

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE COLLEGE CHOICE PROCESS FOR
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

by

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(ABSTRACT)

There has been a slight increase in African American enrollment in higher education in the 30 years since the passage of the Civil Rights Act. However, minority students are not represented in higher education in numbers proportionate to their representation in the general population. African Americans consist of 12.6% of the population, but only 10.6% of the students enrolled in higher education (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1998).

Additionally, there are differences in the types of schools that successfully educate African American students. Historically Black institutions (HBIs) confer a disproportionately high number of bachelor's degrees on such students. Of all the bachelor's degrees conferred on African Americans in 1994, over 43% were awarded by predominantly White institutions (PWIs) while HBIs conferred 45.1% of the degrees (Nettles & Perna, 1997). There seems to be some difference between the success rates of African American students at PWIs and HBIs.

One of the factors that may influence these success rates is the college selection process. That is, if there are different types of African American students attending PWIs versus HBIs, those differences may account for some of the differences in success rates at the two types of schools. It would seem that research is needed on the factors that African Americans consider in the college selection process, and if those factors differ between African Americans at PWIs and those at HBIs. The present study sought to examine this issue.

A 60-item survey was developed specifically for this study. Survey items asked respondents to rate the extent of influence (very negative to very positive) that factors in four

arenas played in their decision to attend a particular school. The four arenas explored in the study included academic factors, social factors, personal factors, and financial factors. The target sample included 360 traditional aged freshmen students: 180 at a PWI and 180 at a HBI.

Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated on all items for each group. These were rank-ordered by group to explore differences by item. Then a factor analysis was conducted to create subscales of the items for each scale. Finally, independent t-tests were conducted to compare mean scores between groups. Results revealed no significant differences in mean score between groups or any of the subscales. However, important differences between groups were identified when the rankings of the mean scores were examined.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Affirmative action was officially enacted with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Civil Rights Act established a set of policies and guidelines intended to eliminate discrimination based on race and gender. This legislation was initiated in response to the concern that executive orders, court rulings and pressure from civil rights organizations were not sufficient enough to end discrimination in the United States (Feinberg, 1998).

There were two main objectives of the legislation. First, it was designed to reduce discrimination against women and minorities in certain positions. In doing so, it aimed to increase the total number of women and minorities at all levels of the work force and in colleges and universities (Feinberg, 1998). Second, the act was designed to create equal opportunity for all persons, regardless of their race, age, gender or socioeconomic background (Clark, 1960). This notion of equal opportunity came to be known as affirmative action.

The introduction of affirmative action into colleges and universities changed the student population. Until the 1950s, students in professional programs at institutions of higher education were primarily young, White males. Affirmative action was designed to allow women and racial and ethnic minorities to more equitably compete for admission to institutions of higher education. As a result of affirmative action, higher education experienced an increase in the percentage of women and racial minorities in college level classrooms (Feinberg, 1998).

From 1965 to 1994, there were significant gains in the total number of racial minorities enrolled in higher education. The total number of minorities enrolled in college increased from 400,000 to 2.8 million during this 30-year period. African American students increased from

8.5% to 10.1% of all college students. Hispanic students increased from 3 % to 7.4 % of all students enrolled in higher education (Nettles & Perna, 1997).

During this same time, the number of minority students graduating from high school also increased. This was due to a greater number of high school aged students in the U.S. population and a declining dropout rate. Researchers speculate that these factors may have contributed to the increased numbers of minority students in higher education (Renner, 1998).

These findings would suggest that affirmative action has been effective in increasing the number of underrepresented students in higher education. Recent trends suggest this might not be the case, however. In recent years, there has been a decline in the number of African Americans attending institutions of higher education. In general, it might be more fair to say that in the 30 years since Affirmative Action became law, racial and ethnic minorities have not been admitted to college in representative numbers in the U. S. (Freeman, 1999).

The population of the U.S. is estimated to be 269 million (Andersen, 1997). Of this figure, 193 million are White Americans and 76 million are racial and ethnic minorities. The racial composition of the country includes 12.6% African Americans, 10.5% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian American and 0.8% who identify themselves as members of other races (Nettles & Perna, 1997).

The enrollment in the American higher education system is also composed of students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Institutions of higher education enroll approximately 14,367,520 students. White Americans represent 71.4% (10,263,865) of the total enrollment. African American students are 10.6% (1,505,565) of college student enrollment, while Hispanic students represent 8.2% (1,166,108) (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1998).

The composition of Asian American students in higher education is a unique situation. They are the only racial minority that has greater representation in higher education than in the U.S. population. Asian American students represent 5.8% of total college enrollment and 2.9% of the U.S. population (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1998).

Unlike the Asian American population, African Americans and Hispanics are not represented in the higher education system in the same proportion as they are in the U.S. population. African Americans consist of 12.6% of the population, but only 10.6% of the students enrolled in higher education. Although Hispanics are 10.5% of the U.S. population, they represent only 8.2% of students in higher education (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1998).

The disproportionate number of African Americans and other racial minorities in higher education has been a concern for some time (Clark & Crawford, 1992; Kingston, 1984). Colleges and universities, specifically predominantly White institutions (PWIs), are seeking ways to recruit more minority students. These institutions are attempting to create innovative programs and special initiatives to recruit, retain, and graduate minority students in order to increase the number of minorities who earn post-secondary degrees (Kunjufu, 1997).

There are 4,009 colleges and universities in the U.S. PWIs represent 3,904 of these institutions. A majority of African American students pursue post-secondary degrees at PWIs (Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995). Of the 1,505,600 African American students attending college, 80% are enrolled at PWIs (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1998; Wenglinsky, 1996).

Although the majority of African American students attend PWIs, historically Black institutions (HBIs) educate a substantial number of African American men and women as well

(Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Clark & Crawford, 1992). Within the United States there are 105 HBIs in 19 states and the District of Columbia. In 1996, 301,120 of African Americans, or 16% of all African Americans in higher education were seeking their undergraduate degrees at HBIs (Wenglinsky, 1996).

Both PWIs and HBIs graduate African American students from undergraduate degree programs. Of all the bachelor's degrees conferred on African Americans in 1994, over 43% were awarded by PWIs while HBIs conferred 45.1% of the degrees (Nettles & Perna, 1997). So although PWIs enroll more African American students than HBIs, HBIs confer a greater percentage of degrees awarded to African American students than do PWIs. This would suggest HBIs have been more effective in retaining their African American students and encouraging them to complete their undergraduate education.

Those who study these enrollment patterns frequently discuss how the college selection process may influence the degree of success students have in college. The college selection process refers to the factors that influence applicants when deciding which colleges to apply to and what factors they consider when deciding which of the colleges or universities they have been admitted to they wish to attend (Ranero, 1999).

Scholars have conducted a wide range of research regarding the factors that influence the college selection process. Some studies focus on the individuals who were most influential in helping students with the college selection process (e.g. high school guidance counselors, parents, college faculty members or alumni from a particular college) (Loewith, 1998; Sevier, 1992). Others focus on the influence of various types of admissions media on the college selection process. Media studies examine applicants' use of the Internet in comparison with

printed material in the college selection process. Although applicants use the Internet to search for college information, they value printed material more (Guernsey, 1998; Hartman, 1997).

Research has also been conducted on other factors that motivate students to attend college. Some students are motivated by their aspirations to become an authority in their field, to own their own business, and to be financially stable when they enter the workforce (Wenglinsky, 1996).

Additional research has been conducted to discover the factors that influence the college selection process among African American students. African American students are attracted to college for a variety of reasons. The most prevalent factors in the college selection process for African American students can be grouped into four main categories: academic issues, social issues, personal issues, and financial issues (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Allen, 1987; Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donahue, 1996; Clark & Crawford, 1992; Freeman, 1999; Horvat, 1996; Sevier, 1992).

Academic issues such as availability of major and academic reputation of the university are factors that influence African American students' decisions to attend college. A large number of students enter their undergraduate institution undecided on an academic major. These students are attracted to institutions that can provide them with a wide variety of academic majors from which to choose (Canale et al., 1996).

The academic reputation of an institution can also be very important to African American students. They expect to acquire knowledge and skills in a particular field so they will be marketable for the jobs they want to pursue. Attending a college that has an excellent reputation for a specific academic program such as engineering or business will assist them in achieving

their goal (Canale et al., 1996; Sevier, 1992). Students also see academic reputation as leading to more job opportunities for them (Freeman, 1999).

The next major group of factors that relate to the college selection process for African Americans is social issues. Racism is one such social issue. Racism on college campuses and concern about being able to adjust to a culturally diverse environment are social issues that African American students consider when choosing a college (Allen, 1987; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). Many students come from communities or environments that are comprised of other minorities like themselves. They have not been confronted with issues of racism and discrimination but consider these issues when deciding on a college or university (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Clark & Crawford, 1992; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Sedlacek, 1987).

There are also personal issues that affect students' decision to attend college. Friends and former students tend to encourage African American applicants to attend a certain university (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990). Opinions of friends and former students pertaining to the college atmosphere weigh heavily in the minds of African American college applicants when deciding upon a college.

Family influences are another personal issue that African American students deal with when selecting a college (Horvat, 1996). Encouragement by family members to attend a particular university influences many students. These students may be persuaded to enroll in a particular college because their parents or other family members attended the same school. They may even be encouraged to attend a particular institution because the family wants the student to achieve at a higher level than they did (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Freeman, 1999; Sevier, 1992).

The fourth group of factors that influence the college selection process for African American students relates to financial issues. There are a number of financial issues that influence African American students' decisions to attend college (Allen, 1987; Canale et al., 1996; Clark & Crawford, 1992; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Sevier, 1992; Wenglinisky, 1996). Thirty-seven percent of African American college students are from families that have a total income of \$18,581 or less (Clark & Crawford, 1992). These students consider whether or not their families can afford the costs associated with attending a college or university. African American students are concerned with the financial hardships their families may incur by sending them to college (Canale et al., 1996; Sevier, 1992).

Collectively, these four types of factors (academic, social, personal, and financial) all influence the college selection process for African American students. The college selection process dictates what type of institution the student will attend, and in turn, seems to have some effect on the success of African American students.

In summary, although there has been a slight increase in African American enrollment in higher education in the 30 years since the passage of the Civil Rights Act, African American students are not represented in higher education in numbers proportionate to their representation in the general population. Additionally, HBIs confer a disproportionately high number of bachelor's degrees to African American students. There seems to be some difference between the success rates of African American students at PWIs and HBIs. One of the factors that may influence these success rates is the college selection process. It would seem that research is needed on the factors that African Americans consider in the college selection process and whether those factors differ between African Americans at PWIs and those at HBIs. The present study sought to examine this issue.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence African American students' decisions to attend a PWI or a HBI. These factors were grouped into four major categories: academic, personal, social, and financial factors.

The researcher created an instrument to measure the degree to which factors in these four categories influenced the college selection decisions of the participants. The instrument was administered to samples of first year African American students at one PWI and one HBI.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The study examined the following research questions and research hypotheses:

1. What factors affect the college selection process of African Americans (AAs) who attend PWIs?
2. What factors affect the college selection process of African Americans (AAs) who attend HBIs?
3. There is no significant difference in the extent to which academic issues (AIs) affect the college selection process of AAs who attend PWIs and those who attend HBIs.
4. There is no significant difference in the extent to which social issues (SIs) affect the college selection process of AAs who attend PWIs and those who attend HBIs.
5. There is no significant difference in the extent to which personal issues (PIs) affect the college selection process of AAs who attend PWIs and those who attend HBIs.
6. There is no significant difference in the extent to which financial issues (FIs) affect the college selection process of AAs who attend PWIs and those who attend HBIs.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for practice as well as for future research in higher education. The data collected from this study might be useful to student affairs professionals in the office of Admissions, African American high school students, and the parents of African Americans in high school.

The staff in Admissions Offices at colleges and universities might benefit from the information gathered in this study. These professionals might gain insight into those factors that African American students perceive to be influential in the college selection process. Admissions staff could use this knowledge to address the concerns of African American students when they try to recruit such students.

African American high school students who are involved in the college search process may find the information provided in the present study helpful by learning about which factors have influenced African American students to pursue an education at a PWI or a HBI. The results of this study might provide them with more information to assist them in their college selection process.

Parents of African American high school students might also be able to use the results of this study. By reviewing this data, parents might develop an understanding what aspects of the college environment are important when students are selecting an institution. Knowing the results of this study could render parents more confident in their abilities to assist their children in the college selection process.

This study also has significance for future research. The present study examined factors that influence the college choice process for African American students. Additional studies could be conducted to examine the most influential factors of the college selection process for other

minority groups (e.g. Hispanics, Native Americans). Such a study would expand the information available about the college search process for students of color.

Another study could investigate the factors that influence the college selection process of African American students at other institutional types. The present study examined the perceptions of African American students at a research I institution and a Master's comprehensive university. This study could be adapted to assess the perceptions of African American students at other institutional types (e.g. community colleges, liberal arts institutions). Such a study would enable scholars to examine differences in factors that influence the college selection process for African Americans by institutional type.

Other potential studies could examine the role of any of the factors investigated in the present study in more depth. For example, the present study explored the role of personal factors in the college selection process. One personal factor explored in the study was the role of the African American family in the college choice process. Future scholars might wish to conduct a more in depth investigation of how the African American family participates in the college choice process and how family aspirations can motivate students to attend college.

Limitations

As with all research, there were several limitations associated with this study. One such limitation was related to the sample used in the study. The data for this study were collected from African American students at two different institutions. The PWI was a research I institution and the HBI was a Master's comprehensive institution (Carnegie Classification, 1994). It is possible that African American students attracted to these two types of institutions differed in some important manner. If so, the results might have been skewed.

Second, this was a quantitative study. It used a survey to collect data from the respondents. This type of data collection technique limited the nature of the responses given by the participants. The survey created for this study may not have addressed all factors that matter to African American students in the college selection process. If so, this may have skewed the results.

Third, the data were collected from a sample that only included African American students from two institutions in a single geographic region. The PWI and the HBI are located in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. It is possible that African American students who attend college in this region differ from African American students who attend PWIs and HBIs in other regions. If so, the results might have been influenced.

Despite these limitations, the present study was important because it examined the factors that influence African American students' college selection process at two different institutions. Acquiring this data was beneficial to staff at colleges responsible for developing effective recruitment strategies for minority students, specifically African Americans. This study also added to the body of literature related to the college selection process in general.

