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Exploring Black Student Success with a Mixed Methods Investigation of Retention in the Second Year of College

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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Although significant gains have been made in recent years with regard to increasing access to higher education for African Americans, with 38.4% of Black 18 to 24 year-olds enrolled in college as of 2016 compared to just 25.4% in 1990, completion rates have not kept pace. The national six-year graduation rate for Black students at four-year institutions in 2008 was 40.9%, considerably lower than their White peers' rate of 63.2% (National

Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Students that persist at their institutions through the first two years are significantly more likely to graduate (Adelman, 2006), but retention in the first two years is a particular challenge for Black students: one-fifth of all Black students who successfully complete the first year leave before the beginning of the third (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015).

Focusing on this second year, then, could provide a meaningful path to increasing graduation rates for Black students at four-year institutions. This study focused on the second year but narrowed that focus further to Black second-year students using an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, starting with a quantitative inquiry into the factors that contribute to retention for all second-year students at a regional, comprehensive, four-year institution in southern California. The follow-up qualitative phase concentrated on Black students at the institution and their second-year experiences.

The results of the quantitative phase suggest that second-to-third year retention is influenced by students' senses of belonging and connection to the institution, which positively influences both their commitment to the institution and their academic engagement, which has its own direct, positive effect on retention. Belonging is, in turn, strongly influenced by positive relationships with student peers and faculty. The qualitative results highlight Black student experiences across six themes that suggest the importance of student involvement, membership in multiple campus communities, relationships with faculty, and positive self-concepts, as well as the strong negative effect of racial separation. The implications of these results benefit practitioners and researchers

who are looking to make positive changes for second-year students on their campuses and improve both experiences and outcomes for Black students.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Income inequality has been associated with a number of social problems, including crime, health issues, social mobility, and lack of public and individual trust (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). In the United States, income inequality is a serious problem that can be drawn along clear racial lines. The median yearly income of the White working population in the U.S. in 2015 was $62,950 in 2015 but only $36,898 for African Americans. This difference is in even sharper contrast at the bottom of the economy: as of 2015, although 11.6% of the White population lived below the federal poverty line, the percentage of African Americans in the US living in poverty was more than double at 24.1%—almost one in four (Proctor, Semega, & Kollar, 2016). Left unaddressed, this staggering level of inequality poses a threat to the well-being of not just those groups on the wrong side of the equation but to the health of American society as a whole (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

Education, especially higher education, has often viewed itself as an equalizing social force, one that can offer marginalized groups the opportunity to find success in spite of structural inequity (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010; Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2003). While in 2016, the median yearly income for African Americans with only a high school degree was $27,830, those with a two-year college degree earned 9% more,

$30,440, and those with a four-year degree earned 65% more, $45,820. Obtaining a Bachelor's degree brought these 2016 median incomes closer to the median income of whites with the same level of education: African Americans with Bachelor's degrees had a median income equal to about 92% of White income (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Income gaps continue to exist, but are at least somewhat mitigated by college education.

It is a positive sign, then, that college enrollment for young Black men and women has increased over the last two decades. In 1990, the percentage of all Black 18 to 24 year-olds enrolled in college was 25.4%; by 2016 that number had grown to 38.4% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). The combined enrollment of the 331 four-year institutions that contribute data to the University of Oklahoma's Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) has increased from 577,415 in 2004 to 685,453 in 2013, and over that time span, the proportion of White students has dropped from about 69% to 59% while the proportion of Black students has stayed between 9% and 10%, representing about a 19% increase in Black enrollment at these institutions. Much of this growth in student diversity is driven by state and regional universities with lower acceptance standards, institutions the CSRDE categorizes as "less selective" with average freshman 2013 ACT composite scores of less than 21.0 or SAT composite scores of less than 990. Combined enrollment at these 77 schools in the CSRDE sample has grown from 66,301 in 2004 to 85,777 in 2013, with the White student proportion decreasing from about 46% to 35%. Black student numbers increased from 15,612 to 17,801 in those ten years but due to a notable increase in Latino/a students, this constituted a small decrease in

proportion from about 24% to 20% (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015). These numbers signify an important diversification of entering freshman populations at regional four-year colleges and reflect an increased desire for educational attainment in traditionally underserved groups.

Unfortunately, this boost in enrollment has not been accompanied by significant increases in degree completion. Six-year graduation rates for all students nationally increased only two percentage points from cohorts beginning in 2002 to those beginning in 2008, from 57.2% to 59.6%. Black students in particular saw very little improvement in going from 40.1% to 40.9%. Not only are these rates stagnant, they represent massive achievement gaps: 63.2% of white students starting in 2008 had graduated by 2014, a rate more than twenty percent higher than Black students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Graduation rates are even lower and reflect less growth at less selective institutions: the CSRDE's report showed only a one percent increase in the overall six-year graduation rate over the last five years, with all cohorts starting in 2004 graduating at 42.4% and those starting in 2008 at 43.4%. The rate for Black students stayed essentially flat at 33.1% to 33.2%. The achievement gap at these institutions was smaller but no less significant: 50.0% of white students starting in 2008 had graduated by 2014, 16.8% more than their Black counterparts (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015).

The California State University (CSU) system, the largest public four-year university system in the U.S. with almost half a million students (California State University, 2017), has focused a great deal of effort on improving graduation rates, and although improvements have been made, they have been modest at best, moving from

52.4% of the 2004 cohort to 54.0% of the 2008 cohort. In the same span, the rates for Black students across the CSU system have actually dropped from 38.3% to 37.4%, meaning only between one-third and two-fifths of Black students leave CSU campuses with a degree (CSU Analytic Studies, 2015). Stagnant graduation rates coupled with increased enrollment means an increase in the number of graduates but also a drastic increase in the number of college dropouts. At the less selective CSRDE institutions, the number of Black graduates has increased from 5,168 in 2004 to 6,067 in 2008, but the number of Black students entering these institutions but not attaining a degree has gone from 10,444 to 12,208 over the same five years (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015). Many of these students leave college with no degree but with substantial student debt, and dropouts who incur debt are twice as likely to be unemployed and ten times as likely to default on their loans as graduates with debt (Gladieux & Perna, 2005).

Many universities have focused on the transition to college in order to address graduation rates, with the first year of college receiving a great deal of institutional focus (Kuh et al., 2010; Nora & Crisp, 2012). At the CSU system, this focus on the first year has improved one-year retention rates across the system from 77.7% in 1995 to 84.7% in 2013. Students returning to CSU campuses after their first year have consistently higher six-year graduation rates: the total 2008 cohort graduation rate was 54.0%, but students in that cohort who returned after their first year graduated at a rate of 67.9%. African Americans, however, still lag behind even when taking students who returned for year two into account: the graduation rate for second-year White students in the CSU's 2008 cohort was 75.3% compared to only 53.7% for African Americans (CSU Analytic Studies, 2015). At

the CSRDE's less selective institutions, which include 12 of the 23 CSU campuses, there has been very little growth in the second-year graduation rate: it has increased less than two points in the last five years, with the 2004 cohort rate of 57.8% moving only to 59.5% for the 2008 cohort, with the rates for Black second-year students even lower at 47.6% (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015).

Even looking at second-to-third year retention, that is, the percentage of second-year students who returned for a third year, paints a picture of slowed growth: at the less selective institutions, 81.9% of all second-year students in the 2004 cohort returned for their third year, which rose less than two points to 83.8% nine years later with the 2012 cohort. Black second-year students, however, returned for a third year at a rate of 79.5%, meaning that one-fifth of all Black students at these institutions who successfully complete their first years of college leave before starting a third year (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015).

Unsurprisingly, graduation rates are significantly higher for third-year students: at the CSU system, 76.6% of the total 2008 cohort who made it to the third year graduated within six years, 8.7% higher than the second-year rate (CSU Analytic Studies, 2015). Black students at the CSRDE's less selective institutions in particular see a strong increase in graduation rate when making it to the third year: 61.0% of Black third-years in the 2008 cohort graduated, 13.4% more than second-years in the same cohort (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015). These finding highlights the importance of the second year, especially for African Americans: gains in second-to-third year retention could amount to significant increases in overall graduation rates.

Student retention through the second year, therefore, is a matter of educational equity. Students of color, particularly Black students, see disproportionate rates of attrition during their second years of college when compared to their peers (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015; CSU Analytic Studies, 2015). If higher education as a whole, both as an academic and an economic enterprise, wants to achieve its oft-stated goal of improved outcomes for all students regardless of demographic or social status, student success in the second year needs to be addressed.

Unfortunately, the second year of college has undergone little academic scrutiny to this point, at least in comparison to the first year (Nora & Crisp, 2012), though this has started to change as institutions begin to understand it as another transition point for college students (Juillerat, 2000; Schaller, 2005). With ever-increasing pressure from legislators, funders, accreditors, and especially students themselves to improve college success (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, 2012), institutions are beginning to address attrition and retention during the second year in earnest (J. N. Gardner, Pattengale, & Schreiner, 2000; Nora & Crisp, 2012). Key to this work is understanding the experiences of second year students and the unique struggles and challenges they face. In particular, few if any attempts have been made to directly access the perspectives of Black second-year students, despite what appears to be a disproportionately strong impact of this time in their college careers.

Significance of the Dissertation

This dissertation addresses two larger research questions: first, what factors influence second-year retention at four-year universities, and second, how do Black

students in particular describe the second year of college? The research design utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach which began with a larger quantitative phase that was followed up by a more focused qualitative phase. The quantitative phase centered on a survey of all second-year students at the research site with survey items designed by the institution's staff to gauge student attitudes and behaviors during the first term of their second year. Analysis of this institutional data addresses the first research question. The qualitative phase was more narrowly focused and centered on phenomenological interviews with second-year Black students; coding and analysis of these interviews addressed the second research question.

The study adds significantly to the literature on college student retention and thus to general knowledge on college success and completion. In particular, the study provides a quantitative perspective to the academic understanding of the second year of college, which has to this point been studied mostly from a developmental perspective (Gump, 2007; Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Schaller, 2005). Further explanation of the factors that contribute to retention—or, alternatively, to attrition—during the second year will help practitioners develop programming and interventions for second-year students that directly address these factors and can help institutions allocate resources to strategies that can help these students succeed.

This study also highlights the experiences of second-year Black students, a group which finds success and struggle in the second year in different ways than their peers. In addition to contributing to the large body of research on African Americans in college, this study recontextualizes their experience in a unique but increasingly important context, that

of a racially and ethnically diverse campus. Black students continue to be a minority on these campuses even as the demographics shift and the majority groups change (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), and it is increasingly important to understand how they experience this shift so that practitioners can support them in meaningful and impactful ways.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation explores the research study in depth, including an overview of the literature related to the topic and a detailed discussion of the study's methods before diving into its results and the conclusions drawn from them. Chapter One provided a summary of the problem addressed in the study and will conclude with this short overview.

Chapter Two begins with a review of the substantial literature on college student retention, focusing mainly on Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure (1975, 1993) and the work in support of and in critique of this theory. I then move to another large body of research on the Black college experience, hoping to highlight work on the ways in which African Americans relate to the college environment and both the ways in which they have found success and the ways in which institutions have failed to support them. The review then moves on to the comparatively narrow yet important area of research on sophomores and the second year of college. The narrowed scope allows for a discussion of the breadth and depth of research in this area, from developmental perspectives to limited quantitative work on second-year students. I conclude the literature review by synthesizing research discussed in each section into a potential framework for

the study: an adaptation of Tinto's theory for the second year that focuses on a student's sense of belonging to the institution and the level of his or her engagement with academics.

Chapter Three focuses on the methods used in the study and opens with its research questions and subquestions followed by a justification for using an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach to answer them. The following section discusses the data collection phases, starting with a description of the research site and moving to details of each phase. The first is the quantitative phase, which involves a survey conducted at the research site by institution staff in the Fall term of 2017; I will discuss the survey sample, design, and procedures, then discuss how this data will be linked to the qualitative phase. The qualitative phase consists of a series of one-on-one interviews with Black second-year students. In this section I will detail the qualitative research process, which includes working with these student facilitators on the research protocol itself. After describing the proposed data collection efforts, I will move to a discussion of data analysis. The qualitative data will undergo a process of phenomenological reflection and thematic coding while the quantitative data will be tested using Structural Equation Modeling techniques.

Chapter Four contains the results of the study presented sequentially in accordance with the mixed methods design, starting with the quantitative results and ending with the qualitative results. The quantitative results are presented in the form of a structural equation model that fits the data collected in the survey while the qualitative results are presented through six overarching themes that arose during the interviews with Black second-year students at the research site.

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation with a deeper exploration of the results presented in the previous chapter. The implications and conclusions of the study draw connections between the results of both phases, a comparison and contrast that leads to recommendations for student-level practitioners and institution-leading administrators to lead change on their campuses in support of second-year students, with a particular emphasis on supporting Black students during their second year of college.

CHAPTER TWO:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The study of how and why students leave college without completing a degree program has become one of the most studied areas in higher education research (Berger et al., 2012). The literature on retention is vast and interdisciplinary and has attempted to address the problem from a wide variety of perspectives. The following review of the literature provides an overview of the history of the study of retention in higher education, focusing mainly on the historical development of Tinto's interactionalist theory (Tinto, 1975, 1993) and the critiques and elaboration of his theory that came after. The focus then presents research on African American success and struggle in higher education, one of the most studied demographic populations in higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The review concludes with a summary of recent studies on sophomore or second-to-third year retention.

Student Persistence and Retention in College

Historical studies of persistence. Although students have been leaving colleges since the development of the modern system of higher education, retention has been of interest to colleges only since demand for higher education began to increase in the second half of the 20th century. Early colleges served only a very small fraction of the population, almost entirely of the elite, and employer demand for college-educated workers was very low. As demand increased, the number of institutions in the United States grew significantly: student enrollment grew from about 110,000 in 1915 to over two million in the 1950s (Berger et al., 2012). This explosion in enrollments began to produce much

more diverse student populations, not only socioeconomically, but, starting in the Civil Rights era, racially and ethnically. Over the last few decades, greater transparency and increased competition for students has caused institutions to pay more and more attention to student attrition. State-funded higher education in particular has faced increasing pressure from lawmakers to increase the number of degrees awarded and provide value to tax-funded tuition, with retention and graduation rates often serving as key benchmarks in government-mandated assessment (Berger et al., 2012).

One of the earliest attempts at studying why students leave college came through a 1937 report for the U.S. Office of Education—then a part of the Department of the Interior. John McNeely's report on what he called "student mortality" (1937) was a comprehensive study of 25 universities that attempted to identify key attributes of both institutions and students that contributed to student departure. McNeely (1937) found that public institutions had higher attrition rates than public ones and empirically illustrated how freshmen are most likely to depart, with decreasing attrition rates as students continue at an institution. He also found that older students are more likely to depart than younger students, that students were more likely to drop out the further their college was from home, and that students taking a lighter credit load were more likely to withdraw. McNeely's analysis was a highlight of early retention research, which through the 1960s was largely focused on individual student or individual institutional attributes and how they related to student departure. Much of the student-focused research came from a psychological perspective (Astin, 1964; Summerskill, 1962) and sought to find particular personality traits in students that would signal a risk of departure (Berger et al., 2012).

Noting that the previous decade's research on dropouts had neither strong empirical support nor any sort of guiding theory, sociologist William Spady (1970) was among the first to synthesize existing research into a conceptual framework (Berger et al., 2012), using a sociological perspective to look at the interactions between students and the academic and social systems in a college. Spady's model was built on early theory on suicide, which posited that individuals increase their risk of suicide when they are less integrated into their particular communities (Durkheim, 1951). He viewed the parallel between suicide and dropout as a function of integration into the community of the college: those that were able to achieve what he called "normative congruence" with the institution, that is, students who could operate comfortably within the norms and standards of behavior of the school, would find social and academic integration easier, which would lead to persistence (Spady, 1970). Spady's sociological model and empirical backing were influential in the retention literature and helped to shape Vincent Tinto's work in the coming years (Berger et al., 2012).

Tinto's theory. Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure has been described as having "near-paradigmatic status" (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997, p. 108) in the retention literature. Elaborating Spady's (1970) model, in 1975 Tinto set out to develop a theoretical model to explain the interactions between a student and his or her institution that would lead to withdrawal. This very influential first attempt followed Spady (1970) in using Durkheim (1951) as a basis for studying social integration, while a later update to his theory in 1987 and 1993 brought in ideas from an anthropological perspective.

The logic of the model is relatively simple: a student's entry characteristics such as demographics and previous academic success influence his or her initial commitments to obtaining a degree—goal commitment—and to obtaining a degree at a particular school—institutional commitment. These commitments in turn influence the student's level of integration into two separate but related spheres at the institution: the social and the academic world of the college. The student's social and academic integration will then influence his or her subsequent commitments to his or her academic goals and the institution, which will ultimately affect the decision to persist or depart (Tinto, 1975).

The second iteration of his theory (1993) recognizes the influence of external factors such as the ability to pay tuition or influences from one's family on persistence, but Tinto stresses that these external factors are filtered through the experience of the college. What effect they have on a student is felt mainly in the student's level of social and academic integration; for example, a student working full time will have little time or motivation to become fully integrated in the social world of an institution. Students who are unable to successfully integrate with the academic world of the institution risk failure and academic dismissal, while students who are unable to integrate socially may be inclined to transfer; both are necessary, at least in some small part, in order to persist and graduate at a specific institution. The lines between the academic and social worlds in a college are hardly clear and are heavily influential to each other; for example, positive integrative experiences in the classroom are often social in nature and can lead directly to social integration (Tinto, 1993)

Empirical study and critique of Tinto. Tinto's work provided a framework for understanding retention that allowed its study to expand in a number of positive directions (Berger et al., 2012). Many subsequent studies used Tinto's model as a base to design investigations into student departure. Terenzini and Pascarella (1980) collected and synthesized a number of these studies in an attempt to ascertain the empirical validity of Tinto's 1975 theory; their results recommended the model as a useful framework but suggested that its variables be more defined. Echoing this critique, Bean (1980, 1983) developed an alternate model based on research on employee turnover in work organizations that was more rigorous in defining discrete variables, including a number of institutional variables, which proved to have significant influence on student attrition. In Bean's (1980) model, specific organizational attributes of the institution influence student satisfaction, which adjusts commitment levels and influences student persistence (Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Pascarella and Chapman (1983) similarly found a strong relationship between institutional variables and attrition when testing Tinto's theory, although their study highlighted how different institution types—residential versus commuter—produced different correlations.

Perhaps the most direct empirical challenge to Tinto's theory comes from Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson's (1997) thorough dissection, which saw the coauthors break the theory up into 15 testable propositions related to the logic of the longitudinal model. They found strong support for only five propositions, most importantly finding that only social integration affects subsequent commitment to the institution, not academic integration. When looking at only commuter institutions, however, their results indicated the opposite:

that academic integration, not social integration, influences subsequent commitment. Earlier researchers noted the same with non-traditional students, finding little correlation between social integration and persistence in those that did not fit the mold of stereotypical, traditional-age, residential students (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Commuter institutions may not provide the kinds of opportunities for social interaction that residential campuses can provide, leaving students with academic integration as the only option for meaningful connection (Braxton & Lien, 2000).

Although he addressed the concern in his 1987 and 1993 updates, Tinto's original theory (1975) was also criticized for downplaying the role of external factors in students' persistence decisions. Many students enter college with a great deal of external commitments, including work and family obligations, which may conflict with institutional commitments and the ability to address them through academic and social integration (Tinto, 1993). Students from traditionally underserved and underrepresented groups are often disproportionally subject to such conflict (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). The ability to pay for college, another stress that disproportionally affects underserved students (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992), not only shapes initial commitments (Tinto, 1993) but continually affects students' ability to integrate and their subsequent levels of commitment (Cabrera et al., 1992).

Actual financial flexibility can affect persistence decisions directly, but a student's perception as to his or her financial difficulty in paying for college can affect levels of integration; for example, students who perceive a great deal of financial difficulty tend to work more outside of campus, which leaves them less time to develop their academics or

participate in social activities on campus (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera et al., 1992). Tinto's updated theory (1993) recognized this external pressure, but suggested that the influence after enrollment was relatively minor and fit into his model mostly in the form of entry characteristics (1975, 1993).

Theoretical critiques of Tinto. Others have critiqued Tinto on theoretical grounds as opposed to questioning his theory's empirical validity. Bean (1980) and Attinasi (1989) both take issue with Tinto (1975) having built his model on Durkheim's (1951) conception of suicide. Bean (1980) contends that there is insufficient evidence to link suicide and student departure, while Attinasi's (1989) critique is more fundamental. He writes that linking attrition and suicide—or, in Bean's (1980, 1983) case, linking attrition and leaving a job—is a limited framework with which to view the problem, especially in regard to the quantitative methods that had been used to study retention until that point, suggesting that those methods remove important context from students' departure decisions and recommending using qualitative techniques in order to understand how and why a student decides to leave an institution (Attinasi, 1989).

Attinasi's critique is closely related to further critical cultural critiques of Tinto (Guiffrida, 2006; Kuh & Love, 2000; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992, 1999). Tinto's (1993) conception of integration can be viewed as harmful to underserved populations, who under the model were being asked to disassociate from their home communities and assimilate into the dominant culture of the college (Rendón et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992). The model can be adjusted to recognize the importance of the community connection for underserved populations (Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009);

Guiffrida (2006) suggests changing the language of the theory from "integration" to "connection," implying growth and development as opposed to destructive change.

In addition to criticism of integration as a general concept, authors have taken issue with the individual concepts of social (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón et al., 2000) and academic integration (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Tinto's model was developed in the 1970s and was thus largely based on the experiences of what was then seen as the traditional college student—young, White, and mostly male—with students of color and other non-traditional students rarely appearing in sizable enough proportion to affect the results of empirical tests of the model (Rendón et al., 2000). These students often find it difficult to become involved on campus, at least in the ways that are usually measured as leading to social integration (Hurtado & Carter, 1997): unlike the traditional college student, who arrives at the institution with both structural and cultural resources, non-traditional students are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and less likely to have parents with college degrees (Rendón et al., 2000). Emphasizing involvement as the primary means of integration leads institutions to "assume that all students, regardless of background, are ready, willing, and able to get involved" (Rendón et al., 2000, p. 145), which is sadly not the case for students from historically marginalized groups or those from low income families. Hurtado and Carter suggest that these students are much more likely to be interested in involvement activities that produce a sense of group membership as opposed to a more general social integration with the college, activities that are often not included in operationalizations of social integration (1997). It is through these smaller group memberships that non-traditional students, particularly

students of color, begin to navigate the college landscape (Attinasi, 1989). Writing that "integration can mean something completely different to student groups who have been historically marginalized" (1997, p. 326), Hurtado and Carter suggest that measuring a student's sense of belonging might better serve students than traditional measures of social integration.

Academic integration has also been challenged on a conceptual level by several authors. In addition to general critiques that academic integration has been inconsistently operationalized (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Braxton et al., 1997; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), Tinto's original concept (1975, 1993) has been criticized as being too vaguely defined (Bean, 1980, 1983; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980) and lacking internal consistency (Braxton & Lien, 2000). Tinto considered academic integration to have a "structural dimension that is indexed in students' academic achievements" (Braxton & Lien, 2000, p. 24), that is, while he considered it a combination of academic achievement and intellectual development, it could be directly measured by grades:

> Though grade performance and intellectual development appear as separate components of a person's integration into the academic system, it is clear, from the discussion of the evaluative aspects of grades, that persons with high grades are more likely to be high in measures of intellectual development, especially as specified by the notion of congruency with the prevailing intellectual climate of the college (Tinto, 1975, p. 106).

Focusing academic integration on achievement neglects the importance of the normative and collective aspects of integration that were key to Durkheim's model of egotistical suicide. Using grades as a proxy for normative congruence with the academic environment downplays the extent to which membership in or isolation from the academic community affects students' levels of academic integration. Students can become intellectually

isolated for a number of reasons, from a more general misalignment with the academic orientation of the institution to a more individual or specific reason such as being unable to choose a major or feeling unchallenged by his or her courses (Braxton & Lien, 2000). Academic integration's high level of importance to student retention at commuter institutions as compared to its mixed results at residential institutions (Braxton et al., 2004, 1997) suggests a new way of thinking about academic integration may be necessary, away from academic achievement and toward intellectual affiliation, membership, and engagement (Braxton & Lien, 2000).

Although it is possible to critique the model from a number of angles, its widespread use and adaptability make it a very useful tool for studying retention (Braxton et al., 2004). With these critiques in mind, we can now move on to the retention literature that deals specifically with a traditionally vulnerable population of college students: African Americans.

