseling staff's efforts were to prepare you for enrollment into a four-year institution?

	Extremely effective	Very effective	Moderately effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Developing college-going aspirations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course planning and selection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
College selection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guidance in completing college applications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The financial aid process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments?

11. Considering the areas below, how effective do you believe your family's efforts were to prepare you for enrollment into a four-year institution?

	Extremely effective	Very effective	Moderately effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective
Developing college-going aspirations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course planning and selection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
College selection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Guidance in completing college applications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The financial aid process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments?

12. While in high school, did the counseling staff help you create an academic plan to extend your education beyond high school graduation?

- Yes
- No

Other (please specify)

High School to College: Alumni Survey

13. If you did create an academic plan to extend your education beyond high school graduation, what was the institutional target?

- Go straight to a four-year institution
- Go straight to a technical institution
- Go straight to a community college with the plan to transfer to a four-year institution
- Go straight to a community college with no further plans

Other (please specify)

14. If you did create an academic plan to extend your education beyond high school, please choose one of the following choices regarding the outcome of that plan:

- The plan was realized without change and I am enrolled in my target institution
- The plan was changed and I am enrolled in the revised targeted institution
- The plan was not changed and I am not currently enrolled in the targeted institution

Other (please specify)

15. Prior to your sophomore year in high school, how well did you understand the importance of YOUR GRADES to your four-year college eligibility and from whom did you learn it? (Chose all responses that apply.)

	Family members	Community members	Friends	Media	Teachers	Counselors	Other (specify below)
Well understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moderately understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slightly understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did not understand it at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify your "other"

High School to College: Alumni Survey

16. Prior to your sophomore year in high school, how well did you understand the importance of TIME WITH YOUR COUNSELOR to your four-year college eligibility and from whom did you learn it? (Chose all responses that apply.)

	Family members	Community members	Friends	Media	Teachers	Counselors	Other (specify below)
Well understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moderately understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slightly understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did not understand it at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify your "other"

17. Prior to your sophomore year in high school, how well did you understand the importance of RIGOROUS COURSE SELECTION to your four-year college eligibility and from whom did you learn it? (Chose all responses that apply.)

	Family members	Community members	Friends	Media	Teachers	Counselors	Other (specify below)
Well understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moderately understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slightly understood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did not understand it at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify your "other"

18. In your opinion, how culturally responsive was the information you received from your high school college counselor?

- Highly responsive
- Moderately responsive
- Somewhat responsive
- Not at all responsive

Other (please specify)

High School to College: Alumni Survey

Please answer the following questions about your demographic.

19. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

20. Did you graduate from high school in June, 2012 or later?

- Yes, and my current institution is the institution that I initially enrolled in.
- Yes, but I initially enrolled in another postsecondary institution prior to my current institution.
- No.

High School to College: Alumni Survey

Thank you for completing this survey! To be entered into the prize drawing for a \$50 gift card, please email devonsmith67@gmail.com with the word "RAFFLE" in the subject line.

APPENDIX I: Student Focus Group Protocol

“This focus group session is designed to gain a more focused understanding of current students’ perceptions of the school’s barriers to four-year college matriculation and information students need to make a more informed college choice.”

1. What are your goals for after graduation? How did you formulate those goals?
2. If you plan to go to college, what type of institution do you plan to attend? Why? How long have you had these expectations?
3. Who is helping you make decisions related to your goal?
4. Describe the nature and quality of guidance you currently receive from your college counselor (aspiration building, course planning/selection, college selection, completing admission and financial aid applications).
5. Describe the nature of support you receive from your family as it relates to your efforts to get to college.
6. If you were a college counselor at WHS, how would you help you (the student) get to college? What would you do, etc.?
7. What do you think are some things that WHS’s counseling staff does well for African American students in terms of helping them enroll in four-year colleges after graduation? Why do you think that?
8. What do you think are some things that WHS’s counseling staff can do to provide more help to African American students matriculate directly to a four-year college?
9. What would you say to an African American high school student to help him/her to enroll directly in a four-year institution?
10. If you were to create one video designed to convey the most important thing that would help African American students enroll directly into four-year institutions after graduation, what would that *thing* be?
11. Why do you think more African Americans do not enroll directly into four-year institutions after graduation from high school?
12. Describe situations or structures at your school that you perceive may be barriers to African American students enrolling directly into four-year institutions?
13. Describe situations or structures at your school that you perceive may be assets to helping African American students enroll directly into four-year institutions?

