BLACK AND HISPANIC MALE TRANSFER STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF

PERSISTENCE AT A FOUR-YEAR RESEARCH INSTITUTION

By

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ABSTRACT

Education is important for keeping people productively employed and gaining important credentials for making positive life changes. Despite the gains in educational access, a gap in education achievement still exists between White and minority students in America. Many people of color are unemployed and continue to experience high poverty rates compared to the non-Hispanic White population. The racial minority population continues to be disproportionately underrepresented in higher education and degree attainment.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomena of persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transferred from a two-year degree granting community college to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). Data were collected using two face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with each of the Black and Hispanic male transfer students. A constant comparative technique was used to analyze the data. The data collection and analysis was used to answer the following research question. How do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe: (a) their academic experiences, (b) their social experiences, (c) motivators that contributed to their persistence in undergraduate studies, (d) personal characteristics necessary for successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate

studies, and (e) institutional attributes necessary for successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech?

The data analysis resulted in the identification of five themes: (a) transfer students had a personal commitment to achieve their academic goals despite the hindrances they experienced; (b) transfer students' academic performance was influenced by family expectations; (c) encouraging support from family, friends, faculty, and peer students was a factor for transfer students' persistence; (d) building relationships within the campus community influenced transfer students' persistence; and (e) learning from life lessons contributed to the transfer students' persistence.

This document concludes with a discussion of the results that may be used to inform future practice, policy, and research in higher education about five Black and Hispanic male transfer students' experiences of persistence. These students successfully adjusted to the university, made meaningful academic and social connections, became attached to the university, and are continuing in higher education.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved mother, Ernestine Robinson Brooks and

my beloved grandmother, Minnie Elizabeth Robinson (Nana). Both have gone home to

be with the Lord. You were both such a great inspiration, support, and my number one

fans. Mom, I promised you that I would complete my master's degree prior to returning

to Atlanta, Georgia. I had no idea that I would continue on to earning a doctoral degree.

Second to Jesus Christ, you are both the wind beneath my wings. Until we meet again

in heaven, this document is dedicated to both of you. I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"We must never forget that all Americans have the right to pursue the American

Dream; we must never forget that the community college represents the only hope

millions of Americans have of achieving that Dream" (Vaughan, 1989, p. 7). The

community college system is an integral part of higher education in the United States; it

offers access to education for all persons in an open enrollment process. The

community college plays a crucial role in educating students. The community college is

a gateway for students to gain the education necessary to improve their professional

skills for employment mobility, to enhance personal life, to gain immediate employment,

or to transfer to a four-year degree granting institution.

The latest United States community college statistics indicated that the

enrollment was 11.5 million in 2006, constituting nearly half of undergraduate students,

according to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) website (2008).

These data were the most current statistics available as of November 2008. According

to the same AACC website, of the 43% of students enrolled for the purpose of

transferring to a four-year institution, only 20% actually transferred to a four-year

institution and only 63% of those who transferred graduated from the four-year

institution. The rate of completion is much less than the rate of enrollment and this is

particularly true of minority students (AACC, 2008).

While there have been numerous studies that focused on undergraduate student

persistence in four-year institutions (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Fleming, 1984; Thompson &

Fretz, 1981; Tinto, 1993), most have not examined the persistence of transfer students

specifically. This is particularly important given the changing population demographics, economic trends, and accountability pressures of the 21st century that are challenging leaders to educate and shape students beyond high school.

<p style="text-align:center">Context for the Study</p>

The demographic shift in the American population and the drive to remain globally competitive in the workplace has led public educators to consider changing the education system. Mandates such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (United States Department of Education, 2004) have forced educators to change education practices regarding accountability. Moreover, due to rapid technological advancement and the need for workers to fill highly scientific and technical jobs, educators are faced with a growing need for educating a workforce beyond high school. In order to fully understand the implications these shifts have on educating students, particularly Black and Hispanic male students, the next section is a description of the context of the problem historically, currently, and within a theoretical framework.

Historical Context

Historically, post-secondary education was comprised of junior colleges, state supported and private four-year colleges and universities, and public land-grant universities. Junior colleges were the lower-division branches of private and public four-year colleges. In the 1970s, most junior colleges were renamed community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). The expectation of these institutions was to meet many societal needs, one of which was to provide business and industry with a supply of trained workers. The community college has evolved as an institution that provides easy access and affordable education for the local community, which ensures social and

economic mobility for many disadvantaged students and also benefits business and industry. Functional missions of the community college included transfer education, career and technical education, continuing education, developmental education, and community service (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Townsend, 1999). The community college became a practical way of educating students.

Besides educational changes, the United States has had and continues to experience demographic changes in its population, including racial composition. Based on estimates of the U. S. population for July 2006, the Black population had nearly doubled in 10 years, and the Hispanic-origin population had become the largest ethnic group (United States Census Bureau, 2007 May). The U.S. Census Bureau reported in its population estimates for July 2006 that about one in three U.S. residents was minority. It also reported that the nation's Black population exceeded 40 million, while the Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander population reached the 1 million mark. The Hispanic population remained the largest minority group at 44.3 million, followed by the Black population as the second largest in 2006. Other minority populations changed as well; the Asian population rose by 3.2% or 460,000 and the American Indian and Native Alaskan population rose by 1% or 45,000 during the one-year period from July 2005 to July 2006 (United States Census Bureau). The U.S. Census in 2000 indicated that the Hispanic population represented about 12.5% of the total population (Guzman, 2001).

Another demographic change that is taking place in America is the aging of the post-World War II baby boomers. Those born between 1946 and 1964 are now in their mid 40s to early 60s. Many baby boomers will continue to work past the age of 65;

however, the total number working will continue to decrease (Hankin, 2005). As this cluster of Americans grows older, the workforce shrinks. A younger population will need to replace the baby boomers in the job market.

Our country has progressed from the agricultural age, to the industrial age, to the information age, and now toward a conceptual age, which is fed by affluence, technology, and a global economy in a society of creators and empathizers (Pink, 2006). In the past, a worker with a high school education possessed the skills to adequately meet the job market demands, but this no longer holds true (McCabe, 2000).

Current Context

The next working generation to replace the baby boomers must be prepared for the workplace, and the community college is a mechanism that will allow short-term education for immediate employment opportunities in a competitive global service economy. The community college also serves as a foundation for students who desire positions in the job market that require a four-year degree or more. McCabe (2000) stated, "As much of the U.S. population ages and the workforce shrinks, it will be up to the education system to ensure that all Americans in their prime work years are prepared for employment. We will need everyone" (p.11). American taxpayers will be supporting a wide variety of educational options and systems. With fewer members of the population working, it will be most important to educate youth for employment and to support the larger, non-working, elderly population. The future of Americans will depend upon the education system not only to educate those who will replace the baby boomer workers, but also to provide higher skills for those experiencing poverty.

Job Market

　　　The U.S. economy has shifted from a manufacturing to a service sector economy and this shift will benefit the United States economy leading to a higher standard of living (Dellow & Romano, 2006). As the world economy continues to be globally competitive and flat, many jobs can be easily moved overseas to countries such as China or India because their workforce is willing to work for wages that Americans consider too low. Conversely, low-skilled workers in America are forced to upgrade their education and skills so that they may occupy newly created jobs resulting from new market relationships developed through outsourcing to countries like China and India (Friedman, 2007). The movement toward a global market means the American workforce will need to be more idea-based, creative, and right-brain thinkers to do well in competing in such a market (Friedman; Pink, 2006). The high-paying blue collar jobs are disappearing and the demand for knowledge-based jobs is increasing. The knowledge-based jobs require at least some postsecondary education and possibly technical skills training (Boswell, 2004).

　　　The baccalaureate degree has become the access point to the professional workforce and the transfer process from the community college to the four-year institution can be an important step (Wellman, 2002). The higher-skilled jobs such as computer programmer, electrician, dental hygienist, library technician, and paralegal require individuals to have earned some education beyond high school, to include apprenticeships and/or a bachelor's degree (Amundson, 1998; Dellow & Romano, 2006). Beyond high school, much of the education and training for these jobs begins at the community college, yet 40% of the community college student population needs

remedial education and may never advance beyond the associate degree (Dellow & Romano). Our future population still remains unprepared to compete in a global economy without the proper education and skills necessary for the 21st century. Obstacles still exist that perpetuate educational gaps for access and student success based on socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and gender. The community college serves as a bridge for closing the education gap for disadvantaged students and students of color in gaining access to higher education. However, gaining access is not enough if these students do not complete their educational goals.

Student Persistence

There are many reasons why students do not attain their goals or persevere once enrolled in higher education. Reasons for student departure may include lack of student satisfaction, academic readiness, financial support, or institutional efforts to help students feel part of the college environment (LaBoone, 2006; Tinto, 1993). In addition to the aforementioned reasons for student departure, mentoring relationships have been identified as strategies for recruiting, retaining, and graduating students, particularly for persons of color (Blackwell, 1989; Tinto, 1993). Researchers have shown that Black students who had mentoring relationships had an increased likelihood of persisting in higher education (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Patton & Harper, 2003; Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005).

Ultimately, student success and institutional success are imperative to higher education. It is important for institutions to develop and implement programs that help students achieve their goals via higher education because these students are our future workforce. Educational leaders and government officials are challenged to revamp

education systems given the continual racial population shift, aging baby boomers, negative correlations of poverty and education, and need to be globally competitive.

Theoretical Foundation

Student persistence is important during the first year of college (Feldman, 2005; LaBoone, 2006; Tinto, 1993). Researchers (LaBoone; Tinto) have found that, typically, students are separated from past associations and everyday life activities that have shaped their world. Academic and social settings are foreign, and gaining social membership may be challenging. Some students may experience difficulty because they are no longer with their parents or other relatives and must fend for themselves. Other students may find it difficult to adjust to the more rigorous academic demands of post-secondary education, as well as to compete with the various levels of academic achievement of peer classmates. Minority students at predominately White institutions may experience social and academic alienation. Some students cope and adjust well to these challenges, yet others do not, particularly in the first year of college (LaBoone; Tinto). All students face challenges in making the transitions necessary to persist to earning a degree in college, and studies have shown that minority students can face particularly difficult and different challenges (LaBoone; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Tinto). The first year of college is extremely important in the process of persistence, as suggested by Tinto. He indicated, "The character of one's experience in that year does much to shape subsequent persistence. By the same token, the largest proportion of institutional leaving occurs in that year and prior to the beginning of the second year" (p.14).

Understanding the difficulties students experience during their first year in college and knowing the reasons why students leave the institution is essential information, but knowledge of these factors is not comprehensive. Researchers have yet to explore whether or not transfer students experience the same difficulties as other students during their initial year at a four-year institution. Furthermore, it is important to gain insight into the experiences of students who exhibit persistence past the first year of transfer to another institution.

One of the challenges experienced by transfer students who matriculate to the four-year institution was a drop in grade point average (GPA) known as transfer shock (Hills, 1965). Hills found that transfer students experienced a drop in GPAs during the first semester to the first year at the senior institution. Transfer shock was included in the theoretical framework of this study along with the theory of student involvement, by Astin (1984). The student involvement theory suggested that students' engagement in quality academic and non-academic activities in college contribute to persistence in higher education. Further discussion of the theoretical framework is presented in Chapter Two.

<center>Statement of the Problem</center>

Studies have been conducted that have informed leaders in higher education about the reasons students are leaving college, and some studies have focused on the persistence of undergraduate students toward earning a degree. More students are attending higher education, especially students of color; however, Black and Hispanic students are not graduating at the same rate as other students. The problem is that we do not know enough about what works for Black and Hispanic male transfer students

who persist toward graduation. More Black and Hispanic students are attending higher education but are not graduating at the same rate as other students. Historically, the Black and Hispanic populations have been the largest uneducated groups of people in the United States. It is important for Black and Hispanic students to persist toward graduation and earn their degrees because combined they will outnumber the White population (United States Census Bureau, 2007). Therefore, they will make up a large portion of the population available for the future workforce. There have been few investigations of the factors that contribute to the persistence of undergraduate students of color toward degree attainment after transferring to a four-year institution from a two-year community college. There have been investigations that explain the causes for students leaving college (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; Hermanowicz, 2007; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1993). It is important to implement strategies for enabling transfer students to persist in their undergraduate studies toward earning the degree desired. Consequently, further research is needed to examine the factors that influence persistence for transfer students. There is much to be learned from minority transfer students' lived experiences of persistence towards graduating senior status. This study addressed the gap in literature regarding what contributes to the persistence to graduating student status for Black and Hispanic male transfer students.

The focus of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Black and Hispanic male transfer students. These two racial/ethnic groups were chosen for several reasons. The Black and Hispanic populations represent the growing minority groups that have the lowest rates of degree attainment. The United States Census Bureau (2007) reported that the percentages of Blacks and Hispanics between the ages

of 18 and 24 who had attained bachelor's degrees were only 4% and 3% respectively. The same year, the rate for Whites between ages 18 and 24 was 8%. In 2007, the rate of master's degree attainment for both Blacks and Hispanics between ages 18 and 24 was only 0.1%, while the master's degree attainment for Whites in the same age range was 0.5% (United States Census Bureau).

The Black and Hispanic populations' unemployment rate has been more than the national average. The United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics Monthly Labor Review (2004) reported that in 2003, Blacks represented only 12% of the labor force, and Hispanics only represented 13%. These groups constituted larger proportions of unemployed persons, as Blacks represented 20% of the unemployed while Hispanics represented 16%. Moreover, for persons unemployed for 15 weeks or more, Blacks represented 24% while Hispanics represented 14% (United States Department of Labor). In 2006, these same employment and unemployment statistics had not changed significantly. In fact, the United States Department of Labor (2008) noted that Blacks represented 11% of the labor force while Hispanics represented 14%. For this same year, the unemployment rate for Blacks was 22% and for Hispanics the rate was 15%. The 2006 long term unemployment rates (persons unemployed for 27 weeks or longer) for these two populations had increased for Blacks to 28% but not for Hispanics at 12% (United Stated Department of Labor).

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomena of persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transferred from a two-year degree granting community college to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and

State University (Virginia Tech). The phenomenological approach of inquiry provided me the opportunity to explore and examine the lived experiences of the transfer students who were persisting in their undergraduate studies toward graduation. I sought to find a deeper understanding and meaning of these phenomena which can be captured through dialogue. This study has given voice to those participants. Results can be used by leaders in post-secondary education to inform them about the experiences of Black and Hispanic male students and what contributes to and influences their post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies. It is hoped that informing leaders will help shape practices that could enhance student persistence in higher education.

Research Question

The specific, five-part research question guiding this study was:

How do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe:

1. their academic experiences,

2. their social experiences,

3. motivators that contribute to their persistence in undergraduate studies,

4. personal characteristics that contribute to successful post-transfer persistence is undergraduate studies, and

5. institutional characteristics that contribute to successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech?

Overview of the Methodology

The qualitative inquiry design used for this study was phenomenological descriptive research. Qualitative research is empirical in nature and allows the

researcher to gain knowledge through direct experiences that occur in natural settings as opposed to controlled ones. Moreover, qualitative research allows the researcher to gather data in a natural world, face-to-face with real people through multiple methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). I sought to understand the phenomenology from the participant's point of view, focusing on the meaning of the events as described by the student. The use of semi-structured interviewing grounded in the theoretical genre of phenomenology provided information about the lived experiences and world views (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) of two Black and three Hispanic post-transfer undergraduate students.

The participants were purposefully selected from among the Black and Hispanic minority students who transferred to Virginia Tech from a community college in the United States. Additionally, each student was at least 18 years old, attending Virginia Tech full time with self-described graduating student status. Each student participated in an in-depth, face-to-face, audio-taped, semi-structured, two-part interview held on the Virginia Tech, Blacksburg campus. The interview protocol was designed to obtain rich data about the experiences that shed light on the essence of the phenomenon of interest. The essence of the phenomenon or shared experience is the core meaning (Patton, 2002) of that experience as described by the participant who lived through the event. Demographic information relevant to describing the participants were also obtained. Analytical memos, reflective writing, and field notes were maintained. Narrative analysis and the constant comparative method were used to code the data and to identify themes.

Significance of the Study

Education is a mechanism for reducing poverty and providing better employment opportunities, allowing for a more competitive workforce. This study has significance for Black and Hispanic populations relative to education, employment, and persistence toward degree attainment in higher education. The study gives voice to selected students in the study's target population and is useful for informing other minority students about post-transfer experiences of students of color relative to persistence. Also, the parents of transfer students who wish to help their children persist in higher education may benefit from the awareness of the post-transfer experiences of the students in this study.

This study has significance for educators as they prepare students for immediate work, postsecondary education, and lifelong learning. Educators will be informed of the skills necessary for transfer students to persist toward degree attainment at either the community college or the four-year college level. For example, career and technical educators may use the information from this study as they engage in communication with other educators when reinforcing academic subjects and making decisions about curriculum at both the secondary and postsecondary levels.

This study has significance for practice, research, and policy in higher education. In practice this study will inform educational leaders of the factors that assisted these transfer students for persistence toward graduating student status. University and community college leaders may use the study outcomes to consider their own transfer and post-transfer activities as they assist students in making successful adjustments to

or from their institutions. The study outcomes may also be used to shape programmatic interventions that support student persistence.

In policy, the results of this study might provide useful information for higher education administrators to reflect upon when establishing articulation agreements, transfer student initiatives, orientation programs, and other institutional policies that support student academic success, social success, and degree attainment for their respective institutions. Ultimately, the findings from this study can be used to inform educational leaders who shape practices related to recruitment, retention, and graduation of students.