Retaining African American College Students

As a general demographic category, Black students in U.S. institutions of higher education are at a significant structural disadvantage compared to their peers in a number of ways: they are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and more likely be the first-generation college students (Fischer, 2007; Tinto, 1993) as well as having generally lower levels of academic preparation, both in terms of standardized test scores as well as in completion rates of advanced placement courses in high school, especially advanced mathematics and science courses (Massey et al., 2003; Tinto, 1993). In addition, Black students are more likely to experience financial pressures, including a

higher likelihood of relying on financial aid including loans (St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). Because of these pressures, they are more likely to incur debt and are often constrained in their choice of college, attending only where tuition is lower, financial aid offers are greater, or living expenses are reduced, whether by generally lower housing costs or continuing to live at home with family; often this means they apply only to less-selective colleges (St. John et al., 2005).

Even when controlling for socioeconomic status and pre-college academic preparation, however, Black students earn lower grades, progress through their academic programs more slowly, and are retained and graduate at lower rates than their White and Asian peers (Massey et al., 2003). Although external forces clearly have a strong influence on Black student success, with particular attention paid to how financial pressure and family obligations can divert student focus (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996), pre-college characteristics like socioeconomic background and academic preparation are not as clearly correlated with success for Black students as for their peers (Steele, 1992; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987) and are specifically not as important as what goes on after they arrive on campus (Allen, 1992).

Walter Allen's (1992) seminal study of differences in outcomes for Black students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) from those in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) highlighted the importance of integration into the campus community, and although he noted that social integration into a PWI for Black students was complex, his assertion of the significance of academic integration was corroborated in subsequent studies (J. E. Davis, 1994; Fischer, 2007). In Tinto's words, however,

traditionally underserved students often struggle "in finding a suitable niche in the social and intellectual life of the college" (1993, p. 75) for a number of reasons.

Students of color at PWIs will have difficulty integrating without the help of a supportive community within the college (Tinto, 1993), especially one with peers who are able to help them navigate their new cultural reality (Attinasi, 1989; Museus & Quaye, 2009). It is also possible that traditional measures of integration, especially social integration, may not work as well for traditionally underserved students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1993); membership in the kinds of organizations that are often measured as indicators of integration may even have a negative effect on students of color (Harper et al., 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Campus climate. The academic and social climate of a college campus may also play a large role in the success and struggle of traditionally underserved students, especially African Americans (Tinto, 1993). For these students, the campus racial climate is intricately intertwined with these two spheres (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), although all students, not just students of color, "are educated in racial climates that influence psychological processes, intergroup relations, and group cohesion" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 330).

African Americans tend to view their college's racial climate as more hostile than do their non-minority peers (Hurtado, 1992; Johnson et al., 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). These negative perceptions have been both directly correlated with Black student attrition (Fischer, 2007) and indirectly linked to attrition by leading to a decrease in their commitment to the institution (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999).

These perceptions are often influenced by overt incidents of racial antagonism on campus, which take the form of both large-scale discrimination and race-based microaggressions (Solarzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) and cause a great deal of psychological distress for many students of color (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Consequently, Black students can develop a sense of "racial battle fatigue," living in a constant state of distress similar to the psychological states of military personnel in combat areas (W. a Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

Even on PWI campuses with lower levels of overt racial conflict, Black students report feeling isolated from the campus community at large as well as in the classroom (M. Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002) and feeling disconnected to physical and social contexts that they see as catering to the interests of White students (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Black students experiencing an unfriendly climate may assume that their institutions are not interested in supporting them, leading them to not seek out or even actively avoid much needed support services (J. E. Davis, 1994). Subsequent generations of Black students may then enter the institution expecting racial conflict, especially at smaller, regional schools that draw students from the same communities (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Academic and social integration is a significant challenge for Black students on PWI campuses (M. Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Tinto, 1993), but it is important to recognize that encouraging Black students to integrate without addressing racial climate may simply

expose them to racial hostility and drive them away from the institution (Harper et al., 2011).

Sense of belonging. Fortunately, positive perceptions of the campus racial climate are associated with a number of benefits for students of color, especially Black students: in addition to increasing involvement and integration and thus being indirectly related to degree completion (Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008), positive perceptions are significant indicators of a sense of belonging for Black students (Johnson et al., 2007). Sense of belonging can be loosely defined as a student's psychological sense of membership in the larger campus community (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997) and contains both a sense that one has a place within and is a valued member of the community (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002). A student's sense of belonging has clear ties with academic integration in both directions (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hoffman et al., 2002) and may in fact serve as a more appropriate measure of integration for students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). It can be seen both as a psychological need and a motivation for behavior: students actively seek it out when looking to "fit in" or "get connected" through peer groups like clubs and student organizations and have it passively reinforced by positive interactions with faculty and other students in a supportive campus environment (Strayhorn, 2012).

For all students generally but Black students in particular, sense of belonging has a direct and positive relationship with commitment to an institution and an indirect relationship with retention (Hausmann et al., 2009). Students report a strong sense of belonging when they display positive attitudes and behaviors toward issues of diversity on

their campuses (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007); cross-racial peer interaction has been shown to be especially important to Black male students in increasing perceptions of belonging (Strayhorn, 2008). In contrast to their White peers and despite Tinto's warning that such continued contact could complicate integration (1993), support and encouragement from close friends and family are strongly correlated to sense of belonging in Black students (Hausmann et al., 2007). It is clear that African Americans can struggle to find a place on unfamiliar and often unwelcoming college campuses (Johnson et al., 2007), but those who feel they have found a good fit and find positivity in their membership in the larger community are more likely to succeed (Hausmann et al., 2009).

It is important to note that for students of color, integration is a complicated concept, especially when defined as integration into the larger academic or social community of an institution (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón et al., 2000). Alternate readings of integration include an understanding that students can become successfully "integrated" by finding membership in a smaller piece of the campus community (Attinasi, 1989; Kuh & Love, 2000), making measurement of sense of belonging important in predicting the success of these students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). When viewed as a psychological need, sense of belonging becomes particularly important for students who may feel out of place, unsupported, or explicitly unwelcomed; these students actively seek membership and belongingness in their interactions with the environment, be it through the academic or social spheres of the institution (Strayhorn, 2012).

Institutions should also view belonging not just as a student-level characteristic but one that can be mediated by the institution itself (Gahagan, 2018; Harper & Hurtado, 2007;

Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Through their direct actions, policies, and procedures, institutions can demonstrate integrity, defined as the alignment of an institution's mission and goals with its actions (Braxton et al., 2004; Gahagan, 2018; Nelson, 2018). When students, particularly students of color, perceive an institution to have this kind of integrity, they are more likely to report stronger senses of belonging and community (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Gahagan, 2018). While it is certainly possible for institutions to address belonging directly through co-curricular programming and high impact practices in the classroom (Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012), institutions that are committed to their integrity may find that their students are more amenable to connection (Ash & Schreiner, 2016) and thus more committed to the institution itself (Braxton et al., 2004).

Positive racial identity. In addition to how they view the campus community around them, it is important for Black students to have a positive view of themselves, both individually (Sedlacek, 1987; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987) and collectively (Adams, 2005; Awad, 2007; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997). A positive self-concept is a very strong predictor of Black student success (Sedlacek, 1987) and having a positive racial identity appears to be a necessary condition for a positive self-image: racial identity has been tied to both academic self-concept, which is itself correlated with academic success (Awad, 2007), as well as with general self-esteem (Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997; Lockett & Harrell, 2003) and self-efficacy (Adams, 2005).

With his nigrescence model, William Cross (1971, 1991) described the development of a positive Black identity in five stages, moving from the *pre-encounter* stage where younger African Americans may not derive much meaning from their Black

identity through an *encounter* stage where they are faced with an experience of difference, one which Cross states often occurs in college for many middle-class African Americans. The transitional stage of *immersion-emersion* follows, with an individual adopting very pro-Black and anti-White sentiments and then slowly moderating those views. The final developmental stages in his model, *internalization* and *internalization-commitment,* see African Americans emerge with a positive Black racial identity as they begin to identify with their Blackness on their own terms as opposed to external influences (Cross, 1991). Students develop racial and ethnic identities throughout college (Chavous, 2000; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Syed, 2010), and this development influences a number of activities and behaviors, including involvement (Chavous, 2000) and major choice (Syed, 2010). For Black males in particular, a positive racial identity helps them feel some measure of control and agency and allows them to actively seek out forms of academic and social integration with the institution (Bonner & Bailey, 2006). Similar to their influences on Black students' senses of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2009), familial relationships have a strong impact on the development of a positive Black racial identity (Wilson & Constantine, 1999).

Oppositional culture and stereotype threat. Two major theoretical explanations of Black academic underachievement also deal with racial identity: the theoretical concepts of oppositional culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2004) and stereotype threat (Steele, 1992, 1997). The theory of oppositional culture suggests that due to the group's historical marginalization, many African Americans view success in school as a quality of oppressive White culture, which causes them to regard putting forth the time and effort to

do well in school as "acting White," with underachievement possibly explained as unconscious opposition to the dominant culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Fortunately, while there have been only a small handful of empirical studies at the college level (Harper, 2010), attempts to replicate Fordham and Ogbu's original findings (1986) and Ogbu's subsequent work (2004) have found little evidence of support (Harper, 2010; Massey et al., 2003), although it could be the case that by making it to the college level, Black students have already learned how to "act White" and cope with the social pressure of doing so (Massey et al., 2003).

Stereotype threat (Steele, 1992, 1997), however, has been shown to have an influence on Black student success in college (Cokley & Moore, 2007; M. Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001, 2002; Massey et al., 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995). The theory relies on the premise that academic success at all levels requires students to relate their self-esteem with academic achievement. Black students face two separate psychological pressures to perform well academically: first, they must cope with the commonly-felt pressure that they risk exposing their lack of a particular academic competence, but in addition they feel the added pressure that this lack of competence will confirm the stereotype of their racial inferiority (Steele, 1992, 1997).

Under this double psychological pressure, Steele theorized that Black students may disidentify with academic achievement, that is, they may reduce the psychological tie between self-esteem and academic achievement as a coping mechanism (Steele, 1992, 1997). Stereotype threat produces immediate and measurable psychological stress in Black students (C. Davis, Aronson, & Salinas, 2006; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson,

1995) in addition to the long-term effects of disidentification, which have been shown to create statistically significant differences in test scores and overall grades (Massey et al., 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Disidentification, which is a particular problem for Black men in college (Cokley & Moore, 2007), makes academic integration difficult, causing a student to become, in Steele's words, "psychologically insulated from her academic life" (1992, p. 74). The constant psychological pressure of dealing with negative stereotypes in classrooms where they are extreme minorities is a tremendous waste of academic energy (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002) and wears down Black students' academic self-concepts (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001); students often describe the pressure of being asked to speak on behalf their race or their community, whether by peers or instructors (M. Davis et al., 2004). While it does appear that a positive racial identity mitigates its effects somewhat (Adams, 2005; C. Davis et al., 2006), even top students at elite universities suffer from the detriments of stereotype threat (Massey et al., 2003).

Validation theory and faculty influence. Given the emphasis on social and academic integration as a predictor of African American success in higher education (Allen, 1992; J. E. Davis, 1994; Fischer, 2007; Tinto, 1993), it should come as no surprise that researchers have attempted to understand how to increase their levels of integration, especially in the academic sphere (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1994). Validation theory contends that traditionally underserved students can succeed and thrive in institutions of higher education if they receive academic and personal validation from faculty, staff, and student peers (Rendón, 1994). This validation can help these students

believe they can be successful and helps them integrate into the social and academic systems of the college. In contrast to Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure (1975, 1993), which places the duty of integration on the student, validation theory stresses that the institution must take an active role in integration for underserved students:

> Expecting students to involve themselves with the social and academic infrastructure of an institution will work only for students who have the skills to gain access to these opportunities. Clearly, some students will be able to get involved on their own. But, merely offering opportunities for involvement will not work for passive students or for those who do not know how to take full advantage of the system. What is needed is the active academic and interpersonal validation of these students—a process that affirms, supports, enables, and reinforces their capacity to fully develop themselves as students and as individuals. (Rendón, 1994, p. 45)

Validation has seen both quantitative (Barnett, 2010) and qualitative support (Terenzini et al., 1994) that highlights the positive influence of validating experiences as well as the negative influence of their inverse: as powerful as validation could be for students, invalidating experiences and impersonal treatment were especially damaging. Academic validation from faculty is especially important, examples of which include demonstrating genuine concern for student learning, being personable and approachable, treating students equitably in the classroom, working individually with students, and providing meaningful and supportive feedback (Rendón, 1994).

Faculty-student contact is an important predictor of academic success and persistence for all students (Kim & Sax, 2017; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), but while Black students report more informal interactions with faculty members, they are generally less satisfied with those interactions than other students (Guiffrida, 2005; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004) and are often looking for a mentoring type of relationship as opposed to

casual contact (Guiffrida, 2005). Quality of faculty contact seems to be more important than quantity for Black students, particularly in terms of its link to academic success (Kim & Sax, 2017; Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018). In fact, just the perception that faculty are concerned with students' academic and career plans serves as a stronger predictor of Black student academic success than the actual frequency of contact (Nettles, Thoeny, & Gosman, 1986); perceptions of faculty as compassionate are also tied to sense of belonging for all students (Hoffman et al., 2002). Validation from faculty can come in many forms (Rendón, 1994) but could be especially powerful if mixed in with classroom instruction, possibly even by incorporating Black identity development in the curriculum (Dawson-Threat, 1997). Faculty who work to foster a welcoming and supportive environment in their classrooms instill in their students an increased sense of belonging which leads to increased academic motivation (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Zumbrunn, McKim, Buhs, & Hawley, 2014).

With only a few notable exceptions (Chavous, 2000; Young, Schreiner, & McIntosh, 2015), the literature on Black student retention does not focus on examining class level as a variable. Thus, there has been little direct research on Black sophomores. Learning about this unique population will require a robust understanding of sophomores and the second year of college in general, a relatively new topic of research to which we now turn.

Sophomore Students and the Second Year of College

The vast majority of student retention research is focused on decisions to persist through the first year (Nora & Crisp, 2012). This has allowed many institutions to improve

first-year retention rates but may have resulted in shifting attrition to subsequent years (Nora & Crisp, 2012). In fact, there is some suggestion that the expansion of services directed toward first-year students but not extended to subsequent years may be masking or postponing the kinds of problems that would lead those students to depart during the first year (Gump, 2007). This discussion will begin with an overview of developmental perspectives on the second year of college.

Schaller's Stages of Exploration. Much of the recent research on second-year students is related to their personal development in an effort to understand the similarities and differences they share with their collegiate peers. These frameworks attempt to discover what is unique about the second year of college and how students approach it. Molly A. Schaller's work with sophomores sees her develop a developmental model with four distinct stages through which students navigate during the second year (2005, 2007). Students enter college in a stage of *random exploration*, where they are learning about themselves, their relationships with others, and the college setting. Much of this exploration is passive: students "make few active choices about their lives" and instead "seem to fall into decisions that are convenient" (2007, p. 9). The random exploration stage can extend into the beginning of the second year for many students, but they soon advance to a stage of *focused exploration*, where students become more concerned about decision-making. Schaller notes that this stage can be accompanied by a great deal of apprehension and anxiety, possibly to the point of affecting students academically, especially as this stage lengthens and students begin to feel external pressure to make firm choices (2007). The focused exploration stage is followed by a stage of *tentative choices*, where students

begin to make decisions for themselves in one or more major areas of their lives. These choices alleviate some of the anxiety of the focused exploration stage but may not be permanent until they reach the final stage, *commitment*. Schaller states that although few sophomore students in her study reached this stage by the end of the second year, those that did expressed a great deal of self-confidence and security (2005). She suggests that sophomore initiatives be designed to help guide students through focused exploration and into tentative choices and finally commitment during the second year, but that staff and faculty must be careful not to rush students into convenient decisions; the discomfort inherent in the focused exploration stage is important for personal growth and ensures that students are making the right decisions for themselves (2007).

Schaller notes that her findings (2005) resonate with Baxter Magolda's work with college students and how they approach learning. Of the sophomores in her sample, she classified 46% as falling into the first of four epistemological domains, *absolute knowing*, meaning those students view knowledge as absolute and their role as learners is to simply absorb it from authoritative sources. 53% of her sophomore sample were placed into the second domain, *transitional knowing*, where some types of knowledge remain certain but other types can be uncertain. Only 1% of her sophomores entered the third domain of *independent knowing* and not one entered the fourth, *contextual knowing*, both of which move a student further along the continuum of understanding knowledge as contextual but real and valuable (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Schaller suggests that sophomores still lingering in random exploration seem stuck in absolute knowing: "Because students in random exploration do not yet seem to be in touch with an internal voice or in active

reflection about decisions, they may feel uncertain about what they should be doing if they are not receiving direction from others" (2005, p. 21). The transition from random to focused exploration is a time of questioning and seeking purpose and meaning and can also be a time of discomfort (Schaller, 2005), aligning well with the transitional knower's lack of clarity, which is also often accompanied by unease (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Schaller's focus on purpose and clarifying goals (2005, 2007) is closely aligned with the work of Arthur Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), a second developmental framework often used to examine sophomores.

Chickering's Vectors. One of the earlier attempts to develop a framework to understand sophomore development is Lemons and Richmond's efforts (1987) to view second-year development through the lens of Chickering's seminal work on student identity in college (1969). Chickering's original work, which was updated in 1993, detailed seven vectors of identity development for college students: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Although students develop along these seven vectors throughout their college experience, Lemons and Richmond suggest that four of the seven vectors are particularly salient during the second year: competence, autonomy, identity, and purpose (1987).

Students develop three different types of competence over the course of their college careers: intellectual competence, physical and manual competence, and interpersonal competence. Intellectual competence is most closely related to academic

pursuits and achievement (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), and it is with this that many sophomores tend to struggle (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). Students in the second year find themselves in a unique position, further removed from the expectations of their families (Medalie, 1981) and often still enrolled in large general education courses with little opportunity for personal contact with faculty (Schreiner, 2010b). Not only do they have difficulty understanding the academic expectations placed upon them, students in this position receive little recognition for their academic achievements, making it difficult for them to know whether or not they are developing competence (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). This is particularly important given that academic self-concept, a student's self-measure of academic ability relative to peers (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) which tends to increase over a full college career (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), actually suffers a general decrease during the first year of college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students may begin the second year somewhat less certain of their academic abilities and in greater need of some form of recognition or validation (Lemons & Richmond, 1987).

Chickering's vector of autonomy can also be separated into three types: emotional independence, instrumental independence, and interdependence. Emotional and instrumental independence are closely linked and often reinforce one another, with interdependence only possible if a student is fully independent in both ways; as such, interdependence usually comes later in the college experience (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Lemons and Richmond see sophomores struggle with independence in a number of ways, including the aforementioned need for academic recognition inhibiting development

of emotional independence and continued financial difficulty stifling their instrumental independence (1987). Students may be generally less inclined to act or think independently after a difficult first year of college (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The establishment of identity is the fulcrum of a student's development, both a goal and an outcome which requires progress in the vectors of competence, emotions, autonomy, and relationships and is necessary for an individual to begin working on purpose and integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). While all students are in some way working on their identities, sophomores are at a critical point in this development, particularly if they are less confident after the challenges of the first year and are regressing on the vectors of competence and autonomy (Lemons & Richmond, 1987). Self-reflection is necessary in the establishment of identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and is particularly lacking in students that fall into Schaller's stage of random exploration (2005).

Sophomores are also at a particular crossroads with regard to developing purpose (Lemons & Richmond, 1987), which Chickering defines as a composite of career goals, personal interests, and interpersonal commitments (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students in the second year deal with a high level of anxiety around major choice and career direction (P. D. Gardner, 2000) and many struggle with either not progressing toward their goals to a satisfactory level or with developing goals in the first place (J. N. Gardner et al., 2000). Connecting with faculty can have a very positive influence on students' development of purpose and goals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schreiner, 2010b), particularly for students of color (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004), but sophomores are often

in a difficult position with regard to faculty, being disconnected from general education instructors, many of whom are part-time lecturers (Schreiner, 2010b), and not yet connected to faculty in the major that they have chosen but not yet been fully immersed in (P. D. Gardner, 2000; Schreiner, 2010b). Schaller's model draws clear inspiration here, with students' progress through the stages of exploration driven primarily by development in this vector (Schaller, 2005).

Students that are unable to progress along the vectors of competence, autonomy, identity, and purpose may enter a state of "developmental confusion" (Lemons & Richmond, 1987, p. 18) which may decrease their level of engagement and may lead to departure from the institution. Lemons and Richmond refer to this developmental interruption or regression as "the sophomore slump" (1987). Their attempt to define the slump in developmental terms provides a useful framework, but it has been viewed though several other lenses which we will cover in the next section.

Academic disengagement in the second year. The vague concept of the "sophomore slump" has been mentioned in educational research for as long as the discipline has undertaken scientific inquiry, although only recently have the tools and methods been developed to adequately study the phenomenon (Gump, 2007). The concept of the slump has never been well-defined (Gump, 2007; Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010), but in addition to being a developmental concern (Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Medalie, 1981), research has suggested that second-year students struggle with decreased general satisfaction with and expectations of the institution (Juillerat, 2000), academic disengagement (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Margolis, 1976; Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000) and

indecision about majors and careers (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Schaller, 2005, 2007). While there does not appear to be empirical evidence to support generalized academic struggle in second-year students as a group (Freedman, 1956; Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010; Margolis, 1976; Terenzini, Theophilides, & Lorang, 1984), the above general categories of difficulty faced by sophomores are clearly related and may combine to produce significant psychological stress (Kennedy & Upcraft, 2010; Medalie, 1981; Schaller, 2005). Academic disengagement is a particular problem for second-year students (P. D. Gardner, 2000; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Schreiner, 2010a) that affects them on a number of levels, including satisfaction with in-class experiences (Schreiner, 2010a), meaningful interactions with faculty (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Schreiner, 2010a, 2010b), and general academic integration (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Schreiner & Louis, 2011).

In particular, students who either remain undecided or have yet to confirm a major area of study have difficulty engaging academically (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Tobolowsky, 2008) and may be floundering in general education coursework, unable to connect with faculty and peers in a particular discipline of interest (Schreiner, 2010b). These students can feel a great deal of pressure from family, from peers both in and out of school, and from the institution itself to make choices, like selecting a major, that will have a huge impact on their futures (Schaller, 2005). Those that are able to make these decisions will emerge with a strong sense of relief, security, and self-confidence (Schaller, 2007), with the ensuing gains in self-efficacy leading to academic success in the second year (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010) and increased institutional commitment (Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013), a driver of persistence (Tinto, 1993). Confidence in

their choice of major has in fact been directly linked to second-year students' academic success (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). But those who stretch this period of uncertainty through the second year may suffer significant psychological distress that can affect them academically (Schaller, 2005). Students in the second year often rely on peers for support with major and career decisions, implying that they feel a lack of institutional or faculty guidance (P. D. Gardner, 2000).

Academic disengagement could also be related to course availability, especially at over-enrolled and under-resourced public universities: many sophomores are simply unable to find seats in courses in their major and are relegated to finishing out general education requirements that may not excite them (Schreiner, 2010b). Sophomores have reported lower scores in comparison to other cohorts in measures of academic engagement, including total effort, gains in learning, active learning, and faculty contact (Kuh & Hu, 2001), all of which could be related to feeling trapped in unwanted courses (Schreiner, 2010b), an especially detrimental experience at a time when many students are developing and deepening academically and looking for more of a challenge intellectually (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Schaller, 2007). In addition to reduced access to faculty in their major or discipline, students in this position also have difficulty finding a peer group with related academic interests, reinforcing their disconnection from the academic side of college (Gaff, 2000).

Academic integration in the second year. Several recent empirical studies have highlighted the sophomore experience at four-year universities, including a national survey of sophomore students through the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience

and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina (Schreiner, 2010a). The results of the survey highlighted the importance of student-faculty interaction, which has been shown to increase all students' connections with their institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) but has rarely been shown to be significant for sophomores specifically (Schreiner, 2010a). The frequency of student-faculty interaction and the level of reported satisfaction with those interactions were highly significant predictors of sophomores' intent to reenroll the next year, intent to graduate, perceptions of the worth of their tuition (Schreiner, 2010a), and overall academic success (Graunke & Woosley, 2005); student engagement, activity, and participation in the classroom is also strongly correlated with sophomore success, satisfaction, and retention (Schreiner, 2010a).

This kind of active learning is difficulty to access for sophomore students, who are often concentrated in lower-division general education courses or entry-level major courses with large class sizes that are often taught by junior faculty with little teaching experience or adjunct and part-time instructors (Schreiner, 2010b). As a whole, sophomores report the lowest levels of satisfaction with faculty when compared to other class levels (Schreiner & Nelson, 2013; Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018; Young et al., 2015), but Schreiner and Tobolowsky write that "Second-year students who are thriving report frequent and rewarding interactions with faculty, both in and out of the classroom; thus, creating opportunities for this interaction to occur is vital to sophomore success" (2018, p. 61). The national survey also highlighted the importance of faculty interaction for Black sophomores: positive faculty interactions reported by this group contributed more to their sense of thriving in college than any other racial group (Young et al., 2015). Interestingly,

involvement in campus activities may not be a strong predictor of academic success in the second year (Graunke & Woosley, 2005), which implies that, in the language of Tinto (Tinto, 1975, 1993), social integration may not be as important as academic integration for sophomores.

