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# College, at What Cost? African American/Black Women Undergraduate Students' Perception of Institutional Policy Levers

## Abstract

This study is exploring how institutional policy levers impact retention for African American/Black women undergraduate students at a private four-year predominantly white institution in a mid-western state of the United States. Retention of African American/Black women undergraduate students is not a widely researched area. In this exploratory case study, eight African American/Black undergraduate junior and senior women, ten administrators and one focus group of six African American/Black women were interviewed. Artifacts were collected from the administrators. The data collected was analyzed using the culturally engaging campus environment model. The experiences of the African American/Black undergraduate women were examined in academic advising, administrative policies and procedures, student orientation programs, residential life and student affairs programming. This research is important for better understanding what institutional policy levers at predominantly white institutions (PWI) are and are not helping retain African American/Black women undergraduate students. African American/Black women undergraduate students (a) have complex race and gender issues to deal with on PWIs, (b) they come to PWIs with agency and develop more while there, and (c) they are surviving and retaining on these campuses because of themselves.

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College, at What Cost? African American/Black Women Undergraduate Students'

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University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Tamara D. White

June 2020

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Title: College, at What Cost? African American/Black Women Undergraduate Students' Perception of Institutional Policy Levers

Advisor: Judy Marquez Kiyama

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Recent data has suggested that African Americans<sup>1</sup> (AAs) are obtaining more college degrees than ever before (Henry, Butler, & West, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016a). In 1976, AAs were conferred 6.5% of bachelor's degrees nationally (NCES, 2016a). Forty years later, in 2015, AAs obtained 10.6% of bachelor's degrees awarded (NCES, 2016a). In those 40 years, whites earned 402,835 bachelor's degrees, and AAs earned 134,079 (NCES, 2016b). Even though the AA percentage of degrees increased every year, the actual number obtained in comparison to whites was significantly lower. AAs earned one third of the degrees whites earned during the same time.

The numbers of degrees earned are lower for African American women (AAW) (NCES, 2016b). In fall 1976, 42,624,000 white women enrolled in postsecondary education and 5,631,000 AAW enrolled. In fall 2016, 59,786,000 white women enrolled in postsecondary education compared to 16,292,000 AAW. Enrollment of AAW from 1976 to 2016 went up 3 percentage points (NCES, 2016b). Although not a direct correlation, enrollment of AAW was going up, yet retention and degree attainment were declining (NCES, 2016a).

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that throughout this study, the terms, African American(s) (AAs), African America/Black(s) (AA/Bs) and Black(s) are used interchangeably, as are the terms, African American Women(s) (AAWs), African American/Black women (AABW) and Black women.

Of degrees earned by women, white women earned 65% of the bachelor's degrees awarded in 2015, whereas AAW earned 11.8% (NCES, 2016a). In actual numbers, that means from 1976 to 2015, white women earned 310,401 bachelor's degrees and AAW earned 89,951 (NCES, 2016b). AAW earned less than a third of the degrees white women earned in the same amount of time, demonstrating that AAW did not complete degrees at the same rate as white women. During this time, retention and student learning culture became a popular research area (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyon, 2005). Nevertheless, while white students were being researched to better understand why they were leaving college, AAW were often left out of these studies.

Decades of work has been done researching why some students leave college and drop out (Bean, 1980; Berger et al., 2005; Tinto, 1973, 1975). Researchers have examined what institutions can do with policy and practices to systemically impact retention (Tinto, 1973, 1975; Ziskin, Hossler, & Kim, 2009). Even with these new developments, little focus has been on AA students. Retention and engagement models, such as those of Tinto (1973, 1975) and Kuh, (1990), originally focused on white students. Research on AA retention is limited because not much has been done since some early models created in the 1980s, Smith's (1980) research. From then until the early 2000s, scholarship on AA college students has largely focused on AA men (Cuyjet, 1997; Harper, 2015; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009; Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002). Overall, scholars have not spent as much time researching successful retention initiatives for AABW as has been done on white college students (Gasman, 2007).

Gaining access to higher education has been challenging for AAs (Kaba, 2005). For them, education has represented freedom and advancement (Gatewood, 1990;

Thomas & Jackson, 2007). Although access to education has been limited for Black people (Thomas & Jackson, 2007), some AABW were given access to higher education to uplift the Black community (Bertaux & Anderson, 2001; Breaux, 2010; Butner, 2005; Gatewood, 1990; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Understanding the resiliency of these pioneer AABW helps to lay a foundational understanding of how AABW gained access to higher education and shows the consistency of experience of AABW in higher education through the years.

### **Retention**

Retention, specifically undergraduate retention, is a well-researched topic (Berger et al., 2005). Well-known theories are being applied to new student populations, and fewer new theories are being developed (Berger et al., 2005). This includes the AA student population. More scholars are examining how AA students were or were not included in the original creation of retention theories (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Guiffrida, 2003). There is much criticism of older models and the lack of inclusion of students of color (Guiffrida, 2006; Tierney, 1992, 1999). A review of the literature revealed little research focusing solely on AABW. Higher education has been focusing on why AA men are not persisting (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002); however, differences across genders have rarely been included in the analysis.

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) offer exemplar models for educating and supporting AA students (Davis, 2007). Despite not having as much financial support from the government as do (predominantly white institutions) PWIs, they have established practices that are working for AA students, and they are retaining

AA students at higher rates than most PWIs (Davis, 2007). AABW who attend single-gender HBCUs are more successful than when they attend most PWIs (NCES, 2017). Whereas not much is documented on the success and methods of these single-gendered HBCUs for women (Rowser, 1990), Chapter 2 will outline some of the intentional, thoughtful student-centered techniques these institutions employ that contribute to their success at retaining AABW.

Creating a campus environment that is intentionally inclusive positively impacts student retention. The environment of an institution is impacted by institutional policy (Braxton & McClendon, 2001), which begins with institutional action (Tinto, 2010). Higher education scholars have been doing research and creating theories for retention and persistence for years yet have not been able to develop a comprehensive model of institutional action that would impact student completion (Tinto, 2010). *Retention* is understood from the institution perspective and includes the process the institution is engaging that leads students to remain at the institution and complete (Tinto, 2010). *Persistence* is from the student perspective and includes the process that leads the student to remain and complete, regardless of the institution (Tinto, 2010). Research has focused on the events that are external to the institution that impact student completion (Tinto, 2010).

Tinto's (2010) research focused on the "actions institutions can take on their own to further the retention and graduation of their students" (p. 54). The present study specifically examined how institutional policy lever areas in student affairs impact AABW undergraduate student retention. There are a series of research studies on institutional policy levers and their impact on student retention (Braxton, Bray, & Berger,

2000; Braxton, Milem, & Shaw Sullivan, 2000; Braxton, Vesper, & Hossler, 1995; Bray, Braxton, & Sullivan, 1999). These led to Braxton and McClendon's (2001) compiling the 20 institutional policy practices that positively impact retention.

### **Institutional Policy Levers**

Braxton et al. (1995), Berger and Braxton (1998), and Bray et al. (1999) further examined Tinto's theory on retention and social integration. Braxton, Bray, and Berger (2000) and Braxton, Milem, and Shaw Sullivan (2000) completed very similar studies examining retention as well. These studies laid the foundation for Braxton and McClendon's (2001) work on institutional policy levers. *Institutional policy levers* are institution practices and student behavior that together influence institutional policy (Ziskin et al., 2009). Later, Braxton, McKinney, and Reynolds (2006) surveyed 47 institutions across the state of Indiana and their retention interventions and institutional policy levers. Both of these latter two studies increased understanding and foundational knowledge for the institutional policy levers retention scholarship.

Overall, institutional policy levers were developed out of a comprehensive analysis of retention literature and best practices, coupled with policy development (Ziskin et al., 2009). These policy levers consisted of 20 recommendations for institutional practice in the following eight areas of the college, (a) academic advising, (b) administrative policies and practices, (c) enrollment management, (d) faculty development, (e) faculty reward system, (f) student orientation programs, (g) residential life, and (h) student affairs programming, all of which positively impact retention (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). The premise is that when institutions positively impact

these areas, they will increase student retention (Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Ziskin et al., 2009).

Braxton and McClendon (2001) determined that retention is a campus-wide responsibility. Students' social integration is influenced and impacted by a variety of services and people across campus. These 20 different recommendations across eight different domains of institutional practice all serve as retention influencers (Braxton & McClendon, 2001), demonstrating that effective retention programs are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members (Braxton & Mundy, 2001).

Campuses still have work to do when it comes to focused retention interventions (Hossler, 2006). Students leave college for complex reasons. Institutions need to do more research on retention at their institutions to initiate retention programs for their students based on the information found (Jones & Braxton, 2009; Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). Retention programs created and planned based on research from their institution serve to make good programs (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). One salient model, using indicators to examine campus environment, is the culturally engaging campus environment model (CECE) (Museus, 2014b).

The present research study focused on the institutional policy levers most often centered in student affairs. These include (a) administrative policies and procedures, (b) academic advising, (c) student orientation programs, (d) residential life, and (e) student affairs programming. The goal was to better understand how engagement with students from these five areas has impacted retention. Moreover, with reference to the 20 recommended institutional practices referred to earlier, five of the eight above-mentioned

policy lever areas were highlighted because most student affairs practitioners are working in these five areas, and one of the primary outcomes of this study is to impact student affairs practitioners and their work with AABW students.

### **Culturally Engaging Campus Environments**

A lens that captured the diverse experiences of students was necessary to fully understand retention. The culturally engaging campus environment (CECE) model uses nine indicators and offers an inclusive lens to retention research (Museus, 2014b). These indicators engage racially diverse students with their community in a manner that encourages their success in college (Museus, 2014b). The nine indicators include (a) cultural familiarity, (b) culturally relevant knowledge, (c) cultural community service, (d) opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement, (e) collectivist cultural orientations, (f) culturally validating environments, (g) humanized educational environments, (h) proactive philosophies, and (i) availability of holistic support (Museus, 2014b). Below is a brief description of the indicators.

1. *Cultural familiarity*: Students feel more comfortable on campus when they see faculty, staff, and peers who look like them and share a common background (Museus, 2014b).
2. *Culturally relevant knowledge*: Students benefit when institutions give them an opportunity to increase their culturally relevant knowledge and learn about their respective cultures (Museus, 2014b).
3. *Cultural community service*: Institutions providing students an opportunity to engage in community activism, community service, and service learning increases the likelihood of success for these students (Museus, 2014b).



4. *Meaningful cross-cultural engagement*: Students are more likely to be successful when institutions give students opportunities to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds (Museus, 2014b).
5. *Collectivist cultural orientation*: Institutions valuing a more group-centered orientation over an individualistic orientation contribute to an environment where students are more likely to be successful (Museus, 2014b).
6. *Culturally validating environment*: Students who are encircled by staff and faculty who validate the culture they bring and the identities they hold are more likely to have a positive experience and therefore succeed in college (Museus, 2014b).
7. *Humanizing students' experiences*: Institutions creating an environment where faculty and staff care about students, are committed to them, and develop meaningful relationships with them will increase student success (Museus, 2014b).
8. *Proactive philosophy*: Faculty and staff going above and beyond and out of their way to provide information to students of color increases these students' retention (Museus, 2014a).
9. *Creation and sustenance of the availability of holistic support*: The more access students of color have to staff and faculty with whom they are confident will provide them with the information, support, and resources they need, the more these students will be successful (Museus, 2014a).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Institutional policy levers provide the theoretical framework for this study (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). The data gathered were analyzed using the CECE model (Museus, 2014a, 2014b). Both institutional policy levers and CECE retention models have been proven to increase retention of college students. Institutional policy levers have been researched on PWIs and white students (Braxton et al., 1995; Braxton & Brier, 2007; Bray et al., 1999; Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000; Braxton, Milem, & Shaw Sullivan, 2000). When, as the research for this study, I sent an inquiry to Braxton to find additional resources on how the institutional policy levers have been applied to AABW, Braxton indicated not knowing of any studies that had been done (personal communication, August 10, 2018). Therefore, to create a diverse lens to examine these retention initiatives, I used the CECE model in conjunction with the institutional policy levers.

## **Significance of the Study**

Research on institutional policy levers benefits all colleges. The wider implication of this study is around retention. The information and research on retention for AABW is limited, and this study adds to the information and practice. Understanding which policy levers impact AABW helps institutions know which policy levers to put the most resources into to then impact AABW retention. Layering that on top of the CECE retention model adds to understanding the impact the policy levers have on AABW. This study also has implications for policies and practices on campuses. The whole institution as well as each individual area of the college and the departments associated with the policy levers are impacted by the results of this study.

As evidenced, there exists a lack of literature on retention of AABW undergraduate students. Likewise, we know little about institutional policy levers that influence AABW retention (Tinto, 2005, 2010; Museus, 2014b). This study adds to the scholarship on AABW college students' experience, and AABW retention at college by exploring AABW's experience with institutional policy levers at a PWI.

For years, AABW's voice has not been centralized in retention research. This study has allowed AABW's voice to be center and to tell the story. More specifically, this study highlights the voices of AABW and their experience at a PWI. It explores how various institutional policies, programs, and procedures directly and indirectly impact AABW's experience and retention at a PWI. Further, based on the voices of AABW, this study gives student affairs practitioners information on how to more effectively work to retain AABW at PWIs. Ultimately, student affairs practitioners want to create an environment for students to thrive and be successful (Baker, 2013), and results from this study give information on how to do that for AABW at PWIs.

### **Personal Commitment to the Retention of African American/Black Women**

When I interviewed for this doctoral program, I was asked what I wanted to research. I remember being very clear that my research must in some way impact AABW's experience at predominantly white campuses. At the time, I wanted to examine race identity development and its influence on academic performance. As I engaged in coursework and began to look at the literature, it became apparent to me that more needed to be understood about both AABW's experiences at PWIs and how such experiences impact their retention, as well as what institutions are doing to influence

AABW retention. When I came across the Tinto (2010) article on institutional action, it captured the significance I wanted my study to have for the field.

Retention of AABW at colleges is important research to me because of my personal experience as an African American/Black woman who went to a PWI as well my experience working with AABW college students at a variety of institutions. When I started at Central Community College<sup>1F2</sup> (CCC), I was charged with working with South Campus, one of our satellite campuses. Everyone in the office of student activities was asked to take one of our satellite campuses and serve as a liaison. When folks in administration at CCC spoke of South Campus, they spoke with fondness but with a tone of condescension. The students had organized themselves into a student organization, and I was to serve as their advisor. When I got to my first regularly scheduled meeting, there were only women of color in the room. There were also some kids sitting around the room. The space looked like it was several years past needing repair. The furniture was outdated and very well used. I did not know what to think. As I introduced myself, the look of astonished excitement on the faces of these women was breathtaking. It was as if their eyes were saying, “You are a Black woman administrator and you came to help us.” They were anxious to get to know me and were very welcoming of me to the group. They were so gracious.

The meeting started, and it was chaos. Where were Robert’s Rules of order for running a meeting?! There was no formalized set of rules or procedures guiding the running of the meeting. The women all talked at once, and they all wanted to be heard. They were discussing the potential of the CCC South campus being closed. An

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<sup>2</sup> Central Community College (CCC) system is a pseudonym.

announcement had just been sent out that all satellite campuses for CCC were going to be closed; that included South Campus. These students did not understand why CCC would do this and what it would mean for them. They loved coming to South Campus. At South Campus, they had teachers who understood their stories and worked with them at their level. At South Campus, they had teachers who allowed them to make progress at their own pace. They were scared of coming to the downtown campus, scared of taking regular-paced classes, and scared of leaving the teachers they had come to love. They were sad to leave their community.

Ultimately, it did not matter how hard these women fought for their South Campus and how many people they gathered to come to a community meeting with college leadership. The satellite campus was closed, and these women were forced to go to college at the downtown campus and join the mainstream of students. Their organization was dissolved, and I stopped being their advisor. I would see them when they were on campus, but not as often as before. Of the four students with whom I was closest, two finished at CCC, and only one of these went on to get her bachelor's degree. I was struck with questions of why: Why did these Black women not make it? Why were we, as administrators at CCC, not able to retain these smart, gracious, kind, giving, caring women to completion of their degrees? A better question is why did the women who graduated persist? What had we done to assist in their completion? How can that be replicated?

As a student at a PWI, it was often hard to be the only AABW in classes and in spaces. I remember realizing that I was a Black woman for the first time at college. It was the first time in my life that I was completely and always surrounded only by white

people. Occasionally I would have other AAs around, such as at Black Student Association (BSA) meetings or when BSA members would have a get together; but for the most part, I was surrounded by white people. Although I went to an all-white high school, I would come home at night to an all-black home life. My family associated with Black friends, and my extended family was mostly Black. At college, I went to school in an all-white classroom, I came home to an all-white residence hall, I ate in an all-white cafeteria, and I studied in an all-white library. I was rarely in a space on campus where there were other Black faces.

It was not until graduate school that I was able to understand and name that experience as an undergraduate. I took a class called “Multicultural Counseling”; and in that class, we learned about how to counsel diverse students. I studied a black race identity model called “nigrescence” (Cross, 1971). It changed my life. I began to wonder how my undergraduate experience would have been different if the administrators I had interacted with would have known I was going through the various stages of this model. How could they have supported me and encouraged me?

Thus, as I engaged in this present research, I was reminded of my experience at this institution as one of the few AABW. I was also reminded of my desire to help AABW navigate the college environment better. Over the years, my research interest has become more focused, but the ultimate goal of helping college administrators understand how to better support AABW at PWIs has not changed.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative explanatory case study was to explore how institutional policy levers influence retention of undergraduate AABW students at a PWI.

This study examined the relationship of institutional policy levers and AABW undergraduate students. More specifically, this study explains the influence five key institution policy levers (academic advising, administrative policies and procedures, student orientation programs, residential life, and student affairs programming) have on AABW undergraduate students' retention at a PWI. Accordingly, the study explored the following main research question and two sub-research questions:

- How do institutional policy levers influence retention of undergraduate AABW at a PWI?
- How do AABW undergraduate students at PWIs experience institutional policy levers?
- How do AABWs' perceptions of institutional policy levers influence their persistence?

Braxton and McClendon's (2001) research on retention and institutional policy levers provided the theoretical framework for this explanatory case study. Museus's (2014a, 2014b) CECE model was used as the analytical framework because it provided the lens with which to examine how students from diverse backgrounds engage with institutions to be successful.

The literature review that follows in Chapter 2 will begin with a history of how AABW gained access to higher education, specifically PWIs, followed by an evolution of the study of retention in higher education. Next I provide a description of the CECE model of retention, which was used in the study to analyze the data. Following, I discuss the theory related to institutional policy levers, including a review of components of the institutional policy levers theoretical framework and how they impact retention. Finally, I

review AABW's racialized experience of college at a PWI, concluding with a brief review of the lack of literature, scholarship, and programs and practices on retention. In Chapter 3, I review the case study methodology used, and the data analysis. Chapter 4 will present overview profiles of each of the AABW undergraduate student participants. In Chapter 5, I outline findings from the data analysis. In conclusion, in Chapter 6, I provide a discussion of implications, recommendations, and future research.



## Chapter Two: Literature Review

A 2017 report by the U.S. Department of Education noted that AABW were conferred 6.2% of bachelor's degrees in 2015-16, whereas white women were conferred 33.6% of bachelor's degrees that same year (NCES, 2017). Six years before in 2011, white women made up 33.2% of the enrollment for bachelor's degrees and AABW made up 9.2% of the enrollment (NCES, 2017). Although it is unclear if this data tracked the same women over the 6 years between 2011 and 2017, what the data do suggest is that AABW experience a decrease in the percentage of bachelor's degree enrollment and bachelor's degrees conferred over time. Understanding the factors that contribute to this decrease is an important aspect for the literature review that follows.

Decades of work has been done on researching retention (Berger et al., 2005), yet little has been done on a model that would give institutions of higher education guidelines on how to create policies and procedures to best impact student success and retention (Tinto, 2005). Tinto (2005), stated,

The absence of such model is not the result of lack of research but rather of the failure of institutional action. In this regard a significant gap remains between what researchers know about the nature of student retention and what practitioners need to know to enhance student retention. (p. ix)

This gap between research and institutional policies and procedures is even more pronounced when it comes to AABW. Although retention remains one of the most researched areas of higher education, the retention literature on AABW is limited.

The following literature review begins with a history of how AABW gained access to higher education, specifically at PWIs, an evolution of the study of retention in higher education. In this literature review, I outline the components of the institutional policy levers theoretical framework and how they impact retention, and AABW's racialized experience of college at a PWI and how that impacts retention. I conclude Chapter 2 with a discussion of the lack of literature, scholarship, and programs/practice on the retention of AABW at PWIs.

### **History of African American/Black Women Gaining Access to Higher Education**

AAs have historically had to fight for access to education (Kaba, 2005). For many, education represented freedom and advancement (Gatewood, 1990; Thomas & Jackson, 2007). Traditionally, white people have limited Black people's access to education for that very reason: freedom and advancement (Thomas & Jackson, 2007). white people have felt if they could limit education, they could limit Black people's freedom and maintain control, and they could limit Black people's advancement (Thomas & Jackson, 2007). Access to higher education has been difficult for Black people (Gatewood, 1990). Throughout the literature, it is mentioned how Black girls have always been educated over Black boys (Gatewood, 1990; Lawson, & Morrill, 1983; Perkins, 1982). Black women were seen as only slightly less threatening than Black men and were thus given a little more access to education (Perkins, 1982). This education was conditional though, as is demonstrated later in this literature review. Black women could access some aspects of higher education and were still limited regarding retention and completion (NCES, 2017).

Since the earliest times in education, AAs could access some education, and many AABW were given access to higher education to uplift the Black community (Gatewood, 1990; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). This tradition of giving education opportunities to AABW over AA men continues today (Howard-Hamilton, 2003), with AABW attaining most of the degrees earned by AAs; however, retention rates for both AABW and AA men are low (Anonymous, 2007). Graduation rates, within 150% of normal time<sup>3</sup> at 4-year postsecondary institutions in 2010 (based on Colorado degree-granting 4-year institutions), for AABW is 42% and AA men is 30%, as compared to white women at 60% and white men at 55% (NCES, 2016b). Limited scholarship exists that has examined how to increase the retention rates of AABW at PWIs. Understanding the scarcity in scholarship is helpful when contextualized through a historical lens.

In the 1890s, the total population of Blacks in the United States was 3,126,497, of which 999,324 (32%) were attending elementary school, secondary school, and college (Wilson, Jensen, & Elliot, 1966). Blacks had a hard time finding quality education, especially in the South (Ihle, 1986; Perkins, 1997). Over the years, the government has impacted AAs' access to higher education, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. In an attempt to broaden educational opportunity, the Morrill Act of 1890 mandated that states either admit Black students to their current institutions or create an institution for them (Fleming, 1983). This led to more separation in the South. Institutions were created specifically for Blacks, without the same resources or support as PWIs (Bettez & Suggs,

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<sup>3</sup> In reference to graduation rates, normal time refers to the amount of time necessary for a student to complete all requirements for a degree or certificate according to the institution's catalog. This is typically 4 years (8 semesters or trimesters, or 12 quarters, excluding summer terms) for a bachelor's degree in a standard term-based institution; 2 years (4 semesters or trimesters, or 6 quarters, excluding summer terms) for an associate's degree in a standard term-based institution; and the various scheduled times for certificate programs (NCES, 2020).

2012). The *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision (1896) reinforced what was already happening in the South, mandating “separate but equal” as legal. Following the end of slavery, with Jim Crow laws, there continued to be discrimination against AAs, AA men in particular. This discrimination made it harder for AA men to obtain jobs, while at the same time encouraged AABW to pursue higher education, with the expectation of getting professional jobs to support the family (Bertaux & Anderson, 2001; Ihle, 1986; Lawson & Merrill, 1983). This was done under the guise of uplifting the race (Butner, 2005).

Early supporters of education for the Black community, particularly after the Civil War, believed that the African American/Black race could be uplifted through education (Bertaux & Anderson, 2001; Breaux, 2010; Butner, 2005; Thomas & Jackson, 2007). During the mid to late 1800s, the Methodist Episcopal Church played a major role in the South in creating institutions for Blacks to attend college (Butner, 2005; Ihle, 1986). The African Methodist Episcopal, Colored Methodist Episcopal, and the Baptist denominations were especially active in establishing schools in the South (Butner, 2005). The Methodist Church worked with the Freedman’s Aid Society to provide educational opportunities for Blacks. Still no PWI graduated more than half-a-dozen AABW before 1910 (Breaux, 2010), further illustrating how AABW had access to education, but with conditions.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, AAs still had limited opportunities to attend college. Options were especially limited for AABW. Whereas most of their opportunities were in the South (Perkins, 1997), many of these schools were considered high school level (Wilson et al., 1966). Explaining further, Perkins (1997) pointed out that whites did not

support the education of AA people “on an equal basis with whites” (p. 722). Although AABW were gaining access to higher education, especially in the South, as indicated above, the schools lacked the same high quality of the higher education institutions that white people were accessing (Gatewood, 1990). In the North, AABW were admitted into a very limited number of white private institutions and some white universities (Perkins, 1997). Also, whereas a very small number of AABW were given opportunities to attend higher education, an even smaller more elite group were given an opportunity to attend PWIs (Perkins, 1997). Most AABW who were fortunate enough to attend higher education typically attended HBCUs.

Preceding the end of the Civil War, Black people in the United States had little access to higher education (Lawson & Merrill, 1983). In the early years of Black education, much of the education curriculum focused on technical skills and manual labor (Butner, 2005; Lawson & Merrill, 1983). The white abolitionists establishing the schools believed that Blacks would be best served if educated in fields they could most easily access (Butner, 2005). Accordingly, many of the institutions that were established in the South focused on technical fields and did not give Blacks an opportunity to learn liberal arts or other professional fields (Butner, 2005). Oberlin College was known for providing Blacks the opportunity to go to college as early as 1835 (Waite, 1996).

From the years 1835 to 1865, 2 to 5% of the student college population was Black (Lawson & Merrill, 1983; Waite, 1996). Little is known about enrollment and retention of Black students during these early years. Colleges did not keep records of AABW attendance, therefore few records of AABW are available, making statistics and data about enrollment and retention difficult to find (Perkins, 1998). The historical literature

indicates that AABW attended colleges, but similar to today, many did not complete their education (Breux, 2010). There are, however, some records on AABW graduating from the white institutions in the North around this time in history.

In 1909, Nannie Burroughs, along with the National Baptist Convention's Women's Auxiliary, founded the National Training School for Women and Girls for AABW and girls (Barnett, 1978). This was the first school in the country to offer vocational education to AABW. The training school focused on the advancement of the race (Albritton, 2012). Additionally, the school demanded that Black women work as hard as Black men for survival, just as the American society was asking of them (Barnett, 1978). Burroughs was a leader in Black women's education and strove for wage equality. She understood that Black women were often the main wage earners in their households and worked to get them more education and wages (Barnett, 1978).

### **History of African American/Black Women's Participation at Predominantly White Institutions**

An examination of AABW's participation at PWIs helps to further lay a foundational understanding of how AABW gained access to higher education and what their college experience was like in the early days of having access to college. This information explores the resiliency of AABW and shows the consistency of experience of AABW in higher education through the years. These AABW were some of the first AABW to access higher education at these institutions and the first to graduate from PWIs (Perkins, 1997, 1998).

Although AABW entered higher education before the end of slavery, few were admitted into the elite northern white Seven Sisters colleges: Barnard, Bryn Mawr,

Mount Holyoke, Radcliffe, Smith, Vassar, and Wellesley (Gatewood, 1990; Perkins, 1997, 1998). These Seven Sisters colleges were originally established to serve as an alternative for upper middle-class white women who were not allowed to matriculate at the leading elite white male institutions. The Seven Sisters colleges were private elite institutions located in the northeastern part of the United States, founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the founding of the Seven Sisters colleges until the Civil Rights era in the 1960s, approximately 500 AABW graduated from these institutions (Perkins, 1997). It was not until the 1960s that the sister colleges began actively recruiting AABW to their institutions (Hill & Zambrana, 2009; Perkins, 1997).

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of the Black women who attended an institution of higher learning in the North attended one of the Seven Sisters colleges (Perkins, 1997, 1998). AABW in the North experienced education differently. Most of these women belonged to families that were educated upper and middle class (Gatewood, 1990; Perkins, 1997). Their families expected education to refine these women and provide culture so they could get into or stay in the highest stratum of AA society (Gatewood, 1990; Perkins, 1997). The roster of women who graduated from the Seven Sisters colleges in the mid-1960s anecdotally reads like an elite Black America “who’s who” list (Perkins, 1997).

The Seven Sisters colleges provided one of the first entry points for AABW into higher education at PWIs (Perkins, 1997). Although they were resistant to admitting Black women, many of these colleges began such admissions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gordon, 1990). In the 1890s, Radcliffe College was the one Seven Sisters institution that admitted AABW. AABW were admitted and fully participated in campus life and

extracurricular activities, but AABW were not permitted to live on campus (Gordon, 1990; Perkins, 1997). By the 1920s, Radcliffe progressed to graduating one AABW every year, and by the end of the 1920s, four AABW, thereby establishing itself as the leader amongst the Seven Sisters schools in graduating AABW.

Maintaining that lead in graduating AABW, Radcliffe graduated 56 AABW undergraduates by the 1950s (Perkins, 1997, 1998). Bryn Mawr did not graduate an AABW until 1927. Only nine AABW graduated from Bryn Mawr by 1960, which meant that in 32 years, Bryn Mawr graduated nine AABW. Bryn Mawr and Vassar were the slowest institutions to admit AABW (Perkins, 1997).

Whereas Vassar mistakenly admitted an AA woman into their institution in the early 1900s, they did not intentionally admit any AABW until the 1940s. They felt that the AABW's presence would take away from the prestigious image they were trying to portray as an institution (Perkins, 1997). The statistics for how many AABW graduated from Vassar are low, with only seven Black women graduating in the 1940s and 23 by 1960 (Perkins, 1997, 1998). In 60 years, 23 Black women graduated from Vassar, as compared to the 267 predominantly white graduates of the college during the year 1960. This number includes the AABW who graduated that year. It also demonstrates the disparity in access and retention for AABW. To reiterate, in one year, Vassar graduated 267 predominantly white students; in 60 years, they graduated 23 AABW (Perkins, 1997). To date, there are no studies exploring this phenomenon. Today the imperative for additional information on these AABW's experience would help increase retention rates for this population of students (Gasman, Abiola, & Freeman, 2014).



Mount Holyoke College, in 1945, voted not to admit AABW into their institution. As a result, prior to the 1960s, few AABW graduated from Mount Holyoke. Only 39 graduated by 1964 (Perkins, 1997, 1998). By 1960, Wellesley graduated 45 AABW. Smith graduated 69 African and AABW by 1964 (Perkins, 1998). This section has demonstrated how a small elite number of AABW gained access to and persisted at these PWIs.

Regardless of the experience these AABW had at Seven Sisters colleges, once graduated, most of them still encouraged other AABW to attend (Perkins, 1997). Although AABW had access to PWIs, retention and success are difficult to measure, with the limited records on AABW (Gordon, 1990). As discussed earlier, these institutions did not keep records on Black women, making it difficult to research and better understand how the AABW who persisted were able to do so. Whereas there is little literature and records on the early experiences of AABW in higher education, there is much on retention of students in higher education.

### **Evolution of the Research on Retention**

There are now thousands of articles on retention. Undergraduate retention is one of the most studied areas of higher education (Berger et al., 2005). Although fewer new theories are being developed, the theories are being applied to new student populations and different types of students (Berger et al., 2005). Berger et al. (2005) wrote an overview of the history of the retention of college students (see Table 2-1). Understanding this history helps to see why retention became important to study in the 1970s and why it was understudied prior to that time.

Based on Berger et al.'s (2005) historical review, during the Retention Prehistory period (1600s to mid-1800s), so few students attended college that there was no need to focus on retention. Throughout the Evolving Towards Retention period (mid-1800s to 1900), “[c]ollege life was created by students as a way to test authority” (Berger et al., 2005, p. 11). More students began attending college, and it became necessary to look at student life and the balance between academic and social programs. In both times (prehistorical and evolving), institutions were focused on surviving (Berger et al., 2005).

In the Early Developments period (1900 to 1950), colleges began to grow rapidly and started developing admissions criteria. At this time, the value of a college degree began to increase as well. This marked the beginning stages of drop-out awareness (Berger et al., 2005). The Dealing With Expansion period (1950s) saw an increase in student attendance in institutions of higher education. Institutions began to think about retention of students and how they could predict student behavior (Berger et al., 2005). These efforts led to the Preventing Dropouts period (1960s), with campuses now monitoring student drop-out data, students’ preparation prior to college, and students’ campus life. At the end of the 1950s, institutions began conducting studies to better understand the student drop-out issue (Ahmann, 1955).

The Building Theory period (1970s) saw a significant amount of research and theory development. Spady’s work in 1971 led to Tinto’s work on student departure (Berger et al., 2005). Tinto’s (1973, 1975) work on social and academic integration led to the development of institutional policy levers as retention influencers. (This is discussed in detail later in this literature review).

Table 2-1

*The History of Retention in Higher Education*

Period number	Period name
1.	Retention Prehistory (1600s-to mid-1800s)
2.	Evolving Toward Retention (mid-1800s to 1900)
3.	Early Developments (1900 to 1950)
4.	Dealing With Expansion (1950s)
5.	Preventing Dropouts (1960s)
6.	Building Theory (1970s)
7.	Managing Enrollments (1980s)
8.	Broadening Horizons (1990s)
9.	Current and Future Trends (early 21 <sup>st</sup> century)

*Note.* Adapted from “Past to Present: A Historical Look at Retention” by J. Berger, G. Ramirez, & S. Lyon, 2005, in A. Seidman (Ed.), *College Student Retention: Formula for Student Success* (pp. 1-29), American Council on Educational /Praeger.

Institutions’ attempt to manage enrollment in the 1980s (the Managing Enrollment period) caused a rapid expansion in retention theories. Tinto’s theory was heavily studied and critiqued, and benefited from additional research (Museus, 2014b; Tierney, 1992). The Broadening Horizons period of the 1990s allowed for more research and increased knowledge and strategies around retention. Braxton’s research further narrowed the model, indicating that social integration had more impact on student retention (Berger et al., 2005). Prior to the upcoming review of the literature on institutional policy levers—institutional practices that positively impact retention—I address, in the following section, literature and scholarship around women of color and AABW student retention.

## **Retention and Women of Color**

As the researcher of this study, my efforts to obtain scholarship that focused on AABW proved challenging (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Winkle-Wagner, 2009b). Scholarship has focused on AA men and the examination of why they are not persisting (Allen, 1992; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). To gather additional literature on retention of AABW, I searched the internet for AABW retention and immediately ran into challenges related to not finding literature that focused explicitly on AABW. Even when a search in EBSCO specifically asked for “retention & African American/Black women,” the majority of resources pulled up were discussing AA men. AA men are an important topic that needs focused research and has received such attention over the last decade (Harper & Harris, 2012; Harris & Struve, 2011). Yet, the retention rate has only increased one percentage point in 10 years for AABW (NCES, 2017). There has not been a “national epidemic” and crisis call for our AABW students like there was for AA men.

There are two studies to note that specifically address an AA student retention model, although one is very outdated. Rowser (1990) explained institutions should not be focusing on haphazardly putting programs together for AA students and instead need to intentionally and thoughtfully have a student-centered approach planned for students from recruitment to graduation. Flowers (2004) proposed a practitioner model for AA student retention. The model was based on research on 60 AA students at a PWI and their perceptions of factors that influence their retention. The model focuses on precollege attributes and provision of student support based on an assessment of AA student needs (Flowers, 2004). The model also addresses having AA student staff to assist in program

planning to make sure programming meets the needs of the students (Flowers, 2004). This was the most in-depth information found around retention models for AA students.

The literature that spoke specifically about women of color (WOC) and persistence was very limited (Ong, Wright, Espinosa, & Orfield, 2011). The range of articles available that spoke specifically to AABW, Latinas, and WOC is even less. After an extensive literature search, it was clear that the focus was on research that specifically explored either AA students (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Strayhorn, 2015) or WOC students (Espinosa, 2011; Johnson, 2006; Landry, 2002). Dissertations represented more recent literature, and empirical scholarly articles tended to be dated. Below is a small selection of relevant literature that offers insight on factors that influence retention of WOC.

One such study on retention factors targeted WOC at PWIs. A review of 40 years of scholarship on WOC in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and their educational experiences, together with an examination of major influences on retention, persistence, and educational achievement, emphasized the importance of recognizing and legitimating WOC for their experiences, which could potentially increase their educational attainment (Ong et al., 2011). WOC retention is impacted by engagement in co-curricular experiences, academic peer relationships, and undergraduate research opportunities, all of which have a positive impact on their retention, particularly in STEM (Ong et al., 2011). Other research showed there are also experiences that do not encourage persistence, such as inability of the professor to make science accessible, lack of academic integration of the student's major, and isolation of WOC (Espinosa, 2011).

The following literature speaks to AABW's experience at an institution created for them and their needs.

### **Female, Single-Gender HBCUs' Role in Educating and Retaining AABW**

It is known that HBCUs established practices and methods for working successfully with AA students, despite the lack of support from white society and the government (Davis, 2007). (These intentional practices are discussed later.) This was especially true for AABW at single-gender black colleges and universities. Still, very little is documented about these methods and their success. The following explores the success that two single-gendered HBCUs are having with AABW because of the intentional, thoughtful student-centered approach (Rowser, 1990).

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, four colleges were established to explicitly serve AABW: Spelman College, Bennett College, Tillotson College, and Barber-Scotia College (Ihle, 1986). During that time, AABW had limited opportunities for college in the North. Bennett and Spelman are the only female, single-gender HBCUs in the United States today. Currently, Bennett enrolls just under 600 women, whereas Spelman enrolls a little over 2,100 women (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013).

Spelman was established in 1881 in the basement of the Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia (Bell-Scott, 1984; Guy-Sheftall, 1982). In 1873, Bennett was founded as a co-educational school, also in a church, St. Matthew's Methodist Episcopal Church, in Greensboro, North Carolina (Bell-Scott, 1984; Guy-Sheftall, 1982). Bennett became an all-women's college in 1926 as a result of the Women's Home Missionary Society's interest in educational programs for Black women (Guy-Sheftall, 1982).

Spelman has always been a women's college (Guy-Sheftall, 1982). Bennett is currently experiencing challenges regarding funding and accreditation.

Guy-Sheftall (1982) explained that as these single-gendered HBCUs were being developed, three questions emerged:

- (a) Should the higher education of Black women be separate or coeducational?
- (b) Should the educational curriculum for Black women be different from or similar to the curriculum in institutions which are predominantly male and/or white?
- (c) Do Black women have special, psycho-social needs that must be considered by educational planners? (pp. 8-9)

These questions are still relevant today. For the purposes of this study, I was especially interested in the above question regarding Black women having special psychosocial needs and how institutions are intentionally responding to this question via programs and services on their campuses to influence retention of AABW.