Limitations of the Study

The five male participants in this study described being highly motivated and had established clear goals which should be considered when interpreting the findings from this study. These students had decided their field of study and therefore were focused on achieving their pre-established goals and aspirations for future employment. These are characteristics that are not found in every undergraduate student. I believe that the transfer students' persistence in higher education was influenced because they possessed these characteristics. The students persevered despite their low high school grades, need to be employed to meet their financial needs, lack of time management skills, finding a social niche, and need to adjust to the university environment. They had internalized their goals and commitments to achieve academically.

No female participants volunteered for this study, which is another caution when considering the study findings. The participants were purposefully sampled. Initially 14 Black and Hispanic transfer students expressed an interest and volunteered. Of those,

there were five who met the study criteria and all five were interviewed. At Virginia Tech, the sample size for enrolled American Indian transfer students was too small to be included in this study. Different results may have been realized if females and American Indians had contributed to its outcomes.

The reactivity of the participant to the interviewer should be considered when reviewing the study results. These five male participants may have responded in a particular manner because I was a Black female and a more senior member of the university. The study outcomes may have been different had the participants been interviewed by a male, a less senior member of the university, a peer student, or a member of the White race.

Another limitation with this study, as with any qualitative research, is that the results cannot be generalized to other college students. The results can only be ascribed to these five male community college transfer students at Virginia Tech. Purposeful samples in qualitative studies are intended to be a small group of selected participants who provide in-depth, rich information about their experiences related to the phenomena of interest. The sample size for this study was five. The participants volunteered and were among those who self-identified as Black or Hispanic and constituted all of those who met the study criteria. Interview data have limitations for those who self-report because the emotional state of the interviewee can affect the information reported during the interviews (Patton, 2002). The participants GPAs and student status were self-reported as were all other data. Other limitations such as the participant's ability to recall events and the possibility that the participants may provide

self-serving or other responses that are not accurate are present within this study as well. Lastly, the interview was the only data collection method used.

<center>Delimitations of the Study</center>

The students in this study did not include Asian, American Indian, or any other racial minority population. American Indian students were not included in the sample due to the low number of students in the population at Virginia Tech. At the time of this study, research has shown that Asian students were not experiencing low graduation rates or goal completion rates as compared to other minorities and non-Hispanic White populations in higher education. According to the United States Census Bureau (2000), the percentage of persons 25 years and over who had earned a bachelor's degree or more was 64.6% for Asians, 14.3% for Blacks, and 10.4% for Hispanics. Asians have also had higher completion rates in earning advanced degrees. For persons 25 years and over, the percentage of Asians earning advanced degrees was 17.4%, while it was 4.8% for Blacks, and only 3.8% for Hispanics. (United States Census, 2000). Participants in this study were purposefully limited to those students who had completed at least one calendar year of active course enrollment at Virginia Tech.

<center>Definition of Terms</center>

To fully understand the scope of this study, key terms were defined for the reader. The race or ethnic terms were defined according to the current educational documents available at the time of this study according to the *Federal Register: Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education* (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). These terms also aligned with the race and ethnic terms available on the Virginia Tech undergraduate

admissions form. This study used the singular terms of Black and Hispanic allowing the participant to self-identify their race or ethnicity.

American Indian: The term American Indian is used to include American Indian, Native American, Alaskan Native, Tribal, or any other race that students may self-identify as American Indian (United States Department of Education, 2007).

Asian: The term Asian is used to include Asian, Pacific Islander, Hawaiian, or any other race that students may self-identify as Asian (United States Department of Education, 2007).

Black: These race or ethnicity categories will be used as follows. The term Black includes African, African American or any other race that individuals may self-identify as Black (United States Department of Education, 2007).

Community college: A two-year, degree-granting, accredited institution of higher education in the United States (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Graduating student status: For the purposes of this study*, a*ny undergraduate transfer student who anticipates graduating within the academic year that the interview takes place to include 2009 spring, summer I, and summer II sessions.

Hispanic: The term Hispanic is used to include Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano, Mexican, Central American, Puerto Rican or any other ethnicity that individuals may self-identify as Hispanic (United States Department of Education, 2007).

Minority student: Any student who does not self-identify as White or non-Hispanic as defined by Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and United States Department of Education (2007). For this study, any student who identifies as Black or Hispanic will be in the minority groups of interest.

Native student: A term used in current literature when comparing transfer students to

students at the four-year institution. Native is defined as a student who began

his/her first postsecondary experience at the four-year institution (Anglin, Davis,

& Mooradian, 1993; Hills, 1965; Lee, Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993).

Persistence: Continued enrollment in undergraduate studies until degree attainment

(Strayhorn, 2005).

Transfer student: One who previously enrolled in a two-year, degree-granting accredited

community college in the United States, earned at least 24 credits, and

atriculated at Virginia Tech (Banks, 1990).

Organization of the Document

This document is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides background

information that frames the context of the study and includes an overview of the

purpose, research question, methodology, significance, and limitations of the study. The

chapter also includes definitions of terms. Chapter Two is a review of relevant literature

that provides support for the study and establishes the framework of the study. Chapter

Three consists of a discussion of the qualitative methodology used to conduct the study.

The discussion includes a description of the proposed phenomenological research

design, the role of the researcher, selection process, setting, participants, gaining

access and entry, informed consent and permission procedures, data collection

process, data management, and data analysis procedures. Chapter Four presents a

narrative description of the findings to include a presentation of the themes that

emerged. Last, Chapter Five includes a summary; a discussion of the findings and their

connections to theory and prior research; the implications for future practice, research, and policy; and answers to the research question.

Summary

Despite the gains in educational access, an education gap still exists in America. Many people of color are still among the least educated and most unemployed, and continue to experience high poverty rates compared to the non-Hispanic White population. Yet the racial minority population, specifically Blacks and Hispanics, is the largest growing population that will begin to replace the baby boomers in the workplace. Education is an individual matter; however, an educated people benefit society. Tax revenues, increased productivity, lower crime rates, and decreased public assistance are some of the public benefits to society as a result of an educated population (Boswell, 2004). Education is essential for keeping people productively employed and gaining important credentials for making positive life changes.

Educators have continued to be concerned with providing programs that promote students' success in higher education. Researchers have conducted studies that determined reasons for student attrition, student success, and persistence in undergraduate and graduate studies. Community colleges have long been a launching pad for providing education to traditional and non-traditional students through an open access system. Many students of color have taken advantage of the open access system but still face many challenges in degree completion. Educational leaders have initiated many programs to address students' challenges in degree completion; however, there is still much to be learned from the transfer student.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomena of persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transferred from a two-year degree granting community college to Virginia Tech. A thorough understanding of the meaning of these phenomena was best captured through learning about the experiences of those students through dialogue. Data gathering through interviews provided rich, detailed, descriptive data regarding the phenomena of interest. The goal was to highlight the essence of the experiences of the students who had persisted post-transfer and to generate knowledge related to implications for practices that promote anticipated degree completion for all students, but particularly Black and Hispanic transfer students.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomena of persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transferred from a two-year degree granting community college to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). The transfer of students to four-year institutions is one of the main missions of community colleges. My concern was whether students who have matriculated to a four-year institution would persist to graduation. The literature review begins with a theoretical framework that is shaped by the student involvement theory (Astin, 1984) and the concept of transfer shock (Hills, 1965).

Next, I present an overview community colleges' missions, advantages, and disadvantages to provide a background of the community college students' initial experiences in postsecondary education. The next section focuses on the transfer swirl concept and transfer student concerns. This section is followed by an examination of previous literature on the factors that foster persistence of transfer students. Discussions of Black student retention, Hispanic student retention, and how parental expectations influence the students is next. This chapter concludes with a summary addressing the gaps in literature.

Theoretical Framework

The student involvement theory (Astin, 1984) and the concept of transfer shock (Hills, 1965) provide a theoretical framework for this study. Astin defined student involvement as the "amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297). He cited an example of a highly involved

student as one who allocates energy to studying, spends time on campus, participates in several extracurricular activities, and interacts with faculty and other students. Astin emphasized the behavioral aspects but recognized that motivation is important to involvement. The involvement of an individual is defined by action and behavior.

Astin's (1984) student involvement theory was developed with student outcomes in mind. He suggested that the student involvement theory could be combined with pedagogical theory variables to bring about the desired learning outcomes. In other words, the student must exert some effort and investment of energy to bring about the learning outcomes. Previous pedagogical theories such as subject-matter, resource, and individualization were used by Astin to illustrate how the student involvement theory can be used with these approaches to bring about student development outcomes. Active student participation is emphasized and student behavior mechanisms that facilitate student learning are central to the involvement theory. Astin recognized that students invest time in family, friends, jobs, and other activities, and he acknowledged that mental and physical student time and energy are not unlimited. Therefore, administrators and faculty must realize that institutional policy and practices can affect the way students spend their time and energy.

The student involvement theory was originally developed by Astin through a longitudinal study of college dropouts in 1975. In this study, the goal was to identify factors in the college environment that affect student persistence. The results revealed that positive factors that contributed to persistence in college suggested student involvement and negative factors that contributed to student dropout implied less student involvement. The dropout study also revealed that students persist in colleges

with which they relate or have something common with the institution (Astin, 1975). For example, Astin suggested that students would persist at religious institutions if their religious backgrounds were similar to the institution; students from small towns were more likely to persist at small colleges rather than large colleges.

Astin (1977) conducted another study using his student involvement theory to examine the impact of college on other outcomes. The focus was to examine how the following types of involvement affect student outcomes: (a) place of residence, (b) honors program, (c) undergraduate research participation, (d) social fraternities and sororities, (e) academic involvement, (f) student-faculty interaction, (g) athletic involvement, and (h) student government. The results revealed that college attendance in general strengthened student's competency, self-esteem, artistic interests, liberalism, hedonism, and religious apostasy (Astin). Astin concluded that certain student involvement outcomes were associated with change in the freshman characteristics or institutional characteristics. In essence, Astin's student involvement concept concluded that the more students are involved with various university-related activities as outlined above, the more likely they will be to persist in higher education.

Another part of the theoretical framework is the concept of transfer shock, developed by Hills (1965). Researchers (Cejda & Kaylor, 1997; Diaz, 1992; Ishitani, 2008; Nolan & Hall, 1978; Peng & Bailey, 1977; Rowley, 2000; Schwartz & Washington, 2002) have focused on the academic performance of transfer students once matriculated at the senior institution by examining grade point averages (GPAs) and transfer shock. When community college students make the transition to the four-year institution, Hills suggested that transfer shock takes place due to differing academic

cultures. Hills created the term transfer shock to describe a drop in transfer students' GPA the first or second semester at the four-year institution. Hills reported that transfer students should expect a drop in grades after transferring from the community college. He also concluded that transfer students will take longer to graduate and will tend to improve their grades in relation to the length of time spent in college. Another finding of the study was that as a group, native students will perform better than transfer students (Hills, 1965).

Through the lens of these two theoretical frameworks I gained insight into the experiences of transfer students who have reached graduating student status. By including transfer shock as a part of the theoretical framework of this study, I provided another layer to a more comprehensive look at successful transfer students. I examined how successful transfer students performed at Virginia Tech regarding transfer shock. This allowed me to get to know more about the characteristics of successful transfer students and the influence that transfer shock and student involvement have on their persistence at Virginia Tech. The next section on community colleges provides an overview of the initial higher educational environment from which the students transfer.

Community College Overview

Historically, higher education opportunities in the United States and other nations were reserved for the socially and economically elite. When our country moved from an agricultural age to an industrial age, education for the non-elite was expanded based on economic and industrial needs. In the nineteenth century, the need for occupational training increased. According to Gordon (2003), the demand for vocational training increased between 1820 and 1860. Traditional colleges offered law, medicine, teaching,

and ministry courses. The passing of the Morrill Act of 1862 established land grant universities to promote liberal and practical education. The second Morrill Act of 1890 was adopted to provide educational opportunities for Black students at segregated Black institutions of the south. During the nineteenth century, when public schools were established, students from the elite social class focused on academics while the majority of other students were encouraged to learn an industrial trade for employment immediately upon high school graduation. Vocational education, known now as career and technical education, evolved out of this movement, which originated in Europe and influenced educational efforts in the United States as a means to remain economically competitive. When higher education expanded, community colleges developed as the demands for solving social and personal problems of society were placed on schools at every level (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). Community colleges have been the fastest growing sector in higher education (Boswell, 2004).

The institutional missions of the community college include societal, curricular, and functional components. The dominant societal mission has been to provide open access for educational attainment for all (Shannon & Smith, 2006). The community college missions typically include central curricular purposes such as developmental education and community service (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The functional missions are usually transfer education, career and technical education, continuing education, developmental education, workforce development, and community service (Cohen & Brawer; Downey, Pusser, & Turner, 2006; Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). The transfer function has been an important aspect of the mission (Eddy, Christie, & Rao, 2006). In contrast, Higginbottom and Romano (2006) noted that the most prominent missions

have been not only baccalaureate transfer, but also career and technical education and workforce development.

The mission and role of community colleges are important as they educate students whose needs are continually changing. As community college leaders examine their position within the overall higher education system, their missions may change as well. Community colleges allow for open-access to higher education for all persons to provide a better education that leads to a higher standard of living through increased earnings. The community college population is diverse in terms of age, tradition, income, race, and ethnicity of students who bring unique backgrounds and varying academic and social experiences to the college environment (Laanan, 2007).

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2008), there are 1,186 community colleges in the United States and they enroll approximately 11.6 million students. Forty percent of those enrolled in 2008 were full time students, and 46% of all United States undergraduates begin at this level in the post-secondary education system. Approximately 100,000 international students attend community colleges. A large number of minority students, particularly Blacks and Hispanics, begin their post-secondary education at the community college level (AACC).

Advantages of Attending Community Colleges

There are several advantages to beginning postsecondary education at the community college level. One advantage is the low tuition cost compared to the university, with cost per credit being considerably less at community colleges than at four-year institutions. The offering of academic core courses is usually the same as those required of all undergraduate students. The community college is a place to gain

college credits, become comfortable with postsecondary education, and then transfer into the university of choice. As indicated by Eddy, Christie, and Rao (2006), the community college becomes more attractive to students desiring a bachelor degree because of the costs associated with a four-year college education.

Another advantage of community college attendance is that students can choose to pursue a trade versus a degree. Students who are trained in a skill or trade are ready for employment in a shorter time period than if they attended a four-year institution. Students have the option to obtain an associate degree, complete a certificate program, learn a trade, enhance personal or professional development, or transfer to a university. In four-year universities, the acquisition of a degree is the goal (Hagedorn, 2004); however, at the community college the goals of students take on a range of possibilities and students may pursue a wide variety of avenues.

A community college campus is often small, friendly, and family-oriented, which are other advantages to attending this type of institution. The student-to-teacher ratio is usually low, which allows for increased individual attention from instructors. Townsend, McNerny, and Arnold (1993) suggested that their study results provided evidence that community colleges serve as a gateway to four-year degree attainment, particularly for those students who are "below university academic admission standards" (p. 441). Townsend et al. suggested that based on the students' College Aptitude Rating available at the time of the study, only 50% would have been accepted to the four-year university. These students were able to attain admissions after attending the community college. No other information was given regarding the university academic admission standards.

The low tuition cost, choice of trade or degree, and the small campus and family-oriented environment are reasons for beginning post-secondary education at the community college level. Some community college leaders have begun to emphasize this concept and have expanded their student support services to include on-campus housing, honors programs, and baccalaureate degrees.

Researchers have shown that students living on campus have a greater opportunity to become integrated in the college setting academically and socially, therefore increasing the likelihood of remaining in college (Pascarella, 2005). Community colleges are beginning to provide residential housing, with on-campus housing offered at 233 public colleges and 70 independent colleges (AACC, 2008).

Honors programs have been a part of the community college curriculum for more than 30 years. But as enrollment increased for the academically talented, ambitious community college leaders began to emphasize honors programs (Townsend, 2007).

Community colleges have endeavored to confer baccalaureate degrees as a solution to increasing access and capacity in higher education according to the Community College Baccalaureate Association (2008). The association reported that 16 states now have community colleges that offer bachelor's degrees. By constructing housing units, strengthening existing honors programs, and offering baccalaureate degrees, community colleges have remained competitive in the higher education market.

Disadvantages of Attending Community Colleges

Gaining access to education is not enough for students and institutions; persistence and degree completion are necessary. Low completion rates may be a

disadvantage for some students attending community colleges. Some researchers have

suggested that community college attendance has a negative influence on students'

persistence to graduate with a bachelor's degree (Alba & Lavin, 1981; Dougherty,

1992). The percentage of students who achieve their educational goals within a six-year

period at the community college is less than 50% (AACC, 2008). Student goal

attainment can include completing a skill certification, earning an associate's degree,

and transferring to a four-year institution. The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE),

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2001), reported similar findings to

those of the American Association of Community Colleges by indicating that only 45%

of the students who enroll in a community college to seek an associate degree or

transfer to a four-year institution achieve these goals within six years of their initial

enrollment. Only 41% of those students who seek a certification accomplish this goal

within six years (USDOE, NCES).

Another disadvantage of the community college as reported by transfer students

was that the teaching practices and norms differed from the perceived "survival of the

fittest mentality" and the competitive nature of four-year universities (Townsend, 1993).

Townsend reported quotations by students who expressed a desire to have been more

prepared for the university environment. The nurturing nature, cultural sensitivity,

supportive care and attention, and extra help given to students at the community college

could indeed leave transferring students with unrealistic expectations of what four-year

institutions will provide.