APPENDIX J: Alumni Focus Group Protocol

“The purpose of the alumni focus group is to gain a deeper understanding of African American students’ college preparation through the perspectives of former African American students of WHS.”

1. What type of institution do you attend? Why did you choose that institution?
2. Was this your desired institution or college of choice?
3. Who helped you make that decision?
4. Describe the nature and quality of guidance you received from your college counselor while at WHS (aspiration building, course planning/selection, college selection, completing admission and financial aid applications).
5. Describe the nature of support you received from your family as it relates to your efforts to get to college.
6. If you were a college counselor at WHS, how would you have helped you (the student) get to college? What would you do, etc.?
7. What do you think are some things that WHS’s counseling staff does well for African American students in terms of helping them matriculate directly to a four-year college? Why do you think that?
8. What do you think are some things that WHS’s counseling staff can do to provide more help to African American students matriculate directly to a four-year college?
9. Knowing what you know now, what would you say to an African American high school student to help him/her to enroll directly in a four-year institution?
10. If you were to create one video designed to convey the most important thing that would help African American students enroll directly into four-year institutions after graduation, what would that *thing* be?
11. Knowing what you know now, would you do anything different in your own college preparation?

APPENDIX K: Action Research Team Focus Groups Protocols / Meetings

SESSION 1

Distribute findings from the current student surveys and the alumni surveys.

Q1: “What is your reaction to some of the data?”

Q2: “What do you notice are some of the student-perceived strengths and challenges in our efforts to help African American students get to college?”

Distribute findings from the current student focus group and alumni focus group.

Q3: “What are the top three topics current and past African American students say they would focus on in a video designed to get to African American students to four-year institutions?”

Distribute literature

Q4: “Based on what current and past African American students say and what the literature says about these topics, what do YOU think should be the primary focus of a video designed to get to African American students to four-year institutions? Why?”

Vote if necessary to narrow down to one topic.

“Next session, we will discuss and create a script based on this one topic. Until then, please brainstorm and keep track of your ideas. You can email them to me at _____.”

SESSION 2

Recap last session. Review the topic selected and the rationales by the team for choosing it. Present ideas and concepts and hear new suggestions. Write the script.

SESSION 3

Conduct a “table read” with the AR Team. Discuss revisions. Revise. Rewrite.

SESSION 4

AR Team members distribute roles from the script. A panel of African American students who have not been part of the focus group or the Action Research Team attends this session. The panel takes a pre-assessment regarding the content of the script. The team reads/performs the script in front of the panel. Members of the panel evaluate the script by completing the post-assessment. The AR Team completes an exit interview. Celebrate.

APPENDIX L: Final Script

Peer-to-Peer College Knowledge Script – FINAL

TITLE: “Michael Meets Regina”

DATE: 4.23.14

It’s a typical Friday lunchtime in the quad at Westside High School. The camera navigates us through a swarm of students just hanging out. We hear snippets of students’ conversations as we bump our way through the crowd.

Voice 1:

Yo! I can’t wait for that game tonight!

Voice 2:

Oh that’s my cut right there!

Voice 3:

Is it summer yet? This class is on my nerves!

Voice 4:

Mom, can I ride home with Sharon and them?

The camera finds MICHAEL, Westside’s self-appointed academic guardian angel, talking to another satisfied student on the bench. Michael notices the camera and finishes up his session.