Organization of the Study

The present study is organized around five chapters. The first chapter discussed the background related to the topic, the purpose of the study, and the significance of the study. Chapter Two examines the literature with respect to the college selection process among African American college students. The data collection and analysis procedures are discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four provides the results of the study. The fifth chapter discusses those results in greater detail and examines their implications for future practice and research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to gain a better understanding of those factors that influence the college selection process of African American students who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and those who attend historically Black institutions (HBIs), it was necessary to first explore the literature on the college selection process in broad terms. To thoroughly explore the college selection process of African American students it was also necessary to examine the college selection literature directly related to African American students. Four main factors emerged that affect the college selection process for African Americans: academic issues, social issues, personal issues, and financial issues. The present literature review is organized around these two major categories regarding the college selection process and the four subtopics.

The College Choice Process

The college choice process refers to the factors that influence applicants when deciding which colleges to apply to and what factors to consider when deciding which of the colleges or universities they have been admitted to they wish to attend (Ranero, 1999). In order to gain a better understanding of this process, it was necessary to examine the stages that college applicants go through during the college selection process. Researchers (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Martin & Dixon, 1991; Paulsen, 1990) who have studied this process have developed various models of the college selection process. The three main stages of these models are predisposition, search and choice.

The first stage of the college selection process in most models is predisposition. Many researchers refer to this stage as the college aspiration formation stage (Paulsen, 1990). This stage is characterized by students determining whether they would like to attend college. During

this stage, certain background characteristics influence students (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Martin & Dixon, 1991). These influences include socioeconomic status, race, sex, ability, achievement, attitudes, and educational background of parents and peers (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Paulsen, 1990).

Researchers have often identified a student's socioeconomic status to be a strong indicator of college attendance (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Paulsen, 1990). The socioeconomic status of a student can open doors of access to certain students or limit their ability to even consider attending college. Students with high socioeconomic status are more likely to go on to college than students with low socioeconomic status (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Ability and achievement of a student are also indicators of college attendance. As a student's ability and achievement increases during their high school years, they are more likely to attend college. Also, the student's college choice process becomes more formal at an earlier age (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

The interpersonal influences of others, such as parents and peers, have been involved in students' aspirations to attend college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Paulsen, 1990). Students whose parents begin to encourage them to consider college early in their educational career are more likely to attend college. Researchers have found that parental encouragement to attend college has a direct effect on college attendance. Students who have friends interested in attending college are more likely to pursue an undergraduate degree as well. Peers who plan to pursue a college degree positively reinforce college choice decisions (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Paulsen, 1990).

The pre-college experiences of students also influence their decision during the predisposition stage. For example, students who have participated in extracurricular activities during high school (e.g. debate teams, leadership roles within organizations, student government associations) are more likely to attend college than those who do not participate in such activities. Academic experiences also influence the predisposition stage. Participation in advanced placement or college prep courses during high school gives students an opportunity to experience the type of work that is required in college classes. This enables students to be challenged and determine if they are ready for the rigors of college work (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

The second stage of the college selection process has been identified as the search stage. Once students have decided that they are going to pursue post-secondary education, they begin to seek information about colleges and universities that they might be interested in attending (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Martin & Dixon, 1991; Paulsen, 1990). Students create a list of these colleges and universities, which researchers refer to as a choice set. Using this choice set, students begin to examine certain attributes of these colleges and obtain information that will assist them in making their decision to apply to particular institutions (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Martin & Dixon, 1991).

Researchers have found that a wide variety of colleges are chosen to create an applicant's choice set. The colleges differ in net cost of attending, size of the institution, and institution type (public or private). Applicants initially choose colleges without considering critical attributes of these institutions (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Once this list of colleges and universities has been created, applicants begin to seek various resources to assist them in their information search. Matthay (1989) examined the

perceptions of first year college students regarding their college decision-making process and the resources used in their college search. A survey was administered to 181 first year male and female students from various ethnic backgrounds. These students were from a variety of public and private, two-year and four-year institutions. They attended institutions that ranged from highly competitive to competitive. Results revealed that the four most helpful resources for students in the college search process are college visits, college catalogs, parents, and high school guidance counselors (Matthay, 1989).

A portion of Litten's (1982) research also focused on the resources applicants use in their college search process. African American applicants seemed to seek information from a variety of sources. These sources included asking for facts about a particular college, visiting colleges, and speaking with college representatives when they visited their high schools. White applicants sought information by writing to institutions, and consulting guidance counselors and parents (Litten, 1982).

Litten (1982) also noted that African American college applicants have other characteristics that differ from White applicants during their college search stage. African American applicants start their search process later than White applicants. The average date for an application from an African American applicant is December 20, while November 13 is the average date for a White applicant. This research also showed that African American applicants consider more institutions (10.85) than White applicants (8.76) (Litten, 1982).

The second stage ends when the students have decided on the colleges or universities they will apply to and have completed the applications for those respective institutions. The students send in applications to their institutions of choice and wait to learn which colleges have

accepted them (Paulsen, 1990). At this point, the student enters the final stage of the college selection process.

The final stage of this process is the choice stage. At this stage, students have been notified of their acceptance into particular colleges and universities. They make a decision to attend one of those colleges or universities based upon the institutional characteristics that are most important to them and their own personal characteristics (Paulsen, 1990). Therefore, students will have different approaches to making their ultimate decision (Matthay, 1989; McDonough & Antonio, 1996; Paulsen, 1990).

McDonough and Antonio (1996) described three basic approaches that have been used to study the college selection process; social psychological studies, economic studies and sociological status attainment studies. All three approaches focus on decision-making influences.

The first approach to the college selection process, social psychological studies, examines three main factors. The first factor incorporates the impact of the academic program that the student chooses, the social climate of the campus, the cost and location of the college, and the influence that other students have on the student's college choice. The second factor is the student's assessment of how they fit into the institution they have chosen. The third factor is the cognitive stages of college choice (McDonough & Antonio, 1996).

The second approach includes economic studies that examine college choice. These studies view college choice as an investment decision for the student. Economic studies make three specific assumptions. The first assumption is that when deciding on a college students will maximize the perceived cost-benefits of their decision. The second assumption is that the student has all of the information necessary to make a sound decision. The final assumption refers to the

fact that the student makes a rational choice based on the information gathered during the search (McDonough & Antonio, 1996).

The final approach focuses on sociological status attainment studies. These studies are different than the previous two approaches. This approach is not composed of several groups of factors nor does it include certain assumptions. Rather, sociological status attainment studies analyze the impact of the student's social status on the development of aspirations for educational achievement. Within such studies, an assessment of inequalities in college success is also examined (McDonough & Antonio, 1996).

Using these approaches, students select a college based upon their race, socioeconomic status, parents, the college's size, location, academic program reputation, prestige, selectivity and alumni, the student's peers and guidance counselor, and financial aid (McDonough & Antonio, 1996). These items along with other personal factors eventually fit with important institutional characteristics to influence the student to attend a particular university (Clark & Crawford, 1992; Paulsen, 1990; Tinto, 1975). In order for this fit to occur, the characteristics students consider when deciding between one college or another must be examined.

Canale, Dunlap, Britt, and Donahue (1996) examined the relative importance of various factors on the college selection process. They surveyed 543 high school juniors and seniors over a two-year period. The instrument was composed of a number of college characteristics that students were asked to rate as very important, somewhat important or not important in their college choice decision. Results showed that 76% of the students rate "excellent teachers" as being very important to their college choice decision. The factor rated second highest as very important to these students is "area of study available" (73%). The results suggested that the

quality of the teachers and the availability of a particular major are important to students when making a college choice (Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donahue, 1996).

Litten (1982) conducted a study on differences in the college selection process based on race of the applicant. He examined the search phase and the college choice phase among White, African American and Asian American high school seniors. The instrument for this study was administered to 3,000 high school seniors in various metropolitan areas (Litten, 1982).

The results of the study showed that African American respondents are more likely than the other two ethnic groups to be interested in the social background of the students at the particular college. They were also more likely than White respondents to rate the availability of financial aid as “very important”. African American students were less likely than those in the other two groups to be interested in outdoor recreational activities (Litten, 1982).

Martin and Dixon (1991) also explored the factors that influence students’ college choice. Their study focused on first year students at a major southwestern university. They created an instrument to measure the factors that influence the college choice process. This study related to social learning theory or the way individuals differ in their own actions (internal) and the way other forces act on their lives (external).

The instrument created for this study, the College Choice Influence Scale (CCIS), assumed that respondents were influenced to attend college for a variety of different reasons. Therefore, it was composed of five sub-scales that included (a) perceptions of the college or university, (b) future aspirations, (c) influences others have on this decision, (d) independence-social activities, and (e) family tradition of attending the institution. These sub-scales fell into three broad categories of the college choice process (Martin & Dixon, 1991). Sub-scale c relates to the predisposition phase. Sub-scales a and d relate to the information and gathering phase.

Finally, sub-scales b and e relate to the last phase of the college choice process, making the decision to attend one particular college (Martin & Dixon, 1991).

The results of the study showed that those students characterized by external locus of control were more influenced by others in their lives than were students who stated that their parents earned \$80,000 or more per year. Declared majors were significantly different from undeclared majors on life planning influences which relate to the second phase of the college choice process, information gathering and collection. Finally, education majors were more influenced by family tradition to attend a particular college than business majors or those who had not declared their major (Martin & Dixon, 1991).

The cost of attending an institution is a consideration for students when choosing a particular college. Jackson and Chapman (1984) studied high ability students who were in need of financial aid to attend college and the factors that influenced them to attend college. They noted that when deciding between a first choice institution and a second choice institution students consider the availability of financial aid as being very influential to their college choice decision. This suggests that financial aid was a major consideration for students and that large amounts of financial aid can move a second choice institution to a first choice institution (Jackson & Chapman, 1984).

Smith and Matthews (1990) examined how those students who had been admitted to a university choose to attend the particular college. First year students were asked to answer two specific questions. The first question pertained to the characteristics that are most important to students in deciding upon a college or university. The second question sought to determine what were the factors that caused the student to attend the institution in the study.

In order to answer the first question, the researchers asked the respondents to rate the importance of several factors in their decision to attend college. These factors included (a) prospect of landing a job, (b) prospect of pursuing advanced degrees, (c) academic reputation, (d) reasonable costs, (e) traditions and activities of the institution, (f) availability of on-campus housing, (g) interaction with other representatives, (h) credit by examination, (i) publications and letters from the institution, (j) scholarships and grants, (k) cost of on-campus housing, (l) handling of admissions applications, (m) location of the university, (n) advice from parents/relatives, (o) advice from friends, (p) availability of employment, (q) contact with Dean/Professors and (r) advice from teachers/counselors (Smith & Matthews, 1990).

Responses to these items prompted the researchers to take some additional steps in the analysis. The researchers separated the responses in two ways. First, they determined the overall rankings for those students who decided to attend the institution and those who did not attend the institution. The results of this portion of the study showed that both groups of students consider the same four factors as most important to consider when choosing a college: prospects of landing a job after school; pursuing an advanced degree; the academic reputation of the institution; and reasonable cost of the institution (Smith & Matthews, 1990).

Using these same results, Smith and Matthews (1990) examined the ratings of importance by ethnicity. There were four groups of students who participated in this study: Whites, African Americans, Hispanics and Others. The results showed that White students consider traditions and activities at an institution more important than African American, Hispanic and Other students. African American and Hispanic students consider scholarships and grants more important than their White or Other counterparts.

The second question focused on what factors are influential in determining why a student would attend the particular college in the study. Three types of influences were identified. The first type of influence related to the background of the student, which included race of the student, location of the university, and relatives who are alumni of the institution. The second type of influence was initial services that the student attempted to obtain when entering the institution. These services included financial aid, campus housing, admissions procedures, and traditions and activities. The final influence pertained to the reputation of the institution. This included the academic reputation of the institution and the advice students received about the institution from their friends (Smith & Matthews, 1990).

The results concluded that there were four factors that had a significant direct effect on the student's choice to attend a particular institution. These factors were (a) the opportunity for employment at the institution, (b) traditions and activities, (c) whether relatives had attended the university and (d) the advice of friends. The researchers noted that background variables have a direct effect on a student's attendance at the university, but the most significant effect is based on whether or not a relative attended the institution. Initial services of the institution have a direct effect on the choice to attend that institution, but the most significant factor that influences the decision is whether employment opportunities are available for the student and the traditions and activities of the university. Finally the institution's reputation had a direct effect on the decision to attend, but this reputation was relayed through the advice the students received from their friends (Smith & Matthews, 1990).

Finally, the study examined why some of the factors that students felt were important in choosing a college were not the most significant factors when choosing to attend the institution once admitted. All of the students in this study had been admitted to the institution and several

other institutions. When it was necessary for students to make a decision regarding which university to attend, the academic reputation of the institution was not considered as highly important because all of the institutions that the student was admitted to had good academic reputations. Therefore, variables that are rated highly important initially tend to be minimized as students narrow their search during the choice process (Smith & Matthews, 1990).

Paulsen (1990) examined several studies conducted by a number of different colleges and universities regarding college choice. He summarized his findings with a list of attributes that participants found to be important when deciding to enroll in a particular institution. These attributes included cost, financial aid, programs of study offered by an institution, size and location of the institution, quality, social atmosphere, athletics, religious emphasis, and jobs available on campus (Paulsen, 1990).

These studies suggest a number of variables that influence the college selection among students in general. Some of the studies analyzed differences by race, but others did not. Since the present study focused specifically on the college selection process among African American students, it was necessary to review the literature on this topic.

The College Choice Process for African American Students

There is literature specifically related to African American students and their college choice process. The literature discusses some of the specific factors that African Americans consider when deciding upon a college or university.

African American College Choice Literature

Sevier (1992) conducted a national survey that examined the factors that affect institutional choice among college-bound African American students. The study sought to answer several questions regarding how and why participants choose a particular college and

what their expectations of the college were once they arrived on campus. The instrument was sent to more than 3,325 college-bound juniors and seniors and 1,127 of them completed and returned the instrument (Seiver, 1992).