Spelman and Bennett considered all three of these questions and responded with intention that is still working (Guy-Sheftall, 1982). In 2009, 96% of Spelman's student body was AABW; Bennett's was 82% (NCES, 2016a). Spelman's overall graduation rate was 76%, with an AABW 6-year graduation rate of 77%. Bennett had an overall graduation rate of 43% and an AABW 6-year graduation rate of 44% (NCES, 2016a). As compared to national data for AABW, Spelman and Bennett produce more than half of the Black women with doctorate degrees in all science fields in the United States (Nealy, 2009), therefore playing a significant role in the production of degrees for Black women. Gasman and Tudico (2008) reported that Bennett and Spelman alone prepare "more than half of the [B]lack women who eventually pursue doctorates in sciences" (p. 3).

A study of these two institutions has shown how success for AABW can be traced to their environment. Both Spelman and Bennett work hard to intentionally create an

atmosphere of sisterhood on their campus. Collins and Lewis (2008) described this process:

[T]he socialization process and integration is explained conceptually through the value of sisterhood. The value of sisterhood and community is prevalent on both the campuses, but each institution has different activities which facilitate the socialization process of sisterhood. The term sisterhood is used as a metaphor for family and community on both campuses. Students are not biologically sisters, but they are sisters in terms of a common experience, a common goal, and the faculty and administrators represent surrogate parents who want them to succeed. On both campuses there are rituals of incorporation and rituals of entering and exiting, which are designed to welcome newcomers into the campus community, and also used as a method of transition from one role in the community to another. (p. 50)

This socialization process is intentional and student centered (Rowser, 1990). It is thoughtfully created and structured with the success of AABW in mind.

The intentional creation of supportive, nurturing, communal villages of learners seems to be working. It is very clear that these two institutions (Bennett and Spelman) care for their students, and the students feel cared for (Guy-Sheftall, 1982; Hamilton, 2009). The college as an entity is seen as a family (Gasman, Lundy-Wagner, Ransom, & Bowman, 2010; Guy-Sheftall, 1982). Early in the AABW's experience at these institutions, they are socialized on the college's values, "moral development, spirituality, behavior, appearance, and intellectual development" (Collins & Lewis, 2008, p. 55), not only through the sisterhood socialization, but also through faculty and staff interactions and their high expectations. Faculty are able to communicate these expectations through small class size, allowing for dialogue and relationship development with students and faculty (Bell-Scott, 1984). Another benefit of female, single-gender HBCUs is the ability to develop a "female-centered" curriculum and co-curricular activities for the students (Bell-Scott, 1984; Guy-Sheftall, 1982). AABW are able to see themselves in the material



they are learning. This can reaffirm the positive messages they are hearing throughout the campus.

AABW students appreciate how Spelman faculty have a “do everything they can” attitude towards them to promote degree attainment (Rawlston-Wilson, Saavedra, & Chauhan, 2014). Participants in a study about Spelman’s STEM program said there were several ways Spelman faculty encouraged academic success amongst its AABW students. For example, faculty members assume that all Spelman students can achieve their education goals, intentionally work to make sure students share these beliefs, and ensure that curricula encourages rather than discourages academic attainment for AABW.

It is especially impactful for institutions to understand that this also requires instructional changes. Faculty are also intentionally available to students as a means to encourage success (Rawlston-Wilson et al., 2014). At Spelman, AABW in the STEM program are positively impacted by the institution’s intentional initiatives of small class size, faculty encouraging and promoting student success, accessibility of academic resources, and availability of undergraduate research opportunities (Perna et al., 2009). If Bennett is closed, it will have a significant impact on AABW college attendance and completion. AABW at PWIs have a contrastingly negative experience to the campus environment. Bennett and Spelman have intentionally created a campus environment that positively influences the college environment of AABW. This is not easy to do, as is demonstrated in the next section.

### **Institutional Action**

Higher education scholars have been doing research and creating theories for retention and persistence for years yet have not been able to develop a comprehensive

model of institutional action that would impact student completion (Tinto, 2010).

*Retention* is considered from the institution perspective, or the process the institution is engaging that leads students to remain at the institution and complete (Berger et al., 2005; Tinto, 2010). *Persistence* is from the student perspective, or the process that leads the student to remain and complete, regardless of the institution (Berger et al., 2005; Tinto, 2010).

This research focused on “actions institutions can take on their own to further the retention and graduation of their students” (Tinto, 2010, p. 54). Research should be focusing on actions of the institution rather than what the student is or is not doing to stay at college (Tinto, 2010). Current retention research assumes that higher education professionals and researchers understand why students are leaving college and therefore impact students to stay (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Masika & Jones, 2016). That assumption is incorrect: Students leave for different reasons than for why they stay (Tinto, 2010).

Tinto (2006) identified three areas of further research for retention: institutional action, program implementation, and the continuing challenge of promoting the success of low-income students. It is known that involvement (engagement) matters; it matters most during the first year (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2001). How can it be made meaningful? Institution action means knowing why students leave, but more importantly, what can the institution do to make students stay and connect (Tinto 2006). Most retention actions that institutions take are add-ons: They are not part of the original development of a process, procedure, or project (Tinto, 2006). Often too few resources are provided to retention programs and they fail; this includes financial resources, but also staff and faculty (Tinto, 2006).

As a lead into the research on institutional policy levers, Tinto's (2010) work on institutional action outlines four institution conditions that support student retention: (a) expectations, (b) support, (c) feedback, and (d) involvement. Constituting the first of Tinto's four conditions related to retention, students are influenced by the *expectations* articulated by the institution action. According to Tinto, "What students expect of the environment in which they enter and of themselves as a result of their experiences within that environment determines in part what students do" (p. 56). Expectations are expressed in three ways for success: at the course level, program level, and institution level. These messages come from faculty, staff, and students. This was further demonstrated in the literature about single-gender HBCUs. They clearly articulate their mission and expectations.

The second condition related to retention, *support* for the student, encompasses the academic, social, and financial spheres as well attention to self-efficacy assessment (Tinto, 2010). Regarding Tinto's (2010) third and fourth conditions, students need *feedback* in a variety of areas to learn, including support with *involvement*. This was also demonstrated by Bennett and Spelman. The AABW expressed feeling this level of support. Tinto's four institutional actions led to more research and further development on institutional policy levers (Braxton et al., 2013). Institutional policy levers include many aspects of the campus, including faculty policies.

An institution action model would need several layers to connect students to programs and provide support for faculty and staff (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Institutions would need to identify the action that needs to be taken, begin the program, and sustain the program (Tinto, 2006). Broad institution support is needed to make that

happen. When Tinto wrote the article, “Research and Practice of Student Retention: What Next?” in 2006, he articulated the next level of research for institutional action and retention was understanding implementation effectiveness tools and practices. That research was already being done by Braxton and McClendon (2001).

### **Criticism of Tinto’s Model**

Tinto’s work has been highly critiqued. Museus (2014a, 2014b) expanded on Tinto’s academic and social integration model to create the culturally engaging campus environment (CECE) model, which is inclusive of diverse students. Prior to explaining the CECE model, Museus (2014b) categorized the critique of Tinto’s research on retention into four categories: (a) cultural foundation critique, (b) self-determination critique, (c) integration viability critique, and (d) psychological dimension critique. Museus (2014b) compiled existing literature and critiques on Tinto’s academic and social integration theory on retention and summarized the foundation of each critique, documenting the researchers who originally expressed a concern about Tinto’s theory in each capacity. These are outlined below.

The cultural foundation critique was identified by Tierney’s (1992, 1999) work, which challenged Tinto’s theory and the lack of students’ of color voice and lens. Tinto recommended students assimilate into a predominantly white environment and leave their cultural heritage behind in order to integrate into the institution (Tierney, 1999). Tierney (1999) argued that Tinto’s theory illustrates a ritual identifying itself as a rite of passage. The criticism is with rite of passage. In many cultures, the rite of passage is a sacred time in which people are shepherded through something and seen through to the end. However, with Tinto’s ritual, students of color are often left behind (Tierney, 1999).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) criticized that Tinto's model needed to be reformulated because it did not address racial and ethnic dimensions of social integration. Dowd, Pak, and Bensimon (2013) shared that Tinto's model of social and academic integration implied deficiencies for students who are unable to separate academics and the other parts of their life. Further research on Tinto's work with this racial/ethnic lens has been done and has examined how students of color negotiate their relationship with their cultural background and their campus (Museus, 2014b).

The self-determination critique challenged Tinto's theory for overemphasizing the students' role in determining their success. This criticism on the theory points out that the institution is not adequately named as responsible for student success and retention (Museus, 2014b). Bensimon (2007) found that students need institutional agents to support them through their college success. In this research, students of color expressed that having a faculty or practitioner who related to them and supported them was extremely useful and helped them through their college process. The study illustrated not only how students of color experience campus differently than white students but also how Tinto's theory and self-determination regarding succeeding on one's own does not align with students' of color experiences of college (Bensimon, 2007).

The integration validity critique tested the concept that academic integration predicts student success (Museus, 2014b). Researchers have developed tools to measure social integration. These tools more accurately measure white students than students of colors in terms of their experiences at college (Museus, 2014b). More than developing a measurement, Tinto's (1973, 1975) theory did not address the different needs of students of color regarding social integration. Different from what Tinto found, Hurtado and

Carter's (1997) research showed that students of color have a need for various student organizations and clubs as a way to connect to their culture. The different clubs and organizations students of color prefer had a different impact on their participation in social activities (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

The last critique Museus (2014b) outlined was the psychological dimension critique, which explained how researchers, in the creation of their theories, have not taken into consideration students' psychological connections to the institutions. For students of color, it is important to belong to campus as a way of social integration (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). In Hurtado and Carter's (1997) study around retention, the students of color expressed feeling a sense of belonging to the campus when their curriculum reflected their culture and when they were involved with outside student organizations that were also culturally affiliated. Social integration is more complex for students of color at PWIs (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Museus (2014b) went on to outline a model of retention that is culturally engaging. This model is further explained later in this chapter. However, before I explain Museus's CECE model for retention, I explain, in the following section, institutional policy levers, how they were created, and how they are relevant for this study.

### **Institutional Policy Levers**

Research on college student departure can be summed up in two concepts: social integration and institutional commitment (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). Braxton continued to do research on retention and expanded Tinto's theory on social and academic integration. The first iteration of what became the institutional policy levers (Braxton et al., 2014) consists of 20 recommended institutional practices that Braxton and

McClendon (2001) claimed positively impact retention, if all 20 are addressed. The next section outlines the research that led to the development of the 20 practices, also known as institutional policy levers.

### **History of Institutional Policy Levers**

In 1986, Lilly Endowment and the Indiana College Placement Center conducted a statewide study with 4,923 Indiana high school freshmen selected through sampling cluster (Braxton et al., 1995). These students were surveyed in their 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. During 12<sup>th</sup> grade, they were asked if they intended to attend college or a vocational school. If they indicated yes, during the year 1990 they were sent a survey. If on this survey they indicated they were enrolled in a 4-year college or university, they were considered in the 263-student cohort of this study of first-time, full-time freshmen. These freshmen were enrolled in different 4-year institutions in fall of 1990. In regard to the sample, ethnicity was the only underrepresented demographic. This study showed the need for colleges and universities to be very clear with prospective students about characteristics of the college (Braxton et al., 1995). This finding led to an institutional policy lever showing that students integrate with campus better when they are shown an honest depiction of the campus during their recruitment (Braxton & McClendon, 2001).

For Braxton et al.'s (1995) study, students were surveyed three times, once using the Student Information Form, second using the Early Collegiate Experience Survey, and third using the Freshmen Survey. The sample consisted of 51% female and 80% white students and was very similar to the institution demographics; the study had a 46% response rate. Results from this research will help with students managing their

expectations and finally their satisfaction with the institution (Braxton et al., 1995). The development of policies and programs to help reduce student departure is also mentioned.

The next study done was by Berger and Braxton (1998), who used the same data set as Braxton et al. (1995). Berger and Braxton's study demonstrated the need to include organizational attributes when researching retention as a part of social integration. Berger and Braxton also confirmed the importance racial identity plays for students at this type of institution. These scholars suggested additional research be done on this aspect of social integration. The research left findings that needed to be explored around the following institutional policy levers: clear expectations and policies for students, clearly defined expectations of faculty in the classroom and faculty development, and orientation for students (Berger & Braxton, 1998).

Bray et al. (1999) also used the same data to begin to lay the foundation of institutional policy levers. Their study showed that, similar to Tinto's theory, there was a relationship for these students between position reinterpretation and growth and denial. This study did not however support a significance in the relationship regarding acceptance and behavioral disengagement (Bray et al., 1999). The results indicated there may be a negative relationship between active coping and social integration for students: Students who had to engage in active coping strategies had a lower social integration with the institution (Bray et al., 1999). The researchers suggested that additional research be done on Tinto's theory around the stressors of coping strategies and how that can impact student departure. These findings began to present a few of the institutional policy levers: orientation, student affairs workshops, and faculty teaching (Bray et al., 1999).



Braxton, Bray, and Berger (2000) used a sample of 696 first-time, full-time students at a highly selective, private Research I university (i.e., a university designated as engaging in the highest research). These freshmen were asked to take a survey three times during their first year. They were asked to take the Student Information Form during orientation, the Early Collegiate Experiences Survey in fall 1995, and the Freshmen Year Survey during their spring term in 1996 (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000). The focus of this study was to examine the impact of faculty performance in the classroom on student departure and social integration. Faculty organization and preparation, and instructional skill were examined and found to have a positive effect on social integration for students (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000). According to the researchers, “The presence of these direct effects [organization and preparation, and instructional skill] suggests that faculty teaching skills, or at least student perception of those skills, directly affect students’ desire to persist at a given institution” (Braxton, Bray, & Berger 2000, p. 222).

These findings have implications for policy development. A major implication of these findings is that faculty performance has a direct impact on student retention (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000). The researchers went on to say academic advisors need to have more information on faculty to be better able to serve students when registering them for classes (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000). The findings from this study also demonstrate the different needs of first-year students and senior students. The institutional policy levers covered in this research are faculty performance and faculty development (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000).

Braxton, Milem, and Shaw Sullivan (2000) conducted a longitudinal study that consisted of 718 first-time, full-time, first-year students at a private selective, Research I university. First-year students were asked to take three surveys. The Student Information Form was given during orientation, the Early Collegiate Experience Survey was given in the fall and the Freshmen Year Survey was given in the spring (Braxton, Milem, & Shaw Sullivan, 2000). In total, 46.4% of the class was surveyed. The researchers were examining how academic support impacts social integration and student departure. One prominent finding was that the role of active learning, or faculty who care about student learning and work to ensure they are learning, has a positive impact on students staying in school. The researchers of this study concluded, “Such efforts might not only reduce student departure, but also increase student learning” (p. 587).

### **Institutional Practices**

These 20 recommended institutional practices to increase social integration and retention are grouped into eight functional areas of the institution (see Table 2-2) (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). As stated earlier, these eight areas include (a) academic advising, (b) administrative policies and procedures, (c) enrollment management, (d) faculty development, (e) faculty reward system, (f) student orientation programs, (g) residential life, and (h) student affairs programming. Below is a summary of each of these functional areas, along with the key components Braxton and McClendon (2001) found to be important as influencers of retention.

**Academic advising.** Academic advising leads to student learning, which leads to academic integration. As advisors are advising students, they should be knowledgeable of faculty evaluations and how other students have engaged with faculty in regards to the

faculty member's organization and preparation and instructional skills and clarity (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). All of these lead to better student learning.

Table 2-2  
*Institutional Practices That Influence Retention*

Functional Area	Institutional Practice
Academic advising	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Academic advisors should encourage their advisees to consider the teaching practices of faculty members in the selection of courses" (p. 58).</li> <li>2. "Academic advisors should strongly encourage their advisees to make efforts to establish memberships in the social communities of their collegiate institution" (p. 59).</li> </ol>
Administrative policies and procedures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. "Effective methods for the communication of rules and regulations important to students should be developed" (p 59).</li> <li>4. "Rules and regulations governing student life should be enforced in a fair manner" (p. 59).</li> <li>5. "Residential college and universities should require that all first- and second-year students live on-campus" (p. 60). "Commuter colleges and universities should develop social environments for students. Residential colleges and universities should develop social environments for commuter students and students who live off-campus" (p. 60).</li> </ol>
Enrollment management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. "Recruitment activities and publications should accurately portray the characteristics of a college or university to prospective students" (p. 61).</li> <li>7. "Programs and practices should encourage prospective students to visit campus" (p. 61).</li> <li>8. "Some financial aid should be given to all students who demonstrate financial need" (p. 62).</li> </ol>
Faculty development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. "The techniques of cooperative/collaborative learning should be the focus of faculty development workshops and seminars" (p. 62).</li> <li>10. "Active learning should be the focus of faculty development workshops and seminars" (p. 63).</li> </ol>
Faculty reward system	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. "Some weight in the faculty reward structure should be given to faculty members who use teaching practices that foster the retention of students in college" (p. 63).</li> <li>12. "The teaching skills of organization and preparation and instructional skill and clarity should be appraised on student course rating instruments and by colleagues conducting classroom observations" (p. 64).</li> </ol>

	13. “Student course rating forms, colleague assessments, self-reports, and teaching portfolios should include indices of active learning” (p. 64).
Student orientation programs	14. “Orientation programs should develop multiple opportunities for first-year students to socially interact with their peers” (p. 65). 15. “Participating in orientation sessions directly fosters social integration and a positive indirect effect on persistence (Passarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986)” (p. 65).
Residential life	16. “First year students should be assigned to residence halls in a manner that encourages a sense of community in each residence hall” (p. 66). 17. “Residence halls should provide opportunities for residents to interact socially” (p. 66).
Student affairs programming	18. “Student affairs offices should conduct workshops on coping with stress” (p. 66). 19. “Student affairs offices should conduct workshops on educational and career planning” (p. 67). 20. “Student affairs offices should conduct programs that honor the history and cultures of different racial/ethnic groups on campus” (p. 67).

*Note:* The explanation for each of the 20 institutional practices, presented above as direct quotes, is taken from “The Fostering of Social Integration and Retention Through Institutional Practice” by J. Braxton and S. McClendon, 2001, *Journal of College Student Retention*, 3, pp. 58-67.

Faculty should also be encouraging discussion in classes and emphasizing higher-order thinking in classes. This information should be garnered in student course evaluations and then considered during advising sessions (Braxton & McClendon, 2001).

**Administrative policies and procedures.** Keeping students informed about rules and regulations positively impacts their social integration (Berger & Braxton, 1998). It is important for students to see the administration as implementing rules fairly (Berger & Braxton, 1998). Students also need an opportunity to provide feedback on policies, procedures, faculty, and staff. This creates more buy-in into the institution. Clarify institutional values to new students, faculty and staff (Braxton & Mundy, 2001).

**Enrollment management.** Institutions should recruit honestly by making sure to accurately represent their student body to potential students (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Encourage potential students to visit campus and engage in a classroom visit; and an overnight stay helps students to have a realistic understanding of the institution. Financial aid is one of the biggest barriers for students completing college (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Institutions should make every effort to give aid to all who need it, because this helps students complete sooner.

**Faculty development.** Many faculty do not receive training on teaching (Braxton, 2006). The focus of teaching and learning centers should be cooperative collaborative faculty development workshops and seminars (Braxton, 2006). According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), “Faculty development workshops and seminars should focus on teaching active learning; any class activity that involves students, in doing and thinking about the things they are doing, meets the definition of active learning” (p. 2).

**Faculty reward system.** Reappointment, tenure, promotion, and annual salary increments should be based on faculty’s ability to retain students. Faculty evaluations should include students’ evaluation of their faculty on whether they are using “active learning practices, class discussion, high order thinking, instructional skill and clarity and organization and preparation [in their classroom]” (Braxton & McClendon, 2001, p. 63). Retention is everyone’s job at the institution (Braxton & McClendon, 2001).

**Student orientation programs.** Orientation programs should give new students many opportunities to interact with each other (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Orientation should give new students an opportunity to visit campus and experience campus life (Braxton & Mundy, 2001). Orientation should provide a foundation of

engagement and involvement for students, so they are prepared to engage in additional programs offered by student affairs later in their college career (Braxton & Mundy, 2001).

**Residential life.** Policies encouraging first-year students to live on campus and participate in academic and social programs in residence halls foster social integration (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Living on campus gives institutions an opportunity to create cohorts and intentional community and gives students opportunities to socialize, increasing opportunities for social integration. Encouraging students to house with other students, sharing similar attitudes, values, and academic interests, should be the basis for assignments, because it encourages social integration (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Institutions should create opportunities for students to socialize. Living off campus makes it more difficult to create opportunities for social integration. Institutions that are creative about social opportunities for students find more success with social integration (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Residential campuses should require first- and second-year students to live on campus. Residence halls should provide opportunities for students to interact socially (Braxton & McClendon, 2001).

**Student affairs programming.** Coping with stress is a resource that students need, particularly on the topic of denial and positive reinterpretation. Student affairs administrators should provide workshops on education and career planning for students (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Workshops should also include topics on inclusive excellence.

Retention is a campus-wide responsibility. Student's social integration is influenced and impacted by a variety of services and people across campus (Braxton &

McClendon, 2001). These 20 recommendations across eight functional areas serve as retention influencers. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) argued that a multiple policy lever change may impact more change than a large-scale policy change.

### **Research Extending Braxton and McClendon**

To review, Braxton and McClendon (2001) outlined institutional practices that increase social integration and retention for college students. They suggested 20 recommendations for institutional practice in eight areas; academic advising, administrative policies and practices, enrollment management, faculty development, faculty reward system, student orientation programs, residential life, and student affairs programming. They concluded, “Although some departure is best for the individual student and the institution (Tinto, 1993), the voluntary departure of many students can be prevented through institutional practices grounded in empirical research on college student departure” (p. 57). The following studies framed the research that came after the 2001 research by Braxton and McClendon

Around the same time as Braxton and McClendon’s (2001) research, Braxton and Mundy (2001) outlined the same institutional characteristics, basing them on Tinto’s three principles of effective retention: (a) “An enduring commitment to the students served” (p. 94). The entire college is responsible for the retention of students. (b) “Institutional commitment to the education of all students” (Braxton & Mundy, 2001, p. 95). Student learning should not be left to chance. (c) “Effective retention programs focus on the integration of all students into the social and academic community of a college or university” (Braxton & Mundy, 2001, p. 95). These researchers explained that for effective retention to occur, institutions need to ensure that students are supported

socially and educationally and are integrated into the community. The institutional practices outlined by Braxton and McClendon (2001) can all be categorized into one of the three principles set forth by Braxton and Mundy (2001), demonstrating how the principles support social integration and institutional commitment.

Institutional policy levers were developed out of a comprehensive analysis of retention literature and best practices, coupled with policy development (Ziskin et al., 2009). Hossler (2006) continued this area of research by examining previous studies on retention, examining 20 empirical research studies published between 1980 and 2002. His study looked for the research to have control groups, sound research questions, specific research methods, and a large student sample. Of the 20, only six met all these requirements (Hossler, 2006). Hossler's study prompted the next study, described below.

Braxton et al. (2006) asked 47 institutions across the state of Indiana to submit information about their retention interventions. Concern for statewide retention and various nationally funded statewide efforts, including the Lilly Endowment and the Lumina Foundation for Education, caused the state to put together an Indiana project on retention to research higher education retention (Braxton et al., 2006). Sixteen colleges responded with 34 documents. The documents were put into one of four categories: "institutional studies, assessments of programs designed to reduce student departure, assessments of the college environment and experience, and reports of policies and programs developed to reduce student departure" (Braxton et al., 2006, p. 27). The conclusions are framed as applicable to Indiana institutions and potentially provocative for other states and policymakers. Conclusions important for this literature review include the suggestion that all institutions should conduct their own research to understand their



rates of student departure (Braxton et al., 2006). The other conclusion to mention is the lack of theory and best practices used in the 34 documents received from the 16 institutions. That is, the retention plans by these institutions were not theory based (Braxton et al., 2006). In the following section, I explain AABW's experience in higher education, particularly at PWIs, and their connection to these institutional policy levers.

### **African American/Black Women's Racialized Experience at Predominantly White Institutions**

AA students at PWIs have reported that the culture there has negative impact on their success (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Sims, 2008). Over 25 years ago, Allen (1992) wrote about this, concluding, "Little doubt exists over the negative impact of hostile racial and social relationships on Black student achievement. When Black students are made to feel unwelcome, incompetent, ostracized, demeaned, and assaulted, their academic confidence and performance understandably suffer" (p. 41). The opposite experience has been created by the more successful single-gender HBCUs' intentional environment.

At PWIs, AA students often do not have role models who look like them, with most of the faculty and staff being white (Landis, 2005). AA students feel faculty have low expectations of them at PWIs (Landis, 2005). These white faculty and staff do not understand the impact that having an all-white faculty and not many role models who look like them has on AA students (Landis, 2005). Henry et al.'s (2011) study of AABW showed that lack of critical mass also had a negative impact on AABW. In Fries-Britt and Turner's (2002) study of AA students at both HBCUs and PWIs, students at PWIs expressed frustration at their campuses' "special efforts" to fulfill their social needs,

rather than a genuine effort to include them in the campus environment. AA students reported that they felt lonely and disconnected and as if the campus worked against them (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Landis, 2005; Sims, 2008). This lack of connection to campus impacts AA students' retention and completion.

AABW experience racism and sexism and institutional, political, and cultural barriers on college campuses (Grier-Reed, 2010; Thomas, et al., 2009). Experiencing a hostile campus environment can feel isolating and can have a negative impact on AABW's experience and sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Haynes (2019) described AABW's experience of self-segregation and isolation in residences halls as a response to experiencing four things regularly: “[a] blatant racial hostility, [b] racialized microaggression, [c] negative race and gender stereotypes, and [d] white colleagues' attempts to undermine Black women's authority” (p. 528). AABW can often be seen as “superwomen” on campuses (Apugo, 2019). They are expected to be involved, have good grades, and not need anything mentally or emotionally (Winkle-Wagner, 2009b; Winkle-Wagner, Turner Kelly, Luedke, & Blakely Reavis, 2019). They often hide their depression and anxiety from the campus, their friends, and their family to keep up the appearance of holding everything together (Apugo, 2019; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005).

Specific to the STEM field in relation to AABW, Perna et al. (2009) identified four challenges that may limit educational attainment: academic, psychological, social, and financial. AABW reported that they understand why they do not form relationships with other groups; they do not share the same experience with them (Sims, 2008). The support that AA students need and find most helpful is often not readily available to them at PWIs. For instance, students studying engineering benefit from peer support groups,

yet these are not noted as being widely accessible to SOC at PWIs (Sims, 2008). It is this lack of accessibility of resources and lack of faculty and staff support that hinder AA students' persistence (Perna et al., 2009).

Specifically for AABW, institutions have not completed a comprehensive assessment of services they provide (Constantine & Watt, 2002; Gasman & Conrad, 2013), that is, they have not assessed the level of comfort provided institutionally in academic, cultural, and social environments for AABW (Constantine & Watt, 2002). All institutions, including HBCUs and PWIs, have an obligation to understand and provide for the specific and unique needs of AABW (Rosales & Person, 2003). Because of the high number of AABW matriculating at PWIs, it is imperative that these institutions increase the comfort level of the environment for AABW (Constantine & Watt, 2002). PWIs have not considered AABW students' characteristics, self-perceptions, level of comfort on campus, and how they respond to perceptions of others (Rosales & Person, 2003). This information should be the foundation for programs and services created specifically for them (Rosales & Person, 2003). To create change, the effort must be system wide and institution wide (Sims, 2008).

Winkle-Wagner (2009a) completed a study with 30 Black women, conducting eight focus groups over 9 months. The study examined the early influences of transition for first-generation AABW. The findings support the institutional policy lever of enrollment management: Give students with financial need some financial aid. All the first-generation women named money as one of the primary factors in their decision to go to college. Nearly all the first-generation college women in this study worked at least 20 to 40 hours a week to help pay college and living expenses. Results from this same study

showed that AABW struggle with managing relationships with their community from home and developing a new community at school (Winkle-Wagner, 2009a). AABW want to feel like they belong on campus and often feel like they do not, yet they often feel like they no longer belong at home once they have gone to college. Hill Collins (2000) described feeling the “first” and the “only one” at the same time and how they both impact AABW’s world.

The same Winkle-Wagner (2009a, 2009b) study also examined how social integration potentially has a negative impact on AABW. Her study researched 30 AABW participants at a predominantly white Midwestern institution. AABW student participants found college to be hard, isolating, and a culture shock. They wanted to leave but out of obligation to their parents, they pushed through the difficulties and stayed. AABW student participants often felt like they are either isolated or are being put in the spotlight. The women felt like they had to represent their entire race and thus felt as if they were in the spotlight in classes and on campus. And at the same time, they felt invisible, because they were not picked by their classmates for group projects. Winkle-Wagner (2009b) acknowledged the lack of research done on AA students and their college experience. Even less has been done on AABW.

AA students want to be part of subcultures to help socially integrate into college (Museus, 2014b; Tinto, 1973, 1975). For AABW, it is helpful to have other AABW students on campus to create more opportunities for subcultures. Institutions have done this by creating summer bridge programs, pre-freshmen seminars, culture centers, and offices of Diversity Education and Cultural Affairs (Landry, 2002). Institutional policy levers take the focus off the student and put the responsibility on the institution to

change: Students are not asked to assimilate or change to integrate into the community; rather, institutions focus on what they need to do to make large-scale changes to retain students.

AA student groups prove to be helpful for AA students at PWIs (Grier-Reed, 2010). Winkle-Wagner (2009b) discussed sister circles, Grier-Reed (2010) discussed the African American Student Network, and both researchers found the social and psychological support AA students found in these spaces helped with retention and graduation rates (Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2016). Both social and psychological support had a positive effect on AA students.

PWI campuses tend not to be culturally responsive to AA students, due to faculty and staff not being trained on working with diverse students (Gallien & Peterson, 2005). This can also tie into the classroom experience for AA students. Included in this is the lack of pedagogical training for instructors to understand the background of many AA students. This causes a disconnect in the classroom and between the student and the faculty member (Gallien & Peterson, 2005). As addressed above, PWIs often lack a significant representation of AA staff and faculty. If AA students want mentors, they may have to depend on white faculty and staff (Gallien & Peterson, 2005). However, white faculty and staff often feel inadequate to mentor students of color (Gallien & Peterson, 2005), which limits AA students' options for mentors significantly. What AABW college students experience on campus influences retention, particularly in its influence on AABW at PWIs rather than HBCUs.

Howard-Hamilton (2003) wrote an article titled, *Theoretical Frameworks for African American Women*. In this article, she highlighted two theoretical frameworks that

could support AABW amongst the many in student development theories: black feminist thought (BFT) and critical race theory (CRT). These two theories offer some explanation of how intersecting identities of Black women can be better understood. Howard-Hamilton outlined how BFT centers AABW's voice in research. I agree: BFT does allow the researcher to center AABW's voices in the research and scholarship (Hill Collins, 2000). This current study has also centered AABW's voices, however, I did not use the BFT framework as a theoretical framework or to assist with analysis. Regarding CRT, Howard-Hamilton explained that when used in education, this model helps highlight race and racism in research; challenges traditional paradigms around race, gender, and class; and shows how these impact SOC. All of these are important in understanding AABW's experiences at PWIs (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Nevertheless, I did not use CRT as my framework or as a tool for analysis, because my research is about institutional policy levers and their impact on AABW. Accordingly, I used institutional policy levers model (Braxton & McClendon, 2001) as my theoretical framework. Additionally, because I researched how these policy levers impacted the retention of AABW undergraduate students, I used, as an analysis tool, a retention model that focuses on creating an environment for success for diverse student populations: the culturally engaging campus environment model (Museus, 2014b), which is discussed below.

### **Culturally Engaging Campus Environments**

Museus (2014b) developed a retention model that posits that undergraduate students who meet a culturally engaging campus are more likely to be successful. They are more likely to feel like they belong and persist to graduation (Museus, 2014b). Several campuses utilizing this model have seen the positive impact on racially and

ethnically diverse students sense of belonging and college experience (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017). As explained earlier, this model has nine indicators of a culturally engaging campus environment (CECE). These indicators engage racially diverse students, reflect their community and community needs, and assist their success in college (Museus, 2014b). To reiterate, the nine indicators include (a) cultural familiarity, (b) culturally relevant knowledge, (c) cultural community service, (d) opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement, (e) collectivist cultural orientations, (f) culturally validating environments, (g) humanized educational environments, (h) proactive philosophies, and (i) availability of holistic support (Museus, 2014b).

The first indicator of the CECE model is cultural familiarity. This supports the literature about students feeling more comfortable on campus when they see faculty, staff, and peers who look like them and with whom they share a common background. This relates to a higher chance of success (Museus, 2014b). The second indicator explains that when institutions give students an opportunity to increase their culturally relevant knowledge and learn about their respective cultures, the students experience success and are positively impacted (Museus, 2014b).

The third indicator of CECE is cultural community service, which includes the provision of opportunities by institutions for diverse students to engage in community service opportunities in various cultural communities (Museus, 2014b). Giving students an opportunity to engage in community activism, community service, and service learning increases the likelihood of success for these students (Museus, 2014b). The fourth indicator involves providing opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement. When institutions give students opportunities to interact with peers from

different cultural backgrounds, students are more likely to be successful (Museus, 2014b).

Collectivist cultural orientation is the fifth indicator of CECE. This indicator describes that when institutions value a more group-centered orientation over an individualistic orientation, students are more likely to be successful (Museus, 2014b). Indicator six is a culturally validating environment. Students who are encircled by staff and faculty who validate the culture they bring and the identities they hold are more likely to have a positive experience and therefore succeed in college (Museus, 2014b).

Indicator seven is about humanizing students' experiences at the institution by creating an environment where faculty and staff care about them, are committed to them, and develop meaningful relationships with them. All these positive interactions increase student success (Museus, 2014b). Proactive philosophy is the eighth indicator of CECE. This indicator suggests that when faculty and staff go above and beyond and out of their way to provide information to students of color, they increase their retention (Museus, 2014b). The ninth indicator supports the creation and sustenance of the availability of holistic support, which is related to a student's success (Museus, 2014b). This aspect refers to how much access students of color have to staff and faculty who the students are confident will provide them with the information, support, and resources they need (Museus, 2014b).

The CECE model can be used in conjunction with already existing models (Museus, 2014b). The intent of the model is not to replace other models but to enhance and complement them (Museus, 2014b). It provides an equity lens to examine the data for this study. These culturally engaging practices are themes I looked for in the data



collected. The nine indicators provided a coding analysis. As explained earlier, the institutional policy levers, which serve as the theoretical framework for this study, do not have an equity lens nor have they been examined in relation to students of color specifically. Because this study is centered on AABW, it is important to think about how these identities impact and are impacted. The CECE model provides a lens to accomplish this with the institution policy levers. Chapter 3 will detail how the CECE model is used to analyze the data in this study.

### **Lack of Literature, Scholarship, and Programs/Practice on Retention**

As explained earlier, campuses still have work to do when it comes to focused retention interventions (Hossler, 2006). Additionally, the reasons students leave are complex, which means there is little most institutions can do to completely stop drop out (Hossler, 2006). In 2001, Braxton and McClendon identified 20 institutional practices that increase social integration and retention. These 20 practices all fall in one of eight college-wide areas: academic advising, administrative policies and procedures, enrollment management, faculty development, faculty reward system, student orientation programs, residential life, and student affairs programming. These researchers emphasized the point that “although some departure is best for the individual student and the institution (Tinto, 1993), the voluntary departure of many students can be prevented through institutional practices grounded in empirical research on college student departure” (p. 57).

Hossler (2006) examined empirical research studies on student retention that had control groups, sound research questions, specific research methods, and a large student sample. Of the 20, only six met all the requirements. This study prompted the next study

by Braxton et al. (2006), who asked 47 institutions across the state of Indiana to submit information about their retention interventions (Hossler, 2006). The findings from examining both studies revealed that campuses still have work to do when it comes to focused retention interventions.

In the early 2000s, Levine pronounced higher education as a “mature industry” (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). The result of this description was a change in focus from public policy towards higher education (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). Mature industries are looked to for accountability, performance, and productivity. Prior to this description, higher education was seen as being in the “growth industry,” and the focus had been on providing access. The focus moved to completion and how institutions are producing completed students (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). The College Board has been developing institution surveys on institution policy levers. Early results have shown that institutions are not putting resources towards retention initiatives. Furthermore, institutions put retention programs into place without adequate research, staff, or funding (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). These programs rarely work and do not sustain (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010).

Institution retention efforts have not been grounded in accountability and therefore struggle to be effective (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). Suggestions for success include putting adequate research resources to understanding and studying your college’s student persistence. Campuses must fully examine the data prior to making new initiatives (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). Initial academic success and satisfactory academic progress are the most important part of the retention equation. Not only do institutions need to do research but they need to engage the campus in the research and

use their data to make policy decisions to impact retention (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). Jones and Braxton (2009) researched how institutions were engaging in retention practices. They had a sample of 54 institutions, selected from institutions ranked in *Measuring Up 2006 National Report Card on Higher Education*. This study produced recommendations for institutions on retention practices. The two main recommendations are as follows: (a) Institutions should engage in more research at their institutions about student retention, and (b) institutions should initiate more retention programs to impact student retention (Jones & Braxton, 2009). Ultimately, retention efforts should reflect the actions of the institution, not those of the student. Kalsbeek and Hossler (2010) clarified this as follows:

A strategic approach to retention shifts the focus from students who fail courses to courses that fail students, so new approaches to pedagogical reform and technologically enhanced classroom instruction hold promise for improving the assessment process, improving student leaving, and improving student retention. (p. 9)

As emphasized throughout this literature review, institutions need to do more research on retention at their institutions and then initiate retention programs for their students based on that information found (Jones & Braxton, 2009). Kalsbeek and Hossler concluded, “[W]e found that student success interventions that worked were not the result of new innovative ideas but rather were the result of implementing well-planned, organized, and funded initiatives” (p. 10).

Whereas my review of the literature revealed no research to date that has specifically targeted students of color in relation to institutional policy levers, the research reviewed in this chapter fills some of the gap by adding information on AABW and how institutional policy levers impact retention. This is important because, based on

empirical research, institutional policy levers have been shown to positively impact retention (Ziskin et al., 2009). In Chapter 3, the methodology, data collection and data analysis are discussed.

### Chapter Three. Methodology

This explanatory case study explored how institutional actions influence retention of African American/Black women (AABW) undergraduate students at a predominantly white institution (PWI). AABW undergraduate students' retention continues to decrease as their enrollment continues to increase (NCES, 2016a). As has been established, retention is one of the most researched areas in higher education (Berger et al., 2005), yet the literature, research, and interventions on AABW undergraduate students is limited. This study highlights AABW undergraduate students' voices and experiences at a PWI and adds to the knowledge of the ways in which retention practices are impacting their retention.

The research question guiding this study was, How do institutional policy levers influence retention of undergraduate AABW at a PWI? The two sub-research questions were, How do AABW undergraduate students at PWIs experience institutional policy levers? and How do AABW undergraduate students' perception of institutional policy levers influence their persistence? It is important in addressing these questions to remember two key concepts for this study: retention and persistence. Retention relates to the institution perspective or the process the institution is engaging that leads students to remain at the institution and complete (Tinto, 2010). Persistence relates to the student perspective, or the process that leads the student to remain and complete, regardless of the institution (Tinto, 2010).