Summary of Literature

College retention is a difficult and complex problem that has puzzled researchers for over eighty years (Berger et al., 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While early research focused on individual student deficiencies, a new sense of urgency has developed around the topic, with pressure from funders and especially from state and federal lawmakers to figure out how institutions can increase graduation rates and produce higher returns on investment for tax dollars (Berger et al., 2012).

Vincent Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure (1975, 1993) offers a strong framework for studying how and why students depart. While the theory does have some issues defining concepts and operationalizing variables (Bean, 1980, 1983; Braxton et al., 1997; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980), integration is a very useful concept that can predict retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and its flexibility can be viewed as a strength (Braxton et al., 2004). Academic integration in particular seems to be a powerful lens for studying retention, especially for non-traditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985) and non-traditional schools such as commuter campuses (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Braxton et al., 1997).

If integration is a key to retention, however, it is unfortunate that there are so many barriers to Black students finding a good fit on many college campuses (Johnson et al., 2007; Tinto, 1993). A general sense of belonging to a campus seems to be important to Black student success (Hausmann et al., 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), but hostile racial climates on college campuses often make that difficult for African Americans (Cabrera et al., 1999; Fischer, 2007). Many Black students also struggle with stereotype vulnerability, which puts them at a distinct disadvantage in the classroom as they face the psychological pressure of performing under a racially-isolated microscope (Steele, 1992, 1997).

Fortunately, faculty appear to be able to make a difference for African Americans in their classrooms through personal and academic validation (Rendón, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1994). Connections with faculty are judged more critically by Black students (Guiffrida, 2005; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004) but also appear to be highly influential in terms of academic success and persistence (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Kim & Sax, 2017; Nettles et al., 1986; Young et al., 2015). In general, Black student success in college seems to be related to how they see themselves, both as individuals (Awad, 2007; Sedlacek, 1987; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1987) and as a racial group (Adams, 2005; Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Goodstein & Ponterotto, 1997), as well as how they see themselves as members of the campus community (Hausmann et al., 2009). Positive views of self (Bonner & Bailey, 2006), the campus community (Hausmann et al., 2009), and the integrity of the institution (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Braxton et al., 2004; Gahagan, 2018) can lead Black students to become integrated both socially and academically, with that

academic integration bearing a particular influence on their retention (Allen, 1992; J. E. Davis, 1994; Fischer, 2007).

Although there has been little focus on the second year (Nora & Crisp, 2012), what research has been done has shown how sophomores often become academically disengaged as a result of the uncertainty they face (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Margolis, 1976; Pattengale & Schreiner, 2000). Much of this uncertainty is related to choices regarding majors and future careers (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Schaller, 2005, 2007). Those sophomores who are able to emerge from this uncertainty with concrete decisions can reconnect and reengage academically (Schaller, 2007; Vuong et al., 2010; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013). Interactions with faculty (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Schreiner, 2010a) and active, engaged learning in the classroom (Schreiner, 2010b, 2010a) can also help integrate or reintegrate sophomores into the academic sphere, although both are difficult for sophomores to access if they have not begun coursework in their majors (Schreiner, 2010b). For sophomores in general and for Black sophomores in particular (Young et al., 2015), academic integration appears to influence retention more than social integration (Graunke & Woosley, 2005), an interesting finding in the light of research on first-year students which shows the opposite (Braxton et al., 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

The Need for Further Research

Although college student retention has been studied for at least eighty years (Berger et al., 2012), the three sections above highlight the need for further research. In particular, there is a clear need for an expansion and adaptation of Tinto's theory to

second-year students. Much of the empirical research on college student retention uses samples of first-year students (Nora & Crisp, 2012), with Tinto's theory specifically designed to explore persistence decisions after the first year (Tinto, 1975, 1993). A small set of empirical work on second-year students uses concepts of social and academic integration (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Juillerat, 2000; Schreiner, 2010a; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013), although each study operationalizes the concepts differently. There is a clear opportunity to be more intentional and explicit in adapting Tinto's model to the second year in order to compare and contrast the factors that affect retention for each group.

There is also little overlap in the literature between the relatively new focus on second-year students and the very large and developed body of work on Black college students. There is very little published work focused on second-year Black students, with what little research on the population that does exist merely using race and ethnicity as a demographic variable (Chavous, 2000; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Wang & Kennedy-Phillips, 2013; Young et al., 2015) as opposed to accessing the unique experiences of Black students or any other traditionally underserved group. Considering the unique challenges Black students face throughout their college careers, it is reasonable to expect that they may experience the second year differently from their peers (Schreiner, Schaller, & Young, 2018). Understanding the successes and struggles of second-year Black students will help add to the puzzle of second-year retention as a whole.

Much of the empirical work on the Black experience in higher education is comprised of studies situated at either PWIs (e.g. Chavous, 2000; M. Davis et al., 2004;

Fischer, 2007; Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2003), at HBCUs (e.g. Awad, 2007; Guiffrida, 2005), or as a comparison of the two (e.g. Allen, 1992; Cokley, Komarraju, King, Cunningham, & Muhammad, 2003). However, with the significant increase in Latino/a students enrolling in universities around the country, many schools, especially the types of less-selective institutions at which many Black students enroll (St. John et al., 2005), are very diverse and can no longer be considered "predominantly White," at least in terms of student body. Black students do, however, remain extreme minorities on these campuses (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015). How these diverse campuses look and feel to African Americans will be an important area of study as American demographic change continues.

An Adapted Model of Tinto's Framework

This dissertation uses an adaptation of Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of Student Departure (1975, 1993) that adjusts his original conceptions of academic and social integration to the context of the second year. These concepts have remained relatively unexplored in research on second year persistence (Nora & Crisp, 2012). The adapted model follows the general framework of Tinto's theory: students' levels of social and academic integration—translated in the second year as sense of belonging and academic engagement, respectively—influence their levels of commitment to their individual goals and to the institution, which in turn influence their decisions to remain or depart.

Tinto's theory posits that students' decisions to persist or depart are largely influenced by their level of integration with the college community, both socially and academically, and these levels of integration are determined by a combination of pre-

college characteristics and in-college experiences (Tinto, 1993). The conception of integration, however, must be transformed for the context of second-year students, a much more diverse population in terms of development (Schaller, 2005, 2007). Integration is a somewhat limited concept for this population, one that inherently implies transition into college: presumably, all second-year students are "integrated" to at least some extent, as those who did not over the course of the first year will have departed. Although Tinto suggests that retention programming after the first year focus on helping students "remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution" (1993, p. 176), he notes that the context widens significantly after the first year, calling the challenge of addressing retention in the later years "considerably more complex" (1993, p. 176).

Sense of belonging as social integration. With this increasing complexity in mind, focusing on more directly measurable outcomes of integration that directly affect the lives of second-year students may lead to a better understanding of retention during the second year. In terms of social integration, measuring sense of belonging may provide a more meaningful way to access a student's level of collective affiliation and the extent to which he or she feels isolated or connected to the community. In adopting Strayhorn's definition of sense of belonging as both a psychological need and a motivation for behavior (2012), it can be measured as both an outcome of previous experiences in the first and second years and as a predictor of persistence; in this way, sense of belonging is the result of social integration during the first year and will continue to influence persistence decisions during the second. Sense of belonging accesses how a student feels about his or her membership within the community of the college at large as well as within smaller

communities that exist within it (Strayhorn, 2012), thus accessing an important aspect of integration for students of color that may not be seen through traditional measurement of social integration (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Most importantly, sense of belonging has been directly linked to goal commitments (Strayhorn, 2012) and retention for all students (Hausmann et al., 2009) and particularly for sophomores (Juillerat, 2000).

A student's sense of belonging is influenced by his or her interactions with various parts of the institution, including staff, faculty, and other students (Hoffman et al., 2002; Strayhorn, 2012). The influence of faculty members is particularly strong, both inside and outside the classroom (Freeman et al., 2007; Schreiner, 2010b; Zumbrunn et al., 2014). For students of color, perceptions of campus racial climate carry a great deal of weight in their feelings of belongingness (M. Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Johnson et al., 2007), though all students feel more connected to campuses with positive climates (Maestas et al., 2007). Interpersonal validation also serves as a powerful influence on students' sense of belonging, particularly for students of color and first-generation students (Barnett, 2010; Rendón, 1994; Terenzini et al., 1994).

Academic engagement as academic integration. Academic integration may be even more important for second-year students (Graunke & Woosley, 2005), but the limits of the concept, particularly its implication of transition into the institution, make it difficult to measure in the second year. Approaching the concept from the idea that a lack of academic integration leads to "intellectual isolation" (Braxton & Lien, 2000, p. 24) allows us to define academic integration for second-year students as the extent of intellectual isolation during the second year. This can be measured through a student's perceptions of

his or her engagement in academics, both in and out of the classroom (Schreiner & Louis, 2011): students who have trouble engaging with the academic community of an institution are, by definition, isolated from that community, and thus at risk of departure (Braxton & Lien, 2000).

Students in the second year struggle with academic engagement for a number of reasons, including having difficulty choosing or confirming a major (P. D. Gardner, 2000; Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Schaller, 2005, 2007), accessing coursework that is personally meaningful (Gaff, 2000; Schreiner, 2010a, 2010b), and connecting with faculty in their discipline (P. D. Gardner, 2000; Schreiner, 2010b). For second-year students, engagement with academics is a clear predictor of satisfaction, academic success, and retention (Schreiner, 2010a).

First-year experiences and perceptions as pre-college experiences. Tinto's model emphasizes the importance of college entry characteristics, which he defines in his updated model as a student's "given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experiences, and dispositions" (1993, p. 113). If we translate Tinto's model to the second year, pre-college experiences, which in the original model include experiences up to the moment of matriculation (Tinto, 1993), would now include experiences leading to the start of the second year. These experiences may have modified how students see themselves, following the observation that students' self-concepts, especially academic self-concepts, often decrease over the first year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Since self-concept has been linked with academic success (Awad, 2007; Sedlacek, 1987), it is an important attribute to measure at the start of the second year.

Although Tinto's model stresses the impact of prior educational experiences, there is reason to suggest that, despite its strong influence on first-year success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), pre-college academic performance has less influence on retention after the first year (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 1999; Nora & Crisp, 2012). As students with particularly poor performance in the first year tend to fall to academic disqualification before they reach the second year (Adelman, 2006), academic progress during the first year seems to influence students in the second year more than grades received that first year (Adelman, 2006; J. N. Gardner et al., 2000). Students who feel that they did not make adequate progress toward their degrees in the first year will have trouble engaging academically during the second (J. N. Gardner et al., 2000). It is reasonable to expect that a student's experiences, both academic and social, will influence his or her self-concept, connection to the institution, and engagement with academics.

Summary of the theoretical framework. Figure 2.1 is a diagram of the adapted model outlined above. The experiences and attitudes a student brings to his or her second year facilitate or hinder the sense of belonging the student feels toward the institution and his or her level of academic engagement. These experiences and attitudes can be measured through though several constructs, including peer and faculty interaction, confidence in the student's choice of major, perception of the campus racial climate, and the extent to which the student feels personally validated by interactions with institutional actors. A student's sense of belonging and level of academic engagement in turn determines his or her commitments to both the institution and individual goals, which ultimately determine the

decision to stay at the institution or depart. Chapter 3 will discuss the study designed to test this new model of second-year retention.

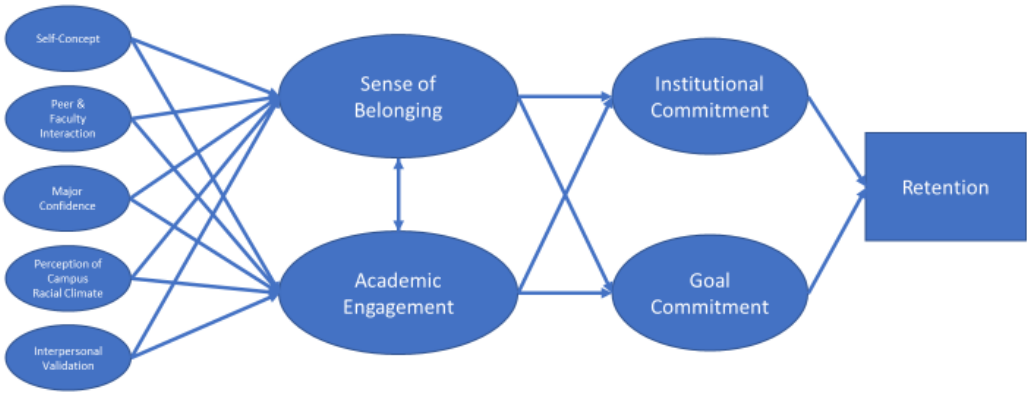

Figure 2.1: Proposed Model of Second-Year Retention

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODS

This chapter discusses the research study in detail, focusing on methodological justifications, data collection, and data analysis. I will begin by stating the explicit research questions, and, from there, move to explaining how the study addresses them, including methods, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Research Questions

The study explores the factors that influence the retention of second-year students at a mid-sized, public, four-year university in southern California, with an intentional focus on Black students. This exploration is driven by two main research questions, each with a set of more directed subquestions:

1. What factors influence second-year student retention at this university?
    a. How does Sense of Belonging influence second-year student retention?
    b. How does Academic Engagement influence second-year student retention?
    c. How do certain distinct concepts related to student attitudes and behaviors (such as academic and social self-concept, perceptions of campus racial climate, satisfaction with institutional interactions, faculty interaction, interpersonal validation, and confidence in major choice) influence Sense of Belonging?
    d. How do certain distinct concepts related to student attitudes and behaviors influence Academic Engagement?

2. How do Black students describe their second year at this university?
    a. How do Black second-years describe their commitments and connections to their goals and to the University?
    b. How do Black second-years describe their engagement with academics?
    c. How do Black second-years describe their relationships and interactions with faculty, staff, and other students?
    d. How do Black second-years describe themselves?

Overview of Methods

The retention of second-year Black college students is a complex, multi-layered problem that requires a unique approach. Traditional studies using quantitative or qualitative approaches in isolation may produce important insights, but only a combination of the two can provide the breadth and depth necessary to fully explore the issue. This study uses an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to address the research questions defined above: 1) what factors influence second-year student retention, and 2) how do Black students describe their second year?

The mixed methods design begins with a quantitative phase based around a survey of second-year first-time-freshmen. This phase addresses the first research question through quantitative data analysis using structural equation modeling (SEM). Preliminary results from this analysis were used to inform a supplemental qualitative phase focused on the research site's second-year Black students, and the analysis of this qualitative data addresses the second research question. Before detailing the quantitative and qualitative

phases of the research design, it is important to address the reasoning behind the choice of methods.

Mixed methods research. I approached the issue of Black student retention in the second year from a pragmatic perspective, focusing my efforts on using the most appropriate methods for answering each research question. Pragmatism emphasizes performing research in order to solve problems (Biesta, 2010) and allows researchers to let the demands of their research questions determine their methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism also offers a powerful epistemological framework that sees knowledge as neither wholly objective or subjective (Biesta, 2010; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), which allows researchers the freedom to approach research questions both from objective and interpretive angles in order to provide the fullest possible understanding (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Having adopted this perspective, a mixed methods approach works well to address the research questions. Mixed methods research assumes that a researcher can form a more complete understanding of an issue by combining quantitative and qualitative methods than he or she could with either method in isolation (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Quantitative research allows researchers to study a large population and produce generalizable results but often lacks detail and specificity, while qualitative research provides depth and a greater understanding of individuals but the results are often not generalizable. In mixed methods research, however, "the limitations of one method can be offset by the strengths of the other" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 8), making the results both meaningful and applicable. Mixed methods research is complicated,

however, and researchers using this approach must make decisions about the level of interaction between the quantitative and qualitative methods, their priority relative to one another, both in terms of timing and emphasis, and how the two sets of data will be combined (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

An explanatory sequential design is appropriate for the research questions defined above. This design begins with quantitative data collection that is supplemented by a second phase of qualitative data collection. With this design, the primary focus is on the quantitative data analysis and the qualitative data analysis is used to further explain the quantitative results. Explanatory sequential design is a very useful tool that allows a researcher to both determine the relationships between factors as well as attempt to explain why those relationships exist (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

After the development of Tinto's framework in the 1970s, much of the influential work on college student retention was based around quantitative studies (Berger et al., 2012), with a particular emphasis on quantitative tests of Tinto's theory (e.g. Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Thus the quantitative basis for studying student retention using Tinto's theory is well known and very widely used (Braxton et al., 1997). Used alone, however, quantitative methods have the potential to "strip away the context" (Attinasi, 1989, p. 250) of students' decisions. In addition, most of the quantitative models used to study retention, including Tinto's, were designed around the experience of "traditional" college students, that is, young White men who attended full-time at residential institutions (Rendón et al., 2000). Qualitative studies of retention can allow for the return of student voice and perspective (Attinasi, 1989) and offer a

valuable insight into the reasons behind trends in attrition and retention uncovered through quantitative analysis. Qualitative research based in the experiences of racial minority and other traditionally underserved students has the potential to add significantly to the literature (Echols, 1998). In particular, Black student voices have rarely been used to inform the understanding of college student retention (M. Davis et al., 2004); in fact, much of the literature on the Black students in higher education has approached these students "as a monolithic or homogeneous group," ignoring their variation and complexity (Harper & Nichols, 2008). This study values those voices within a unique institutional context.

Data Collection

The following section details the data collection process for this study of second-year Black student retention. After describing the institutional context for the study, the section will thoroughly describe the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study, including the structural link between the two.

Institutional context. The study was conducted at a public, regional, comprehensive university in suburban southern California, part of a state-wide system of public universities focused on baccalaureate education. To protect the identity of the institution, it will be referred to throughout this dissertation as "the University." The University is a relatively new institution, having been founded in the late 1980s, but has grown rapidly to a total student population of about 14,000, with about 95% of those enrolled at the undergraduate level and the remaining in the University's handful of small Master's degree programs. As with other schools in the state-wide system, the University began primarily as a destination for local community college students, though in recent

years the proportion of transfer students has steadily declined as the number of first-time-freshmen has continued to grow: in Fall 2012, about 2 in 5 undergraduates had transferred to the University from another institution, but as of Fall 2017, that proportion had fallen to about 1 in 3 ("Institutional Planning and Analysis - Student Profile," 2017). The University is classified in the group of Master's Colleges and Universities at the Medium Programs level by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education and its size and setting is classified as "four-year, large, highly residential," similar to many other regional state universities across the country ("Carnegie Classifications," 2017).

The University's undergraduate population is relatively diverse in terms of racial and ethnic demographics, with just over half of the population (50.5%) categorized by the state-wide system as Underrepresented Minority (URM) students, that is, students who identify primarily as American Indian or Alaska Native, Black or African American, Latino/a, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. The University has received recognition as both an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI) and a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) ("Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities," 2017; "List of AANAPISIs," 2017). Latino/a students make up the largest racial or ethnic group on campus, with students who identify primarily as Latino/a at about 45% of the undergraduate population as of Fall 2017; the Black student population is very small in comparison (3%). In addition, a large proportion of the University's students are considered First-Generation college students: only about 35% of the undergraduate population has a parent with a baccalaureate degree, and almost a third

are the first in their families to attend college of any kind ("Institutional Planning and Analysis - Student Profile," 2017).

Around half of all first-time-freshmen graduate within six years of starting at the University, slightly below the national average of public institutions of around 58%; the four-year graduation rate of around 15% is much lower than the national average of around 34% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). The University has focused much of its efforts in student retention on first-time-freshmen in their first year, investing in wrap-around support for first-year students including a robust first-year seminar course. These efforts have markedly improved one year retention for first-time-freshmen, moving from a low of 60% in 2000 to 80% in 2015. However, the University sees a consistent loss of about 13-15% of the second-year students who successfully return after their first year, leaving only about two-thirds of the original cohort at the start of the third year ("Institutional Planning and Analysis - Student Profile," 2017). This study is focused on those second-year students at the University and the factors that contribute to their retention or attrition.

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative phase of the study consists of a campus-wide survey of second-year students, the Second-Year Student Survey (SYSS). This section will provide an overview of the sample, the survey design, and the survey procedures, followed by an explanation of the initial quantitative analysis that serves as the point of interaction between the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study.

Sample. The SYSS was administered through the University's undergraduate studies unit in the Fall term of 2017 to all first-time-freshmen (FTF) that began their undergraduate careers at the University and who were enrolled in what was the Fall term of their second year. About 1,710 students fit these criteria and were invited to participate in the survey. This total population of second-year students is detailed in the first column of Table 3.1.

A total of 548 of the 1,710 students contacted started the SYSS, an initial response rate of 32%. Of those 548, 428 students completed the survey for a completion rate of 78% and a final response rate of 25%. This final response rate is similar to other institution-wide surveys at the University ("Institutional Planning and Analysis - Surveys," 2017). These 428 responses comprise the sample for the quantitative phase of the study and are detailed in the second column of Table 3.1. Student participation in the survey was voluntary, leaving the survey open to nonresponse bias, which will be further discussed in the limitations section in Chapter Five. Respondents were also allowed to skip questions, so some survey items have fewer than 428 responses.

Table 3.1:

Comparison of Total Population and Survey Sample

Category	All Second-Year Students		Survey Respondents	
Total	1710	100.00%	428	100.00%
Sex				
Female	1130	66.08%	335	78.27%
Male	580	33.92%	93	21.73%
Race/Ethnicity				
American Indian / Alaska Native	11	0.64%	2	0.47%
Asian	198	11.58%	53	12.38%
Black / African American	67	3.92%	20	4.67%
Latino/a	753	44.04%	175	40.89%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	14	0.82%	4	0.93%
White	511	29.88%	133	31.07%
Two or More Races / Ethnicities	140	8.19%	36	8.41%
Decline to State	16	0.94%	5	1.17%
Underrepresented Minority (URM)	845	49.42%	201	46.96%
Not Underrepresented Minority	865	50.58%	227	53.04%
First-Generation Status				
First in Family to Attend College	528	30.88%	117	27.34%
Not First in Family to Attend College	1182	69.12%	311	72.66%
Class Standing				
Freshman (<30 units as of Fall 2017)	1015	59.36%	197	46.03%
Sophomore (30-59 units)	664	38.83%	214	50.00%
Junior (60-89 units)	29	1.70%	15	3.50%
Senior (90+ units)	2	0.12%	2	0.47%
Fall 2017 Unit Load				
Part-time (<12 units attempted)	97	5.67%	14	3.27%
Full-time, not full load (12-14 units)	1158	67.72%	279	65.19%
Full-time, full load (15+ units)	455	26.61%	135	31.54%
Disciplinary College				
Business	246	14.39%	45	10.51%
Education, Health, and Human Services	414	24.21%	106	24.77%
Humanities, Arts, Behavioral, and Social Sciences	687	40.18%	181	42.29%
Science and Mathematics	326	19.06%	91	21.26%
Undeclared	37	2.16%	5	1.17%
Average GPA				
Fall 2016 (First Term)	3.247		3.384	
Spring 2017 (Second Term)	3.037		3.209	
Cumulative GPA as of Fall 2017	3.106		3.306	

Survey design. The SYSS was developed by University staff under the direction of one of the institution's primary student success committees prior to the start of the Fall 2017 term to address the causes of second-year attrition and was selected for this study due to its measurement of several variables of interest, some of which are indirectly measured through larger scales made up of multiple items. *Academic Engagement* is measured using Schreiner and Louis's Engaged Learning Index (2011), which asks students to reflect on the level of interest, engagement, and commitment to what they are learning both in and out of the classroom. The SYSS adopts a four-item scale of *Sense of Belonging* and two separate scales measuring *Academic* and *Social Self-Concept* from the University of California Los Angeles's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). *Confidence in Major* is measured using Nauta's Academic Major Satisfaction Scale (2007), an index of student attitudes on their level of comfort with their choice of major. Students' *Perception of Campus Racial Climate* is also measured using a four-item measure developed by Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn (1999). *Institutional* and *Goal Commitment* are measured using original scale items. Finally, HERI's Diverse Learning Environments survey provides a set of items designed to measure a student's sense of *Interpersonal Validation.*

The survey also adapts several scales from other sources to measure a few more general concepts. Three scales are drawn from Pascarella and Terenzini's early tests of Tinto's model (1980), the first of which is a measure of satisfaction with peer-group interactions. The other two are related to faculty interactions: one measures satisfaction and the other measures a student's perception of faculty concern for students and their

learning. Another set of faculty-related questions designed to measure frequency of interactions comes from HERI's Your First College Year survey, which also provides a separate set of questions on general student satisfaction. Another set of scale items from the National Survey of Student Engagement measures student satisfaction with other institutional interactions. Finally, the survey includes a series of questions asking students to compare their first and second years at the University; these questions were written by University staff and have not been evaluated for validity and as such will not be used as part of the quantitative data set in this study. The full SYSS can be found in Appendix A.