One section of the instrument that specifically relates to the present study asked students to rate the importance of approximately 26 college choice items. They were asked to list the characteristics in order of importance to them. The college choice items included (a) reputation of the college, (b) availability of majors, (c) availability of financial aid, (d) total cost of attending, (e) job placement record, (f) quality of the faculty, (g) academic advising, (h) geographic location, (i) number of students, (j) recreational facilities, (k) student/faculty ratio, (l) appearance of campus, (m) career counseling, (n) quality of on-campus housing, (o) graduate school placement, (p) extracurricular activities, (q) closeness to home, (r) job opportunities in the area, (s) internships in the area, (t) opportunities for part-time work, (u) cultural opportunities in the area, (v) size of the library, (w) family ties to the college, (x) religious activities, (y) computer resources, and (z) volunteer programs. The students rated reputation of the college, availability of a specific major, the total cost of attending a particular university, and the availability of financial aid as being those factors most important to them when considering which college to attend (Seiver, 1992).

A study conducted by Wenglinsky (1996) discussed the educational justification for HBIs. A portion of the results discussed the reasons that African American students attended either a PWI or an HBI. The two groups of students chose to attend their respective institutions for different reasons (Wenglinsky, 1996).

Students at the HBI were more likely to have chosen their institution because of the substantial financial aid package they received, because the tuition at the institution was

inexpensive, the cost of living in the area was low, and because the students would be living far away from their parents. Students at the PWI were more likely to decide upon their university for a different set of reasons. They selected a PWI because their friends were attending, because they could pursue some type of employment while they were in school, because they were in close proximity to the institution and they could live at home, and they could finish their program quickly (Wenglinsky, 1996).

Another study focused on students' perceptions of college including satisfaction with a particular institution, academic and social climate of the institution and the factors that influenced respondents to attend college at their respective institutions. The data from this study were collected from African American and White students at both PWIs and HBIs (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990).

Results from this study demonstrated that African American students are less likely to select a PWI because of a specific major that is offered by the institution. In a comparison to African American students in 1978, students in 1990 are more likely to agree with the statement that African American students should meet the same admission standards as other students. The students in the study were less likely to believe that African American students should receive special consideration when applying to professional schools (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990).

The college choice literature related to African American students in general suggests four main factors that influence the college choice process for African Americans: academic issues (AIs), social issues (SIs), personal issues (PIs), and financial issues (FIs). Therefore, it was important to examine the literature on these four factors more closely.

Academic Issues

Research has shown that academic issues have been a factor that African American students consider when selecting a university. African American students have expressed an interest in attending an institution that has a good academic reputation, quality professors and a variety of academic majors (Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donahue, 1996; Seiver, 1992; Smith & Matthews, 1990). These students seek such institutions because they have strong feelings regarding the academic climate at their respective institutions (Allen, 1987).

At PWIs, African American students feel academically challenged by the workload. They become discouraged by the lack of supportive faculty to assist them with their coursework. In some cases, African American students do not experience reasonable levels of academic success (Allen, 1987). In these instances, African American students are encouraged to seek faculty and other networks that are supportive of their academic achievement. This may be difficult for first year students who are not familiar with the campus and are not comfortable approaching faculty for help (Sedlacek, 1987).

The presence of African American faculty at PWIs is also a concern for first year African American students. These students need to be able to identify with same-race faculty members. This helps to alleviate the loneliness and isolation that African American students may feel when coming to a PWI (Allen, 1987; Darden, Kamel, & Jacobs, 1998; Sedlacek, 1987).

African American students at HBIs experience greater relative gains in academic pursuits during their college years (Allen, 1987). The HBI environment offers African American students a more comfortable and less isolating atmosphere in which to pursue their academic coursework. There are more African American faculty members at HBIs and as a result students feel more comfortable approaching a faculty member with whom they can identify (Sedlacek, 1987).

Academic issues are just one group of factors that have an effect on the success of an African American student at a particular institution. Other factors within the institution may affect the student as well. These factors may be related to the social climate at a university and may create issues for African American students when selecting a college.

Social Issues

There are several social issues related to an institution that African American students consider when selecting a university. These issues relate to the social atmosphere of the campus, the racial composition of the students, on-campus life within the residence halls, and student organizations (Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999; Person & Christensen, 1996; Sedlacek, 1987; Seiver, 1992).

The social atmosphere of a campus can affect African American students in various ways. At PWIs, African American students experience difficulty adjusting to an environment that is culturally different to what they have been comfortable with at their high schools. Some students experience “culture shock” when attending an institution where they are in the minority and they have not been accustomed to this type of atmosphere before (Allen, 1987; Person & Christensen, 1996).

African American students have also reported that they feel socially isolated at PWIs (Allen, 1987; Clark & Crawford, 1992; Sedlacek, 1987). They are dissatisfied with the social atmosphere of the campus and report greater alienation than their White counterparts at the same institution (Allen, 1987). These issues cause them to perceive the PWI more negatively than White students (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999).

Researchers have also found that the racial climate of a university is a consideration for African American students when choosing an institution (Allen, 1987). Some students who

experience prejudice and discriminatory behavior on campus find it difficult to integrate themselves into the campus environment, socially and academically. This can cause psychosocial distress for the student that is often difficult for first year students to cope with (Cabrera et al., 1999; Tinto, 1993).

Due to the lack of respect demonstrated to African American students at some PWIs regarding their values, ideas, and ways of behaving, feelings of intolerance are created and these feelings influence the interactions of African American students with others on campus (Cabrera et al., 1999). This involves roommates and resident advisor staff in the residence hall environment who are not welcoming, and non-supportive social environments on campus. In order to foster satisfaction and success among African American students, they must feel comfortable, supported, and valued on their college campus (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999; Sedlacek, 1987).

Douglas (1997) studied African American students at one PWI. The study involved students in particular classes who took photographs of positive and negative aspects of the campus. Some of the positive facets of the campus environment pictured and discussed by participants included interactions with faculty; involvement in student organizations; specific courses in which the students were enrolled, especially Afro-American studies classes; and the residence hall climate. Negative factors identified by respondents included the underrepresentation of African American students, faculty, and staff; the prevalence of voluntary racial and cultural separation; and a perceived lack of receptivity by others in the university community toward African Americans (Douglas, 1997).

African American students at HBIs report different social experiences than African American students at PWIs. Students at HBIs report feelings of satisfaction, being well adjusted

and increased levels of involvement in campus. These students exhibit more positive psychosocial adjustment on their campuses, stronger awareness of their African American culture, and higher educational and occupational attainment aspirations (Allen, 1987).

Personal Issues

There are a number of personal issues that affect a student's decision to attend an institution of higher education. Personal issues include encouragement and advice from family and friends and self-assessments that students conduct before entering college (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Freeman, 1999; Sedlacek, 1987).

Freeman (1999) examined African American high school students' decision-making process to obtain an undergraduate degree. The participants included 70 African American students in grades 10 through 12. The personal factors that affect the college decision process were grouped into three main categories: family or self-influences, psychological or social barriers, and cultural influences (Freeman, 1999).

African American students who have college-educated fathers and siblings most often find themselves attending a particular institution they were advised to attend by these members of the family. Family influences also included those relatives who may or may not have attended the particular university. These relatives wanted the student to attend so that the student could achieve beyond the relatives' educational levels. Their efforts to influence the student's decision put pressure on the student (Freeman, 1999).

African American students often have self-motivated factors that cause them to attend one institution over another. Freeman discussed a response from one participant that demonstrated this self-motivation. The respondent reported that not only would she be attending

college, but felt it was necessary to attend a university and not a city college to make something of herself (Freeman, 1999).

Abraham and Jacobs (1990) also discussed several personal factors that influenced students' decision to attend a particular university. These factors included encouragement and advice from parents and encouragement from friends. In this study, all African American students agreed with the statement that "my family supported my decision to attend this [institution]." A majority of them disagreed with the statements "I enrolled [at this institution] because my friends were enrolling here too" and "I was encouraged to enroll here by former students" (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990).

Financial Issues

A number of African American students face financial issues when preparing to enter college. Thirty seven percent (37%) of African American students come from families that make less than \$18,581 per year. Only 11% of the families of White students fall within this income bracket (Clark & Crawford, 1992). Therefore, African American students depend more on financial assistance when considering a particular institution.

In terms of differences by institutional type, HBIs are experiencing more financial pressure from their African American students. Some of these institutions are less expensive than PWIs. Most African American students are not financially able to meet the total cost of their education, but HBIs do not have the financial resources to assist them and therefore have limited their enrollments (Clark & Crawford, 1992; Wenglinsky, 1996).

When African American students are offered financial aid to attend college, these offers provide two distinct opportunities for the students. The first is that the students will have greater access to higher education. The second is the fact that they are more likely to attend because they

have been more cost-sensitive in their search process due to financial constraints (Paulsen, 1990). In the study conducted by Abraham and Jacobs (1990), African American students were more likely than White students to agree with the fact that they enrolled in a particular college because of the financial aid that was offered to them.

In terms of financial aid, college becomes more attractive or less attractive to students as the variables related to cost change. For example, attending college may be less attractive to African American students when tuition, room and board, and distance from home increase. Conversely, college may be more attractive as financial aid availability increases, specifically scholarships (Paulsen, 1990). For African American students, grants alone or financial aid packages with grants and loans are more likely to encourage college enrollment than is an offer of aid in the form of loans only (St. John & Noell, 1989).

In conclusion, the literature suggests that certain factors influence the decision of African American students to attend PWIs. Other studies have explored factors that have influenced the choice process for African Americans at HBIs. Noticeably absent in the existing literature are studies that compare the factors that influence the college selection process of African American students at both PWIs and HBIs. The present study addressed this gap in the existing literature by exploring differences in the factors that influenced the college choice process between African American students at PWIs and HBIs.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence the college selection process of African American students who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and those who attend historically Black institutions (HBIs). For purposes of this study, the college selection process referred to those factors that students considered when deciding to attend the college at which they enrolled.

Data for the study were collected using a survey that examined four groups of factors (academic, social, personal, and financial) students considered in the college selection process. Specifically, the study examined the following research questions and research hypotheses:

1. What factors affect the college selection process of African Americans (AAs) who attend PWIs?
2. What factors affect the college selection process of African Americans (AAs) who attend HBIs?
3. There is no significant difference in the extent to which academic issues (AIs) affect the college selection process of AAs who attend PWIs and those AAs who attend HBIs.
4. There is no significant difference in the extent to which social issues (SIs) affect the college selection process of AAs who attend PWIs and those AAs who attend HBIs.
5. There is no significant difference in the extent to which personal issues (PIs) affect the college selection process of AAs who attend PWIs and those AAs who attend HBIs.

6. There is no significant difference in the extent to which financial issues (FIs) affect the college selection process of AAs who attend PWIs and those AAs who attend HBIs.

Sample Selection

There were two samples needed for this study. The first sample related to selecting institutions. For purposes of this study, it was necessary to identify a PWI and an HBI. There were two criteria used to select the institutions. The first criterion was that the institutions had similar institutional missions. These similar missions were more likely to attract similar students to these campuses. The second criterion was geographic location. The PWI and HBI were in reasonable proximity to the researcher making it convenient for the researcher to collect data from students at these institutions.

The PWI chosen for this study was a large, public, research, land-grant institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. The PWI enrolled approximately 21,416 undergraduate students in the fall of 1998. Of these 1,039 were African American and 197 of those African Americans were first year students (Shrader & Sheldon, 1999).

The HBI was a small, public, comprehensive land-grant institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. The HBI enrolled approximately 3,228 undergraduate students in the fall of 1998. Of these 3,369 students, 2,879 were African American and 881 were first year African American students (Moadab, 1998).

The second sample needed for the study consisted of students at the two institutions. All participants were expected to meet certain criteria. The first criterion for the students selected for this study was that all participants must be first year students. The researcher wanted to capture the data shortly after these students went through the college selection process. It was the

assumption of the researcher that first year students would be better able to recall those factors that influenced their decision to attend college than older students. For purposes of this study, a first year student was defined as a student who had not attended another college, had earned no more than 30 credits at the time the data were collected and who was enrolled on a full-time basis. Assuming that the participants had not attended other colleges prior to enrolling at the PWI or HBI selected for the study ensured that the responses they provided were relevant to their selection of that particular PWI or HBI.

The second criterion for the students selected for this study was that the participant must be a traditional aged student of African American descent. For purposes of this study, traditional aged referred to those students who were ages 18, 19, and 20 at the time the study was conducted. Therefore, all participants were born in 1979, 1980, or 1981. This group of students was chosen for the study because it assured the researcher that, at the time of the study, the participants had recently graduated from high school and gone through the college selection process.

In order to obtain a representative sample of the first year African American students from both institutions, two protocols were followed. At the PWI, the Office of the Associate Provost for Retention and Academic Support was asked to provide the researcher with a list of all of the students who met the selection criteria. These criteria included being an African American, first year student who was born in the years 1979, 1980, or 1981 and had earned 30 or fewer credits at the time of the study.

In the fall of 1998, there were 197 students who met these criteria at the PWI. It was assumed that a like number of African American students were enrolled at the PWI in the spring of 2000 when data were collected. Since this total number of students was small in comparison

to the number of African American students at the HBI, all students identified by the Office of the Associate Provost were included in the PWI sample for the study.

A representative sample of first year African American students was also chosen from the HBI. The Admissions Office at the HBI was asked to formulate a list of all students who met the sample criteria. These criteria included being a first year, African American born in the years of 1979, 1980, or 1981 who had earned less than 30 credits at the time of the study.

There were 1,223 students who identified themselves as traditional aged and African American among the first year students at the HBI in the fall of 1998. It was assumed that a like number of African American students were enrolled at the HBI in the spring of 2000 when data were collected. In order to select a like sample of African American students from the HBI, roughly 200 students were randomly selected from the list of possible respondents obtained from the Admissions Office of the HBI. These names were selected using a random numbers table. The researcher selected 200 participants in order to match the 197 potential participants at the PWI. It was assumed that if participants in both groups responded in like numbers, then results would be based on comparable sample sizes.

For purposes of this study, then, the target sample was around 400 African American students, roughly 200 from each institution.

Instrumentation

An instrument, the College Selection Inventory (CSI), was designed specifically for the purposes of this study. The CSI identified the factors that African American students considered when deciding where to attend the college. To construct the CSI, the researcher examined existing literature on the college selection process. The researcher also had a group of experts

review the instrument to examine whether the items included in the instrument would yield data that were relevant to the research questions and hypotheses posed in the study.