In this methodology chapter, I outline my research paradigm, drawing on a social constructionist paradigm, I explain the methodology and methods that were used to conduct this explanatory case study, describe the data collection process, and explain the analysis of the data using the CECE model framework.

### **Research Paradigm**

I approached this research from a social constructionist paradigm. The social constructionist paradigm centers on jointly constructing meaning of the world (Creswell, 2007). Social constructionism is derived from constructivism (Shaw, 1996), which puts the participants as active creators of knowledge (Shaw, 1996; Hruby, 2001; Papert, 1993). Thus, knowledge is built by the learners, not by the instructors (Shaw, 1996). *Social constructionism* is the creation of knowledge by a group through social activities and social relations (Shaw, 1996). These practices then become the shared outcomes for the group (Shaw, 1996). The social constructionism paradigm is appropriate for this study because the AABW undergraduate students create knowledge through their individual interviews and together in the focus group. The AABW created community and knowledge about their community and needs (Shaw, 1996). This information informed themes and potential strategies for better working or supporting AABW undergraduate students at PWIs in the future.

I sought to understand how PWIs can better retain AABW undergraduate students from the point of view of AABW undergraduate students. I approached this research from the assumption that if institutions enact the eight policy levers highlighted by Braxton and McClendon (2001), they will positively impact retention for AABW undergraduate students (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Within this research and in

alignment with a social constructionist paradigm, I asked AABW undergraduate students and those leading the policy lever areas at Capital University<sup>3F4</sup> (CapU) to make meaning of their experience with each other and create knowledge and understanding around retention. It is this socially constructed knowledge that I used to develop conclusions and answer my research questions. Basically, this case study examined their experiences with each other and made meaning of their interactions (Creswell, 2007).

### **Case Study Research**

More specifically, in this explanatory case study, I explored how CapU's institutional policy levers are impacting AABW undergraduate students' retention. *Case study methodology* is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in its context when the boundaries of the context are clear and there are multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). In this study, the phenomenon is AABW undergraduate students' retention and how institutional policy levers at CapU are impacting retention. The boundary is the institution and the factors are the policy levers.

The researcher who uses this methodology "can see human beings up close, get a sense of what drives them, and develop claims of how their personal as well as collective lives have been created" (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 11). Case study research enables observation of research participants in their own environment doing real-life activities (Feagin et al., 1991). In the present research, use of the case study allowed me to exam participants in their everyday life and better understand how beliefs and decisions impacted their persistence and retention (Feagin et al., 1991).

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<sup>4</sup> Captain University (CapU) is a pseudonym.

Case study research calls for the examination of patterns over time and allowed me to see how decisions impacted the participants over the time they attended CapU (Feagin et al., 1991; Yin, 2014). This case study research gave me an opportunity to find theoretical generalization in the participants' experience over their time at this PWI (Feagin et al., 1991; Yin, 2014). *Theoretical generalization* occurs when new conclusions are made about a population based on this new information (Feagin et al., 1991). Once appropriate data are collected and analyzed, conclusions can be made based on the information collected (Yin, 2014). I employed the following methods of collecting evidence: individual and group-focused interviews and gathered artifacts. This next section outlines the methods used to conduct this case study research.

### **Methods**

The case study research utilized individual interviews, a focus group interview, and artifacts to collect data. Interviews are a predominant way to gather data in qualitative research (Flick, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). An *interview* is a conversation with structure and purpose (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews had specially structured questions, and I listened with the purpose of gathering information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Focus groups can be used when the researcher is interested in examining how people interact around an issue (Flick, 2007). Moreover, focus groups allow researchers to create a snapshot of current states of opinions around an issue (Flick, 2007). Focus groups can also be used as a step after individual interviews to confirm gathered information and assessments. More specifically, researchers can use the focus group to go over findings from individual interviews and confirm correct information was gathered and receive feedback on the results (Flick, 2007).



Focus groups have become increasingly more popular as a data gathering method (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A focus group typically has six to 10 participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The goal of the focus group is to bring about a variety of viewpoints on a topic. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), “Focus group interviews are well suited for exploratory studies in a new domain, since the lively collective interaction may bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views than in individual, often more cognitive, interviews” (p. 150).

An additional component of data collection for this case study was artifacts, or gathered documents and archival records. The advantages to using artifacts, both documents and archival records, as a source of data are that the information is consistent, can be reviewed at any time, and remains the same (Yin, 2014). The information is precise and static. It can provide correct spelling of names and other specific details that are, in essence, frozen in time. Artifacts can provide information over a large span of time (Yin, 2014). The challenges with artifact data are gaining access, bias selection if the researcher does not gain access to all artifacts, and potential for limited access to the artifacts (Yin, 2014).

A benefit that is specific to archival records is the potential for a quantitative component. A disadvantage specific to archival records is gaining access due to privacy concerns (Yin, 2014). I was limited to the data I could access on the website and what was provided by the institution leaders/staff. The next section describes the institution, the individual AABW undergraduate student participants, and the policy lever area participants. The section following outlines the theoretical framework used for this

research study, institutional policy levers, and explains the CECE model used to analyze the data through an equity lens.

## **The Institution and Participants**

### **CapU Profile**

CapU is a small, private college in the mid-western part of the United States and represents the unit of the case study. Located near the Rocky Mountains, CapU embodies the history of the area and is a private institution built on the value of research and collaboration. CapU has nationally recognized academic programs and appears to have a deep commitment to promoting inclusion and a forward-looking vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> century education. CapU grants bachelors, masters, and doctorate degrees. The student population is predominantly white, with a growing AA population.

This case study focused on undergraduate students. Undergraduate enrollment headcount for fall 2017 at CapU was 5,753 (see Table 3-1). AABW undergraduate students made up 1.4% of that headcount. This was down .4% from 4 years previous, fall

Table 3-1  
*CapU Undergraduate Enrollment*

	Fall 2013		Fall 2017	
	Headcount	% of total headcount	Headcount	% of total headcount
Total undergraduate headcount	5,504		5,753	
African American/ Black women	101	1.8%	78	1.4%
White women	2,018	36.7%	2,079	36.1%

*Note: Source: CapU Factbook. CapU is the acronym for the actual college upon which this research is based.*

2013, when AABW undergraduate students made up 1.8% of headcount. In fall 2013, CapU admitted 101 AABW undergraduate students, and in fall 2017, 78 AABW undergraduate students were admitted.

CapU awarded 1,225 bachelor’s degrees in 2013-14. Four years later, in 2017-18, CapU experienced an increase in degrees awarded, awarding 1,332 bachelor’s degrees. CapU awarded 17 AABW bachelor’s degrees in 2013-14 and 19 in 2017-18 (see Table 3-2).

Table 3-2  
*CapU Undergraduate Degrees Awarded*

	2013-14		2017-18	
	Degrees awarded	% of degrees awarded	Degrees awarded	% of degrees awarded
Total bachelor’s degrees awarded	1,225		1,332	
African American/ Black women awarded bachelor’s degrees	17	1.4%	19	1.4%
White women awarded bachelor’s degrees	494	40.3%	463	34.7%

*Note: Source: CapU Factbook. CapU is the acronym for the actual college upon which this research is based.*

Comparing enrollment numbers to degrees awarded shows a decrease in retention of AABW. In fall 2013, CapU enrolled 101 AABW and 2,018 white women (see Table 3-1). In fall 2017, CapU enrolled 78 AABW and 2,079 white women, illustrating an

increase in enrollment in white women and a decrease for AABW. In academic year 2013-14, CapU awarded 17 AABW degrees and 494 white women (see Table 3-2). In academic year 2017-18, CapU awarded 19 AABW degrees compared to 463 for white women. The number of degrees awarded increased, whereas the percentage of degrees awarded to AABW remained the same at 1.4%, and the percentage of AABW enrolled increased in those same 4 years. In fall 2013, 101 AABW undergraduate students were enrolled at CapU, and 4 years later, 17 AABW graduated with a bachelor's degree. CapU is not retaining the same percentage of AABW as it is enrolling. This study explored how institutional policy levers are impacting those AABW undergraduate students' retention.

Table 3-3  
*African American/Black Women Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Major	Minor	Year	GPA	Group-interview participation
Blanket	21	Biology	Psychology, Chemistry, and Leadership	Senior	3.4	Yes
Jane	20	Computer Science	Math, Critical Race, and Ethnic Studies	Junior	2.81	Yes
Karima	21	Business Management, and Finance	Leadership	Senior	3.4	Yes
Tia	21	International Studies and Finance	Leadership	Senior	3.5	Yes
Merci	20	International Studies and Political Science		Junior	3.2	

Whitney	20	Anthropology	Political Science	Junior	3.3	Yes
Mary	21	International Business and Marketing	Leadership Studies	Senior	3.64	Yes
Aisha	20	Psychology	Biology, Sociology, and Leadership Studies	Junior	3.7	

**African American/Black Women Participants**

In fall 2017, CapU enrolled 78 AABW undergraduate students, and in fall 2016, CapU enrolled 70 AABW undergraduate students. Of those, a total of 8 student participants were recruited for this study (see Table 3-3). This participant group consisted of AABW undergraduate students in their third or fourth year of college at CapU. The rationale for choosing this particular group is that by the third year, students are considered to be done with transitioning and to have settled into their college experience. Accordingly, based on this study’s focus on how institutional policy levers did or did not impact student retention, third and fourth year students having had more experience on campus and more opportunities to interact with these areas, would be in a better position to describe if the office has or has not impacted their retention.

**Institutional Policy Lever Areas**

Below I summarize each of the five CapU institutional policy lever areas examined in this study (academic advising, administrative policies and procedures, student orientation programs, residential life, and student affairs programming) (see Table 3-4). Each is described in terms of (a) its professional staff team, (b) the mission or vision of the department, and (c) where it is physically located on campus. Please note

that I did not engage the other three institutional policy levers of enrollment management, faculty development, and faculty reward system.

Administrative policies and procedures. The administrative policies and procedures policy lever area will be addressed in the division of SEIE at CapU. The division leaders include the Vice President for Student Engagement and Inclusive Excellence, Associate Vice President for Student Engagement and Inclusive Excellence, Executive Director of Health Center, Assistant Vice President of Budgets, Executive Director of Academic Services, Executive Director of Career Services, and Director of Residence Life.

Table 3-4  
*Institutional Policy Levers*

<b>Institutional policy lever</b>	<b>Departments</b>
Administrative policies and procedures	Student Engagement and Inclusive Excellence (SEIE)
Academic advising	Academic Advising
Student orientation programs	New Student Orientation (NSO)
Residential life and commuter living	Residence Life
Student affairs programming	Student Activities, and the Culture Center

This is typically known as the Division of Student Affairs at institutions of higher education. The division expresses a commitment to supporting students in developing skills to become citizens who are empowered to make positive impacts in our communities. SEIE expresses a desire to challenge students to recognize their strengths

and cultivate their passions. Neither their mission nor their website addresses retention and persistence as a goal. The website also does not indicate that helping students attain their degree is part of their outcome goals when working with students. These executive offices are located in various offices across campus and are accessible for appointments with students via email, phone calls, and on rare occasions, text messages.

**Academic advising.** Academic advising at CapU is comprised of a director, an assistant director, one senior staff academic advisor, four staff academic advisors, and two academic coaches. The mission of the department outlines creating an inclusive environment to help students transition to college and complete their degree. This department is part of the SEIE Division and is located in the student center in the middle of campus. Students can make appointments to see advisors via email, phone, on-line, or drop-in.

**Student orientation programs.** New Student Orientation (NSO) is housed in the division of SEIE. This department does not have a director; the assistant director reports directly to the associate vice president of SEIE. Interviews clarified that this department had transition with leadership and structure over the last several years. Student peer leaders and faculty instructors also serve as staff. NSO describes the program as the place students learn about support systems, get connected and engaged in their campus culture. The webpage assures students they will meet other students and learn about CapU resources during NSO. They are also promised to learn about CapU traditions and values. This office is located in a temporary location while the student center is being renovated.

**Residential life.** At CapU, the department, Residence Life, has a student development value statement in the division of SEIE. The staff consists of Director of

Residence Life, Associate Director of Residence Life, Manager of Communication, Director of Housing, two assistant directors of housing, 11 graduate assistants/fellows, 5 resident directors, and 6 desk managers. The director reports to the vice president of SEIE. The value statement of Residence Life indicates supporting students' education and leadership experience as its priority. Residence Life has a webpage dedicated to its mission, vision, and values. This webpage discusses Residence Life creating inclusive environments for students at CapU. The central office where the director's office is located is in the basement of a residence hall. The residence halls are located on north and south ends of campus.

**Student affairs programming.** Student affairs programming policy levers will be covered under the department, Student Activities, and Culture Center (the Center) at CapU. The staff in Student Activities consists of two associate directors, one for student activities and one for fraternity and sorority life; three assistant directors, one each for undergraduate student activities, event services, and graduate student activities; a coordinator for fraternity and sorority life; and seven graduate assistants. Student Activities includes co-curricular programming, events and student clubs. Student Activities has identified three pillars as important when working with students: community, dialogue, and growth. They care about relationships; every voice matters, and they want to support students through their entire college journey. This office is also located in a temporary space while the student center is being renovated.

**Culture Center.** Staff from the Culture Center were interviewed as part of student affairs programming policy lever. The staff consists of an executive director; two directors, one each for a STEM program and Native American programs; two assistant



directors, one each for First-Generation programs and Affinity Group programs, graduate assistants, and student employees. The Center has worked to position itself as the place all members of the campus can feel valued and supported. Students can go to this space to thrive, engage, and embrace their social identities. The Culture Center is aligned with the inclusive excellence work that much of the college is engaging in. However, the vision and mission have not been updated on the webpage since 2015. The vision states that the Culture Center is a collaborative space and inclusive environment that is welcoming and supportive and celebrates students, staff, and faculty. The Center values equity and action. One of the stated goals is increasing the presence of “historically underrepresented populations within all ranks of the University, as well as their retention, success, and sense of belonging.” The Center has two locations on campus, one for students of color organizations and one for transition organizations.

This explanatory case study included individual interviews with one AABW pilot study (me), eight AABW undergraduate students, one focus group with six of the same AABW, and 11 professional staff interviews: five participants (including one professional staff pilot study participant) representing leadership roles in each institutional policy lever area, five participants representing staff in program manager/coordinator roles, and one executive leader (see Table 3-5). The next section outlines how data were collected and how participants were recruited.

## **Data Collection**

### **Recruitment**

**African American/Black undergraduate women students.** AABW undergraduate student participants were recruited in a variety of ways. The first way was

via an email from a Cultural Center staff member. She sent an email to all AABW undergraduate students with an invitation to participate in the study, including a link to the prequalifying survey (see Appendix H). I sent a personal email to colleagues I knew at CapU and asked them to send the same recruitment email to AABW undergraduate students with whom they had a relationship (see Appendix K). The recruitment email was sent to the following student organization leadership with a note to please forward to their organization: National Society of Black Engineers and Scientists, National Pan-Hellenic Council, Black Student Association, and Black Women Leadership Program (see Appendix J). An email was also sent to the staff leadership for the following two organizations with a note to please forward the recruitment email: Equity in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (U-STEM) and the Graduate AABW Program.

In my dissertation proposal, I had indicated I was going to reach out to the Black Student Association and the Black Women's Leadership Program and ask to send an email and attend a meeting to recruit participants. Although I was able to send an email, I was not able to attend a meeting because my participant recruitment occurred over the summer and they were not meeting during that time. Moreover, in my proposal, I had indicated I would hang flyers in the student union and library to recruit AABW undergraduate student participants, however I did not hang flyers because my recruitment period was during the summer and it was not likely that a large number of students would be on campus and access the student union or library. I felt the best option for recruitment was via email.

I reviewed the college website for offices affiliated with SEIE that might interact with AABW undergraduate students and sent individual emails asking college professionals to send the recruitment email. I offered an incentive for participating in the individual and focus group interviews. The AABW undergraduate students who participated in the individual interview received a \$25 gift card. Those who participated in the focus group received an additional \$15 gift card.

**Institutional policy lever area participants.** In my proposal, I had indicated that I would begin recruitment for policy lever staff participants first by discussing my research goals with the executive leadership of SEIE. However, through conversations with my committee, we decided to conduct that interview last as a way to confirm themes and better understand the implications that came from the AABW undergraduate student individual interviews, the focus group interview, and the professional staff/leader interviews.

The professional participants were separated into two groups: leaders and staff. In my proposal, I had indicated that I wanted to talk with a leader in each area and a program coordinator in each area. However, I was not able to find a leader or program coordinator in each area. Thus, I reclassified the professionals into leaders and staff. In this study, leaders represented professionals who supervise staff, provide leadership for a program or two, and work closer with the Vice President of SEIE; staff represented the professionals who have more hands-on experience with the students and the programs and report to the leaders.

I recruited leaders first in hopes that they would help identify staff. I identified leaders for the five policy lever areas from the CapU website. I emailed a leader/staff

recruitment letter, inviting them to participate in the research study (see Appendix O). I reached out to six leaders, including the executive leadership and the pilot study participant; one leader said no. I reached out to nine staff. Four did not participate, of which one responded no and the other three did not respond. Originally, the NSO staff member declined to participate. However, once I sent the questions and explained the purpose and goals of the study, she changed her mind and participated. I interviewed a total of 11 administrative participants. Most of the interviews took place on campus at an agreed upon location that was convenient for participants. Two interviews took place via zoom. I changed the names of all staff participants to female pseudonyms because the male professionals would be identifiable.

### **Interviews**

The interviews and focus group for this case study were designed around the five institutional policy levers (administrative policies and procedures, academic advising, student orientation programs, residential life, and student affairs programming). The institutional practices (see Table 2-2) from those five policy lever areas were developed into interview protocols. For the AABW undergraduate student's individual interviews, the questions were centered on the AABWs' experience at the institution and the five institutional policy lever areas. The follow-up focus group interview with AABW was used to confirm and validate themes from the first interviews and better understand their perceptions of the institutional leaders and staff interview themes.

In this section, I outline how interviews were conducted and recorded. Prior to the interviews, all interview participants were given definitions of retention and persistence and the interview questions. The order of the interviews were as follows (see Table 3-5):

pilot study, AABW undergraduate student individual interviews, administrator interviews, and then focus group interview. All participants were informed of the overall purpose of the study prior to being interviewed. Informed consent forms were collected from all individual interview and focus group participants (see Appendix P). Consent forms include information about the interview process, research problem, potential risks, and definitions (Tesch, 1990). Each participant was provided a copy for their records.

Table 3-5  
*Data Collection*

Order	Participants	Number of participants	Length of interview	Location of interview	Interview questions
Individual interviews					
Pilot	Leader	1	2 hours	In-person	
Pilot	AABW (me)	1	1 hour	CapU library	
First	AABW	8	1.5 to 2 hours	CapU library	Appendix A
Second	Institutional leaders	4	.5 to 1 hour	Leader's office	Appendix B
Third	Institutional staff	5	.5 to 1 hour	Staff's office or Zoom	Appendix B
Artifacts/Documents					
Focus Group					
Fourth	AABW	6	2 hours	CapU library and Zoom	Appendix C
Fifth	Executive leadership	1	1 hour	Zoom	Appendix D

**Pilot study.** Pilot interviews establish validity and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009). A pilot study was established for the student interview protocol and the

administrator interview protocol. Because I attended a similar PWI and my experience as an AABW undergraduate student at a PWI inspired my research, my dissertation proposal committee thought having me answer my interview questions would provide insight into the usefulness of the questions and helpful information for the study. I had a colleague and good friend ask me the initial questions. From that interview, I adjusted some language in the questions and added clarification, but the general questions stayed the same. The protocol was edited by my chair (tenured faculty). It was helpful to have answered beforehand the questions I would be asking the AABW participants to answer in the actual research.

I piloted the administrator interview protocol. I recruited someone from CapU who worked in the original Multicultural Center. I felt this person would have good insight and long-term experience as to how the institution intentionally supported AABW undergraduate students. I was able to understand how the staff/coordinator questions would sound and if I believed I would receive the information I sought. I changed the questions after this interview to read specifically, “AABW undergraduate students.” Without that context, the professional staff wanted to include both undergraduate students and graduate students. In subsequent interviews with staff/leaders, they focused on undergraduate students. This clarification helped focus the administrator responses to AABW undergraduate students.

**African American/Black women.** Interested AABW undergraduate students completed a pre-qualifying survey. Once the survey was completed and it was determined the student qualified, an email from Qualtrics (an experience management company) was sent to me. The pre-qualifying survey was set up in Qualtrics to email me

when a survey was completed by someone who met the research study qualifications. I then emailed the students who qualified, asking for a time to meet to interview (see Appendix M). The interviews with the AABW undergraduate students were 45 minutes to 1½ hours long. The interviews were conducted in the CapU campus library. I reserved a study room at the library for all of the individual AABW interviews and the focus group interview.

The individual interviews began with introductory questions focusing on the general experience of the AABW undergraduate students at CapU (see Appendix A). The questions were open ended and focused on how they were experiencing CapU as Black women. The next set of questions were general questions about their experiences with the five policy levers, giving the participants opportunities to explain their overall experiences with each policy lever (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012a). The beginning questions were broad and not based on opinions but rather the participants' experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012a). The next set of questions were specific questions about each policy lever area. These questions were more probing, specific, and direct (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The follow-up questions focused on when participants mentioned CECE indicators (Rubin & Rubin, 2012a) or how they were experiencing the policy lever as AABW undergraduate students.

Rubin and Rubin (2012a) explained a few practices to avoid when conducting interviews. I avoided questions that required a yes or no answer. Closed-ended questions do not allow the participant to talk about their experience or provide a description of their experience. Similar to other literature around interviewing protocol, I avoided asking "why" questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012a), based on the

caution that asking why questions will take the participant out of describing their experience and take them into opinions about their experience, which may limit the opportunity to get additional information about their experience (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012a). Introductory questions about participants' experience at CapU in general provided an opportunity for rich description and spontaneous accounts from the participants without much probing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012a).

In this case study, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. As the interviewer, I took notes during the interview to better formulate follow-up questions and themes. After each interview, I wrote a summary of the interview—an interview memo (Tesch, 1990). This interview memo kept track of how the interviews impacted me personally, because the participants and I shared similar identities. Both of these—the interview notes and interview memos—helped with analysis, once all the interviews were conducted (Tesch, 1990).

**Institutional policy lever areas.** The following functional areas (see Table 3-6) and areas of campus were contacted to represent the five policy lever areas identified by Braxton and McClendon (2001) for this explanatory case study. There were three participant groups in this area, the institutional leaders, staff, and executive leadership. The institutional leaders suggested which staff should be interviewed. Both institutional leaders and staff identified and provided artifacts to be examined.

My initial proposal was to interview two people from each policy lever area to provide multiple perspectives. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview two staff members for each policy lever area. My proposal had targeted 30-minute to 1-hour



interviews with institutional leaders and staff. The actual interviews lasted longer and averaged 1 hour in length. I asked staff for information on systemic and budgetary processes and procedures that are potentially impacting AABW undergraduate student retention (see Appendix B). The Center was the only office that had a program that was specifically created for AABW. None of the other offices were able to provide evidence that they program intentionally for AABW, so there were no budgets to examine. The reason I targeted staff who were actually working directly with the programs was that I

Table 3-6  
*Functional Areas and Institutional Policy Levers*

Institutional policy lever	CapU Departments	Participants	
Administrative policies and procedures	Student Engagement and Inclusive Excellence (SEIE)	Audrey	Executive leadership
Academic advising	Academic Advising	Florence Linda	Leader Staff
Student orientation programs	New Student Orientation (NSO)	Jennifer	Staff
Residential life and commuter living	Residence Life	Aimee Janshi	Leader Staff
Student affairs programming	Student Activities	Aimee	Leader
Student affairs programming	Culture Center (The Center)	Tameka Blossom Bay Amira	Leader Staff Leader Staff

thought they would provide hands-on information on how these areas actually worked with AABW undergraduate students. Although the interviews provided different perspectives, they did not provide the overview (leaders) and hands-on information (staff) I thought they would. One interview per participant was sufficient to gather the information needed to understand how the offices were (and were not) supporting AABW undergraduate students. All of the areas interviewed fall under SEIE. Therefore, as a conclusion and for triangulation, an interview was conducted with executive leadership in SEIE to review themes and implications from student and staff interviews.

During the interviews with these college professionals, I asked for artifacts that showed how their area's retention initiatives for AABW undergraduate students were being institutionalized or how they were supporting AABW undergraduate students. These artifacts served as evidence and data showing how these institutional policy levers are supporting retention of AABW undergraduate students. A few examples of artifacts collected include a list of events from the Culture Center, curriculum from an academic advising program, and a copy of the "racist4F" student email all the student participants referenced.

**Focus group.** I conducted one focus group with six AABW undergraduate student participants from the individual interviews for 1½ hours at the library (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). In my proposal, I had indicated the focus group questions were going to be general questions around the eight policy lever areas. Additionally, I had indicated the focus group would provide an opportunity for the AABW undergraduate students to respond to the effectiveness of the interventions mentioned in the institution policy lever leader/staff interviews. However, due to timing of interviews and the information shared

and not shared at the interviews, these things did not happen. The leader/staff interviews did not provide any interventions that have been specifically created for AABW undergraduate students, therefore they did not have any to respond to during the focus group.

As mentioned, I recruited the same participants from the AABW undergraduate student individual interviews for the focus group interview, of whom six of the eight participated. I sent a doodle poll to see when the most people were available (see Appendix U). There were three times that everyone was available. I picked a Sunday afternoon and sent a meeting invitation, with a Zoom link for two of the participants who were out of the country on study abroad. I sent email reminders and a few sample questions (see Appendix C, V, W and X). For the students who were abroad, I sent the consent form and confidentiality statement ahead of time for signature and asked for them to have it signed prior to the focus group. Both participants did this. I compiled the club and program memberships of each participant and created a membership sheet for each participant (see Appendix G). I printed forms for each participant and asked them to confirm that their membership list was accurate.

Prior to conducting the focus group, I read the transcripts of the AABW undergraduate students' individual interviews and mapped out themes (see Appendix E). From those themes, I provided interview questions and a summary theme sheet. I did not want to use the group interview time to go back over their experiences with the policy lever areas, so I did not ask general questions about the policy lever areas. Instead, I focused on using the group interview time to get feedback on the themes and some outstanding questions I still had. The more important questions were at the beginning of

the group interview and the less important followed (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The participants confirmed that the themes I identified from the individual interviews were correct. They also gave their reactions to the summary of administrator interview responses. The one focus group provided enough evidence to link the AABW undergraduate students' experiences back to themes found in the individual interviews.

As the focus group moderator, I was attentive to group dynamics, such as monitoring if one participant was dominating the conversation. I was ready to utilize my facilitation and group-dynamic skills to keep things moving in a productive manner (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). For example, during the focus group, I noticed one participant talked more than the others. I asked the others to join in the conversation by looking directly at them and asking if they wanted to add anything to the conversation. Sometimes they did and other times they did not; this was a way to provide space for them to contribute. To center myself and not bring my experiences into the group interview and facilitation, I wrote an interview memo afterwards and was able to identify similarities and differences in my experiences and theirs.

The steps I took for this focus group include (a) summarizing the individual interviews (see Appendix E), (b) creating questions based on this summary (see Appendix C), and (c) sending the questions to the individual AABW undergraduate student participants ahead of the focus group interview. Whereas all eight of the AABW individual participants were invited to the interview, only six were able to attend. As mentioned, two were studying abroad, so they participated via Zoom. Analysis and interpretation of the data were done when all the data were received for this case study.

**Artifacts.** In an effort to collect multiple forms of data, I collected artifacts from the leaders/staff in the institutional policy lever areas (Yin, 2014). Examples of potential documents are letters, agendas, announcements, written reports, proposals, progress reports, other internal documents, formal studies and media. During the interviews with the leaders/staff, I asked for documents that showed how their area was supporting AABW undergraduate students' retention. After each of these interviews, when I sent the transcript for validation, I asked for additional documents, which were included in NVivo as part of the data. In total, I received 39 additional documents. The artifacts produced were used to corroborate or refute the information shared from the institutional policy levers representatives (Yin, 2014).

In particular, I indicated that I wanted to collect archival records from each of the departments. I sought to include service records representing organization records, such as organization charts and budgets, survey data, or previously collected data for each department (Yin, 2014). These artifacts were to confirm conclusions made in the interviews. None of the areas I interviewed provided budget data or organization charts. A few mentioned surveys and survey data, however these surveys were not for AABW undergraduate students specifically or about services specifically for AABW undergraduate students. Many of the departments said they were new and did not have historical data.

### **Data Analysis**

In this case study, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim, as noted earlier. During each, I wrote notes about the interview (called interview notes) (Tesch, 1990). After each interview, I wrote a summary of the contents of the interview

and my reaction, including information about where and when and how long the interview took place (Rubin & Rubin, 2012a). Rubin and Rubin (2012b) suggested creating a separate file for notable quotes that might catch my attention during the re-listening of the interviews and while reading the transcripts. I kept a separate notebook with these items, which were included in the analysis. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I went through each transcript, along with my written notes from the interview and my interview memos, to create concepts.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012b), data analysis “entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining materials from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (p. 2). Analyzing data from interviews has specific steps and then produces information used to move the field forward (Rubin & Rubin, 2012b; Tesch, 1990). The data from the individual interviews were transcribed, themes were developed, and the transcripts were coded. Once all the data were coded, the data were de-contextualized and sorted, based on the codes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012b; Tesch, 1990). All the data for one code were compiled in the same place via Nvivo—a process called re-contextualization. This allowed me to analyze the information for each code thoroughly (Tesch, 1990). The data were examined again for commonalities and contrasts. The data were compared in several ways (Tesch, 1990; Yin, 2014). The coding was analyzed for patterns (Rubin & Rubin, 2012b; Tesch, 1990; Yin, 2014).

The first step in analyzing the data was to go through and identify concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 2012a; Tesch, 1990). The concepts represented large ideas that were important to the research question. I used my interview notes and interview memos to

help identify these concepts. I analyzed the data in this order: (a) AABW participant interviews, (b) administrator participant interviews, (c) focus group interview, and (d) artifacts. This included looking for information shared by participants, information about each of the five policy lever areas, and other concepts that emerged. I used the software NVivo to assist with the organization of the data for analysis. Once the themes emerged, all interviews were coded into those identified themes. I looked at each interview, all documents, and the college website to see how the AABW undergraduate student participants and administrative participants defined the concepts that were identified during the analysis phase (Rubin & Rubin, 2012b). This created additional concepts and ideas.

The additional concepts and ideas were incorporated into the original concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 2012b). During the interviews for this case study, the participants were not asked specific questions about CECE indicators, because this study was centered on the institutional policy levers. The CECE model helped make sense of the data in the analysis phase. These CECE indicators therefore became codes. This allowed me to find data that showed examples of each indicator. It also gave me a central location to place all the data around CECE. In these codes, I included data of when CapU demonstrated the opposite of an indicator. Bringing in the CECE model introduced an equity lens and created space for the AABW's voice to be centered (Museus 2014b).

Once coding was done, the codes were put into bigger concepts (Tesch, 1990). Concepts can be identified by asking, "What is this about?" (Tesch, 1990) for each piece of data. These concepts were aligned with the original concepts, which subsequently became (a) administrative policies and procedures, (b) academic advising, (c) student

orientation programs, (d) residential life, (e) student affairs programming, (f) AABW undergraduate students' experience.

Coding involved going through the data and methodically labeling any data that aligned with the concept of the code. Codes were the shortened names of the concepts (Tesch, 1990). Coding and categorizing represented the most common way to analyze data, because the data were gathered from interviews and focus group (Flick, 2007; Yin, 2014). A coding outline was created to show how the codes were related to each other and the hierarchy (Rubin & Rubin, 2012b). Originally there were 82 codes (see Appendix AB).

Once all the data were coded, they were then sorted again based on the codes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012b; Tesch, 1990). As noted above, all the data for one code or concept were in the same place, using NVivo, and I further analyzed that specific information (Tesch, 1990). The AABW undergraduate student interviews were conducted first. These interviews were coded first, using (a) codes that emerged during the interviews, (b) summary development, (c) policy lever areas, and then (d) the CECE indicators. The institutional leaders/staff in the policy lever areas were interviewed second. Those data were coded and analyzed at the same time and in the same way as were the data from the AABW undergraduate student individual interviews. I reviewed the codes that emerged during the interviews, using the themes developed during the summary development, which was preparation for the focus group interview. The themes were around policy lever areas and the CECE indicators.

Patterns, consistencies, and inconsistencies were identified from the AABW undergraduate student interviews, the leader/staff interviews, and the group interview.



The artifacts gathered from the professional staff were coded and analyzed using the codes that emerged and then the CECE indicators. The data were examined again for commonalities and contrasts. Then I examined the data most relevant to the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012b; Tesch, 1990). The one focus group with the AABW undergraduate students constituted the third and final means of data collection. This group interview was transcribed and coded, using the codes developed for the individual interviews and artifacts. Additionally, I used memos and summaries after each interview as a form of member checking (Tesch, 1990). The member checks were also coded and analyzed.

The data were organized by codes for the five institutional policy levers (academic advising, administrative policies and procedures, student orientation programs, residential life, and student affairs programming), the CECE indicators, and the major concepts. This information answered the main research question, How do institutional policy levers influence retention of undergraduate AABW students at a PWI? and then the two sub-research questions, How do AABW undergraduate students at PWIs experience institutional policy levers? (related to student experience), and How do AABW undergraduate students' perception of institutional policy levers influence their persistence? (related to student perception). The results revealed two major concept areas: how the policy lever areas did or did not impact retention of the participants, and AABW undergraduate students' experience at CapU (see Appendix AA).

### **Summary of Themes from Individual Interviews**

After the individual interviews a summary of themes was developed that was confirmed by the student participants in the focus group interview (see Appendix E).

These themes were based on responses from individual interviews of both the student and administrator participants. In general, the summary of themes from the individual interviews with the AABW were, experiences as Black/African American women at CapU, concerns with CapU and positive influences at CapU.

During the interviews, the women described CapU as a tough environment. In their interview, many included the 2016 Presidential election and the negative impact of that election on their experiences at CapU in their interview. For some, the elections created a hostile environment on campus. The women spoke about how a Freedom of Speech wall created tension on campus too. Many of the student participants did not agree with how administration handled the situation and the students wanted administration to take a stronger stance against racism.

Several of the student participants told stories of how their friends frequently experienced microaggressions. One example many of them shared was an incident in the residence halls with a student making racist comments in her room. The student participants shared how that was the beginning of a negative cycle where they began to expect a negative racialized experience to happen every year; where students of color had to fight for the right outcome when racist events happened on campus. Another example the student participants shared was a Black Lives Matter protest that did not create the outcomes they wanted or expected from administrators. The impact of these incidents on these student participants was that race is always at the forefront of their minds.

None of the women said they turned to any of the offices named in this research for support, most said they turned to themselves or their family. The student participants said they were tired of being the only Black person and Black woman in spaces at CapU,

and specifically the only one in their classes. This caused some of them to feel like they stick out in classes and at programs. In the interviews, they described feeling like a fraud like they do not deserve to be at CapU. This feeling of insecurity went further for the student participants, they also expressed feeling scared to ask a question or share their opinion in classes.

The fear these student participants experienced went beyond being scared to participate in class. Many of them spoke about how they were scared and felt fear of being on campus as a Black woman. They shared examples of being attacked for being Black at CapU. In general, the feeling of fear CapU's environment caused for them distracted them from their studies. The mental and emotional energy it took for these students to deal with the fear, took away from time to engage with their academics.

The additional emotional burden of feeling inferior to the white students socially and academically, having self-doubt, feeling like a fraud, and having imposter syndrome took a toll on these women. Many of the women experienced a culture shock when they started CapU despite the fact that coming in, they knew CapU was a PWI coming in. They explained that they did not see race or racism in high school. And many said they experienced racism or saw racism for the first time at CapU. CapU was the first time they began to think about their race. For the first time they felt the burden and pressure of being a Black woman at CapU, often feeling an obligation to educate others about the Black experience and racism. They described this act of always being on the look out to address race things as mentally exhausting. They recognized the good education they were getting at CapU. In fact, many stayed at CapU because of that good education and

the financial assistance they got from CapU, yet at the same time they were exhausted by the burden of being Black at CapU.

The student participants were often concerned with how they were being perceived by CapU. This concern impacted how they acted: They feared saying the wrong thing and did not want to make their race or other Black people look bad. Therefore, these students did not raise their hand in classes, and did not speak up in class or at programs. The student participants described feeling like the only one in class often and they felt ignored and/or unwelcome. Many of the women shared an experience where white people had forgotten their name, or that they had previously met them.

All of the women had considered transferring out of CapU at one time. Many even completed applications for other schools. During the interview they shared stories of how their friends had considered transferring from CapU too. The participants also spoke of positive aspects at CapU. A few talked about how being at CapU had taught them how to love themselves as a Black woman. The student participants all had good interactions with the affinity groups (BSA, ASU), and these departments, Financial aid, Bursar, and The Culture Center. These areas were all mentioned as places that provided support for the participants, and had some impact in helping them stay. Lastly, the students mentioned the following as being impactful in helping them stay: NSO Involvement Fair, scholarships, silent disco, skate night, dinner with their professor during College Success Course.

## Use of the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment Indicators in Analysis

### Data Analysis

In order to fully understand the data during the data analysis phase of this study, the nine indicators of Museus's (2104b) CECE model were used. They provided the lens with which to examine how diverse students engage with institutions to be successful. In review, the nine indicators include (a) cultural familiarity, (b) culturally relevant knowledge, (c) cultural community service, (d) opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement, (e) collectivist cultural orientations, (f) culturally validating environments, (g) humanized educational environments, (h) proactive philosophies, and (i) availability of holistic support.

The first indicator of Museus's (2014b) CECE model is *cultural familiarity*. I looked for indications that the AABW undergraduate students felt comfortable on campus when they saw faculty, staff, and peers who looked like them and with whom they shared common background. With the second indicator, I watched for signs that the AABW undergraduate students were given an opportunity to increase their *culturally relevant knowledge* as well as learn about their respective cultures.

The third indicator of CECE is *cultural community service*, which means I looked to see if CapU provided opportunities for the AABW undergraduate students to engage in community service opportunities in various cultural communities. Institutions who give students opportunities to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds have a more culturally engaging campus. I watched for indicators that showed if the institution provided the AABW undergraduate students *opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement*, the fourth indicator. With the fifth indicator of CECE, *collectivist cultural*

*orientation*, I looked to see how CapU showed its value for a more group-centered orientation over an individualistic orientation. Indicator 6 required me to examine the data for indicators of a *culturally validating environment*.

I examined the data for how CapU was demonstrating the seventh indicator, *humanizing students' experiences*, for AABW undergraduate students. Regarding the eighth indicator, *proactive philosophy*, and the ninth indicator, supporting the creation and sustenance of *the availability of holistic support*, I looked for indicators in the AABW undergraduate students' stories to find demonstrations of how CapU had a proactive philosophy and provided holistic support. I also looked for additional concepts and themes to emerge as I was examining the data for CECE indicators.