Another disadvantage of the community college system is the transfer rate for

students. Townsend and Wilson (2006) agreed that although community college

transfer rates are low, there is no official statement that suggests an acceptable rate. Grubb (1990) indicated that the decline of community college transfer rates were evident in his study using national longitudinal data. Grubb suggested that maintaining transfer rates was important for three reasons: (a) the transfer rate is symbolic of the community college and is one of the academic purposes for this type of academic institution, (b) a large number of community college students wish to advance in higher education by earning a bachelor's degree, and (c) the community college appeals to people and equal opportunity by allowing open access to postsecondary education. However, open access may not be enough if students do not complete a degree or certification, transfer to a four-year institution, or attain a bachelor's degree (Grubb).

The community college plays an essential role in granting higher education access to many students as well as preparing students for transfer to four-year institutions. The ultimate purposes of both types of institutions are to educate and graduate students, which translates into an educated population and workforce. Nonetheless, there will always be a certain amount of student attrition. Student attrition results in time and money loss for both the institution and the student. The following section introduces an important link between community colleges and universities that can help to bridge baccalaureate degree access for minorities and transfer students.

Articulation Agreements

Articulation agreements called 2 + 2 have been established between the community colleges and the four-year institutions; these are designed to ensure that associate degree course credits apply toward the baccalaureate study (Falconetti, 2009). California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Texas, and Oklahoma are recognized for

effective articulation agreements. For example, every graduate having earned an Associate of Arts in Florida is guaranteed admission priority to Florida state universities (Falconetti). For community colleges, articulation models are most important for transfer students to complete baccalaureate degrees (Ignash & Townsend, 2001). Others have indicated that community colleges' participation in articulation models is necessary for bachelor's degree achievement for both students and colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Floyd, 2006; Floyd & Walker, 2003).

Articulation agreement models vary across states, community colleges, and universities. Articulation agreement models described by Floyd (2005) suggested a guaranteed acceptance of community college course work at the receiving institution, or an extension offer for baccalaureate as an additional part of the university programming, or a university center model that offers the delivery of the baccalaureate using the facilities of the community college. Another model presented by Windham, Perkins, and Rogers (2001) allows the university to confer the baccalaureate through a partnership in which the community college offers the lower-level courses and the university offers the upper level courses for students in their program. Articulation agreements can benefit minority students as indicated by Boswell (2004), who suggested that strong agreements are more effective in decreasing the education disparities low-income and minority students experience in achieving the baccalaureate. The next section will focus on the issues and concerns of transfer students who desire to pursue education beyond the community college.

Transfer Students

Student mobility in higher education is not unusual. Only about one-third of students graduate from the college in which they initially matriculated (Kearney, Townsend, & Kearney, 1995). As indicated by Townsend (1999), the typical transfer path is from a community college to a four-year institution. However, students also transfer between community colleges and from a four-year institution to a community college. The range of transitions has been termed the transfer swirl by de los Santos and Wright (1990) because the transfer is not only in one direction. This type of enrollment activity is not uncommon. Because of such mobility, transfer students have issues and concerns about attending a four-year institution.

Some transfer students face academic concerns about four-year institutions such as a lack of academic skills, poor faculty-student communication, and limited advising and planning (Gardner & Barefoot, 1995). They may also have concerns about senior institutions' size, location, academic rigor, and student competition (Laanan, 1996, 1998, 2001). Moreover, financial concerns may be barriers to attending four-year institutions. For example, the tuition cost for one undergraduate credit hour for a Virginia resident at Virginia Tech is $310.00 (Virginia Tech, University Bursar, 2010). In comparison, the cost of one undergraduate credit hour for a Virginia resident at New River Community College, which is located within 30 miles of Virginia Tech, is $101.00 (New River Community College, Student Services, 2010). Lester (2006) provided another example of a tuition cost comparison in favor of the community college versus the university. He indicated that the Los Angeles Community College tuition was $18

per credit compared to $226 per credit for a student who enrolled part-time with six credits per semester at a four-year institution in the California higher education system.

Another concern for transfer students is grades (Lester, 2006). The transfer student must consider the complex adjustment process and the possibility of transfer shock (Laanan, 2001, 2007). Another concern is the ethnic population at the senior institution, which may differ from that of the community college. Other concerns include how the receiving institutions respond to the transfer student in offering ongoing support (Lester, 2006), the loss of credits earned at the community college, and articulation agreements between the community college and the receiving institution (Townsend et al., 1993). All of these concerns may impact transfer students' academic success positively or negatively when adjusting to the senior institution. The next section focuses on the factors that foster transfer student persistence once transfer students arrive at the four-year institution.

Factors Fostering Student Persistence in Higher Education

Understanding the factors that foster student persistence is important because all students experience transition issues the first year of college and it is during this transition period that students need support (LaBoone, 2006; Tinto, 2003). This is important for transfer students who are once again transitioning as they matriculate at the four-year institution. The successful transition during the first year may also impact return to the four-year institution or community college (Tinto, 1993). Additionally, researchers have found transitioning to higher education is more difficult for minority students (Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Fleming, 1984). Researchers have examined grade point averages (GPAs) as an indicator of

whether transfer students are academically successful and have made a successful transition at the four-year institution.

The following section is a review of the literature related to transfer student academic success, academic success and transfer shock, and student persistence. This is followed by a review of the student adjustment process and institutional interventions that may foster student persistence.

Academic Success

Academic success is not easily measured. Besides examining transfer student GPAs, other researchers of community college transfer students focused on the examination of the community college transfer process and how well the college prepared students for transfer (Brint & Karabel, 1989; de la Torre, 2007; Kozeracki & Brooks, 2006). However, more recently Hagedorn (2004) examined transfer student academic readiness, which she defined as the completion of course modules as required in California's Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC). The students were required to take these courses and pass with a letter grade of C or better in order to be admitted to a state college with junior status. The results showed no statistically significant differences among the racial groups who completed the modules with a passing letter grade C or better. The student groups included were White, Hispanic, and minority. The minority group included Blacks, American Indians, and Alaska Natives. According to Hagedorn, all minority racial student groups are important; however, Asian Americans were not underrepresented in higher education and therefore were not included in the minority group. Of the three student groups, the Hispanic group experienced the highest percentage of students who successfully

passed the History and American Ideals Module (49.6%) and Social and Behavioral

Sciences Module (49%) (Hagedorn). Additionally, the results show that minority

students are as academically prepared for transferring to the senior institution as the

majority race students. Other researchers have focused on the academic performance

of transfer students as compared to native students as discussed in the following

studies.

Townsend, McNerny, and Arnold (1993) conducted a study to determine if the

community college GPA was a predictor of academic success and persistence at the

senior institution. They wanted to determine if particular ascertainable student

characteristics and academic behaviors at the community college were associated with

degree persistence and completion at the senior institution. Based on a 4.0 GPA scale,

the results indicated that students who transferred with a GPA of less than 2.5 were not

as likely to persist to degree or attain a high GPA at Northern Illinois University.

Townsend et al. concluded that a GPA of at least 2.5 at a community college was a

good predictor of academic success and persistence. This was contrary to the study

conducted by Cejda, Rewey, and Kaylor (1998), whose findings identified 3.0 as the

minimum pre-transfer GPA necessary for academic success at the senior institution.

The studies conducted by Townsend et al. and others (Clegg, Shoup, & Liu, 1990; Lee,

Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993) indicated that students who begin postsecondary

education by attending community college are likely to persist and experience success

at the four-year institution if their pre-transfer GPA is at least 2.5.

Anglin, Davis, and Mooradian (1993) conducted another study focused on

academic performance of transfer students at Kent State University by comparing

transfer student GPAs and native student GPAs. The findings from their study revealed that there were no significant differences between urban community college transfer students and native students' grade point averages at the senior institution. Notable differences were found in bachelor's degree attainment between White and minority students resulting from higher dropout rates for minority students at the end of the first year of attendance. The study results revealed three major findings. First, there were no statistically significant differences between transfer and native students' GPAs when compared after the second and fifth year of enrollment at Kent State University. Additionally, in the relationships of GPA to age, gender, race or ethnicity, and high school attended, there were no statistically significant differences. Second, a significant difference in attrition between the transfer and native students was found. Attrition was operationally defined as any student who failed to enroll for three consecutive semesters. Over 70% of all the native student attrition occurred within the first two years. The native students who dropped out had significantly lower GPAs and fewer credit hours compared to the transfer students who dropped out. The third major finding was related to race and ethnicity. About 15% of the transfer students were minority and most of these were Black, but minorities were underrepresented in the study because they did not reflect the Cuyahoga Community College minority student body, which was at least 30%. The findings revealed that the minority transfer students performed as well as the native minority students. They were just as likely to graduate earning a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, a 70% dropout rate of minority transfer students and minority native students occurred by the end of the second semester. Anglin et al.

indicated that as a result of the dropout rate, the minority students had a lower probability of completing a baccalaureate degree than White students.

Laanan (1996) conducted an exploratory study to investigate how students who transferred from California community colleges to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) performed academically and to explore the nature of the students' experiences in adjusting to UCLA. The study surveyed two sets of transfer student participants. The target population included students who transferred from within the state of California and were enrolled in the Transfer Alliance Program (TAP). The TAP program was originated by the Center for Academic Interinstitutional Program (CAIP) at UCLA in 1985, and the participants pursued an honors program at the community college while enrolled in prerequisite courses for transfer into the College of Letters and Science at UCLA. The second group of participants was non-TAP students who were transfer students in their second year at UCLA.

The findings revealed no statistically significant difference in academic performance between the TAP and non-TAP students (Laanan, 1996). The average GPA for TAP students was 3.53, compared to 3.52 for non-TAP students. However, Laanan noted that the GPAs were higher than those found in a study by Ackermann (1989). Ackermann examined both TAP and non-TAP students' academic performances after transferring into UCLA and compared prior performance with current performance. She found that both groups entered UCLA with average GPAs above 3.1, but TAP students maintained a statistically significant higher average GPA of 2.99 after entering UCLA as compared to the 2.70 GPA average for non-TAP students. Conversely, Ackermann also found that student persistence rates were lower for TAP students than

for non-TAP students. The previously mentioned studies revealed that community college transfer students were able to maintain their GPAs and persist at the senior institution at the same rate as native students. Other studies confirmed that minority transfer students were as able to maintain GPAs and persist at the senior institutions as their White counterparts. Conversely, according to Anglin et al., a high dropout rate for minority transfer students caused minority students to have a lower probability of baccalaureate degree completion than White students. Overall, these studies also indicated that GPA is an inconsistent predictor of academic success for community college transfer students. This is confirmed in the results of other researchers who have also conducted studies on transfer students, GPAs, and transfer shock (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Cejda, Rewey, & Kaylor, 1998; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Graham & Hughes, 1994; Johnson-Benson, Geltner, & Steinberg, 2001).

Academic Success and Transfer Shock

The previous section focused on academic success of transfer students by evaluating differences in students' GPAs at both the community college and senior institution. This section focuses on academic success and transfer shock. Since 1927, there have been more than 60 studies conducted on academic success and transfer shock (Diaz, 1992). Between 1954 and 1990 there were four national studies focusing on transfer students and academic performance. They were conducted by Martorano and Williams (1954), Knoell and Medsker (1965), Killin (1968), and Snyder and Blocker (1970). Martorano and Williams' study included 251 transfer students and their findings indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between transfer students and native students on academic performance (Diaz, 1992). Knoell and Medsker

reported opposite results, indicating an overall drop in GPA of .30 on a 4.0 scale for transfer students. This was consistent with what Hills (1965) described as transfer shock. Killin reported that students had experienced transfer shock, but there was no significant difference between community college transfer students and other transfer students. However, Snyder and Blocker found that the transfer students experienced transfer shock, and they only recovered half of their GPA by graduation.

Patricia E. Diaz (1992) noted that W. E. Eells at Stanford University performed the earliest identifiable study of students who had transferred to a university in 1927. Diaz believed that by collecting available data from previously published studies reporting differences in transfer students' academic performance, a pattern might be revealed. As a result, Diaz conducted a meta-analysis of studies that reported effects of transfer shock on academic performance experienced by community college transfer students. The purpose of her work was, "…(a) to identify all studies that tested the effects of transfer on academic performance and that reported the effect in terms of letter-grade percentages; and (b) to determine the magnitude of effect of transferring on academic performance" (Diaz, p. 280). The researcher identified 62 studies to be included in the meta-analysis. In studies used, the researchers had determined the actual magnitude of transfer shock or transfer ecstasy as delineated by GPA change. As defined by Diaz, the magnitude of change is the difference between the transfer students' GPA at the community college and their GPA at the senior institution at the end of the first semester. Transfer ecstasy was defined as the increase in GPA as opposed to the decrease in GPA (Nickens, 1972; Laanan, 2001). Studies that noted transfer shock and recovery but did not state the exact magnitude of change were not

included. The purpose of this analysis was to report the magnitude of GPA change as an indicator of academic performance for community college transfer students and to clarify whether or not these students are risks at the senior institution. The data analysis resulted in an average of .354 GPA magnitudes of change computed across the 62 studies. This was measured by hundredths of a grade point. For example, change of .03 means that a transfer student obtained a grade three hundredths of a letter grade higher or lower while enrolled at the receiving institution. The variables used were: (a) publication date or study date, (b) form of publication or source of the document, (c) number of transfer students in the study, (d) type of senior institution students transferred to, and (e) geographic location of senior institution. The results revealed that 79% of the studies showed community college transfer students experienced transfer shock, but for most the magnitude of GPA change was one half of a grade point or less. From the 79% of the studies that showed community college transfer students who experienced transfer shock, 34% of the studies revealed that students recovered completely, 34% revealed nearly complete recovery, and 32% revealed partial recovery. Most recovered within the first year of transferring. Recovery means that the students improved their GPA at some point after the initial drop and for some, recovery was complete by graduation.

Three of the studies in Diaz's meta-analysis reported that transfer students who were not successful at the senior institutions had post transfer GPAs of less than 2.0. Several other studies showed that transfer students who had stayed at the community college for two years experienced less transfer shock. Yet, two studies showed that the time spent at the community college had no statistically significant difference in GPA

change. The analysis of the date of publication or study date, type of institution, and geographic area did not result in a magnitude of change or significant difference. The results from this meta-analysis revealed that although most students experienced transfer shock, most will recover and persist toward graduation. These factors are important for admissions officers to consider in their admission criteria. The overall results of Diaz's meta-analysis showed that there is no significant difference between the native and transfer students at the senior institution. The next section will present more information on student persistence.

Student Persistence

Researchers have conducted studies in student persistence. Some studies have shown that individual intentions relating to participation in higher education and attending specific institutions have been important predictors of persistence and degree completion (Astin, 1975; Bean, 1982; Wilder & Kellams, 1987). Janasiewicz (1987) found that students who are more certain about their futures are more likely to finish college, while Raimst (1981) found that uncertainty about a career or occupational choice was not an indication of first-year students' departure. Consequently, there are many reasons that have led students to persistence in college, but not many researchers have focused on the persistence of community college transfer minority students.

Student persistence is not a new concept in higher education. Some researchers have defined persistence as achieving the baccalaureate degree, aspiring to attend graduate school, or enrolling in graduate school (Cejada, Rewey, & Kaylor, 1998; Lee, Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993). Another defined persistence as those students who

graduated with a bachelor's degree or are still enrolled (Townsend, McNerny, & Arnold, 1993). Elsewhere, persistence to degree was defined as persistence to completion of a bachelor's degree program (Strayhorn, 2005). Researchers have examined undergraduate student persistence extensively (Astin, 1975; Bean, 1982; Pace, 1980; Ramist, 1981). In studies that related to persistence, Lee, Mackie-Lewis, and Marks (1993) focused on comparisons of native student and transfer students who were likely to attain a bachelor's degree; other researchers focused on the relationship between associate degree attainment and the transfer student (Cejda, Rewey, & Kaylor, 1998): and Laanan (2007) focused on the adjustment process. Next is a review of these studies.

Lee, Mackie-Lewis, and Marks (1993) built upon Lee and Frank's (1990) study by comparing transfer students with their peers who entered four-year institutions directly from high school. Their investigations focused on how likely community college transfer students were to attain bachelor's degrees within a reasonable time frame, to make plans for graduate school, or to enroll in graduate school. The researchers used the same High School & Beyond (HS&B) national data sets. The investigation centered on finding out if community college attendance affected persistence after the transfer students made the transition to a four-year college and whether the community college experience exerted some disadvantage on the transfer students' persistence in higher education. The major finding of this study revealed that there were no disadvantages of community college attendance for persistence to graduation at the bachelor degree level. There was a significant difference in the outcomes for enrollment in graduate studies and aspirations for graduate studies. The results revealed a larger percentage

of native students enrolled in graduate school or aspired to attend graduate school than transfer students. The outcome differences showed that both the transfer and native groups graduated or were poised for graduation at 69%. It was noted that variables such as full time status, academic satisfaction, grade point average, minority enrollment, and institutional selectivity were statistically significant and had a positive effect on persistence. The researchers also discovered that the transfer students preferred senior institutions that awarded professional degrees, thus this institutional characteristic was found to have a positive effect on persistence. Lee et al. (1993) performed several analyses in this study. In the analysis using a logistic regression of the effect of attending community college on persistence to graduation from college with the independent variables, the results revealed that being Hispanic had no significant effect on persistence, while Black students were significantly less likely to graduate. The researchers performed further analysis, which was to focus on a specifically on the Black students group. Therefore, looking at race combined with other independent variables such as student background, college behaviors, and institutional characteristics Black students who attended the community college were differentially affected, but not significantly.