The CSI was composed of 65 items grouped around five sections. The first section was created to gain demographic information about the respondents. Among the 5 items in this section, participants were asked to report their age, gender, year of graduation from high school, major and residency (in-state or out-of-state). Data elicited from these responses were used to paint a profile of the respondents.

The remaining sections of the CSI were designed to gather data about the extent to which various factors influenced participants when they were deciding on a college to attend. The second section of the instrument was entitled Academic Issues. The 15 items in this section elicited data about the extent to which participants considered various academic factors when choosing a college. For example, respondents were asked how much the academic reputation of the school influenced their decision to enroll there. They were also asked if factors such as availability of their major, quality of the faculty, student to faculty ratio, and size of the library influenced their decision to enroll there.

The third section was entitled Social Issues and included 15 items. This section gathered data about the extent to which participants considered various social factors when choosing a college. For example, respondents were asked how much the total number of students at the school influenced their decision to enroll there. Other items asked whether the number of African American faculty at the institution, the number of African American students at the institution, the racial composition of the institution, and the clubs and organizations at the institution influenced participants' decision to enroll.

Fourth was the section entitled Personal Issues that included 15 items. This section elicited data about the extent to which participants considered various personal factors when choosing a college. For example, respondents were asked how much their parents' or guardians' advice influenced their decision to enroll. Other examples of potential influences included friends' advice, friends attending the institution and the distance of the institution from home.

The final section was entitled Financial Issues and it included 15 items. This section elicited data about the extent to which participants considered various financial factors when choosing a college. For example, participants were asked how much the total cost of attending the institution influenced their decision to enroll there. They were also asked if scholarships, grants, opportunity for work-study positions, and the potential amount of debt in loans influenced their decision.

Each section of the CSI contained 15 items. The instructions asked the respondent to identify the extent to which a certain factor influenced the respondent's decision to enroll in that particular institution using a Likert-type scale. The points on this scale were 4 = Was a very positive influence, 3 = Was a somewhat positive influence, 2 = Was a somewhat negative influence, 1 = Was a very negative influence, and 0 = Factor I did not consider. A copy of this instrument is provided in Appendix A.

Data Collection Process

Before initiating the data collection process, the researcher received approval from the Institutional Review Board for Research Using Human Subjects at the institution with which she was affiliated. After obtaining permission from the IRB, the researcher began collecting data.

A packet was mailed to the participants on January 22, 2000. Enclosed in the packet were a cover letter, and a copy of the CSI, an informed consent form and a pre-addressed, stamped return envelope.

The cover letter (see Appendix B) provided participants with information about the researcher and briefly described the study. This cover letter explained the incentive the researcher was offering for completion of the instrument. The researcher also gave the participants a time frame for the completion of the study and notified the participants of the importance of returning the informed consent form to be considered for the incentive.

The informed consent form (see Appendix C) was used to explain several items. It provided the name of the researcher, the topic and a summary of the study. This form notified respondents that their responses would remain confidential. The data collection procedures and the risks and benefits of the study were also explained on this form. The last page of the informed consent form was used as an entry form for the participant to be considered for the incentive. It was necessary for the participants to provide the researcher with their name, telephone number and e-mail address. This information assisted the researcher in contacting the winner once the drawing for the incentive had taken place.

The incentive for the respondents was a drawing in which the researcher awarded \$100 to one participant from each institution involved in this study. When the respondents returned their surveys and informed consent forms, the researcher placed all of the names of the respondents into two separate containers. One container consisted of the names of the respondents from the PWI and the other contained the names of participants from the HBI. At the conclusion of the data collection period, the researcher randomly selected one participant from the PWI as a

winner and one participant from the HBI as a winner. This drawing took place on March 27, 2000 and the prizes were awarded to the winners April 3, 2000.

In order to keep responses to the CSI confidential, the researcher separated the informed consent forms from the instruments when materials were received from a respondent. This enabled the researcher to maintain the confidentiality of the responses and to enter the respondents into the drawing for the incentive.

Validity and Reliability

The validity of an instrument refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of specific inferences made from test scores (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The researcher had a group of experts review the instrument and provide feedback about the questions and content to enhance the validity of the CSI. These experts included an Associate Provost, a Vice President of the university, and an Associate Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs. These individuals all had expertise in issues related to minority students and all three had extensive experience conducting research like the present study. The CSI was revised to reflect the suggestions that members of the panel made.

The reliability of an instrument refers to the consistency, stability, and precision of test scores over time and populations (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The CSI was designed for purposes of this study and data were collected at a single point in time and from a single group of participants. As a result, no attempt to establish reliability was made.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once all of the completed instruments were received from the respondents, the researcher analyzed the data. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Kellough, 1985).

First, the researcher separated the responses by institution. All of the surveys sent to participants at the PWI were printed on yellow paper. CSIs sent to participants at the HBI were printed on blue paper. This system enabled the researcher to readily distinguish participants from the PWI and the HBI.

A number of steps were taken to analyze the data. First, an exploratory factor analysis was calculated on all CSI items. This data reduction method was used for two reasons. First, it revealed whether the items on the survey independently measured the theoretical constructs they were intended to measure. This enabled the researcher to create a composite score for each of the 4 scales: academic, social, personal, and financial. Second, this method allowed for items to be grouped into subscales during the data analysis process.

After this initial step, attention was turned to the two research questions posed in the study. The first question focused on the factors that affect the college selection process for African American students at PWIs. To address this question, the researcher calculated the mean responses of PWI participants to all items on the CSI. These mean scores were then rank-ordered from highest mean score to lowest mean score. Given the response options on the instrument (4 = very positive influence, 1 = very negative influence) the resulting list represented the factors that most positively and most negatively influenced the college selection decision of participants at the PWI.

The second research question posed in the study examined the factors that affect the college selection process for African American students at HBIs. To address this question, the researcher calculated the mean responses of HBI participants to all items on the CSI and rank-ordered these from highest to lowest mean score. The resulting list represented the factors that

most positively and negatively influenced the college selection decision of participants at the HBI.

The remaining four questions posed in the study were in the form of research hypotheses. The first research hypothesis examined the differences in the extent to which academic issues (AIs) affected the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and those African American students who attend HBIs. In order to address this, the researcher calculated the mean scores of the subscales in the AI section of the CSI for each group of respondents (PWI v. HBI). The researcher then conducted an independent t-test to explore whether there was a statistically significant difference in those mean scores ($p < .05$).

The second research hypothesis in the study examined the differences in the extent to which social issues (SIs) affected the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and those African American students who attend HBIs. To test this hypothesis, the researcher calculated mean scores for the subscales on the 15 SI items on the CSI. An independent t-test was conducted to see if there was a statistically significant difference in these scores ($p < .05$).

The third research hypothesis in the study examined the differences in the extent to which personal issues (PIs) affected the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and those African American students who attend HBIs. The researcher calculated mean scores for both groups on the subscales of the PI items on the CSI. These mean scores were then compared using an independent t-test ($p < .05$).

The last research hypothesis in the study examined the differences in the extent to which financial issues (FIs) affected the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and those African American students who attend HBIs. Again, the researcher

calculated mean scores for the two groups on the financial issues subscales. An independent t-test was conducted to discover whether there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores ($p < .05$).

In conclusion, this study was conducted to examine the factors that influence the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and HBIs. Collecting the data in the manner described in this chapter was deemed sufficient to answer the research questions and research hypotheses posed in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter is intended to report the results of the study. The first section describes the changes that were made to the data collection procedures. The second section provides a description of the sample. Finally, the chapter concludes with the data analysis, which is arranged around the research questions and hypotheses posed in the study.

Changes in Data Collection Procedure

There were some minor changes in the procedures used to collect the data from those described in Chapter Three. First, the researcher received from the Office of the Associate Provost a list of 180 potential participants eligible for the study at the predominantly White institution. Therefore, the sample size was decreased from 200 participants at each institution to 180 participants at each school. On February 8, 2000 the researcher mailed the packets of information to the participants at both institutions. The packet of information contained a cover letter, the College Selection Inventory, the informed consent form and a self addressed and stamped envelope for the participants to return the instrument. The deadline to return the instrument was February 25, 2000.

Due to a low response rate from the initial mailing, the researcher conducted a second mailing. Those participants who had not returned the instrument along with an informed consent form were sent the same packet of information on March 8, 2000. The deadline for these instruments to be returned was March 21, 2000. During this time, the researcher sent an e-mail reminder to those students who received the instrument a second time to encourage them to return the instrument. These changes did not alter the study in any substantive way.

Description of the Sample

Three hundred sixty (360) surveys were sent to potential participants of the study and 73 of these surveys were returned to the researcher. This number represented a 20% response rate. There were 35 (48%) respondents between the ages of 18 and 20 at the PWI and 1 respondent who was between the ages of 21 to 23 (1%). At the HBI, 35 (48%) respondents were between the ages of 18 and 20 and 2 (3%) respondents did not report their age. Fourteen (19%) of the respondents from the PWI were male and 19 (26%) of them were female. There were 9 (12%) male respondents from the HBI and 23 (32%) female respondents. The remaining 4% of respondents at the PWI and 7% of respondents at the HBI did not report their gender.

The participants from the PWI and the HBI were both in-state and out-of-state residents. Twenty-four (33%) of the respondents from the PWI were in-state residents, 6 (8%) of them were out-of-state residents, and 6 (8%) did not report their residency status. There were 17 (23%) respondents from the HBI were in-state residents, 11 (15%) respondents who were out-of-state residents, and the remaining 9 (12%) did not report their residency status.

There were a number of different majors represented among the respondents at the two institutions. The majors ranged from Accounting to University Studies. In order to condense the data, the researcher grouped majors that were similar into five categories: Business, Engineering/Architecture, Liberal Arts/Education, Science and Technology, and Undecided. Within these categories, there were 4 (5%) participants from the PWI and 13 (18%) of the participants from the HBI who were enrolled in majors related to Business. There were 6 (8%) participants from the PWI and 1 (1%) participant from the HBI in majors related to Engineering/Architecture. In the category of Liberal Arts/Education there were 16 (22%) respondents from the PWI and 17 (23%) respondents from the HBI. Those participants enrolled

in majors related to Science and Technology represented 12% (9) of participants from the PWI and 8% (5) of participants from the HBI. Finally, there was 1 (1%) participant from the PWI who indicated Undecided for the major and 1 (1%) participant from the HBI who was Undecided.

The year of graduation for the participants ranged from 1997 and 1999. There were 2 (3%) respondents from the PWI who graduated in 1997 and none of the respondents from the HBI graduated in 1997. Three respondents (4%) from the PWI and 1 (1%) respondent from the HBI graduated in 1998. Thirty-one (42%) respondents from the PWI graduated in 1999 and 33 (45%) respondents from the HBI graduated in 1999. The remaining 4% (3) of respondents at the HBI did not report their year of graduation. These demographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 1.

Results of the Data Analysis

The first research question posed in the study focused on the factors that affect the college selection process for African American students at PWIs. To address this question, the researcher calculated the mean scores and standard deviations of the PWI participants on all items on the CSI. These responses were then ranked in descending order. Given that higher scores (2.1 – 4.0) reflected factors that positively influenced participants and low scores (0.0 – 2.0) reflected factors that were negative influences, the ranking reveals factors that very positively to very negatively influenced the participants' decisions. Table 2 summarizes the mean scores and standard deviations of the CSI items from the respondents at the PWI.

The resulting list of mean scores revealed that a majority of the respondents rated the items on the survey from somewhat positive to fairly positive influences in their decision to

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=73)

Characteristic	PWI		HBI	
	n	%N	n	%N
Age				
18-20	35	48	35	48
21-23	1	1	0	0
Missing Cases	0	0	2	3
Subtotal	36	49	37	51
Gender				
Male	14	19	9	12
Female	19	26	23	32
Missing Cases	3	4	5	7
Subtotal	36	49	37	51
Residency				
In State	24	33	17	23
Out of State	6	8	11	15
Missing Cases	6	8	9	12
Subtotal	36	49	37	50
Major				
Business	4	5	13	18
Engineering/Architecture	6	8	1	1
Liberal Arts/Education	16	22	17	23
Science and Technology	9	12	5	7
Undecided	1	1	1	1
Missing Cases	0	0	0	0
Subtotal	36	48	37	50
Year of High School Graduation				
1997	2	3	0	0
1998	3	4	1	1
1999	31	42	33	45
Missing Cases	0	0	3	4
Subtotal	36	49	37	50

Note: Percentage subtotals may be inexact due to rounding

Table 2

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations By Item for PWI Sample

Scale/Item	M	s.d.	Rank
S Number of African American students	3.53	0.76	1
A Availability of my major	3.47	0.62	2
A Size of classes	3.47	0.75	
S Total number of students	3.45	0.71	4
S Presence of Greek fraternities and sororities	3.45	0.81	
P My parents'/guardians advice	3.38	0.85	6
A Availability of academic advising	3.35	0.55	7
A Availability of tutoring services	3.33	0.48	8
A Availability of computer resources	3.32	0.60	9
S African American cultural opportunities	3.30	0.67	10
S Appearance of the campus	3.29	0.86	11
F Total cost of attending the institution	3.29	0.99	
S Number of clubs and organizations	3.26	0.68	13
S Number of African American faculty	3.23	0.59	14
S Religious activities	3.17	0.54	15
A Availability of faculty during office hours	3.17	0.70	
A Presence of an honors program	3.16	0.82	17
S Traditions and customs of institution	3.13	0.88	18
A Size of the library	3.12	0.93	19
A Course load requirement for first year students	3.07	0.70	20
A Quality of the faculty	3.07	0.70	
P Extracurricular activities during high school	3.06	0.89	22
P Feelings about the institution before applying	3.03	1.07	23
S Athletic program	3.00	0.80	24
P Classes taken in high school	3.00	0.95	
P Information received in mail about institution	3.00	0.83	
F Financial support from family	3.00	1.23	
A Academic reputation of institution	2.97	0.59	28
P Leaving family	2.97	1.02	

P	Proximity of institution to home	2.97	1.11	
P	Prospects of landing a job after graduation	2.97	0.92	
A	Availability of study abroad opportunities	2.96	0.64	32
P	Number of alumni who obtain jobs	2.93	0.94	33
P	Number of graduates attending graduate school	2.90	0.86	34
A	Student to faculty ration	2.89	0.96	35
S	Volunteer programs available	2.89	0.69	
F	Financial obligations of parents/guardians	2.88	1.13	37
S	Racial composition of institution	2.88	0.89	
S	Ratio of female to male students	2.86	1.08	39
A	Contact with professors and deans	2.86	0.89	
P	High school counselor's advice	2.84	1.05	41
P	Availability of career counseling	2.81	0.97	42
F	Income of parents/guardians	2.76	1.21	43
F	Opportunity of work-study	2.75	1.02	44
F	Grants received from institution	2.74	1.15	45
P	Friends' advice	2.73	0.87	46
P	Internships available through institution	2.72	0.88	47
F	Grants received from outside sources	2.69	1.14	48
S	Residence hall environment	2.67	1.07	49
F	Cost of living in area	2.67	1.07	50
P	People I knew already in attendance	2.68	1.13	51
F	Scholarships from outside sources	2.64	1.22	52
F	Money parents/guardians saved for me to attend	2.62	1.18	53
S	Availability of recreational facilities	2.59	0.87	54
A	Academic competitiveness of institution	2.59	0.71	
F	Scholarships received from institution	2.52	1.15	56
F	Money I saved to attend	2.52	1.16	
F	Debt after graduation	2.39	1.31	58
F	Other family members in college need money	2.32	1.25	59
F	Opportunities for regular employment	2.25	0.93	60

attend the PWI. Mean scores ranged from a low of 2.25 to a high of 3.53. There were 27 items ranked with a 3.0 or above. Ten (10) of these items were from the Academic Issues scale, 10 items from the Social Issues scale, 5 were items in the Personal Issues scale and 2 were from the Financial Issues scales.