I did find data to support that CapU was demonstrating all nine indicators. Some of the data showed CapU was demonstrating some indicators stronger than others. The administrator participants gave examples of how CapU was demonstrating CECE indicators; however, they also gave examples of how CapU was not demonstrating these same indicators. Overall, an examination of the data through the lens of Museus's nine CECE indicators constituted a critical part of the data analysis for this study, because these indicators help show if the institutional policy levers at an institution of higher education are engaging diverse students with their community in a manner that encourages their success in college (Museus, 2014b), which is the basis of this study.

### **Positionality**

I share some social identities with the AABW participants, because we both attended a PWI undergraduate institution. It was important to me to acknowledge this during the interviews, sometimes at the beginning and sometimes at the end. Sharing

similar identities did not mean I had the same experience as the participants, nor did it mean that they were at ease and comfortable with me. That was taken into consideration as the interviews were planned, conducted, and analyzed (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This made me further consider my position as a graduate student and a higher education professional.

As I think about myself and how I entered this work, I recognize the project did stir up memories of being an undergraduate. I think about being an undergraduate student at a PWI so many years ago and know that is why I wanted to do this research. I saw how few of us (AABW) were at my PWI, and I always wondered why. My journey in this doctoral program led me to this research. I started looking at racial identity development and how that impacted AABW undergraduate students and their college completion, which led me to question how PWIs are retaining AABW undergraduate students. I wanted to know how institutions are intentionally retaining Black women, how they are institutionalizing resources and services for Black women undergraduate students. I wanted to know how institutions are doing more than just pushing these Black women with unique needs off to the cultural centers (multicultural affairs office, during my time) or the student support services office, or worse yet, the small numbers of Black professionals at the institution. I wanted to know how institutions are utilizing their resources to systemically impact AABW undergraduate students. I saw how programs are being created to support men of color, and I wondered where those programs were for our women of color. I wanted to do this research for all the Black women on campuses working hard and doing the work and working to maintain relationships with their

families back home and working to make friends here and trying really hard to do both and not really feeling like they belong in either (Winkle-Wagner, 2009b).

I know my story is in the stories of the women I interviewed. I remember being the only Black student in class and feeling like I had to represent all Black students. I remember joining the Black Student Association so I could see other Black people. I remember feeling so glad to see other Black people on campus. As a researcher, I recognize that all of that was in me as I approached this work at this institution, and I journaled and talked with my advisor and colleagues to make sure that my story did not impact the students or professionals' experience. I fully wanted to hear their experiences and recognize theirs might be different from mine.

As I was conducting the interviews, I journaled about my college experience in interview memos when something came up for me. Hearing the participant stories did bring back memories of my experience, and it was important to separate my experience from theirs (Tesch, 2003). I debriefed the interviews with other college professionals with similar identities to help me process the similarities and used the interview memos to make sense of my feelings and reactions. This experience added to the data as similarities and contrasts came up.

The other piece that caused me to reflect is the part I included in the introductory chapter about my experience working with AABW undergraduate students on a college level. This impacted me in two ways. One, there is a lack of financing at institutions to really make institutionalized changes for AABW undergraduate students. Institutions continue to say that diversity, inclusion, and equity are important yet do not put the money behind the programs. This was evidenced by the study's finding that no offices at



CapU were able to articulate one program that was specifically for AABW undergraduate students. The other way this impacted me was in my thinking about the campus where I work. The stories these women shared about what they experienced as Black women on a predominantly white campus made me wonder how often my current students were experiencing these things and how I was going to impact that on my campus.

There are a couple of stories from the interviews with the women in the study that have stayed with me. They have stayed with me because they almost brought me to tears—I could relate to them or felt an obligation to share their experiences of what happened with the world, believing their voices could assist with the needed change in higher education. These stories stayed with me in a way that made me realize I had to get them out. They stayed with me in a way that made me ask myself, Can I share these stories?! Can I not share these stories?! Some of them kept me up at night, some of them made me laugh, some of them made me proud, and some of them made my heart hurt. Ultimately, they made me say, CapU is hard.

During the interviews, I was challenged by some of the responses to my follow-up question, “And how is that impacted by you being an AABW?” Some participant responses came off as irritated by having to respond to that question. Some would say their experience was not impacted by being Black. It was challenging to hear them say that and at the same time hear them say they did not have a relationship with any of the offices on campus, they did not see any faculty that looked like them, their NSO experience was very white, and CapU is hard. The other thing that was hard to hear during the interviews was that microaggressions did not happen to them. All of the participants said microaggressions did not happen to them, yet they went on to explain

several microaggressions that had happened to them, and that their friends experienced microaggressions daily. The disconnect from microaggressions happening to them and being able to name them as microaggressions was big for them and hard to see.

During the individual interviews with the AABW participants, I felt a sense of obligation to get their stories right. My memo notes showed an awe for these women's experiences and for their sharing these experiences with me. The last interview I conducted really brought that message and sentiment home for me. The participant spoke about feeling exploited in her experience at CapU and even by my interview. I wrote in my interview memo about feeling an obligation not to exploit these women's stories. I believe the AABW undergraduate students' voices are centered in this research, particularly in Chapters 4 and 5.

Lastly, as I stated earlier, I share identities with the participants. Like my student participants, I identify as an African American woman and I attended a PWI for my undergraduate. Like my administrator participants, I am a student affairs professional who works at a PWI. Sharing these identities with my participants, having insider status, was helpful in creating questions, during the interviews and during the analysis. There were several instances where participants did not have to explain their experience or something that happened to them, for I knew what they were describing because it had happened to me or a friend or colleague. It allowed me to ask follow-up questions that got additional information. Ultimately, this insider status made my analysis stronger.

### **Human Subjects Review Board**

This research study was reviewed by the Human Subjects Review Board. The study was approved on July 2, 2019. Consent forms were completed for every participant.

Focus group participants completed an additional consent form and a confidentiality statement. AABW individual participants selected their own pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were selected for all other participants and policy lever areas.

### **Trustworthiness and Ethics**

Trustworthiness in research is important. When collecting data in case study research, it is important to collect “multiple sources of evidence” (Yin, 2014). I followed Creswell’s (2007) suggestions as to several ways this can be done in a qualitative research study. After the individual interviews were transcribed, I sent the transcriptions to the participants asking them to verify that what they said was correct and to let me know if I missed anything or and if they wanted to add anything. Of the eight individual AABW undergraduate students’ interviews, three responded that the transcript was correct; for the leader/staff interviews, seven of the 11 confirmed the transcripts were correct. I used member checking and peer debriefing.

After the interviews were conducted and analyzed, a member check sheet (theme summary, see Appendix E) was developed and used at the focus group. They confirmed the themes were accurate. This also happened with the administrator interview themes: The themes established through their interviews were included on the theme summary sheet for the focus group interview. Lastly, the themes were confirmed with the executive leader of the SEIE division. A shortened version of the theme summary was created to review with the Executive Leadership (see Appendix F). During the interview, the Executive Leadership responded to these themes and what she thought of their accuracy. The peer debriefing happened confidentially with one friend who was familiar with research on AABW undergraduate student retention, as suggested by Creswell (2007).

Yin (2014) outlined three approaches to ensure trustworthiness of data in a case study—three principles of data collection: (a) use multiple sources of evidence, (b) create a case study database, and (c) maintain a chain of evidence. Collecting multiple sources of evidence allowed for triangulation of data (Yin, 2014). Findings and conclusions were confirmed by several data sources. In this case study, I collected data from several data sources to triangulate the individual interviews with student participants, the individual interviews from college professionals, the focus group interview, and the artifacts. This allowed me to confirm themes and conclusions. Regarding data trustworthiness, the second principle, I maintained a case study database detailing the data collected in NVivo (Feagin et al., 1991; Yin, 2014). This database allowed for ease in cataloging data collection, coding, and analyzing data. In my proposal, I had outlined that this database would maintain a chain of evidence, which it actually did, because it contained all the data and created a catalogue when the data were entered into the system. However, I uploaded all the materials at the same time for my convenience. I have a record of when I received each artifact from the leader/staff.

### **Limitations**

Case study methodology has limitations. Limitations include potential limits to the internal or external validity of the results. Although limitations were considered when the study was conceptualized, these were out of my control. The study had a limitation with respect to participants. The participants were a mix of (a) students whose parents were immigrants, (b) those whose parents were U.S. born, (c) students who were born in Africa and raised in the United States, and (d) those who were born and raised in the United States. One participant pointed out the cultural differences in these various

populations of students and how there is an assumption that because all groups identify as Black or African American, they have the same lived experience, when they do not. One participant spoke of being invited to a cookout and first, not knowing what that was, and second, not knowing what to bring. I wonder if students whose parents were born in Africa or if they themselves were born in Africa experienced racism and microaggressions differently than students whose parents were U.S. born and consequently they also were U.S. born. I did not ask participants where they were born or where their parents were born. I was able to speculate based on responses to other questions. In future research, I would ask that question to better understand the difference in experience. It is hard to generalize experience without this information.

Other limitations to this case study included focusing on only five institutional policy levers at the one institution. The study is limited in its adaptability, because all eight policy levers were not examined on this population of students. It can be difficult to understand these five without the complete picture of all eight and how they interplay and interact with the retention of these AABW undergraduate students. One of the institutional policy lever areas not examined for this study was enrollment management. Enrollment management, had an institutional practice that dealt with financial aid. Several of the participants discussed that they would have transferred from CapU, but they were getting such a good financial aid package it would have been irresponsible to say no to that money. One of the administrators said that was an area that needed some additional examination. She said someone should do a study on who received financial aid and why. Since that was out of scope, I did not ask additional questions about financial aid.

The study only includes one institution and eight students, it cannot be generalizable for all students. Similarly, because this study only included eight AABW undergraduates, findings cannot be generalizable for all AABW undergraduate students at PWIs. The study highlighted how complex race and ethnicity in the United States is for Black/African Americans at CapU, however, I did not consider how immigrant or parental immigrant status would impact the study. This will need to be considered in future studies.

Relevant to this study, researchers have pointed out that limitations regarding focus groups include the small number of participants, and recruitment can be difficult (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Moreover, the interaction between the participants is unpredictable, and the interaction between the participants and the moderator is unpredictable. Their responses are not independent of each other, and a very dominant or opinionated participant can impact participation of the others (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Further, the moderator bias could influence the discussion by unknowingly providing cues in the discussion (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

The focus group in this study had two additional limitations that I identified in my interview memo. Participants' responses were similar to their individual interview responses, and the focus group did not offer much more depth in responses. Also, during the focus group interview, one of the participants was rude to another participant, and I had to manage that odd dynamic of two women of similar identity having conflict with one another. Two of the participants were good friends, and one way they interacted together was by calling each other "stupid" and "dumb." They were also texting each

other constantly when others were speaking. No one else was texting. I realized I should have provided ground rules and expectations at the beginning. I do not believe this impacted the information received from the focus group interview.

In summary, this study centered AABW undergraduate students' experience--their voices in research and in the higher education community. I used an explanatory case study methodology. The literature reviewed for this study included how AABW undergraduate students gained access to higher education and an examination of institutional policy levers and culturally engaging campus environments indicators. This information provided a foundation to create the proposal and subsequent implementation of the research. This study provides practical information for practitioners and faculty when working with AABW undergraduate students. Most importantly, this study answered the main research question, How do institution policy levers impact AABW undergraduate students' retention. Chapter 4 will provide profiles of the AABW participants.

## Chapter Four. Findings:

### AABW Undergraduate Student Participant Profiles

*“You’re important in your own right. People need to value you because of who you are, because of your story. Because of your challenges. That’s what makes you unique. You know? You wanna be different, you wanna be special. The fact that you’ve been able to overcome challenges - and this is what I’ve always thought - that made me smarter. That made me better because I could overcome things that a lot of people who were in the same position never had to overcome.”*

(Michelle Obama as cited in Davis, 2016, no. 7)

### **Participant Profiles**

This chapter gives an overview of the African American/Black Women (AABW) undergraduate student individual participants. Each profile will include the name, age, major, minor, class standing, and GPA of each AABW undergraduate student participant. I include their responses to the first and last question I asked during their individual interviews. The first question I asked the women was, “Tell me about your experience at Capital University (CapU) as a Black/African American woman.” At the end of the interview, the very last question I asked them was, “Is there anything I should have asked you that I did not?” It was often during these two questions that the extent of the participants’ college journey came out or was better understood. I have centered their voices as the focal point of this research. I have also included in this chapter a summary



of their response to “What is success as a student?” The profiles fall into three themes: (a) complexity of race and gender, (b) agency, and (c) surviving and retaining because of themselves.

I selected these stories as representations of who I saw the participants to be. It is from these responses that I have shared their stories and provided a glimpse of why I have decided to name this dissertation, “College, at What Cost?!” During the interviews, I used a quote from Michelle Obama (Feeling Success, 2017) to explain retention. Moreover, I also used a quote from Michelle Obama to introduce each participant profile, because in the interview, each participant smiled and seemed to enjoy the quote that came from Michelle Obama. Each of her quotes was specifically selected for each participant as a representation of who I saw them to be. Here are the stories of these smart, beautiful Black women who were brave enough to take time out of an already difficult experience to share their stories with me in hopes of making the space at CapU better for those who will come after them. Below, I introduce the AABW participants and their profiles, illustrating how these women navigated the complexity of race and gender at CapU.

### **Complexity of Race and Gender**

The most common theme throughout the AABW interviews was how often they had to navigate race and gender. For many this is how they began and ended their interviews with me, talking about how they interact with CapU around their race and gender. The below profiles describe some of those experiences.

#### **Merci**

*“Always stay true to yourself and never let what somebody else says distract you from your goals.”* (Michelle Obama as cited in Hoffower & Yuan, 2020, no. 20)

Merci is 21-year-old senior, majoring in International Business and Marketing, minoring in Leadership Studies, with a 3.64 GPA. Merci said she often wonders if she is at CapU because she is Black. She also wonders if she got the job she has because she is a Black woman. Thinking about this makes her lose confidence. She dresses a certain way to de-emphasize her shape. She said she and other Black women have often talked about this. The white women have a certain shape, and when they go to party, they wear tight clothes emphasizing it. She pointed out that when Black women go, they do not want to emphasize their big butts and do not want to wear a cardigan to the party. It is uncomfortable both ways. Merci recounted that this summer, she was doing a presentation for her campus job, and after the presentation, a father came up to her and said her presentation was good but she should dress differently because her shape was a distraction. She went on to say that she was dressed like many of her colleagues, in business dress. She also said that white people think they can comment on Black bodies in a way they do not comment on white women. It was both insightful of her and sad that she has had to be so conscious of what she wears. She mentioned that she wears cardigans to cover her butt. She had a cardigan on the day of our interview.

Merci attended several pre-orientation programs for students of color (SOC). She recalled learning college success skills at these programs; one skill in particular related to how students should sit in the front of the classroom and try to get to know their instructor. Merci said she did all those things and was really proud of herself for making the effort and taking a risk. Despite this, Merci described her experience with a professor not recognizing her with a new hairdo:

When you go to college, they always tell you, sit in the front, get to know the professor, and all that stuff. So again, my hair straight the first week of school and I sat in the front, I talked to the professor, "Yeah, my name is Merci." He was like, "Wow, I've never heard that. That's beautiful." The weekend, the next time I come to class, I am sitting in the same spot, he's like, "Are you a transfer student?" I said, I've been here for two weeks. We have a connection. I talk to you all the time. Then suddenly my hair looks different, and you thought I'm a completely different person and asked if I was a new student that you had. I laughed it off. Then by the end of the year, I thought about how no other, definitely, white people would never experience something like that for changing as simple like a hairstyle. I thought that initial connection was genuine, but it wasn't genuine enough that you could have still recognized my face. That hurt me a lot.

Merci started her story by saying, "I think there was just a lot of microaggressions. My first week at that time, it literally took me a whole year to realize how bad that experience is." Many of the other participants talked about having to put on "armor" when they got their hair done, explaining that they knew white people on campus would not know them. Another student participant also told a story about her hair.

### **Blanket**

*"Success is only meaningful and enjoyable if it feels like your own."* (Michelle Obama as cited in Daum, 2016a, no. 8)

Blanket is a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Biology with a concentration in Cognitive Neuroscience and minoring in Psychology, Chemistry, and Leadership. Her

GPA is 3.4, and she described her experience at CapU as “fairly positive.” Her words were so powerful when she talked about the incidents that happened at CapU that were racially motivated bias incidents and about which, in her eyes, the institution was not doing anything about. She talked about how the students were fed up and went to the President to say they were fed up. She talked about how that impacted her experience and how the 2016 Presidential election was happening at the same time—how it was a heightened state for everyone but especially the Black students. I could feel the emotion and energy coming from her during the interviews.

Blanket described her freshman-year residence life experience as heavily, heavily white. She lived on a living-and-learning floor in one of the first-year residence halls. She was the only Black woman on the floor, and there was only one other person of color on the floor. Blanket grew up in a part of Colorado that was not demographically diverse, so she was used to being in an all-white environment, but she thought CapU would be more diverse than it was. She said the all-white environment did not hinder her experience. She described her first roommate:

Fun fact, my roommate freshman year, she told me that I was the first Black girl that she had ever met. Or yeah, because the only other Black person she had known was like, uhm a kid who was mixed who moved away in third grade. She's from [the mountains], Colorado. So, I was like the first Black person she had like ever really met. So, I was just like, wow this is cool. I was like, I thought like it was just gonna be a really negative experience. But it was, it was great. Like she was really like open and understanding. Like she would like stare at me while I did my hair.

It was not unusual for the participants to be singled out like this. Blanket then went on to tell a story about how her resident assistant (RA) unintentionally made her feel isolated through an activity with the floor around baby pictures. She described the impact of this floor program with residents sharing their baby pictures:

I liked how they [RAs] were forced to make a community for us, even though they're forced to. I think it's still helpful cause I feel in a way socials and stuff it helped me get to know my floor a little better than I would have if we didn't have it. There was one activity, activity though—this actually happened to me in first grade too, it was a flashback but over winter break, he asked us to send baby pictures, and it was just a little guessing game who's who, you know? And I was the only Black person on the floor, so it's not that hard to guess who's who this is and everyone's having fun—Oh, I wonder who this is, bla blahhh. And then mine was there and everyone knows, and the same thing happened in first grade too. We sent everyone's baby pictures, and it was the same guessing game, but for me it wasn't like anything special. So just I didn't really like that part, but I mean it's not his fault, you know. I think it really is just a fun, and it's fun for a majority of people, but it was just ironic that happened twice to me, and both times it kind of made me feel the same way. I feel like it just made me realize I stuck out even more, you know. So that was interesting, I guess.

Blanket was not the only participant who expressed feeling like she stood out because of her race. Blanket felt isolated and marginalized because of her race. This is an example of

the microaggressions the participants experienced. In the following interview scenario, Jane also shared an example of a microaggression that happened her first year at CapU.

**Jane**

*“Success is not about how much money you make. It’s about the difference you make in people’s lives.”* (Michelle Obama as cited in Daum, 2016b, no. 20)

Jane is a 20-year-old junior Computer Science major, with a minor in Mathematics and a 2.8 GPA. Jane has a work study position working with athletics and plays on a club sport team. She recently went abroad. Jane concluded her interview sharing a story where she experienced a microaggression. She expressed such indignation about a night when she was leaving the library behind a tall white man, around 1:00am. She was behind him and she overheard him make a phone call. Jane described this white male student’s reaction to her presence:

He's like, "Can you actually just stay on the phone with me just so I'm safe." I was looking around, like safe from what? There's no one out here. What are you trying to be safe from? Me? 'Cause I'm not going to do anything. Whenever people walk out late at night, usually for most people, they look around their surroundings to see if there's people behind them or in front of them, around them, and he already did that. He knew I was behind him. And I was just like, safe from what? What am I going to do to you? Like come kill you? I don't have the time for that or energy. I was just like, what? What are you, what? What are you being safe from? And then, she was like, "Yeah, I'll stay on the phone." He was like, "Great, 'cause sometimes I just feel unsafe out here." And I was like, unsafe from what? You are

a white male. You are the least unsafe person on this campus. I don't know what you're talking about. I was just like, okay, anyways.

Jane could not understand how this white man felt unsafe walking across campus. She felt targeted because of her race. During her interview, this story was prefaced by Jane saying she rarely encountered microaggressions, but her friends regularly encountered them. Similarly, many of the other participants said they rarely encountered microaggressions, but at the same time, also said that their friends regularly encountered microaggressions. In the following participant profile, Karima described how she also felt isolated because of her race. She recalled that she was too shocked at the impact of being in an all-white space to know what she needed.

**Karima**

*“As women, we must stand up for ourselves . . . for each other . . . for justice for all.”*

(Michelle Obama as cited in Juma, 2019, no. 65)

Karima is a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Business Management and Finance, with a minor in Leadership and a 3.4 GPA. She expressed gratitude for being part of this study. She said it was important and was glad she could help. Karima described herself as a first-generation college student with Ethiopian immigrant parents. She grew up in Colorado and went to a college-prep high school. She attended a summer pre-orientation program at CapU for underrepresented students. When she got to New Student Orientation (NSO) week, she described being in shock at how many white people were there and how isolated she felt. Karima described her culture shock:

When coming to CapU, I did a summer program called Student of Color Prep Program (SO CPP), that's what it's called and essentially it was a way where CapU is bringing us Black students on to campus and showing them college and teaching them about the college application process, financial aid, all that stuff, and I really, really enjoyed being in a small set classroom, and I just love the people here at CapU, and when I was like applying for college, I was like, "Okay, CapU is definitely my top, one of my top schools." When I got accepted, I was like, "Okay, regardless I'm going to go through with CapU, I'm going to be, stay committed." I know it's predominately white, I knew, but then NSO week hit and it just, I thought I was prepared, and I was not prepared at all because just feeling like you're the only one. . . . I feel like people connect with people just based on physical appearances, so if you see someone like you, it's like you set in your mind to connect with them, and for me, I'm really like no one, so everyone else already made friends and stuff, and I'm just there in the corner like, "Oh okay." You know? NSO week goes, and I'm like, I literally hate it here, but I wasn't still going to quit. I was still going to be, "Okay, I'm just going be alone. I'm just going like, do my own thing."

Karima, like other participants, had attended a transition program offered by CapU for underrepresented students. These programs were held prior to classes beginning, usually prior to NSO. It was during these pre-orientation programs that some SOC met each other and developed friendships. The prep program created a community for Karima, and she liked it because it was with other SOC, had small classes, and she



learned about resources. She did not have the same experience with NSO. As Karima explained, the programs could be challenging for students after the prep programs because they were used to being with mostly SOC and that is not a typical experience at CapU. Many of the participants experienced a shock going from the pre-orientation of mostly SOC to the NSO of mostly white.

Similar to many other participants, Karima knew CapU was white, but the actual reality of being around white people all the time was a hard adjustment. Additionally, the participants found their white peers did not engage with them like they did their white peers. Many of the participants felt this was because of the different backgrounds and experiences. The all-white environment, coupled with their white peers not engaging with them, made NSO a culture shock for many of the participants. The way her white peers treated her made Karima feel isolated and “othered.” As illustrated below, Aisha had a similar experience with culture shock.

### **Aisha**

*“Don’t be afraid. Be focused. Be determined. Be hopeful. Be empowered.”*

(Michelle Obama as cited in Meah, n.d.[a], no. 13)

Aisha is a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Psychology with a concentration in Cognitive Neuroscience and minors in Biology, Sociology, and Leadership Studies. She has a 3.7 GPA and described her experience at CapU as a Black/African American female as very challenging. I had originally scheduled Aisha as one of the first interviews; however, at the last minute, she canceled. It took quite a bit of rescheduling to get her back on my schedule. She ended up being the last interview. It was not until the

last question of the interview that I found out why she canceled and why it was so difficult to reschedule (more on this later).

Aisha grew up in Colorado and attended a racially diverse high school. She described coming to CapU as a culture shock. Being the only AA woman in class was very challenging and difficult for her. She sometimes would not go to class her first year because of feeling uncomfortable with the lack of diversity in the class. In the interview, she said she felt her experience at CapU and the lack of diversity were preparing her for her future in the real world.

Overall, she felt as if she had a really negative experience on campus and moved her graduation date up because of that experience. Aisha, described her experience on campus:

I don't really feel comfortable on this campus, to be involved, just things like that.

I don't know, there's not really a good stable community here and I think there's a lot of things that contribute to that on this campus, just the lack of spaces just exclusively for Black people or Black females, whatever you want to call it.

Aisha expressed the need for CapU to create a Black space for students to gather and create community. She believed the institution should do more than have affinity-based groups for students. CapU should create Black space for students. In the participant profile below, Tia recounted a tough racialized experience as well.

### **Tia**

*“How hard you work matters more than how much you make.”* (Michelle Obama as cited in Meah, n.d.[b], no. 14)

Tia is a 21-year-old senior majoring in International Studies and Finance, with a minor in Leadership and a 3.5 GPA. She described her experience at CapU as “not easy.” She explained how the 2016 Presidential election negatively impacted her freshman year. It created racial tension and made the environment tough for SOC at CapU. The only reason Tia survived was because she and her friends created a student organization, African Students Union (ASU). All of the student participants shared how being a part of Black Student Association (BSA) and ASU positively affected their experience and helped them stay at CapU. Tia described her experience at CapU:

It hasn't been easy. While, I've been able to receive good things like a college education and everything that comes with that and meeting new people. There have been like some instances where you kind of feel unwelcome here or like you don't belong. I feel like every Black freshman walks into here and has that initial reaction of, "Oh, I'm transferring." Everybody kinda went through that experience together. Some applications were sent, some weren't. Freshman year was a hard time for everyone because people were deciding, "Am I going to stay or not?" My freshman year, there's just a lot of racial tension going on and the election was going on. . . . I mean, being Black, you always encounter little things here and there, but I guess I just never expected it to get that bad on a college campus, because I feel like school is always a place where at least administration would put their foot down and say, "Hey, you don't say these kinds of things, and those kinds of things aren't accepted here," but I feel like at this school, the administration never really put their foot down on some of the things that were happening.

As will be explained in a later chapter and was described by Tia, all of the AABW undergraduate student participants at one point during their time at CapU considered transferring out of CapU. Most explain, like Tia did, that the good education they are getting at CapU is the reason they stay. The reason they survive is each other and BSA/ASU. Tia expressed how the 2016 Presidential election exacerbated racial tensions on campus. Many of the participants talked about how this particular time impacted their experience at CapU. Their view of race relations was not good because of the incidents that happened and how administration handled the situations. Tia said her experience at CapU was not easy and she fully acknowledged the racism she experienced. During Whitney's interview, she told of her fairly lucky experience at CapU, yet she did not acknowledge the microaggressions that she experienced.

### **Whitney**

*“For the first time in my adult lifetime, I am really proud of my country. And not just because Barack has done well, but because I think people are hungry for change. And I have been desperate to see our country moving in that direction.”* (Michelle Obama as cited in Adams, 2018, no. 1)

Whitney is a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Anthropology and minoring in Political Science, with a 3.4 GPA. Whitney helped plan the Black Women Leadership Program (BWLP) which is a leadership conference for high school AABW students. BWLP conducts CapU's event of bringing together Black women who are in high school for a day at CapU where they talk about current issues, what it means to be a Black woman in America, networking, and how they can navigate the world as a Black woman. Whitney was also a part of the Black Male Initiative Summit.

Whitney described herself as being “fairly lucky” when asked about her experience at CapU. She went on to say that sometimes in class, she was the only person of color, and that could be uncomfortable when it came time to do partner work, because she did not know anyone and people did not pick her to partner. But other than that, her experience had been fine. She described her experience at CapU:

I’ve been fairly lucky only because I know some of my friends that are also Black females have had to kinda see or talk to people who have problematic views or interact with professors who did stuff that they were uncomfortable with, like saying the N-word in class. That’s happened a couple of times to a couple of my friends. But that’s never happened with me; like the classes that I usually take, a lot of the people are really, I don’t know, progressive or always share the same values that I share basically. In that aspect, I think, I’ve been lucky to not have to deal with that so far.

Whitney was one of several participants who stated that their friends experience microaggression regularly, while she does not. She did not recognize the slight of being the only Black woman in class and not being picked for partner work as a microaggression. Whitney had a good experience with an affinity-based program. Similarly, Mary, profiled below, pointed out that she began to enjoy CapU once she found the affinity-based student organizations.

**Mary**

*“Through my education, I didn’t just develop skills, I didn’t just develop the ability to learn, but I developed confidence.”* (Michelle Obama as cited in Meah, n.d.[c], no. 31)

Mary is a 21-year-old senior, majoring in International Business and Marketing, with a minor in Leadership Studies and a 3.64 GPA. She is from a diverse city in Colorado. Her family is Ethiopian and is very ingrained in the Ethiopian community. Mary was an executive board member for African Students Union (ASU), in the Women's Scholar Program, and a member of BSA. She turned to the Culture Center for support, often visited the Hub, and enjoyed seeing staff of color who looked like her. She also utilized the Volunteers to Help program as a support, explaining that its Volunteering to Help program coordinator was helpful with financial aid and scholarships.

Mary described what it felt like to go to class and be the only Black person, and how difficult that was. Her descriptions touched me because she was able to articulate her experience differently than the other participants. For example, she said that during her first year, she thought of transferring. She said she was having a hard time finding her place at CapU and described how finding a community made her experience there better:

I was really finding it hard to connect with people, and I didn't feel like I had similar interests with people. It seemed like people just came from a lot different backgrounds, like everyone seemed wealthier and just were interested in different things and things like that. . . . Then we also had the [2016 Presidential] election stuff and that just made it such a hostile environment, because you'd be walking to class and look up and see the [freedom of speech] wall. Then there was just crazy racist stuff on the wall you would see. Then you go to class, you're the only Black person and you just feel like, I don't know, kind of on your own in those environments. I think it was just really difficult for me. I really didn't enjoy my

experience, I wasn't finding places to connect with others, because I knew there were other Black students here, but I wasn't finding the places to connect with them, so that was really hard. But I think after my first term, and after that six-week break, I was thinking of transferring, but I decided not to because I got a scholarship here that basically paid off all my tuition. I was like, I'd be really dumb to transfer, [laugh] so I stayed. Then, me and some girls I met at the time, they're now my friends, but we started a club called African Students Union (ASU). I think through that, I was able to find my community of people who were Africans, who are Black. It felt good because even though you're in your classes and stuff, you feel like you don't really know anyone, and then still have those people to depend on, we were able to bond over, like creating events and bringing African culture to CapU. I think that really made it more enjoyable.

Mary also mentioned how hard the CapU environment was for her. As indicated above, Mary explained how participating in the ASU student club helped her find a sense of belonging on campus. ASU was something she and her friends started; CapU did not create it for the students. The students had to develop and maintain this resource for themselves. As the interviewer/researcher, I remember how being a part of BSA did the same for me. I describe that memory below.

**Tamara (me)**

*“When they go low, we go high.”* (Michelle Obama as cited in Daum, 2016c, no. 21)

I majored in Marketing and minored in Finance. My experience at CapU was both similar and different from that of the participants. I have had the benefit of years of

reflection. I remember my race being very important to me in college at CapU, as described below:

My race being very present for me, at CapU. I think it impacted my experience significantly. I think that it was everything for my experience at CapU as an undergrad. That it impacted everything about my experience. From being an RA to being an NSO leader to being part of BSA; being a leader in BSA, it impacted everything. And, in particular, I was an NSO leader because I was Black and then I wanted to be, for the Black students who were just entering, one of the first Black faces they saw so that they could see that there were other Black faces here. So, it impacted everything. It impacted my whole experience.

My experience was similar to the experience of the participants in that a few participants were also RAs, one was a NSO leader, all participated in BSA, and most were in leadership for BSA (see Appendix G). The participant who was also a NSO leader had the same motivation I did for being a peer leader. We wanted new Black students to see another Black face during NSO. I came to understand my blackness by participating in all of these opportunities. For me and the participants, race was significant in our undergraduate experience. It impacted and shaped everything about my experience. Participating in BSA in particular was where I learned how to advocate for myself, how to research to get the information I needed, and how to talk to administration when my community needed something. It was where I learned I had agency. Many of the participants had a similar experience.

The profiles thus far have centered on the theme of race and gender, and the complexities the women had to navigate through at CapU. Most of the participants shared



stories of microaggressions, being targeted and isolated because of being AABW, and navigating a very white space; yet they persisted. This next section illustrates a few examples of how the women showed agency and created their own experience (Bandura, 2000).

### **Agency**

Throughout the interviews, another common theme I heard the women articulate was their capacity to persist and act on their own—their agency (Baez, 2000). These women acted on their own behalf and demonstrated a tremendous amount of agency. Their stories of self-determination, autonomy, and independence follow.

Whitney, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Anthropology, described wanting to go to an HBCU, but experienced finding her voice at CapU:

Yeah. I think for me being a Black woman on campus, it's kinda helped me be more outspoken. I was really trying to go to Howard or an HBCU for the longest time, because I wanted to be around Black people. But coming here and just finding my own niche, especially like some of the students from BSA, it pushed me to be more outspoken, where I don't think I would've done the same had I been at an HBCU. Just like being a Black woman, especially on this campus, has pushed me to be more vocal about the problems that other people go through. Just being a part of clubs that also help, I guess, younger students of color as well.

Whitney's experience at CapU helped her become more confident about speaking up for the Black community on campus. Whitney found her voice while in college.

Merci, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in International Studies and Political Science, helped with an understanding of the complexity of learning one's worth and how

race can make that a difficult lesson. Illustrating this point, she described the different ways she interacted with her white peers:

The past 2 years, like with white people, I would go so out of my way to be friends with them and to make them feel comfortable. For some reasons, I couldn't even say the term, white people, around white people 'cause I thought that offended them. I don't know why. I just really wanted them to like me; but then when I go to the Black people, when I hang out with people of color, I'm always defending white people saying, "They're not all bad. Give them a chance. We're segregating ourselves and we need to interact more with them." But then, this summer, the end of last year, something clicked, "Why am I going so out of my way?" Now, as bad as it sounds, I could care less what white people could think of me, and now I could care less about making that connection with them. Not to say I'm not going to put an effort, but not [like] before. I'm definitely not going out of my way. Now I feel like I don't know where it came from, but there is the confidence to be myself, and whether they accept it or not, that's up to them. I think it's just more so like, now, I'm definitely gonna start being more comfortable and understand my own worth and not go so out of my way to make that connection and interact with other people. It's going to be interesting.

Merci described coming to understand who she was during her time at CapU. Self-acceptance, as Merci described, is up to the individual. These complexities complicated how the participants experienced community and belonging on campus.

Karima, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in International Studies and Political Science, found a sense of purpose and was looking forward to being a mentor and giving back like her mentor had done for her. In the following excerpt, she described her future:

Interviewer: What haven't I asked you about that I should?

Karima: Oh, a good question. I would say how I would use my experience of being a Black college woman right now and then how that's going to affect me moving forward? So that's what I would say. How are you going to use these experiences moving forward in your career?

Interviewer: How would you answer that?

Karima: Oh dang. I would go back to where I ended off with. Just always giving back and being like—because right now, I have an internship from my boss, she specifically wanted students of color to help her, and she's being an amazing mentor and just like teaching all the ropes of finances and stuff like that. I want to be that to someone else. I think that's a goal of mine. It was being like-- All the stuff I've learned at CapU, through my business major and learning about my identity and other people's identity, that's how I would use it moving forward.

Karima came to have a better understanding of what she wanted to do after college because of her internship experience. She recognized the impact her supervisor/mentor had on her as a WOC.

I remember understanding at some point during my undergraduate experience that I had power, and I could use my voice to make changes on campus and for future Black students. In the following scenario, I (Tamara) described putting a proposal together for a Black floor in the residence halls:

I remember also at one point putting together a proposal, I don't know if you heard of it or if you even know that I did it, but when, um, I wanted a black floor. So I put together a proposal for administration. And this is when I found out that there were 106 Black students on campus at the time. And that was including graduate students at the time. . . . Yeah, just African Americans. 'Cause there were 3,000 grads and I don't know how many undergrads. But the numbers were 106 African American students. And so, I was putting this proposal together, and I took it to the administration and then I said, "We need to have a black floor," and they said that we don't need to segregate. So, they did not support my proposal. Even then, I knew that we needed some sort of coming together to support . . . .

I have described above my recollection of coming to understand the power of my voice and importance of support networks for Black students. The administration did not create a black floor, but I learned some very valuable skills and gained the respect of many administrators. As a result, I was invited to many other conversations and decision tables later. The participants described making choices and ultimately putting their heads down and getting the work done. They described having agency and surviving campus because of themselves and each other. The next section illustrates how many of them survived at CapU because of themselves.

### **Surviving on Campuses Because of Themselves**

The participants not only had agency, but they were helping and supporting themselves in increasing their persistence. They relied on each other, the affinity-based student organizations, and themselves for support. Below the participants described how they were helping themselves survive CapU.

Jane, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Computer Science, had a different experience with the people in NSO than she did with the people in her pre-orientation program. Her experience was very similar to Karima and other AABW undergraduate student participants' experience of NSO and College Success Course at CapU:

Freshman year, before I started here, there was this program called U-STEM, and that is the Underserved in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math program, and we were the pilot program. We were the first ones to start it, and basically, it's a program where they teach you how to be successful being an underrepresented person on CapU's campus. That's just transitioning from high school to college as well. I started that, and it started over the summer, so it started before orientation week. I really enjoyed that program, and I made a lot of friends, and it was just great to have people who look like me and also doing the same thing as me and trying to pursue the same goals. So yeah . . . and then orientation week came . . . I became friend-ish or like acquaintances with the group of people. I didn't really think they were friends 'cause they all were from different backgrounds, but they were mostly all white. I was just like, "I don't know who you are." . . . So then, I just went back to my U-STEM people. Then also during freshman year, I started going to BSA meetings (Black Student Association).

Jane was proud of her experience participating in a pre-orientation program over the summer with other underrepresented students transitioning from high school to college. She really enjoyed the program and made friends; then NSO week came and the first-year seminar, College Success Course. Jane's story is a preview to one of the policy lever impacts on retention for AABW undergraduate students in this study that will be

discussed in Chapter 5. In Chapter 5, more information is shared about BSA and ASU's positive impact on the participants' sense of belonging.

Aisha, a 20-year-old, junior majoring in Psychology, had a different experience with CapU. As was mentioned before, she canceled her interview, which was difficult to reschedule. It was not until the last question that I found out why she canceled and why it was so difficult to reschedule. She described feeling tired of being all things to all people; and knowing she would be returning to classes, she said she just could not come talk about her experience with me. She described feeling exploited as an AA woman at CapU:

Black American women are kind of exploited, we're exploited in a way. Like, we might only be here just so CapU can put on that front, that diversity front. And they even do that on the website. They'll have pictures of us on the website as if a lot of Black kids go here. So that is a deception. And then, also, my first time touring here, I had a Black tour guide, so I'm like, they're probably just like using us for like these work-study jobs that you need to put on that social and public figure to be able to, you know, draw the attention that they want to draw. So in a way, we're being exploited, and the process is kind of hurting the Black community here at CapU, because if it was not like that, then I think you wouldn't be, so like I said, divided as we are now.