MICHAEL:

Alright, so you got it?

STUDENT:

Got it.

The student leaves and Michael gives his full attention to the camera.

MICHAEL:

Oh, hey! Welcome to my world. As a senior, I take personal responsibility to help others find their path to success. Someone helped me a couple of years ago. So I kind of like pay it forward. I’m up outta here in a couple of months – heading to college. Legacy? In a way, I’m trying to take as many students with me.

He pauses to locate his next “appointment”.

Like my lady over there... She wants to go to college in a few years, but she doesn’t believe she can make it happen. She needs to grow in her *efficacy* – Oh! That’s a fancy way of saying: “She needs to grow in her

abilities to make her dreams come true!” Come hang out. Who knows, you might learn something, too!

We follow Michael to REGINA, a sophomore who wants to go to a four-year college, but is experiencing some challenges. She will be the first in her family to go to college. She thinks college is a waste of time, but her parents want her to go.

MICHAEL:

Good morning, my sister!

REGINA:

Hey what’s up?

MICHAEL:

So you ready for your summer break?

REGINA:

Kinda. Mom is trying to get me to start looking at those colleges for next year.

MICHAEL:

Oh! Have you thought of doing something fun or volunteering?

REGINA:

Why would I do that if I’m trying to look at colleges?

MICHAEL:

Well colleges look for well-rounded students who will show character and hard work ethic to be successful at their school. Volunteering is a great way to show that.

REGINA:

I didn’t know that. I like working with kids. I could volunteer at the Boys and Girls Club. It would be hard, because I have to attend summer school. Grades.

MICHAEL:

How are they looking?

REGINA:

I am failing Algebra.

MICHAEL:

What have you been doing? How have you been managing your time?

REGINA:

Well, I did get an iPhone for my birthday! Plus, that math stuff doesn't interest me.

MICHAEL:

Whatchu talkin' 'bout, Willis! Do you wanna make your *own* money or do you want to be dependent on somebody else? That iPhone won't pay the bills! You gotta manage your time responsibly.

REGINA:

Ok, dad! (sarcastically)

MICHAEL:

Well someone has to look out for you. You're obviously on the wrong track. Who's helping you with your future? Have you been to the College and Career Center?

REGINA:

Yeah. I see what you're saying. But I've never been there. And, I don't know how I'm even going to pay for college. And how am I going to get *to* college because of my grades?

MICHAEL:

All great questions to ask your college counselor. You gotta get into the College Center. And if you're scared, I'll go with you.

REGINA:

All they will talk about is schools I don't care about!

MICHAEL:

Says who? Plus, I'm here to tell you there's a school for everyone: State schools, Private universities, HBCUs –

REGINA:

HBC-What?

MICHAEL:

Historically Black Colleges and Universities – you know like Morehouse and Southern. HBCUs are great schools – especially if you are looking for cultural support. But right now, you need to start meeting with your college counselor and map this thing out. Figuring out your future can be scary. That's why we need guides to help us.

REGINA:

Pssshht! Like I said. Never been there before. No money for college. I don't have the –

Michael sighs, cutting her off.

MICHAEL:

Let me tell you about my situation. Mom's a single mom. Dad's not around. Mom dropped out of college because of no guidance. She has multiple jobs. I have take care of my two sisters while my mom goes to night school. It's very tough. But even with all that, she stays on me about school. If I work hard and go to college, I will get educated and have an opportunity for a better job to support my family.

REGINA:

Dang, that's kinda hard...like my situation. Parents are stressed out. We've moved so much I barely know my address right now. I'd be the first in my family to go to college... But, hey, if you overcame all that, maybe I can, too!

MICHAEL:

Yeah. I *know* you can! Be cool and focus... ONE: Volunteer for an organization you're passionate about. TWO: Get off that iPhone and get into those books. THREE: There's a college that's right for you, so start seeing your college counselor ASAP! And FOUR: Hit me up if you need some help!