The remainder of the items (33) were rated with a mean score of 2.0 to 2.9. These items included 5 from the Academic Issues scale, 5 from the Social Issues scale, 10 from the Personal Issues scale, and 13 from the Financial Issues scale. None of the items were rated with a mean score of 0.0 to 1.9 from the respondents at the PWI.

The top five items ranged from being either a very positive or somewhat positive influence on their decision to attend the PWI. These items included the number of African American students attending the institution (mean score = 3.53), the availability of their major (3.47), the size of the classes (3.47), total number of students at the institution (3.45), and the presence of Greek fraternities and sororities (3.45). These five items were all rated as fairly important factors in the college choice process for the PWI participants.

The second research question in the study focused on those factors that affect the college selection process for African American students at HBIs. In order to address this question, the researcher calculated the mean scores and standard deviations of the HBI participants to all items on the CSI. The mean scores were then rank-ordered from highest to lowest to indicate those factors that very positively influenced to very negatively influenced their decision to attend the HBI.

Mean scores ranged from a low of 1.7 to a high of 3.68. The five items rated highest by the participants were academic reputation of institution (3.68), availability of my major (3.51),

prospects of landing a job after graduation (3.50), availability of computer resources (3.44), and appearance of the campus (3.46). Table 3 summarizes the remaining mean scores of the CSI items for respondents at the HBI.

There were 40 items with mean scores that ranged from a mean score of 3.0 to 3.68 suggesting that they were important factors in the college choice process of HBI participants. Of these items, 12 were from the Academic Issues scale, 8 related to Social Issues, 14 were from the Personal Issues scale and 6 were from the Financial Issues scale.

There were 18 items with mean scores of 2.00 to 2.95. Of these items, 3 were from the Academic Issues scale, 5 from the Social Issues scale, 1 from the Personal Issues scale and 9 from the Financial Issues scale suggesting that these factors were somewhat important in the college choice process for HBI participants. The remaining two items were rated with mean score of 1.77 and 1.88, suggesting they were unimportant factors in the college choice process for HBI participants. Both items were from the Social Issues scale.

The data also revealed that a number of the issues were rated differently among the participants from the PWI and the participants from the HBI. For example the highest rated factor among the participants from the PWI was the number of African American students on campus (3.53). In comparison, the mean score on this item among HBI participants was 1.88, rendering it ranked in 59th place. The second highest item among PWI participants was the availability of a particular major at the institution. This factor had a mean score of 3.47 for PWI participants. This factor was also rated as the second highest item among HBI participants with a mean score of 3.51. Table 4 summarizes the differences in rank among the PWI and HBI participants for each item on the CSI.

Table 3

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations By Item for HBI Sample

Scale/Item	M	s.d.	Rank
A Academic reputation of institution	3.68	0.63	1
A Availability of my major	3.51	0.65	2
P Prospects of landing a job after graduation	3.50	0.81	3
A Availability of computer resources	3.44	0.82	4
S Appearance of the campus	3.46	0.85	5
P Feelings about the institution before applying	3.41	0.86	6
P My parents'/guardians advice	3.39	0.61	7
S Number of clubs and organizations	3.38	0.79	8
P Internships available through institution	3.37	0.69	9
P Number of graduates attending graduate school	3.36	0.66	10
A Academic competitiveness of institution	3.36	0.64	
S Availability of recreational facilities	3.35	0.66	12
P Number of alumni who obtain jobs	3.33	0.73	13
S Athletic program	3.31	0.59	14
A Quality of the faculty	3.28	0.73	15
P Information received in mail about institution	3.25	0.84	16
A Contact with professors and deans	3.23	0.75	17
A Availability of academic advising	3.19	0.93	18
S Volunteer programs available	3.19	0.66	
P Classes taken in high school	3.16	0.81	20
F Opportunities for regular employment	3.16	0.75	
P Availability of career counseling	3.16	0.69	
F Scholarships from outside sources	3.15	1.03	23
P Extracurricular activities during high school	3.15	0.76	
S Traditions and customs of institution	3.14	0.48	25
S Residence hall environment	3.13	0.90	26
A Size of the library	3.12	0.60	27
P High school counselor's advice	3.12	0.86	

A	Availability of tutoring services	3.10	0.64	29
F	Opportunity of work-study	3.08	1.02	30
A	Presence of an honors program	3.08	0.65	
F	Financial support from family	3.06	0.90	32
F	Income of parents/guardians	3.06	1.00	
S	Religious activities	3.05	0.71	34
P	Friends' advice	3.04	0.69	35
F	Total cost of attending the institution	3.00	0.97	36
P	Students I knew already in attendance	3.00	0.96	
P	Proximity of institution to home	3.00	0.89	
A	Course load requirement for first year students	3.00	0.85	
A	Availability of faculty during office hours	3.00	0.58	
A	Availability of study abroad opportunities	2.95	1.00	41
P	Leaving family	2.94	1.01	42
A	Student to faculty ratio	2.87	0.88	43
S	Ratio of female to male students	2.87	0.76	
S	Presence of Greek fraternities and sororities	2.86	1.08	45
F	Other family members in college need money	2.81	1.17	46
S	African American cultural opportunities	2.81	0.80	
F	Cost of living in area	2.79	1.02	48
S	Total number of students	2.79	0.89	
F	Grants received from outside sources	2.73	1.31	50
F	Financial obligations of parents/guardians	2.71	1.01	51
F	Grants received from institution	2.70	1.29	52
F	Money I saved to attend	2.68	1.34	53
F	Money parents/guardians saved for me to attend	2.62	1.20	54
A	Size of classes	2.59	0.80	55
F	Scholarships received from institution	2.46	1.36	56
F	Debt after graduation	2.27	1.21	57
S	Racial composition of institution	2.09	0.93	58
S	Number of African American students	1.88	0.75	59
S	Number of African American faculty	1.70	0.72	60

Table 4

Comparison of Mean Scores and Ranks by Group

Scale/Item	PWI Mean	HBI Mean	PWI Rank	HBI Rank	Differences in Rank
S Number of African American students	3.53	1.88	1	59	-58
A Availability of my major	3.47	3.51	2	2	0
A Size of classes	3.47	2.59	2	55	-53
S Total number of students	3.45	2.79	4	48	-44
S Presence of Greek fraternities and sororities	3.45	2.86	4	45	-41
P My parents'/guardians advice	3.38	3.39	6	7	- 1
A Availability of academic advising	3.35	3.19	7	18	-11
A Availability of tutoring services	3.33	3.10	8	29	-21
A Availability of computer resources	3.32	3.44	9	4	5
S African American cultural opportunities	3.30	2.81	10	46	-36
S Appearance of the campus	3.29	3.46	11	5	6
F Total cost of attending the institution	3.29	3.00	11	36	-25
S Number of clubs and organizations	3.26	3.38	13	8	5
S Number of African American faculty	3.23	1.70	14	60	46
S Religious activities	3.17	3.05	15	34	-19
A Availability of faculty during office hours	3.17	3.00	15	36	-21
A Presence of an honors program	3.16	3.08	17	30	-13
S Traditions and customs of institution	3.13	3.14	18	25	- 7
A Size of the library	3.12	3.12	19	27	- 8
A Course load requirement for first year students	3.07	3.00	20	36	-16
A Quality of the faculty	3.07	3.28	20	15	- 5
P Extracurricular activities during high school	3.06	3.15	22	23	- 1
P Feelings about the institution before applying	3.03	3.41	23	6	17
S Athletic program	3.00	3.31	24	14	10
P Classes taken in high school	3.00	3.16	24	20	- 4
P Information received in mail about institution	3.00	3.25	24	16	8
F Financial support from family	3.00	3.06	24	32	- 8
A Academic reputation of institution	2.97	3.68	28	1	27

P	Leaving family	2.97	2.94	28	42	-14
P	Proximity of institution to home	2.97	3.00	28	36	- 8
P	Prospects of landing a job after graduation	2.97	3.50	28	2	26
A	Availability of study abroad opportunities	2.96	2.95	32	41	- 9
P	Number of alumni who obtain jobs	2.93	3.33	33	13	20
P	Number of graduates attending graduate school	2.90	3.36	34	10	24
A	Student to faculty ratio	2.89	2.87	35	43	- 8
S	Volunteer programs available	2.89	3.19	35	18	-17
F	Financial obligations of parents/guardians	2.88	2.71	37	51	-14
S	Racial composition of institution	2.88	2.09	37	58	-21
S	Ratio of female to male students	2.86	2.87	39	43	- 4
A	Contact with professors and deans	2.86	3.23	39	17	22
P	High school counselor's advice	2.84	3.12	41	27	14
P	Availability of career counseling	2.81	3.16	42	22	20
F	Income of parents/guardians	2.76	3.06	43	32	11
F	Opportunity for work-study	2.75	3.08	44	30	14
F	Grants received from institution	2.74	2.70	45	52	- 7
P	Friends' advice	2.73	3.04	46	35	11
P	Internships available through institution	2.72	3.37	47	9	38
F	Grants received from outside sources	2.69	2.73	48	50	- 2
S	Residence hall environment	2.67	3.13	49	26	23
F	Cost of living in area	2.67	2.79	50	48	2
P	People I knew already in attendance	2.68	3.00	51	36	15
F	Scholarships from outside sources	2.64	3.15	52	23	29
F	Money parents/guardians saved for me to attend	2.62	2.62	53	54	- 1
S	Availability of recreational facilities	2.59	3.35	54	12	42
A	Academic competitiveness of institution	2.59	3.36	54	10	44
F	Scholarships received from institution	2.52	2.46	56	56	0
F	Money I saved to attend	2.52	2.68	56	53	3
F	Debt after graduation	2.39	2.27	58	57	1
F	Other family members in college need money	2.32	2.81	59	46	13
F	Opportunities for regular employment	2.25	3.16	60	20	30

Factor Analysis

The remaining hypotheses posed in the study related to significant differences between the two groups of participants on the four scales of the CSI. Before conducting further analysis, an exploratory factor analysis was calculated on all CSI items. This enabled the researcher to combine variables within each of the four scales (academic, social, personal, and financial) that were moderately or highly correlated with each other. These variables were grouped into three subscales for each of the four scales.

The factor analysis calculated for those items in the Academic Issues category identified three subscales. These subscales were Academic Quality, Academic Competitiveness, and Availability of Academic Services. Collectively, the three subscales accounted for 54.7% of the variance in the Academic items. The items in the Academic Quality subscale accounted for 30.9% of the variance in the scores. These items such as “quality of the faculty”, “presence of an honors program” and “student to faculty ratio” were factors revealed in the Academic Quality subscale.

The next subscale was Academic Competitiveness. The items in this subscale accounted for 14% of the variance in the Academic Issues mean scores. Academic Competitiveness included items like “academic reputation of the institution” and “the academic competitiveness of the institution compared with other institutions.”

The final subscale in the Academic Issues scale was Availability of Academic Services. The items in this subscale accounted for 9.8% of the variance in the mean scores. Items in the Availability of Academic Services subscale included “availability of my major”, “availability of academic advising” and “availability of tutoring service.”

A factor analysis was also calculated for the items in the Social Issues category. Three subscales were revealed from this process: Social Activities, Diversity Issues, and Campus Population. Collectively, the three subscales accounted for 59.3% of the variance in the Social items. Twenty-seven percent of the variance in the mean scores could be explained by those items in the first subscale, Social Activities. These items included “the presence of Greek fraternities and sororities on campus”, “African American cultural opportunities” and “the number of clubs and organizations at the school.”

The next subscale in the Social Issues scale revealed items related to Diversity Issues. These items accounted for 20.3% of the variance in the mean scores. The items in this subscale included “the number of African American students at the institution”, “the number of African American faculty at this institution” and “the racial composition of the students.”

The last subscale in this category was Campus Population. The items clustered in this subscale accounted for 11.2% of the variance in the mean scores. Some of the items included in this subscale were “the ratio of female to male students” and “the total number of students in attendance at the institution.”

The researcher calculated a factor analysis on those items in the Personal Issues scale. This analysis revealed three subscales that included High School Influences, Career Opportunities, and Family Influences. Collectively, the three subscales accounted for 63.0% of the variance in the Personal Issues items. The first subscale, High School Influences, was composed of items that accounted for 41.2% of the variance among the mean scores. These items included “the classes I took high school”, “my feelings about the institution before I applied”, and “the extracurricular activities I participated in during high school.”

The second subscale in the Personal Issues scale was Career Opportunities. The items clustered in this subscale accounted for 12.5% of the variance in the mean scores. These items included “prospects of landing a job after I graduate from this institution”, “the internship opportunities available to me”, and “the number of graduates who attend graduate school after they graduate from this institution.”