The other participants echoed the sentiment of being busy and being tapped to do many things on and for campus. Black women were leading the organizations on campus. They were in everything and leading everything. The administrators reiterated this sentiment as well. They spoke about the Black women being the leaders of the clubs and being the influencers on campus. Although they said it with pride and that most of the

RAs are Black women, there was no recognition of the overburden that they were placing on the Black women.

Mary, a 21-year-old, majoring in International Business and Marketing, described being a Black woman at CapU:

I think there is more of an expectation, I didn't realize but I think Black women here are probably perceived as more hostile or not as friendly because people aren't really as willing to just come up and talk to us, or in group projects, we're not the first ones picked. Things like that I just notice. I think maybe part of it is, for me, I'm not going into class like smiling and bubbly, because I already know I'm going to be the only student that looks like me. I'm probably going to be hearing really ignorant—I just mentally prepare myself, and then it's also class. I'm not a huge fan of going to class, I think sometimes like it's just class, like I don't want to go. I'm not going to be sitting here smiling. But people will just take that as, "Oh, maybe she's not as friendly or she's kind of hostile."

Mary described coming to understand how she is perceived as a Black woman on campus. She described coming to terms in herself with this expectation and misperception of Black women. The misperception being, Mary says, Black women are hostile and not friendly.

Tia, a 21-year-old senior majoring in International Studies and Finance, described her frustration around race tension her first year at CapU:

I was so shocked to just, because I feel like when people are racist, it's usually low key little microaggressions, like they'll never say something blatant like that. That was one of the first times, especially at this age where you think people

know how to act, that I experienced that. I was just so shocked, and I'm not a sensitive person at all, but I actually cried because I was just in so much shock. How can you be full of so much hate? It was just so disgusting to me. I was just so surprised at the way I reacted too. I think some of the students called for the administration to say something about these groups or do something, and while there were certain people that did face some consequences, I feel like nothing really happened.

These racial tensions contributed to why the AABW participants all, at some point, wanted to transfer. Although all the participants thought about transferring, none of them followed through. They talked about financial aid and the transfer process being too cumbersome as the reason they did not follow through.

Blanket, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Biology, described wanting to transfer her first year at CapU too. BSA and ASU helped her stay. She shared how she and the Black community were impacting each other in a positive way:

I think almost like 90% of my friends were ready to transfer at that point, and they wanted to go to a different school. And I think it was tough being around it, like nothing had happened to me personally directly but I was still being affected by the negative energy of it, I guess. But I think so, I think it was really BSA and ASU, those clubs that really just helped us—okay, we're here for a reason, you know. Like we're not here on accident. And we kind of just supported each other, and I don't think anyone ended up transferring. So we're all, at least my immediate friends and stuff, we're all still here so. The first year was definitely, definitely rocky.



Blanket was able to overcome her rocky first year by creating relationships with BSA and ASU.

Merci, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in International Studies and Political Science, talked about the toll that managing the complex racial system at CapU, cultivating and maintaining agency, and surviving had on them as AABW. Below, she described staying at CapU, “at What Cost?”

Interviewer: How does that impact you wanting to stay or staying?

Merci: I don't know. It just, it's very hard and I'm constantly asking myself like, “Are you compromising your own moral beliefs to be at this school?” because, at the end of the day, it's good. Like the degree I get is going to matter, and it's going to get me places. Like saying I went to CapU has a lot of merit. But I'm like, “At what cost?” Like y'all don't know the insides of this. People just see CapU, private school and extent of a great, great programs but they won't see the little things under it that people are like hurt by. So yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. What is the cost to you?

Merci: Ugh, I don't know

The participants described experiences that shaped their pride in the SOC community, shaped how they saw themselves as Black women, and shaped how they saw the administration. Through all of this, they survived and continued to stay enrolled at CapU. They were there for each other.

### **Summary and Takeaways From Profiles**

I asked the AABW undergraduate student participants how they defined success as a student. Many named getting good grades and finding a job. Some perceived gaining

skills and learning as success. There were answers about internal intrinsic success, like intention and accomplishing something; having an impact; being challenged socially, academically, and personally. Lastly, one woman responded, “Being proud”; another woman said, “Happiness and passion are success.”

All of the AABW participants have been introduced and a portion of their interview responses from the first or last question have been shared, as well as a summary of how they defined success as a student. In summary, the three themes that were highlighted here were (a) the complexity of race and gender, (b) agency, and (c) surviving because of themselves. The AABW undergraduate student participants navigated race and gender on campus and came to have a better understanding of their blackness. They exercised their agency and found their voice. They shared many stories of surviving CapU despite the lack of support and because of not allowing the administration to exploit them and not allowing white peers’ negative perception of Black women to become their self-perception. The quote from Michelle Obama is meant for these women—for them to know that they were important because of their story. The challenges they experienced at CapU, the complexity of race and gender, and surviving because of themselves, made them unique, smarter, and better because they overcame such obstacles. The fact that they came to CapU with agency or learned it there made them special.

These participant profiles show how institutional policy levers do and do not impact AABW undergraduate students at CapU, a PWI. The cost of attending college for these women was great, mentally and emotionally. All of the student participants shared that, at one time, during their time at CapU, they considered transferring. CapU’s

predominantly white environment can be hard and harsh for AABW undergraduate students. Offices, such as Academic Affairs, New Student Orientation (NSO), Residence Life, and Student Activities, are supposed to be places of support. The findings from this study showed that for AABW undergraduate students, this was not always the case.

It is important to me that these women's stories be told in an effort to make changes in our field. I believe hearing their story is one way student affairs professionals will do better by AABW undergraduate students. I explained why I named this dissertation, "College, at What Cost?" The women were resilient, strong, and smart. They were succeeding at CapU, despite the environment, without support, and because they had decided they would. They suffered microaggressions, exploitation, isolation, and invisibility, and kept moving on, because they were committed to getting their degree. Their definition of success did not include giving up or making excuses. Instead, it meant being intentional, getting a degree, and making an impact. These profiles illustrated how these women had agency, were being retained because of themselves, and had to navigate the complexities of race. Chapter 5 will explain the findings: how the policy levers did or did not impact retention of the participants, and their experience at CapU.

## Chapter Five. Findings

In this chapter, I share findings from the individual interviews, focus group interviews and documents to answer the main research question, How do institutional policy levers influence retention of undergraduate AABW at a PWI? And the two sub-research questions, How do AABW undergraduate students at PWIs experience institutional policy levers? and how do AABW undergraduate students' perception of institutional policy levers influence their persistence? Analysis from the data collected revealed there were two major concept areas,

1. How the policy lever areas did or did not impact retention of the participants
2. AABW undergraduate student experience at CapU.

During the individual interviews, I asked each student participant questions about their experiences with the five key institutional policy lever areas, academic advising, administrative policies and procedures, student orientation programs, residential life, and student affairs programming. Below I review the overall policy lever areas and the themes found within the data. In this chapter, I present the student participants and administrator participants' perceptions of how the following institutional policy levers do or do not have a positive impact on AABW undergraduate student retention.

### **Institutional Policy Levers**

Institutional policy levers were developed out of a comprehensive analysis of retention literature and best practices, coupled with policy development (Ziskin et al.,

2009). The 20 recommended institutional practices to increase social integration and retention were grouped into eight functional areas of the institution by Braxton and McClendon (2001) (shown in Table 2-2). For this research, only five were examined: academic advising, administrative policies and procedures, student orientation programs, residential life and student affairs programming (see Table 5-1, adapted from Table 2-2).

In addition to the institutional policy levers, culturally engaging campus environment (CECE) indicators were used to analyze the data collected in this study. The CECE model is a framework of college success for diverse students. Its nine indicators include (a) cultural familiarity, (b) culturally relevant knowledge, (c) cultural community service, (d) opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement, (e) collectivist cultural orientations, (f) culturally validating environments, (g) humanized educational environments, (h) proactive philosophies, and (i) availability of holistic support (Museus, 2014b). The CECE analysis was interspersed throughout the findings. Evidence of all nine indicators were found. Evidence showing the opposite to be true for each of these was demonstrated as well.

In this next section, I explain the data findings for the research questions. Using data that relied heavily on the interviews with the AABW undergraduate students, I answer my main research questions: How do institutional policy levers influence retention of undergraduate AABW at a PWI? And the two sub-research questions, How do AABW undergraduate students at PWIs experience institutional policy levers? And how do AABW undergraduate students' perception of institutional policy levers influence their persistence? Below I outline study findings that address the two major

concept areas of (a) how the policy lever areas did or did not impact retention of the participants, and (b) AABW undergraduate student experience at CapU.

### **Institutional Policy Levers' Impact on of AABW Undergraduate**

#### **Students' Retention at a PWI**

The first major concept area from the data analysis is how policy lever areas are impacting retention of AABW undergraduate students. The following areas had a positive impact on retention of AABW undergraduate students at this PWI: student affairs programming, specifically student clubs and organizations; student orientation programs, specifically NSO Involvement Fair; and residential life, specifically living on campus. The policy levers academic advising, administrative policies and procedures, and student orientation programs (the entire NSO program) did not have an influence on retention of undergraduate AABW at this PWI. With respect to the offices representing all five policy lever areas (Academic Advising, SEIE, NSO, Residence Life and Student Activities), none were found to have an influence on retention of undergraduate AABW at this PWI. The participants did not see themselves in any of the offices therefore did not find themselves seeking these offices out for support. Below I explain the data for each of these policy lever areas, beginning with student affairs programming – in particular, student clubs, which was found to have an influence on retention of AABW undergraduate students at CapU.

#### **Student Affairs Programming - African Students Union and Black Student Association**

Student affairs programming policy lever includes student clubs. Many of the participants spoke of the need for an African Student Union (ASU) and Black Student

Association (BSA). They expressed that being part of a student organization helped them feel a part of a community, which was helping them stay. They all saw BSA and ASU student organizations as significantly impacting their experience and impacting their staying. BSA and ASU are associated with the office of Student Activities, because all student organizations are housed under Student Activities. BSA/ASU are also supported by the Culture Center. All the AABW found connection, community, and friendship through these organizations. They all talked about being in a leadership role in one or both organizations.

**Mary**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in International Business and Marketing, described how attending ASU and BSA makes her feel:

I feel super comfortable being a Black woman. I feel appreciated there. ASU meetings, at BSA meetings. I feel like it's been a really good part. Like a lot of my favorite experiences are there, like the events like ASU has done, or BSA or all of those groups... I think it's like definitely been a good impact. Then just for people, I think just the people who are in those organizations . . .

Most participants were involved in BSA, starting their freshman year, and many became part of the executive board of both ASU and BSA. Most talked about becoming familiar with BSA at the NSO Involvement Fair. They also met their friends at BSA and ASU. Additionally, after they joined BSA and ASU, they began to enjoy CapU and felt like they were making friends.

**Tamara**, who majored in Marketing, described her experience at my a PWI and in BSA:

I remember my experience at my PWI, and BSA helped me stay. It was at BSA that I met my friends and became a part of a community helped me stay. I joined BSA my freshmen year and became part of the executive board my sophomore year. They were my community and my safe place on campus. I did not feel encouraged by staff or faculty to find BSA nor was I led by anyone to these organizations.

A few of the student participants were part of the founding members of ASU and talked about the impact starting this particular club had on them and the community. The women with whom they started the club have continued to be part of their support community and friends. Several participants shared how they and their friends worked together to create a new student organization that would honor their African heritage and community. Participants had a positive experience with the office of Student Activities around starting a new club.

**Karima**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Business Management and Finance, described how she felt about forming ASU:

For sure, first starting my own club with my friends, I felt like that definitely showed us like, "Hey, we can make a change together. We can bring other people along for the journey and see other students who come in and join our club and grow."

Creating and participating in that community space became crucial for Black students.

**Amira**, Assistant Director Culture Center, addressed the need for Black students to find BSA at CapU, illustrating below the importance of having space.



I had a Black male student, who was a transfer student, email me and say, "I'm not free on Thursday nights." That's when BSA meets. You might as well transfer. If you're a Black student on this campus and you're not free on Thursday nights, there's virtually no community for you outside of those affinity spaces.

The CECE indicator, cultural familiarity, helps explain why student participation in BSA and ASU had the strongest impact on participants. Over and over, participants related how being a part of ASU and BSA made them feel more comfortable on campus, helped them create a community, and is where they found their support network. BSA/ASU created that space for students to be able to see and engage with other students who looked like them and who shared a similar culture. Students felt more comfortable at CapU because they were able to have this cultural familiarity with other students in BSA/ASU. This was why students saw a need to create an ASU. African students were not finding a space on campus for themselves. Though they felt welcome at BSA, they did not feel like the space were all theirs and wanted to create a space that was exclusively African. The familiarity the students found in coming together as an African community helped them all stay at CapU.

### **Student Orientation Programs – NSO Involvement Fair**

Participants found student involvement with clubs and organizations significantly impacted their staying at CapU. All of the student participants talked about participating in the NSO Involvement Fair. Many of them talked about how being exposed to BSA and ASU at the fair helped them socially integrate; for some, such involvement was a survival mechanism. The NSO Involvement Fair was how many student participants were initially exposed to BSA/ASU. This was the connection point for many of them, which aligns

with Museus (2014b), it is important to find as many opportunities to connect with SOC as possible.

**Aisha**, a 20-year-old junior majoring in Psychology, described her experience at the NSO Involvement Fair:

I think that has helped me get socially integrated because I was able to like see what they offer and see what my interests might align with. And even like just like finding out for something that I'm not sure that I would like it or not, like signing up for that and receiving emails. I'm like, "Okay, yeah, like maybe I can get out there and make new friends and be involved on CapU's campus outside of classes.

The NSO Involvement Fair seemed to have had a significant impact on several students, as shown below.

**Merci**, a 20-year-old junior majoring in International Studies and Political Science, described her experience with the NSO Involvement Fair:

I guess one good thing that comes out of orientation week is the Involvement Fair because all the groups are there and you could see which one you are interested in and then be able to go to them. That's how I first got exposed to ASU and BSA which clearly impacted the rest of my college experience so far. That's what I would say. I think for orientation week, just having that Involvement Fair was good.

From a department perspective, the fair was an opportunity to provide information and resources to new students. Amira, Assistant Director of the Culture Center, remarked in

her interview that the fair was one of the ways students found out about the Center as a resource.

### **Residential Life – Living on Campus**

In general participants' experience with parts of residential life did help them stay. Student participants enjoyed living on campus and being near campus activities but did not necessarily attribute Residence Life, the department, to positively impacting their retention. Residence Life, the department, in some ways made the participants feel unwelcome and isolated, yet the participants found living on campus to be helpful and positive.

Student participants found the socials provided by the residence halls helpful in some ways, however many of them did not attend them. Three of the participants went on to be resident assistants (RAs) and really enjoyed the role. In general, policies encouraging first-year students to live on campus and participate in academic and social programs in residence halls foster social integration (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). All student participants felt living on campus helped them stay at CapU. However, this sentiment did not apply to residence life as a department of the institution. They saw the residential life as simply representing a place to stay.

A few of the student participants saw their RA working to get the floor to bond with each other and make sure they had a good relationship with the RA. Many of the participants' RAs tried to get them to attend various socials that were not heavily attended. Because many of the participants had attended pre-orientation programs, they did not always feel like they needed the social support of RAs and Residence Life.

Participants wanted RAs to create a personal connection with them and wanted programs that reflected them and their peers. Participants wanted to see staff that looked like them.

**Mary**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in International Business and Marketing, described her experience with residential life:

Yeah, like residence life, it's helped me stay. I think being on campus makes you feel more connected. I definitely say staying on campus in general has helped me.

I've had good living situations all years.

Participants believed staying on campus helped them and pushed them to be more involved on campus. Living on campus forced them to go to the dining hall, different activities in their residence hall, and events near their residence hall. These things allowed them to engage in different parts of CapU. The residence hall staff promoted programs in the building, and there were often flyers for things happening around campus, but participants felt these events were not for them. For although student participants enjoyed the opportunity to interact, they often felt isolated and lonely at these events as the only AABW.

**Aisha**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Psychology, described the benefits she received from living on campus:

I think it has forced me to go to the dining hall, go to different activities on campus that they're having near my dorm, in my residency. I think that has allowed me to engage and be a part of the CapU community. I think if I lived off-campus then my experience here would be a little worse 'cause I would just be going from home to school, home to school.

Overall, participants felt living on campus in the residence halls helped them stay, and most had a good experience. They felt living on campus made them feel more connected. Events on campus are advertised in the residence hall, and the student participants were more likely to attend when they lived on campus. They saw posters for things happening on campus, and they would go with friends. However, the CECE indicator, cultural familiarity, was missing in residence halls for the participants. The programming was not for them; it did not help them build culturally relevant knowledge. They were often the only SOC on their floor and most certainly, the only AABW. They did not attend programs because they did not want to be the only. Leadership in Residence Life was aware of lack of cultural representation in the residence halls. When interviewed for the study, Aimee, Director of Residence Life, talked about planning to address the buildings' physical environment. As the campus continued to expand and build additional residence halls, Aimee indicated she would take into consideration how the physical space impacts different cultures and races and their retention.

**Aimee**, Director of Residence Life, described her plans for the new residence hall: What I'm really starting to think more about, is our physical environment and how that helps retention in African American/Black women in particular. When it comes to the first year residence halls are all community restrooms, and in the residence halls that we have now, you go into the shower and you get out of the shower, there is no place for you like an in between where you can put your hair up, you can put a cap on, you can fix your hair before you come out of the shower, bring a shampoo with you, "why aren't you bringing your shampoo with you?" The environment is built to be incredibly transparent. This new residence

hall we're doing all gender bathrooms, but it's also a way to help our students of color, in particular our African-American women, feel much more different about going into the bathrooms, to having this community experience in the shower because there is a place for that to go, do whatever you need to do before you get into the shower, and then go into the shower. My physical environments are what I really had been spending the most amount of my time, and money, and resources, on making these, so that it is the most comfortable across the board.

Aimee went on to explain how Residence Life is aware that cultural norms that show up in residence halls can be hard for SOC to manage. Residence Life is thinking about how they can create culturally validating environments for SOC, in particular AABW. Aimee acknowledged that to have an impact on SOC, Residence Life needs to staff enough staff of color for SOC to feel they can find someone they connect with and so the staff can surround SOC and validate the culture they bring and the identities they hold.

Aimee explained that Residence Life recruited a large number of AABW to be RAs and/or work the front desks in the residence halls, so they had a large number of AABW who are involved on campus. Audrey, Executive Leadership, student engagement and inclusive excellence (SEIE), confirmed this in her interview, explaining, “[An] overwhelming number of our RAs over represent our student population in terms of diversity. The low-income students, the students of color, are well represented in the RA body.” Many of the administrators recognized that AABW made up a large number of the RA population. Only Janshi, Resident Director of Residence Life, recognized the potential toll on these women. Janshi, an administrator participant in the study, said there were microaggressions and racist acts that these women were facing that could have been

avoided if the other staff members had been properly trained. Janshi was encouraged that the Resident Assistant Training was being revised to include more work around inclusive excellence (IE) for staff.

Overall, student participants found living on campus was helpful. Residence Life seems to be working to make the residence halls a humanized educational environment (CECE) for students. During the staff interview, Aimee mentioned several times that the Residence Life staff was very diverse so that students had more people to relate to and make connections with. They were intentional about their higher for this reason. Moreover, based on how they are building their new residence halls, they were also intentional about the actual space they were creating for students.

#### **Academic Advising – A Transactional Experience**

Overall, participants did not find academic advising impactful in helping them stay at CapU. They found academic advising to be a very white space and unwelcoming. The participants were asked an overview question about their experience with advising. Their responses focused on the transactional nature of the advising experience, such as looking at classes and program requests rather than relationship building.

According to Braxton and McClendon (2001), “Academic advisors should encourage their advisees to consider the teaching practices of faculty members in the selection of courses” (p. 58). CapU academic advising does not encourage advisors to consider the teaching practices of faculty members in the selection of courses. Participants did not experience advising of this kind. Some participants expressed that they would like advisors to help them select courses, and some did not feel this was the

role of the advisor. A few wanted more from the advisor/advisee relationship. In general, student participants did not have a firm understanding of an advisor's role.

**Mary**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in International Business, described her experience with her faculty advisor:

From what I know, it's just more like, they just tell you what classes to take versus like professors. They don't really say like, "Oh, you should take this professor because they're funny or they're a person of color. They're different from this background." They're more just like, "Oh, you need this class to graduate. You need these electives, just take this.

When administrator participants from the office of Academic Advising were asked how they advised students to select certain faculty based on their teaching practices, they remarked that philosophically, they thought this was a good idea, but it was not a common practice amongst advisors. Thus, academic advisors at CapU did not suggest specific faculty based on their teaching practices. They rarely suggested specific faculty at all.

Staff explained what advisors do and the difference between a faculty advisor and a professional advisor. Faculty advisors mentor students through the curriculum, course selection, their academic experience in their selected field and they refer students to appropriate campus resources to meet their academic goals. On the other hand, professional advisors work with students on degree planning outside of the major, the understanding of academic policies and processes, academic development, empowerment and support, and strength-based skill-building (e.g., understanding who they are as



learners, strengths finder, time management, organizational skills, and navigating their academic experience).

**Merci**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in International Studies and Political Science, described her impersonal interactions with academic advising:

The person I went to, he was person of color. Even then, he was talking really fast and just straight to the point. I think I was expecting more of personal questions. "Why do you wanna do these things?" Then that could help him understand what my heart is at and how to better support me. There wasn't a lot of personal questions which I think is really important when it comes to finding those things but I guess he didn't think that. There were just a lot of academic-based questions . . . "We see the same paper. I can clearly make the decisions that you're telling me to make." I just needed a little something more.

Merci expressed several times her experiences with academic advising left her wanting more. Other participants had different experiences with academic advising, from not knowing they had an advisor to not finding the experience very helpful. Many of the participants did not understand what the purpose of an advisor was and how to fully utilize them. They articulated that they did not have a good advisor. The disconnect between the actual purpose of academic advising and how it was being carried out was evident in every AABW undergraduate student interview. Participants wanted a relationship with someone rather than going over a checklist.

Student participants were not clear about the role of the professional advisor and the faculty advisor and the difference between the two. This lack of understanding caused some of the participants not to go to an advisor for help. A theme present throughout the

data analysis was that, for many of the policy levers, there is this disconnect between what the institution intended for students to gain from a department and what AABW were actually gaining from that area.

**Florence**, Director of Academic Advising, described the Academic Advising office:

Centralized advising, and that is my department. And so, we provide transactional academic advising. So common curriculum advising the general education requirements that all students must take. We work with those undeclared students who may not have declared a major yet so they wouldn't have a major advisor. And then the first-year students, they have their first-year seminar instructor who is supposed to be also their academic advisor. So, our office mainly sees students that are undeclared, second-year students, students that are on probation, so they have below the required 2.0 GPA, and then students that are just overall lost.

Many of the participants also described their experiences with academic advising as transactional. Executive leadership also described academic advising as transactional.

**Audrey**, Executive Leadership, Student Engagement and Inclusive Excellence, described Academic Advising:

Academic advising is very neutral in the sense that I don't know that they're necessarily seen as-- I mean, they're seen as the place where you go if you have a hold or if you can't navigate something on your gen eds. It's not actually seen as a place of mentorship. I think it's far more transactional than we ever wanted it to be. You go there when there's a problem. You go there when you can't get into a class. You go there when you're a little confused, but you don't go there if

everything's right and you just want to actually pontificate on what you should major in. You just don't use it that way.

Overall, student participants did not experience their advisor as encouraging them to select certain faculty based on teaching methods. Student participants did not fully understand advisors' roles but would like more guidance in course selection.

Administrator participants saw advising serving a different purpose from what students actually experienced. Lastly, some student participants wanted their advisors to get to know them better. Another aspect of cultural familiarity is students having an opportunity to connect with people they feel understand them, their background and their identities (Museus et al., 2017).

### **Summary – How Institutional Policy Levers Impact Retention of AABW**

Participation in BSA/ASU provided a sense of community and gave participants familiarity, thereby aligning with the CECE indicator, cultural familiarity, which addresses SOC's need to feel secure on campus. Participants' experience with the NSO Involvement Fair also supports the importance of cultural familiarity. The Involvement Fair was described by participants as their going into a large space, full of white people they did not know, and when they came across a table of people who looked like them, they were happy to see each. The participants described this as validating and familiar.

In conclusion, the student participants did not find all of the institutional policy lever areas impactful to their retention except student affairs programming, in particular participation in affinity based student organizations, Black Student Association (BSA) and African Student Union (ASU). The student participants in this study articulated that they did not create a relationship with any of the offices representing the policy lever

areas examined in this study because they did not see anyone in those offices who was an AAB woman. The data also showed overwhelmingly that engagement in co-curricular activities focused on AABW/SOC has a strong impact on AABW persistence. Because the NSO Involvement Fair exposed the women to BSA and ASU, it was impactful and was mentioned several times by them in their interviews. Additionally, living on campus provided access to social opportunities and social engagement, which also had a positive impact. The next section outlines how the AABW undergraduate students experienced the institutional policy levers at CapU.

### **AABW Students' Experience of Institutional Policy Levers at PWIs – CapU Is Hard**

AABW students experienced institutional policy levers at this PWI as white, unwelcome, segregated, exploitive, not inclusive, and harmful. As shown above, they did not have positive experiences in most of the institutional policy lever areas, nor in any of the offices that represented these areas. Overwhelmingly they indicated they felt alone in most spaces at CapU. All the women in some way or another expressed having to put on armor when they went out into the community.

#### **Student Orientation Programs**

In this section on student orientation programs within the office of New Student Orientation (NSO), I discuss findings on how AABW experienced NSO. More specifically, I address social opportunities provided during NSO, opportunity for SOC to interact, social integration lack of diversity.

Braxton and McClendon (2001) pointed out that student orientation programs should give new students many opportunities to interact with each other. However, at

CapU, student participants did not find NSO impactful in helping them stay. They found the experience to be white, segregated and not inclusive. Participants wanted NSO to create opportunity for them to interact with their peers and with AA and AABW. They wanted an opportunity to connect and find their sense of belonging. The opportunity to create personal connections with each other was missing. It was clear to them NSO had not been intentionally created with them in mind. The Involvement Fair was effective, and dinner with the faculty for the College Success Course was effective.

**Blanket**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Biology, described her experience with NSO and College Success Course:

I feel like NSO, I think it just reminded me like how white everything was. . . most people are white. I was the only Black person in the group. . . a sea of white everywhere. . . And I feel like for them, it's like easier to like connect and you know like they're like afterwards, like I'm sure like people in my College Success Course like they became friends, you know? They will hang out." It's not that like I don't wanna hang out with them but I just feel like there's something that like we just don't really like relate on. And like there's something that they talk about, they're not really like funny to me. Like I don't really like want to like hang out with them, you know?

Student participants did not remember the NSO program, the experience or what happened during NSO week. They found the relationship building with faculty members during the College Success Course a positive experience. One of the participants, Aisha, found NSO to be pointless. She did not remember what happened during NSO except for College Success Course, which she appreciated.

**Aisha**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Psychology, described her experience with NSO:

I think that NSO was important because I was able to find my advisor and my College Success Course teacher was my advisor for like, the whole year in my first year and I was able to kind of like, build a good connection with him and kind of see what CapU was about and he helped me, he was always checking on different aspects of my life while I was here. I think that kind of like gave me a good impression of CapU, like about the professor, overall the professors really care about their students and I like that. And they care about their success and they're here to help them and give them advice from their own walk of life and I really like that. I think that helped me with that aspect but I feel like NSO was kind of pointless for me. I don't even remember what I did during NSO.

NSO was a place where student participants consistently described experiencing the opposite of CECE indicators. Participants explained a lack of cultural familiarity in staff, programming and opportunities to engage. SOC had one intentional opportunity to come together as a community during NSO, the Multicultural Student Reception. Overall, students should feel like the program was created for them and their particular needs, but clearly this was not the case with most of the student orientation programming.

### **Student Orientation Programs – NSO Socially interacting with Peers**

Braxton and McClendon (2001) advised, “Orientation programs should develop multiple opportunities for first-year students to socially interact with their peers” (p. 65).

CapU provided some opportunities for AABW to socially interact with their peers.

Participants were given opportunities to interact with their white peers, not their peers of

color or specifically AA peers. Student participants had mixed reactions to the impact of NSO's efforts to help them socially interact with their peers. Their responses point to the lack of intentional cross-cultural engagement (a CECE indicator). Participants wanted NSO to provide opportunities to engage with other cultures in a productive, educational way. Whether it was with peers from other cultures to learn how to interact with other cultures or AABW peers to begin to develop a community (Museus, 2014b) participants wanted this during NSO.

**Aisha**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Psychology, described interacting with peers during NSO and College Success Course:

It didn't really encourage me at all. It made me feel awkward because, once again, like it was me being the only Black female in those classes [College Success Course] surrounded by a bunch of white students who-- yeah-- who I just didn't really have a lot in common with.

NSO had social events to meet new people. The fact that NSO was mostly white felt isolating for participants. Many did not feel prepared for the all-white environment of CapU. Aisha, described interacting with peers during NSO and College Success Course:

But it didn't really prepare me to get out of my comfort zone and to overcome the aspect of my life with socializing with people who are different races and come from different backgrounds because-- or who come from or who are the majority. Because I'm used to socializing with people who are from different backgrounds. But I'm not used to socializing with, I guess, white people and people who were the majority in this country and then even in my school. So yeah, I just don't think that it prepared me at all. I think it made me kind of standoffish if anything.

Students wanted to learn more about each other and different cultures, just as the CECE indicator, cross cultural engagement, explains. Student participants felt NSO should be an opportunity for students from different cultures to engage intentionally. Tia, a student participant, remembered during her NSO, the BSA President and Vice President coming to the NSO movie night and walking around to meet the new Black students. They were trying to find the new Black students, introduce themselves and invite the students to the BSA meeting. Tia said she thought they were nice so she decided she would go. This opportunity to socially interact happened during NSO but was not provided by NSO.

**Tia**, a 21-year-old, senior, majoring in International Studies and Finance, described a positive interaction with BSA leadership during her NSO:

The BSA President and Vice President were there at the movie night, and then they were just walking around I guess scouting (laughing). Trying to find all the Black kids, telling them to come to BSA, but it worked as I went. They were really nice too and they had a nice vibe about them, so I was like, “Yeah, I’ll go.”

Participants experienced NSO differently than how college administration wanted students to engage with NSO. Students did not leave NSO feeling connected, they did not have a sense of belonging. Participants found it hard to interact during NSO because the other students in their groups did not look like them. The responsibility to make connections with other SOC and/or AA/B students was left to the students themselves. The students described their experience with NSO as lacking culturally relevant knowledge (a CECE indicator). The program itself did not engage students in conversations or workshops around race or culture, and the participants felt it did not encourage the white students to learn about them and their culture. They wanted to see



and engage with people who looked like them at NSO, wanted an earlier opportunity to create some cultural familiarity (a CECE indicator).

As stated previously, students wanted more opportunity to engage with other students with different cultural backgrounds. The participants also expressed a desire for cross-cultural engagement during NSO and College Success Course. NSO's Multicultural Reception was potentially one such opportunity, as described below.

During NSO, students are given one formal opportunity to interact with other SOC, the Multicultural Reception. Yet, another aspect of NSO that does not meet AABW needs was the Multicultural Reception. Participants did not significantly mention this activity during their interviews; it came up in most administrator interviews as a prominent event intentionally planned for SOC at CapU. This is another example of a disconnect between staff and students.

### **Student Orientation Programs – NSO Multicultural Reception**

During NSO, the Center co-hosts a Multicultural Reception in collaboration with NSO for SOC. This reception has looked different over the last several years. During 2017, smaller identity-based receptions were held. There were receptions for Black students, Latinx students, Asian students and Native students, with the Latinx reception being the largest and the Asian reception being the smallest. The receptions were fairly successful. Amira, Assistant Director of the Culture Center described in her interview the changes that occurred over the years. In 2018, the Culture Center shifted their timing so students with multiple identities could attend multiple receptions, thus being even more intentional. This year, the Center went back to the original all-students-of-color reception. They had a large turnout. At the reception, the Center leadership introduced themselves,

student leaders introduced themselves, parents were invited, and it was an opportunity for students to connect with each other. Administrator participants spoke highly of this event and gave it as an example of something the college is doing to support AABW. The student participants did not list it as something impactful that happened to them during NSO. Perhaps the disconnect goes back to the intentionality of the creation of the NSO for them. The program was not intentionally created for AABW, so it did not stand out to them as particularly impactful in helping with retention of AABW.

**Audrey**, Executive Leadership of SEIE, spoke in her interview about understanding that students want administration to take the lead in diversity, equity conversations, especially during NSO. She acknowledged that during NSO, students' first week on campus is not the right time for students who are not used to engaging in this topic to begin this conversation. She explained that engaging new students in the IE conversation when they first get to CapU could turn them off the conversation completely. She believed a better strategy is to ease them into the conversation as they learn how to be engaged students at CapU. She was conscious of the intention needed to make this change a lasting effect. She described what AABW undergraduate students want from administration around NSO:

We let them down every year. They want us to go to level three as students of color and to really make the predominantly white campus uncomfortable. I tend to try to talk them out of it and say, "If we go to level three too soon we're actually going to make it worse for you on the ground as people reject this journey and you have to be able to take people where they're at and walk them through it. If I threatened their ego too fast, if I put white supremacy in front of them too

quickly, they're going to reject diversity and inclusion.” We never agree on that. They very much would like us to go heavy and to put all that in front of them at once. Welcome week just isn't the time to do it. I actually think I could do more damage than good.

Audrey acknowledged the largescale work that needed to be done across the campus regarding IE conversations. She also spoke about working to create this type of environment with the Culture Center and affinity groups. Below, she described three levels of development around IE:

[There are] three conceptual buckets ... one the intra-group needs. How do you get the intra-group together?... We need a lot more intra-group programming, all of us. Whatever the constituencies alumni to faculty, let's all come together and bring the Black community together once a term, the Latino community once a term, that kind of thing... We want to empower affinity group leaders to understand the role of an affinity group, the history, and to not lose sight of that. Then we want affinity allyship building. Can they actually get intrasectional once they've done their own intra-group work ... and start to develop a more intrasectional and allyship based approach. That's level three, so we hope we might get them there. If we don't get them and that's okay, as long as we do the other two things, really, really well.

Audrey felt she was helping affinity groups do this work through the Culture Center. As was the case many times with administration and students, students were not aware that this strategy was happening behind the scenes from administration. Student participants did not see administration's vision in this area and other areas of the college.

As was mentioned earlier, students in the study did not mention this reception as having a significant impact on their experience. This program was created for SOC, not specifically for AABW as part of NSO. As was stated in relation to NSO, if the Multicultural Reception were intentionally created and planned for the specific needs of AABW, the participants would find it useful and impactful. It could serve as one way to encourage social integration of AABW. The Multicultural Reception was one way NSO was providing an opportunity to promote cultural familiarity (CECE indicator) for SOC. Jennifer, Assistant Director of NSO, explained in her interview, they provided the reception at the beginning of NSO so SOC could meet each other early in the experience in hopes that they could find other ways to connect with each other later in the week on their own. This does support creating a sense of belonging for SOC and fostering social integration.

### **Student Orientation Programs– NSO Social Integration**

In the words of Braxton and McClendon (2001), “Participating in orientation sessions directly fosters social integration and a positive indirect effect on persistence (Passarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986)” (p. 65). As the second question around NSO, I asked student participants how NSO helped them get socially integrated into the CapU community. They responded that they did not view participating in NSO as fostering social integration or having a positive effect on their persistence. As mentioned earlier, several participants did not remember their NSO experience. Many saw the experience as negative and something they had to “get through,” some participants found the College Success Course helpful, none identified NSO as helping them stay.

**Jane**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Computer Science, said she did not think NSO helped with social integration. She took it upon herself to find her community. She sought out BSA and ASU. She also looked for other affinity groups, like Latinx Student Association (LSA) and Native Student Association (NSA) to help her create her community. Below she described how she found her community:

I don't think orientation helped out with that at all really. I think I just kind of took it upon myself mostly and just was like, after this orientation group, now I need to find all of the affinity groups which are like BSA, LSA, NSA and all those. I was like, I need to find those people because they'll relate to me more than my orientation group will and they'll understand me. I'll be able to make more friends off of them than starting from here, I think.

As mentioned earlier, Tia met the President and Vice President of BSA at NSO. During movie night of NSO, they were out scouting for members and suggesting people attend a meeting. She remembered them being nice and thinking she would enjoy going to a meeting with them. Tia also saw that BSA and ASU had connections with Black professors on campus, African professors and community members. Meeting executive board members during NSO helped break up the white space for Tia. Many participants expressed the all-white space of NSO was problematic.

### **Student Orientation Programs– NSO White Space**

The overwhelming theme from the data about NSO from student participants was that NSO was very white. Most of the participants felt the difference in race impacted how they made friends with people. Several participants did not like NSO and went so far as to say it did not have any impact on them staying at CapU. They felt it was geared

towards majority white students and was not inclusive. The events NSO planned, such as the bands, were catered to majority students. Due to the structure of NSO, they found it hard to find time to engage with others outside of their College Success Course. When they did not connect with their College Success Course community, they found it difficult. Many of the student participants spoke of watching the students in the College Success Course becoming close and developing friendship groups, but they themselves were not having access to those same relationships.

**Mary**, a 21-year-old, majoring in International Business and Marketing, described her perception of NSO and College Success Course being white:

I mean, they do have events for you to meet people and talk with people outside of your College Success Course but it wasn't anything. It's geared towards the majority of the population here. To the follow up about me being impacted. I would say it wasn't as inclusive. The events that they had or the things they did. Even this year, like they had a band, but the band was a sound that only certain people have listened to... Mainly white students is what I've heard. A lot of students of color didn't really say. A lot of the students of color who were friends with people in their College Success Course, they knew them beforehand. But a lot of the people who made friends while in their College Success Course were white students, I would say.

The student participants felt the SOC tended to be left out of those groups and extended friendships. Participants felt NSO needed to have more peer leaders; faculty mentors and staff of color specifically, AABW.

Utilizing CECE practices can also help minimize the potential negative impacts of being a person of color in an all-white environment. As stated earlier, NSO provided examples of how CECE indicators were not happening, and the result was a negative experience for AABW. NSO was not providing a culturally validating environment for SOC. Cultural familiarity was missing because there were no staff of color to surround the students and validate their experience and identities, only one peer leader of color, and few faculty of color participating in the College Success Course. As stated earlier, the only intentional opportunity created by NSO for SOC to interact and engage is the Multicultural Reception. If SOC wanted to connect with SOC organizations outside of the Involvement Fair, it was left to them to make that connection. Cross-cultural engagement was missing because there were no intentional conversations about how different cultures can engage and learn from/about each other during NSO. Participants appreciated the opportunity to interact socially during NSO. Nevertheless, they wanted more opportunities to connect with other SOC and time to specifically interact with AABW. Similarly, they expressed the same need for socially interacting in the residence halls.