They stand. Michael looks sternly into REGINA's eyes as if to communicate that what's coming next is most important thing REGINA needs to hear.

MICHAEL:

Hey, look. To keep it one hundred.... your mind is your weapon and your education is your tool. Use your tool for change!

They hug.

REGINA:

I'm gonna do that! You know, you really gave me some things to think about. I can do this!

REGINA walks away, mumbling something about HBCU's. Michael winks at the camera.

MICHAEL:

Another satisfied customer!

FADE OUT.

APPENDIX M: Script Evaluation Pre-Assessment

Please answer the question below by circling your preferred response.

1. How much do you know about *efficacy*?
 - A. Not a bit
 - B. A little bit
 - C. Quite a bit

2. How much do you know about what kind of student colleges look for?
 - A. Not a bit
 - B. A little bit
 - C. Quite a bit

3. How much do you know about the importance of time management as a student?
 - A. Not a bit
 - B. A little bit
 - C. Quite a bit

4. Have you visited your *college counselor* this year?
 - A. No
 - B. Yes
 - C. I made an appointment, but I did not meet with my college counselor

5. Do you know what HBCU's are?
 - A. No
 - B. Yes

6. Are you aware of any challenges in your life that could *potentially be* barriers to you going to college?
 - A. No
 - B. Yes

APPENDIX N: Script Evaluation Post-Assessment

After listening to the table read of the script, and reflecting its content, please answer the questions below by circling your preferred response.

1. How much did the script increase your understanding of *efficacy*?
 - A. Not a bit
 - B. A little bit
 - C. Quite a bit

 2. Did the script increase your understanding about what kind of student colleges look for?
 - A. No
 - B. Yes

 3. Did the script increase your understanding about the importance of time management as a student?
 - A. No
 - B. Yes

 4. *As a result listening to the script*, are you interested in visiting your *college counselor*?
 - A. No
 - B. Yes, before this school year ends
 - C. Yes, at the beginning of next year

 5. Did the script increase your understanding of what HBCU's are?
 - A. No
 - B. Yes

 6. *As a result listening to the script* are you interested in getting help from a trusted guide in your life (like a trusted and capable family member, friend, counselor, pastor, etc.) in order to help you deal with any barriers to you going to college?
 - A. No
 - B. Yes

 7. Overall, how effective do you think the script may be in informing African American students about *efficacy*?
 - A. Not a bit
 - B. A little bit
 - C. Quite a bit

 8. How, if at all, would the script interest / engage African American high school students about preparing for college?
-

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX O: Action Research Team Exit Interview Protocol

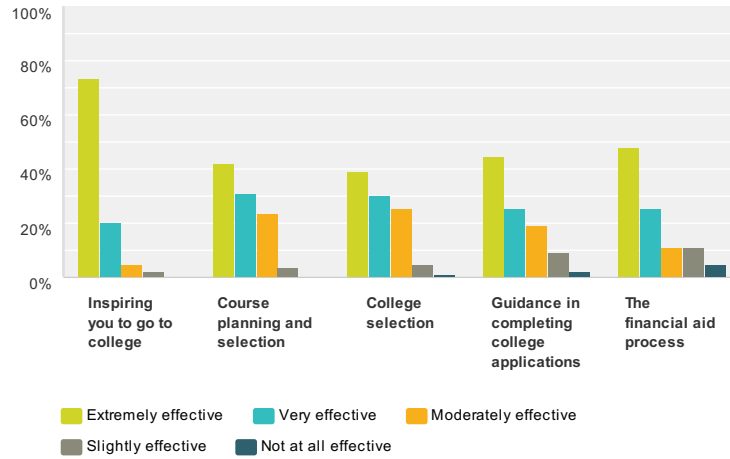
1. In your opinion, what has been the value (if at all) of our process toward helping African American students enroll in four-year institutions?
2. How could we improve our script development process?
3. Do you think this school could benefit from students involving themselves in helping to solve school problems? Why? How?
4. How might our school encourage the use of a similar process to solve school problems?
5. What should be the next steps in getting students to see the video once it is produced?
6. How has the Action Research process of writing the script challenged your thinking about your involvement in a solution to the problem of low African American college matriculation?
7. How, if at all, has this process changed you?