Survey procedures. Following approval from the University's Institutional Review Board, student data was collected from the University's institutional research office and used to generate the sample of 1,710 second-year students. In addition to email addresses to administer the survey, staff collected enrollment and demographic data for each student. The survey was administered through email invitations to the 1,710 second-year students in the eighth week of the sixteen-week term. The full sample of students received three reminders to complete the survey before it closed at the end of the tenth week. Students were incentivized to participate in the survey through an opportunity drawing for one of five University sweatshirts. The full text of the email invitation can be found in Appendix B.

Initial quantitative analysis. The survey responses and the respondents' associated demographic and enrollment data make up the majority of the quantitative data analyzed in this study. Although the University collected key demographic variables including sex and first generation student status, i.e. whether or not a student is the first in

his or her family to attend college, the study uses only primary racial and ethnic identification as per the reporting standards of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a). Key enrollment variables collected by the University but not used in the study included academic major, first year grade point average (GPA), units attempted during Fall 2017, and completed units as of Fall 2017, which can be used to determine official "class standing," i.e. if a student is classified as a freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior. The final variable, second-year retention, was not collected until the subsequent Fall term, Fall 2018. The final quantitative analysis was therefore conducted after the official enrollment data was recorded for Fall 2018 and is be covered in detail below in the Quantitative Analysis section.

An initial quantitative analysis, however, was undertaken in the early Spring term of 2018 and serves as the point of interaction between the quantitative and qualitative data collection phases. This analysis focuses on a summary of all student responses to the survey and a comparison of the responses of two groups: Black students and all student respondents. As this analysis utilizes factors developed using quantitative results that are covered in detail in Chapter Four, the analysis is also covered in detail there. This initial analysis was used to generate the questions and script for the interviews that comprise the qualitative phase.

Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative phase of the study narrows the focus from all second-year students at the University to a smaller subgroup: Black second-year students. The qualitative phase

consists of individual interviews with second-year students who primarily identify as Black or African American. The design follows an approach based around Seidman's concept of phenomenological interviewing (I. Seidman, 2013). Qualitative data collection can be considered phenomenological if it is focused on the experiences of participants and the very subjective meaning that they make of these experiences (Creswell, 2007; I. Seidman, 2013; van Mannen, 1990). This approach has researchers ask only a small series of very open-ended questions intended to have the participants reflect on their experiences in an attempt to describe the core or essence of an experience that they all share (Creswell, 2007; I. Seidman, 2013). The following section details the interview process.

Selection and training of interviewers. In an attempt to access what Attinasi called "the insider's point of view" (Attinasi, 1989) on Black student retention in the second year and with an understanding that students should be actively sought to participate in institutional change for their own learning and development and not simply for the benefit of the institution (Taylor & Robinson, 2009), the University's Black Student Center (BSC) was an active participant in this research. In the early part of the Spring 2018 term, two undergraduate research assistants were added to the research team. These additions, selected in consultation with the BSC's acting director, were student employees of the BSC whose role was to facilitate the Center's regular events, which include study sessions, cultural events, and student, staff, and faculty roundtable discussions. The results of the initial quantitative analysis was shared with the two research assistants along with the purpose and context of the study as a whole. The two research assistants were then trained in phenomenological interviewing and provided interview scripts.

Participant recruitment. Recruitment of Black second-year students for the interviews began near the end of the Spring 2018 term. All 67 Black second year students were invited by email to sign up for a one-on-one interview and informed that all students who complete an interview would be awarded with a $20 Amazon gift card. The full text of the email invitation can be found in Appendix C. Of the 67 Black second year students invited to participate, 14 students signed up for interviews but 3 did not interview and 2 were not recorded due to technical difficulties, resulting in 9 student interviews.

Interview process. The interview script was developed to address the second main research question and four research subquestions defined at the beginning of this chapter. The initial quantitative analysis was used to design 14 questions on particular factors that were isolated as part of the quantitative phase of the study. These factors will be explained in Chapter Four and the interview script can be found in Appendix D.

The interviews themselves were one-on-one interactions between one of the two student research assistants and a student interviewee. Each interview was audio recorded with express permission of the student interviewee and it is the transcript of these interviews that make up the qualitative dataset. The student research assistants were provided the interview script but were instructed to follow it loosely and were encouraged to ask follow-up questions if they felt it necessary, thus following the guidelines of phenomenological interviewing (I. Seidman, 2013). Interviews lasted between 15 and 45 minutes and were transcribed verbatim using the transcription service Rev.com.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data collected in this study required three separate analytical phases: an initial, descriptive analysis of the quantitative data from the SYSS; analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews; and the final analysis of the full qualitative dataset. The following section details these phases in the order in which they occurred.

Initial quantitative analysis. The first phase of data analysis occurred early in the Spring 2018 term and consisted of a descriptive analysis of the results of the SYSS, which was conducted in the previous term. This analysis, detailed in Chapter 4, focused on summarizing and describing the survey results, disaggregated by racial and ethnic category, in order to reveal findings that influenced the development of the qualitative data collection.

Qualitative analysis. The second analytical phase immediately followed the qualitative phase of data collection. As the interview transcripts were the result of a phenomenological interview process, I analyzed them using van Mannen's process of phenomenological reflection, using the text of the transcripts to uncover "the structural or thematic aspects" of the shared experience of the participants (1990, p. 78). The process itself began with thematic coding: a close read of the transcripts where the researcher marks any quotes that "seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience" (1990, p. 93). These marked quotes become the first layer of codes, and by following this process with each transcript and looking for patterns and repeated codes, a researcher can begin to develop larger categories of common ideas or experiences (Creswell, 2007) that fit van Mannen's definition of a theme: a simplified but particular

meaning that research participants ascribe to an experience that helps define that experience (1990).

Final quantitative analysis. The quantitative dataset was completed in Fall 2018 with the collection of the final outcome variable: retention to the third year, that is, whether or not each SYSS respondent returned to the University for the Fall 2018 term. The full quantitative dataset was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a technique that combines path analysis and factor analysis (Klem, 2000) to test a structural theory (Lei & Wu, 2007). In SEM analysis, a researcher proposes a theoretical model based on the literature and previous studies in the field; this model can be comprised of both directly and indirectly measured variables, the latter of which are uncovered using confirmatory factor analysis (Klem, 2000; Lei & Wu, 2007). The researcher then tests to see if that model adequately explains the data that the researcher has collected, that is, if the hypothesized causal relationships between and among the directly-measured variables and latent factors are supported by the data (Lei & Wu, 2007). The model should be evaluated using several different goodness-of-fit indices (Thompson, 2000) and may be modified if the indices suggest a poor fit (Lei & Wu, 2007). SEM has been used to study student retention from a number of different angles, including tests of Tinto's original framework (Braxton et al., 1997; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993), tests of models adapted from Tinto (Cabrera et al., 1992), and tests of models designed specifically to explain the retention of traditionally underserved students (Museus et al., 2008; Nora & Cabrera, 1996).

The initial structural model for this analysis closely followed the adapted theoretical model of second-year student retention developed in Chapter Two. This model hypothesized a series of relationships between the variables measured in the SYSS, mostly indirectly through larger scales. The model suggests that, together with students' academic performance in the first year, their levels of academic and social self-concept, the quantity and quality of their peer and faculty interactions, their confidence in their choices of major, their perceptions of the campus racial climate, and the extent to which they feel validated by staff and faculty influence both their senses of belonging and level of academic engagement. These variables, in turn, influence their commitments to their personal goals of graduation and to the institution itself, which influence their decisions to stay or leave the University.

SEM was used to evaluate the full model, both in terms of the measurement model, that is, the structure of the latent variables themselves, tested by confirmatory factor analysis, and in terms of the path model, or the structure of the causal relationships between the factors and directly-measured variables, tested by path analysis (Lei & Wu, 2007). As the initial model scored poorly on goodness-of-fit indices, subsequent models were tested; this process will be fully detailed in Chapter Four. The specific correlation coefficients between the latent factors and observed variables answer the subquestions of the first research question, that is, the final model suggests which factors have the strongest influence on second-year retention for students at the University.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RESULTS

This chapter discusses the results of the study outlined in the previous chapter. This discussion follows the explanatory sequential mixed methods design and thus begins with the results of the quantitative phase before moving to the results of the qualitative phase and concluding with a comparison of the results.

Quantitative Phase

As detailed in the previous chapter, the quantitative phase started with the SYSS which was administered to all second-year students in Fall 2017 and concluded in Fall 2018 when student respondents either returned for their third years at the University or were not retained by the institution. This phase focused mainly on the first research question: what factors influence second-year retention at the University?

Building the measurement model. A full structural equation model requires both a path model and a measurement model (Lei & Wu, 2007). We begin by building the measurement model, which uses various factor analysis techniques to explore and identify latent variables that are indicated by explicitly measured variables (Kline, 2015; Lei & Wu, 2007). Although the SYSS itself is made up of a handful of scales and indices from prior research which are detailed in the previous chapter, it is first necessary to use exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to determine whether data from the SYSS sample fits these assumed factors. The results of this initial EFA are listed in Table 4.1 and a full list of all SYSS items and their associated factors is located in Appendix E; the scores of these factors are

averages of the scores of each individual item that make up the factor. In order to simplify the full structural equation model, the 14 factors identified in the initial EFA operated as the observed or measured variables. Most of these factors have a Cronbach's Alpha (α) score greater than 0.8, suggesting good internal consistency and reliability (Cortina, 1993).

Table 4.1:

Factors in SYSS Identified Using Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factor	Label	α	Mean	Min	Max	SD
I	*Majorconf*	0.921	3.825	1.000	5.000	0.875
II	*Validation*	0.887	3.452	1.250	5.000	0.715
III	*Peerfriend*	0.909	3.830	1.000	5.000	0.828
IV	*Instinteract*	0.818	3.976	1.000	5.000	0.613
V	*Facoutofclass*	0.925	3.480	1.000	5.000	0.793
VI	*Meanlearning*	0.834	3.681	1.000	5.000	0.739
VII	*Selfconfidence*	0.818	3.405	1.500	5.000	0.752
VIII	*Senseofbelonging*	0.867	3.681	1.000	5.000	0.787
IX	*Classengage*	0.823	3.013	1.000	5.000	0.878
X	*Genraceclimate*	0.765	3.730	1.000	5.000	0.853
XI	*Faccare*	0.803	2.845	1.000	5.000	0.854
XII	*Acadself*	0.664	3.548	1.667	5.000	0.622
XIII	*Classpart*	0.764	3.392	1.000	5.000	0.916
XIV	*Satisfaction*	0.813	4.055	1.000	5.000	0.725
Observed	*Instcomm*	-	4.100	1.000	5.000	1.042
Observed	*Retention*	-	0.900	0.000	1.000	0.304

The next step involved using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to explore relationships between the observed variables in order to identify any and all latent variables in the model. The results of the CFA are shown in Figure 4.1:

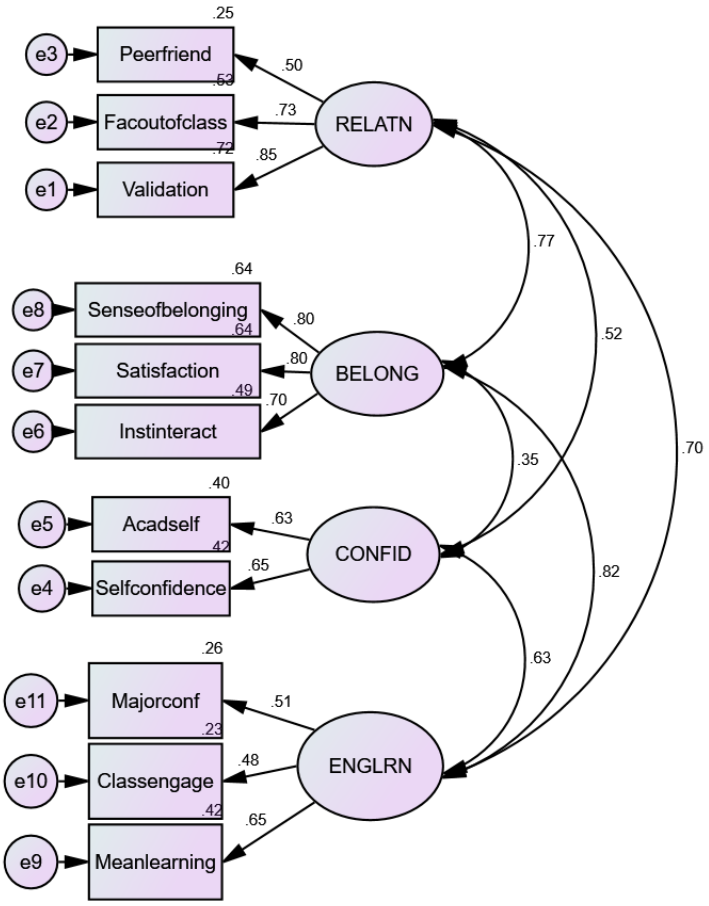

Figure 4.1: Confirmatory factor analysis for latent variables in SYSS.

Four latent variables were identified: relationships, represented by the six-letter label RELATN; belongingness, labeled BELONG; self-confidence, labeled CONFID; and academic engagement, labeled ENGLRN. Each of these latent variables is indicated by two or three observed variables or factors from the initial EFA. RELATN has three indicator variables: peer friendships, labeled *Peerfriend*, a group of questions asking respondents to rate the strength of their friendships at the institution; faculty interaction outside of class, labeled *Facoutofclass*, a set of items asking about the quality of interactions with faculty members outside of the classroom; and interpersonal validation,

labeled *Validation*, a scale measuring respondents' feelings of interpersonal validation from faculty and staff at the institution. As a combination of these three indicator variables, RELATN represents how respondents feel about their relationships with peers and institutional actors.

BELONG also has three indicator variables: sense of belonging, labeled *Senseofbelonging*, a set of items that measures respondents' perception of their connection to the institution; overall satisfaction, labeled *Satisfaction*, a small set of questions asking respondents to rate their levels of general satisfaction with the institution; and satisfaction with institutional interactions, labeled *Instinteract*, a set of questions asking more specific questions about respondents' satisfaction with institutional interactions, including faculty and advising staff. As indicated by these three observed variables, BELONG represents the level to which respondents feel connected to the institution and how they feel about that connection. Although there is a clear conceptual difference between *Senseofbelonging* and the other two variables which are related to respondent ratings of satisfaction, the correlation coefficients between these three variables was very high for this sample, implying an unobserved connection; this connection was identified in the model as BELONG.

CONFID is indicated by two observed variables: academic self-concept, labeled *Acadself*, a set of items asking respondents to rate themselves in comparison to their peers in terms of academic ability; and social self-concept, labeled *Selfconfidence*, a similar set oriented more toward social self-confidence. These two indicator variables combine to provide a measure of how respondents feel about themselves socially and academically.

Acadself has the lowest reliability score of any individual factor used in the model (α = 0.664) largely due to high variance in one of its items, which asks respondents to rate their mathematic ability.

Finally, ENGLRN is indicated by three observed variables: major confidence or *Majorconf*, a highly consistent scale (α = 0.921) measuring respondents' levels of confidence in their choice of academic major; classroom engagement, labeled *Classengage*, consisting of questions about the level of active engagement respondents have in their classes and classroom environments; and meaningful learning, labeled *Meanlearning*, a set of items asking respondents to rate their connection to what they are currently learning in college. These three variables provide an indication of the extent to which respondents are actively engaged in the process of learning and making connections to the major of their choice. SYSS respondents who indicated that they have yet to choose a major were not asked the six questions that make up the *Majorconf* variable.

Three factors identified in the original exploratory factor analysis did not strongly correlate to other factors and were not identified as indicators of any of the three latent variables. The factor labeled *Genraceclimate* is made up of three questions asking respondents to rate their perceptions of the campus racial climate, *Faccare* consists of a set of questions asking respondents to rate their perceptions of faculty attitudes toward students, and *Classpart* was part of the original Engaged Learning Index (Schreiner & Louis, 2011) that dealt with classroom participation. *Faccare* and *Classpart* were not used in the study but *Genraceclimate* was used to shape some of the qualitative inquiry that will be detailed later in the chapter.

Building the path model. Having identified the four latent variables that will be included in the full model, we now move to building the path model, which will serve to hypothesize relationships between the latent variables and the observed outcome variable of *Retention*, a binary variable indicating whether or not a respondent returned to the institution for the Fall 2018 term.

Path models should be built first on established theory that suggests particular patterns of cause and effect between theoretical constructs (Kline, 2015; Lei & Wu, 2007). As such, the initial model was designed using the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2: an adaptation of Tinto's original theory (Tinto, 1993) for the second year. To review, this adaptation suggests that the theoretical constructs of academic and social integration can be operationalized in the second year as academic engagement and sense of belonging respectively, with those two constructs influencing institutional and goal commitments which in turn influence persistence decisions. Goal commitment and institutional commitment are directly measured in the SYSS: the goal commitment variable (*Goalcomm*) asks respondents to rate their agreement on a five-point scale with the statement "I will graduate from college" and the institutional commitment variable (*Instcomm*) uses the statement "I will finish my degree at [the University]." Tinto's original theory (Tinto, 1993) would suggest that both are strongly correlated with retention, but this is not the case in the SYSS sample. *Goalcomm* is not significantly correlated with the *Retention* binary variable while *Instcomm* significantly correlates with *Retention*, $r = 0.468$, $p < .001$. Because *Goalcomm* is not significantly correlated with *Retention*, it is not included in the model.

The first model to test is then a simplified model suggested by the adapted framework, although one that does not include goal commitment as an observed variable. This first model, labeled Model A and illustrated in Figure 4.2, implies that *Retention* is influenced by *Instcomm*, which is influenced by BELONG and ENGLRN, which are in turn independently influenced by RELATN and CONFID respectively. This model generally reflects Tinto's (1993) framework with the adaptations discussed in Chapter 2: social integration, represented in year two by sense of belonging, and academic integration, represented in year two by academic engagement, combine to influence commitment which influences retention. Model A was tested using a set of global fit indices recommended by Kline (2015) as providing a well-rounded indication of model fit: model chi-square (x^2), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Bentler's (1990) comparative fit index (CFI), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Fit indices for each model tested are located in Table 4.2. Model A scored as a poor fit across all four fit indices, suggesting that model respecification is necessary to fit the data. In addition, the path coefficient from ENGLRN to *Instcomm* in Model A is very low (0.05), implying that there is no direct path between the two.

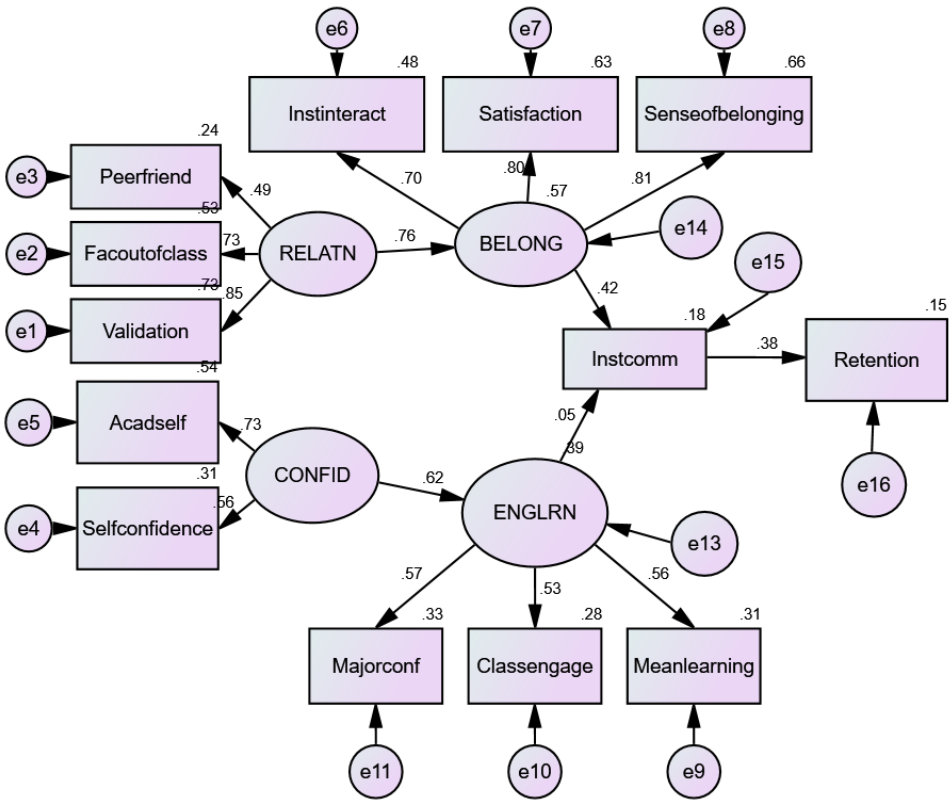

Figure 4.2: Structural equation Model A.

Table 4.2:

Select Fit Indices for Structural Equation Models

Model	x^2	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
A	439.680, df=62, p<.000	0.119	0.778	0.171
B	209.752, df=57, p<.000	0.079	0.910	0.048
C	82.856, df=51, p=.003	0.038	0.981	0.036

Using SPSS AMOS to produce the implied correlations between observed variables in the model (Arbuckle, 2013), the model could be respecified according to any implied correlations that varied substantially from the actual variable correlations in the data (Kline, 2015). With this method, a more complex set of pathways was tested in Model B, illustrated in Figure 4.3. Model B suggests that *Retention* is directly influenced by *Instcomm* but also by the latent variables BELONG, CONFID, and ENGLRN. *Instcomm* is directly influenced by RELATN and BELONG in the model. ENGLRN is directly influenced by BELONG and CONFID, both of which are directly influenced by RELATN. The coefficients for each of these paths vary in strength but are all large enough to imply true relationships. Fit indices for Model B, again listed in Table 4.2, show significant improvement in fit when compared to Model A but still suggest a misspecified model.

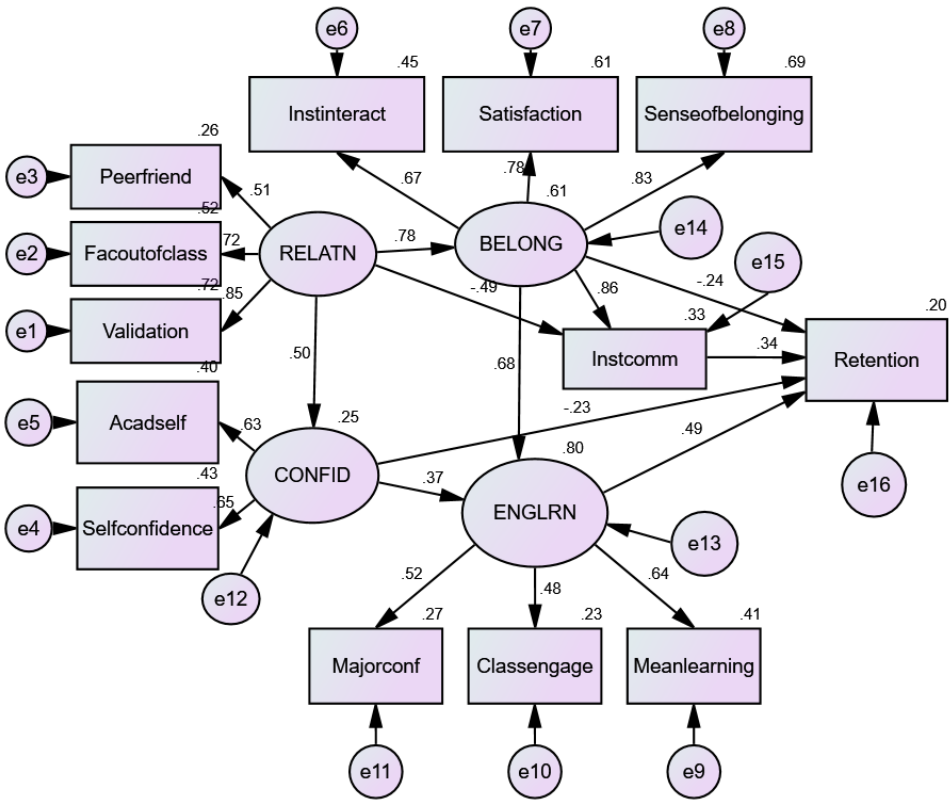

Figure 4.3: Structural equation Model B.