Researchers have found many characteristics related to persistence toward a baccalaureate degree for community college transfer students. Cejda, Rewey, and Kaylor (1998) found that a positive relationship existed between the completion of the associate degree and having a community college 3.0 or higher grade point average (GPA). The GPA is based on a 4.0 scale. In addition, students who completed an associate degree with a 3.0 or higher GPA were more likely to persist toward

baccalaureate degree completion. The results of the statistical analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between community college GPA of 3.0 or higher and the first semester GPA at the liberal arts college. The findings also revealed that the percentage of community college students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher who persisted at the senior institution or graduated was essentially the same as native students. For the transfer students who completed an associate degree, the persistence rate was 78.5% compared 58.9% persistence rate for those transfer student who had not completed an associate degree. Hence, the researchers concluded that for those who completed the associate degree and had a GPA level of 3.0 or higher, the persistence rate of transfer students was greater than or equal to that of the native students (Cejda et al.). The findings in this study were not race specific.

Although many studies focused on transfer student academic performance, Koker and Hendel's (2003) study was different than previous studies because they examined the impact of demographic variables, high school and pre-transfer college academic characteristics, transfer student cohort, and post-transfer college academic characteristics on the bachelor's degree completion at a public urban university in the Midwest. This study consisted of three participant cohort groups. The first cohort group included participants who were enrolled in the Post-secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program which is similar to Advanced Placement programs. The second cohort group was two-year college transfer students who did not participate in the PSEO program but earned 26 college credits at a community college. The third cohort group did not earn college credits through PSEO but completed at least 26 semester college credits at a four-year institution. The researchers concluded that the academic

background of transfer students should be considered when attempting to identify

students likely to leave. Age and gender did not significantly affect graduation but

ethnicity was a significant predictor of graduation status. White students were more

likely to graduate than minority students. Also, the results were consistent with the

transfer shock concept. Most importantly, the results revealed that the greatest

percentage of students who completed a degree or remained enrolled in spring 1998

was from the third cohort group who were four-year native students and the second

cohort group of transfer students. Thus, the transfer students who earned college

credits while attending the community college persisted as well as the native four-year

institution students. Moreover, the transfer students performed better than those

students in cohort one who earned college credits while in high school (Koker &

Hendel). The implications may be that the community college environment may have

some impact for the persistence of the transfer students at the four-year institution.

Student Adjustment Process

Laanan (2007) moved beyond the transfer shock concept to examine the

complex adjustment process that is necessary for community college transfer students.

Laanan built upon previous studies to operationally define complex adjustment process

as the quality of effort, student involvement, and culture shock experienced by transfer

students. In keeping with Pace's (1984) definition of quality of effort, Laanan defined the

quality of effort as an education process and a product as well as the investment of time

and effort required by a student to learn. Student involvement was defined as the

academic and social involvement of students. Culture shock was defined by Laanan as

a person physically moving from the familiar place to a foreign place as students do when they attend college. Students have to adjust to the unfamiliar place.

The results of Laanan's (2007) study indicated that the social demographic variables had no effect and were not statistically significant in predicting students' academic adjustment. Laanan suggested that these factors do likely play a role in who attends college and who transfers, but they do not influence the prediction of students' adjustment. The social demographic variables included students' background characteristics such as age, honors program participation, and racial background. Moreover, it is what the students do once at the receiving institution that will determine their social and academic adjustment to the environment. Other findings indicated that it is possible that students who are having academic difficulties may compensate for it by spending more time studying, doing homework, and attending academic workshops, but these activities may not help. According to Laanan, these findings suggested that the mastering of the course material does not necessarily require many hours spent in the aforementioned activities. In such cases, students spending a lot of time in these activities are more likely to experience difficulty adjusting academically, because it is not the quantity of time spent but the quality of the time spent and the effort that students give to the learning process that contributes to their success (Laanan). In looking at academic adjustment as the dependent variable, the transfer students' perception of the senior institution, experiences with counselors, view of competitive environment, GPA, hours spent studying and doing homework, perceptions of faculty, and academic workshops were positive predictors of students' academic adjustment. The students' university GPA and intellectual self-confidence had a positive impact on student

adjustment. This finding revealed that the higher the GPA and intellectual self-confidence that the students possess, the less likely the students will have difficulty adjusting academically. The results showed the following variables had a positive association with social adjustment: clubs and organizations, academic counseling, hours spent in club activities, attending cultural events, social self-confidence, four-year college satisfaction, psychological adjustment, and hours socializing with friends. Therefore, transfer students who were involved in these activities are likely to experience less difficulty adjusting socially. The students' understanding of others had a positive association with social adjustment. Student perceptions of the four-year environment were also positively associated with social adjustment. The findings also suggested that there are two important factors that were critical at the community college level. One important factor was that students who had previous involvement with academic counselors at the community college experienced academic challenges at the four-year institution. This finding was interpreted by Laanan as students were seeking counseling because there were experiencing academic or social difficulty and the students were spending time with counselors to address their concerns. The second factor was that insecure feelings about the university environment were negatively related to academic adjustment. It was suggested that eliminating or reducing students' apprehensions and feelings of anxiety about the four-year institution helped to facilitate academic adjustment. It was noted that if students did not worry about competition at the university, but spent more time on their individual learning, they would likely experience a smoother academic adjustment. The findings of Laanan's study support

the theory of student involvement (Astin, 1984) and the concept of student quality of effort (Pace, 1980).

The aforementioned studies involved transfer students at differing levels, and while some confirm transfer shock and the likelihood of persistence, others do not. In summary, the factors that seem to foster persistence for transfer students include the completion of an associate degree, ability to recover from transfer shock, a better than average GPA upon transfer to the senior institution, and student social and academic involvement as factors that foster transfer student persistence in higher education.

Institutional Interventions

At the institutional level, community colleges and universities have begun to shift their focus to issues of academic readiness, student retention, student persistence, and graduation rates. Community colleges across the nation have examined the issues of student success and persistence that lead to completion of post-secondary goals at both the institutional and student level. The Lumina Foundation (2007) has launched one national support program. In 2004, the Foundation partnered with higher education institutions to implement programs to help students achieve their educational dreams, beginning at the community college through a program titled, "Achieving the Dream: Community College Counts." To date there are 80 community colleges in 15 states and four Texas universities involved in the program. This was only one of many partnership programs (Lumina Foundation). Institutions are implementing strategies for increasing student engagement utilizing instructional techniques, developmental education, and student success courses. While these programs are necessary at the community

college level, there remains a need for continual intervention at the university level for promoting recruitment, retention, and graduation of Black and Hispanic students.

Parental Expectations

There is limited research on parental influence on education for people of color. Researchers have shown that parents do influence the education attainment of their children. This is particularly true of first-generation students. As defined by Choy (2001), first generation students are those students who are the first generation in their immediate family to attend college. Hossier and Stage (1992) and Choy found that the parents' level of education does influence college aspirations. In the study by Choy, Horn, Nunez, and Chen (2000), findings indicated that children whose parents did not attend college were more likely to drop out of high school with no aspiration for attending college. Parental involvement was associated with the increased likelihood that the student would attend college. These researchers also found that when parents discussed school-related issues with their children on a regular basis, those students were almost twice as likely to attend college (Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen).

Fisher and Padmawidjaja (1999) explored the parental influences that persuade the choice and career development of Black and Hispanic college students. They found that encouragement was one of the most frequently identified factors of parental influence. Another finding of this study revealed that the students were aware of the education attainment obstacles their parents faced. As a result, these students reflected upon the benefits their parents informed them that education can offer. Fisher and Padmawidjaja found that regardless of the education levels of the participants' parents; all the parents had high educational expectations for their children. The parents had

instilled in their children the desire to surpass them in educational and occupational levels. The researchers concluded that high parental educational expectations may have resulted from a desire to protect the children from life hardships experienced by the parents. Additionally, such expectations were encouraging the students to make a contribution to their race or ethnic population as well as to prepare them for the world that has marginalized them. Yet, other researchers found that college students are attached to their parents and have a desire to respect them, gain their approval, and meet their expectations because they are still a part of the family unit (Youniss & Smollar, 1989).

<div align="center">Black Student Retention</div>

The cycle of recruiting, retaining, and graduating students is the business of higher education. The continuous recruitment and retention of Black and Hispanic students is necessary for individuals in these populations to graduate. Literature on Black student retention has focused on student pre-college attributes, goals and commitments, higher education experiences, and personal and normative integration.

Pre-College Attributes

Cope and Hannah (1975) studied personal attributes and concluded that personal commitment was the single most important determinant of persistence in college. In a study of academic performance and retention of Black freshmen males, Schwartz and Washington (2002) found a statistically significant relationship between high school grades, high school ranks, a few noncognitive variables (academic adjustment, attachment to college, personal emotional adjustment), and academic performance and retention. Students who felt a part of the social environment of the

institution and who held higher school ranks were more likely to return the next semester. This study focused on pre-college attributes and was significant because the findings were consistent with Astin (1984) and Tinto (1987), who emphasized students' need to feel attached to the institution. However, the study was limited to a small number of Black men at a historically Black college.

Goals and Commitments

Goals and commitments are also important to academic persistence. Tinto (1993) suggested that students committed to their institution will most likely persist and graduate. There are two forms of commitment: goal and institutional (Tinto). Goal commitment was defined by Tinto as the personal willingness that one has for working toward the achievement of a goal. The more committed individuals are to their own goals, the more likely they will be committed to the institution. Abel (1966) studied persistence to graduation and found that students who had committed to specific career goals had graduation rates twice as high as those students who were uncertain of their goals. However, Hackman and Dysinger (1970) found that goal commitment was contingent upon student ability. The researchers concluded that students with high competence and moderate to low commitment would transfer to another college or university, or depart from higher education and re-enroll at a later time. Additionally, Hackman and Dysinger found that students with low competence and moderate to high commitment would persist in college unless forced to leave because of failing grades.

The second form of commitment is institutional, which is defined as a person's willingness to work toward goal attainment at a selected higher educational institution

(Tinto, 1993). A person's commitment to graduate from a certain institution may impact his or her persistence to graduate (Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1981).

Flowers and Pascarella (2003) researched the cognitive effects of race in college, comparing the differences between Black and White students. The findings revealed that White students made significantly higher cognitive gains than Black students in the first three years of college. Black students were disadvantaged in standardized and objective assessments of critical thinking, reading comprehension, mathematics, science reasoning, and writing skills. During the longitudinal study, it was found that the effects of race on cognitive skills were conditional; thus the impact of race on learning differed each year in college between Black and White students. For example, the total number of social science courses taken negatively impacted the reading comprehension outcomes for Black students but not for White students at the end of the third year of college. For White students who took social science courses, their reading comprehension was not significantly impacted at the end of the third year. It was suggested that past research may explain or clarify the differing results for the White and Black students who took social science courses. Flowers and Pascarella referred to two studies that revealed that poor educational experiences of Blacks in elementary and secondary school may have negative impacts on standardized tests of academic achievement and cognitive outcomes in higher education (Davis & Jordan, 1994; McElroy-Johnson, 1993). Second, it was suggested that noncognitive measures may provide better predictors of academic performance (Fleming, 2000). It was implied that the noncognitive measures may be race identity, feelings of belonging, self-confidence, or other factors, not including standardized tests. Fleming suggested:

SAT scores correlates found for Black students at PWCU's [predominately White colleges and universities] more often reflect issues of identity alienation when the conditions of success are quite the opposite – that is, when identity integration, which synthesizes social connectedness and good academic performance, is present. (p. 36)

Third, research showed that Black students were more likely to perceive the college environment as unwelcoming (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000). Additionally, Flowers and Pascarella (2003) found that Black students' perceptions of social support helped to increase the students' commitment to the institution and influenced their beliefs that their goals were fitting with the university's academic mission.

Higher Education Experiences

Institutional experiences can impact the learning process for Black students. Gladwell (2000) conducted a study examining the perceptions of Black students regarding factors that increase retention at his institution, which was predominately White. Gladwell found that factors such as special support programs, student interaction, and campus involvement were important to the participants. These factors are consistent with Tinto's (1993) suggestions for student retention and align with the findings of Astin (1984). Rowley (2000) suggested that Black students reported that institutional experiences such as discrimination, feelings of isolation, and lack of support were distractions to their learning process. Rowley also reported that "College is often a place where African-American students begin to think more deeply about issues of racism and discrimination" (p.19).

Personal and Normative Integration

Personal and normative integration into the higher education environment has shown to be a predictor of student retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1999).

Such integration includes student involvement on campus, establishing social connections, and becoming acclimated to the university culture and community. Lee (2001) suggested that cross-cultural communities with culturally-competent, predominant race faculty and staff are an important ingredient to helping minority students feel connected to the university. As suggested by Tinto (1993), informal and formal forms of social contact among students may establish social and intellectual membership in the social community of the university. Although interaction does not guarantee persistence, the absence of interaction almost always increases the likelihood of departure (Tinto, 1993).

Hispanic Student Retention

The following section includes literature regarding Hispanic student retention and those factors which influence persistence in higher education. Literature on Hispanic student retention has focused on student pre-college attributes, environmental factors, and involvement factors similar to those of Black students. Socio-cultural factors also contribute to Hispanic retention.

Pre-College Attributes

The pre-college attributes have been found to influence persistence for Hispanics as they have for Black students. The pre-college attributes include high grade point average and test scores, academic self-concept, family support, and financial resources. Most college admissions offices rely on high school grade point averages and college entrance exams as a measure for college success. Lesure-Lester (2003) found evidence that Hispanic students did not score well on standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs), and therefore such scores may not predict college

grades, time of degree completion, or potential filing of graduate school applications. As suggested by Hernandez (2000), the single most important factor influencing Hispanic retention was the student's positive outlook. Family support and encouragement were also found to be important influences in the retention of Hispanic students as suggested by Wintre and Jaffe (2002). Financial assistance is essential for low-income students as studies have shown that those students receiving financial aid are more likely to persist in higher education (Cabrera, Stampen, & Hansen, 1990; Nora, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Environmental Factors

The environmental factors that influence the retention of Hispanic students are somewhat similar to the institutional experiences of Black students. The racial climate of the institution was found to be a factor in retention. Feelings of isolation were found to be directly related to failure and perceptions of support were found to be directly related to the students' academic success (Harvey, 2001). The presence of a Hispanic community in a predominately White institution helped Hispanic students meet other students who had common backgrounds. Consequently, they were better able to cope with the postsecondary environment. This factor had a positive impact on retention (Hernandez, 2000). Hernandez suggested that students who had a sense of belonging and who felt accepted by other students, faculty, and staff were more likely to persist.

A study conducted by Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) examined the extent to which three factors were interrelated and were predictive of academic nonpersistence decisions for Hispanic students. The three factors were university comfort, social support, and self-beliefs. Self-belief was defined as the beliefs that a

person has of oneself (Valentica & Black, 2002) as well as the self-efficacy or confidence the one has in their ability to successfully complete tasks (Hackett & Byars, 1996). Gloria et al. found that social support was the strongest predictor of students' academic nonpersistence decisions. The next strongest predictor was university comfort. Individual perceptions of social support from friends, mentorship, and university environment had the strongest predictive values. The findings of Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archuleta, Phoummarath, and Van Landingham (2006) affirmed that Hispanic students' perception of the university environment is related to ethnic identity and persistence attitudes. The findings from a correlation analysis showed that perceptions of a negative university environment were related to nonpersistence attitudes.

Involvement Factors

Suarez-Orozco and Paez (2002) suggested that the student involvement theory confirms that factors such as student-faculty interaction, mentor relationships, and student organization participation influence the persistence of students, including Hispanic students. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) found that when Hispanic students experienced interaction with faculty who were perceived as student-centered, those students were more likely to adjust to college.

Hernandez and Lopez (2004) also found that influential persons outside of the Hispanic student's family were important, suggesting that mentoring programs can be an effective tool for minorities in higher education. Tinto (1993) indicated that mentoring programs designed to provide students of color with faculty members who take

responsibility to formally or informally advise or mentor them were helpful for students of color to become integrated into the college community.

The last involvement factor is participation in student organizations. As described by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), participation in student organizations has a positive effect on educational persistence and attainment in college. They suggested that student organization participation leads to greater involvement in the college experience.

Socio-Cultural Factors

According to Hernandez and Lopez (2004), socio-cultural factors that shape Hispanic students include aspects of ethnic identity, immigration status, gender roles, community orientation, and religion. Socio-cultural factors, including various aspects of identity development, are important to Hispanic students (Hernandez & Lopez). Casas and Pytluk (1995) defined ethnic identity as "one's knowledge of personal ownership or membership in the ethnic group, and the correlated knowledge, understanding, values, behaviors, and proud feelings that are direct implications of that ownership" (p. 159). This is important to Hispanic students because they experience multiple identities within their cultural influences, as suggested by Hernandez and Lopez. In a qualitative study of the influences on the ethnic identity development of Hispanic students during their first two years in college, Torres (2003) found that the students viewed community with pride in the neighborhood or barrio. The Hispanic community issues and problems are often shared privately within their community; consequently community orientation was important to Hispanic students.