APPENDIX P: Students' Perceptions of Family Effectiveness

High School to College Survey of Current Students

Q3 Considering the areas below, how effective do you believe your family's efforts are to prepare you for enrollment into a four-year institution?

Answered: 91 Skipped: 1



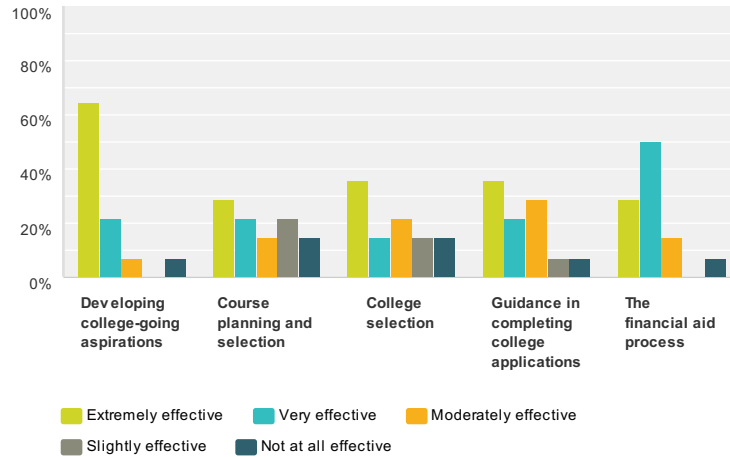
	Extremely effective	Very effective	Moderately effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective	Total
Inspiring you to go to college	73.63% 67	19.78% 18	4.40% 4	2.20% 2	0.00% 0	91
Course planning and selection	42.22% 38	31.11% 28	23.33% 21	3.33% 3	0.00% 0	90
College selection	38.89% 35	30.00% 27	25.56% 23	4.44% 4	1.11% 1	90
Guidance in completing college applications	44.44% 40	25.56% 23	18.89% 17	8.89% 8	2.22% 2	90
The financial aid process	47.78% 43	25.56% 23	11.11% 10	11.11% 10	4.44% 4	90

APPENDIX Q: Alumni's Perceptions of Family Effectiveness

High School to College: Alumni Survey

Q11 Considering the areas below, how effective do you believe your family's efforts were to prepare you for enrollment into a four-year institution?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 4



	Extremely effective	Very effective	Moderately effective	Slightly effective	Not at all effective	Total
Developing college-going aspirations	64.29% 9	21.43% 3	7.14% 1	0.00% 0	7.14% 1	14
Course planning and selection	28.57% 4	21.43% 3	14.29% 2	21.43% 3	14.29% 2	14
College selection	35.71% 5	14.29% 2	21.43% 3	14.29% 2	14.29% 2	14
Guidance in completing college applications	35.71% 5	21.43% 3	28.57% 4	7.14% 1	7.14% 1	14
The financial aid process	28.57% 4	50.00% 7	14.29% 2	0.00% 0	7.14% 1	14

APPENDIX R: Students' Frequency of Visits With Their College Counselors

	At least once per month	At least once per semester	At least once per year	Never	Does not apply to me	Total
Freshman year	3.57% 3	8.33% 7	8.33% 7	72.62% 61	7.14% 6	84
Sophomore year	8.86% 7	6.33% 5	12.66% 10	56.96% 45	15.19% 12	79
Junior year	10.14% 7	17.39% 12	17.39% 12	26.09% 18	28.99% 20	69
Senior year	28.07% 16	8.77% 5	1.75% 1	12.28% 7	49.12% 28	57

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