Further examination of the implied correlations in Model B and comparison to the actual correlations in the data highlighted a few discrepancies that were not explained in the model. In particular, the *Peerfriend* variable carried significant correlations to a number of other variables, including *Instinteract*, *Satisfaction*, *Senseofbelonging*, *Selfconfidence*, and *Majorconf*, implying a relationship that was not explained in the model. *Peerfriend* is a composite of four SYSS items related to meaningful relationships with other students. The items measure agreement with the following four statements: "Since coming to this university I have developed close personal relationships with other

students;" "the student friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying;" "my interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values;" and "my interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas." The correlations between *Peerfriend* and many other variables imply a connection between how students responded to these items and how they viewed many other aspects of their second-year experience. The nature of this relationship is complicated, however. It is possible that students generally disagreed with these four statements for a number of different reasons: they could have, for example, not developed any close relationships with other students and thus not felt that those relationships were meaningful, or they could have developed close and satisfying relationships with students who shared anti-institutional values. Without the ability to further define peer friendships and relationships in the data, it is difficult to explain these relationships in the model. Fortunately, SEM allows for pathways of error variance to imply relationships that are unexplained by the model itself (Kline, 2015).

The final structural model, Model C, was developed by adding several pathways of error covariance, including the aforementioned relationships between *Peerfriend* and *Instinteract*, *Satisfaction*, *Senseofbelonging*, *Selfconfidence*, and *Majorconf*, as well as a covariance pathway between the errors of *Instinteract* and *Satisfaction*, a relationship which may vary considerably depending on the quantity of interactions with institutional actors while *Instinteract* itself measures only respondents' perceptions of the quality of those interactions. Model C, illustrated in Figure 4.4, provides a solid representation of the

relationships between observed and latent variables in the SYSS. The fit indices for Model C listed in Table 4.2 indicate a moderate fit: although we cannot reject the null hypothesis via the results of the chi-square test (x^2 = 82.856, *df*=51, p=.003), the model scores very close to 0 in RMSEA (0.038), very close to 1 in Bentler's CFI (0.981), and close to 0 in SRMR (0.036), reaching thresholds of fit described by Kline (2015). With the model correctly specified, we can begin exploring the individual paths to understand the relationships highlighted by the model.

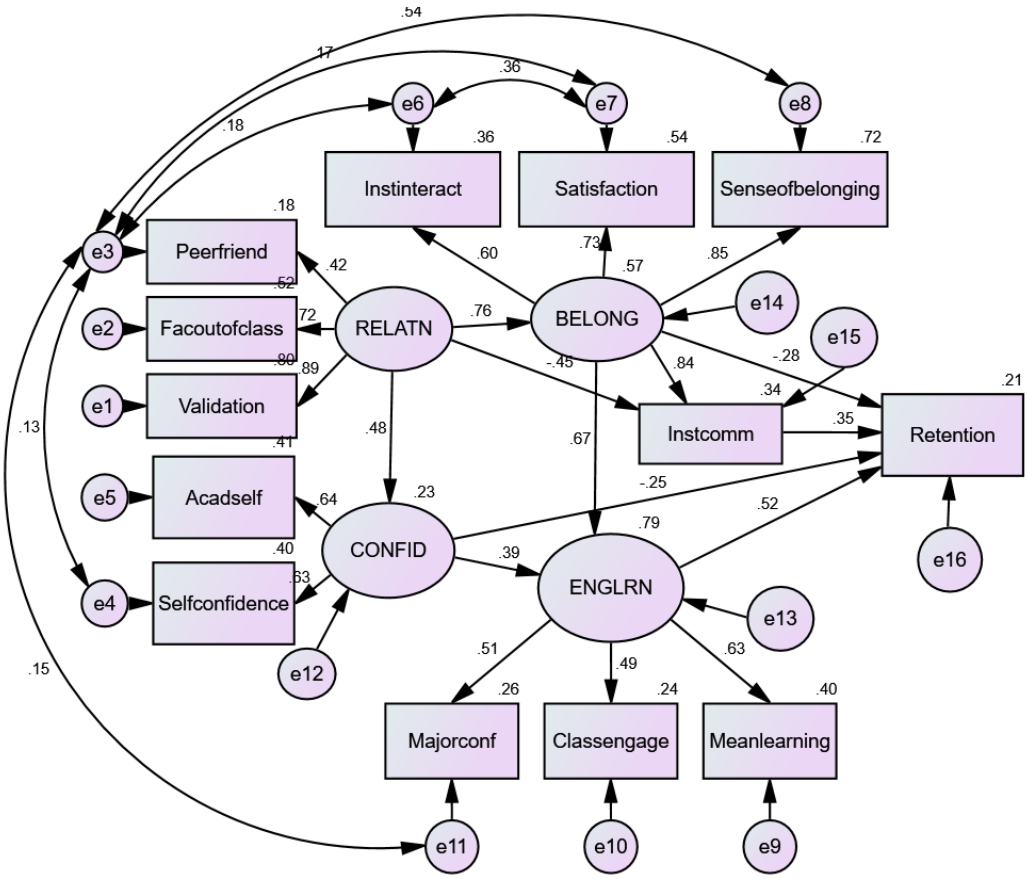

Figure 4.4: Structural equation Model C.

Exploring model pathways. Models in SEM are visual representations of a series of regression equations (Kline, 2015; Lei & Wu, 2007) and SPSS AMOS produces sums of correlation coefficients along a pathway to determine total effects (Arbuckle, 2013). Standardized total effects for the main pathways in the model are listed in Table 4.3; these total effects are standardized to simplify interpretation and comparison across variables. For example, in the direct path from BELONG to *Instcomm*, the standardized total effect is 0.840, which can be interpreted quantitatively by stating that when BELONG increases one standard deviation, *Instcomm* increases by 0.840 standard deviations. In the following section we will explore the pathways between each latent variable and the two main observed outcome variables, *Instcomm* and *Retention*.

Table 4.3:

Standardized Total Effects (STE) for Key Pathways in Model C

RELATN		
Path	Path Type(s)	STE
to BELONG	1 direct	0.755
to CONFID	1 direct	0.483
to ENGLRN	2 indirect	0.694
to *Instcomm*	1 direct, 1 indirect	0.180
to *Retention*	4 indirect	0.093
BELONG		
to ENGLRN	1 direct	0.670
to *Instcomm*	1 direct	0.840
to *Retention*	1 direct, 2 indirect	0.365
CONFID		
to ENGLRN	1 direct	0.384
to *Retention*	1 direct, 1 indirect	-0.045
ENGLRN		
to *Retention*	1 direct	0.522

RELATN has two pathways to *Instcomm*, one direct and one indirect through BELONG. Although RELATN has a negative direct effect on *Instcomm* (-0.455), its strong positive direct effect on BELONG (0.755) leads to a weak positive total effect on *Instcomm* (0.180), implying that relationships with peers and faculty, when isolated from belongingness, can negatively impact commitment to the institution but that those relationships are such strong influences over belongingness that they end up positively influencing commitment. RELATN also has four indirect pathways to *Retention*: through BELONG, through BELONG and then *Instcomm*, through CONFID, and through CONFID and then ENGLRN, with a total effect of 0.093. RELATN's influence on *Retention* is largely dependent on its effects on the other three latent variables.

BELONG has one direct path to *Instcomm* with the strongest direct effect in the entire model (0.840), suggesting that belongingness is strongly and positively associated with commitment to the institution. BELONG has three paths to *Retention*, one direct and two indirect, through *Instcomm* and through ENGLRN. Although the direct effect of BELONG on *Retention* is negative (-0.283), its strong positive influences on *Instcomm* (0.840) and ENGLRN (0.670) lead to a total positive effect of 0.365. While belongingness seems to reduce persistence in isolation, its strong association with academic engagement produces a net positive effect.

CONFID has no path in the model connecting it to *Instcomm* but two paths to *Retention*, one direct and one indirect through ENGLRN. The direct effect is negative (-0.248), implying that when controlling for other variables, self-confidence has a negative influence on persistence for this sample. This negative effect is mostly cleared by the

positive effect CONFID has on ENGLRN (0.390), however, leading to a total effect close to zero (-0.045). Although self-confidence seems to negatively effect persistence by itself, it boosts academic engagement, which itself is positively associated with persistence.

Finally, ENGLRN, having been influenced directly and indirectly in multiple ways by the other three latent variables, has no path to *Instcomm* and one direct path to *Retention*, resulting in a strong positive effect (0.522). This suggests, as previously stated, that academic engagement positively influences persistence; this is in fact the strongest total effect on *Retention* of the four latent variables.

Variance explained by the model. As SEM is a series of regression equations (Kline, 2015; Lei & Wu, 2007), SPSS AMOS can produce squared multiple correlations (r^2) for variables predicted in the model (Arbuckle, 2013). These r^2 values provide an estimate of the variance in each variable that is explained by the model and are listed for three of the four latent variables and the two observed outcome variables in Table 4.4. RELATN is an exogenous variable in the model, but the other three latent variables are endogenous and are therefore able to be predicted. CONFID has a relatively low r^2 value of 0.233, suggesting that the model explains only 23% of its variance. The model explains only the influence of RELATN on CONFID; it is reasonable to suggest that self-confidence is influenced by many things not included in the model. In contrast, the model explains 57% of the variance of BELONG ($r^2 = 0.570$) and 79% of the variance of ENGLRN ($r^2 = 0.792$), implying that these latent variables can be more accurately predicted in the model.

Table 4.4:

Variance Explained by the Model

Variable	Error Variance	Explained Variance (r^2)
BELONG	0.430	0.570
CONFID	0.767	0.233
ENGLRN	0.208	0.792
Instcomm	0.664	0.336
Retention	0.793	0.207

Note. RELATN is an exogenous variable and is not predicted in the model.

The model produces squared multiple correlations of 0.336 and 0.207 for *Instcomm* and *Retention* respectively. Although the model highlights significant and strong paths between the latent variables, it does not strongly predict either institutional commitment or persistence, explaining only 34% of the variance of the former and 21% of the variance of the latter. Discussion of the implications of this important result will continue in Chapter 5.

Summary of key quantitative results. After identifying and specifying an appropriate structural model that provides a moderate fit for the data, we were able to identify several key pathways to *Instcomm* and *Retention* that help answer the primary research question of which factors influence second-to-third year retention. The two latent variables with the strongest positive influence on *Retention* were BELONG and ENGLRN, with BELONG's influence acting largely through its influence on *Instcomm* and ENGLRN itself. RELATN has strong effects, both direct and indirect, on BELONG and ENGLRN,

the latter through CONFID. Although these effects are strong in isolation in the analysis, the model itself explains only 21% of the variance in *Retention* for the sample.

Qualitative Phase

This section will cover the results of the qualitative phase of the study, which focused on the second research question: how do Black second-year students describe their experience at the University? This phase of the study consisted of one-on-one interviews with students toward the end of their second year.

Development of the interview protocol. Following the administration of the SYSS in Fall 2017, a series of analyses were used to begin the development of the qualitative phase. An explanatory sequential mixed methods design allows for a researcher to further investigate discrepancies in quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this particular case, a series of means comparisons revealed some important differences in aggregate responses to the SYSS from Black respondents as compared to their peers. The results of these means comparisons are listed in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5:

Differences in Means Between Black Respondents and Others in SYSS

Factor	Label	Black Respondents Mean	Non-Black Respondents Mean	Difference in Mean
-	*Goalcomm*	4.700	4.620	0.080
-	*Instcomm*	3.950	4.110	-0.160
I	*Majorconf*	3.595	3.836	-0.241
II	*Validation*	3.474	3.451	0.024
III	*Peerfriend*	3.800	3.831	-0.031
IV	*Instinteract*	3.843	3.983	-0.140
V	*Facoutofclass*	3.433	3.482	-0.049
VI	*Meanlearning*	3.321	3.699	-0.378
VII	*Selfconfidence*	3.908	3.381	0.527**
VIII	*Senseofbelonging*	3.497	3.690	-0.194
IX	*Classengage*	2.851	3.021	-0.171
X	*Genraceclimate*	3.350	3.749	-0.399*
XI	*Faccare*	2.733	2.851	-0.117
XII	*Acadself*	3.483	3.551	-0.068
XIII	*Classpart*	3.395	3.392	0.003
XIV	*Satisfaction*	3.933	4.060	-0.127

*$p < 0.05$. **$p < 0.01$

The subsample of Black respondents in the SYSS is small (N=20), and as such most of the differences in construct means are not statistically significant. Several are notable, however: first, Black respondents had a slightly higher average for goal commitment (*Goalcomm*) than non-Black respondents but a lower average for institutional commitment (*Instcomm*). They also scored slightly lower than their peers in sense of belonging (*Senseofbelonging*), satisfaction with institutional interactions (*Instinteract*), and overall satisfaction (*Satisfaction*), the three constructs that make up the latent variable belonging (BELONG). Although they scored similarly to non-Black respondents in

interpersonal validation (*Validation*), peer friendships (*Peerfriend*), and interactions with faculty outside of the classroom (*Facoutofclass*), the constructs that make up relationships (RELATN), they had lower average scores in major confidence (*Majorconf*), meaningful learning (*Meanlearning*), and classroom engagement (*Classengage*), which together indicate academic engagement (ENGLRN). They scored slightly lower in academic self-concept (*Acadself*) but statistically significantly higher ($p < .01$) in social self-concept (*Selfconfidence*). Finally, they scored statistically significantly lower ($p < .05$) in their perceptions of the campus racial climate (*Genraceclimate*), a construct not used in the structural model; their lower scores indicate that, on average, Black respondents felt that the racial climate at the University is more hostile than did their peers.

This initial analysis, which highlighted differences in key constructs and one statistically significant difference in an unused construct, was used to generate interview questions for the qualitative phase. The interview script, located in Appendix D, is based around four research subquestions that generally align with the latent variables in the structural model:

a. How do Black second-years describe their commitments and connections to their goals and to the University?
b. How do Black second-years describe their engagement with academics?
c. How do Black second-years describe their relationships and interactions with faculty, staff, and other students?
d. How do Black second-years describe themselves?

These subquestions cover BELONG, ENGLRN, RELATN, and CONFID respectively. Each subquestion includes two to four interview questions related to the constructs that make up the structural model. Outside of the constructs that indicate the four latent variables, the first subquestion includes questions related to goal and institutional commitments while the third subquestion includes a question related to campus racial climate.

Interviews were conducted by two undergraduate research assistants recruited from the student staff of the University's Black Student Center and took place toward the end of students' second academic year. The following sections will detail the dominant themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected through these interviews.

Involvement. One of the first patterns to emerge from the interviews coalesced around the concept of involvement. First, the students in the sample tended to answer questions related to belonging or connection to the University with references to their own involvement in campus life. The typical response was very similar to this student's response to being asked if she feels like she is a part of the campus community:

> Yeah, I do feel like it because um, I just, I just involve myself in a lot of things. Like for BSU [Black Student Union] and I was in the sorority too. So I feel like I'm really connected, like I go onto campus and I'll say hi like I always see somebody that I know. So I feel like pretty involved and connected with it.

Connection and involvement were equated or conflated many times in the interviews. For many of the students, involvement was an intentional step taken toward connection, both with the campus community as a whole and with individuals. One student succinctly established a link between involvement and personal connections: "I always feel like I'm a

part of the campus just being involved in BSU, and being in the Black Student Center, and just interacting with all different types of people, and getting to make connections." Involvement on campus allowed these students to interact with a variety of people, including not only peers but also faculty, staff, and administration.

One component of this emphasis on involvement worth noting is that these students often viewed involvement as a personal responsibility. One student described how he worked to become more involved:

> Student: Oh, well this, I'd say this is my first, this is my, uh, see, my fourth semester here. My first three semesters about, I'd say I wasn't-
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: ... at all basically. I wasn't really involved on campus. I was like, I commute from like Escondido, which isn't too far, but I might be, uh, more involved on campus like goin' to events and stuff like that, but I, uh, I really didn't feel like much of a connection.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah.
>
> Student: But, yeah, so my second semester and my third semester, there wasn't really much of a connection as well just 'cause I, I was just commuting. Half of my friends are at home as well. But, um, this last semester at least, I've like got really involved on campus so, um, the connections have honestly just like skyrocketed.

After making the intentional effort to become more involved, this student reported being able to connect with more people on campus. Another student further emphasized his feeling of responsibility to become involved: "…I was involved a lot in high school, and after my first year of doing nothing, I felt disconnected from the campus, I knew I had to do something." He viewed disconnection as something he needed to remedy by his own action. This linkage of involvement and connection through active intention or effort was repeated several times in the interviews. Students recognized the personal benefits to be

gained from connection to the campus community and individuals on campus and took it upon themselves to create those connections. The student who described his connections having "skyrocketed" this term as a result of his increased involvement went on to elaborate how this was affecting him:

> Student: And like it's been, it's been an experience, I, something I didn't really expect out of college almost. Because like I'm so close to home, and like I kind of just wanted to get my degree and go.
>
> Interviewer: Right.
>
> Student: So that was like my main objective but, uh, like this last semester, definitely since I've gotten to know people, it's been like, my experience like at college is just like enhanced like so much.

Students were able to clearly articulate the value they derived from increased involvement, often, as above, referring to increased quantity and quality of personal connections. Unfortunately, another student was able to expand upon the same point with a negative example:

> Interviewer: Do you feel like you are part of the campus, campus community, at [the University]? Why or why not?
>
> Student: Um, no. I feel like it's, I just feel like it's a commuter school so people usually just come on campus, go to school, I mean go to class, and leave. So I feel like I don't really, I'm not really connected. It's not really, like, a lot of activities that, like, draw my attention, so I just usually go to class and go home.
>
> Interviewer: Okay. How do you think this has affected you this year?
>
> Student: Um, it's affected me a lot because um, I just feel like I'm not really enjoying my college experience as I expected. Like, in col-, in high school, like I had a different interpretation of how college would be. And then when I came to look at this campus a couple times, I feel like they're like false advertising. So I really do regret coming here.

This student has been unable to make the same kinds of connections other students described in their interviews and she makes a direct connection to her level of institutional

commitment, enough to comment that she "regret[s]" her decision to come to the University. Without the tangible benefits of involvement and connection that other students described, she sees her "college experience" as lessened, a clear contrast to the student above who uses the same general language, "my experience at college," to highlight the personal importance of his many connections. It is interesting to note that unlike many of her peers in the study, she does not seem to see involvement as her responsibility and instead places at least some blame on the institution for her lack of involvement. Both examples draw clear linkages between involvement and connection to campus and underscore how effort and intentionality mediate their value to students.

Community. Students in the interviews were able to clearly articulate explicit benefits they derived from membership in campus communities. This theme would often arise in responses about interviewees' friends. One student described how she viewed her friends as a social support network:

> Interviewer: In what ways have your friends here at Cal State San Marcos influenced your experience this year?
>
> Student: Um, they definitely helped it to feel more like home.
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: Because like I, I don't have family out here, as I stated before.
>
> Interviewer: Right. Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: And, um, it's like even when I do want to have like my days when I just want to be by myself they're always there checking on me, or like always encouraging me like when I'm struggling in classes, even though we're not even in the same major or same classes it's like I have someone I can like lean on when things get tough.

In particular, this student alludes to her friends as serving the role of surrogate family, offering her psychosocial support as well as academic encouragement. Many students used the language of community and even family to describe their friends in similar ways.

Importantly, however, students described being a part of multiple communities and of being able to derive different benefits from different communities. One student, in describing his connection to a community within his academic major, made a clear distinction:

> Student: I feel connected to the campus. They have a lot of events to bring you in and there's students who will come up to you and be like, "Oh, do you want to hang out and be friends?" So-
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Student: ... it's one of those type of communities. It's more like, concrete. I'd say it's the, definitely, your major community.
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: Because I'm a bio major, so we're all going through the same classes. You get that sense of-
>
> Interviewer: Com- comradery.
>
> Student: Family. So, we're all going through the same-
>
> Interviewer: Oh okay.
>
> Student: ... stuff. So, like, if someone sees you're falling, you can help them lean ... you could make them on your or you can lean on them.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, let me ask you ... Outside of that major com- ... your major field community, what about the campus in the whole? Do you feel connected? How is that?
>
> Student: Yes.
>
> Interviewer: Okay. How do you think this year has affected ... Let, let me say that ... Let me re-say it. How do you think this has affected you this year? Your connections here, how do you think it has affected you this year?

> Student: It's definitely worth it 'cause it's ... 'cause I don't, um ... My upper di- ... some of my upper division classes. So, you definitely need both communities. So, you need your major community for people to help you.
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student; And then also if your stressed, 'cause the community is not seeing you go through your major.

The student's statement that "you definitely need both communities" serves to highlight that each serves a separate purpose for him: the community within his major can offer him academic support while he looks for a different kind of psychosocial support from a different community, one that "is not seeing [him] go through [his] major." Students mentioned several times the necessity of consciously and intentionally navigating between multiple communities in order to access the benefits from each. One student described intentionally seeking out community in an attempt to develop an academic support network:

> Student: And then, but within like my own major, I don't really have a lot of ... I'm still trying to get friends that are in my major.
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Student: Um, so when I am in like a computer science class, since it's so new to me, um, I do feel a little dumb at times, just because everyone be like usually they grew up like, "Oh yeah, this is wanted to do for so long."[crosstalk]
>
> Interviewer: Oh okay. This is second nature to them, this is their life, this is their lifestyle, so they know this. Oh okay.
>
> Student: Yeah, and I'm learning this for the first time.

The student had previously been describing how he had recently changed his major, and although he was positive about this decision he recognized the need to establish membership in the new community. Another student described this navigation across communities in terms of being able to separate from a community that offered no tangible

benefits: “Like within that socializing, that social life you have to come to realize, okay, who is going to help me grow in my process and who is holding me back… Or who can I get connections with to bring me further to what I want in life, in your life.” This student clearly articulated her thought process in choosing between community memberships, wondering aloud which would “help [her] grow” and which were “holding [her] back.”

Along these same lines, many of the answers to the question of whether or not students felt they were a part of the “campus community” were complex and often alluded to the idea of multiple communities, and when prompted to address the campus community as a whole, they tended not to view it as a single entity. Many of the responses that referred to the entire campus community emphasized the absence of a sense of community, as in the following example:

> Interviewer: Um, do you feel like you are part of the campus community at [the University]? Why or why not?
>
> Student: Um, I would say sort of in a sense. Uh, just there is a lot going on for activities and stuff that I do know of, but then when it comes to everything else, like there're clubs and stuff, I'm in part of some, but I don't feel as though everything's kinda unified, you know?
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: I feel like everything's kinda doing their own thing rather than knowing what truly is everything going on or so.

Statements like these were rarely explicit, but when coupled with the tendency for students to respond by alluding to multiple community memberships, implied that the students interviewed rarely recognized a single, unified campus community. The students interviewed in the study shared a complex and multidimensional understanding of community, an understanding that the recognition of and ability to traverse multiple

communities provides more tangible benefit than does a larger, less-defined campus community.

Academic engagement. When asked questions about engagement with academics, almost every student in the study responded with a reference to faculty, particularly to classroom instructors. In contrast to involvement as described above, where students viewed involvement as a responsibility, students tended to view classroom engagement as a task primarily for instructors. One student, in answering when he felt most engaged in the classroom, described classroom environments "where a professor makes an effort to, um, like engage with the students and like also have the students engage with each other" as settings where "…I feel like I'm actually learning something, and like havin' that connections, which is really important to me." The idea that student levels of classroom engagement are largely determined by instructor effort in that regard was echoed several times in the interviews. Some students connected this effort with active learning strategies, as when one student described "…sort of in class activities, uh, like one teacher like my Spanish teacher, she has, she created little puzzles, and it's like okay, now that you just learned this, let's see if you can put everything together." In addition to teaching style and strategy, students also focused on instructor personalities and attributes and articulated how instructor behaviors could add or take away from their experiences in the classroom. Although many of these responses were negative in nature, for example, a student referring to an instructor as "[not] really much of a social person" and therefore leading a "really boring class," several highlighted positive experiences in classes where an instructor had individualized interactions with students. One student described this type of interaction:

> Student: I feel most engaged when the professors themselves are interacting with me, or they ask me a question personally, as opposed to the class when they ask people. It kinda gets you engaged 'cause, for me, I feel kinda standoffish of what to say 'cause, if anything, it's, if it's a big classroom you're afraid to say something, you look like the fool, as opposed to like, you know, the information, you're just afraid to say it even though like someone will say and it's the correct answer, and you're like, I knew that or-
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: …so I think it's just a discouraging thing, but just hoping that someone just calls you out and be like, hey, do you know this, or they keep you well up and say like, yeah, it's okay that you got it wrong, but this is how we do it. So, yeah.

The instructor described above goes further than simply encouraging class participation and calls on students directly, something that seems to resonate with this student. In particular, this description is one of an instructor who not only actively engages each student but who does so without judgment, one who can "keep you well up" and lets students know "it's okay that you got it wrong." This kind of supportive and individualized attention appeared several times in the interviews and was linked not only to student academic engagement but also with more general support as described in the next section.