The final subscale included in the Personal Issues scale was termed Relationship Influences. This subscale incorporated items that accounted for 9.2% of the variance in the mean scores. The items included this subscale were “the students I knew who were already attending this institution” and “leaving my family to attend this institution.”

The last scale on the CSI was Financial Issues. A factor analysis of the items in this category revealed three subscales: Scholarship Opportunities, Job Opportunities on Campus, and Financial Indebtedness. Collectively, the three subscales accounted for 65.8% of the variance of the Financial Issues items. Forty percent of the variance in the mean scores could be explained by those items in the Scholarship Opportunities subscale. Some of the items in this subscale were “the grants I received from outside sources” and “scholarships I received from this institution.”

The next subscale in this category was Job Opportunities. This subscale included items that explained 16.5% of the variance among the mean scores. The items in this subscale included “the opportunity for work-study positions”, and “opportunity for regular employment.”

The final subscale in the Financial Issues scale was Financial Indebtedness. This subscale reflected 8.9% of the variance among the mean scores. Some of the items in this subscale were “the amount of debt in loans I will have to repay when I graduate from this institution”, “the total cost of attending this institution” and “my parents’/guardians’ income.”

T-Tests on Subscales

The remaining four research questions posed in the study were in the form of research hypotheses. The first research hypothesis focused on the differences in the extent to which Academic Issues (AIs) affected the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and HBIs. To address this hypothesis the researcher took several steps.

First, the researcher calculated mean scores for each of the subscales in the Academic Issues scale (Academic Quality, Academic Competitiveness, and Availability of Academic Services) for each of the two groups of participants (PWIs and HBIs). Then a t-test for independent means was calculated on the mean responses from participants at the PWI and the HBI. There were no significant differences in the mean scores of any of the three subscales of the Academic Issues scale ($p < .05$).

The next hypothesis in the study examined the differences in the extent to which Social Issues (SIs) affected the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and HBIs. In order to address this hypothesis, the researcher calculated a mean score for each subscale included in the Social Issues scale (Social Activities, Diversity Influences, and Campus Population) for each group of participants. A t-test for independent means was calculated on the mean subscale scores. The results revealed no significant differences in mean scores on any of the three subscales ($p < .05$).

The third hypothesis in the study focused on the differences in the extent to which Personal Issues (PIs) affected the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and HBIs. To address this hypothesis, the researcher calculated a mean score for each subscale included in the Personal Issues scale (High School Influences, Career Opportunities, and Family Influences) for each group of participants. Then a t-test for

independent means was calculated on the subscale means. There were no significant differences revealed on any of the subscales ($p < .05$).

The final hypothesis in the study examined the differences in the extent to which Financial Issues (FIs) affected the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and HBIs. In order to address this hypothesis, the researcher calculated mean scores for each subscale in the Financial Issues scale (Scholarship Opportunities, Job Opportunities, and Financial Indebtedness). Finally, a t-test for independent means was calculated on those mean scores. Results revealed no significant differences among the subscale scores ($p < .05$). Table 5 summarizes the results of the t-tests for each of the subscales of the four scales involved in the study.

The results of this study revealed no significant differences in the extent to which Academic, Social, Personal and Financial Issues affected the college selection process of African American students who attend PWIs and HBIs. However, there were important differences in the order in which factors were rated between participants at the PWI and those at the HBI. These results and their implications for further practice and research are discussed in Chapter Five of this study.

Table 5

Results of T-Tests by Subscale by Group

Scale/Subscale (n)	m	s.d.	d.f.	F-value	p
Academic Scale					
Academic Quality			68	.004	.950
PWI (35)	3.07	.47			
HBI (35)	3.12	.52			
Academic Competitiveness			69	2.49	.119
PWI (34)	3.00	.41			
HBI (37)	3.26	.52			
Availability of Services			71	2.14	.148
PWI (36)	3.37	.42			
HBI (37)	3.35	.59			
Social Scale					
Social Activities			71	.126	.723
PWI (36)	2.99	.54			
HBI (37)	3.24	.52			
Diversity Influences			65	.032	.858
PWI (33)	3.17	.67			
HBI (34)	1.96	.75			
Campus Population			67	1.38	.244
PWI (35)	3.20	.57			
HBI (34)	2.82	.75			
Personal Scale					
High School Influences			70	1.18	.280
PWI (35)	3.04	.69			
HBI (37)	3.26	.55			
Career Opportunities			68	1.48	.228
PWI (34)	2.90	.72			
HBI(36)	3.41	.58			

Family Influences			71	.084	.773
PWI (36)	2.95	.70			
HBI (37)	2.99	.74			
Financial Scale					
Scholarship Opportunities			66	1.72	.194
PWI (36)	2.70	.93			
HBI (32)	2.84	1.05			
Job Opportunities			63	1.01	.319
PWI (34)	2.63	.82			
HBI (31)	3.06	.75			
Financial Indebtedness			70	.003	.954
PWI (36)	2.78	.87			
HBI (36)	2.77	.81			

Note: All t-tests conducted at the .05 level

CHAPTER FIVE

The focus of this study was to explore the factors that influence the college choice process for African American students at PWIs and HBIs. These factors were examined on four scales: academic, social, personal and financial.

This chapter is designed to examine the results of this study and their implications for further research and practice. The first section discusses the research questions and hypotheses posed in the study. Next the researcher examines how the results relate to prior research. Implications for future practice and research are examined in the next section. Then the limitations to the study are presented. In the final section, the researcher draws some general conclusions about the college choice process for African American students.

Discussion

The first research question in the study explored the factors that African American students at PWIs considered when selecting a college to attend. In order to explore this question, the researcher examined the means and standard deviations for the responses to the CSI among the participants from the PWI. The mean scores ranged from a high of 3.53 on the item related to the number of African American students at the PWI to a low of 2.25 on the item related to opportunities for employment on campus.

One of the most interesting points about this finding is the overall pattern of the results. Among the top 10 factors considered by African American students attending a PWI are five items from the Academic scale, four items from the Social scale, and one item from the Personal scale. The Academic items suggest that the availability of a particular major, size of classes, and the availability of academic advising, tutoring services and computer resources were important to African American students. The Social issues include the number of African American students

at the PWI, the total number of students attending the institution, the presence of Greek fraternities and sororities, and the availability of African American cultural opportunities. In the Personal scale, only advice from parent or guardians was ranked among the 10 factors the PWI participants considered. There were no items from the financial scale included in the top ten items.

These findings are interesting for several reasons. First, they suggest that Academic and Social factors seem to play almost equal roles when African American students at PWIs are deciding where to attend college. The conventional wisdom that the academic reputation of the school and costs to attend are the most important factors in the college choice process is not supported by these findings. Rather, more pragmatic academic issues, such as the availability of a major and the availability of advising services were more important to the PWI participants than either academic reputation or financial concerns.

Second, these findings reflect that Personal factors are not as influential in deciding where to attend college for the PWI participants. The only personal factor rated in the top 10 factors among PWI participants was advice from parents and guardians. This suggests that African American students value the advice of their parents or guardians in a major life decision such as choosing a college.

Finally, with the rising costs of a college education in the United States, it is interesting that these findings do not support the fact that financial issues are a major concern for African American students at the PWI. The absence of a Financial item in the top ten factors among the responses from PWI participants suggests that these students are more concerned with other aspects of choosing a college, such as the number of African American students on campus, and those services and resources provided by the institution than they are concerned with the total

cost of attending the institution. This could be a result of the advice of their parents or guardians who may be encouraging the students to pursue higher education despite the cost because it will benefit them in the future.

The second research question posed in the study examined the factors that African American students at HBIs considered when selecting a college to attend. This question was explored by examining the mean scores and standard deviations of the responses from the HBI participants. The mean scores for the respondents ranged from a high of 3.68 on the item related to the academic reputation of the institution to a low of 1.70 on the item pertaining to the number of African American faculty at the institution.

Once again the pattern of the results provides for an interesting discussion. The top 10 responses from the HBI participants are three Academic items, two Social items, and five Personal items. The academic items included the academic reputation of the institution and the availability of a particular major and computer resources. The social issues were the appearance of the campus and the number of clubs and organizations at the institution. Finally, the Personal items were prospects of securing a job after graduation, feelings about the institution before applying, advice from parents or guardians, internships available through the institution and the number of graduates who attend graduate school. Again, there were no Financial items included in the top ten factors HBI participants considered when choosing a college.

These results seem to imply that HBI participants are very concerned with both Academic and Personal issues when making their decision to attend college. Specifically, these students feel that the academic reputation of the institution and the availability of their major are critical issues to consider when choosing a college. These two Academic factors were ranked first and second on the CSI by HBI participants. The results suggest that when deciding on a

college to attend, these students want to ensure their success by attending a college that in their eyes has a good academic reputation and one that offers the major they intend to pursue. HBI students consider those traditional factors when choosing a college.

Another Academic factor that HBI students rated among the top 10 factors was the availability of computer resources. This finding is interesting in that many HBIs are not as equipped with the technological resources as PWIs. Despite this disparity in resources, HBI participants consider computer resources to be a fairly positive influence for them when choosing to attend an HBI.

HBI participants considered several interesting Personal factors in their decision to attend college. These items included prospects of securing a job after graduation, feelings about the institution before applying, advice from parents or guardians, internships available through the institution and the number of graduates who attend graduate school. Again, the advice of parents and guardians is among the top 10 factors, which suggests that HBI participants consider this advice to be instrumental in their college choice decision. Several other factors surface in this list including post-graduation concerns. HBI participants are not only considering what factors are important when they arrive at college, but they also consider factors that will prepare for their futures beyond college when they select a college to attend.

Social items were two of the top 10 factors among HBI participants. This suggests that the appearance of the campus and the number of clubs and organizations at the institution are fairly positive influences for these students.

It is interesting to compare the rank order of the responses from the PWI participants to that of the HBI participants. There were 60 items on the CSI. That means that it was possible for a difference of 59 in the rank orderings of items between the two groups. That is, if one group

ranked a particular CSI item as the most important (1) factor in their college selection process and the other group ranked that same items as least important (60), a difference of 59 (60 – 1) places would result.

To explore differences in ranks, the researcher calculated the difference in rank between groups for each item on the CSI (see Table 4). Some important differences emerged. Since the greatest possible difference was 59, the researcher decided to further explore any differences of 30 or more. A difference of 30 places in rank order would seem to suggest that the particular factor was viewed very differently by PWI participants than by HBI participants.

A total of 10 items yielded differences in rank order of 30 or more places. Of these, six were related to Social factors, two were related to Academic factors, one was related to Personal factors and one was related to Financial factors.

The six Social factors that were ranked 30 or more places apart by the two groups suggest some interesting patterns. Some of the items seemed to be explained through intuitive logic. For example, the number of African American students was the top ranked factor for participants at the PWI, but ranked 59th by HBI students. Logically, students choosing an HBI would know that there were large numbers of African American students on that campus so such a factor might not be important to them, while African American students at a PWI might be more concerned about the number of African American students on campus.

The results also revealed that the first Financial factor, total cost of attending this institution, ranked 11th by PWI participants and the second, financial support from my family, ranked 24th. This may suggest that participants are considering the costs associated with attending the PWI, but anticipate financial support from family during their college experience. This may suggest that PWI students assume families will worry about financing their college

education so they (the students) do not worry as much about college costs. All other Financial factors were ranked 37 or higher by PWI participants, suggesting that they are less important than Academic or Social factors. It is possible that scholarships and grants from outside sources may not have been offered for the PWI participants and therefore these factors were not considered as strongly as other factors in their college choice process.

The results also revealed that Financial factors seemed to be less important for HBI participants than for their counterparts at the PWI. The first Financial factor is ranked 20th by HBI participants. Nine of the 15 Financial factors are ranked 40 or below. These participants may not have considered the financial factors associated with attending college to be that important because in some cases the total cost of attending the HBI was less expensive than that of attending the PWI.

The findings in relation to Personal factors also seem to be different between the two groups. For the PWI participants, the first Personal factor is ranked 6th, but there are 5 Personal factors in the top 10 factors among HBI participants. The HBI participants see Personal factors related to their futures beyond college such as internships and graduate school and job prospects as very important. PWI participants consider their parents' or guardians advice as being more important when considering Personal factors. Perhaps PWI students expect internship and job opportunities to be available at a PWI and may not consider these factors as important as other factors. HBI participants may not have these opportunities readily available to them because these services may not be as prevalent on their campuses. Perhaps, HBI students believe contacts within the smaller community of HBI graduates renders internship and job opportunities a more important issue associated with the HBI experience.

The remaining four hypotheses posed in the study focused on examining the significant differences between PWI and HBI participants on Academic, Social, Personal and Financial factors that influenced their college selection process. The results revealed no significant differences on any subscale of any scale. There may be several possible explanations for these findings. For example, overall, only 2 items rated as unimportant, both by HBI participants. This could suggest that all of the factors were really important to both groups, but each group of students placed different values on them when selecting a college to attend.

Another explanation might relate to the timeframe in which the data were collected from the participants. The data may have been gathered too far after the participants had made their college choice, so they were unable to accurately recall what factors they considered. Alternatively, the data may have been collected too soon in the college experience. The participants may have needed more time to really assess which factors were important given the college choice they made.

The lack of significant findings could be due to the fact that the data were collected only about schools the participants ultimately decided to attend. It is possible that participants applied to both PWIs and HBIs and they may have considered the same factors about both types of institutions. This might have made their responses less concise and led to the finding of no significant differences.

Finally, most of the participants in the study were ages between the ages of 18 and 20. The college choice experience was new to them and they may have had some preconceived beliefs or values that society has dictated to be factors that a student should consider when selecting a college. If participants were from environments that foster certain shared beliefs, both groups of participants have responded in similar ways.

Overall, there were no significant differences on any of the subscales on the CSI. These findings are interesting when compared to prior research conducted regarding the differences between PWIs and HBIs.

Relationship of the Findings to Prior Research

When the results of the posed study are compared with prior studies, two patterns emerge. In some cases, the present study supports prior research. In other instances, the findings contradict those of prior studies. There have been several studies conducted that the results of this study support. The present results revealed that advice from parents and advice from guardians were ranked as fairly positive factors that influence the college choice process for both HBI and PWI students. These results support research on interpersonal influences of others in students' aspirations to attend college. Parental encouragement was found to be a direct influence on college attendance (Paulsen, 1990).