Suarez-Orozco (1991) found that education beliefs were based in part on the immigration status of Central American populations. He found that their adaptive approaches for schooling were different from minorities with long histories of poverty. Those Central Americans in this study developed their adaptive approaches because they clearly believed that opportunities were better in their current home than in their native country. Those who stayed in the native country had long histories of degradation and were not exposed to better opportunities (Suarez-Orozco, 1991). Hernandez and Lopez (2004) indicated that differences existed between Hispanic immigrants and native-born high school students regarding educational goals.

In looking at gender roles, Hurtado (1995) has found that Hispanic families are like all other families in negotiating power between men and women. DeLeon (1995) conducted a cross-cultural study and found a consistency in literature that suggested that differences in gender roles can be attributed to race, gender, and social class for minority groups.

Tinto (1993) suggested that external communities have some influence in persistence of college students. If external communities support education, then persistence may occur. However, if students experience greater demands from external communities that do not support education, the likelihood of persistence is lowered.

Lastly, Heyck (1994) suggested that Hispanic religious practices and beliefs are varied, but religion was associated with family and holiday traditions. Such religious matters enter into the daily lives and decisions of some Hispanic students related to educational goals.

Hispanic and Black share common factors that influence their persistence in higher education, such as financing education. Nora (2001) reported the importance that financial assistance plays in the persistence of students from low-income backgrounds in higher education.

Studies have shown that mentoring for Black students and other students of color has influenced their persistence in undergraduate studies (Friedman, 1992; Patton & Harper, 2003; Reddick, 2006). Mentoring has been defined in various ways and many relate the term back to its Greek origin. "Mentor" was the name of someone who was responsible to teach, guide, and counsel another person (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999; Patton & Harper, 2003). Students who have had mentors reported that mentoring helps to assist students with academic and social challenges, encourages student engagement with faculty, and provides assistance to students in achieving their educational goals (Reddick, 2006; Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001) reported that mentoring provides a network for students to learn to adjust to stressful environments. Understanding the factors that influence their persistence is important for retaining these populations. Parental expectations for educational attainment have been found to influence the persistence of students in higher education; this is last factor to be discussed. Thus, the opportunity to examine the factors that have contributed to the academic success and persistence directly from Hispanic and Black will help educators to understand the personal, social-cultural issues that impact these populations.

<center>Summary</center>

The factors that contribute to student persistence in higher education have been studied by examining academic success, academic success and transfer shock, student

persistence, student adjustment, and institutional interventions. Academic success has been measured by examining students pre-transfer GPA and students' GPA at the senior institution. The results of these studies have shown that GPA has been a predictor of academic success. However, the results show an inconsistency in whether the pre-transfer GPA should be at a 2.5 or higher average based on a 4.0 scale to predict a student's academic success.

Student persistence and retention researchers have found that transfer students have experienced transfer shock at the four-year institution, but most have been able to recover from transfer shock prior to graduation. Many of these studies focused on the comparison of native students and transfer students. In comparing the two groups of students, researchers have discovered that transfer students experience the same or improved level of academic success as native students at the senior institution.

Studies of student persistence have looked at one or more of the following issues: (a) individual intentions, (b) career choice, (c) completion of an associate degree, (d) pre-transfer characteristics, (e) demographic characteristics, (f) social adjustment, (g) sociological factors, (h) psychological factors, (i) and extra-curricular factors. Researchers have studied how to measure these characteristics and how they relate to student persistence in higher education, as well support the theory of student involvement. Mentoring has been found to be a common factor for influencing persistence for students of color. Moreover, institutional leaders are focusing on the issue of student persistence and are initiating programs in response.

Researchers have found that minority populations have been less likely than White students to persist in higher education. Parental influence has been directly linked

to student persistence in higher education, but limited research exists in understanding how this impacts students of color. Understanding these issues are important and therefore studies have focused on student retention factors for Black and Hispanic students.

This literature review included information about the importance of these factors for transfer student academic success and persistence. Few researchers have directly interviewed transfer students, particularly Black and Hispanic students, in an effort to understand their experiences of persistence in college studies. More research is needed to discover the factors that contribute to persistence of Black and Hispanic transfer students at senior institutions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological approach of qualitative inquiry was implemented for this study. This chapter begins with an overview and research question. The methodological components described next are the research design, informed consent and permission, data collection, data quality, data management, data analysis, and data representation.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomena of persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transferred from a two-year degree granting community college to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). This study has given voice to students from a population that has not traditionally been heard and found meaning as students expressed and described their post-secondary experiences relevant to persisting in their undergraduate studies. This study also addressed the gap in literature and informed leaders in post-secondary education about the experiences of minority students' post-transfer persistence in higher education. A thorough understanding of this phenomenon was captured through five students' dialogue about their experiences.

Research Question

The specific, five-part research question guiding this study was: How do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe:

1. their academic experiences,

2. their social experiences,

3. motivators that contribute to their persistence in undergraduate studies,

4. personal characteristics that contribute to successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies, and

5. institutional characteristics that contribute to successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech?

Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach was used for this study. The ultimate purpose for using qualitative research in social sciences is learning (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), with the goal of improving some circumstance. Qualitative research is empirical in nature and allows the researcher to gain knowledge through direct experiences which typically occur in natural settings as opposed to controlled ones. In the natural environment, the researcher can use what is seen, heard, or felt to make meaning of social phenomena through various data gathering techniques (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The setting or situational context is important for understanding human behavior, since the setting influences that behavior (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; McMillan, 2004). I was interested in discovering what contributed to the persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transferred from two-year degree granting community college to a residential four-year degree granting college or university. The goal was to understand these phenomena from the participants' points of view, focusing on the meaning of the events as explained by the students.

Research Design

A phenomenological approach was used to describe the experiences of transferring to a four-year institution for a few individuals. This approach was chosen to develop a deeper understanding of the post-transfer experiences of the minority students who have matriculated to the university in pursuit of a bachelor's degree and were now scheduled to graduate. In a phenomenological study, the researcher gathers, reviews, interprets, and highlights the emerging themes from the data, ultimately developing a description of the lived experiences of the participants, getting to the essence or meaning through the participants' lenses (Creswell, 2007). The phenomena were explored and the data gathered in a series of two semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews. An analysis of the text from each transcript was conducted to find codes and categories. As the data were gathered and analyzed, follow-up probes were asked of the participants in a second interview in response to the five-part research question. The data analysis resulted in the identification and discussion of themes emerging from across participants' experiences. A narrative about each participant has been composed.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument of analysis who often collects and interprets data (Patton, 2002). As a result, an intimate relationship develops between the researcher and the data. This relationship has the possibility of strengthening the study. My personal or professional predispositions that may have influenced the study are presented below.

As a Black female who struggled academically at various points in the higher education journey, I experienced challenges in persistence toward degree completion while attending a predominantly White institution during my undergraduate years. Challenges included maintaining my cultural identity while socially adapting to a majority culture and race. Academically, I recognized my lack of some mathematical, writing, and study skills because my peers seemed more adept when demonstrating these skills in class. Despite the challenges, I always persevered by working hard and believing in myself. Moreover, I received support and encouragement of family and friends.

I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and a Master of Science degree and an Education Specialist degree in Career and Technical Education. While conducting this study, I was enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Career and Technical Education as well. My graduate degrees were earned at the same four-year research institution. All of my higher education experiences were at predominately White universities. As a graduate teaching assistant, I taught the same undergraduate academic success strategies course for two consecutive semesters and co-taught an undergraduate first-year seminar course for one semester. This course was designed to provide academic and transition support for first-year students. Another instructional experience involved teaching a Certified Professional Secretaries (CPS) review course for adult learners at Virginia Tech and the same CPS review course was taught for hospital personnel. My interest and motivation to help students succeed academically in higher education has influenced my desire to develop research interest in this area.

Throughout the study, my responsibility as a researcher to suspend and acknowledge any preconceived ideas and/or personal experiences that might have

influenced what was heard and seen relevant to what the participants revealed during the data collection process, as in epoche as defined by Creswell (2007) and McMillan (2004). In practicing epoche, the phenomena were examined without prejudgment by looking within myself to become aware of and understand my biases and perspectives formed from personal experience because I identified with other students of color attending a predominantly White institution. As suggested by Patton (2002), by maintaining an awareness of any personal bias that was brought to the study during data collection and data analysis, I acknowledged that what was seen and heard might be influenced by my personal experiences.

It was important for me to engage in reflexivity, a process of being reflective about one's own voice and perspective (Patton, 2002). Reflexivity reminds the researcher to examine, acknowledge, and take ownership of personal biases and perspectives relative to the phenomenon. Maintaining a reflexive journal to record thoughts immediately after each participant interview was another part of this process. My researcher role included submitting a research protocol application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Human Subjects Committee of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, ensuring that procedures were in place to protect study participants. I used principles of best practices of human subject and ethics issues for protecting the participants continuously throughout the study.

Participant Selection

The participant selection process for a qualitative study consists of the identification of the participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The sampling strategy for this study was purposeful, intentionally selecting key informants for study because they

provided information that was rich in meaning and because they offered useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest as suggested by Patton (2002). The participants were recruited using the university established undergraduate transfer student listserv.

The purposeful criterion sampling allowed me to interview those participants who had experienced the phenomena and had a willingness to communicate those experiences. As indicated by McMillan (2004), "In purposeful sampling…, the researcher selects particular individuals or cases because they will be particularly informative about the topic" (p. 113). While purposeful sampling often involves a small number of participants and the findings cannot be generalized across a population, the results provide rich information regarding the phenomena.

Initially 14 students volunteered and all five of the participants who met the participation criteria were selected for two series of semi-structured, useful, in-depth, face-to-face interviews. Creswell (1998) suggested that a range of 5 to 25 participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon is a typical sample size. Interviews continued until all participants had completed two interviews each. The final number of subjects for this study was five.

The participants self-identified as Black or Hispanic and volunteered to tell their story about their personal experiences related to this study. The all male participants were at least 18 years old, transferred from a community college earning a minimum of 24 credits, and enrolled in undergraduate studies full time at Virginia Tech with graduating senior student status.

Setting

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that inquiry must be carried out in a natural setting because the phenomena of study cannot be separated from the world in which it is experienced and no phenomenon can be understood out of the relationship to the time and context that initiated, harbored, and supported it. All interviews were conducted at Virginia Tech's main campus in Blacksburg, Virginia. The residential campus environment was selected in keeping with conducting research in a natural, post-secondary setting.

Participants

This study was limited to those students who self-identified as Black or Hispanic based on the national educational attainment and the Virginia Tech enrollment of these two populations. According to the 2000 Census report, regarding education attainment for the population of 25 years and over, the Asian population ranked higher than both Blacks and Hispanics (United States Census Bureau, 2003). The percent of Asians who were high school graduates was 80.4% compared to Blacks at 72.3% and Hispanics at 52.4%. The percentage gap is larger for postsecondary education. Table 1 shows educational attainment for the Asian population compared to Black and Hispanic populations.

The Virginia Tech fall 2008 student enrollment numbers for minority undergraduate students were only preliminary by week at the time of this study; therefore, I used the fall 2007 data. The overall on-campus enrollment of undergraduate students from fall 2005 to fall 2007 was 66,492. The fall 2007 enrollment numbers for minority undergraduate students at Virginia Tech indicated that the Asian/Pacific

Table 1

Educational Attainment by Race and Ethnicity (25 years and over)

Race or Ethnicity	Some College	Bachelor's Degree or more	Advanced Degree
Asian	64.6%	44.1%	17.4%
Black	42.5%	14.3%	4.8%
Hispanic	30.3%	10.4%	3.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2003, August), Educational Attainment: 2000.

Islander population enrollment was almost twice that of Black students, and more than triple the number of Hispanic and American Indian students. Of the total number of students enrolled during the same time period, the race and ethnicity statistics indicated that of the student population, Blacks were 4.5%, Asians were 7.0%, Hispanics were 2.3%, and American Indian were only .2% of the student body.

According to the university's institutional research data source student census, the total number of transfer students who attended a community college and transferred at least 30 credits to Virginia Tech from fall 2005 to fall 2007 was 2,558. The number of Black students was 86 or 3% and the number of Hispanic students was the same.

Educational attainment for the Asian population was much higher than for the Black and Hispanic populations. However, the Black and Hispanic populations were the largest growing populations that lack education beyond high school. Given the low number of American Indian or Alaskan Native transfer students enrolled at Virginia Tech, was too small to be included as a group in this study.

The participants were invited via transfer student listserv to participate in two separate interviews and were asked to contact the researcher to signify their willingness to participate in the study. A recruitment flyer was also be used to invite student participation in the study. Recruitment flyers were hung in the Graduate Life Center, War Memorial Hall, and Squires Student Center bulletin boards. Due to a low number of student responses, the researcher asked the Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence Director and the Office for Equity and Inclusion to recommend potential participants. Each of the aforementioned offices were given a recruitment flyer to display in their areas. Other contacts included the Transfer Student Organization, Black Student Alliance, Latino Association of Student Organization, and Sigma Delta Pi National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society. Since these efforts still yielded a low number of respondents, I asked potential participants to recommend individuals who might be willing to participate in the study. Further participant selection continued as participants agreed to take part and met all the criteria for this study.

Gaining Access and Entry

Prior to participant selection for interviews in a study, the researcher must make contact with the participants. How the researcher gains access to the potential participants is very important since this step initiates the relationship between the two and every subsequent step in the interviewing process (Seidman, 2006). According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), it is important for researchers to establish relationships with people who control or who implement or enforce policies and can grant permission to access information or persons, these individuals are known as gatekeepers. When conducting research, it is wise to build relationships with gatekeepers because they can

influence the success of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). After several meetings, discussions, and previous work at Virginia Tech, I have built a relationship with, and established credibility and rapport with, the gatekeepers (Rossman & Rallis). In my previous position as graduate assistant for Dr. Karen Eley Sanders, Associate Vice President for Academic Support Services, I established a professional relationship with the faculty and staff in the Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence. Dr. Sanders and I met to discuss the study and how the results of this study might inform the policies and practices for supporting transfer students Virginia Tech. Dr. Sanders granted me permission to access potential participants through the undergraduate transfer students' listserv (see Appendix A). The listserv reached all undergraduate students who transferred to the university since 2003.

Upon approval by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB), I gained access by using the undergraduate transfer student listserv to email the potential participants a letter of introduction (see Appendix B) regarding the study. The email included a recruitment flyer (see Appendix C) about the study, and the email also contained my email address and telephone number. The group contact saved time by giving one explanation of the study to several people at once, as suggested by Seidman (2006).

The potential participants were instructed to contact the researcher via email if they are willing to participate in the study. I subsequently emailed each of the volunteers an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D) for their perusal, with instructions to return one electronically signed Informed Consent Form to me within one week from the date sent and to maintain one copy for their records. Upon receipt of the electronically signed

Informed Consent Form from the participant, I gathered background information. A

Background Information Form (see Appendix E) was emailed to the participant for

completion and requested return to me within one week from the date sent. After I

received the completed Background Information Form, I emailed the Participant

Interview Schedule (see Appendix F) to the selected participants for completion, with a

request that it be returned within one week from the date sent. Upon receipt of the

completed Participant Interview Schedule, the Participant Interview Confirmation Letter

(see Appendix G) was sent notifying the participant of the date, time, and location of

each interview. The same interview confirmation letter was emailed to the participant

one day prior to the scheduled interview date. A reminder email (see Appendix H) was

sent to each participant the day before any completed study document was due to be

returned to me. A discussion of the informed consent occurred face-to-face prior to the

start of the interview and the participant was able to read all documents, ask questions,

and get clarification about the study. The electronic signed copy of the participants

Informed Consent Form was provided at the time of the interview for each participant to

write their initials beside the electronic signature on the form.

<div align="center">Informed Consent and Permission Procedures</div>

In this qualitative study, ethical issues may arise. Consequently, it was important

to protect the rights, privacy, and reputation of each participant. The Belmont Report

lists the ethical principles and guidelines for research involving human subjects

(National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research, 1979). Three basic principles particularly relevant to the ethics of

research involving human subjects are respect of persons, beneficence, and justice.

The application of these general principles leads to consideration and requirements of informed consent, risk and benefit assessment, and the selection of subjects for research. This study was conducted in compliance with the rules and regulations of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB), which align with the Belmont Report. The following sections discuss the instrument, freedom to withdraw, informed consent, assurance of confidentiality, risk, and compensation procedures used to ensure compliance for ethical principles and guidelines for research involving human subjects.

Freedom to Withdraw

As indicated on the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D), the participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were also free not to answer any question(s) without penalty. If any circumstances arose that might pose a threat to the participants or others, or if otherwise determined that the interview should not continue, the interview would be stopped.

Informed Consent

The Informed Consent Form included a statement regarding the audio-taping of the interviews, the purpose of the study, risks, participant rights and benefits, confidentiality of the records, and information about dissemination of results. Confidentiality was addressed and identifying information was eliminated from all public documents; pseudonyms (false names) were used to mask each participant's identity. I asked each participant choose a pseudonym, but if the participant does not choose a name, a pseudonym was assigned by me. Giving the participant a choice in selecting a pseudonym provided grounds for leveling the power structure in favor of the participant. Consistent with ethical principles of conducting research, the consent form was

submitted to the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech as part of the research protocol application.

Assurance of Confidentiality

In qualitative research, it is important to maintain confidentiality that is consistent with ethical principles of data collection, particularly because the participants are not anonymous to the researcher. The challenge in maintaining confidentiality is protecting the identities, names, and specific roles of the participants and the assurance that the information shared by the participants will not be shared with others but will be held in confidence by the researcher (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Every effort was made to maintain participants' confidentiality throughout the study and the issues surrounding confidentiality of their information was discussed with the participants prior to the interview. The use of pseudonyms and the removal or renaming of any information that may reveal the identity of the participants was implemented to protect the participants' privacy.