### **Residential Life – Residents Interact Socially**

Similar to NSO, residence life provided opportunities for residents to interact. RAs provided programming for floors and building residents to interact. Student participants perceived these opportunities to be for majority white residents not SOC. Yet, Braxton and McClendon (2001) stipulated, “Residence halls should provide opportunities for residents to interact socially” (p. 66). Participants did feel the residence hall provided them with opportunities to interact socially with each other. Their RAs and

the residence hall they lived in provided programs and events for them to get to know other people on their floor and in their hall. However, many of the participants explained they did not participate because they felt isolated being the only Black person on their floor and often the only Black person at the social events. The participants' reaction to such opportunity aligns with the CECE indicator, cultural familiarity: Students wanted to see people who looked like them on their floor and in their environment. They wanted to interact with people who looked like them and were familiar to them and their culture, especial where they lived.

Many participants recalled their RA having gatherings and there being low turnout. Most talked about appreciating the opportunity to attend, but not attending, as mentioned earlier, because they did not want to be the only Black person at the event. Thus, although residence life provided opportunities to socialize, participants did not take advantage of them. Often these women felt isolated in spaces as the only AABW at events.

**Blanket**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Biology, did recall her RA throwing socials, and she felt it helped her get to know people better on her floor; however she would not go to those socials without her roommate, stating, "Like, I'm already by myself. I can be by myself in my room. I don't have to be by myself with other people." Many of the participants described going to events in the residence halls and no one talking to them. These examples illustrate how the women often felt isolated, targeted or like "the only" in spaces.

As stated previously, in analyzing the data through a CECE lens, there were several examples of when CapU was not demonstrating the indicators. Student



participants did not find the programs offered culturally relevant knowledge, a CECE indicator. When I asked staff in Residence Life if programming was done specifically for AABW, they commented that they once saw a bulletin board done on influential AABW, but they have never seen a whole program focused on AABW that was put on by Residence Life staff. This is one of those occurrences. Moreover, the environment created by some of the residence hall spaces conveyed the opposite of cultural familiarity, another CECE indicator, it was culturally isolating for the participants. They were often the only SOC on the floor and did not feel included in programming or social situations. Participants had to take their own initiative to make friends. It did not happen in NSO and did not happen in residence life. If they did not make their own connections, they would not have been able to feel at home in the residence hall. If they did not make their own connections, they would not have been able to feel at home in the residence hall.

**Karima**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Business Management and Finance, did feel like her RA's social programs helped to bond the floor, unlike the other participants. Her RA, her first year, was Latina and she did dance competitions and painting pumpkins. Karima described her programs as really, fun and they brought people together. Below, she described her RA her first year:

The RA's are required to put on a social event, 5 per term, something like that. I remember my first year, being a resident, my RA was, she's Latina and she'd do like a dance competition and all that stuff. It was really, really fun and we like paint pumpkins and stuff. I feel like it bonded people, busy with their own thing by coming together, everyone's just joking over certain things.

Karima was the only participant who discussed having an RA who was a staff of color. This may have impacted her experience. Having someone of color on the floor with her, who was trying to build community may have created the sense of familiarity that the other participants discussed was missing from their residential life experience. Of the participants that became RAs, many mentioned the impact they had in supporting the other WOC on their floor as well as the cross-cultural engagement they were able to have with the white students on the floor. The opportunity for cross-cultural engagement is not just in residential life, student affairs programming had the opportunity to provide that for the participants too.

### **Student Affairs Programming (Student Activities)**

Participants found the office of Student Activities to be problematic for SOC. They found the programming to be targeted towards white students, not welcoming, and not planned for AABW. As stated earlier, student clubs and organizations are housed in Student Activities. Support for SOC organizations and events come from both Student Activities and the Culture Center. Both of these departments provide funding support and staff support. A large majority of programming on campus comes from these two areas. Braxton and McClendon (2001) recommended that student affairs administrators put on workshops on coping with stress and on education and career planning for students. In contrast, students in this study did not feel programming from student activities was created for them as AABW.

**Aisha**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Psychology, described her experience with Student Activities:

I think that they have helped me stay because, just like I said again with the student activities on campus, I think that those are really fun and engaging and I think that I was able to participate in some of those things and that kind of like allowed me to be a student. I didn't have to be a Black student. I didn't have to be all of these different-- I didn't have to-- like worry about my identities impacting my experience here because there were activities that could-- some of the activities where activities that you could engage in no matter where you come from. I would say that winter carnival is a thing that, like a tradition here at CapU, homecoming. All those things, I can't relate to them.

Many participants did not relate to Winter carnival and other traditions, such as homecoming. In general, a few participants did not feel comfortable in the Student Activities space, because it was a very white space. The majority of programs put on by Student Activities programming – the University Programming Board (UPB) – were geared and targeted towards white students, such as skiing. Participants felt UPB had enough money – they could do more focused events towards SOC. Most of their events were for white people. As stated earlier, student participants pointed out that UPB never brought bands and artists that SOC could relate to. Looking again through the lens of CECE indicators, and specifically at the indicator for cultural validation, it can be seen that these AABW wanted to see artists on campus who looked like them and represented their culture, yet UPB consistently brought artists they were not familiar with and who did not honor their cultures.

Many participants found some of the traditions from the student affairs programming problematic and racist. The “Founders” Formal, “mascot” language were a

couple that came up regularly. Several student participants brought up the Ski club, CapU's largest and oldest student organization. This club is made up of majority white students who enjoy the outdoors, who have the money to ski regularly. One student participant, Merci, commented that the club/institution should investigate how they are financially supplementing students who do not have the income to attend these events. The small scholarship they offer is often not enough. However, another participant that found Student Activities supportive. Student Activities helped her stay because the events she attended helped her meet people who were like minded and make friends. People made sure she had experiences outside of the classroom and was doing more than just studying. If she had not met these people she probably would have transferred.

**Tia**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in International Studies and Finance, described the impact the programming board had on her experience at CapU:

Yeah, that definitely helped me stay just because I got to make friends and meet people who were like-minded. Just meet different people and I don't know, they made sure that you had an experience outside of doing homework and studying which I think is really important.

Similar to Tia, Whitney talked about making connections with students through student activities clubs and how that helped them find friends, as presented below.

**Whitney**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Anthropology, described connections she made through Student Activities:

Yeah, they definitely helped me just connect with more students that I vibed with on campus. Definitely, like the student orgs. and everything like that. That's

where the majority of all my friends are, in other student orgs., yeah. They helped me just connect with other people.

Overall, participants experience with student affairs programming was helpful in making connections on campus, finding student organizations and clubs, and meeting friends. However, participants' engagement in student affairs programming varied.

### **Student Affairs Programming – Coping with Stress Workshops**

CapU Student Activities office conducted workshops on coping with stress that student participants perceived to be primarily for the majority white population. The Culture Center had, in the past, produced activities for SOC populations around difficult topics. According to Braxton and McClendon (2001), “Student affairs offices should conduct workshops on coping with stress” (p. 66). At CapU, at the end of each term, Student Activities provided activities around coping with stress, such as goody bags, food trucks, massages, therapy, yoga. Participants varied in how they utilized these services. Aisha, a student participant, did utilize this program and said it really helped her cope with stress during finals week. Likewise, Whitney was one of the few student participants who enjoyed and got anything positive from the before-finals de-stress activities. Students did not seem to differentiate between who was offering the event – Student Activities, the Center, BSA or ASU. They did appreciate when a particular event was focused on them or created for them, especially around stress management. But importantly, AABW students in study wanted staff who looked like them who worked in counseling and health areas on campus. Essentially, the AABW student participants needed coping-with-stress programs that were created for them and their unique needs.

**Jane**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Computer Science, described student affairs coping skills programming:

During finals week, I think it's every term or during finals week, they have a week or a couple of days in the week at least before final weeks where they have a de-stress week. They'll have days where they'll have coloring books or like a movie night, or they'll bring dogs in the library to pet. I cope with stress a different way and I don't cope with petting animals or coloring books.

CapU did not have a therapist whom the participants could relate to. Some student participants and staff participants pointed out that the Health Center had a counselor who was often seen as Black, who was of mixed race. Many of the participants had sought out finding a counselor/therapist on campus but had not found one that resonated with them and their experience. The cost had been a challenge for some of them. Additionally, there was a significant wait for the "Black" counselor. Even though Aisha has anxiety, which impacted her going to class sometimes, she could not find a counselor at CapU Health Center. She managed her anxiety on her own and with friends. The events planned by Student Activities for finals week were not planned or targeted towards AABW.

**Blanket**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Biology, described how she copes with stress:

I don't think anything is really ever, for that sense ever targeted towards black women. It's like there have been like de-stress workshops and stuff that's like have been towards like black women. But I don't think I've gone to them but I think they do like exist.

Another example of CapU demonstrating the opposite of a CECE indicator – creating opportunity for students to increase culturally relevant knowledge – is that of Student Activities’ consistently lacking programs that SOC, in particular AABW, could relate to or feel was honoring their culture and identity; this was not creating a sense of belonging for these women. All of the participants mentioned that Student Activities did not provide programming that met the needs and wants of SOC. CapU was also not providing a humanized education environment for SOC, in particular for AABW around mental health. These women spoke specifically about wanting a mental health counselor they could relate to, someone who had similar experiences to theirs. They expressed that they do not relate to the current staff. If effect, CapU was not creating an environment where these women could create a meaningful relationship with a counselor they could relate to, if there were no counselors they could relate to. These AABW student participants did not feel validated by the environment or the programs put on around them.

### **Academic Advising – Encourage Membership**

The last policy lever focus area for Academic Advising is how academic advisors encouraged students to join organizations and committees around campus to increase social integration. Braxton and McClendon (2001) emphasized that “Academic advisors should strongly encourage their advisees to make efforts to establish memberships in the social communities of their collegiate institution” (p. 59). However, CapU academic advisors did not encourage their AABW undergraduate students to establish membership in social communities. In the interviews, the student participants were asked how academic advisors encouraged students to participate in clubs or other social

communities on campus. Most student participants did not experience their advisor's encouraging them to establish membership in any organization. When advisors did suggest a participant join an organization, it was the traditionally white, larger organizations that had nothing to do with the woman's interests. Advisors did not ask participants what they were involved in nor did not they generally suggest participants participate in social events. Essentially, the participants did not feel advisors knew them well enough to recommend clubs or events. Student participants did not have a personal connection with advisors. Student participants wanted advisors to know them well enough to encourage membership in appropriate organizations. They wanted academic advisors to be aware enough about their experience as AABW at a PWI to suggest they join BSA and/or ASU. Most of the students were assuming academic advisors currently knew about ASU/BSA.

**Merci**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in International Studies and Political Science, described the white club advisors encouraged her to join:

It's just that they will just tell me to join these big clubs that they will hear of. BSA or ASU they probably didn't know about them. Ski Club, that's the one thing I hear because that's the oldest and largest club and so I've been told to join Ski Club several times and I told them I'm not an outdoors person. But Ski Club is one I hear being, at least to me, given been told to join.

Staff participants saw the need for advisors to suggest membership to AABW but did not see it being done in practice. In the following passage, a participant discussed a student cohort program for underserved students in STEM programs. This program was



developed based on best practices from Landis (2005) and National Society of Black Engineers and Scientists (NSBE).

**Linda**, Academic Advising, Major Advisor, described how club information is given to students:

There is a list of, our inclusive excellence fellow wrote a list of clubs available to those that are interested in our area of science and math and they let them know. Again, it's just by word of mouth, I would say, but that list is available. Then the U-STEM group, it is such a tight group. This is our third year, our third cohort in there and that is where they go, that's their home.

Overall, the student participants did not demonstrate any CECE indicators for academic advising. Instead, there were examples of how academic advising was demonstrating the opposite. For instance, students felt the space was very white and did not feel like their culture or race was represented in the Academic Advising office – they did not feel cultural familiarity, a CECE indicator. Students wanted advisors to know about BSA/ASU and encourage SOC to join and participate in these organizations, thereby encouraging the CECE indicator of culturally relevant knowledge. Unfortunately, several participants shared stories of advisors doing the opposite and making the space uncomfortable for them. The biggest criticism from participants about academic advising was the lack of proactive philosophies, another CECE indicator. They wanted advisors to go beyond going over their class schedules, and they wanted the advisors to really get to know them and be able to provide resources and support based on that relationship.

## **Administrative Policies and Procedures**

According to the student participants, administrative policies and procedures was another policy lever that did not help students stay. Students had a lack of trust for administration and did not feel administration had their back or would keep them safe. This section begins with a general overview of the participants' experience with administrative policies and procedures. I asked how policies were helping the student participants stay at CapU and how that was impacted by them being AABW. Braxton and McClendon (2001) specifically noted that "effective methods for the communication of rules and regulations important to students should be developed" (p 59).

Further, Braxton and McClendon (2001) emphasized, "Rules and regulations governing student life should be enforced in a fair manner" (p. 59). From the perspective of the participants, CapU did not enforce rules in a fair manner. Many participants remarked on how administration was handling bias-related incidents. Student participants wanted more transparency and clarity on why decisions were made, and in some cases, they simply wanted to know what the outcome had been.

This following is an example of a situation – a series of events – where the participants did not feel the rules were enforced or outcomes were communicated in a fair manner. All eight of the student participants referred to a few incidents that happened early in their time at CapU, including the 2016 Presidential election, a Freedom of Speech wall, an angry racist email, and a rally. The series of events was explained to me by student participants and by administrator participants. In short, during the 2016 Presidential elections, campus was tense. There was a Freedom of Speech wall on campus, which started out as a positive thing. BSA wrote, "Black Lives Matter", which

became, “Black Lives Matter, white People Do Something.” This was altered to read, “All Lives Mater, People Do Something.” BSA was upset and wanted something done. The wall was painted over and the same thing happened again, only this time, lyrics were added about not being guilty, but being white. Again, BSA was upset. They met with the President of CapU, but felt the situation was swept under the rug.

**Blanket**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Biology, described how it felt when administration did not address the wall vandalism:

But like the administration would just like sweep it under the rug. They would never do anything about it you know so like especially with this I think it was just really important that like they didn't like it wasn't just something that got ignored. Like they just wanted to make it a big deal, so because of that like for a lot of my friends especially ones that came from like [a] blacker like more diverse communities, I think for them it was really tough cause it was already like tough being an environment with like all these like white people and then being surrounded by all this hate.

Later that year, A white female student leader, Adrianna, who lived on a leadership living-and-learning-community, was put through the conduct process for allegations that she used racial slurs, was being racist and was attacking people. She went before a judicial board of her peers, was found responsible for violating the student code of conduct and was suspended for a term. She appealed her conduct decision but remained suspended for a term. Later, an anonymous email was sent to various members of the CapU community, including students in different affinity groups. The email specifically was in support of Adrianna but attacked affinity groups and others, such as LSA, BSA,

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Association (LGBT) and people of size. Members of the Adrianna's judicial panel were from some of these organizations. The email accused the people on Adrianna's hearing panel of being jealous of her. The email was described as nasty, racist, homophobic and sizist.

**Merci**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in International Studies and Political Science, described the email incident:

Last year, there was an email sent out to different people, different departments where she's definitely involved in it. But basically, it was attacking a lot of the affinity groups and I would call out Latinx Student Association, Black Student Association, saying that the people that did her investigation with the Honor Code and all that stuff, were people of color. One of them was part of the LGBT community... She was attacking the Black community and the Latinx community and just bad. It was very very very bad. Clearly, there was a policy breach right there and the President sent out an email saying, "This is a cyber-attack. Like do not--" The email that it was sent out from, it came from different emails and it was set up in a way where it's fake emails that it came out of. "This is just a cyber-attack. Dismiss the content that was in the email." And I was like, "We can't just dismiss it. It's not like that."... yeah, in theory, it's nice to know that if you break the rule, something happens to you and that makes me feel good knowing that if there is any kind of racial charges against me, that the school will take care of it. But then it does happen and nothing happens. It's like the rules might bend and change for that person and so even after we did the whole rally, to see that nothing actually changed. It sucks.

In response to the email, SOC were upset and expressed their concern to the President. The President said the email came from various email accounts and was a cyber-attack and nothing could be done. SOC saw this as “letting Adrianna off the hook” and were upset. Many of the participants described feeling like, “here we go again”. Another time someone gets to say extremely hurtful things to us and nothing is going to be done to them.

**Mary**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in International Business and Marketing, described her reaction to the email:

That was really hard to see once again. It was not surprising I feel like at this point at CapU because you just know there's people that think like that here. But I think it was just like for students of color it was like another battle we have to fight. Another thing we have to go through and have people judge us and say, "Oh, you're blowing this out of proportion kind of thing." Which is, of course, what happens every times something like this happens.

Hence, many of the participants expressed concern with how the administration enforced rules. They did not feel supported and did not feel as if the administration enforced rules fairly. This policy lever area did not have a positive impact on the participants – quite the opposite actually. Audrey, Executive Leadership of SEIE, talked about college leadership having meetings with students around this time and these events and hearing lists of demands after a rally the students held. Students had a list of demands. College leadership wrote a formal response to the students, explaining what they could do on the list of demands and what they would work on in the list of demands. As of the writing of this dissertation college leadership is still working on completing the

students list of demands. Similar to their dissatisfaction with policy enforcement, student participants had criticism for how the institution was honoring their history through cultural programming.

### **Student Affairs Programming – Honoring History and Culture Programs**

Participants did not feel student affairs programming honored their history and culture. They did not feel student affairs programming honored the history and culture of any of the different racial/ethnic groups on campus. This is in contrast to Braxton and McClendon's (2001) best-practices recommendation that "Student affairs offices should conduct programs that honor the history and cultures of different racial/ethnic groups on campus" (p. 67). Overwhelmingly, the student and staff participants agreed that the cultural events and programming provided to honor the history of AABW were done by the students in ASU and BSA. Student Activities financially supported the programming done by the students and provided staff support in helping plan when students had questions. Student participants wanted to see more events on campus that honored and celebrated AA/B's. Nevertheless, they expressed concern for having to be the primary planners and implementers for these programs. It was exhausting and represented a misplaced responsibility for the students. Administrator participants saw this additional responsibility as a good opportunity for AABW students to gain leadership skills. This represents a disconnect between students and administration on how these additional responsibilities impact AABW students.

As a whole, CapU was demonstrating all of the CECE indicators. They are demonstrating some stronger than others (Museus, Zhang, & Kim, 2016). None of the institutional policy lever areas demonstrated competencies in these areas, and none of the

AABW participants expressed having a significant connection with any of the areas. Cultural responsive characteristics include (a) developing meaningful relationships, (b) going above and beyond, and (c) providing information and support the student feels confident in. All characteristics lacking in those offices for these students, yet staff did not see it.

**Karima**, a 21-year-old senior, majoring in Business Management and Finance, described who plans Black History month events:

We're teaching CapU in our own way about our history. We're teaching ourselves about our own history. I would say that more than anything, but I don't think CapU's like, teaching us about our history but one thing CapU does is the BSA Black History Month and stuff so I feel like they do a really, really good job. But it's through the student group, I would say, from BSA again, students teaching other people rather than faculty, so it is like most of those student clubs like that...

It was an institutional tradition that Black History Month be planned almost exclusively by the students. So much so that there was rarely any time left for staff to schedule or plan anything because the schedule was so busy. Even if staff wanted to schedule something, they would have a hard time finding a time or space on campus to do an event. Black History Month events and programming were always planned by BSA; however, the Center approved the spending and then covered the cost. Most of the events planned or coordinated by Student Activities were focused and targeted towards the majority student population and were very white in theme. The BSA Facebook page of events listed Live at the Apollo talent show, a BSA art and fashion show, as well as

poetry nights, during Black History Month 2020. UPB Facebook page had a good deal more events, and during Black History Month 2020, had a sitcom café, a Valentine's Day open mic night, and the Winter Carnival. Thus, illustrating the difference in programming and how UPB does not program for SOC, they did not even have one AA/B focused event during Black History Month.

**Amira**, Assistant Director, Culture Center, described who plans Black History Month events:

They are doing some things that if you ask me, we should be doing, but CapU just doesn't have that culture. Historically, it's been the affinity groups. If you say, "Black History Month is coming up, what's going on?" I'll say, "Well, BSA is doing this, this and this." That would be my answer." Not that we don't have the capacity or the funding or interest to do programming, there is no time. They've already set these traditions in place. So, to try to do something will us trying to throw something together on a Wednesday at 2 PM because they have it down pat.

One participant's experience was different than all the other participants. This example shows CapU being culturally responsive and engaging by creating a support program for SOC in the sciences. Whereas the program was not specifically for AABW, they were benefitting from this research-based program. Several staff participants referred to this program as a success story. When administrators saw that SOC were not passing Calculus, they created a cohort-based program and recruited special faculty to teach them. These faculty had to have cultural competence and be able to devote time and



energy to the students. This program was a best-practice-based program built specifically for SOC in STEM that was having success.

**Jane**, a 20-year-old junior, majoring in Computer Science, described a unique advising experience:

For U-STEM, yes, when we all started in STEM, we all have to take Calc 1 at least or most of us had to take Calc I to III but we all started with Calc I. She [Blossom, the Director of Underserved in STEM] kinda of had already pre-planned this professor who was engaged and wanted to be involved with U-STEM. He kinda was like, "Yeah, I'll teach all of your students. We'll get them a code so that if they register for my class and they don't get in, we'll automatically put them in." ... Yeah and then he also had a TA who helped us do Calc sessions where kinda we just did review on the concepts from the class before. She would help us review for a test and it was just all just for us and it was just people didn't know what was going on. They're like, "Who are these people?" It was like, "Yes, we got in, yeah."

Staff and faculty worked together to create a support network for SOC in the STEM field that would allow them to go through the Calculus series together, and they created a support mechanism with faculty and teaching assistants (TAs) ahead of time. This was an example of CapU providing cultural familiarity, and this was the only example of CapU providing a collectivist cultural orientation, proactive philosophies, and holistic support (all CECE indicators). This program was created with SOC and their success in mind. The faculty and TA's were picked specifically for this program to provide support and information beyond making information available in the classroom and during class time.

The creator of this program explained the holistic frame in which this program was created and the thoughtfulness they was put into creating the cohorts. The students felt comfortable in the class because the number of SOC was significant.

Both Linda, the Academic Advising office's Major Advisor for College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and Blossom, the Director of Underserved in STEM, spoke about this program. They remarked how thoughtful and intentional the creation of the program was and how it was built to do just what Jane said it was doing: help support SOC in learning foundation skills to be successful in STEM fields.

This program was created based on research specifically for SOC. The student participant who was participating in this program expressed feeling a sense of belonging, felt supported, and felt as if she had the resources to be successful because of her experience in this series. In contrast, students had the direct opposite experience with academic advising. The contrast between how administrator participants and how student participants saw the offices supporting AABW undergraduate students was vast. To begin to examine that gap, I created a table (see Table 5-1) to summarize administrators' responses to a few key questions.

In summary, AABW undergraduate students found participating in student clubs, NSO Involvement Fair, and living on campus to be impactful in helping them stay. Two of these areas, student clubs and Involvement Fair were places CapU had done a good job in creating cultural familiarity for AABW undergraduate students. Residence life had created a humanized educational environment and were intentional about hiring practices. The other institutional policy levers did not have a significant impact on helping AABW undergraduate students stay. These other areas were missing significant pieces of CECE

indicators. For instance, the NSO program did not create cultural familiarity for SOC because they offered only one event intentionally created to bring SOC together and did not have staff of color. Another example was that Student Activities did not provide culturally validating programming for SOC, in particular AABW. The events Student Activities provided and supported did not honor and celebrate AABW/AAB culture; and generally, AABW participants did not find the events were created for them.

Administrator participants were asked about how their offices supported AABW undergraduate students. Table 5-1 summarized their responses to some of the key questions. Many offices did not know how familiar AABW undergraduate students were with their services. The follow-up was usually that they were curious to know and wanted to think of a way to find out. One office (NSO) felt AABW's perception of their office was negative, which was accurate based on the individual interviews with Black women participants. Another office (Residential life) felt AABW's perception of their office was positive which was also accurate according to individual interviews with AABW participants.

### **Administrator Participant Response Summary**

None of the offices had any funding or programming that went exclusively to AABW. These offices had not done any specific research or outreach to AABW. Many had not thought specifically of this population before our conversation. These offices did not have intentional AABW programs nor funding to support the creation of programs. The Center had funds for AABW specific programming. Again, some offices had combined programming and funding that included AABW, but nothing exclusively for Black women. Most offices said AABW turned to each other for support. One office said

Table 5-1  
*Administrator Participant Response Summary*

Interview question	Academic Advising	NSO	Residential Life	Student Affairs Programming
How does your office support Black women?	Does Not Specifically	Multicultural Reception	Target for RA Hiring	Nothing
How familiar are Black women with your services?	Don't know, don't have much exposure	All students know NSO	Students who work for us are very familiar.	Students associated with BSA are very familiar.
What is Black women's perception of your office?	Don't know, haven't asked	Not positive	Don't know, haven't asked	(no response)
How much funding and programming went to Black women?	Nothing	Co-sponsor Multicultural Reception	Nothing specifically	Nothing specifically, BSA and ASU club budgets
Who do Black women go to for support?	Affinity groups	Specific administrators and each other	Each other	(no response)

Black women turned to affinity groups, and another said they turned to the Culture Center. This aligns with the individual interviews with the AABW participants; they said they turned to each other and spoke of the positive relationships they had with the affinity groups. During the follow-up focus group interview, participants were asked why they did not name any offices as a support. They said this because none of the offices had

people that looked like them, so they therefore did not feel comfortable going to those office for help.

The administrator participant responses to the institutional policy lever area specific questions regarding institutional practices that influence retention (see Table 5-2) aligned with the student participants responses to these specific questions. Both the administrator participants and the student participants did not feel academic advisors were advising based on teaching practices, nor were advisors recommending club participation. There is a disconnect with how administration felt they were governing policies and procedures and how students felt they were doing. Students felt administration was not fair in how they governed policies; in contrast, administration felt they were being fair. This disconnect could be about communication. Students did not seem to be aware of the work that was being done for their good. Perhaps if they were aware of these changes, they would see administration as a more just group.

NSO saw themselves as providing opportunities for peers to interact and for students to socially integrate. Participants did not see NSO as providing those opportunities. As stated earlier, NSO did not provide the cultural familiarity or validation (CECE indicators) these women wanted – they wanted more opportunities to interact with SOC during orientation. Neither administrative participants nor student participants saw the way first year or second year students were assigned to residence halls to be intentional. Everyone knew and was quick to explain that it was required for students to live on campus their first and second year, but neither the administrator or student participants were able to articulate how Residence Life was intentional in assigning students to particular communities, besides explaining that students complete a housing

application and then a computer software pairs them up with someone based on their application preferences.

Both administrator participants and student participants were able to explain that Student Activities put on stress relief programs. Neither group was able to articulate if Student Affairs did career planning events; they felt those came from career services or the department of the student’s major. Both groups of participants were also able to explain that most of the programs put on by Student Activities were not focused on SOC.

Table 5-2  
*Institutional Practices that Influence Retention – Administrator Participant Responses*

Functional Area	Institutional Practice	Leader Response	Staff Response
Academic Advising	“Academic advisors should encourage their advisees to consider the teaching practices of faculty members in the selection of courses” (p.58)	No	No
	“Academic advisors should strongly encourage their advisees to make efforts to establish memberships in the social communities of their collegiate institution” (p. 59)	No	No
Administrative Policies and Procedures	“Rules and regulations governing student life should be enforced in a fair manner” (p.59)	Yes	
Student Orientation Programs	“Orientation programs should develop multiple opportunities for first-year students to socially interact with their peers” (p.65)	Yes	
	“Participating in orientation sessions directly fosters social integration and a positive indirect effect on persistence (Passarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986)” (p. 65)	Yes	
Residential Life	“First year students should be assigned to residence halls in a manner that encourages a sense of community in each residence hall” (p.66)	No	No

	“Residence halls should provide opportunities for residents to interact socially” (p. 66)	Yes	Yes
Student Affairs Programming	“Student affairs offices should conduct workshops on coping with stress” (p.66)	Yes	
	“Student affairs offices should conduct workshops on educational and career planning” (p.67)	No	
	“Student affairs offices should conduct programs that honor the history and cultures of different racial/ethnic groups on campus” (p. 67)	No	

### **Summary**

The data analysis revealed two major concept areas: how the policy lever areas did or did not impact retention of the participants, and AABW students’ experience at CapU. In summary, student affairs programming, specifically student clubs and organization involvement; student orientation programs, specifically NSO Involvement Fair; and Residential life, specifically living on campus had a positive impact on retention for AABW undergraduate students at this PWI. In contrast, academic advising, with its lack of personal connection, did not have an impact on AABW undergraduate students’ retention. AABW undergraduate students’ experience at CapU is hard. They had difficult experiences with student orientation programs (NSO), residential life (residence life programming), student affairs programming, and academic advising (specifically advisors encouraging them to select faculty based on teaching skills). Regarding the policy lever area administrative policies and procedure, AABW experienced the administration as not being fair in how they enforced rules, and they felt student affairs programming needs to take more responsibility in cultural programming.

In general, retention programs that are thoughtfully created and based on research are successful for AABW. None of the offices at CapU had done research on AABW. The staff participants were all struck by the questions being focused exclusively on AABW. Many remarked that they had not thought specifically about this population before. They had not looked at their data in this way and did not know what AABW thought about their area, nor did they know how AABW engaged with their area specifically. Chapter 6 will describe implications, my recommendations and future research.



## Chapter Six. Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

National enrollment of African American/Black women (AABW) undergraduate students in college increased 3% since 1976 (NCES, 2016). Although access to higher education for AABW increased over the years, data have indicated that retention has not (NCES, 2016). At Capital University (CapU) enrollment of AABW undergraduate students has also increased. However, the number of AABW undergraduate students who have obtained a degree remains similar each year (see Table 3-2). In 2014, CapU graduated 17 AABW undergraduate students, and in 2018, 19 AABW undergraduate students graduated. Retention is one of the most researched areas of higher education (Berger et al., 2005), yet retention of AABW undergraduate students is one of the least studied areas (Winkle-Wagner, 2009b). This current study researched how institutional policy levers influence retention of undergraduate AABW students at a predominantly white institution (PWI). In this final chapter, I discuss my findings and draw on literature and the culturally engaging campus environment (CECE) model to offer implications for research, practice, and policy. The purpose of this study was to add to the literature, scholarship, and practice on AABW undergraduate student retention by exploring AABW's experience with several institutional policy levers (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). In this chapter, I summarize the findings related to the research questions, address implications and recommendations, outline future research, and conclude with my purpose.

Analysis revealed two major concept areas: how the policy lever areas did or did not impact retention of the AABW undergraduate student participants, and AABW undergraduate students' experience at CapU. This study found that there were a few experiences that the student participants had that they found positive, such as participating in student clubs, specifically Black Student Association (BSA) and African Students Union (ASU), participating in the New Student Orientation (NSO) Involvement Fair, and living on campus. Student participants found several aspects of CapU to have negative impacts on their experience, specifically the majority white environment of academic advising, NSO, and student activities. These all adversely impacted their experience. Student participants' experience of CapU was negative in general. They did not trust administration and did not feel supported by Student Affairs programming. Below I outline how these findings specifically answer my main and sub-research questions.

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

My main research question was, How do institutional policy levers influence retention of undergraduate AABW at a PWI? In general, participants found residence life, specifically living on campus, and student affairs, particularly BSA and ASU, impactful in helping them stay. On the other hand, they did not find the institutional policy lever areas of academic advising, administration policies and procedures, and NSO to be impactful in helping them stay at CapU. Thus, at this particular institution, for this specific population, retention efforts must be re-evaluated in the areas of academic advising, administrative policies and procedures, and NSO. Participants did not find the offices highlighted in this research as sources of support. The participants did not see

themselves in any of the offices because there were no AABW staff; therefore they did not find themselves seeking these offices out for support.

This is further understood through the research of Bensimon (2007) and Landis (2005). Bensimon detailed the desire of students of color (SOC) to have faculty or student affairs practitioners who supported them and helped them through their college process. The participants in the current study did not find that level of support in faculty or student affairs practitioners, so they found support and community in other ways. Their source of support was one another, BSA and ASU, and their family. They used BSA, created an ASU, created friend networks with other SOC, and remained close with family for support rather than turn to these policy lever areas. Espinosa (2011) and Hurtado and Carter (1997) reiterated that SOC feel a sense of belonging when they are affiliated with affinity groups on campus.

My two sub-research questions were, How do AABW undergraduate students at PWIs experience institutional policy levers? and How do AABW's perception of institutional policy levers influence their persistence? The data revealed that AABW undergraduate students experience institutional policy levers at this PWI as white, unwelcome, segregated, exploitive, not inclusive, and harmful. Participants did not have positive experiences in most of the institutional policy lever areas. Overwhelmingly they indicated they felt alone in most spaces at CapU. Whereas they turned to each other for support, they did not see staff and faculty as support resources and therefore felt alone. As stated earlier, Bensimon's (2007) research reiterated that SOC want a faculty or student affairs practitioner to help them through their college experience, someone to

help and support them. The participants did not have this so they turned to each other. This void was felt in the interviews.

Participants experienced CapU as hard. One participant asked, “CapU, at what cost?!” Participants felt that as Black women, they were exploited at CapU. One participant said it was hardest for AABW at CapU than any other social identity. Still, none of the administrators indicated that any of the offices at CapU had done assessment, outreach, or research on AABW undergraduate students to better inform how they might serve them. Not only did administrators not recognize the lack of role models and lack of research, but they were struck by the questions in my interview as being focused exclusively on AABW. Many remarked that they had not thought specifically about this population before.

Administration had not looked at their data in this way and did not know what AABW undergraduate students thought about the area they represented, nor did they know how AABW engaged with their area specifically. The importance of this is further understood by Constantine and Watt (2002), who encouraged institutions to assess not only the services they provide to AABW, but also how comfortable these women are on campus academically, culturally, and socially. These researchers pointed out that because PWIs are matriculating a high number of AABW, once they have this data, they must use it to make campus comfortable for AABW. Sims (2008) recommended that efforts must be campus wide and system wide to create change that is necessary to impact AABW’s experience at PWIs.

The current data disclosed that students want a personal connection with staff who look like them. The participants in this study articulated that they did not create a

relationship with the offices in this study because they did not see anyone in the office that was an AA/B woman. PWIs need to have more AABW administrators and faculty so AABW students can create connections (Museus, 2014b). In the CECE model, the first indicator that a campus is engaging to diverse students and creating an environment that promotes success is cultural familiarity. This is when an institution has created an environment where students see themselves in faculty, staff, and students, which creates a sense of belonging and a sense of familiarity that allows the student to feel comfortable on campus (Museus, 2014b). The opposite of that is happening at CapU. Based on the study's findings, there are clearly not enough AABW administrators and AABW undergraduate students to make the environment familiar or comfortable. Ultimately, creating a personal connection with these students increases retention.

This data also showed the need for PWIs to create intentional programs specifically for AABW, based on research of AABW undergraduate students' needs at their particular institution. The other serious consideration institutions should address is including aspects related to the nine indicators of the CECE model when building programs for AABW (Museus, 2014b). The participants in this current study specifically indicated wanting a campus that is culturally engaging (first CECE indicator). They wanted more AABW staff, faculty, and students (CECE indicator of cultural familiarity). These students wanted campus to take more responsibility in teaching SOC about their culture, especially during heritage months (CECE indicator of culturally relevant knowledge). They expressed enjoying opportunities to engage with the Black community in service—they wanted more opportunities to do this (CECE indicator of cultural community service).

The student participants wanted opportunities to engage with other cultures, learn more about other cultures, and teach others about their culture (CECE indicator of opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement). The participants wanted classrooms that validated them and their experiences, and where they saw themselves (CECE indicator of culturally validating environments). They wanted to feel valued and cared about by faculty and staff and feel as if their experience was a priority to the institution (CECE indicator of humanized educational environments). They wanted more programs and experiences like U-STEM (CECE indicator of proactive philosophies). And lastly, they wanted staff they could believe in, and in turn, staff who they knew believed in them, who also looked like them (CECE indicator of availability of holistic support) (Museus, 2014b).

Findings revealed overwhelmingly that engagement in co-curricular activities focused on AABW/SOC had a strong impact on AABW persistence. Ong et al.'s (2011) research further illustrated this point, showing that WOC in STEM who engaged in co-curricular activities had increased retention. Below I outline the implications of this research for CapU, student affairs professionals (SAPs), and AABW undergraduate students.

## **Findings, Implications, and Recommendations**

### **African Student Union and Black Student Association**

This section outlines the findings, implications, and recommendations from this study, including literature and CECE model connections. The student participants found their involvement with student clubs, specifically BSA and ASU, useful. From the students' perspective, student engagement with student clubs influenced their retention at

this PWI (Espinosa, 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Ong et al., 2011). They found their support community in these organizations. Moreover, many of the participants explained that they found their best friends in these organizations. Participation in these organizations made their experiences at CapU better. The implication here is that participation in affinity-based organizations may have a positive impact on retention for AABW undergraduate students at this PWI, which is consistent with Ong et al.'s (2011) research.

Students' social integration was influenced and impacted by a variety of services and people across campus, as Braxton and McClendon's (2001) research indicated. AABW undergraduate student retention was impacted by involvement in clubs (see Ong et al., 2011). The cultural familiarity they gained from their affinity-based organizations provided the support they needed to navigate this tough environment. Cultural familiarity suggests students feel more comfortable when they see students who look like them and share a common background (Museus, 2014b). Students in the study wanted this in their classrooms as well. When prompted, some participants mentioned their not being represented in the curriculum of their courses and the courses being very white. Accordingly, they did not see themselves in the curriculum and felt isolated as AABW undergraduate students. Bell-Scott's (1984) research illustrated that PWIs should also focus on female-centered curriculum to increase retention of AABW undergraduate students at PWIs. The participants had similar criticism for their experiences in student affairs areas.

As SAPs, we can use these results to better inform how we work with AABW undergraduate students at PWIs. Landis (2005) revealed the lack of role models AA/B

students have at PWIs and how white staff and faculty are often unaware of the negative impact that not having role models has on AA/B students. Having a better understanding of how important making a connection with affinity-based organizations is for developing a community and a support network can influence how SAPs develop NSO, first-year experience programs, and college success courses. Staff and faculty should be trained on the benefits of SOC's participation in BSA and ASU and make sure they know how to refer SOC to these organizations.

Recommendations for student activities include specific programming for AABW. The participants wanted more opportunities to interact as an AA/B and/or AABW community. Thus, more events and activities must be developed specifically for AABW, such as sisterhood circles (Winkle-Wagner, 2009b) or the re-establishing of the sisterhood retreat through the Center. This would provide space for AABW where they can see themselves and other women who look like them. An additional recommendation for student affairs programming is to create programs for coping with stress that are focused on AABW. Participants remarked that the current programming does not provide stress management that they can relate to. In addition, hiring staff and counseling staff with whom the AABW identify is a recommendation. Moreover, additional AABW staff and faculty would increase AABW familiarity and comfortability on campus.

### **Student Orientation Programs – NSO Involvement Fair**

Student participants found the NSO Involvement Fair useful. Most of the student participants mentioned attending and that it was useful in connecting them to BSA or ASU. One administrator participant mentioned the fair as being one of the few ways students were able to learn about affinity-based resources on campus. The clear



implication here is that attending Involvement Fairs during NSO can positively impact AABW undergraduate students' experience because it provides a connection opportunity for them with BSA and/or ASU. As Hurtado and Carter (1997) further explained, SOC feel a sense of belonging when they participate in culturally affiliated student organizations.