The findings related to high school influences revealed that the extracurricular activities in which the students participated and the classes the students took in high school were rated as fairly positive to somewhat positive influences (3.0 and 3.15) in the decisions of PWI and HBI participants. These results support prior research on pre-college experiences. Students who participate in extracurricular activities and advanced placement courses in high school are more likely to attend college than those who do not participate in such activities. These experiences give students an opportunity to challenge themselves in the academic arena as well as in leadership positions that will prepare them for college life (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

The findings with respect to Academic Issues revealed that the availability of a particular major was ranked as the second most important factor for participants at the PWI and HBI in their decision to attend college. This supports a study conducted to examine the relative

importance of various factors on the college selection process. After surveying 543 high school juniors and seniors, results revealed that the factor rated second highest as very important among these students was “area of study available” (73%). The availability of a particular major is important to students when making a college choice (Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donahue, 1996).

In the present study, HBI participants considered the prospects of landing a job after graduation, the academic reputation of the institution, and the number of graduates attending graduate school as three of the top 10 factors that influence their college choice. These results support a study that examined the factors that prompted first year students to attend the institution involved in the study. The results of that study revealed that the prospects of landing a job after school, pursuing an advanced degree, and the academic reputation of the institution were three of the top 10 factors that influenced the decision to attend the selected institution (Smith & Matthews, 1990).

The findings related to Academic Issues are also consistent with prior research. The academic reputation of the institution was ranked as only somewhat positive by the participants at the PWI. These results support a portion of a prior study that examined why some factors that students feel important in choosing colleges to apply to are not the most significant factors when choosing to attend the institution once admitted. When students have to make a decision regarding which university to attend, the academic reputation of the institution is not considered as highly because all of the institutions that they had been admitted to were of high academic standing. Therefore, those variables that were considered as highly important initially tend to be minimized as students narrow their college choice decision (Smith & Matthews, 1990). The present results suggest this is also true of African American students who attend PWIs.

PWI participants ranked the number of African American faculty as 14 among CSI items and HBI students ranked this item as 60 among CSI items. These findings are consistent with research that discusses the differences between African American students who attend PWIs and HBIs. African American students at PWIs need to be able to identify African American faculty members to help alleviate loneliness and isolation that African American students experience when attending a PWI (Allen, 1987).

There are other studies that the findings of this study contradict. The results of this study revealed that African American students from the HBI ranked the grants and scholarships they received from the institution as numbers 52 and 56, respectively, among CSI items. A prior study that discussed the educational justification of HBIs commented on the fact that students who have chosen these institutions were more likely to have chosen their institution because of the substantial financial package they received (Wenglinsky, 1996). The results of the present study are not consistent with this prior research.

The present findings pertaining to PWI participants revealed that those students who the participants already knew in attendance at the school and opportunities for regular employment were ranked 51 and 60, respectively. The Wenglinsky (1996) study revealed that African American students were more likely to decide upon their university because their friends were attending and they could pursue some type of employment while they were in school. The present findings contradict those of Wenglinsky.

Finally, the findings of the present study revealed that PWI participants rated the number of African American students and faculty as the 1st and 14th most important among those factors on the CSI. This suggests that these were positive influences in their decision to attend the PWI. One study conducted on African American students at a PWI involved photographs of positive

and negative aspects of the campus. The present findings did not support the results of that study. The prior study revealed that students identified underrepresentation of African American students, faculty and staff as being one of the negative factors of the institution (Douglas, 1997) while in the present study the number of African American students was a positive influence on the college selection process.

Implications for Future Practice and Research

The results of this study have several implications for future professional practice. These results can be used to assist student affairs professionals, African American students and their parents, and high school counselors. Each constituency can benefit from these results as they go through the college selection process.

The first group that can benefit from the findings of this study are student affairs professionals who work in admissions, particularly those who work with the admissions process for African American students. For those members of the admissions staff at PWIs, the findings suggest that certain factors are more important for African Americans considering PWIs. It would seem that the PWI admissions staff should be inclined to focus on these factors when recruiting African American students. These students are concerned with the number of African American students on campus. This was the most highly rated factor among the PWI participants in the study. So, PWI admissions staff should be prepared to report those numbers to prospective students at college fairs and in other settings where they have contact with prospective African American students.

Overall, the results of the study suggest that academic and social factors are more important to African American students considering a PWI than are personal or financial factors. Among the 27 items on the instrument that were rated at the 3.0 level or higher, 10 were related

to academics, 10 were related to social factors, while 5 were related to personal issues and only 2 were related to financial concerns. These results suggest that when considering a PWI African American students do not see financial issues as being strong influences on their decisions. Admissions counselors could use this information to address questions that African American students may have regarding the financial aid process and assist them in understanding what the process for acquiring scholarships and grants is like at that particular institution.

The feelings regarding financial issues related to attending a PWI also suggest that admissions counselors can assist parents with financial aid options that work best for their student. Pamphlets referencing books, websites and magazines that contain information regarding scholarships and grants may make the search easier for families who need assistance finding sources of funding for their child's education.

Other areas of concerns that the admissions staff may want to explore from these findings include the personal factors addressed in this study. Among those items rated at the 3.0 level or higher, the personal factor that was rated the highest was the advice of parents or guardians. Knowing that African American students at the PWI consider the advice of their parents or guardians as highly influential in deciding on which college to attend should prompt admissions counselors to assist parents in learning more about the institution. This may have a positive influence on students when deciding whether to attend the school.

The findings also have implications for admissions staff at HBIs. The results suggest that certain factors are more influential for African American students considering HBIs. Admissions counselors should focus on these factors when recruiting African American students. The most highly rated factor among HBI participants was the academic reputation of the institution. Admissions counselors should be prepared to give information to students that explains where

the institution stands in comparison to other institutions based on their programs and course offerings.

The overall results of the study reveal that 40 items were rated at the 3.0 level or higher by the HBI participants. Of these items, 14 were related to personal issues, 12 were related to academic issues, 8 were related to social issues and 6 were financial issues. This suggests that personal and academic issues are very positive influences in the college choice decision of HBI students. These students are concerned with personal factors such as prospects of landing a job after graduation. Admissions counselors may be able to assist students who consider HBIs by presenting information regarding career counseling opportunities, and how students can obtain assistance with preparation for graduate degrees from the HBI.

Admissions counselors at HBIs would also be helpful to students who are considering an HBI if they could provide them with information about the campus environment. The results revealed that HBI students rate the appearance of the campus, the availability of recreational facilities, the residence hall environment, and the traditions and customs of the institution to be very positive influences in their decision to enroll at an HBI. These factors should be highlighted in the conversations that admissions counselors have with prospective students.

One of the factors rated as a somewhat negative influence for HBI participants on the survey instrument was leaving their family to attend the institution. Admissions counselors should remember that this may be the first time that HBI students have been away from home and it is important for the student know when they would have an opportunity to visit family. It may be beneficial for admissions counselors to review the academic calendar for students that highlights breaks and holidays that would allow students to go home and visit with their families. It would also be helpful for admissions counselors to provide information about “ride boards”

and programs sponsored by the institution that help students who wish to travel home on the weekends.

Another constituency that might benefit from the information provided by this study would be student affairs professionals who work in the area of retention of African American students. Knowing that a large number of African American students at the PWI are concerned with the availability of academic services at the institution, such as computer resources, academic advising and tutoring services, students should be made aware of these services as soon as they come to campus. Due to the fact that these students are new to campus and may have difficulty navigating the campus, a brochure could be created that identifies these services and their respective locations on campus. At the beginning and middle of each semester, special information sessions could be held to provide students with information regarding these services. It would be important to send letters or special invitations to first year students to invite them to these sessions because they still may have difficulty seeking these services out on their own.

The next constituency that might benefit from these results would be African American high school students who would like to attend PWIs or HBIs. After reviewing these results, high school students would be better informed on those issues that influenced the college choice process of other African American students. Given the present findings, prospective college students might be better equipped to ask questions and seek out information from admissions staff and financial aid officers during their college search process.

Prospective African American college students could also do additional background research on those factors that had a less positive influence on the participants in this study. This might enable them to make a more informed decision regarding their college choice and avoid some of the pitfalls that their predecessors had encountered in the study. For example, financial

factors were not particularly highly rated in this study. Perhaps participants had not considered the financial implications of attending college or conducted adequate research on scholarships opportunities or the financial aid process at the institution they were seeking acceptance to. This may prompt future African American students to more fully consider financial implications of attending college or to conduct more thorough research on financial aid possibilities.

For those factors that were positive influences for the participants of this study, these results could confirm some of the feelings that prospective high school students have about a PWI or HBI. If a prospective student is truly interested in a PWI or HBI, these results could help stimulate a discussion between students who currently attend one of the institutions and prospective students. Currently enrolled students might provide a realistic perspective of the institution for the prospective student while sharing the results of this study.

The results of this study also have implications for parents or guardians of African American high school students. Parents and guardians might be more instrumental in the college choice process for their students if they are aware of some of the factors that affect the college choice decision of other students who are attending the type of institution their student would like to attend. Parents and guardians could help their student make a more informed decision if they have adequate information.

The parents and guardians of high school students who review the results of this study would note that of the 18 factors rated at 2.0 to 2.9 by HBI participants, nine were financial factors and of the 33 rated at this level by PWI participants, 13 were financial factors. These results reveal that financial factors were of concern for these students, but not of high concern. Parents and guardians might be more concerned about financial matters than students. If so,

parents and guardians can assist their students by working along with the student to search for additional sources of funding for college.

Finally, the results of this study can also be beneficial to high school counselors as they assist prospective students with their college choice decisions. These counselors can show students how to more successfully seek scholarships and grants from the institution they would like to attend. They could also use the results of this study to assist a student who may be considering both a PWI and an HBI. By sharing this information, counselors can help the student make a more informed decision about the college choice process.

High school counselors can use recommendation letters they write to colleges and universities for students to express research the student has conducted on the institution in order to showcase how interested the student is in attending that particular institution. They can include some of the issues that students report as being important in those reference letters.

This study also has implications for future research. The present study examined the factors that African American students at PWIs and HBIs considered in the college choice process. A future study might explore the same research questions, but conduct the research using a different technique. Another researcher may want to conduct interviews with African American students from both types of institutions and discuss their reasons for selecting the college they attend. This type of study might yield richer data and would further add to the body of research related to the college choice process among African American students.

Second, another study could examine the differences among factors considered in the college selection process between students who participate in pre-college programs, such as Upward Bound and those students who do not participate in such programs. Such a study might

explore the effectiveness of pre-college programs as they relate to the college search process and how these programs can benefit students who may be eligible to participate in them.

Third, the present study collected data from students who accepted admission to their respective institutions. The study could be adapted to solicit information from students who were admitted to the institutions, but declined their acceptance and enrolled in another institution. Such a study would provide researchers with information as to the reasons why one institution was chosen over another.

Finally, this study examined the perspectives of first year African American students at PWIs and HBIs. Another study could explore those factors that African American seniors feel are important to consider when selecting a college. The results of that study could offer insights to future students that they might consider when selecting a college. They would have the findings from the present study and the findings from students who have matured from their college experience to provide insight on what factors are important to consider when selecting a college.

Limitations of the Study

This study, as with any study, had several limitations. The first limitation was the low response rate (20%). The limited response rate may render some of the findings suspect and limit the generalizeability of the results. The low response rate was perhaps the biggest limitation to the study.

Another limitation to this study related to the survey instrument. The instrument was created by the researcher using results from previous studies and it was reviewed by a panel of experts to determine if it was appropriate for the type of research conducted by the researcher. So, the face validity was somewhat reasonable. However, the instrument was not piloted before

being administered to the participants of this study, so no reliability statistics were available. It is possible that the instrument would not accurately measure the influence of factors on the college selection process over time and populations.

An additional limitation to this study was the time frame for collecting data from the participants. The survey was administered during the months of February and March. If the instrument had been administered earlier in the school year, possibly October or November, the respondents may have had a different opinion of the factors that influenced them to attend their respective institutions. It is possible that their opinions had been influenced by the amount of time that passed between when they actually selected their college and when the data were collected. If this occurred, the results might have been influenced.

The final limitation to the study was the fact that the survey instrument did not include all of the factors that participants may have considered when making their college choice decision. The survey only specified 60 items that might have influenced the decisions of the respondents. There are an infinite number of factors that may influence students to attend college and this instrument did not allow respondents to indicate other factors they might have considered when choosing a college. If the items on the CSI did not address certain factors, the results might have been influenced.

Despite these limitations, however, the results of the study provided some interesting insights in to the college selection process for African American students. The results suggest that academic and social factors are important to African American students who attend PWIs, while academic and personal factors seem to be more important to African American students who attend HBIs. Neither group seems to place a great deal of importance on financial factors. The findings suggest that staff at different types of institutions need to employ different

strategies when recruiting African American students. If staff at PWIs and HBIs better understand what matters to prospective students, they might be more successful in recruiting them to attend their respective institutions.

Overall, what is most important to remember is that African American students are not represented in higher education in numbers proportionate to their representation in the general population. This suggests that all those who work with African American students need to do a better job in encouraging them to pursue higher education opportunities. To that end, it is important to increase the body of knowledge available about the factors that influence the college selection process for African American students. Only with a thorough understanding of these factors will those in secondary and post-secondary education be able to promote greater participation in higher education among African Americans.