While faculty seemed to be the most common response related to questions of academic engagement, students referenced three other mediating factors that influenced their engagement. First, academic interest seems to play a role, though it was mostly referenced in questioning about major confidence. When referring to classroom engagement, language around interest tended to be negative, as in the above example of one student calling one of his courses "really boring" or in the following example of a

student who spoke at length about enjoying his biology courses but when asked about his relationships with faculty said:

> Student: I usually talk to my teachers. I don't, I don't really ... I don't just sit there in class, show up and then like, leave.
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: I may do it with some classes to where, if the class doesn't pique my ... Well, not ... when it doesn't pique my interest. I make sure I go to ... the teacher's there to teach.
>
> Interviewer: Right.
>
> Student: So, you don't want like, an empty classroom.
>
> Interviewer: Right, right.
>
> Student: So, even if it's really easy, I still try to be more interested in what the teacher's doing.
>
> Interviewer: Engaged in it.
>
> Student: So, they know that I'm understanding. I'm not just showing up to, just to show up.

The student here describes an almost transactional relationship with instructors of courses that don't "pique [his] interest." Specifically, interest requires effort on his part.

He also alludes to another common factor influencing academic engagement, that of course difficulty: he implies that it requires more effort to be interested in a course that is "really easy." Several other students referenced difficulty in questions related to academics, with almost every student noting an increase in either the quantity of their academic workloads or an increase in the overall difficulty of their courses during their second years. One student described the phenomenon succinctly as him "…taking like all the next level classes." Difficulty in coursework was often cited as a detriment to

academic engagement, as in this example of a student describing her struggles in a mathematics course:

> Um, I feel most engaged when it's a topic that I, one, understand or two, is interested in, type of thing like 'cause like in my Pre-Calculus class, I don't feel engaged at all in that class. 'Cause it's, like the professor goes too fast and it's kind of just like, okay, all this stuff like I'm writing it down, but I'm not really like engaging it because I'm- I'm not, I don't understand it, but the rest of my classes, it's fine like I'm engaged in every single one of my classes. It's just that the math, I'm just like mm (negative).

She begins this response with a reference to interest but she clearly articulates a situation in which a specific disciplinary academic struggle made it difficult for her to have a positive learning experience. Another student, when asked about her satisfaction with her choice of major, described how course difficulty had limited her confidence: "Um, at this point I'm pretty indecisive. At first I was satisfied but as like I progressed within like the classes and they got harder it's like I wasn't prepared for it." Although self-confidence, which will be explored in a later section, certainly plays a role here, it is clear that students in the study viewed course difficulty as a large influence on their academic experiences.

The final significant factor in determining academic engagement as described by students is the influence of peers both in and out of the classroom. Often, the support of friends was referenced as a moderator of course difficulty, as in the case of one student who, when asked about how his friends have influenced his second-year experienced, answered that they "helped me get through some of these tough classes, because you know, like you bond over the struggle, and then you try to help each other get through it." Several other students referenced peer support networks as providing direct academic benefit, both in terms of specific academic support and more general psychosocial support

that helped them academically. This benefit could extend into the classroom as well: when asked when she feels most engaged in class, one student answered: “Um, honestly when I know people I have in the classroom. Like I've always been a little bit more participating when I'm comfortable with people I'm around… And it's like I don't know, but it's like there's a little, kind of a barrier there kind of protecting me.” With friends in class with her, she describes feeling less apprehensive, particularly with regard to class participation. Having what she describes as a “barrier there kind of protecting” her creates a more comfortable learning environment where she is more readily able to engage.

In sum, students in the study describe their academic engagement as being determined at least in part by their own academic interests, with both interest and engagement itself influenced positively by peers and negatively by course difficulty. But the primary influence on engagement seems to be faculty. The next section also deals primarily with faculty relationships, particularly the ways in which students view individual relationships with faculty members.

Outreach. Throughout the interviews, students told stories of positive interactions with institutional actors, primarily faculty members, with whom they had some form of individual relationship. These positive relationships were often initiated by the institutional actor, again, usually a faculty member, as opposed to being initiated by the student. One student provided an example of the typical kind of faculty outreach described by several students:

> [Professor] saw that I was, 'cause he takes attendance and he saw that I was missing a couple classes and that I missed a quiz and he actually reached out to me. He emailed me. He was like, "Is everything okay at home? Like

> if you ever needed any help, just let me know. Come to office hours. Talk to me." Blah, blah, blah. And I was like, oh, like that was really cool. 'Cause I'd never had a professor do that before. So I thought that was really cool of him. And that was really nice.

The student felt that this contact was individualized, not systematized or routine but a direct attempt at addressing his concern about her in a non-judgmental way. This kind of outreach was valued by many students in the study in a way that student-initiated outreach was not. Students made many general statements about attending office hours or staying after class to ask questions but were only ever specific about interactions in cases like the above where faculty reached out directly. One student spoke about his difficulty with student-initiated contact:

> I feel for me when it comes to like talking to, uh, professors and stuff, I'm kinda, um, somewhat afraid of in a sense, just 'cause I know they're ... just I don't know what it is, but it's just like I'm anxious, and I'm like unaware. I always feel that they're going to deny my request before talking.

This kind of general unease with approaching faculty was common in the interviews and only serves to highlight the high value students placed on faculty-initiated contact.

Some students drew distinct lines between faculty who do and do not care about students based on this kind of outreach, with one student describing a professor who "definitely showed that she cared the most, and like, she wanted to know people like personally 'cause she like got personal with us like very often," adding that "…she really tried to connect to me like personally" and as a result, in his view "she like stood out… more like in comparison to everyone else." One student in particular tied this interest in students to race:

> Interviewer: Okay, now how would you describe your interaction with faculty members this year?
>
> Student: Um, I definitely think ... Well, I got in touch with a few faculty members, mostly African American. Um, I never had relations with my professors.
>
> Interviewer: Let me ask you this ... Let me ask you this one? Why just your African American ones? I'm curious.
>
> Student: Because they're the only ones that's ever reached out to me, like if I see an African American faculty on campus they'll smile at me. They'll be like, "Hey, how are you doing?" And I love that, like ...
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Student: Like it's like you're acknowledging that I'm there.

Both quotes see the students ascribing particular value to faculty who show interest by contrasting with those who did not, although they assume different reasons for that interest.

Students in the study were also able to clearly articulate how these relationships positively influenced them. These positive influences sometimes took the form of direct, tangible benefits like major and career advice, as in the case of one student who spoke about how a faculty member in his major department "sends us all, uh, work, work and what we can go to, like internships and stuff like that" which "kinda helps [him] to know what to do." Another student, who described how a faculty member had introduced him to an undergraduate research program, said that the faculty member's interest in him gave him "extra like, credibility to do stuff," implying a combination of both a boost in confidence and validation in his academic ability. Often students described a less tangible but still valuable influence that this kind of positive attention from faculty could provide. One student described how his relationship with a faculty member has affected him: "I feel like it's made me believe in myself even more, because somebody else is believing in me,

and they see the potential in me that I may not see in myself all the time." Another student echoed this sentiment when talking about his connection to a staff member: "I feel that if someone takes an interest in me, I respond better… And I feel like I want to live up to it, impress them, make, make sure that I'm okay, so that they know I'm okay." These quotes imply that these two students highly value connections with institutional actors who hold high expectations for them. Both examples reflect a sense repeated in several other interviews that individual relationships with faculty and staff can provide powerful validating experiences for students, contributing to both academic pursuits and general self-confidence, which will be explored in the following section.

Self-confidence. Although the final two questions in the interview script dealt with academic and social self-concept directly, students in the study referenced self-confidence either directly or indirectly in nearly every segment of the interviews. As described in the above sections, students were able to clearly articulate how their self-confidence was positively and negatively affected by their membership in or distance from different communities on campus, their academic experiences, and their relationships with faculty, staff, and other students.

They were more direct, however, in describing how their levels of self-confidence moderated those aspects of their experiences, often in negative terms. For the student who had been unable to make connections and felt disconnected from the campus community, social self-confidence was described as a limitation: "Like I know, like, if I were more outgoing or more social, I could like have more options or more opportunities, like, more experiences. But, I don't think that's gonna change while I'm here." As in this case,

students tended to be more candid about limitations or constraints that resulted from a lack of self-confidence. Several students spoke about the difficult social task of developing academic peer support networks in particular classes or disciplinary areas, with one student focusing on study groups: "…I had to study on my own and then like I'd hear of people like, 'Oh, like, we're studying together later.' Like I know I could have took the initiative to like study with them, but it wasn't in my comfort zone." A few students repeated this idea of "comfort zone" with regard to social interactions, often with either the lack of inclination or the determination to "get out" of one's "comfort zone" in terms of social situations.

This leads to another aspect of self-confidence that arose in the study: students tended to place an emphasis on effort and initiative over aptitude. As in the above quote, many students spoke about "[taking] the initiative" to access support from peers or faculty or to become involved. Specifically, however, many students would emphasize effort over their ability, often in terms of academics. When asked about her academic ability in comparison to her peers, one student said she felt "…like I'm able, I'm definitely able to pass the class, it's just that I have to put in the extra work." Similar to how students tended to view involvement as their responsibility, many framed success, particularly academic success, as driven primarily by their own effort. One student seemed uncomfortable comparing himself to his peers:

> Interviewer: How would you describe your academic ability in comparison to your peers?
>
> Student: I mean, I wouldn't compare. I'd just say, I mean, you live up to the potential that you decide to live up to. You set your standards for yourself. So, I mean, for me, I'm not doing as good as I can, but I know I can do well.

> Interviewer: Okay. Um ... How do you feel that your academic ability has affected you this year?
>
> Student: Uh ... I feel like I've put in a lot of effort this semester to make things better, because I have necessarily certain goals that I reach for myself. So, I feel like this year I've been more so academically inclined and pursued.

This student clearly sees his goals as attainable through increased effort, a sentiment echoed in a number of other interviews, though often in more deficit-minded terms. More students lamented their lack of effort or initiative or attributed struggle to this lack, as in the case of the student who did not "[take] the initiative" to enter a study group.

Fortunately, despite these references to deficits, students in the study made many direct references to their self-confidence, particularly in social terms. One final aspect of self-confidence in the study was a repeated reference to self-confidence in racial terms: specifically, that Black students at the University are socially confident. One student made this reference in terms of the Black community on campus in a response about her confidence in social situations:

> Um, I'd definitely say I'm a lot more social than a few of my peers, but honestly drawing back to the Black community wise, I think we're all equally the same, well, most of us are equally the same and we just communicate with each other. Like it's not ... Within a Black community it's not about, "Oh, I need to know you to talk to you." It's like if I see you there I'm just going to start a conversation with you.

Although this particular student referred specifically to the campus's Black community, which she referenced a few times prior and called "all connected with one another," another student seemed to expand the sentiment somewhat: "So it's not a big deal to just be like, oh hi, first 'cause you know, like other people are shy, but um, in comparison to my peers? Um, I find my friends are the same way, honestly. I feel like us Black people are

just like, you're not shy, like." One student described how his self-confidence insulated him from racial antagonism:

> Interviewer: How would you describe your self confidence in social situation, in comparison to your peers in a social situation?
>
> Student: High. They always come ... They usually, um ... if someone's racist to them or-
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: ... they're going through anything socially, they'll come to me first and tell me like, "Oh, [name], someone said this to me." I'm like, "Oh, then like, don't phase it. Don't let it get to you." "Cause then, usually when people say that, it's just ignorance or they're jealous. Like, my mom always told me to wear ... If someone's like, "Oh, you're intelligent." Like, "Oh, you're not going to achieve that. You're not gonna make it." It's usually, they're telling you that because they, they failed and they want to bring you down.
>
> Interviewer: They're, they're, they're marrying their shirt comes off and projecting them on you.
>
> Student: Yes.
>
> Interviewer: So, you don't let that happen.
>
> Student: I don't let that-
>
> Interviewer: You don't, you don't be a catcher for that. No.
>
> Student: No, 'cause I know my own worth.

This kind of positive racial identity was repeated a few times in other interviews but was unfortunately contrasted by a general sense of racial isolation, which will be elaborated in the following section.

Separation. Students in the study were able to clearly articulate a general sense of racial separation at the University when asked about campus racial climate. Their descriptions of this separation were similar in several key ways, the first of which being a

clear recognition of the lack of critical mass of Black students on campus. Many students referenced this in terms of classroom demographics, as in the example of this student:

> Student: Well, I, I know from my major, well, I'm like usually the youngest one there and then I'm like, the only person of color.
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Student: Like, who's Black.
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.
>
> Student: Most of my major is. In most of my classes, I'll probably see like, three, four ... Like, three or four and then everyone will be more in like, split into groups of their own race.

Being the "only" Black student in a particular environment was a very common theme in the interviews, with the classroom being the most commonly referenced environment. One student implied that this was a common enough experience to be expected: "…like you walk in class on the first day of school and usually I'm like the only Black person."

In addition to clearly recognize and explicitly describe the lack of critical mass of Black students on campus, many students were also able to clearly articulate what effects this had on them. The most common response was general resignation to the situation, with many students using language around the idea of being "used to it." One student, when prompted about the racial makeup of his classes, answered "…for African American students, pretty limited. Like, it's been like that since high school… Yeah. I'm used to it." Another student described a similar attitude, saying "…it's, kind of, like a second nature now of life." Most of this resignation came from students describing the racial demographics of other students, either in their classrooms or across the campus as a whole.

Students' reactions varied slightly when referring to faculty and what effects the racial climate had on their relationships with faculty. Some students, as in the case of the student who described in a previous section how she felt recognized by Black faculty members who she felt were "acknowledging that I'm there," described in positive terms a kind of special attention payed to them because of their race and particularly because of their relative racial separation or lack of critical mass. When asked about faculty, one student described them as "very like out there, and they kinda make sure you know, and they always look for you 'cause you always like, I would say, stand out in a point." Being the "only" Black student in an environment, especially in a classroom setting, necessarily means that these students "stand out," and this student feels that this "stand[ing] out" leads to his instructors to "always look for you." Other students, however, described this attention as negative:

> Student: Um, that was like a very, very important like, for example, like you walk in class on the first day of school and usually I'm like the only Black person.
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: So it's kind of like you stand out more and like people, like, look at you differently I feel like. Like, I just feel like I have higher expectations-
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: ... than people that are in my class.

Although her comment that "stand[ing] out" leads to having "people… look at you differently" could apply to both peers and the instructor in a classroom, her description of feeling that she has "higher expectations" connects more directly to the instructor, something her tone implied was a source of increased pressure. Students described both positive and negative effects of the kind of increased visibility that a lack of critical mass

of Black students provided them. In general, students made comments similar to one student's declaration that "I feel like the faculty is okay when it comes to race," mostly neutral with regard to their perception of the faculty influence on the campus racial climate.

Students were significantly more likely to call out non-Black peer attitudes on race and their contribution to a hostile racial climate. Every student in the study who referred to an uncomfortable or even actively hostile racial climate talked about that antagonism coming from other students. These comments would often be coupled with an intentional separation of the University staff and faculty from students, as in this example:

> Interviewer: How would you describe the [University] climate when it comes to race and ethnicity?
>
> Student: Um ... I feel like they try to address the problems by giving us our own centers and stuff, but in reality, if you were to bring it up to a student, they'd kind of just be like, ew, like-
>
> Interviewer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
>
> Student: It's like a sticky type of situation. They wouldn't really want, especially a White student, like they wouldn't really want to talk about it, or they feel like uncomfortable.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.
>
> Student: Mm-hmm (affirmative), or feel attacked with the situation. It's like I'm just asking you like-
>
> Interviewer: Right.
>
> Student: A simple question. Why are you offended already? Type of thing. Like that's what I feel like the environment is.
>
> Interviewer: K. Got-
>
> Student: Even though they try to make a better environment.

There is a clear separation by this student between "they," who "try to address the problems" and "try to make a better environment," and students, particularly White students who she describes as reluctant to engage with or actively threatened by racial issues. Although many students described their interactions across racial groups in less direct terms, many described these interactions as guarded or uncomfortable, with one student repeating that "…it's like you get like a standoffish vibe from them, like they don't care to communicate." Some students, however, were much more direct in their assessments:

> Student: Yeah, I feel like the faculty is okay when it comes to race. It's just the students sometimes that have a problem, and I'm like-
>
> Interviewer: What do you mean, help me, give me an example, I don't-
>
> Student: There's, I would say in order to be employed at [University], you would have to accept diversity, but in order to be a student at [University], you don't necessarily have to have that same requirement. So I've come across a couple of people where like I can, I, I just know like they have, like the micro-aggressions they would have. It's like I, I, I know they're racist.

As with the previous example, this student makes a clear distinction between institutional actors and students, with the institution getting a pass and the students called out as racist. This student in particular describes microaggressions as an indicator of racist attitudes in his peers. The hostility he describes and which was reflected in several other interviews comes from fellow students, not from faculty or staff.

His statement is clear that even though "the faculty is okay when it comes to race" and that employment implies some measure of alignment with positive racial attitudes, these do not appear to be changing harmful student attitudes. Many students in addition to the two examples above used similar language to talk about how "they try," that the

institution makes attempts to address issues of race, with many references to the University's establishment of the Black Student Center. But many students agreed with the two above that these efforts do not seem to be getting through to students, with one student stating that "the effort's there, but it's just no improvement from the effort." These students' statements do not absolve the institution of its responsibility for managing the racial climate of the campus, but it is clear that students in the study place most of the blame for their perceptions of hostility on their fellow students.

Summary of key qualitative results. Students in the study described their second-year experiences along six major themes, the first of which was *involvement*. Connection to the University was seen by students in the study to be a direct result of their involvement, which they often viewed as a personal responsibility. The second theme was *community*: students described tangible benefits to their membership in multiple communities on campus, particularly social and academic communities, while at the same time downplaying the existence of a unified campus community. *Academic engagement*, the third theme, was described by students to revolve around faculty interactions, particularly with course instructors. Academic interest and peer support also played a role in how engaged students were academically. The fourth theme was *outreach*, which was especially valuable from faculty when it was individualized. Students described faculty-initiated contact as being more impactful than student-initiated contact. The fifth theme of *self-confidence* was spread evenly through the interviews, with students describing how their self-confidence influenced and was influenced by involvement, engagement, and relationships with faculty and other students. The final theme was one of *racial*

separation, which students in the study described as recognizable in terms of Black students being a visible minority on campus. They described this affecting them in a number of ways, including increased academic pressure from faculty and increased racial tension with their non-Black peers. The next chapter explores these results and the results of the quantitative phase further, leading to implications and conclusions of the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation focused on two main research questions related to second-to-third year retention for college students: what factors influence second-year retention for all students; and, more specifically, how do Black students describe their experiences during their second years of college? With the results of the mixed methods investigation of these questions established in the previous chapter, this chapter draws conclusions from the study by exploring the implications of the findings of the two phases, first as separate entities and then by comparing and contrasting the findings. The discussion will then conclude with implications and recommendations for theory, practice, and further research.

Quantitative Phase Implications

The quantitative phase of the study, which was focused on the Second-Year Student Survey (SYSS), produced a structural equation model of second-to-third year retention that details the complex interactions among a number of concepts that have been suggested to influence student persistence decisions. The following section will tie the model to the established literature, showing where the results of the SYSS align as well as where they differ.

Alignment with Tinto's theory. When building the structural model, I used Tinto's theory of student departure as a loose theoretical framework. In his original theory, social and academic integration combine to influence student commitment to the goal of completing a degree and to doing so at a particular institution, and it is these levels of

commitment that influence the student's decision to persist or depart from the institution (1993). Tinto's theory was originally designed to test persistence to the second year (1975, 1993) and has largely been empirically tested as such (Braxton et al., 1997). In adapting Tinto's theory to the second year, the structural model makes several changes that should be highlighted.

First, goal commitment, that is, the extent to which a student feels committed to the ultimate goal of degree completion, did not strongly correlate with retention for students in the SYSS sample. This is a reasonable finding: if Tinto's theory holds, students with a low goal commitment would have departed during or shortly after the first year and thus would not remain in the sample as second-year students. There is evidence of this in a simple view of the means and standard deviations of the goal commitment (*Goalcomm*) and institutional commitment (*Instcomm*) variables: in the SYSS, the mean response on a scale of 1 to 5 for *Goalcomm* was 4.62 with a standard deviation of .719, both higher and more consistent than the mean response of *Instcomm*, 4.10 with a standard deviation of 1.044. 71.5% of SYSS respondents answered the *Goalcomm* item with a 5 and 94.2% answered with a 4 or 5; for *Instcomm* these percentages were 46.7% and 72.4% respectively. This was, as a whole, a group of students with very high stated commitment to degree completion, strongly suggesting that students with lower levels of goal commitment had not persisted to the second year. The lack of correlation between *Goalcomm* and *Retention* led to the decision to keep goal commitment out of the model entirely and suggests that although the construct may carry a great deal of weight in retention equations for first-year students, it has little to no effect on second-to-third year retention. Institutional

commitment, however, continues to play a strong role, with *Instcomm* having the single strongest influence on *Retention* of any observed variable.

We next turn to the viability of sense of belonging and academic engagement as respective replacements for social and academic integration. If we were to adapt Tinto's theory directly, both belonging (BELONG) and academic engagement (ENGLRN) would have direct effects on institutional commitment (*Instcomm*), but this is not the case in the final structural model. Instead, only belonging has a strong direct effect on institutional commitment, with academic engagement having a strong direct effect on *Retention* itself. Tinto's original theory did not specify any interactions between social and academic integration (1975), although later explanations and expansion of his theory recognize that the two have a complex relationship (1993), interactions that have been explored empirically in a number of studies (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Braxton et al., 1997; Cabrera et al., 1993). The model implies that general feelings of connection and belonging to the institution contribute to a student's ability to engage in their learning, both in the classroom setting and in the wider context of his or her academic major. While these feelings of belonging and connection are important to the student's level of commitment to the institution, which is in turn a strong influence on retention, academic engagement contributes directly to retention. This effect can be the result of general academic success, which can be easily connected to engagement in the classroom (Schreiner & Louis, 2011), or to a strong connection to the student's major (Graunke & Woosley, 2005).

The results suggest that Tinto's framework can thus be adapted to the second year, but not without significant changes. The influence of students' levels of commitment on

their persistence decisions changes from the first to the second year, as does the nature of integration as a functional concept. Belonging and academic engagement clearly play a key role in student decisions to stay or leave during the second year. The next section will explore how these concepts, along with those tied to the latent variables of relationships (RELATN) and self-confidence (CONFID), relate to one another according to the paths laid out in the model.

Influence of student relationships. The model contains four main latent or unobserved variables: relationships (RELATN), which was indicated by the observed variables peer friendships (*Peerfriend*), interactions with faculty outside of the classroom (*Facoutofclass*), and interpersonal validation (*Validation*); belonging (BELONG), indicated by sense of belonging (*Senseofbelonging*), satisfaction with institutional interactions (*Instinteract*), and overall satisfaction (*Satisfaction*); self-confidence (CONFID), indicated by academic self-concept (*Acadself*) and social self-concept (*Selfconfidence*); and academic engagement (ENGLRN), indicated by major confidence (*Majorconf*), classroom engagement (*Classengage*), and meaningful learning (*Meanlearning*). The primary function of the model is to explain the paths between these latent variables, and, in so doing, suggest how the underlying concepts that inform them relate to one another.

One of the strongest direct paths in the model is from relationships to belonging, implying that meaningful relationships have a strong, positive relationship with feelings of belonging and connection. This is consistent with previous findings that positive relationships with peers (Juillerat, 2000) and with faculty (Kim & Sax, 2017; Lundberg &

Schreiner, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 2005) contribute to student satisfaction with an institution and, in particular, contribute to a student's sense of belonging (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Hausmann et al., 2009; Hoffman et al., 2002; Strayhorn, 2012). Perhaps most importantly, the model implies that Rendón's theory of validation (1994) applies quite powerfully to second-year students. The observed variables of interpersonal validation and sense of belonging have a statistically significant correlation of 0.583 ($p <$ .001) and this relationship carries much of the weight of the influence of the relationships variable on the belonging variable. Rendón posits that validating experiences with institutional actors have a powerful influence on students, particularly students from traditionally underserved groups (1994); the model, built on a survey sample that includes a significant number of these students, clearly supports this idea. Students who reported feeling validated by staff and faculty were much more likely to report feeling a connection and sense of belonging to the institution, which in turn led them to be more likely to be committed to it.

Interestingly, when isolated from the belonging variable, the relationships variable has a negative influence on institutional commitment, suggesting that apart from their connection to students' feelings of belonging, connection, and satisfaction, there is something about the strength of students' relationships with peers and faculty that turns them away from the institution. It is possible that some students in the sample have strong relationships with peers or faculty who have negative feelings toward the University. The influence of such individuals would therefore be detrimental to a student's level of commitment to the institution. Further research would be required to see if this

phenomenon is specific to this particular institution or if it can be generalized to second-year students at others, as it does not match with any prior research.

The relationships variable also has a direct influence on self-confidence in the model, implying that relationships have a positive influence on students' views of themselves. This is also consistent with prior research, with a particular focus on relationships with faculty members. Students who develop positive relationships with faculty outside of the classroom report a number of benefits (Kim & Sax, 2017; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), with increases in academic self-concept noted explicitly (Guiffrida, 2005; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004). It is important to note that the model does not imply that self-confidence is determined entirely by students' relationships: with only 23% of the variance in self-confidence explained by the model, it suggests the influence of relationships but does not suggest causality.