I took the necessary steps to not reveal the identity of the participants at the beginning of the process as suggested by Seidman (2006). Moreover, the data consisting of the demographic information, contact information, informed consent forms, interview questions, audio-tapes, CDs, interview transcripts, and research notes for each participant were stored in a secure, locked location known only to the three primary investigators (Ms. Audrey Robinson, Dr. Penny Burge, and Dr. Daisy Stewart). The participant identity list was stored separately in a secure, locked location. The data were accessible to only the primary investigator. After the data analysis is completed, results are distributed, all reports are written, and oral presentations are completed, the

investigator will destroy the audio-tapes and CDs. The digital recordings were erased

after downloading the data to each CD. The audio-tape ribbons will be removed from

the casings and cross-shredded. The CDs will be broken, then discarded. All written

documents will also be destroyed by cross-shredding after all reports are completed.

Risks

The study posed minimal risks to participants. I asked the participants to describe

post-transfer experiences. The questions were open-ended and were asked in a

nonjudgmental manner. The participants did most of the talking and were allowed to

answer questions completely or to stop at any time prior to being asked the next

question.

Compensation

The participants were not compensated or paid for participating in this study.

Participation was strictly voluntary. No promise or guarantee of benefits was made to

encourage participation. Each participant received a $10 Wal-Mart gift card upon

completion of each interview. The maximum distribution was $20 per participant. The

Wal-Mart gift card was not meant to encourage participation but rather to show

appreciation for participation in this research project.

<center>Data Collection Process</center>

For this study, interviews were the primary means of data collection. Seidman

(2006) stated that interviewing is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and

other social issues by understanding the experiences of the persons whose lives reflect

those issues. Interviews allowed me to examine the participants' worldviews and lived

experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). To support the data collection, an interview

guide, a reflexive journal, and field notes were also used. The interview guide helped

me to explore the areas of interest surrounding the phenomenon. The participants were

asked to reflect on the experiences that influenced their persistence in undergraduate

studies. The reflexive journal was used to record my personal reactions and thoughts.

Field notes provided information that was reflective for me, that is, my speculations,

feelings, interpretations, impressions, and other subjective notions related to the

research (McMillan, 2004). Field notes were taken during and after the interview. Field

notes were recorded on a tablet to record reflective thoughts.

The research question provided the framework for the research project using the

interview protocol technique. The interview protocol questions were open-ended, and

included probes (see Appendix I). An additional question was included to capture

relevant information that may not have been addressed by the other questions.

The data were collected on a digital recorder and audio-tape cassettes. The

audio-tape cassettes served as a back-up should a problem arose with the digital

recorder. The data from the digital recorder was transferred to compact discs (CDs) for

transcription. Field notes were taken during and after the interview.

In-depth interviews are the characteristic of phenomenological research.

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), interviewing is one of the primary methods for

learning about the meaning of an experience in the field. Further, Rossman and Rallis

suggested that dialogue in long, in-depth interviews develops a deeper understanding,

and both the participant and interviewer co-construct meaning during the interview.

Creswell (1998) suggested that the process of collecting data primarily involving

in-depth interviews with a small number of individuals who have experienced the phenomena are important for the purpose of describing the meaning of the phenomena of interest. Interviewing allows the researcher to enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 2002).

I provided a framework for gathering the data that was participant friendly. The goal was to structure questions that participants can respond to comfortably, accurately, and honestly. The semi-structured nature of interviewing allows the interview to be organized in a practical manner that will yield the most information to answer the five-part research question. The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were informal conversations. The open-ended questions did not provide or suggest any structure for the respondents' replies but gave them the opportunity to answer in their own terms and create their own frames of reference (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

The Counselor Education Conference Room, 303 East Eggleston Hall, on Virginia Tech's main campus, was chosen as the interview site. This site was convenient to the participants. Public transportation and campus transportation were accessible at this site. Accessibility for individuals with special needs was also available. For participants who resided on campus, this site was within walking distance from all on-campus housing. The conference room provided an excellent place for audio-taping in a secure, private location that was easily accessible and comfortable.

Interview Protocol

An interview protocol was used in this study to allow me to explore the basic lines of inquiry and yet remain free to build upon the interview conversation using probes. The probes included were designed to explore categories of interest related to the

phenomenon, but the questions were open enough to pursue topics that the participant introduced. The protocol questions guided the study and additional probes emerged from the participant's conversation. The interviews were conversational in nature and the participants did most of the taking. Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggested that talk was essential for understanding the participants' view of their world. I decided the order in which the questions were asked and how the questions were asked of each participant.

The interview guide technique allowed me to establish the focus of both interviews in the series. The advantage of using the interview guide approach is that the researcher is able to focus the questions according to topic but can still ask questions on other topics that the participant brings up during the interview (Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Other probing questions emerged from the participant's conversation. Protocol questions for the initial interview were designed to gain knowledge of the students' perception of the persistence to graduating senior status after transferring to Virginia Tech from their community college.

Pilot Test

I conducted a pilot test of the interview protocol questions (see Appendix I) for this study to learn if the structure of the interview protocol questions supported the study objectives. A pilot test is typically accomplished with a small number of individuals who agree to test the interviewing design (McMillan, 2004; Seidman, 2006). From a practical aspect, this test helped me determine how long it may take to ask and obtain answers for the five-part research question. After completing the pilot, a discussion of the experience with my co-chairs followed.

I tested the questions with two students who met the criteria for the study participants. I will seek participation of the students by contacting Dr. Jody Thompson, Assistant Director for College Transition Programs, Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence, to recommend transfer students who may be willing to participant in my pilot. For those two transfer students who were willing to share their experience, I scheduled an interview time and date, and then informed the students via email.

The interviews were held on the Virginia Tech, Blacksburg campus in the Counselor Education Conference Room, 303 East Eggleston Hall, following the same interviewing and data collection procedures as described for the main study. The pilot study resulted in the elimination of repetitive questions that did not provide additional information related to the phenomena of interest.

Reflexive Journaling

Reflexive journaling was used throughout the data collection process and it allowed me the opportunity to engage in self-reflexivity. I reflected upon the context of the study and related this to my own personal experiences by recording journal entries as described by Rossman and Rallis (2003). I referred to the journal entries to reflect upon my own experiences and bias when making meaning of the data collected. Because the relationship between the researcher and participant is also reflexive, paying attention to intuitive insights while reflecting upon personal thoughts and reactions to what was heard during the interview process was necessary. Time was spent thinking about the participants' responses and reactions to make meaning of the data, as well as understanding personal meaning relative to influencing the data interpretation. The journal entries became a part of the data to be used in triangulation

because they provided insight into the data interpretation, additional questions, further reflection, and thoughts about the study.

Analytic Memos

Rossman and Rallis (2003) stressed the importance of writing analytic memos in the data gathering process into the data analysis phase because it encourages analytic thinking and forces the researcher to document emerging ideas. Analytical memos were used to document and enrich the analytical process to supplement the transcript (Creswell, 1998). The documentation was written in short narratives to my peer debriefers and to myself about the progress of the study and emerging themes and questions. As a result, I realized that I was only performing surface analysis and not the deeper meaning of the data. Thus, I reexamined the data. This process helped me to link the data to codes, categories, themes, and possibly theory during the data analysis phase.

Data Quality Procedures

Quality data collection procedures ensure the rigor of a qualitative study. To ensure quality and rigor in this research design, a number of steps were taken to increase the credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability of this study.

Credibility

The credibility of qualitative research is defined by the believability of the data, data analysis, and conclusions of the study (McMillan, 2004). Credibility is the primary criterion for evaluating qualitative studies (McMillan). In his discussion of reliability perspectives, Creswell (2007) recommended that, out of the eight validation strategies, the researcher should engage in at least two in any given qualitative study. In this study,

I utilized prolonged engagement, member checks, triangulation, field notes, and peer debriefing to ensure credibility of the study. I made every effort to perform fieldwork that yields systematic high-quality data by recording data accurately and thoroughly. The field notes reflected the first interpretations of what is seen and heard.

The use of a series of two interviews provided prolonged engagement. Spending time with the participant ensures that the researcher will have more than a quick view of the phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This allowed me the opportunity to build participant trust and check for misinformation. The first interview was used to gather information relevant to the five-part research question as guided by the interview protocol questions (see Appendix I). During the second interview, subsequent questions were asked of the participant based on the data gathered in the first interview. If there are any questions were not asked in the first interview, those questions were asked in the second interview. The second interview was designed to build upon previous data, add to information relevant to the five-part research question, and allowed the participant to add any information they felt was relevant to the phenomenon. Prior to the second interview, the first transcribed interview was emailed to the participant for review. The email contains detailed instructions (see Appendix J) for the participant to review the transcript for accuracy and to make any changes and return the transcript via email prior to the second scheduled interview. After receipt of the emailed transcript from the participants, the second scheduled interview was confirmed. The participant was asked to give further explanation and clarification about their responses in the initial interview. In addition, the participant may offer additional information relevant to the

study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to this procedure as a member check and considered it the most important technique for establishing credibility.

Triangulation was used to verify information using multiple sources (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), which helped to ensure that I have studied the complexity of the post-transfer experiences of persistence for the selected students. The multiple sources that were used in this study included two interviews per participant, comparison of participant information, and identification of codes, categories, and themes that emerged across cases from the interview data. In this study, peer debriefing served dual purposes. It added to the credibility and dependability of the data quality. Peer debriefing is discussed further under dependability.

Confirmability

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher seeks confirmability rather than objectivity. As suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1981), the concept of confirmability shifts the burden of proof to the information itself not the researcher. Guba and Lincoln also suggested that although researchers may have objective intentions, researchers can influence objectivity unconsciously though their own biases, prejudices, incompetence, gullibility, or corruptibility. Therefore, qualitative researchers realize that their research is not objective because it is difficult if not impossible to separate personal biases and prejudices. Many experts suggest that the researcher's role is to remain as neutral as possible by presenting the data, analysis, and findings so that the reader can confirm whether the findings are adequate. As suggested by McMillan (2004) and Creswell (2007), bracketing was used in the data collection process. Bracketing, also called epoche, is the ability of researchers to set aside their experiences in order to gain an

understanding of the participants' experiences of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2007; McMillan, 2004). Moreover, an audit trail was used as suggested by Morrow (2005) as a means for ensuring confirmability. An audit trail is established when the researcher documents the research events and decisions in such a way that an external auditor could verify or provide judgment about the quality of the data collection and analysis procedures used in the study. An audit trail can also be used to ensure dependability as indicated by Patton (2002).

Transferability

As defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is related to whether or not the results can be applied to the same or an alternative context of this study. The results will not necessarily represent the beliefs of a larger participant population or be applicable to the same or an alternative context because the purpose of this qualitative research is to increase understanding of the phenomenon (McMillan, 2004). A qualitative researcher works to present a rich, thick description of the data that will enable others to determine transferability to another setting. Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggested, "thick description makes analysis and interpretation possible" (p. 275). I used purposeful sampling in order to provide information-rich cases and thick descriptions that illuminate the essence of the context (Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Additionally, I have provided background information about myself and about the proposed relationship between each participant and myself. Descriptive information is provided related to the data, analyses, and themes so that other researchers can understand the findings and so that the findings can be used in other settings, as suggested by McMillan (2004).

Dependability

Reliability is an interchangeable term with dependability in qualitative research and is defined as that which is recorded as data is actually what occurred (McMillan, 2004). The dependability is enhanced through the use of audio-tape recorders, peer debriefing, and member checks. With the consent of the each participant, the interviews were audio-tape recorded.

Peer debriefing supports dependability and adds to the rigor and credibility of the research design. Peer debriefing is the use of an intellectual watchdog (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) or peer who will be available to offer intellectual expertise and input throughout the study. My peers, Carolyn Stuart and Kelly Oaks, served as peer debriefers. Since this research began, both Carolyn and Kelly have earned their doctoral degree in Counselor Education at Virginia Tech. Dr. Stuart and I have been working closely together on another research project in which her expertise in qualitative inquiry has strongly guided the process. Dr. Oaks and I have worked together on equal opportunity projects and have shared many ideas regarding research techniques.

Another method to ensure dependability is the use of member checks (McMillan, 2004). I sent each participant his interview transcripts for review and verification of accuracy. The constant comparative method of coding and recoding data was utilized. Finally, I was cognizant of using ethical practices to ensure minimal risk to participants at all times.

Trustworthiness

A trustworthy study is performed by a competent researcher who utilizes methodological rigor and ethical standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). A trustworthiness study can be trusted based on the researcher's ability to perform the study using ethical practices. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is judged by two standards: acceptable and competent practice, and ethical conduct. Moreover, Rossman and Rallis described trustworthiness in terms of the study's usefulness, indicating that readers and potential users must believe and trust in the integrity of the study. This research was designed for systematic data collection, credibility, rigor, triangulation from multiple data sources, and peer debriefing that will ensure the trustworthiness of the study. This study design was not a single contact, but was a series of two in-depth interviews conducted over a period of time. Accurate, honest, and full reporting of the participants' accounts of their worldviews was performed. I understood the participants' vulnerability and guarded against harming the participants throughout the study. My use of reflexivity and peer debriefing enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. Peer debriefers served as intellectual watchdogs as the research design changed (Rossman & Rallis). Finally, I used triangulation, the use of multiple methods of data collection and data analysis (Patton, 2002), used in the form of interviews and member checks, comparison of participant information, and identification of categories and themes across cases that emerge from the interview data. Strategies for ensuring credibility and rigor were used throughout the study as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

Quality and Rigor Strategies

_____

Strategies used	Credibility	Confirmability	Transferability	Dependability
Audit trail		X		X
Prolonged engagement	X		X	X
Peer debriefings	X			
Ethical practice				X
Triangulation	X			
Member checks	X			X
Purposeful sampling	X		X	
Thick descriptions	X		X	
Code/recode	X			X

_____

Data Management

Data management in the formative stages of the study helped maintain order throughout the research process as the data was generated. Seidman (2006) suggested that there is no right way to manage the data, but doing so at the beginning of the study may save the researcher much time as the study progresses. In this study, transcribed interviews were used throughout the analysis process. Each interview was transcribed into a Microsoft Word document by a professional transcriber from the data downloaded onto CDs from the digital recorder. If the data was unable to be retrieved from the digital recorder, the data was retrieved from the micro-recorder tapes. Data was organized for each participant with an assigned pseudonym and a Study ID

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number, which appeared on the audio-tape cassette label, CD, and Participant ID List (see Appendix J), interview transcript, audio-taped interviews, and interview questions. Each audio-tape cassette label was dated at the time of the interview. The interview questions, audio-taped interviews, CDs, and participant identity list were stored separately in a secure, locked location known only to the three primary researchers. One year after the primary researcher concludes the data analysis, and dissemination of study results, written reports, and oral presentations are completed, the primary researcher will destroy the source documents.

Data Analysis

Data was gathered and then synthesized inductively as I constructed meaning from the significant statements and textural, thick, rich descriptions of the participants' perspectives as suggested by Patton (2002). Initially, coding occurred upon review of the participants' phrases or words that were expressed when they answered the five-part research question during data collection. The codes were organized into categories. Themes emerge from the categories when analyzing the differences and similarities across cases (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The themes are the final form of results. My goal in conducting the analysis was to discover the ideas, codes, categories, themes, and understanding. A constant comparative method was used to accomplish organization, synthesis, and interpretation. This method involves listening to the CDs or audio-tapes and reading the transcripts several times. Codes are words or phrases that link the data to a concept (Rossman & Rallis). Codes which signify categories of data were created as I read and re-read each participant's transcript. Categories are broader terms, ideas, and information that is similar or different. Categories are identified as

related to the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The categories were compared continuously. This step was repeated and each time I compared previous categories to identify those that were common across the cases. As described by Patton, I engaged in a process in which information gained from interviews ultimately resulted in emerging themes in response to the five-part research question. The themes are the core meanings of the categories (Patton). A code map was created to provide an overview of how the codes, categories, and themes were developed from the data. The code map is presented as Table 3 in Chapter Four. A narrative description was compiled from field notes taken during the interviews relative to body language, setting, voice tone, key quotations, and any other observed verbal and non-verbal communication.

Theory explains why something happens or the phenomena. My work was influenced by the theory providing the framework that constructs the basis for analysis of the study. A contribution to knowledge takes the form of a theory that explains the phenomenon (McMillan, 2002).

<center>Data Representation</center>

Data representation and reporting was the last step in the data analysis. As suggested by Rossman and Rallis (2003), coding is the formal representation of analytical thinking that links data to general analysis issue. The researcher will then attach significance to the findings through interpretation. The goal is to tell what the researcher has learned of the participants' stories of the experience and communicate the information in such a way that others can also learn (Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis). The report writing and analysis cannot be separated according to Rossman and Rallis, because the writing reveals the discovered meanings to the reader, so the written

report must be descriptive. Thick descriptions, quotations, and narratives from the participants' stories and themes are included in the final report.

Summary

The phenomenological approach for this study was proposed to explore, describe, and bring understanding to the experiences of Black and Hispanic transfer students who persist to graduating senior status at Virginia Tech. Guided by a five-part research question, data was collected from participants using face-to-face, audio-taped interviews, field notes, interview transcripts, and reflective journaling. The natural setting for this study was Virginia Tech, the campus where the phenomena were experienced.