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Appendix A:
The College Selection Inventory

College Selection Inventory

Circle One

Age: 18 – 20 21 - 23 **Gender:** Male Female

Residency: In State Student Out of State Student

Major: _____ **Year of graduation from high school:** _____

Please use a #2 pencil to indicate the extent to which the following factors influenced you to enroll at this institution. Please fill in the number that corresponds to your response using the following scale:

- 4 = Was a very positive influence
- 3 = Was a somewhat positive influence
- 2 = Was a somewhat negative influence
- 1 = Was a very negative influence
- 0 = Factor I did not consider

I. Academic Issues

- 1) The academic reputation of the institution
- 2) The academic competitiveness of this institution compared to other institutions
- 3) The availability of my major at the institution
- 4) The availability of tutoring services at the institution
- 5) The availability of academic advising at the institution
- 6) The availability of computer resources at the institution
- 7) The availability of study aboard opportunities at the institution
- 8) The presence of an honors program at the institution
- 9) The size of the library at the institution
- 10) The size of the classes that I would be taking at the institution
- 11) The quality of the faculty at the institution
- 12) The availability of faculty during their office hours
- 13) The student to faculty ratio at the institution
- 14) The contact I had with professors and deans at the institution during my college search process
- 15) The course load requirement for first year students at the institution

II. Social Issues

- 16) The total number of students at the institution
- 17) The racial composition of students at the institution
- 18) The ratio of females to males at the institution
- 19) The number of African American students at the institution
- 20) The number of African American faculty at the institution
- 21) The African American cultural opportunities at the institution
- 22) The volunteer programs available at the institution
- 23) The number of clubs and organizations at the institution
- 24) The presence of Greek fraternities and sororities at the institution
- 25) The traditions and activities associated with the institution
- 26) The religious activities at the institution
- 27) The availability of recreational facilities at the institution
- 28) The athletic program at the institution
- 29) The residence hall environment at the institution
- 30) The appearance of the campus at the institution

III. Personal Issues

- 31) My parents'/guardians' advice
- 32) My friends' advice
- 33) My high school counselor's advice
- 34) Leaving my family to attend the institution
- 35) The proximity of this institution to my home
- 36) The classes I took in high school
- 37) The extracurricular activities I participated in during high school
- 38) The people I knew who were already attending this institution
- 39) My feelings about this institution before I applied for admission
- 40) The information I received through the mail about this institution
- 41) The availability of career counseling at the institution
- 42) The internships available to me through this institution
- 43) The prospects of landing a job after graduating from this institution
- 44) The number of alumni who obtained jobs in their fields after graduating from this institution
- 45) The number of graduates who attend graduate school after they graduate from this institution

IV. Financial Issues

- 46) The total cost of attending this institution
- 47) The grants I received from my institution
- 48) The scholarships I received from my institution
- 49) The grants I received from outside sources
- 50) The scholarships I received from outside sources
- 51) The opportunity for work study positions at the institution
- 52) The opportunities for regular employment on campus
- 53) The cost of living in the area where the institution is located
- 54) My parents'/guardians' income
- 55) The extent to which my family would be required to support me
- 56) The fact that other members of my family are in college and need money
- 57) The other financial obligations of my parents/guardians
- 58) The money my parents/guardians saved for me to be able to attend the institution
- 59) The money I saved on my own to be able attend the institution
- 60) The amount of debt in loans I will have when I graduate

Please return this survey and the informed consent form to:

Melanie Hayden
325 Squires Student Center (0138)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

Thank you again for your time and best wishes for a successful semester!

Return all materials by March 21, 2000 to have your name entered in the drawing for a \$100 cash prize.

Appendix B:
Cover Letters to Participants

325 Squires Student Center
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

March 3, 2000

Hello Participant,

My name is Melanie Hayden and I am an African American Master's student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I recently sent you a packet of information regarding a research project that will examine African American students' decisions to attend college. I am again soliciting your help with my research because I did not receive your survey on February 29, and I would like to give you an opportunity to win \$100. Your responses will help me complete this project.

If you are willing to participate, please complete and return the enclosed survey in the pre-addressed envelope provided (no stamp necessary using campus mail). You will also find enclosed a copy of an Informed Consent form. If you complete the survey, you also need to sign and return this form. By completing both the survey and form, you will be eligible for an incentive. The incentive consists of a drawing for \$100. If you return both the survey and the form, you will be entered in the drawing. Only 200 students have been asked to participate in the study. Your odds of winning the \$100 depend on the number of students who complete and return the enclosed materials. At this time your odds of winning the \$100 have increased due to the low response rate from your fellow first year students at Virginia Tech.

I realize that you are bombarded with surveys on a monthly basis, but I hope that you would strongly consider taking just a few moments to complete my survey. By completing this survey you will be helping an African American student achieve the goal of attaining a Master's degree and assisting me with my data collection so that I am able to graduate in May. It is important to return the survey and other forms as soon as possible. In order to have your name entered in the drawing, you must return your completed survey and consent form by March 21, 2000. The only way that you can be eligible for the drawing is by completing both the survey and the informed consent form.

Again, I say thank you for your consideration regarding my research. I look forward to receiving your completed survey and informed consent form. I truly appreciate your time.

Sincerely,

Melanie L. Hayden
Graduate Student
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

325 Squires Student Center
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

March 3, 2000

Hello Participant,

My name is Melanie Hayden and I am an African American Master's student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I recently sent you a packet of information regarding a research project that will examine African American students' decisions to attend college. I am again soliciting your help with my research because I did not receive your survey on February 29, and I would like to give you an opportunity to win \$100. Your responses will help me complete this project.

If you are willing to participate, please complete and return the enclosed survey in the pre-addressed envelope provided (no stamp necessary using campus mail). You will also find enclosed a copy of an Informed Consent form. If you complete the survey, you also need to sign and return this form. By completing both the survey and form, you will be eligible for an incentive. The incentive consists of a drawing for \$100. If you return both the survey and the form, you will be entered in the drawing. Only 200 students have been asked to participate in the study. Your odds of winning the \$100 depend on the number of students who complete and return the enclosed materials. At this time your odds of winning the \$100 have increased due to the low response rate from your fellow first year students at Virginia State.

I realize that you are bombarded with surveys on a monthly basis, but I hope that you would strongly consider taking just a few moments to complete my survey. By completing this survey you will be helping an African American student achieve the goal of attaining a Master's degree and assisting me with my data collection so that I am able to graduate in May. It is important to return the survey and other forms as soon as possible. In order to have your name entered in the drawing, you must return your completed survey and consent form by March 21, 2000. The only way that you can be eligible for the drawing is by completing both the survey and the informed consent form.

Again, I say thank you for your consideration regarding my research. I look forward to receiving your completed survey and informed consent form. I truly appreciate your time.

Sincerely,

Melanie L. Hayden
Graduate Student
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

325 Squires Student Center
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

February 9, 2000

Dear Participant,

My name is Melanie Hayden and I am a Master's student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. I am conducting a research project that will examine African American students' decisions to attend college. For this reason, I am soliciting your help with my research.

If you are willing to participate, please complete and return the enclosed survey in the pre-addressed envelope provided. You will also find enclosed a copy of an Informed Consent form. If you complete the survey, you also need to sign and return this form. By completing both the survey and form, you will be eligible for an incentive. The incentive consists of a drawing for \$100. If you return both the survey and the form, you will be entered in the drawing. Only 200 students have been asked to participate in the study. Your odds of winning the \$100 depend on the number of students who complete and return the enclosed materials.

It is my hope that you would strongly consider taking just a few moments to complete my survey and assist me with my data collection process. It is important to return the survey and other forms as soon as possible. In order to have your name entered in the drawing, you must return your completed survey and consent form by February 25, 2000. The only way that you can be eligible for the drawing is by completing both the survey and the informed consent form.

Again, I want to thank you for your time and consideration regarding my research. I look forward to receiving your completed survey and informed consent form.

Sincerely,

Melanie L. Hayden
Graduate Student
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Appendix C:
Informed Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants of
Investigative Projects

Title of Project: Factors that Influence the College Choice Process for African American Students

Investigator: Melanie L. Hayden

I. The Purpose of this Research

The purpose of this research is to determine the factors that influenced you to attend the college in which you are presently enrolled in.

II. Procedures

This study involves several tasks for you to complete in order to be a participant. First you will be asked to read and sign this form to acknowledge your participation in the study. Then you will complete the survey that has been mailed to you in this packet. Once you have completed this survey, you will be expected to return the completed survey and this informed consent form in order to be considered in the drawing for \$100.00 (see details below).

III. Risks

The risks involved by participating in this study are minimal. You may experience a minor amount of tension while completing the instrument. If this does occur, the researcher will direct you to a facility that can assist you in dealing with this issue at no cost.

IV. Benefits of this Project

Participating in this study provides you with two benefits. First, your responses will provide more information about African American college students' decisions regarding college. Second, you will have the opportunity to win \$100.00 in cash for participating in this study if you are selected in the drawing.

V. Extent of Anonymity

If you decide to be a participant in this study, your confidentiality will be maintained at all times during this research. The researcher will be the only individual with access to the names of the respondents. The results of this study will only be reported in aggregate form. Neither your name nor any other information that might identify you will be reported in the results of the study. During the study, the data will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the home of the researcher and all data will be destroyed one year after the completion of this study.

VI. Compensation

If you are willing to participate, and if you fully complete and return this form and the enclosed survey, you will have a chance to win a \$100 cash prize. When you return the survey, your name will be entered into a drawing. On March 27, one name will be drawn from among those who returned the survey at your school and that person will be awarded the prize money. Only 200 students at your school are receiving this survey. Your chances of winning \$100 will depend on the number of students from your school who return the survey, but will be no more than 1 in 200.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

As a voluntary participant, you are free to withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty. You are free to not respond to any questions that you choose not to answer without

penalty. In order to withdraw from this study once you have returned the informed consent and survey, please contact the researcher.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

IX. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities: (please agree by signing your initials in the space provided on the left)

_____ I agree to complete the informed consent form

_____ I agree to complete the College Selection Inventory (survey)

_____ I agree to send the completed informed consent form and survey to the researcher before the **March 21, 2000** deadline

X. Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all of my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

_____ Signature _____ Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Melanie L. Hayden, Investigator 540-231-5552
Phone

Joan B. Hirt, Faculty Advisor 540-231-9700
Phone

H.T. Hurd, Chair, IRB 540-231-9359
Research Division Phone

In order to have your name entered into the drawing for the \$100 cash prize, you must complete the information below.

Name: (Please print) _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Thank you.

MELANIE L. HAYDEN
1317 University City Boulevard
Apartment 12
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060
(540) 961-6171 E-mail: mhayden@vt.edu

EDUCATION

Master of Arts in Education, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies,
Concentration - Higher Education and Student Affairs, Graduated May 2000
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), Blacksburg, Virginia
Thesis Topic: Factors that Influence the College Choice Process for African American Students

Bachelor of Business Administration, Marketing, Graduated May 1997
James Madison University (JMU), Harrisonburg, Virginia

EXPERIENCE

The Office of Program Advising and Student Entertainment, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Graduate Advisor - Black Student Alliance (BSA), Fall 1999 - Present

- Advised 4 Black Student Alliance committees in the areas of program planning and implementation, advertising, marketing strategies and committee development
- Provided on-site supervision for committee programs and workshops
- Serve as a resource person and programming consultant to student organizations and University departments
- Maintained budgets for BSA committees, monitor spending and assist with the preparation of committee budgets for annual student funding hearings
- Assisted Program Coordinator with programming and leadership development for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Alliance (LGBT)

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Recruiting Representative (Higher Education and Student Affairs Program - HESA), Fall 1999

- Attended graduate school fairs to serve as a representative for the HESA program
- Disseminated information and answered questions from interested persons regarding the program

Minority Graduate Transition Retreat, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Team Leader/Panelist, Fall 1999

- Facilitated workshops with student participants regarding the graduate school application process, including application process, critiquing resumes, and self-inventory
- Participated in a panel discussion to inform undergraduate students about graduate school life

Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Assistant Program Coordinator and Head Graduate Assistant - Student Transition Program (STP), Summer 1999

- Developed training manual and training workshop for STP staff
- Created parent and student information packets for STP Orientation
- Planned and implemented student activities for participants such as weekend activities, tutoring sessions, and weekly group discussions
- Served as a role model for student participants providing guidance on academic and non-academic matters while living in the residence hall
- Enforced rules and regulations to maintain student safety and well being on and off campus
- Served as a liaison between students and Program Coordinator and staff members and Program Coordinator

Dean of Students Office, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Practicum Graduate Student, Spring 1999

- Coordinated the student life component of the Black, Hispanic and Native American Student Preview Weekend
- Developed a marketing plan for recruiting students participants during the Preview Weekend, which included giving tours of the campus and conducting registration of prospective students

- Provided supervision and structure to student activities that were conducted during the Preview weekend
- Facilitated the planning and implementation of the Black Student, Faculty and Staff Discussion Series

Residential and Dining Programs, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
 Community Assistant – Graduate Student, *Fall 1998 - Spring 1999*

- Recruited, trained and evaluated a staff of 60 night monitors and 6 fitness monitors
- Assisted students with completion of employee paperwork, i.e. tax forms and employee contract
- Tracked students' work hours and prepared hours for payroll processing
- Advised 5 undergraduate Residence Hall Federation hall councils in the areas of program planning and leadership development
- Authorized expenditures of residence hall funds and maintained residence hall account ledgers

Black, Hispanic and Native American Student Preview Weekend Committee, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Committee Member, Fall 1998

- Planned and developed various social activities for prospective students to attend during Student Preview Weekend
- Served as an advocate for a more diverse population of students at Virginia Tech

Career Services Mock Interview Program, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA
Mock Interviewer, Fall 1998

- Served as a Mock Interviewer for students to practice their interviewing skills
- Evaluated students performance and supplied feedback to students and Career Services staff

Events and Conferences, JMU, Harrisonburg, VA
Office Assistant, Fall 1996 - Spring 1997

- Scheduled on-campus facilities for administrative, academic and student events using a computerized reservation system
- Monitored front desk and preformed various office duties

Center for Service Learning, JMU, Harrisonburg, VA
Program Assistant, Youth and Adult Services, Fall 1995 - Spring 1996

- Supervised placement of students in community service agencies
- Provided information to students and community service agencies about volunteer opportunities by way of public speaking engagements and written media

Center for Service Learning, JMU, Harrisonburg, VA
Work Study Student, Fall 1994 - Spring 1995

- Coordinated A.C.E. (African Americans Committed to Excellence), mentoring program for underprivileged youth in the Harrisonburg area
- Supervised 20 student mentors from James Madison University

**OTHER
 EXPERIENCE**

ALLSTATE INSURANCE COMPANY, Roanoke, VA
Customer Service Representative, Fall 1997 - Spring 1998

- Answered specific questions from customers regarding insurance policies
- Amended existing policies to reflect policy changes

**PROFESSIONAL
 AFFILIATIONS**

American College Personnel Association - Member (1998 - Present)

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators - Member (Present)

Southern Association College Student Administrators - Member (Present)

Black Graduate Student Organization - Treasurer (1999 - 2000), Member (1998-1999)

Association for Student Development - Professional Development Chair (Spring 1999 - Fall 1999), Member (Fall 1998, Present)