AABW undergraduate students at CapU would benefit from thoughtfully created and structured programs designed with the success of these particular students in mind. CapU needs to provide additional opportunities for SOC to make connections with affinity-based organizations during NSO week. Perhaps one suggestion is partnering with the Culture Center (Center) on additional programs and social opportunities for SOC (Ong et al., 2011) in order to provide more than one SOC event during the week of NSO. The participants wanted more opportunities to come together as SOC. Thus, NSO should consider keeping the first-night SOC reception and adding a "meet and greet" with affinity groups a day or so later, giving new SOC an opportunity to interact specifically with other SOC as well as meet the leadership in SOC affinity groups. Another recommendation is having this "meet and greet" at the Center, giving the students an opportunity to find the Center, meet the staff, and become familiar with the space. These recommendations provide more than one opportunity for AABW to gather during NSO and would help with the culture shock they feel.

### **Student Orientation Programs – NSO White Environment**

Student participants found NSO to be a very white environment. They found the week to be catered towards majority white students and did not find the week useful. Many had attended pre-orientations and found NSO repetitive. Many found the all-white

environment of NSO a culture shock and challenging to manage. The implication here is that NSO may have a negative impact on AABW undergraduate student retention because of the potentially negative impact on them emotionally. Findings did not support the commonly held theory that participating in NSO has positive results for students' social integration. If the social engagement is not structured around culturally engaging practices, SOC may feel the program is white centered and therefore not feel included.

The purpose of NSO is to help students find a sense of belonging, however the participants did not feel that, coming out of NSO. Instead, they felt more isolated, and they felt the weight of an all-white campus more than they did coming in. The CECE indicator, culturally validating environment, seems missing here. This indicator described students being encircled by staff and faculty who validate their culture and identities. When this happens, students are more likely to have a positive experience (Museus, 2014b).

CapU needs to re-evaluate how it does NSO for AABW undergraduate students. Recommendations include an affinity-based connection activity a couple times during the week, as mentioned earlier. Although staff felt the multicultural reception was serving a purpose, the students did not indicate it was effective. Likewise, to achieve an effective orientation, it would be to CapU's benefit to engage program assessment and research to understand how SOC want to be engaged during NSO (Constantine & Watt, 2002).

The student participants liked the connection they made with the faculty in the College Success Course, which is consistent with Braxton and Mundy's (2001) research. They felt the faculty cared about them and wanted them to be successful. CapU should consider developing a way to expand this program and this personal connection with

students. The connection could be because the College Success Course topic was a passion for both parties. Student participants mentioned sharing a meal with the faculty member, usually at the faculty member's home. They described this experience as feeling the faculty cared about them, as Fries-Britt and Turner's (2002) research indicated.

Another recommendation for NSO is to set up an AABW-specific NSO/College Success Course group. For example,

- Create a group specifically for AABW and widely publicize it as a group to explore AABW; encourage AABW to sign up for it; enlist an AABW faculty member and AABW peer leader.
- Make sure BSA and ASU purposely visit this NSO group during NSO week.
- Plan the curriculum around AABW.

This group provides Black women with space and support when they first get to campus. It will lessen the culture shock of the all-white NSO and get them in the habit of coming together as Black women to support each other. This NSO group could continue into a living-and-learning community in the residence halls as a way to continue to create space for AABW to connect.

### **Residential Life – Living on Campus**

Student participants found living on campus to be useful to participate in on-campus activities and have the “college experience,” as Braxton and McClendon (2001) pointed out. All of the student participants lived on campus their first and second year at CapU, also suggested by Braxton and McClendon (2001). They appreciated the opportunity to engage socially with their floors and buildings. Living on campus was the most useful aspect of residence life for most of them (see Braxton & McClendon, 2001).

The implication here is that living on campus their first and second year increased their opportunity for social engagement and may have increased their retention (see Astin, 1999; and Kuh, 2001).

Aimee, Director of Residence Life, explained in her interview that students are required to live on campus and have a meal plan their first and second year. Because students are randomly assigned to residence halls based on their expressed preferences on the housing application, CapU offers a roommate switch opportunity during the third week of each term. Residents can come down to the lobby of their residence hall and switch out of their room, no questions asked. CapU was not intentional about how students are assigned to communities.

Many of the participants said they did not attend the social events planned by their resident assistant (RA) because they felt isolated on the floor and did not want to be the only Black person at the event. Residential campuses should require first- and second-year students to live on campus. Most students were not encouraged to live on campus; they knew it was a requirement of CapU, so they did it. As the literature has stated, this is an opportunity to have an impact on community building in the residence halls (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). I recommend that Residence Life look at assigning students with a focus on putting more SOC in closer proximity.

Haynes (2019) reinforced the experience of this study's student participants as isolating as well, in her description of AABW's experience in residences halls. Given this isolation, Residence Life should have an all-AABW floor in an effort to create space and community for these women. They have to experience not only isolation but also being in the spotlight when they are on campus and in class, so being able to come home to the

familiarity of other AABW would feed their souls and provide familiarity, sense of belonging, and comfort (Museus, 2014b). I would recommend this all-AABW floor have an AABW RA and an AABW resident director, if possible. This would provide an opportunity for role models and support for these women.

The other recommendation for Residence Life is to continue their thinking about the physical space and its impact on AABW. The director of Residence Life indicated in her interview she was thinking about this in relation to the new buildings. But, how is administration thinking about this in the current buildings and about the impact these buildings would have on AABW and their experience? The recommendation here is to assess what AABW feel they need from the physical space of the residence halls' current structure and how Residence Life can be more culturally aware, using that data to improve the comfort of AABW in the residence hall space, with a focus on making it more comfortable for AABW undergraduate students. In a similar vein, Academic Advising also needs to focus on making its environment more comfortable for AABW undergraduate students.

### **Academic Advising – White Environment**

Student participants found Academic Advising to be a very white environment. They saw the space as transactional and did not fully understand the role of an advisor, be it faculty or professional. They did not find academic advising useful in helping them stay. The implication here is that Academic Advising at CapU is not positively impacting retention for AABW undergraduate students. As previously stated, during the focus group interview, the student participants explained that they did not seek support from any of the departments because they did not see any AABW in the offices, which is

consistent with Bensimon's (2007) research. The CECE indicator, humanizing student experience, emphasizes the importance of institutions creating an environment where staff and faculty care about students and develop meaningful relationships with them and are committed to their success. These relationships increase retention (Museus, 2014b). Participants wanted advisors to care about them.

Academic advisors need to have more information on faculty to be better able to serve students when registering them for classes (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000). Study results showed students did not understand this was an option. They were not receiving advising of this kind; they were receiving transactional advising. Furthermore, the AABW undergraduate students did not see themselves in the office staff and did not see themselves relating to the staff (see Museus, 2014b). They felt as if the experience was sterile and devoid of personal relationship building, and white (see Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

Participants wanted to make connections with the advisors. Academic Advising has an opportunity to focus on hiring and training. Academic Advising needs to hire AABW academic advisors. Academic advisors need training on culturally responsive advising practices, including but not limited to understanding the resources on campus for AABW and SOC overall. Doing so would help with advisors being able to explain and provide the resources to AABW. Having an understanding of that the Center does and how they provide support and resources for students will help academic advisors provide better support and resources to SOC. Advisors would do well to also understand the programming resources offered by Student Activities.

## **Student Affairs Programming**

Student affairs programming encompasses events, student clubs, coping-with-stress programming, and cultural programming. Student participants remarked on how cultural history month programming was typically done by students at CapU.

Administrator participants also commented on this tradition. Students from BSA and ASU were expected to produce the programming for Black History Month. This was the long-standing tradition for years. This put an undue tax on students to educate themselves, their peers, and campus about their culture. This part of this policy lever area was not useful for AABW undergraduate students in helping them stay. They found it more of a burden. The implication here is that the responsibilities being placed on AA/B students are having a negative impact on their experience and could be negatively impacting their retention.

Student Activities did not conduct programs that honor the history and culture of different racial/ethnic groups on campus. This responsibility was placed on the SOC affinity organizations. The CECE indicator, culturally relevant knowledge, highlights how an institution provides an opportunity for students to learn about their culture. Although the opportunity for students to learn about their culture is valuable (Museus, 2014b), having to teach themselves every time or create and implement a program for themselves was exhausting. SAPs need to take on the responsibility of leading the programming and education efforts for cultural heritage months and not leave the responsibility to student affinity-based organizations. This however does not mean taking over the programming from the students. Students should not feel that if they do not plan the events, the programming will not happen. Cultural heritage months should be about

celebration and learning for students, not obligatory work and teaching. The bulk of the programming should come from staff and faculty.

Participants' involvement in clubs and events helped participants stay. Student activities on campus were fun and engaging, and participating in them made them feel like a student. Yet, student participants wanted programming that honored them and celebrated their culture. They wanted to see themselves and their peers in the events and activities that were planned by Student Activities. Lastly, they wanted more staff and faculty to be familiar with BSA/ASU so they would be able to suggest that AA/B students attend; consequently, more AA/B students would be exposed to BSA/ASU earlier. This next program is an example of how CapU created a program specifically for SOC that was having a positive impact.

### **Student Affairs Programming – U-STEM Program**

One student participant described a cohort-based program created to help students get through calculus. The program was modeled after best practices outlined by National Society of Black Scientists and Engineers (NSBE) and the research done by Landis (2005) on successful SOC in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Although this program only relates to one participant, it has the potential to impact many. The program's implications are positively impacting retention of SOC, positively impacting the experience of SOC, and increasing SOC's positive perception of support services at CapU. As one of the only retention models specifically focused on AA/B students that I could find, that of Rowser (1990) reinforced the importance of the underserved students in STEM—the U-STEM program. Rowser (1990) recommended institutions be intentional and thoughtful when putting together programs for AA/B



students. This researcher advocated that institutions be student centered and focus on the entire career of an AA/B student from recruitment to graduation, which is what this U-STEM program does. By focusing on success and understanding of calculus, this program makes sure students are successful in their program at CapU. Flowers's (2004) model constituted the other AA/B student-focused retention program. This model also suggested being intentional, recommending an assessment of student needs prior to program planning. Both Rowser and Flowers's strategies are being followed by the U-STEM program at CapU. Sims's (2008) research further illustrated why this program is important for SOC studying engineering in that SOC benefit from peer support groups. Although the U-STEM program was created for SOC and underserved populations in STEM, it resembles the intentionality and thoughtfulness that Rowser and Flowers suggested for putting together programs for AA/B students.

Programs similar to this thoughtful, intentional creation of supportive, nurturing programs seem to be working at Bennett and Spelman. As stated earlier, it is very clear that these two institutions care for their students, and the students feel cared for (Guy-Sheftall, 1982; Hamilton, 2009). U-STEM at CapU is creating a similar experience. The CECE indicator, collectivist cultural orientation refers to when institutions value a group-centered orientation over an individualistic orientation. With this program, the focus was on the group and the group being successful as a cohort. Administration register the group together for the same class to encourage a cohort relationship. They encourage students to study together, and the students take the three Calculus sequence together as a cohort. This program is culturally validating because it was created in a way that the students would feel like they were encircled in support and validated for their identities

(Museus, 2014b). Overall, students have a positive experience with this program and the administrators. This is not always the case with administrators at CapU. CapU should create more programs like this in other areas of the college, such as in the College of Business.

### **Administrative Policies and Procedures**

Student participants did not find the institutional policy lever of Administrative policies and procedures (within the department of Student Engagement and Inclusive Excellence [SEIE]) to be useful. They did not have a sense of trust for administration and did not feel the rules were enforced fairly, which is consistent with Berger and Braxton's (1995) research. The implication here is that this could be creating a negative perception for these AABW undergraduate students regarding both procedures and people at CapU. Typically, having a better understanding of policy and practices helps students have more trust in administration and helps decrease student departure (Braxton et al., 1995).

Participants expressed that they wanted more transparency in conducting processes and decisions (see Berger & Braxton, 1998). As SAPs, we often feel we have communicated our message to students in a clear and concise manner. However, based this study, students are telling us they are not hearing us. SAPs need to start listening and find a different way to communicate their message to students. Students are not feeling supported. There was a significant disconnect between what the students saw the administration not doing and what the administration was doing. The disconnect centered around communication. Students also need an opportunity to provide feedback on policies, procedures, faculty, and staff. This creates more buy-in into the institution. As recommended by Braxton and Mundy (2001), clarify institutional values to new students,

faculty, and staff. Thus, policies and procedures need to be more transparent to students about the vision for SEIE. Knowing the background may help students understand the process and timeline of progress.

### **Literature Implications**

The institutional policy levers were utilized as a theoretical framework for this study because of the positive impact they have on retention (Braxton & McClendon, 2001). Once I knew that institutional policy levers had not been exclusively researched with SOC, I thought this would be an important way to understand if there is a connection to race, and specifically with AABW to the policy levers. From the beginning of the conceptualization of the study, I had to look for additional ways to bring in race. For this reason, I used Museus's (2014b) CECE indicators to help analyze the data. The overarching implication was that equity was missing in Braxton and McClendon's (2001) institutional policy lever model (Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005) that provided the theoretical framework for this study. That model had only one question that asked about diversity: In the student affairs programming section, it asks about how institutions' "student affairs offices should conduct programs that honor the history and cultures of different racial/ethnic groups on campus" (p. 67). As such, the model, although instrumental to this study, did not have an equity lens. However, an equity lens was important because my participants were AABW, hence, my use of the CECE model.

The consideration of how the policy levers are impacted by SOC is also nowhere in the literature. As this study demonstrated, AABW did not engage in many of these institutional policy lever areas because those areas did not have AABW staff. It is imperative moving forward that an equity component is added to each of the eight policy

lever areas. For example, in Academic Advising, the inclusion of training and competency in culturally responsive advising would have a positive impact on SOC. In NSO, a question about how SOC social integration is being encouraged would bring an equity lens. More research would need to be done with SOC to see if the eight policy lever areas mentioned in this study are the policy lever areas that impact their retention or if other areas are more important and impactful for their retention.

The CECE model as a retention model posits that racially and ethnically diverse undergraduate students who meet a culturally engaging campus are more likely to be successful. As a broadly applied equity framework, there is a need for more specific recommendations for the population of student in this current study. This study indicated that AABW wanted programs and services that were specifically created for them. My recommendation is the CECE model provide specific institutional practices for each indicator for different populations of students. For instance, in cultural familiarity, be specific in recommending campuses have staff and faculty that mirror their student populations.

This research was important because it asked the question about the retention practices in the institutional policy levers. It was hard at times to marry the policy lever discussion with the experience of the AABW at CapU. Now that this research has shown which of these institutional policy levers have an impact on AABW undergraduate student retention, it would be important to find a theoretical framework that centers Black women, like Black feminist thought or intersectionality. It may be easier to analyze the data with a theoretical framework created for Black women, rather than trying to see how Black women fit into a framework that was not.

## **Implications and Recommendations for CapU**

Overall, the most essential recommendation for CapU is to hire more staff and faculty of color, AABW in particular. Although these students seem to be doing well academically, their college experience is tough, and making personal connections with various offices across campus would benefit them. The AABW in this study did not connect to AABW staff and faculty because the offices and departments did not have any AABW. CapU's increasing the number of AABW in staff and faculty positions would increase the support and resources for these students (Bensimon, 2007). The participants also spoke passionately about wanting to see representation of themselves in their courses and curriculum. As stated earlier, Bell-Scott (1984) argued that a benefit of female, single-gender HBCUs is the curriculum. These institutions have curriculum and co-curricular activities that are Black "female-centered" for their students, and their retention and graduation rates show how this is benefiting these AABW. More AABW must be included in curriculum and programming so AABW undergraduate students see themselves in their classrooms and in campus events.

The research-based U-STEM program can be replicated in other areas where there are larger numbers of SOC or where SOC seem to be having a challenging time at CapU. Participants who studied in the College of Business remarked how tough that environment was for a woman of color. CapU could create a similar program like the Calculus series for Business SOC to create a cohort (Landis, 2005). This would provide connection and resources for these students (Museus, 2014b).

Lastly, CapU needs to do research on the AABW undergraduate student population and interrogate why they are admitting 100 AABW undergraduate students

(fall 2013) and graduating 17 students 4 years later (2017). Perhaps this was because AABW undergraduate students are not making connections with any of these resource offices; perhaps it was because CapU is not engaging these best practices (institutional policy lever areas of focus); perhaps it was because CapU is a tough environment for AABW. More likely, it was a combination of all of those things. Kalsbeek and Hossler (2010) further emphasized this point by explaining if campuses want to have success in retention programs, they need to put adequate research resources toward understanding and studying their particular college's student persistence. Campuses must fully examine the data prior to making new initiatives. This study produced recommendations for CapU and Student Affairs.

### **Recommendations for Student Affairs**

SAPs can see the importance of relationship building and making connections with students (Baker, 2013). Students want someone to ask their questions to and help them figure out their courses, their major, their life, and so on (Bensimon, 2007). They do not want administrators to simply check a box when working with them. It is important for us as SAPs to remember, even in roles where we have business to attend to with students, we must still remember to connect with them on a personal level. They want to feel a personal connection. All staff and faculty must remember to take the time to engage with students as people, and care. The faculty at the HBCU's in the literature treat the students like their family. This familial environment was credited for some of the high retention rates of AABW at HBCU's. One of the administrators in this study who identifies as a Black woman said when she walked across campus she made a point of looking all the Black students in the eye and speaking to them. If she did not know them,

she introduced herself. She wanted them all to feel seen. That is something all administrators can do. Make a point to recognize and speak to AABW that you have had previous interactions with. Remember their face, remember their name and acknowledge them when you see them on campus.

Because of the high number of AABW matriculating at PWIs, it is imperative that these institutions increase the comfort level of the environment for AABW (Constantine & Watt, 2002). Consistently, when I talked with the student participants, they discussed microaggressions that were happening to their close friends and, in the same breath, would say microaggressions were not happening to them personally. My first reaction was that these students must not really know what a microaggression was. However, they identified a microaggression for their friend. Therefore, they knew what microaggressions were. Consistent racial sensitivity or microaggression training must be provided for faculty, staff, and students, and it should begin in orientation. Training staff and faculty on identifying, addressing, stopping, and mitigating microaggressions would help students not have to deal with it on their own.

CapU had engaged in the CECE national survey and had results on their website. My recommendation is putting together a specific training for staff to go through the data from this survey and examine how students feel the campus is doing creating a culturally engaging campus environment. They can further evaluate their areas and engage in exercises to work on one indicator at a time. For instance, they could look at the data around cultural familiarity and then look at their functional area. They could look at the sub-questions and see what they are doing to encourage a more comfortable office for SOC.

## **CapU is Hard**

Student participants overwhelmingly said being at CapU as an AABW was hard. They shared many stories of microaggressions and resiliency. The implication here is that the institutional policy levers are not supporting these women in the way they need to be supported, and this may have a negative impact on retention for AABW undergraduate students at CapU. AA/B students at PWIs have reported that the culture negatively impacted their success (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Sims, 2008). Almost 30 years ago, Allen (1992) wrote about this, concluding, “Little doubt exists over the negative impact of hostile racial and social relationships on Black student achievement. When Black students are made to feel unwelcome, incompetent, ostracized, demeaned, and assaulted, their academic confidence and performance understandably suffer” (p. 41). The participants did not suffer academically, but they did feel unwelcome, incompetent, and ostracized, and it is almost 30 years later. They do not have a space on campus where they are encircled by support and validated for their identities (Museus, 2014b). These AABW undergraduate students felt this way in most of the environments they encountered at CapU. The culture negatively impacted AABW undergraduate students. This negative environment did not seem to impact their retention or grade performance. It impacted their mental health, emotional well-being, and overall satisfaction.

All eight participants referenced wanting to transfer at some point in their time at CapU. Many stated that in the end, the financial package they received from CapU could not be matched at other institutions, so they stayed. The implication here is that CapU’s financial aid package for AABW positively impacts their retention. This aligns with previously mentioned research by Winkle-Wagner (2009a, 2009b) on the financial needs



of AABW college students and how this high need impacts their college experience. Henry et al.'s (2011) study of AABW showed that the lack of critical mass also had a negative impact on AABW. These women spoke about being "the only" in several different spaces. When 17 AABW undergraduate students are graduating, they are bound to feel like the only. They do not have a critical mass on campus. During the group interview, I asked the women why their peers were not being retained like they were. The women first were confused about who was not being retained; they did not feel like CapU had lost more than one AA/B woman from each of their classes. When I showed them the actual numbers, they were shocked. That left me with more questions: Why didn't they know that their starting class was 100 AABW undergraduate students? Why didn't they know by senior year that number decreased by 80%? If they didn't know, did administrators know?

I did not ask that those questions specifically. However, as stated previously, none of the offices at CapU had done research on AABW. They had not looked at their data in this way and did not know what AABW thought about their area, nor did they know how AABW engaged with their area specifically. They had not disaggregated their data and looked at how different student populations were being impacted by different programs. A clear recommendation is to gather data from AABW undergraduate students and consider their characteristics, self-perceptions, level of comfort on campus, and how they respond to perceptions of others (see Rosales & Person, 2003). This information should be the foundation for the development of programs and services created specifically for AABW (Rosales & Person, 2003).

In summary, overwhelmingly the student participants indicated they felt alone in most spaces at CapU. Participants experienced CapU as hard. As stated previously, one participant asked, “CapU, at what cost?!” Participants felt that as Black women, they were exploited at CapU. Higher education has not proven to be the safest place for AABW undergraduate students. We, SAPs and institutions of higher learning, have not done our due diligence in making sure the spaces we bring AABW undergraduate students into are created especially for them (Kalsbeek & Hossler, 2010). We have not done our research to learn what a space in which they need to thrive would look like. We have not asked them what they want their college space to look like. Retention programs that are thoughtfully created and based on research are successful for AABW (Flowers, 2004; Rowser, 1990). We have work to do. This study is a beginning, and now additional research needs to be done.

### **Bring Institutional Policy Levers to Life**

My final recommendations are on how to bring the institutional policy levers to life. People have a hard time understanding what institutional policy levers are, what institutional practices are, there is confusion on if levers are the same as areas. My recommendation is to use different language. I remember when I worked in policy and you could tell the folks who had never actually worked on a campus versus those of us who had worked on a campus with students and knew how the policies we were writing would actually be implemented. We used different language. It almost seems that way with this language. Using functional areas/department titles would be sufficient. Adding an explanation that there are policy implications for each area would help. For example, student affairs programming institutional policy lever could be renamed, student affairs.

That is a common division title and most people who work in higher education would understand better what that encompasses. Adding the word “programming” confuses people. Change institutional practices to programs and services, which are what areas in student affairs do to help increase retention. That language would be more accessible to people who work in higher education and is easier to understand. Changing the formal language of institutional policy levers and institutional practices would help people understand what they are and what they do.

### **Findings Differ from Literature**

Most of the literature relevant to this study aligned with the study’s findings. This section highlights a few that did not. Many of the RAs for CapU are SOC. Many of the students leading the SOC organizations are AABW. Staff recognized that AABW were the main leaders on campus, yet the AABW remarked that they were overburdened and over extended, to the point of feeling exploited. There was a disconnect here between the two. Literature has shown that students do better and are more engaged if they are involved (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2001). This does not match up with these participants’ experience of feeling exploited.

SAPs have been told that it does not matter what race you are, it is just important to develop a relationship and rapport with SOC. Furthermore, once a relationship is established, the students will seek you out and your office/resources. This study is calling that notion into question and causing us to ask, Would AABW rather engage with AABW SAPs? Based on the study’s findings, AABW would benefit from relationships with AABW faculty and staff. Similarly, this study’s findings did not support the commonly held theory that SOC want a mentor, of any race, as long as it is someone who

makes a connection with them (Lee, 1999). As has been stated previously, participants were not interested in creating relationships with people in these because they were not AABW, which is consistent with the research of Blake, Beard, Bayne, Crosby, and Muller (2011).

### **Future Research**

This study was a good beginning for establishing more scholarship on AABW undergraduate student retention. There is more to learn about AABW undergraduate students and retention. This study examined how departments help AABW undergraduate students at PWIs. While conducting the interviews for this research, there were a few things I wondered. One was, none of the participants had examined their gender. They were focused on their racialized experience at CapU as an AABW. I did not examine my gender until after graduate school. I remember regretting that I had not taken a gender and women studies class as an undergraduate. During my undergraduate days, taking a gender and women studies class was not on my radar. Likewise, it did not seem to be on any of the student participants' radar. Future research on how gender impacts persistence of AABW would provide additional insight. The research could explore when gender becomes important and what events push gender to the forefront. This study would have to be longitudinal to study the participants over a span to see if/when gender becomes more salient than race.

Another future research study could focus on how the women perceived themselves as being exploited when administrator participants saw them as the main leaders on campus. The disconnect of perception of opportunity versus obligation would be an interesting study to do at several different PWI campuses to see how AABW

undergraduate students are perceiving their student engagement as exploited, exhausting, and an obligation. And in contrast, how many administrators see their AABW undergraduate student engagement and involvement as opportunities to learn leadership skills, and are they unaware of the impact on the AABW. The research could have impacts on how SAPs recruit AABW into leadership roles, how we train AABW in leadership roles, and how we view leaders.

A future research topic is the disconnect around microaggressions happening to the participants and their happening to their friends. Participants said microaggressions happen to their friends frequently, yet they do not happen to them at all. There is a disconnect when microaggressions happen to them personally. Are they in denial that they are experiencing microaggressions? This is a good future research topic as well.

One of the criticisms of the BSA/ASU towards the office of Student Activities was the lack of leadership and support around cultural history month programming. The participants felt the student organizations were doing the bulk of the programming for the cultural heritage months. A study on how many institutions are in similar situations would provide insight on how to create training and support for leadership and staff in these departments on how to better serve students around cultural heritage months.

Future research should be conducted on the remaining three policy levers, (enrollment management, faculty development, and faculty reward system) and the two institutional practices not addressed in administrative policies and procedures, and their impact on AABW needs to be examined. As recommended by Braxton and McClendon (2001), those institutional practices include

- Effective methods for the communication of rules and regulations important to students should be developed (p. 59),
- Residential college and universities should require that all first- and second-year students live on-campus. . . . Commuter colleges and universities should develop social environments for students. Residential colleges and universities should develop social environments for commuter students and students who live off-campus. (p. 60)

These remaining policy levers are based in instruction and will provide information on how AABW undergraduate students experience the classroom and faculty. Additionally, further study on enrollment services, faculty development, and faculty reward systems, including how they do or do not impact AABW undergraduate student retention at PWIs would offer important insight. The research could be done in a similar way to the current study: Interview AABW undergraduate students and ask about their experiences with these remaining institutional policy lever areas. In addition, ask leaders from those policy lever areas to get additional information. It would be important to use CECE indicators for analysis and compare the results with those gathered in this study.

Lastly, I suggest future research on whether these are the appropriate institutional policy lever areas for SOC, examining how the policy levers impact retention on other race and ethnicity groups and comparing results to these findings. Along with this, examining the demographic factor of whether the AABW study participants are domestic born or internationally born and how the policy levers impact their retention from this perspective would be a good future research study.

## **Concluding Thoughts and My Purpose**

I conclude this section with a final statement about what I hoped to accomplish with this research. I wanted to do this research for student affairs practitioners to better understand what institutional practices are impacting retention of AABW undergraduate students at PWIs. This research helped me understand that AABW undergraduate students want connection with someone that looks like them. They are seeking connection with a community of people who understand their experience, with people who see them and believe in them. In the absence of administrators who can do this, they looked to peers for that support. The lesson for us, as administrators, is that we need to do a better job at finding administrators, staff, and faculty who look like our student populations. Then we need to support and provide resources for these administrators so they can support these students, so they all have support and do not have to overburden each other.

The other lesson I have learned from this research is that just because students continue to do it does not mean they enjoy doing it and need to continue to do it. For example, although the BSA and ASU have programmed Black Heritage Month for years at CapU, that does not mean they enjoy it or need to continue to do all the programming. They would like to learn from administrators and not carry the full burden of teaching the campus. Again, although they have not complained or protested about it, this does not mean it should not change and administration should not take more of a leading role.

Lastly, a critical lesson I am taking from this research is that students are watching what we say and what we do not say. In the wake of the racially motivated events that happened early in the participants' experience at CapU, they were waiting for

the institution to take a stand against racism and behavior that looked like racism and felt like racism. The actions CapU took were not seen by the students as statements against racism. We, as administrators, have to find ways to connect with our students in a manner that they *see* us and our actions. Ultimately though, I believe it is more about us seeing them. When we see them, they will know we hear them, and they will, in turn, hear us.



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Appendix A. Individual Interview Questions:  
African American/Black Women Participants

- Please select a pseudonym (alias name used for research purposes) (first name only)
- How old are you?
- What is your academic major and minor?
- What is your GPA?
- How many years you have attended the Capital University?

Definitions:

- **“Persistence** – refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion.
- **Retention** – refers to the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to the university through graduation” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 7).

Persistence “You have to practice success. Success doesn’t just show up. If you aren’t practicing success today, you won’t wake up in 20 years and be successful, because you won’t have developed the habits of success, which are small things like finishing what you start, putting a lot of effort into everything you do, being on time, treating people well.” – Michelle Obama

Retention “...though the intentions and commitment with which individuals enter college matter, what goes on after entry matters more. It is the daily interaction of the student with other members of the college in both formal and informal academic and social domains that in large measure determine staying or leaving.” – Vincent Tinto

Direct questions

1. Tell me about your experience here at CapU as a Black/African American women undergraduate student.
2. How has being a Black woman impacted your experience at CapU?
3. How has race impacted your experience here?
4. How has gender impacted your experience here?
5. When you think about the definitions and the quotes, what has helped you staying here at CapU?
6. What offices have you turned to for support? What support did they give you?

7. I'm going to name a few offices at CapU, tell me How have these offices helped or didn't help you stay at CapU? Academic Advising, Orientation, Residence Life, and Student Activities (the place that does programming like UPB)?
8. How have these offices impacted you staying at CapU?
9. Tell me how your experience with academic advisors has or has not impacted you staying at CapU. (Follow-up question, were there specific people or programs that were particularly impactful?)
10. Tell me how your experience with Orientation has or has not impacted you staying at CapU. (Follow-up question, were there specific people or programs that were particularly impactful?)
11. Tell me how your experience with residence life has or has not impacted you staying at CapU. (Follow-up question, were there specific people or programs that were particularly impactful?)
12. Tell me how your experience with Student engagement has or has not impacted you staying at CapU. (Follow-up question, were there specific people or programs that were particularly impactful?)

Academic Advising (follow up questions)

- How have academic advisors encouraged you to take certain faculty members? How is that impacted by you being a Black/African American women?
- How have academic advisors encouraged you to participate in clubs or other social communities on campus? How is that impacted by you being a Black/African American women?

Orientation (follow-up questions)

- How does orientation providing opportunities to socialize encourage you to socially interact? How is that impacted by you being a Black/African American women?
- How did participating in orientation impact your social integration (finding friends, a social unit and getting integrated into the campus)? How is that impacted by you being a Black/African American women?

Residence Life (follow-up questions)

- How were you encouraged to live on campus your first year? second year?
- How were you encouraged to participate in the social environment on campus? How was this impacted by you being Black/African American women?
- What type of residence hall were you assigned to your first year at CapU? How did it impact your sense of community? How was this impacted by you being a Black/African American women?

- How did your residence hall provide opportunities for residents to interact socially? How was that impacted by you being a Black/African American women?

#### Student Engagement (follow-up questions)

- How have student engagement workshops/programs helped you cope with stress? Who put those on? How were they targeted for Black/African American women?
- How have workshops/programs helped you with academic and career planning? Who put those on? How were they targeted for Black/African American women?
- How have workshops/programs honored your history and culture on campus?
- How do CapU policies help you stay (for instance the code conduct or student handbook)? How is that impacted by you being Black/African American women?

#### Final Questions

- How do you define success as a student?
- What haven't I asked you about that I should?

## Appendix B. Individual Interview Questions:

### Administrator (Leader and Staff)

#### General questions

1. How do you define retention?
2. How do you define persistence?
3. How does your office support students through retention and persistence?
4. How does your office support African American/Black Women undergraduate students specifically?
5. How familiar are African American/Black Women undergraduate students with your support resources on campus?
6. What is African American/Black Women undergraduate student's perception of how your office works with African American/Black Women undergraduate students?

#### Definitions:

- **“Persistence** – refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion.
- **Retention** – refers to the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to the university through graduation” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 7).

Persistence “You have to practice success. Success doesn’t just show up. If you aren’t practicing success today, you won’t wake up in 20 years and be successful, because you won’t have developed the habits of success, which are small things like finishing what you start, putting a lot of effort into everything you do, being on time, treating people well.” – Michelle Obama

Retention “...though the intentions and commitment with which individuals enter college matter, what goes on after entry matters more. It is the daily interaction of the student with other members of the college in both formal and informal academic and social domains that in large measure determine staying or leaving.” – Vincent Tinto

7. Based on those definitions and quotes what impact does your office have on African American/Black Women undergraduate student’s retention?
8. How many African American/Black Women undergraduate students have you worked with? Supervised, mentored? How many of those women graduated?
9. How many programs from your office are dedicated to African American/Black Women undergraduate students?
10. How much funding is dedicated to African American/Black Women undergraduate students and support services in your area?

11. Would you be willing to share any artifacts or programming resources that help to illustrate your offices persistence and retention efforts for African American/Black Women students?
12. Where do African American/Black Women undergraduate students turn for support?
13. What haven't I asked you about supporting African American/Black Women undergraduate students that I should?

Office specific follow-up questions:

#### Academic Advising

- How have academic advisors encouraged African American/Black Women undergraduate students to take certain faculty members?
- How have academic advisors encouraged African American/Black Women undergraduate students to participate in clubs or other social communities on campus?

#### Orientation

- How does orientation provide opportunities for African American/Black Women undergraduate students to socialize?
- How does participating in orientation impact African American/Black Women undergraduate student's social integration?

#### Residence Life

- How are African American/Black Women undergraduate students encouraged to live on campus their first? and second year?
- How are African American/Black Women undergraduate students encouraged to participate in the social environment of campus?
- What type of residence hall are African American/Black Women undergraduate students assigned to their first year at CapU? How does that impact African American/Black Women undergraduate students sense of community?
- How do residence halls provide opportunities for African American/Black Women undergraduate students residents to interact socially?

#### Student Engagement

- How have workshops from student affairs been created and designed to help African American/Black Women undergraduate students with educational and career planning?
- How have workshops from student affairs been created and designed to honor the history and culture of African American/Black Women undergraduate students on campus?
- How have workshops from student affairs been created and designed for African American/Black Women undergraduate students to help them cope with stress?

#### Final Questions

- Is there anything else I should have asked you about?

## Appendix C. Interview Questions: Focus Group

### A) Definitions:

- “**Persistence** – refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion.
- **Retention** – refers to the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to the university through graduation” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 7).

Persistence “You have to practice success. Success doesn’t just show up. If you aren’t practicing success today, you won’t wake up in 20 years and be successful, because you won’t have developed the habits of success, which are small things like finishing what you start, putting a lot of effort into everything you do, being on time, treating people well.” – Michelle Obama

Retention “...though the intentions and commitment with which individuals enter college matter, what goes on after entry matters more. It is the daily interaction of the student with other members of the college in both formal and informal academic and social domains that in large measure determine staying or leaving.” – Vincent Tinto

### B) Specific questions

1. What have you been thinking about since our last conversation? What has stayed with you? Anything you didn’t say that you want to share now?
2. Reactions to any of the themes from section one or two on the summary sheet?
3. How could CapU offices support you through some of these themes?
4. Reactions to section three – Staff summary?
5. What would an ideal CapU look like for Black/African American women undergraduate students in Academic Advising, Orientation, Residence Life, Student Engagement?
6. What additional supports does CapU need to provide support for Black/African American women undergraduate students undergraduate students?
7. What else do you want me to know about support that has influenced retention or persistence for you at CapU?
8. Why don’t you have an office/administrator you turn to for support?

### C) Follow-up questions

- What more/different would you like student engagement to do (programming to support your culture/history and focus on and celebrate your history and culture)?
- What could administration do to better support Black/African American women undergraduate students when racism occurs on campus?
- How do you deal with the burden and pressure of being an Black/African American women undergraduate students at a predominantly white institution?



Appendix D. Individual Interview Questions: Executive Leadership for Student  
Engagement and Inclusive Excellence

**Questions**

1. How do you define retention?
2. How do you define persistence?
3. How does CapU support students through retention and persistence?
4. How does CapU support African American/Black women undergraduate students specifically?
  - Academic Advising, NSO, Residence Life, Student Engagement?
5. How familiar are African American/Black women undergraduate students with your support resources on campus?
  - Academic Advising, NSO, Residence Life, Student Engagement?
6. What is African American/Black women undergraduate student's perception of how CapU works with African American/Black women undergraduate students?
  - Academic Advising, NSO, Residence Life, Student Engagement?

**Definitions**

- **“Persistence** – refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion.
- **Retention** – refers to the ability of an institution to retain a student from admission to the university through graduation” (Berger & Lyon, 2005, p. 7).

Persistence “You have to practice success. Success doesn’t just show up. If you aren’t practicing success today, you won’t wake up in 20 years and be successful, because you won’t have developed the habits of success, which are small things like finishing what you start, putting a lot of effort into everything you do, being on time, treating people well.” – Michelle Obama

Retention “...though the intentions and commitment with which individuals enter college matter, what goes on after entry matters more. It is the daily interaction of the student with other members of the college in both formal and informal academic and social domains that in large measure determine staying or leaving.” – Vincent Tinto

7. Based on that definition and quote what impact does CapU have on African American/Black women undergraduate student retention?
  - How is that happening in Academic Advising, for AABW undergraduate students?
  - How is that happening in NSO, for AABW undergraduate students?
  - How is that happening in Residence Life, for AABW undergraduate students?

- How is that happening in Student Engagement for AABW undergraduate students?
8. How many African American/Black women undergraduate student have you worked with? Supervised, mentored? How many of those women graduated?
  9. How many programs from your division are dedicated to African American/Black women undergraduate students?
    - How have workshops from student affairs been created and designed to honor the history and culture of AABW on campus?
    - How do you think faculty includes AABW in their curriculum?
  10. How much funding is dedicated to African American/Black women undergraduate students and support services?
    - How is that happening in Academic Advising, for AABW undergraduate students?
    - How is that happening in NSO, for AABW undergraduate students?
    - How is that happening in Residence Life, for AABW undergraduate students?
    - How is that happening in Student Engagement for AABW undergraduate students?
  11. Would you be willing to share any artifacts or programming resources that help to illustrate your offices persistence and retention efforts?
  12. Where do African American/Black women undergraduate students turn for support?
  13. Themes

**Final Questions**

14. What haven't I asked you about supporting African American/Black women undergraduate students that I should? Is there anything else I should have asked you about?

## Appendix E. Theme Summary

### (Responses From Individual Interviews)

#### 1) Summary of themes from individual interviews with Black women.

Experiences as Black/African American women at CapU:

CapU is a tough environment:

- The election had impact on your experience at CapU. For some it created a hostile environment on campus.
- The free speech wall created tension on campus. Many of you did not agree with how administration handled the situation and wanted them to take a stronger stance against racism.
- Your friends frequently experience microaggressions.
- Adrianna making comments in her room was the beginning of a negative cycle, where you began to expect something to happen every year where students of color had to fight.
- The Adrianna email impacted many of you very negatively. Once again you were not pleased with how administration handled the situation and felt like she should have had harsher consequences.
- Black Lives Matter protest did not create the outcomes you wanted or expected.
- Race is always at the forefront.