All participants who met the study criteria were interviewed; all were male. The five participants were identified from the purposeful sample of those students who had experienced the phenomena of interest and provided thick, rich descriptions of the experiences through dialogue.

Data collected from interviews were used to identify themes and narratives in response to the five-part research question. Data were organized, synthesized, and interpreted in such a way as to give voice and meaning to the experiences of the five participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings of this study are presented with the first section focused on the purpose of this study and the guiding research question. The second section contains a description of the participants and a narrative of each one. The third section contains the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected by interviewing the undergraduate student participants.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the phenomena of persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transferred from a two-year, degree-granting community college to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). Purposeful sampling was used to select the five participants. The participants who met the selection criteria were willing to describe their experiences with me during two separate interview sessions lasting about one hour each. As previously indicated in chapter three, a structured, open-ended, interview protocol (see Appendix I) was used to allow me to gain a deep understanding of the meaning of the participants' experiences. Prior to the two face-to-face interviews, each of the participants completed an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D) and Background Information Form (see Appendix E). The study methods were approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board.

All the interviews were informative and I enjoyed hearing the participants' stories. They were conducted at a time and date selected by the participants. The interviews were held on the Virginia Tech, Blacksburg campus. The participants were responsive

and spoke openly about their academic and social post-transfer experiences of persistence at Virginia Tech.

The five-part research question for this study was: How do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe the following factors as related to their successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech: (a) academic experiences, (b) social experiences, (c) motivators, (d) personal characteristics, and (e) institutional characteristics?

Participant Descriptions

The participants were recruited from the university transfer student listserv and several other means. Seven Virginia Tech undergraduate transfer students volunteered participation in this study. A total of five males and two females were interviewed, but the two females are not included in this study as they did not fit the study criteria. During the data analysis I became aware that one female attended a community college, then attended another four-year institution for one semester prior to transferring to Virginia Tech. For that reason, she was not included in this study because the participants in this study must have transferred directly to Virginia Tech from their community college. Late in the interview process I discovered that the other female indicated that she anticipated a graduation date in year 2011, which was beyond the selection criteria established for this study. Therefore, she was not included in the study. Consequently, my findings are the data collected from the five male participants. In terms of ethnicity, three participants self-identified as Hispanic and two participants self-identified as Black. The age range of the participants was 20 to 27 years. Three of the participants received an Associate of Science degree from a community college and the other two completed

at least 24 credits. One of the participants majored in biochemistry, one in mathematics, one in sociology, and one in finance and accounting. One participant had a dual major in mathematics and physics. All of the participants were enrolled in at least 12 credit hours at the time of the interviews. None of the participants lived on campus.

<div align="center">Narrative Descriptions</div>

The participant narrative descriptions were developed using the interview data and field notes taken during and after each interview session. The following narratives are provided to give the reader a description of the participants in this study. The narratives include (a) age at the time of the interview, (b) attire during at least one interview, (c) general appearance, (d) native origin, (e) reason for attending the community college, (f) program of study, (g) grade point average (GPA) at the community college and at Virginia Tech, (h) a quotation that characterizes their academic status, (i) general mannerisms during the interviews, (j) anticipated graduation date, and (k) goal upon graduation. The participants are described in the order in which they were interviewed. Each student had an opportunity to choose a pseudonym to protect their identity. The interviewer assigned pseudonyms to participants who did not choose one.

Martin

Martin is a 24-year-old Black male with a brown complexion who was dressed in blue jeans and a t-shirt, carrying a backpack over his shoulder. He was clean shaven with short black hair. He is a native of Haiti and his family had been in the United States for three years. Martin began his undergraduate education at the community college because of the low cost compared to a four-year institution; however his intention was

to transfer to a four-year institution after two years. He earned an Associate of Science degree at the community college. Martin transferred to Virginia Tech in the fall of 2008 and chose biochemistry as his major.

Martin's GPA during his first semester at Virginia Tech increased to 3.63 from 3.30 at the community college; however, the second semester was more challenging. He reported,

> I usually got As when I was at the community college and last semester I had many A minuses and some Bs. This semester is not going so well, but I don't know how it will end; I'm hoping to keep up with some As because I need to keep my GPA up.

During the interviews, Martin spoke with confidence in his Haitian accent while maintaining a pleasant smile. At times, he appeared serious while answering the questions. He seemed to relax more during the second interview as he leaned back in the chair when responding to the questions. His goal of attending medical school seemed to be at the forefront of all of his conversation. Martin anticipates graduating in the summer of 2010 with the intent of proceeding to graduate or medical school.

Fabio

Fabio is a Hispanic male with a pale skin tone and long brown curly hair under his baseball cap. He is a native of Peru. According to Fabio, his family moved to the United States when he was 15 years old; he is now 24. Fabio attended a community college with the intention of transferring to a four-year college. While at the community college, he learned that he could earn a degree while also completing the first two years of a four-year degree. After earning an Associate of Science degree with a concentration in mathematics, Fabio transferred to Virginia Tech in the fall of 2008. Fabio chose mathematics as his major and was enrolled in 12 credits in spring 2009.

His desire for mathematics was evident during our conversation. He anticipates graduating in the summer of 2010. His goals after graduation are to get a good job and to provide some financial support to his parents.

Fabio reported having a GPA of 2.75 after fall semester 2008 at Virginia Tech, which was lower than his GPA of 3.52 when he graduated from community college. Fabio spoke about the challenge of maintaining a high GPA at Virginia Tech as he stated:

> I'm aiming for anything higher than a 3.0. Actually 3.3. 3.3 was my GPA throughout community college and I graduated actually with a 3.52. It was really good and I came in here and classes were much harder so it's tougher to get it, but I like a challenge.

Fabio was laid back and relaxed in his seat wearing khaki shorts and a t-shirt. His backpack was on the floor next to his chair where he laid it upon taking his seat. During the interview, he used profanity in his responses, seemingly a part of his everyday language.

Carlos

Carlos was the third participant interviewed for this study. Carlos transferred to Virginia Tech without earning an associate's degree at the community college. His goal in transferring to Virginia Tech was to receive his bachelor's degree by the summer of 2010. Carlos indicated that he was wavering as to what he would like to do after graduation. He laughed as he said that he really did not know. However, in contradiction to this statement, he did say that since he was studying physics and mathematics, he wanted to go to graduate school and hopefully get his doctoral degree.

His love for physics and mathematics was apparent as he spoke during the interview. Carlos talked with confidence and displayed a relaxed, comfortable demeanor

as he leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs while he answered the interview questions. He spoke with his hands, using them to gesture as he gave his responses.

Carlos is a 21-year-old Hispanic male with a light brown complexion. He was clean shaven with curly black hair. He wore blue jeans and a t-shirt and carried his book bag to the interviews. This native Cuban and his family had been in the United States for some time; however he could not recall the number of years.

Carlos began his undergraduate degree at a community college because he realized that his high school grades were not high enough to be admitted to most four-year institutions. He admitted that he did not work hard while in high school. His goal was to do well at the community college then to transfer to what he called a "nice" four-year institution. Carlos chose physics and mathematics as his dual major at Virginia Tech.

Carlos began his first semester at Virginia Tech in the fall 2008 and experienced a drop in his GPA from a 3.60 at the community college to a 2.80 at the end of the fall semester 2008. Carlos said that the spring 2009 semester when he was interviewed was both academically positive and negative, but his goal was to raise his GPA as stated:

> I think I've had good and bad. I've done a lot of work and still to do a lot of the work to get done [with the assignments and homework], get the grades I need but also raising my GPA is a big part in terms of how I get the grades, that type of stuff. Mostly I just study hard.

Paul

Paul appeared younger than the other participants. His youthful face looked smooth and soft. His hair was cut close to the scalp and he was neatly dressed in Bermuda shorts and a t-shirt. He also carried a backpack, which he kept near his chair

during the interview. Paul is a 20-year-old Black male with a brown complexion who was born in the United States.

Paul spoke with self-assurance. He came across as a person who knew what his goals were and was sure he would accomplish them. He was more than eager to convey his story. He was relaxed and comfortable as he leaned back in his chair, crossing his legs during the interview. He spoke with clarity and sense of direction when articulating his responses. His love for law enforcement and the desire to serve the public was evident during our conversation.

Like Carlos, Paul also began his undergraduate education at the community college because he realized that his high school GPA was not high enough to attend Virginia Tech. His goal was to get a GPA of at least a 3.0 so that he could transfer. He obtained this goal and transferred to Virginia Tech without earning an associate degree. Paul chose sociology for his major at Virginia Tech. Paul expected to graduate in the summer of 2010 with the intent of proceeding to graduate school then joining a branch of the law, possibly the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Paul reported earning a GPA of 2.89 his first semester at Virginia Tech, which was lower than his community college GPA of 3.26. At the time of the interview, Paul was in his second semester at Virginia Tech. He reported that each semester he focused on what it took to reach his goal. This was evident in his statement,

> I know exactly what I want to do and I know exactly what GPA it takes to get there. Every day when I wake up, I say this is what I have to do so I can maintain that GPA so that I can get to my ultimate goal of working in law enforcement.

Joe

Joe's parents moved to the United States from Mexico and were residing in Georgia. Joe appeared to be young-looking like Paul because he too had a youthful face. He was holding a yellow and black motorcycle helmet in his hand as he entered the interview room. As he removed his red, black, and white motorcycle jacket, it was clear how he arrived on campus. He had a pleasant smile on his face that was displayed throughout both interviews. He was clean shaven and had dark, curly, medium-length hair. Joe came to the New River Valley area to be with his girlfriend who was attending Radford University. Initially, Joe was employed and had plans to attend Radford University, but he decided to attend a local community college. After one semester at the community college, he applied to Radford University and was accepted. Yet, he decided to continue his second semester at the community college having earned a 3.2 GPA in the first semester. After his second semester, he changed his mind about his college choice once more and applied for a scholarship and admission to Virginia Tech. He received both. Joe chose finance and accounting as dual majors so that he can work in the corporate environment.

<div align="center">Data Analysis Process</div>

During the data analysis process, I referred to my reflexive journal notes that were written after the each participant interview. I spent time thinking about the participant responses and what their responses meant. After each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed by a transcriptionist. As I received these, I read through each of the transcripts several times, comparing them to my interview notes, and I also listened to the audio recordings to ensure the accuracy. Once the accuracy was

confirmed, I sent participants an electronic copy of their transcript so they could read, review, edit, and clarify the information as necessary. This process, referred to as member checks, was used to contribute to the credibility and rigor of the study as suggested by Rossman and Rallis (2003). Only one participant returned the first interview transcript with edits and changes. This same participant is from a British country, and he used a British style of grammar. For that reason, participant edited his grammar throughout the transcript to be aligned with the grammar used in the United States. These changes did not alter the content of his responses. Additional changes were made to the transcript by the participant in an effort to maintain confidentiality for the participant as well as for others involved. The eliminated information did not alter the participant's story. The participant made no changes in the transcript from the second interview. The other four participants returned their two transcripts with no changes.

After receiving the member-checked transcripts from the participants, the initial coding process began. After coding each transcript individually, differences and similarities were discovered across all the participants. The codes which are words or phrases signified categories of data. These codes were compared to identify differences and similarities as related to the phenomenon. Analytical memos in the form of short narratives were sent via email to peer debriefers and myself about the progress of the study and my thoughts about the themes that may be emerging from the data. The codes were then organized and reorganized several times using a constant comparative analysis. The codes were categorized and these categories were examined for their core meanings. Through another iteration of analysis, five themes were identified and

meaning has been made from the data, which has led to overarching conclusions as suggested as a goal of analysis by Siedman (2006).

Themes

The five themes that emerged from the data regarding academic success of the five participating Black and Hispanic male transfer students who persisted in undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech were: (a) transfer students had a personal commitment to achieve their academic goals despite the hindrances they experienced; (b) transfer students' academic performance was influenced by family expectations; (c) encouraging support from family, friends, faculty, and peer students was a factor for transfer students' persistence; (d) building relationships within the campus community influenced transfer students' persistence; and (e) learning from life lessons contributed to the transfer students' persistence. A code map was created to present an overview of the codes, categories, and themes that emerged during the data analysis (see Table 3).

Prior to discussing theme one, academic success is defined as articulated by the participants. One of the protocol questions included asking the participants to define academic success. As I viewed academic success through the participants' lenses, it was defined as goal attainment. The participants had set academic goals and they considered themselves successful if they were able to attain those goals. They also viewed success as their ability to apply what they have learned. Academic success was not defined in terms of grades or grade point averages. This was especially true for Carlos, who initially responded to the question saying, "You could say it's simply getting

Table 3

Code Mapping: Three Iterations of Analysis

Iterations of Analysis

First Iteration: Initial Open Coding

1. a. Highly motivated
1. a. Personally motivated
1. a. Internally driven
1. a. Inner strength
1. a. Determination to succeed
1. a. Established career goals
1. a. Vision for future employment
1. a. Set goals were motivational
1. a. Refused to quit
1. a. Triumph over circumstances
1. a. "Never quit" attitudes
1. a. "I can do" attitudes

1. b. College education was important
1. b. Desired to perform academically
1. b. Academic success equals goal attainment
1. b. Goal oriented
1. b. Parents were role models
1. b. Highly interested in chosen major
1. b. Passion for subject
1. b. Satisfaction with course of study
1. b. Clear education goals
1. b. Low grades in high school
1. b. Desire to raise college GPA

1. c. Lacked financial resources
1. c. Employment was necessary
1. c. Need to earn money
1. c. Balancing schedules and roles was difficult
1. c. Balancing social and academic components
1. c. Lacked time management skills
1. c. Experienced transfer shock
1. c. Difficult academic work at Virginia Tech
1. c. Academics at community college easy

2. a. First-generation college students
2. a. Participants' parents' education varied

(table continued)

Table 3 (continued)

2. a. Expected to attend college
2. a. Family pressure to attend college
2. a. Expected to earn a degree
2. a. Expected to become gainfully employed
2. a. Parents invested in their children
2. a. Parent wants to retire
2. a. Parents' background motivated students
2. a. Parents wanted students to excel
2. a. College was not optional
2. a. Parent relocation

2. b. Wanted to help parents financially
2. b. Did not want to disappoint parents
2. b. Desired to fulfill family expectations
2. b. Students as role models
2. b. Gained independence through education

3. a. Strong family bonds
3. a. Family support (non-monetary) for educational efforts
3. a. Strong people supported the students
3. a. Strong network of friends
3. a. Pushed to achieve academically
3. a. Words of encouragement
3. a. Belief in the students' ability
3. a. Friends had a listening ear
3. a. Positive compliments
3. a. Family encouraged students
3. a. Friends encouraged students
3. a. Cheering for student success
3. a. Professors encouraged students
3. a. Valued opinions of professors
3. a. People were willing to assist
3. a. Parents viewed students' potential as great

3. b. Orientation program was beneficial
3. b. University efforts were important
3. b. Engage with other students
3. b. Connect with faculty

4. a. Students' chose friends with like interests
4. a. Chose friends with same race/ethnicity
4. a. Strategically developed a social network
4. a. Positive student-faculty interactions

Table 3 (continued)

4. a. Social experiences outside the classroom
4. a. Limited or no social relationships with faculty
4. a. Socialization balanced college life
4. a. Participation in clubs and organizations
4. a. Social activities helped students
4. a. Connected to the university
4. a. Well-rounded person
4. a. Found purpose outside of academics

5. a. Parents motivated students
5. a. Learn to overcome life situations
5. a. College instead of young parenthood
5. a. Peer pressure
5. a. Education opens doors
5. a. Mother shared what life is about
5. a. Defeat Hispanic stereotypes

Second Iteration: Categories

1. a. Internally driven to succeed   1. b. Strategic goal-setters
1. a. Maintained positive attitude   1. b. Passion for learning
1. a. Highly motivated

1. c. Lacked time management skills
1. c. Need for financial resources
1. c. Experienced transfer shock
1. c. Adjustment to academic rigor

2. a. Higher education was expected   2. b. Students wanted to repay
2. a. Students compelled to attend college   their parents
2. a. Students as role models   2. b. Reciprocal relationship
2. a. Better opportunities for children
2. a. First-generation college students
3. a. Support system   3. b. Transitional support
3. a. Words of encouragement   3. b. University support
3. a. Belief in students' ability

4. a. Built important social networks
4. a. Socialization with people like me   4. a. Participation in clubs and
4. a. Connecting to the university   organizations

5. a. Learning from life situations
5. a. Motivated by life experiences

Table 3 (continued)

Third Iteration: Themes

Theme 1: Transfer students' had a personal commitment to achieve academic goals despite the hindrances they experienced.

Theme 2: Transfer students' academic performance was influenced by family expectations.

Theme 3: Encouraging support from family, friends, faculty, and peer students was a factor for transfer students' persistence.

Theme 4: Building relationships within the campus community influenced transfer students' academic persistence.

Theme 5: Learning from life lessons contributed to the transfer students' persistence.

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the grades, but to me grades don't mean anything…I see the importance in our society."

Later, Carlos specifically said, "I feel like my definition is, if you're able to gain some knowledge, whether it's a grade you get in the class, gaining knowledge and being able to teach it somehow. I think that's how I would define that." Another participant had a similar definition stating, "Some complete understanding of everything you have learned from classes you have taken. Being able to retain that information, keep it for future use."

When grades or grade point averages were mentioned by the participants, the grades were a means to an end. For Martin, his academic success was measured by the grades he earned while at Virginia Tech. The grades were an indicator which signified progress toward a larger goal, acceptance into medical school. Another participant wanted a high GPA because he equated this success with obtaining a good job after graduation.