Influence of belonging. The belonging variable has two direct paths leading to institutional commitment and academic engagement, both of which are strong and positive. Students in the SYSS sample with higher scores in the indicators of belonging, which include measures of sense of belonging and satisfaction, tended to answer more positively when asked about their commitment to the institution. This is right in line with previous research showing how institutional commitment is largely influenced by sense of belonging (Hausmann et al., 2007, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012) and, particularly for sophomores or second-year students, satisfaction with educational experiences (Ash & Schreiner, 2016; Juillerat, 2000; Schreiner, 2010a; Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). The path coefficient for the path from belonging to the observed variable

of institutional commitment is the strongest of any direct path in the entire model, suggesting that it is this latent variable, made up of items designed to access students' feelings of belonging, connection, and satisfaction, that has the most influence over students' levels of commitment to the institution.

The belonging variable's direct path to academic engagement was also strong, suggesting that belonging and connection also contribute to student academic experiences. Although there is some evidence from the literature that sense of belonging can lead to improved academic outcomes (Hausmann et al., 2009; Strayhorn, 2012), the finding of such a strong connection between belonging and the indicators of academic engagement is relatively unique. The model implies that feelings of belonging and connection have a strong positive influence on both student engagement in the classroom and confidence in major choice. In viewing belonging's strong influence on institutional commitment and academic engagement, we can make a clear case for the power of belonging, connection, and satisfaction in determining second-year student success.

Influence of self-confidence. The latent variable self-confidence has two very interesting direct paths in the model, one to *Retention* with a negative coefficient and one positive path to academic engagement. The positive path to academic engagement is supported by research that shows the power of academic self-concept and self-efficacy (Awad, 2007; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Sedlacek, 1987) and the particular effect that self-concept has on classroom engagement (Schreiner, 2010b; Schreiner & Louis, 2011). Students in the sample with higher ratings of self-confidence, both academic and social, scored higher on measures of classroom engagement, interest in

what they were learning, and confidence in their choice of major. The connection between general self-confidence and major confidence is an important but logical one; it seems reasonable to assume that students with strong and stable senses of self will make decisions about their major that are consistent with their identities (Nauta & Kahn, 2007).

The negative path from self-confidence to *Retention*, however, requires further exploration. While we would expect to see self-confidence in general and academic self-concept in particular contribute to academic outcomes (Awad, 2007; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), for the students in the SYSS sample, grades awarded during the second year had very little correlation with student persistence. Although student grade point average (GPA) for the Fall term was weakly associated with *Retention* (Pearson's correlation of 0.151, $p < .01$), Spring term GPA and cumulative GPA at the end of the academic year had no significant correlation at all, thus precluding its use in the model. Instead, the model suggests that self-confidence has a slightly negative influence on persistence. As with the relationship variable's negative effect on institutional commitment, a wider study will be necessary to see if this result is unique to this particular institution. It is possible that some students at the University with very high levels of self-confidence, particularly in academics, transfer to more selective programs at other institutions at the end of their second years.

Influence of academic engagement. Finally, the latent variable academic engagement, having been influenced itself by relationships through belonging, belonging itself, and self-confidence, has the strongest direct path to *Retention* of the four latent variables. Academic engagement is thus the simplest answer to the question of which

factors have the largest influence on student persistence in the second year, supporting previous evidence of the influence of major and career decision-making in the second year (P. D. Gardner, 2000; Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Schaller, 2005, 2007) and the importance for second-year students to connect curriculum and meaningful learning (Schreiner, 2010a, 2010b; Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018). It is also possible that academic engagement has a double influence on persistence: not only is it associated with intentions to persist (Schreiner & Louis, 2011), it also carries with it an association with learning and academic success (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Schreiner & Louis, 2011). In other words, not only are engaged students more likely to decide to continue, they are more likely to pass their classes and thus be allowed to continue. It is clear, however, that reducing the question of which factors have the strongest influence on persistence to a simple answer of academic engagement is insufficient: academic engagement has strong connections to the three other latent variables and to remove it from this context is detrimental to understanding students in their second years. The next section will explore this context in its entirety to draw conclusions from the full model.

Summary and conclusions from the quantitative phase. The model as a whole suggests that student decisions to persist from the second to the third year are driven by their levels of commitment to the institution and their engagement in academics, both of which are strongly influenced by their feelings of belonging and connection to the institution. These feelings are in turn mediated by the quality of their relationships and interactions with staff, faculty, and other students, which also influence how they see themselves.

It is important to note that the model as a whole lacks predictive power. It is not designed as a predictive model but as one used to examine relationships between concepts. The variance in *Retention* explained by the model is only 21%, though low explanatory power is not an uncommon outcome in large-scale empirical studies of college student retention (e.g. Bean, 1980; Braxton & Lien, 2000; Braxton et al., 1997; Cabrera et al., 1993). Even perfect institutional conditions cannot guarantee that students will return; college students are human beings with full lives who make occasionally irrational but mostly rational decisions about their education under a great many external constraints (Tinto, 2010). The key takeaway from the model is not which variables have the highest predictive power but how the variables themselves interact with and support and influence one another. With this understanding, we can begin to think about how to create institutional environments and systems that support positive relationships with faculty and peers, belongingness and connection, self-confidence, and academic engagement for second-year students not in isolation but in a way that reinforces and develops these important concepts together.

Qualitative Phase Implications

The qualitative phase of the study, which focused on the lived experience of Black second-year students at the University, resulted in the emergence of six general themes. The following section will tie these themes to the larger literature of the Black college student experience and highlight areas of strong convergence as well as any areas of divergence.

Involvement. The first of the six themes to explore is the theme of involvement. Students interviewed in the study tended to answer questions around the concept of connection and belonging with references to involvement, often measuring their connection to the institution through their own level of involvement in campus life. Over the course of their interviews, students were able to clearly articulate the benefits they derived from involvement, which many seemed to view as a distinct responsibility. Individual student involvement is an important concept in the wider literature on college students in general (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008) and has been tied directly to increased academic success and retention (Astin, 1993). In particular, Black students at PWIs have been shown to benefit from being involved on campus (Flowers, 2004; Littleton, 2002). The evidence from this study supports these previous findings.

The connection between involvement and belonging aligns well with Strayhorn's conception of belonging as both a motivation for and a result of individual student action (Strayhorn, 2012). Students in the study recognized the importance of involvement, as in the case of the student who said that after his first year he "felt disconnected from the campus" and that he "knew [he] had to do something" to remedy it. This connection also makes sense in the context of the second year, where students are looking for opportunities to narrow and focus their direction and purpose (P. D. Gardner, 2000; Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Schaller, 2005; Schreiner, 2018). If Black students view involvement as a responsibility during their second year, it is up to institutions to create and maintain environments where these students feel comfortable getting more involved (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Community. Another theme that emerged around the concept of belonging was that of community. Students in the study spoke on the many benefits they derived from membership in campus communities, often with an understanding that membership in multiple communities was a necessary condition for success. The idea that Black students navigate through multiple campus communities highlights the complicated nature of the concept of integration for college students from traditionally underserved groups. Tinto's original theory focused on integration into the college community as an important factor in persistence (1993), but students in the study seem to reflect later elaborations of the theory that recognize students can be successful having gained membership into one of many smaller social communities on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh & Love, 2000; Museus & Quaye, 2009; Rendón et al., 2000). This reflection is further sharpened by the dismissal of many students in the study of any sense of a larger campus community for which to belong in the first place.

The ease with which the students in the study were able to navigate multiple communities should be viewed as a strength, one that could be very beneficial to their college experiences. Moving between multiple campus communities requires a significant amount of what Yosso refers to as linguistic, social, and resistant capital, resources that originate in communities of color (2005) and can be utilized in the college environment in powerful ways (Attinasi, 1989; Jayakumar, Vue, & Allen, 2013). Students in the study were able to seek membership in different communities with an express understanding that each specific membership could offer different benefits. Again, this understanding of belonging is in strong alignment with Strayhorn's model of belonging as both input and

output (2012). Institutions that can learn to tap into this strength may be able to offer unique and impactful kinds of support for Black students (Jayakumar et al., 2013).

Academic engagement. Students in the study saw their engagement in academics mediated primarily by relationships with instructors and secondarily by academic interest, course difficulty, and peers in and out of the classroom. The powerful and positive influence of faculty on both student learning and academic success is strongly supported in the literature (Kim & Sax, 2017; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), with the evidence of that influence on second-year students being one of the few common findings across several studies on second-year student success (Graunke & Woosley, 2005; Juillerat, 2000; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Schreiner, 2010a, 2010b; Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018). It is important to recognize the importance that students in the study placed on instructors in light of the general understanding, reflected in these interviews, that students in the second year are looking for direction and purpose (P. D. Gardner, 2000; Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Schaller, 2005) and are often not yet fully immersed in coursework in their major but instead fulfilling general education requirements that may not be directly aligned with their academic interests (Schreiner, 2010b; Young et al., 2015). These students described situations where the instructor seemed to be the sole determinant of their engagement in a particular course. Institutions would do well to recognize the importance of good teaching in second-year courses outside the major pathway.

The relationship that students described between course difficulty and peer support is another important takeaway from the theme of academic engagement. Although students in the study struggled with harder courses in their second years, many were able

to leverage the support of their peers, both inside and outside of the classroom, to sustain their academic engagement. While the importance of having a strong social support network is well documented (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), what arose from students during the interviews was a specific link between academic engagement and student peers, one that implies these students feel that the social aspect of their learning is particularly important. This idea aligns with research showing how non-traditional students and students of color benefit from active learning in college classrooms (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Schreiner & Louis, 2011; Tinto, 1997). Traditional, lecture-based models of content delivery may not resonate with students like those interviewed who are looking for a more social learning experience.

Outreach. Relationships with faculty were clearly important to students in the study, particularly when the initial contact was initiated by the faculty member. This theme of outreach is clearly rooted in Rendón's theory of validation, which emphasizes the power of individual connections to institutional actors who validate the experiences of marginalized students through individual outreach, supportive and inclusive language, and intentional feedback (1994). Students in the study clearly articulated the benefits they derived from these relationships, including the student who said his experiences with a faculty member who could "see the potential in me that I may not see in myself all the time" gave him a boost of self-confidence: "I feel like it's made me believe in myself even more." While this study can add to those where validation has been tested and proved to be a powerful contributor to the success of non-traditional students and students of color in general (Barnett, 2010; Terenzini et al., 1994), the stories of the students in this study

highlight the importance these validating experiences and relationships have during the second year.

Self-confidence. Students in the study referred to self-confidence at many points during the interviews, not just when they were asked about it directly. Self-confidence or self-esteem and its connection to college success for Black students has been a subject of much debate in the literature (Awad, 2007) and it has become clear that the relationship is complex, multidirectional, and variable (Awad, 2007; Hope, Chavous, Jagers, & Sellers, 2013). Comments from students in the study offer support for this complexity: students referred to self-confidence as both a positive and negative mediator of behavior as well as an outcome of supportive relationships and environments. The qualitative findings of this study reflect earlier quantitative work (Awad, 2007; Hope et al., 2013; Lockett & Harrell, 2003) in that self-confidence is very difficult to isolate and study independently, though it is important to note that students in this study spoke directly about how they view themselves and the various ways in which that self-image affects their behavior.

The ease with which the students in the study recognized and vocalized their varying levels of confidence as both input and outcome suggests that self-concept carries a great deal of weight in their decision-making and behavior in both social and academic environments. It is also clear, both from the initial quantitative results that informed the qualitative phase and the qualitative phase itself, that Black second-year students possess uniquely strong self-concepts, particularly social self-concepts. More research will be required to determine if this finding can be generalized to a wider set of universities, but it is possible that Black students with lower levels of self-confidence either do not enroll

directly into four-year universities (Massey et al., 2003; J. Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013) or are less likely to persist to the second year. Institutions looking to access this strength in their Black students may consider that several studies have linked self-confidence in Black students to racial identity development (Lockett & Harrell, 2003; Parham & Helms, 1985; Speight, Vera, & Derrickson, 1996).

Separation. Consistent with a general theme in the literature on the Black college experience (Allen, 1992; M. Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002), students in the study described distinct feelings of separation based on their race. Much of this separation focused on the lack of critical mass of Black people on campus, causing many of these students to feel not just isolated but hypervisible, particularly in academic spaces. The stress of hypervisibility is clearly documented in the literature and contributes to student anxiety that affects them both psychologically and academically (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper, 2009; Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Students in the study described themselves as "stand[ing] out" in class, attracting the attention of instructors in both positive and negative ways. It is reasonable to suggest that these students struggle with Steele's stereotype threat, a double pressure to succeed in defiance of racial stereotypes (Steele, 1997).

Several students in the study also described observing overt racist attitudes and behaviors from other students, clearly contributing to their sense of separation in the student body. These attitudes and behaviors would sometimes take the form of direct racial antagonism and microagression, the harmful effects of which have been documented in the literature (Solarzano et al., 2000), but would also take more subtle forms, as in the

case of the student who described her White peers' aversion to discussion of issues of race. These are more indicative of the impression of students in the study that the University's racial climate is, if not outright hostile, then at the very least uncomfortable for Black students. Again, this finding unfortunately mirrors earlier findings that Black college students tend to view campus racial climates at PWIs as more hostile than their peers (Cabrera et al., 1999; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

One interesting aspect of this theme that may be specific to this particular institution is that students in the study seemed to give the University as a whole a passing grade when it came to racial climate. They seemed to recognize the efforts of the faculty and administration to improve the climate but declared that those efforts were not working. This is an interesting finding in contrast to a general sense in the literature that Black students do not feel supported by their institutions (Allen, 1992; Cabrera et al., 1999; M. Davis et al., 2004; Harper, 2009; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). The students in this study seemed to feel that the institution did offer some support but that this support did not make a meaningful difference in their experiences. It is possible that this response is due to sample bias: the students who agreed to be interviewed were more likely to be connected to the University in at least some extra-curricular way, as evidenced by the many references to the University's Black Student Center. It is also possible that these views are unique to second-year students who have had at least a year to interact with programs and services offered by the institution, with those who have not made contact less likely to have persisted to the second year. Either way, further research will be needed to determine

how student views of institutional support with regard to racial climate vary by institutional type and support offered.

Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Comparing and contrasting the quantitative and qualitative findings is an important exercise due to the differences in focus between the two phases: while the quantitative phase was based around a survey of all second-year students at the University, the qualitative phase was more narrow and focused specifically on Black second-year students. In viewing the similarities and differences between the results, we can determine the factors unique to Black students that impact their success in the second year.

Similarities between quantitative and qualitative results. In general, the findings of the two phases aligned much more often than they diverged. The qualitative phase confirmed for Black students the general shape of the model designed for all second-year students, particularly in terms of the importance of connection and belonging. The structural model puts the latent variable of belonging in an important position with direct and strongly positive connections to the variables of academic engagement and institutional commitment, implying that belonging is a necessary condition of those two vital constructs, both of which have strong and direct connections to persistence. The relative strength of belonging was reflected in the interviews with Black second-year students, although the concept of belonging was deepened and elaborated across the themes of involvement, community, and separation. Students interviewed in the qualitative phase described feelings of belonging and connection as outcomes of individual involvement with campus life and membership in multiple campus communities. They

also described how belonging was difficult in light of the separation they felt, predominantly but not exclusively from other students, based on their race.

Students also described in their interviews how belonging, particularly in terms of the membership in multiple communities, contributed to their ability to establish and sustain engagement in their academics, mirroring the strongly positive path from belonging to academic engagement in the structural model. In the model, academic engagement had the strongest positive direct influence on *Retention*, implying it has the double effect of making students more likely to decide to persist and helping them achieve higher grades which allows them the freedom to determine their academic fate. Black students described in their interviews how their ability to establish membership in communities that offered both social and academic support could keep them engaged and connected to their classes.

Differences between quantitative and qualitative results. Although the general pathways and connections of the structural model seemed to be reflected in the qualitative results, the relative strengths of these associations differed in a few important cases. In particular, students interviewed in the qualitative phase seemed to place a significant emphasis on what the quantitative phase would have placed in the latent variable relationships. The interviews provided a great deal of evidence of the power of positive relationships for Black students, both with peers in and out of the classroom and with faculty members. Relationships with peers were implied to mediate students' self-confidence, connection to and satisfaction with the institution, and academic engagement, directly influencing their success in the second year. The structural model built on the full

sample of second-year students highlights these pathways but their relative strength may be significantly higher for Black students.

Positive relationships with faculty members was a particular focus of the qualitative results as illustrated in the theme of outreach. The most powerful stories from the interviews were stories of faculty members who had offered students validation through individual outreach, feedback, or support. It is clear that these validating experiences made a strong difference in the college careers of these students. Although this influence does appear in two model pathways, from relationships to belonging and from relationships to self-confidence, the relationship is complicated in the model by the relationships variable's negative direct influence on institutional commitment. For Black students, positive relationships may have more influence over other factors than for their non-Black peers. We may even hypothesize a direct path from relationships to academic engagement for Black students based on the connection made in many interviews between instructors and classroom engagement.

Finally, the most apparent difference between the structural model and Black student experiences as described in their interviews is the strong influence of the perception of racial climate for Black students. In the full SYSS sample, campus racial climate, as observed in the items that made up the perceptions of campus racial climate (*Genraceclimate*) factor, had little or no significant correlation with other observed variables and did not fit into any of the four latent variables in the model. This is clearly not how Black students at the University experienced their second years, however. The theme of separation highlighted how Black students experienced isolation, hypervisibility,

and racial hostility from non-Black peers on campus. This separation affected them in a number of ways that likely would have been included in all four latent variables in the model. It would therefore be necessary to include racial climate in any model of Black student success in the second year.

Limitations of the Study

Although attempts were made to address issues of validity and reliability in the selection of the methods described in Chapter Three, there were challenges and necessary limitations with both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. The quantitative phase was based on survey responses and was thus subject to nonresponse bias. Nonresponse bias occurs when the respondents in a survey differ in meaningful ways from those who did not respond, generating a sample that does not accurately reflect the full population (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003). Table 3.1 illustrates the differences between the respondents of the SYSS, that is, the quantitative sample, and the total population of second-year students at the University. Although the survey's low response rate does not itself imply the existence of nonresponse bias (Sax et al., 2003), the mismatch in proportions between the sample and the population does suggest the possibility of bias. For example, women were overrepresented in the survey sample as compared to the overall population of second-year students. If women responded to survey items in meaningfully different ways than men, nonresponse bias may have affected the results of the quantitative analysis. Of particular note is the underrepresentation of students with an official class standing of "freshman," that is, students who started their second year with fewer than 30 collegiate units completed. Almost 60% of all second year students at the University fit

into this category, but only about 46% of the survey sample did not pass the 30 unit threshold by the start of year two. This fact, coupled with the slightly higher average GPA for the sample, suggests that the survey sample tended to be a higher achieving group as compared to the full population, at least in terms of traditional measures of academic success. It is important to consider this limitation when interpreting the results of the quantitative analysis and drawing generalizable conclusions about all second year students at the University and second year students in general.

Nonresponse bias may also have influenced the qualitative phase. Although in general, qualitative research is not meant to be generalizable and as such representative sampling is less emphasized than in quantitative studies (Creswell, 2007), it should be stated clearly that the students who chose to be interviewed for this study may vary in significant ways from their peers. The students who responded to the call for interviews may be more connected to the University in various ways; for example, the interviews were conducted on campus, which may have excluded any students taking courses exclusively online or any students who were unable to be on campus for the days and times that the research assistants were available to interview. It should also be noted that any students who had left the University prior to the spring term would not have been included in the call for interviews.

One of the most important decisions in qualitative research design is determining the relationship between the researcher and the research participants (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006), and although I have approached this decision with great care, my positionality remains a potential limitation of this study. Positionality refers to this

relationship between researcher and researched and should be considered at all steps in the research process: design, execution, and analysis (Jones et al., 2006; Lincoln, 1995). A proper consideration of researcher positionality recognizes the structural differences between the researcher and participants, not just in terms of the power relationship involved in the study itself but also in terms of differences in social identities, which may be influenced by or the result of structural inequities based on lines of race, class, or gender (Lincoln, 1995). Positionality was a concern in designing this study, as I have undertaken a qualitative investigation of Black college students not only as a White man but one who is an administrator at the institution they attend and about which they were questioned. Including the student research assistants in developing the interview protocol and then having them conduct the interviews were attempts to address the limitations of my ability to accurately represent this group of students, but in the end it is my interpretation and representation of their responses that have produced the final analysis. This is a very important limitation to consider and I have been careful about using the participants' own words to describe their experiences, not just to preserve the validity of the research but also to ensure that the research process does not contribute to their marginalization in the institutional context (Bourke, 2014; Jones et al., 2006; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Implications of the Study

In viewing the study as a whole, we see many opportunities for meaningful work to support second-year students as well as important implications for practice and leadership practice within higher education institutions. The following section concludes the dissertation with implications for theory, several recommendations for practitioners

working with second-year students, and opportunities for further research. Finally, the educational landscape presented in both the quantitative model and the lived experiences of Black students at the University suggests an environment in dire need of change, a change that must be achieved through leadership focused on equity. The final section will suggest several paths and principles toward equity-minded leadership in higher education.

Implications for theory. The quantitative phase of the study used a framework adapted from Tinto's theory of student departure (1975, 1993). As the original theory did not specify strict operationalizations for its concepts of academic and social integration, using theory elaboration to explore adapting the theory for use with different student groups and different concepts and constructs from the wider retention literature can provide useful new lines of inquiry that help researchers better understand why students leave college without a degree (Braxton, 1999; Braxton & Lien, 2000; Braxton et al., 1997). The model first tested in this study substituted sense of belonging for social integration and academic engagement for academic integration, with the final model showing support for the general idea that belonging and engagement with academics do have a significant influence on retention for students in their second year. Testing these constructs on second-year students offers two important expansions of Tinto's theory.

First, integration as a distinct concept is more difficult to define and operationalize for second-year students than for first-years, as presumably students will have become integrated into the academic and social spheres of the institution during the first year, or, as the theory posits, they will not return for the second year (Tinto, 1993). Instead of needing to enter a new space and become integrated, second year students struggle with *staying*

integrated, necessitating a new understanding of what integration means in the second year. The expansion of Tinto's theory offered in this study suggests that belonging and academic engagement, both of which are enhanced by positive relationships and self-concepts, serve as the forms of integration necessary for students to stay committed to the institution and choose to stay.

Second, the model developed in this study does not include goal commitment, an important contributor to a student's decision to persist according to Tinto's theory (1993). While institutional commitment remains a key component of the student departure pathway, goal commitment appears to have little influence on persistence for second-year students. Again, this operates as a direct extension of the original theory: students with low levels of commitment to the goal of a college degree are less likely to have made it through the first year (Tinto, 1975, 1993). It is reasonable to suggest that most students have made up their minds about college by the beginning of the second year—it is their paths to and their careers after graduation that they are concerned with now (Schaller, 2005), a suggestion strongly supported by the results of this study.

Implications for practice. As institutions across the country begin to focus on their second-year students, many practitioners are left to wonder how to approach this unique population (J. N. Gardner et al., 2000; Schaller, 2007). The results of this study lead us to several recommendations, starting with programmatic recommendations for all second-year students and then focusing more directly on support for Black second-years.

In general, the strong influence of BELONG in the structural model suggests that programs for second-year students should focus on fostering students' sense of belonging

to the institution. Sense of belonging, however, is complex and difficult to directly address through programmatic intervention (Strayhorn, 2012). The model suggests an alternative solution: as there is a strong positive path from RELATN to BELONG, it may be possible to foster sense of belonging through programs that are focused on building relationships. Peer mentorship programming may be a particularly effective way to build student relationships with peers, both for the mentor and the mentee (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Programs could also focus on building peer groups within a particular major or discipline, creating peer networks that offer both academic and social support.

It is perhaps even more important, however, to develop formal and informal networks for faculty contact outside of the classroom, as relationships with faculty members strongly influenced both the quantitative model and were a key to almost every theme in the quantitative phase. Students in the second year are looking for purpose and direction (P. D. Gardner, 2000; Schaller, 2005) and contact with faculty can help development along these lines (Schreiner, 2010a, 2010b; Schreiner & Tobolowsky, 2018). Programs designed for second-year students should try to create, facilitate, and strengthen personal connections to faculty members, particularly in the academic department of their major. Many of these students are still unable to access coursework in their major (Schreiner, 2010b) and any connection to faculty in their major can help them develop confidence in their major choice, an important factor in the model that is recognized as key to second-year success (Graunke & Woosley, 2005).