Many of you feel CapU needs to be more proactive like renaming “Founders Formal” and removing the term “Mascot”.

When asked who you turn to for support most of you said yourself or family. No one said an office.

Most of you spoke about:

- Being the only one (Black woman and Black person) in spaces at CapU, and specifically the only one in your classes. This causes some of you to feel like you stick out, feel like a fraud, feel scared to ask a question or share your opinion, be concerned with how you act, fear saying the wrong thing, and therefore you do not raise your hand, and don’t speak up.
- Feeling ignored and/or unwelcome, having the experience where white people forgot your name or that they had previously met you, and feeling ignored by your RA/professor.
- Thoughts about transferring from CapU. You even went so far as to complete applications for other schools. Many of your friends considered transferring from CapU.

Many of you spoke about:

- Feeling fear and being scared of being on campus, sometimes feeling attacked for being Black, CapU environment scares and distracts you from studies.
- Feeling inferior, having self-doubt, feeling like a fraud, and having imposter syndrome.
- Experiencing a culture shock when you started CapU. You didn't see race or racism in high school. Some of you experienced racism or saw racism for the first time at CapU. You began to think about your race for the first time.
- The burden and pressure of being a Black woman at CapU. Often feeling an obligation to educate others about Black experience and racism, always on the look out to address things, mentally exhausting, CapU at what cost?!, exhausted by this burden.

A few of you spoke about:

- Issues for Black women around dating and body image
- Black women being perceived as hostile
- It is harder for AABW than anyone else, and Black women are being exploited.
- AABW are ostracized while AA/B men are desired

Concerns with CapU:

- CapU is very white:
  - Higher education is targeted towards white students.
  - Academic advising is not welcoming.
  - Orientation is very white and caters to the majority. Orientation is useless. Orientation is segregated and is not inclusive.
  - Residence halls socials are not for us.
  - UPB programs are for white students, not for students of color.
  - Health and Counseling Center focuses on white students.
- Division between students of color, and division in black community
- Lack of Black faculty and staff

Positive influences at CapU:

- Being at CapU has taught you how to love yourself as a Black woman
- Affinity groups (BSA, ASU), U-STEM, Financial aid, Bursar, The Culture Center
- Orientation Involvement Fair, scholarships, student of color organizations do most of the programming for Black History month, silent disco, skate night
- Dinner with professor during College Success Course

## 2) Summary of experiences with the four areas on campus

- Most of the women did not find Academic Advising helpful. Of the few that did, you found major advisors to be helpful in scheduling classes only.
- All women except one did not find Orientation helpful. Some found Pre-Orientation Leadership (POL), Black PLP or U-STEM helpful. Many found Orientation not to be inclusive and catered to white majority students.
- Many of the women are/were RA's. Most found Residence Life helpful. Two women had negative experiences with Residence Life and therefore did not find Residence life helpful.
- All of the women were involved with a club in student engagement, mostly BSA or ASU. You all indicated that being involved in this club was helpful in staying at CapU. You all talked about the relationships built from participating in these clubs as being supportive.

## 3) Summary of themes from Staff interviews

- How does your office support Black women?  
Most offices do not have any support specifically for Black women. Some supports are for combined populations that include Black women, but nothing specifically for Black Women.
- How familiar are Black women with your services?  
Many offices did not know how familiar Black women were with their services. And were curious about it.
- What is Black women's perception of your office?  
Same with perception Black women had of their services, many did not know and were curious to know. Many commented that they should know and were now curious. One office felt Black women's perception of their office was negative (Orientation) which is accurate from the individual interviews with Black women participants. One office felt Black women's perception of their office was positive (Residence Life) which was also accurate according to individual interviews with Black women participants.
- How much funding and programming went to Black women?  
None of the offices had any funding or programming that went exclusively to Black women. Again, some had combined programming and funding that included Black women but nothing exclusively for Black women.
- Who do Black women go to for support?  
Most offices said Black women turn to each other for support. One office said Black women turn to Affinity groups and another said The Culture Center. This aligns with the individual interviews with the Black women participants, they said they turn to each other and spoke of the positive relationships they have with the affinity groups.

## Appendix F. Executive Leadership Theme Summary

1. I have a summary of themes from individual interviews with Black women. I'm wondering if I can get your impression of some of the themes?
  - Most offices said Black women turn to each other for support. One office said Black women turn to Affinity groups and another said The Culture Center. This aligns with the individual interviews with the Black women participants, they said they turn to each other and spoke of the positive relationships they have with the affinity groups.
  - Thoughts about transferring from CapU. Most even went so far as to complete applications for other schools. Many of their friends considered transferring from CapU too.
  - The burden and pressure of being a Black woman at CapU. Often feeling an obligation to educate others about Black experience and racism, always on the look out to address things, mentally exhausting, CapU at what cost?!, exhausted by this burden.
  - Lack of Black faculty and staff was a reason stated for why they have a lack of relationship with various offices.
2. When I asked the women which offices were helpful to their persistence and retention.
  - Most of the women did not find Academic Advising helpful. Of the few that did, they found major advisors to be helpful in scheduling classes only.
  - All women except one did not find Orientation helpful. Some found Pre-Orientation Leadership (POL), Black Student Preparation Program (BSPP), or U-STEM helpful. Many found Orientation not to be inclusive and catered to white majority students.
  - Many of the women are/were RA's. Most found Residence Life helpful. Two women had negative experiences with Residence Life and therefore did not find Residence life helpful.
  - All of the women were involved with a club in student engagement, mostly BSA or ASU. All indicated that being involved in this club was helpful in staying at CapU and talked about the relationships built from participating in these clubs as being supportive.
3. When there has been campus unrest or things that have impacted Black women (freedom of speech wall, the Adrianna incident and subsequent email), how does the IHE respond?
  - Additional information if necessary: Most of the women characterized their experience at CapU as Black/African American women as:
  - CapU is a tough environment:
    - The election had impact on your experience at CapU. For some it created a hostile environment on campus.

- Incidents have had significant impact to their experience:
  - Adrianna making comments in her room was the beginning of a negative cycle, where you began to expect something to happen every year where students of color had to fight.
  - The free speech wall created tension on campus. Many of you did not agree with how administration handled the situation and wanted them to take a stronger stance against racism.

## Appendix G. AABW Undergraduate Student Participant Membership

Member-ship	BLANKET	JANE	KARIMA	TIA	MERCI	WHITNEY	MARY	AISHA
Year	Senior	Junior	Senior	Senior	Junior	Junior	Senior	Junior
Major	Biology	Computer Science	Business Management and Finance	International Studies and Finance	International Studies and Political Science	Anthropology	International Business and Marketing	Psychology
Minor	Psychology, Chemistry and Leadership	Math, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies	Leadership	Leadership		Political Science	Leadership Studies	Biology, Sociology and Leadership Studies
Born	Africa (Ghana)	Colorado	Africa (Ethiopia)	Denver	Africa (Ethiopia)		Africa (Ethiopia)	
Raised	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado	Colorado (Denver)	Colorado (Aurora)		Colorado (Aurora)	
First Generation Program					First Generation Program			First Generation Program
Academic Coaching								Academic Coaching
African Student Union (ASU)	ASU		ASU	ASU	ASU	ASU	ASU	ASU
ASU Executive Board (eboard)	ASU (eboard)			ASU (eboard)	ASU (eboard)	ASU (eboard)	ASU (eboard)	
Big 12	Big 12	Big 12 – 2019 Conference						
Black Student Preparation Program (BSPP)		BSPP	BSPP	BSPP		BSPP		
Black Women Leadership Program (BWLP)		BWLP				BWLP	BWLP	
Black Student Association (BSA)	BSA	BSA	BSA	BSA	BSA	BSA	BSA	BSA
BSA (Executive board)	BSA (eboard)	BSA (eboard)				BSA (eboard)		
Club Sports		Club Sports						
Multi-cultural Center (MC)	MC		MC	MC			MC	MC
Women Scholar Program (WSP)			WSP	WSP			WSP	WSP



Diversity Committee					DC			DC
Diversity Committee (eboard)					DC (eboard)			
Pre-Orientation Leadership (POL)				POL				
POL floor			POL floor	POL floor				
Under-served STEM		U-STEM						
First generation		First- Gen Student	First generation	First generation	First generation			
First year Hall	First year hall 2	First year hall 1	First year hall 1	First year hall 1	First year hall 3	First year hall 3	First year hall 3	First year hall 3
Living and Learning Community	LLC	LLC						
NSBE		NSBE						
NSBE (eboard)		NSBE (eboard)						
Orientation Leader							Orientation Leader	
Parents immigrants			Parents immigrants	Parents immigrants			Parents immigrants	
Student of Color Prep Program (SOCPP)	SOCPP	SOCPP	SOCPP			SOCPP		
RA	RA		RA		RA			
Religion			Muslim					
Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Study Abroad	Study Abroad				Study Abroad	
Volunteer Program (VP)			VP			VP		
Work-study/internship		Work-study/internship		Work-study/internship	Work-study internship		Work-study/internship	

## Appendix H. Pre-Qualifying Survey

Qualifying questions:

- Do you identify as a Black/African American woman? Yes or no  
Do you currently attend the Capital University as a fulltime student? Yes or no  
Are you currently a junior or senior? Yes or no  
Have you attended the Capital University for all years of your undergraduate? Yes or no

Fill in the blank questions:

Please provide your first and last name:

Please provide your email address:

What is your daytime phone number:

## Appendix I. Informed Consent:

### African American/Black women participant Qualifying Survey

#### **Implied Consent for Online Surveys**

You are invited to take a pre-qualifying survey for a in a research study that will help explain how your institution is helping you stay and graduate from college. The study is called, Institutional Policy Levers Influence On African American/Black Women Undergraduate Students Retention. This study is being conducted to better understand how African American/Black women junior and senior undergraduate college students understand, experience, and utilize Academic Advising, New Student Orientation, Resident Life and Student Engagement. Results will be used to gain insight into the overall experiences of African American/Black women undergraduate student's experiences at a predominantly white institution.

The researcher is looking for 8-10 undergraduate students at your institution who identify as African American/Black and who are juniors or seniors. Minors (those under 18) will be excluded from the study. The principal investigator for this study is Tamara White, Doctoral Student, Higher Education at the Morgridge College of Education, Denver, CO 80208. Tamara White can be reached at [Tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:Tamaradwhite@gmail.com).

If you decide to participate, please understand your **participation is voluntary** and you have the **right to withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate.** If you decide to participate, complete the following qualifying survey. Your completion of this survey indicates your consent to participate in this research study. The survey is designed to determine if you qualify to be a participant in this research study. It will take about 5 minutes to complete. You will be asked to answer questions about how you identify racially and your experience at your institution. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to determine if you qualify as a participant for this research study.

Any discomfort or inconvenience to you from answering the questions and potentially from not qualifying for the study, but they are not expected to be any greater than anything you encounter in everyday life. Data will be collected using the Internet; no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third party. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used.

We strongly advise that you do not use an employer issued device (laptop, smartphone etc.) to respond to this survey.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relationships with student led organizations at your institution. If you decide to participate, you are free to

stop at any time; you may also skip questions if you don't want to answer them or you may choose not to return the survey. If you are eligible for this research study and complete the interviews, you will be compensated.

Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study. You may contact me if you have additional questions at *Tamara White*, [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com), 720-448-3399. My faculty sponsor is Judy Marquez Kiyama, PhD, [Judy.Kiyama@du.edu](mailto:Judy.Kiyama@du.edu), (303) 871-3753. If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the University of Denver (DU) Institutional Review Board to speak to someone independent of the research team at (303) 871-2121, or email at [IRBAdmin@du.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@du.edu).

If you qualify for this research study, you will be contacted to schedule an individual interview with the researcher.

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tamara White,

University of Denver and Morgridge College of Education, Higher Education

Department

Judy Marquez Kiyama, Ph.D.

By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age. [Please feel free to print a copy of this consent form.]

I agree to participate (link to survey,  
[https://udenver.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_42bLGlouG7VirnT](https://udenver.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_42bLGlouG7VirnT))

I decline (link to close webpage)

Appendix J. Recruitment Letter:

African American/Black Student Organizations

Dear Organization,

I am a doctoral student from the college of education at the Capital University. I am writing to ask you if you could forward this flyer for me. I am looking for participants for a research study about retention of African American/Black women at the Capital University. Participants will receive an Amazon gift card for completing a series of interviews.

To be eligible, they must identify as African American/Black, woman, a current junior or senior, and have attended the Capital University for their entire undergraduate career. If a student decides to participate in this study, they will participate in a 90 minute to two-hour individual interview and a two hour group interview. They will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in the individual interview and \$15 gift card for participating in the group interview. The individual interview will be audio recorded and the group interview will be audio and video recorded. This information will be used to help me write my dissertation.

This is completely voluntary. They can choose to be in the study or not. If you know of a student who qualifies for this survey, please forward this email and flyer to them. Thank you.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Tamara White

Appendix K. Recruitment Email to Administrators for African American/Black Women  
Undergraduate Student Participants

Dear Administrator,

I am a doctoral student from the college of education at the Capital University. I am writing to ask you if you could forward this flyer for me. I am looking for participants for a research study about retention of undergraduate African American/Black women at the Capital University. Participants will receive an Amazon gift card for completing a series of interviews.

To be eligible, they must identify as African American/Black, woman, be a current junior or senior, and have attended the Capital University for their entire undergraduate career. If a student decides to participate in this study, they will participate in a 90 minute to two-hour individual interview and a two hour group interview. They will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in the individual interview and \$15 gift card for participating in the group interview. The individual interview will be audio recorded and the group interview will be audio and video recorded. This information will be used to help me write my dissertation.

This is completely voluntary. They can choose to be in the study or not. If you know of a student who qualifies, please forward this email and flyer to them. Thank you.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Tamara

Appendix L. Recruitment Flyer for African American/Black Women Undergraduate Students

**Wanted: African American/Black women juniors and seniors!!**

The University of Denver's Department of Education is conducting a research study on: **Retention of African American/Black women undergraduate junior and senior students**. The study will take place at the Library at the Capital University.

If you are junior or senior who identifies as a woman and African American or Black, and are currently **attending the Capital University**, you may qualify for a research study examining how CapU is helping Black women be successful at college. Eligible participants will be asked to complete a 90-minute to 2 hour individual interview and a 2 hour group interview. Every participant will receive a \$25 gift card for completing the individual interview and \$15 gift card for completing the group interview.



For more information, please email Tamara White at [Tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:Tamaradwhite@gmail.com)

Principal Investigator: Tamara White, Doctoral Student

Faculty Sponsor: Judy Marquez Kiyama, Ph.D.



Appendix M. Qualifying Email to African American/Black Women  
Undergraduate Student Participants

Dear Student,

Thank you for taking my survey. I am a doctoral student from the college of education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about retention of African American/Black Women. You're eligible to be in the study because you are an AABW junior or senior student at the Capital University.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will participate in a 90 minute to two-hour individual and a two-hour group interview. You will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in the individual interview and \$15 gift card for participating in the group interview. The individual interview will be audio recorded and the group interview will be audio and video recorded. This information will be used to help me write my dissertation.

If you would like to participate please email me three dates and times that would work for an 90 minute to 2 hour interview between September 7-13 and September 22-28.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Tamara



Appendix N. Confirmation Email to African American/Black Women

Undergraduate Student Participants

Dear Student,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study about how CapU is helping you be successful. Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not.

Your interview time will be:

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Location: Academic Commons, Room #108B**

This interview should take between 90-minutes to 2 hours. You will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card at the completion of the interview. The individual interview will be audio recorded. This information will be used to help me write my dissertation.

If you decide not to participate in this research study, or if you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Tamara White

Appendix O. Recruitment Email to Administrators (Pilot, Leader and Staff)

Dear Administrator,

I am a doctoral student from the college of education at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about retention of African American/Black women. You're eligible to be in the study because you work in Academic Advising, Residence Life, Orientation or Student Engagement at the Capital University. I obtained your contact information from the employee directory.

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will participate in a 30-minute individual interview. You will not receive any compensation. The individual interview will be audio recorded. This information will be used to help me write my dissertation.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

If you would like to participate please email me three dates and times that would work for an interview between dates and dates.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Tamara White

Appendix P. Informed Consent:

African American/Black Women Participants' Individual Interview

**Exempt Research Information Sheet**

**Title of Research Study:** Institutional Policy Levers Influence On African American/Black Women Undergraduate Students Retention

**Principal Investigator:** Tamara White, University of Denver, Faculty Sponsor, Judy Marquez Kiyama, PhD, University of Denver, Morgridge College of Education, [Judy.Kiyama@du.edu](mailto:Judy.Kiyama@du.edu), (303) 871-3753.

**IRBNet Protocol #: 1456518-1**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

**Study Purpose:**

You are invited to participate in a research study that will help explain how the Capital University is helping you stay and graduate from college. This study is being conducted to better understand how African American/Black women junior and senior undergraduate college students understand, experience, and utilize Academic Advising, New Student Orientation, Residence Life and Student Engagement at the Capital University. Results will be used to gain insight into the overall experiences of African American/Black women undergraduate student's experiences at a predominantly white institution. The researcher is looking for 8-10 undergraduate students at the Capital University who identify as African American/Black and who are juniors or seniors. Minors (those under 18) will be excluded from the study. The Principal investigator will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. The principal investigator for this study is Tamara White, Doctoral Student, Higher Education at the Morgridge College of Education, Denver, CO 80208. Tamara White can be reached at [Tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:Tamaradwhite@gmail.com). Please know, you may choose not to participate in either interview or answer any of the questions during the interview for any reason without penalty.

The study will involve two interviews. Interview one will take approximately 90 minutes to two hours in length. Interview two will be a group interview with other African American/Black women in the study and will take approximately two hours in length. During interview one, the researcher will ask you questions specifically concerning your experiences at CapU as an African American/Black woman and your experience with Academic Advising, New Student Orientation, Residence Life and Student Engagement

offices. During the second interview, you and the other women will be asked follow-up questions related to themes from interview one and themes from interviews with those departments.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary.

### **Possible Risks and Discomforts**

The risks associated with this project are as follows. You may experience discomfort from discussing issues of race. You may experience discomfort sharing personal information with the group interview. If you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. The Capital University Health and Counseling Center (303-871-2205) is available should the nature this study initiate emotions which are difficult to process. The researcher will also provide a list of professional counseling references for participants. Since the researcher will keep some research files on a personal computer, loss or theft of the computer is a potential risk. However, the computer is password protected. Additionally, information sensitive documents will be encrypted.

### **Possible Benefits of the Study**

You may benefit from this research by being able to tell your story about your experience as an African American/Black woman college student, and this research will be used to better understand how colleges can better support African American/Black women undergraduate students.

You will receive compensation for participating in this research project. After completing the individual interview, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card. After completing the group interview, you will receive a \$15 Amazon gift card.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be a part of the research study, you will be asked to complete a short 5 minute qualifying survey. If you qualify, you will be contacted by the researcher to schedule an individual interview for 90 minutes to two hours. Once all the individual interviews are completed with the students and the staff, you be contacted for the group interview. You will be asked to participate in a two hour group interview with 7-9 other African American/Black women undergraduate students. details about the procedures and duration of participation.

Before you begin, please note that the data you provide may be collected and used by Qualtrics as per its privacy agreement. This research is only for U.S. residents over the age of 18. Please be mindful to respond in a private setting and through a secured Internet connection for your privacy. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

You will be audio recorded *during the individual interview*. If you do not want to be audio recorded, please inform the researcher, and only hand-written notes will be taken during the interview/group interview.

You will be audio and video recorded *during the group interview*. If you do not want to be audio and/or video recorded, please inform the researcher. You do not have to be video recorded and participation in both interviews is voluntary.

### **Consent to audio recording solely for purposes of this research**

This study involves audio recording. If you do not agree to be recorded, you can still take part in the study. *(Please check one.)*

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I agree to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ NO, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact *Tamara White* at 720-448-3399 or at *Tamaradwhite@gmail.com* at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Denver's Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) by emailing [IRBAdmin@du.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@du.edu) or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

The University of Denver Institutional Review Board has determined that this study is minimal risk and is exempt from full IRB oversight.

**Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.**

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Participant Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Date**

## Appendix Q: Counseling Resources:

### African American/Black Women Participants

Counseling resources – African American/Black women

#### **Capital University, Health and Counseling Services**

- Phone: 303-871-2205
- After Hours Medical Problems: 303-871-2205/Follow the Prompts
- After Hours Counselor on Call: 303-871-2205/Follow the Prompts
- For life-threatening Emergencies, dial 911 or call Campus Safety at 303-871-3000

#### **Mental Health Center of Denver**

- <https://mhcd.org/>
- To schedule a first time appointment, contact the Access Center by calling (303) 504-7900.
- Send an Email: [AccessCenter@mhcd.org](mailto:AccessCenter@mhcd.org)

#### **Colorado Crisis Services**

- <http://coloradocrisisservices.org/>
- **Call 1-844-493-TALK (8255)**  
If you are in crisis or need help dealing with one, call this toll-free number 1-844-493-TALK (8255) to speak to a trained professional or **text TALK to 38255**.
- Colorado Crisis Services operates 6 walk-in crisis centers across metro Denver. These centers are open 24/7, and offer confidential, in-person crisis support, information and referrals to anyone in need.

Appendix R. Confirmation Email:  
Administrators (Pilot, Leader and Staff)

Dear Administrator,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my pilot research study about retention of African American/Black women. Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not.

Your interview time will be:

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Location: Academic Commons, Room #**

This interview should take about 30-minutes. You will not receive any compensation.

The individual interview will be audio recorded. This information will be used to help me develop my interview protocol for my dissertation.

If you decide not to participate in this research study, or if you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Tamara White

Appendix S. Informed Consent Form:  
Administrator Participants (Pilot, Leader and Staff)

Exempt Research Information Sheet

**Title of Research Study:** Institutional Policy Levers Influence On African American/Black Women Undergraduate Students Retention

**Principal Investigator:** Tamara White, University of Denver,  
Faculty Sponsor, Judy Marquez Kiyama, PhD, University of Denver, Morgridge College  
of Education, [Judy.Kiyama@du.edu](mailto:Judy.Kiyama@du.edu), (303) 871-3753.

IRBNet Protocol #: 1456518-1

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

**Study Purpose:**

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to interview to provide information on how the Capital University is helping African American/Black women undergraduate students stay in school. I am interested in interviewing 3-4 institution staff who have decision making responsibility in Academic Advising, New Student Orientation, Residence Life and Student Engagement for 30 minutes to one hour.

Please know, you may choose not to participate in either interview or answer any of the questions during the interview for any reason without penalty.

You are invited to participate in a study that will help explain how the Capital University is helping African American/Black women undergraduate students stay and graduate from college. This study is being conducted to better understand how African American/Black women junior and senior undergraduate college students understand, experience, and utilize Academic Advising, New Student Orientation, Residence Life and Student Engagement. Results will be used to gain insight into the overall experiences of African American/Black women undergraduate student's experiences at a predominantly white institution. The researcher is looking for 3-4 staff in leadership roles in Academic Advising, New Student Orientation, Residence Life and Student Engagement. Minors (those under 18) will be excluded from the study. The Principal investigator will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. The principal investigator for this study is Tamara White, Doctoral Student, Higher Education at the Morgridge College of



Education, Denver, CO 80208. Tamara White can be reached at [Tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:Tamaradwhite@gmail.com).

The study will involve one interview. Interview one will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour in length. During the interview, the researcher will ask you questions specifically concerning how your office supports and interacts with African American/Black women undergraduate students. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary.

### **Possible Risks and Discomforts**

The risks associated with this project are as follows. You may experience discomfort from discussing issues of race. You may experience discomfort sharing information on how your office is supporting African American/Black women undergraduate students. We will be asking you about both positive and negative experiences in working with students. There is a very small chance you may become upset if you voluntarily disclose an experience that was particularly stressful or unhappy. You may also experience discomfort being interviewed in the same study as a staff member in your office. Strict privacy measures will be used to ensure your confidentiality.

If you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. The Capital University Health and Counseling Center (303.871.2205) has an Employee Assistance Program and is available should the nature of this study initiate emotions which are difficult to process. The researcher will also provide a list of professional counseling references for participants. Since the researcher will keep some research files on a personal computer, loss or theft of the computer is a potential risk. However, the computer is password protected. Additionally, information sensitive documents will be encrypted.

### **Possible Benefits of the Study**

You may benefit from this research by being able to highlight how your office is supporting African American/Black women undergraduate students, and this research will be used to better understand how colleges can better support African American/Black women undergraduate students.

You will not receive compensation for participating in this research project.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be a part of the research study, you will have an individual interview for 30 minutes to one hour.

You will be audio recorded during the individual interview. If you do not want to be audio recorded, please inform the researcher, and only hand-written notes will be taken during the interview.

**Consent to audio recording solely for purposes of this research**

This study involves audio recording. If you do not agree to be recorded, you can still take part in the study. *(Please check one.)*

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I agree to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ NO, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact Tamara White at 720-448-3399 or at [Tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:Tamaradwhite@gmail.com) at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Denver’s Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) by emailing [IRBAdmin@du.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@du.edu) or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

The University of Denver Institutional Review Board has determined that this study is minimal risk and is exempt from full IRB oversight.

**Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.**

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Signature** **Date**

## Appendix T. Counseling Resources:

### Administrator Participants (Pilot, Leader and Staff)

Counseling resources – staff

#### **Capital University, Health and Counseling Services**

- Phone: 303-871-2205
- After Hours Medical Problems: 303-871-2205/Follow the Prompts
- After Hours Counselor on Call: 303-871-2205/Follow the Prompts
- For life-threatening Emergencies, dial 911 or call Campus Safety at 303-871-3000

#### **Employee Assistance Program**

- call 1-888-881-LINC [5462], or
- log in to the [SupportLinc website](#) with username
- eConnect® mobile app

#### **Mental Health Center of Denver**

- <https://mhcd.org/>
- To schedule a first time appointment, contact the Access Center by calling [\(303\) 504-7900](tel:3035047900).
- Send an Email: [AccessCenter@mhcd.org](mailto:AccessCenter@mhcd.org)

#### **Colorado Crisis Services**

- <http://coloradocrisiservices.org/>
- Call [1-844-493-TALK \(8255\)](tel:1844493TALK)  
If you are in crisis or need help dealing with one, call this toll-free number [1-844-493-TALK \(8255\)](tel:1844493TALK) to speak to a trained professional or text TALK to 38255.
- [Colorado Crisis Services](#) operates 6 walk-in crisis centers across metro Denver. These centers are open 24/7, and offer confidential, in-person crisis support, information and referrals to anyone in need.

## Appendix U. Recruitment Email: Focus Group Interview

Dear Student,

Thank you again for participating in the individual interview for my research study about how your institution is supporting you in being successful in college. This email serves two purposes, your transcript and a scheduling question.

First, I want to make sure you received your transcript of our individual interview. If you did not, please let me know. Please take a look and ensure I accurately captured our conversation. If there is something missing or incorrect, please let me know.

Second, I have completed my individual student interviews and am now working on scheduling the group interview. Can you please complete this doodle poll and let me know which dates and times you are available. I will provide a Zoom option for those of you studying abroad.

<https://doodle.com/poll/4v5mtyyxivrrka67>

Once I hear back from everyone on their availability, I will let you know when the group interview is scheduled. Please complete the doodle poll by 10/18/19.

Remember, you will receive a \$15 gift card for participating in the group interview. This information will be used to help me write my dissertation.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Tamara

## Appendix V. Confirmation Email: Focus Group Interview

Dear Student,

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my research study about how your institution is helping you be successful. I really enjoyed talking with you at your individual interview and look forward to talking with you at the group interview. Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not.

The group interview is scheduled for:

Date: Sunday, November 3, 2019

Time: 3pm -5pm (Mountain time)

Location: Anderson Academic Commons - Room 389 - Cherne Large Group Study

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/122158064?pwd=Y1RIQUdhc3VQajh4bG12T3RRMUw5QT09>

Meeting ID: 122 158 064

Password: 999598

One tap mobile

+14086380968,,122158064# US (San Jose)

+16465588656,,122158064# US (New York)

Dial by your location

+1 408 638 0968 US (San Jose)

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 122 158 064

Find your local number: <https://us04web.zoom.us/u/fbuCi7ADLx>

This interview should take about 2 hours. You will receive a \$15 Amazon gift card at the completion of the interview. The group interview will be audio and video recorded. Just a reminder, this information will be used to help me write my dissertation.

If you decide not to participate in this part of the research study, or if you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

Thank you very much and I look forward to seeing you again soon.

Sincerely,

Tamara

Appendix W. Informed Consent:

African American/Black Women Participants' Focus Group Interview

**Exempt Research Information Sheet**

**Title of Research Study:** Institutional Policy Levers Influence On African American/Black Women Undergraduate Students Retention

**Principal Investigator:** Tamara White, University of Denver, Faculty Sponsor, Judy Marquez Kiyama, PhD, University of Denver, Morgridge College of Education, [Judy.Kiyama@du.edu](mailto:Judy.Kiyama@du.edu), (303) 871-3753.

**IRBNet Protocol #: 1456518-1**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

**Study Purpose:**

You are invited to participate in a study that will help explain how the Capital University is helping you stay and graduate from college. This study is being conducted to better understand how African American/Black women junior and senior undergraduate college students understand, experience, and utilize Academic Advising, New Student Orientation, Resident Life and Student Engagement. Results will be used to gain insight into the overall experiences of African American/Black women undergraduate student's experiences at a predominantly white institution. The researcher is looking for 8-10 undergraduate students at the Capital University who identify as African American/Black and who are juniors or seniors. Minors (those under 18) will be excluded from the study. The Principal investigator will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. The principal investigator for this study is Tamara White, Doctoral Student, Higher Education at the Morgridge College of Education, Denver, CO 80208. Tamara White can be reached at [Tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:Tamaradwhite@gmail.com). Please know, you may choose not to participate in either interview or answer any of the questions during the interview for any reason without penalty.

The study will involve two interviews. Interview one will take approximately 90 minutes to two hours in length. Interview two will be a group interview with other African American/Black women in the study and will take approximately two hours in length.

During interview one, the researcher will ask you questions specifically concerning your experiences at CapU as an African American/Black women and your experience with Academic Advising, New Student Orientation, Resident Life and Student Engagement offices. During the second interview, you and the other women will be asked follow-up questions related to themes from interview one and themes from interviews with those departments.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary.

### **Possible Risks and Discomforts**

The risks associated with this project are as follows. You may experience discomfort from discussing issues of race. You may experience discomfort sharing personal information with the group interview. We will be asking you about both positive and negative experiences about being a student at CapU. There is a very small chance you may become upset if you voluntarily disclose an experience that was particularly stressful or unhappy or hear about an experience. All participants will be asked to sign a confidentiality statement asking them not to discuss any information they learn during the interview about other participants.

If you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. The Capital University Health and Counseling Center (303.871.2205) is available should the nature this study initiate emotions which are difficult to process. The researcher will also provide a list of professional counseling references for participants. Since the researcher will keep some research files on a personal computer, loss or theft of the computer is a potential risk. However, the computer is password protected. Additionally, information sensitive documents will be encrypted.

### **Possible Benefits of the Study**

You may benefit from this research by being able to tell your story about your experience as an African American/Black woman college student, and this research will be used to better understand how colleges can better support African American/Black women undergraduate students.

You will receive compensation for participating in this research project. After completing the individual interview, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card. After completing the group interview, you will receive a \$15 Amazon gift card.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be a part of the research study, you will be asked to complete a short 5 minute qualifying survey. If you qualify, you will be contacted by the researcher to schedule an individual interview for 90 minutes to two hours. Once all the individual interviews are completed with the students and the staff, you be contacted for the group interview. You will be asked to participate in a two hour group interview with 7-9 other African American/Black women undergraduate students. details about the procedures and duration of participation.

Before you begin, please note that the data you provide may be collected and used by Qualtrics as per its privacy agreement. This research is only for U.S. residents over the age of 18. Please be mindful to respond in a private setting and through a secured Internet connection for your privacy. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

You will be audio recorded during the individual interview. If you do not want to be audio recorded, please inform the researcher, and only hand-written notes will be taken during the interview/group interview.

You will be audio and video recorded during the group interview. If you do not want to be audio and/or video recorded, please inform the researcher. You do not have to be video recorded and participation in both interviews is voluntary.

**Consent to audio recording solely for purposes of this research**

This study involves audio recording. If you do not agree to be recorded, you can still take part in the study. *(Please check one.)*

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I agree to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ NO, I do not agree to be audio recorded.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact *Tamara White* at 720-448-3399 or at *Tamaradwhite@gmail.com* at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Denver’s Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) by emailing [IRBAdmin@du.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@du.edu) or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

The University of Denver Institutional Review Board has determined that this study is minimal risk and is exempt from full IRB oversight.

**Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.**

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Participant Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Date**



Appendix X. Confidentiality Statement:

African American/Black Women Participant Focus Group Interview

**Title of Research Study:** Institutional Policy Levers Influence On African American/Black Women Undergraduate Students Retention

**Principal Investigator:** Tamara White, University of Denver, Faculty Sponsor, Judy Marquez Kiyama, PhD, University of Denver, Morgridge College of Education, [Judy.Kiyama@du.edu](mailto:Judy.Kiyama@du.edu), (303) 871-3753.

I am \_\_\_\_\_  
Student Name

Agree to the following:

- I will not tell other people who participated in this group interview,
- I will not tell other people the participant responses to the researcher's questions, and
- I will not disclose to others outside this event anything said within the context of the discussion.
  
- I will keep the information discussed at this group interview confidential.

**By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.**

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix Y. Recruitment Email:

Executive Leadership, Student Engagement and Inclusive Excellence

Dear Executive Leadership for Student Engagement And Inclusive Excellence,

I am a doctoral student from the college of education at the Capital University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about retention of African American/Black women at predominantly white institutions.

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will participate in a 30-minute individual interview. You will not receive any compensation. The individual interview will be audio recorded. This information will be used to help me write my dissertation.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

If you would like to participate please email me who I should contact to schedule a meeting with you.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Tamara

Appendix Z. Confirmation Email:

Executive Leadership, Student Engagement and Inclusive Excellence

Dear Executive Leadership, Student Engagement and Inclusive Excellence,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study about retention of African American/Black women undergraduate students at predominantly white institutions. Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not.

In preparation of the meeting, I have attached the consent form. I will go over it on Monday and ask you to sign. I have also attached the questions. Please don't feel like you need to prepare responses. This is only to give you an idea of what I will be asking.

Your interview time will be:

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Location:**

This interview should take about 30-minutes to one hour. You will not receive any compensation. The individual interview will be audio/video recorded. This information will be used to help me write my dissertation.

If you decide not to participate in this research study, or if you have any questions about the study, please contact me at [tamaradwhite@gmail.com](mailto:tamaradwhite@gmail.com) or 720-448-3399.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,  
Tamara

Appendix AA.

Codes – Major Concepts

<b>Institutional Policy Levers</b>
<b>Academic Advising</b>
Theme findings
Major advisor
Daniels
<b>Administrative Policies and procedures</b>
Theme findings
Policies
President
Classroom
<b>Student Orientation Programs</b>
Theme findings
College Success Course
Involvement Fair
Orientation Leader
<b>Residential life</b>
Theme findings
Resident Assistant
Resident Assistant Training
<b>Student Affairs Programming</b>
Theme findings
African Student Union
Black Student Association
Student Government Association, Diversity Committee
<b>How AABW students experience Institutional policy levers at PWIs (Student Experience)</b>
<b>Perception of Black women</b>

Angry Black Woman
How we are seen
<b>Lack of Black Resources</b>
Black Faculty and Staff
Black Greeks
Black Space
<b>Culture Center</b>
First Generation
Black Male Initiative
Black Women Leadership Program
Pre-Orientation programs
Black women retreat
Volunteer Program
<b>How did the participants use various Offices for support</b>
Women Scholars Program
SEIE
The Culture Center
Career Advising
Health Center
Funding
Financial Aid -CapU gave me money
Support AABW
Mentor/Supervise
Staff
<b>How Familiar were the participants with the offices</b>
<b>Inclusive Excellence</b>
POC SOC
First Gen
Immigrants
Muslim

<b>CapU is hard</b>
Being Black
Find my voice
Friends
Gender
Safe and Scared
Self-conscious
Dating
The only
Transferring
Microaggression
Parents
<b>Racism at CapU</b>
Email
It's okay to be white
Mascot
<b>CECE</b>
Cultural Familiarity
Culturally relevant knowledge
Cultural community service
Cross-cultural engagement
Collectivist cultural orientation
Culturally validating environment
Humanizing student's experiences
Proactive philosophy
Holistic support
Retention
Persistence
Success
Suggestions

Appendix AB.

Original 82 Codes

Code	Files code appears in	Number of times code is referenced
Academic Advising	22	92
Major Advisor	9	35
College of Business	2	7
Administration not doing anything	11	31
Angry Black Woman	1	3
African Student Union	9	30
Being Black	10	59
Black Faculty and Staff	2	4
Black Greeks	2	2
Black Space	4	15
Black Student Association	17	71
Career Advising	1	3
The Culture Center	99	1040
First Generation	8	19
Black Male Initiative	3	4
Black Women Leadership Program	3	7
Pre-Orientation programs	15	63
Black women retreat	2	2
Volunteer Program	5	9
CECE	4	4
Collectivist Cultural Orientation	3	4
Cross-cultural Engagement	16	42
Cultural Community Service	5	7
Cultural Familiarity	49	152
Culturally Relevant Knowledge	15	35
Culturally Validating Environment	36	123
Holistic Support	15	58
Humanizing Students Experiences	13	37
Proactive Philosophy	16	51
Chancellor	2	3
Classroom	10	47
SEIE	6	8
The Culture Center	9	21
Women Scholars Program	3	9
Dating	1	1

Student Government Association, Diversity Committee	5	9
CapU is hard	14	79
Racist Email	9	52
Familiar	10	14
Financial Aid - CapU gave me money	8	12
Find my voice	5	13
First Gen	2	2
Friends	8	16
Funding	9	14
Gender	9	12
Health Center	1	2
How we are seen	6	23
Immigrants	3	4
Inclusive Excellence	5	19
It's okay to be white	1	3
Mentor /Supervise	10	22
Microaggression	5	9
Muslim	1	1
New Student Orientation	28	120
College Success Course	8	19
Involvement Fair	2	3
Orientation Leader	3	6
Orientation	14	43
Offices for support	17	34
Parents	1	1
Perception	10	14
Persistence	16	20
Pilot interview nodes	0	0
Mascot	1	3
POC SOC	4	6
Policies	15	28
Residence Life	38	208
Resident Assistant	10	38
Resident Assistant Training	6	13
Retention	12	20
Safe and Scared	3	5
Self-conscious	5	17
Staff	10	25
Student Engagement	25	139
Success	9	11
Suggestions	9	16



Support AABW	8	44
The only	8	24
Transferring	4	10
Workstudy	4	8
Writing Center	1	1

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