The important role of RELATN in the model and the power of faculty outreach as described in student interviews suggests that institutions should consider how faculty are

incentivized to connect with students outside of the classroom. Faculty are evaluated for tenure primarily through their contributions to the three pillars of teaching, research, and service (Fairweather, 1996). All three pillars can be expanded to include increased connection to and support for students. More active and individualized teaching strategies could be used to increase student success in the classroom (Braxton et al., 2000; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005) and faculty could expand their research portfolios to include student success research in their respective disciplines. Most of all, the understanding of service could be expanded to include individual student support. This would require university tenure and promotion committees to commit to recognizing this kind of direct and individual service to students as valuable both to the institution and to the discipline. Understanding how second-year students are a unique population can also help facilitate the growth of faculty development programming around the second-year experience, programming that helps individual faculty members connect with this population inside and outside of the classroom.

The overall results from the study contribute to the contention among scholars of the second-year experience that second-years are a unique population of college students and the retention solutions developed for first-year students will not necessarily translate to them easily (J. N. Gardner et al., 2000; Schaller, 2007; Tobolowsky, 2008). Second-year students, according to the structural model, do not struggle with goal commitment, an important determinant of first-year student retention (Tinto, 1993); it would therefore be ineffective to develop second-year programming that focuses on student commitments to degree completion. The model suggests that students have clarified their commitment to

completing a degree as of the second year; what they need now is major and career direction (P. D. Gardner, 2000; Schaller, 2005), most powerfully through connections to faculty and peers in their major.

The relative strength of BELONG also implies that measurements of belonging, connection, and satisfaction for second-year students can provide some predictive power for second-to-third year retention. Isolating these measurements by academic colleges or individual departments may provide an institution with interesting data with which to make key decisions on programming. Although scores in belonging will vary across departments and disciplines and from year to year, consistently high scores year over year for a particular department may be worthy of investigation. Investigating this kind of positive deviance can help institutions figure out how and why departments are fostering belonging in their students, information they can incorporate into strategies to build belonging across the institution (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004).

The rich data provided by the interviews in the qualitative phase lead to several suggestions specifically for practitioners looking for ideas to support their Black second-year students. It is important to build these recommendations using an asset-based framework that focuses on the unique qualities and strengths that Black students carry with them into their second years. A continued focus on deficits, differences, and difficulties these students face in a system of structural inequity and racism has the potential of reinforcing that system instead of helping students overcome it (Harper, 2009; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Evidence from this study of the power of self-confidence in Black second-year students suggests an avenue for program development.

Students interviewed in the study clearly articulated the fluidity and malleability of their self-concepts and how these self-concepts could both open and close doors to their success in the second year. In noting that these students had uniquely strong social self-concepts, we suggest that this strength be leveraged into peer mentorship programming, either through established Black cultural centers and student organizations on campus or within academic disciplinary units at larger institutions. At smaller institutions like the University, Black second-year populations might be small, but this small size could be leveraged to create a wider peer mentorship program outside of the second year. For example, second-year mentors, recruited through the institution's Black cultural center, could be paired with incoming first-year students over the summer prior to their first term. Such a program could serve the dual purpose of helping freshmen navigate the campus in their first year and giving second-year students the opportunity to clarify their purpose through the act of mentorship (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). It might also be possible to incorporate specific curriculum on Black identity into such a program with the goal of developing positive racial identity for both mentors and mentees, bolstering their self-esteem while strengthening social support networks (Dawson-Threat, 1997; Lockett & Harrell, 2003; Parham & Helms, 1985; Speight et al., 1996).

Implications for higher education institutions. While individualized, student-focused programming should be developed through an asset-based framework, that does not preclude directly addressing structural inequity at the institutional level. Some of the most powerful narratives in the student interviews revolved around a general sense of separation and isolation on campus, a sense driven largely by their recognition of a lack of

critical mass of Black people on campus, not just students but staff and faculty as well. Intentional efforts at the institutional level to recruit and retain more Black students, staff, and particularly faculty should be paramount in achieving goals of educational equity. At the national level, affirmative action policies should be defended and enforced, as their weakening and limitation have been documented as lowering rates of degree attainment for students of color (Hinrichs, 2010), but at the institutional level, even in states such as California that have removed affirmative action entirely, innovative recruitment strategies can be used to increase the matriculation of students of color. Enrollment management strategies need to be rethought to reach this goal, with institutions not only working with their local communities to improve the college pipeline but highlighting the support on campus offered to students of color, particularly to Black students.

Hiring a more diverse faculty is one of the most challenging diversity initiatives at many institutions, but it may be the most important (D. G. Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, & Richards, 2004). Students in this study directly referenced the importance of seeing Black faculty on campus to serve symbolically as representations of their academic and personal potential as well as directly as mentors and colleagues. Despite the commonly held understanding that faculty of color are important contributors to student success, they remain significantly underrepresented at most institutions (Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). This underrepresentation leads faculty of color, particularly Black faculty, to face unique burdens in supporting Black students, including unusually high student support loads due to supporting students outside their own disciplines (Moule, 2005; Turner et al., 2008). As Black students are looking for mentoring relationships with faculty (Guiffrida,

2005), it becomes all the more important for institutions to focus on recruiting, hiring, and retaining Black faculty members. Without addressing this larger structural issue, any programmatic effort to retain Black students faces an extremely uphill battle.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides an important view of one institution's second-year students, both from a broader quantitative perspective and a more focused qualitative view of Black second-years specifically. The most obvious avenue for future research in this area is a multi-institutional study using the same general framework. Do the pathways between latent variables in the structural model hold for different four-year institutions? The alignment of the results of this study and the literature on the second-year suggest that they will, but only a true multi-institutional study would be able to verify those claims.

It may first be necessary, however, to further refine the construct of sense of belonging. This study measures the construct with a four item scale from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)'s Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which they use in a handful of different instruments. Sense of belonging, however, is a complex concept, particularly for students of color who may derive belonging from different places on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). It may be worthwhile to develop a more robust instrument to measure sense of belonging in order to access this complexity, specifically differentiating its use by students as both a motivator and an outcome of behavior (Strayhorn, 2012).

Finally, the qualitative inquiry used in this study could benefit from expansion, as the sample size is a particular limitation. It may be interesting to use this framework of inquiry to explore how other student groups experience the second year, from other racial and ethnic groups to first-generation and non-traditional-age students. One population that could provide interesting and actionable data is students who departed from their institutions during the second year. How did their experiences contribute to their decisions to depart?

Summary

We conclude this dissertation with an understanding and recognition that institutions of higher education face particular structural challenges that limit their ability to support and retain students from the second to the third year. The first important recognition was highlighted in the introductory chapter: with more and more students of color, particularly Black students, leaving during the second year (Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange, 2015), second-year retention is an issue of educational equity for higher education, an issue that is especially prevalent at public systems like the California State University system (CSU Analytic Studies, 2015). It has become increasingly important for institutions to devote resources toward supporting students in the second year in order to improve graduation rates (Tobolowsky, 2008).

This support cannot be accomplished without large-scale institutional change. We suggest that this change be incorporated into a larger movement toward equity in higher education. This kind of change requires a reorientation of a university's vision into one that prioritizes equity and sets it as a founding principle of higher education as a whole

(Bensimon, Dowd, & Witham, 2016; Williams, 2013). Williams writes that "to create a truly diverse and inclusive academic community, our actions must reflect a larger purpose" (2013, p. 164), placing educational equity at the center of that purpose.

Bensimon, Dowd, and Witham offer a framework for achieving this kind of institutional change, a framework largely based around reimagining the university as a collective organization with clear principles, goals, and roles where decisions are informed by data that describes the successes and struggles of all students (2016). While some of this change requires a reassessment of institutional structure to create a more collaborative and distributed system where individual units understand their unique contributions and responsibilities to the mission (Bensimon et al., 2016; Williams, 2013), it also requires rethinking the way we do data in higher education in order to be more "equity-minded," a concept Bensimon and her colleagues define as being not just data-informed but socially, historically, and politically conscious (Bensimon et al., 2016).

Equity-mindedness has implications not only for how we collect and share data at our institutions but also in how we do research on and for students. Bensimon writes that researchers who "have aspirations to do research that does much more than describe the contours of racial inequity" (2018, para. 1) should consider how critical action research can provide meaningful insight while directly supporting students. It is possible to develop systematic qualitative inquiry to gather student voice with rigor and validity in order to directly address differential outcomes for students (Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, & Gildersleeve, 2012) just as it is possible to construct quantitative inquiry that addresses critical issues (Stage, 2007). Combining these two approaches with an eye toward using

the collected data to inform institutional change can lead institutions toward their goals of educational equity and improved outcomes for all students.

In keeping equity at the center of a new model for the university, we can begin to see how institutions can approach and address issues like second-year success in meaningful and effective ways. Using data like the results of the study detailed above to inform practice and policy, institutions have an opportunity to reach their short-term goals of increasing retention and graduation rates for all students but particularly for Black students. Reaching these goals is an important first step in creating a society that can address structural inequity on larger and larger scales, hopefully ensuring that future generations can thrive in a more equitable and just world.

APPENDIX A:
Second-Year Student Survey

Second-Year Student Survey

Invitation to Participate

Dear ${m://FirstName} ${m://LastName},

My name is Adam Petersen and I am the Student Success Analyst in the Office of Undergraduate Studies at California State University San Marcos. You are invited to participate in a research study of second-year students. You were selected as a possible participant because you are in the Fall semester of your second year at CSUSM. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

STUDY PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to learn about students' experiences in the second year of college, how those experiences relate to students' engagement in academics and their sense of belonging to the University, and how these concepts relate to student success.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: If you agree to participate, you will be one of approximately 1700 participants who will be participating in this research.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY: If you agree to be in the study, you will complete the survey on the following pages. The survey is 11 pages of multiple-choice questions that should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. You are free to skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. The survey can be completed in any web browser, including on a mobile device, and your answers are saved after each page so you can return to it at a later time. Completing the final page of the survey will submit your results and end your participation with the study.

RISKS AND INCONVENIENCES: There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These include:

1. The 10-15 minutes required to complete the survey may be inconvenient.

2. Your contact information will be stored in the Qualtrics software with survey responses, which will be linked with select information from student records in order to allow for more in-depth data analysis. Thus, there is some risk that individual responses will be seen by others, but the risk is very low.

3. You may feel compelled to participate in the study because you are being invited by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

SAFEGUARDS: To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken:

1. The survey items are limited to multiple-choice questions and we have tried to minimize their number. You can also save your responses and come back to the survey later before submitting your answers.

2. Your responses will be linked to enrollment and demographic data using your ID number but every effort will be made to ensure strict confidentiality. Names and contact information will be removed from the data set prior to analysis.

3. Participation in the study is voluntary. You do not need to participate if you do not wish to do so. There is no consequence of any kind if you choose not to participate. You can skip any question and still complete the survey.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your responses will be confidential. We will link your responses with information that the University has already collected about you, but we will not use your name or any other identifying information in the reporting of results. Your personal information will only be accessed by the lead researcher and will be removed from the data set prior to analysis. The results of this survey will only be presented in aggregate, i.e. we will not share individual results.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with the University in any way.

BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY: There are no direct benefits to participation in this study, however, your participation will help inform the University's Graduation Initiative Steering Committee (GISC) and may aid in the development of programming designed to address second-year/sophomore student issues.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION: You will not receive payment for taking part in this study, but participants who complete the survey will be eligible to participate in a drawing for one of five CSUSM sweatshirts from the CSUSM Bookstore (a $50 value). All participants who submit their responses by completing the final page of the survey will be eligible for this incentive. You do not need to answer every question in order to complete the survey.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND SIGNATURES: If you have questions about the study, please call me at 760-750-7327 or e-mail me at apetersen@csusm.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029. If you experience a strong emotional response to any questions in this survey, you are encouraged to contact CSUSM Student Health and Counseling Services (https://www.csusm.edu/shcs/index.html or 760-750-4915).

Q24 PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT: By clicking "Continue," you are giving consent to participate in the study. You must be at least 18 years old to give your consent.

☐ I certify that I am 18 years of older. (1)

Q1 Please indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution.

	Very dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	Satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)	Not applicable (6)
Students (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Academic advisors (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Faculty (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.) (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other administrative staff and offices (registrar, financial aid, etc.) (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q4 Please rate your satisfaction with your college in each area:

	Very dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)	Satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)	Not applicable (6)
Amount of contact with faculty (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Your overall academic experience (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overall quality of instruction (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overall CSUSM experience (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ability to enroll in the courses you wanted this semester (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ability to get the schedule you wanted this semester (i.e. days and times) (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q6 If you could make your college choice over, would you still choose to enroll at CSUSM?

- ○ Definitely not (1)
- ○ Probably not (2)
- ○ Not sure yet (3)
- ○ Probably yes (4)
- ○ Definitely yes (5)

Page Break

Q11 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I will graduate from college. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I will finish my degree at CSUSM. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I intend to pursue a graduate degree after completing my degree. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Q12 In what academic year do you plan to complete your degree?

- ○ 2017-18 (this academic year) (1)
- ○ 2018-19 (next academic year) (2)
- ○ 2019-20 (two years from now) (3)
- ○ 2020-21 (three years from now) (4)
- ○ 2021-22 (four years from now) (5)
- ○ 2022-2023 or beyond (five or more years from now) (6)
- ○ Don't Know / Not Sure (7)

Q2 Since entering this college, how often have you:

	Daily (1)	2 or 3 times per week (2)	Once a week (3)	1 or 2 times per month (4)	1 or 2 times per semester (5)	Never (6)
Communicated regularly with your instructors (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Interacted with faculty during office hours (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Interacted with faculty outside of class or office hours (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Asked an instructor for advice after class (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Received advice or guidance from faculty about your educational program (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q23 During a typical 7-day week this semester, how many hours have you spent working for pay?

- 0 hours (1)
- 1-5 hours (2)
- 6-10 hours (3)
- 11-15 hours (4)
- 16-20 hours (5)
- 21-25 hours (6)
- 26-30 hours (7)
- More than 30 hours (8)

Page Break

Q5 Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age. We want the most accurate estimate of how you see yourself:

	Highest 10% (1)	Above Average (2)	Average (3)	Below Average (4)	Lowest 10% (5)
Academic ability (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Drive to achieve (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Mathematical ability (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Self-confidence (intellectual) (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Leadership ability (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Public speaking ability (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Self-confidence (social) (7)	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q3 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I often discuss with my friends what I am learning in class. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel as though I am learning things in my classes that are worthwhile to me as a person. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I can usually find ways of applying what I'm learning in class to something else in my life. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I find myself thinking about what I'm learning in class even when I'm not in class. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel energized by the ideas that I am learning in most of my classes. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel a sense of belonging to this campus. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
It's hard to pay attention in many of my classes. (7)	○	○	○	○	○

In the last week, I've been bored in class a lot of the time. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
I often find my mind wandering during class. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
I regularly participate in class discussions in most of my classes. (10)	○	○	○	○	○
I ask my instructors questions during class if I do not understand. (11)	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q9 Have you declared a major?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

Display This Question:
If Have you declared a major? = Yes
Q8 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I often wish I hadn't gotten into this major. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I wish I was happier with my choice of an academic major. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I am strongly considering changing to another major. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I am happy with the major I've chosen. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel good about the major I've selected. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to talk to someone about changing my major. (6)	○	○	○	○	○

Q19 The following set of questions asks you to compare this year with your first year at CSUSM:

Q13 Do you feel more or less confident in your academic abilities than you did in your first year?

- Much less confident (1)
- Less confident (2)
- No difference (3)
- More confident (4)
- Much more confident (5)

Q14 Do you feel more or less interested in your courses than you did in your first year?

- Much less interested (1)
- Less interested (2)
- No difference (3)
- More interested (4)
- Much more interested (5)

Q15 Do you feel that your courses are more or less difficult than they were in your first year?

- Much less difficult (1)
- Less difficult (2)
- No difference (3)
- More difficult (4)
- Much more difficult (5)

Q16 Do you feel that you have more or less access to faculty than you did in your first year?

- Much less access (1)
- Less access (2)
- No difference (3)
- More access (4)
- Much more access (5)

Q17 Do you feel that you have more or less access to campus support than you did in your first year?

- ○ Much less access (1)
- ○ Less access (2)
- ○ No difference (3)
- ○ More access (4)
- ○ Much more access (5)

Q18 Do you feel more or less connected to the CSUSM campus community than you did in your first year?

- ○ Much less connected (1)
- ○ Less connected (2)
- ○ No difference (3)
- ○ More connected (4)
- ○ Much more connected (5)

Page Break

Q20 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Since coming to this university I have developed close personal relationships with other students. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The student friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
If asked, I would recommend this university to others. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas. (5)	○	○	○	○	○

It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had a personal problem. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Most students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own. (8)	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q10 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I have observed discriminatory words, behaviors, or gestures directed at minority students at this institution. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel there is a general atmosphere of prejudice among students. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I have heard negative words about people of my own race or ethnicity while attending classes. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel that instructors treat all students the same regardless of race. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
At least one faculty member has taken an interest in my development. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Faculty believe in my potential to succeed academically. (6)	○	○	○	○	○

At least one staff member has taken an interest in my development. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Staff recognize my achievements. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
I see myself as a part of the campus community. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
Faculty empower me to learn here. (10)	○	○	○	○	○
Staff encourage me to get involved in campus activities. (11)	○	○	○	○	○

Q21 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
My interactions with faculty outside of class have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
My interactions with faculty outside of class have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
My interactions with faculty outside of class have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel I am a member of this university. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Since coming to this university I have developed a close, personal relationship with at least one faculty member. (5)	○	○	○	○	○

I am satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are interested in students. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are outstanding or superior teachers. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
Most of the faculty I have had contact with are interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas. (10)	○	○	○	○	○

Most faculty members I have had contact with are genuinely interested in teaching. (11)	○	○	○	○	○

APPENDIX B:
Second-Year Student Survey Invitation

Subject: Second-Year Students: Tell Us About Your Year!

Dear student,

The Office of Undergraduate Studies at CSU San Marcos is conducting a survey to learn more about our second-year students and how we can help you reach your academic goals. The survey will ask questions about your experiences so far in your second year at CSUSM. Your answers will help us understand the challenges you are facing as a second-year student and the ways you are overcoming them to achieve success.

To thank you for your participation, your name has been entered into a drawing to receive one of five CSUSM sweatshirts (a $50 value). Please note that this prize will only be available to students who complete our survey; if you are a winner of the drawing but have not completed the survey by Friday, November 3, you will not be eligible to receive the prize.

The survey should only take 10-15 minutes and will be very helpful to our efforts to develop programming for sophomores. Participation is voluntary and your individual responses will remain strictly confidential.

Follow this link to the Survey: [link]

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [url]

The results of this survey will be shared with decision-makers across campus and used to enhance the services and programs CSUSM offers. If you have any questions about the survey, please don't hesitate to ask Adam Petersen in the Office of Undergraduate Studies (apetersen@csusm.edu). Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this important survey.

Sincerely,

Dawn M Formo, Ph.D.
Dean of Undergraduate Studies
CSU San Marcos

APPENDIX C:
Interview Invitation

Subject: Invitation to a research study on second-year African American students at CSUSM

Dear student,

We are conducting a series of one-on-one interviews as part of a research project on African American students in their second year at CSU San Marcos and we'd love to have you participate! If you agree to and complete an interview, you'll receive a $20 Amazon Gift Card straight to your CSUSM email.

Interviews are being planned for the weeks of April 30th and May 7th and will last between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews will be conducted by CSUSM undergraduate students and will ask questions about your second year, including your academics, your relationships with faculty and other students, and how you feel about yourself and your goals. More information about the study is attached in the Informed Consent document, which you should review before signing up. Please note that these interviews will be audio recorded.

If you do wish to be interviewed, please click the following link to pick a time and date: [link]

If you have questions about the study, please call me at 760-750-7327 or e-mail me at apetersen@csusm.edu. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Patricia Stall, at 760-750-4386 or pstall@csusm.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

Sincerely,

Adam Petersen
Student Success Analyst
Office of Undergraduate Studies, CSU San Marcos

APPENDIX D:
Interview Script

[*Turn on audio recorder*]

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this project. We are interested in learning more about how students are experiencing their second year in college and I have a series of questions to ask to try and explore that idea. I have a script to follow for the main questions but I may ask a few follow-up questions to have you expand or clarify some of the things that you say. If you are not comfortable answering a question, just let me know and we can skip it, and you have the right to stop the interview at any time.

[*Research Subquestion: How do Black second-years describe their commitments and connections to their goals and to the University?*]

1. First, I'd like to ask a couple questions about your goals in college. Would you say that completing your degree is an important goal for you? Why or why not?

2. Would you say that completing your degree at CSUSM is an important goal for you? Why or why not?

3. Next, I'll ask a few questions about your connection to the University and to your academic pursuits. Do you feel like you are a part of the campus community at CSUSM? Why or why not?

4. How do you think this has affected you this year?

[*Research Subquestion: How do Black second-years describe their engagement with academics?*]

5. When do you feel most engaged in class?

6. Are you satisfied with your choice of major? Why or why not?

[*Research Subquestion: How do Black second-years describe their relationships and interactions with faculty, staff, and other students?*]

7. Next we'll move on to questions about how you've interacted with others this year. Has a University staff member or faculty member taken an interest in your personal development this year? If so, in what ways do you feel this has affected you?

8. How would you describe your interactions with faculty members this year?

9. In what ways have your friends here at CSUSM influenced your experiences this year?

10. How would you describe the CSUSM climate when it comes to race and ethnicity?

[*Research Subquestion: How do Black second-years describe themselves?*]

11. Our last few questions deal with how you view yourself. How would you describe your academic ability in comparison to your peers?

12. How do you feel that your academic ability has affected you this year?

13. How would you describe your self-confidence in social situations in comparison to your peers?

14. How do you feel that your social self-confidence has affected you this year?

APPENDIX E:
Second-Year Student Survey Items with Associated Factors

Factor	Scale	Item
Majorconf	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	I often wish I hadn't gotten into this major.
		I wish I was happier with my choice of an academic major.
		I am strongly considering changing to another major.
		Overall, I am happy with the major I've chosen.
		I feel good about the major I've selected.
		I would like to talk to someone about changing my major.
Validation	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	At least one faculty member has taken an interest in my development.
		Faculty believe in my potential to succeed academically.
		At least one staff member has taken an interest in my development.
		Staff recognize my achievements.
		Faculty empower me to learn here.
		Staff encourage me to get involved in campus activities.
		Since coming to this university I have developed a close, personal relationship with at least one faculty member.
		I am satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members.

Peerfriend	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	Since coming to this university I have developed close personal relationships with other students.
		The student friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying.
		My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values.
		My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
Instinteract	Please indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution: [1-5: Very dissatisfied to Very satisfied]	Students
		Academic advisors
		Faculty
		Student services staff (career services, student activities, housing, etc.)
		Other administrative staff and offices (registrar, financial aid, etc.)
	Please rate your satisfaction with your college in each area: [1-5: Very dissatisfied to Very satisfied]	Amount of contact with faculty
Facoutofclass	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	My interactions with faculty outside of class have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.
		My interactions with faculty outside of class have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
		My interactions with faculty outside of class have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations.

Meanlearning	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	I feel as though I am learning things in my classes that are worthwhile to me as a person.
		I can usually find ways of applying what I'm learning in class to something else in my life.
		I find myself thinking about what I'm learning in class even when I'm not in class.
		I feel energized by the ideas that I am learning in most of my classes.
Selfconfidence	Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age. We want the most accurate estimate of how you see yourself: [1-5: Highest 10% to Lowest 10%]	Self-confidence (intellectual)
		Leadership ability
		Public speaking ability
		Self-confidence (social)
Senseofbelonging	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	I see myself as a part of the campus community.
		If asked, I would recommend this university to others.
		I feel I am a member of this university.
		I feel a sense of belonging to this campus.
	[1-5: Definitely not to Definitely yes]	If you could make your college choice over, would you still choose to enroll at CSUSM?

Classengage	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	It's hard to pay attention in many of my classes.
		In the last week, I've been bored in class a lot of the time.
		I often find my mind wandering during class.
Genraceclimate	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	I have observed discriminatory words, behaviors, or gestures directed at minority students at this institution.
		I feel there is a general atmosphere of prejudice among students.
		I have heard negative words about people of my own race or ethnicity while attending classes.
Faccare	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are interested in students.
		Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are outstanding or superior teachers.
		Few of the faculty members I have had contact with are willing to spend time outside of class to discuss issues of interest and importance to students.
Acadself	Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age. We want the most accurate estimate of how you see yourself: [1-5: Highest 10% to Lowest 10%]	Academic ability
		Drive to achieve
		Mathematical ability

Classpart	Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagre with the following statements: [1-5: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree]	I regularly participate in class discussions in most of my classes.
		I ask my instructors questions during class if I do not understand.
Satisfaction	Please rate your satisfaction with your college in each area: [1-5: Very dissatisfied to Very satisfied]	Your overall academic experience
		Overall quality of instruction
		Overall CSUSM experience

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