These five participants understood what academic success was for them, and they had a personal commitment to achieve their academic goals. This is the topic of theme one.

Theme One: Transfer students had a personal commitment to achieve their academic goals despite the hindrances they experienced.

The five transfer students in this study wanted to achieve their academic goals and have persisted beyond their first year at Virginia Tech. It was apparent that personal commitment was the main factor for their academic success and persistence in their undergraduate studies. For these students, personal commitment was defined as their obligation and responsibility to achieve their academic goals no matter the cost. Through dialogue with the participants, I gained insight and understanding of their personal commitment to succeed in their academic endeavors. The participants relied upon their own inner strength and self determination to persist in their undergraduate studies. They knew what they wanted to accomplish. Hence, they set their goals strategically, learned to triumph over obstacles, and were personally driven to succeed.

This theme began to materialize as the participants talked about their goals to attend higher education, beginning either in high school or at the community college. During our conversations, four of the students openly conveyed that their academic performance in high school was not good enough to allow them to attend at a four-year institution. Yet, all the participants expressed their desire to attain a bachelor's degree. Their choice to begin at a community college was influenced by their understanding that such institutions were a gateway into their desired institution of higher learning. Hence, their higher education experience was realized through hard work in the community college. Their longing to gain entrance into higher education materialized due to their self-determination to earn either a two-year or a four-year degree or both.

The students set goals to obtain the highest grades while at the community college because it was a means for transferring to the four-year institution. For example, Paul was determined to obtain excellent grades at the community college because he wanted to become a Virginia Tech student as noted in the following expression. "I wanted to maintain the highest possible GPA so I could transfer to Virginia Tech because pretty much ever since high school, I realized my GPA wasn't good enough to go to a four-year institution." Joe was in a similar situation; he too had low grades and set goals for overcoming a low GPA as stated below:

> When I first enrolled at the community college, I had my plans set for Radford University. I had graduated with a low GPA in high school. I didn't think that I would be able to make it to Virginia Tech, so after one semester at the community college, I was accepted to Radford, but I figured if I could make it into Radford after one semester, maybe I could stay a little longer and bring my grades up further and I could make it into Virginia Tech, so I had my goals set to get above a 3.2.

Each of the participants rose above their high school academic circumstances, obtained their desired GPA, and then transferred to a four-year institution. The students used goal-setting techniques effectively as one participant stated, "I also make a plan of the goals I have and everything I am doing. It is important to keep track of myself and remind myself of where I am and where I am going." All the participants had clearly conceived techniques for achieving their goals as was evident through our conversations.

Besides having clear educational goals, the participants talked about their approach to achieving them in ways that described their internal drive to succeed academically and persist in higher education. The participants were internally driven and believed in their ability to achieve their goals, to succeed, and to not quit. They

displayed positive, "I can do" attitudes throughout the interview sessions. When the participants spoke about their individual academic experiences, personal characteristics, and motivations, their statements described accomplishing whatever they set their minds to do because they were internally driven to perform and not give up or quit despite any negative situations that might arise. One of the most powerful illustrations of the participants' internal drive to succeed was provided by Martin when he discussed his personal characteristics that had contributed to his success.

> Confidence. I teach myself to be confident at all times and not to give up easily. What I learned from the experience I had while living in a poor country with not many resources to achieve one's goals is not to expect things to be easy but to be fair. This is probably a strong word to say, but I keep the attitude of a soldier, always ready to fight.

> Paul also displayed an internal drive to succeed while describing a personal

characteristic that had helped in his persistence in undergraduate studies as he said,

> One characteristic I would definitely have to say helps undergraduate education would be cockiness…arrogance maybe…You need to be arrogant, not rude towards other people, but you have to be arrogant in your own way. Like say, this is mine, I can do it. I will be a graduate of a four-year institution, I will leave community college and I will get the degree I'm seeking. You can't be one of those types of people who need a parent to kind of push you along. You really need to have that within yourself. You have to internalize it and say this is what I want and I will get it. I will get it at almost any cost.

Paul elaborated upon his internal drive as he explained, "I just have something in me. Whenever I get that determination, if I come up with it on my own and there's something in me that causes me to not want to back down, then I probably won't."

The participants discussed a love for learning during their interviews. Some of the participants were extremely satisfied with their chosen course of study and that drove them to persist in their undergraduate studies. Carlos was motivated by his

professors, but even more so by the passion and love for his academic subjects. In the

following quotation, he explained that mathematics and physics were motivators for him.

> I would say it's really just my strong interests and love for seeing mathematics. I love it. I'm in a graduate math class now where we're constructing these amazing structures that's really just cooked up in your head but it just looks really, really pretty. Especially when you write it all out. Physics does the same thing, it's just the idea that when you're talking about something that we can't see, can't touch, that kind of stuff. I really enjoy doing that, it's just a constant drive to learn about that stuff, those topics.

Carlos continued to explain how learning one level of mathematics has motivated him to

continue to other levels and to persist in undergraduate studies as he stated,

> When I took this one class, Modern Algebra, I've been interested in math and physics at the time, I was loving it, enjoying it. Well I took this class it really put me over the edge of what I wanted to do. I knew that now, I want to do this math. I want to just keep doing it. So the following summer, I took the next level of it and then the next fall I took the graduate class for it, and I've been doing it since. Basically it's just reading about new classes or topics have just pushed me to take another class, and I take it and it says "well there's this other class, that'll do more stuff." So I'll take this one then. Each class is just a step for something cooler to me. I would say that each class has been helping me to keep going.

Carlos was internally driven by his love for learning and was motivated by his desire to

learn mathematics and physics. Subsequently, he was determined to persist in his

undergraduate studies. Carlos explained that it did not matter what it took for him to

keep doing mathematics and physics, just as long as he could keep learning and

performing these operations.

Alternatively, Joe initially expressed how he was externally driven to succeed as

a result of life circumstances, but eventually he was committed to achieve his goals for

himself. Joe said that he used to be concerned about the stereotype of Hispanics'

desire to only work in construction or some low paying jobs, but with no desire to pursue

jobs that required educational preparation. Nevertheless, he is no longer as persuaded

by racial stereotypes and is more self-motivated. This is revealed in his statement, "I am doing this [getting his degree] for myself; I put aside everyone else's perspective."

Through discussions with Joe, Carlos, Paul, Fabio, and Martin, it was clear that they all took responsibility for their own academic success at the community college, which was a stepping stone to the next level of higher education. These transfer students were committed to achieve their academic goals to gain entrance into the university, which resulted in the opportunity to earn bachelor's degrees that they all ultimately aimed to achieve at the end. The bachelor's degrees were the goals that they envisioned would create opportunities for preferred future employment. Despite their drive to succeed academically, the participants openly discussed experiencing obstacles to their academic success and persistence.

Time management, lack of financial resources, transfer shock, and adjustment to the academic standards of the university were hindrances for the participants. The participants reported time management as a hindrance to their academic success because of their need to balance college life with employment, and social activities. College life included going to class, course work, studying, and any other activity related to academics. There was an overlap in the participants' stories about managing their time for college life and employment. Four of the students worked at least part-time and maintained a full course load of at least 12 credit hours per semester. The participants preferred working to asking their parents for financial support. Consequently, employment was necessary. One student explained that he must graduate and secure a good paying position so he could repay his school loans. As a result of the need to

have jobs, the participants found it difficult to manage their time for academics and a social life.

Financial support was a concern and employment was not optional for these students. The four participants talked about their lack of financial resources in a way that they were sure to overcome their situation. Fabio, Paul, and Joe voiced that there are times they worry about how their bills will be paid, which is a distraction from their ability to pay attention to academics. Joe was the only student who mentioned receiving financial aid. Martin declared that he had a difficult time supporting himself. The participants commented about their finances, but they did not elaborate. As they talked about their lack of sufficient financial resources, it appeared that it was not a deterrent for academic success and persistence. Therefore, employment was one of the responsibilities that required their time.

During our conversations, the participants clearly described how their study time was limited due to job schedules. This was not a new experience for the students because many of them were employed while attending the community college. From our conversations, I concluded that the students had less homework and required reading after class hours at the community college compared to the course work required of the students at Virginia Tech.

Joe held a full time job and a full time student course load in spring 2009. He talked about how his family cannot afford to pay for his education, or maybe they could, but he has taken on that responsibility. During the interview with Joe, he discussed having difficulty managing his time, particularly because he works full time and this was

a hindrance to his academic progress. He explained that he had a similar experience when he was in high school. He stated,

> Mostly my personal experiences, I do work full time…I feel this does get in the way. I've always blamed that [working full time] for not doing so well in high school because I did work full time in high school. I procrastinated and I didn't manage my time well.

Joe continued talking about having to find a way to balance work and school. He stated,

> I would say that it hurts a little going to school full time and working full time. But it also teaches me time management since I'm in school but I'm still trying to get a good handle on it. It's getting bad sometimes.

Joe also said that he had a lack of time management skills while pledging a fraternity as he explained that pledging was time consuming. Joe experienced a drop in his GPA as he had a 3.06 for fall 2008 which dropped to a 2.5 his pledge semester of spring 2009. He also explained that his problem was not due to his fraternity obligations because maintaining good academic standing was a priority. The fraternity required that all members maintain a minimum 2.5 GPA. Joe talked about how his fraternity brothers would allow him to opt-out of scheduled activities if he had an exam to study for or required course work to complete. However, the fraternity was an added activity that was time consuming in light of his other obligations. He had to balance employment, time with his girlfriend, college life, and social life. As a result, his grade point average dropped lower than the previous semester.

Like Joe, Paul was employed, but he found that his time management failures were due to his balancing academics and extra-curricular activities. He had to learn to balance his time well enough to achieve his academic goals and community service while in college. Paul was heavily involved as an emergency medical technician (EMT).

He recalled having to re-evaluate his academic goals and time management skills. He explained:

> I was a volunteer EMT and I still do it …I could pretty much wake up and be an EMT 24/7/365, take all the classes and just keep doing that all day long, but that's not my ultimate goal. I want to step back, re-evaluate, say what my ultimate goal is; can I be an EMT later on in life? Those sorts of things have kind of hindered me but I've learned how to cut back, manage my time a little better, and focus on my goals instead of focusing so much on other activities that are really fun but, I have to take a slight break from it.

The lack of time management skills, the need to work, and lack of finances may have had an impact on the grades for these participants. All of the students had a better than average GPA upon transferring, but four out of five students reported a drop in their GPA during their first year at Virginia Tech. The fifth student reported an increased GPA during his first year at Virginia Tech. Such an increase in GPA is defined as transfer ecstasy (Laanan, 2001; Nickens, 1972). Findings from previous literature have indicated that students often experience a drop in their GPA during their first semester or year after transferring to a senior institution (Hills, 1965).

Three of the participants expressed that they were having a difficult time adjusting to the academic rigors of a four-year institution. They articulated that the work load, class size, and teaching styles of the instructors were different than what they experienced at the community college. Fabio described Virginia Tech as the "real deal" and expressed that the course work was hard. He also said, "The assignments are tough and they are tough graders too. I don't want to say that the community college is easier, but I think that the teachers are more interested in your understanding the material." The students had to adjust to the rigors of the university setting while balancing other aspects of their college life.

Fabio and Joe discussed experiencing discrimination. Joe talked about this experience prior to attending Virginia Tech, while Fabio discussed experiencing discrimination at Virginia Tech. Neither participant allowed these experiences to distract them from achieving their academic goals.

Despite the hindrances experienced by these participants, they continued to pursue their degrees, and they were also driven to fulfill their families' expectations. The second theme reflects how family expectations influenced their academic pursuits for persisting in higher education.

Theme Two: Transfer students' academic performance was influenced by family expectations.

Listening to the students' statements, I realized that they desired to fulfill their families' educational expectations that they would attend college, earn a degree, and become gainfully employed. Secondly, it was apparent that a repaying relationship was being established but was not expected by the parents. The students wanted to repay their parents in exchange for the educational opportunity regardless of the parents' expectations.

As reported by the participants, the family expectations came primarily from their parents. The parents' educational backgrounds varied among the participants. Parents of one participant earned undergraduate degrees outside of the United States. One participant stated that both his parents earned master's degrees. The other three participants were first-generation college students. Although parents' academic backgrounds differed, they shared common academic expectations for their children. Participants shared stories that depicted parental occupations that caused the students

to want better paying and more prestigious jobs than those held by their parents. From the participants' stories, both students and parents thought education was the means for opening doors to better employment opportunities. For example, Fabio's parents received their education in Peru, but wanted Fabio to be educated in the United States. For him, receiving an education was not optional, it was expected. Fabio was particularly forthcoming in his interview as he openly talked about his family background and expectations and his drive to meet those family expectations as he stated: "I want to succeed and there are a lot of expectations, too, from my family." He continued by saying, "There's a lot of pressure, there always is, but more than pressure is expectations. That drives me, too."

During the first interview, Fabio was asked to further describe his family expectations, and he answered:

> My parents moved here because of me. They moved here from Peru…the economic situation of the country didn't seem promising…So that right there is a big pressure because even though my parents don't tell me "we did it because of you," I know it was because of that. We've talked about it a little...both of my parents went to school. They have degrees. They know how important it is…but having a school degree obviously changes your chances in getting a better job.

This quotation illustrates how Fabio's family expectations have influenced his desire to gain an education. He spoke as though his academic success would lead to his degree attainment and that such accomplishment was not optional. This participant's response addresses several aspects of family expectations. First, Fabio expressed that his parents moved to the United States due to the economic situation in Peru. Fabio explained that although his parents had an education and were employed, they could earn more money and find better employment opportunities in the United States. They wanted their son to receive a good education as well as a job in the United States.

Second, his parents expected their children to earn an education. In the United States, Fabio articulated that he could work for two or three employers at the same time, which allowed him to make a decent living, but this was not enough. Education was important for him and his parents. Therefore, it was expected of him to go to college because higher education credentials opened doors of opportunity that might not be available otherwise. Third, Fabio stated that because his mother told him about her need to retire, he wanted to be financially supportive of her after he graduated and secured a job. Fabio also explained that although his parents did not tell him that they moved to the United States because of him, he knew it was true, so he was obligated to obtain his degree. This was Fabio's way of giving back to his family, which is a second facet to this theme.

The second aspect related to this theme originated from the students' desire to fulfill family expectations in a reciprocal manner. All of the participants articulated their desire to give back to their parents because the parents believed in their ability, expected them to achieve academically, worked hard to support them, and wanted their children to accomplish more than they accomplished. The most noted way that the participants reported repaying their parents was in their successful pursuit and completion of a higher education degree. As the participants talked during the interviews, I got the impression that they did not want to disappoint their parents, subsequently they did what was necessary to get into college.

In addition to college attendance, each of the participants gave back to their families in different ways. Joe remained a positive example for his family by continuing his education and earning a scholarship, Fabio contributed financially to his family, and

Carlos was following his father's advice of being independent through his educational

pursuits. The following quotations illustrate some of the participants' individual

contributions to their families as they attempted to fulfill family expectations.

Joe talked about family pride because he was a first-generation college student.

On his father's side of the family, Joe was also the first child to graduate from high

school. Joe's family viewed him as a role model. When asked to speak more about this

topic, he continued by saying:

> My parents moved here from Mexico… My dad worked hard since high school.
> They worked hard and have gone really far...I have always had my family; my
> uncles have encouraged me. Graduating high school, I was also the first to
> graduate high school on my dad's side of the family in the United States. I have a
> couple of cousins that haven't made it out of high school. I was already being set
> as a role model for my younger siblings and family.

The family expected Joe to continue his education. Joe realized that he was an example

for his siblings. He also realized how hard his parents worked; consequently he wanted

to continue to his education. Unlike Joe, Fabio contributed financially to his family.

Fabio discussed giving financially to his parents while gaining an education. In

return, his parents are providing a home for him. This reciprocal relationship is

intertwined with his college and parents' expectations. Fabio's perception of American

children who moved away from home in their college years was different than his lived

experience. In Fabio's Hispanic culture, it was normal for children to live at home while

in college and/or until their late twenties. He talked about American children leaving

home as teenagers going away to college as an opportunity for the parents to get their

children out of the family nest. Also, American children could live on their own in their

early twenties but have the benefit of relying on their parents to help them financially as

needed. As a result, he concluded that his family bond was stronger than the family bonds he has observed in the United States.

Last, Carlos talked about his family expectations during his first interview when he revealed information about how his dad influenced his independence and his self-determination to be independent by gaining an education. He told his story of his father influencing his life in the following way:

> When I was growing up, my dad tended to push toward independence. He was just like do everything for yourself, don't rely on others…He pushed me in the direction of just being independent and that's why I'm the type of student I am where I go home and I do my work. I don't have any of these distractions with people, I'm just concentrating on something I really like and that's what I do.

Besides the family expectations, the participants received encouragement from various people in their lives, which contributed to their persistence. The following is a description of theme three with supporting direct quotations from the participants.

Theme Three: Encouraging support from family, friends, faculty, peer students, and the institution was a factor for persistence.

The five participants received encouraging support from various people and the institution, which contributed to their persistence. First, I will discuss the support the five participants received from other people. The institutional support provided for the students will be discussed at the end of this theme. Throughout the interviews, the participants talked about the many people in their lives who supported their educational efforts in some way. The participants perceived support from family, friends, faculty, and peer students as a contributor to their academic and social persistence in higher education. The students discussed the people in their lives who encouraged them and provided descriptions of the support received which included words of encouragement,

active displays of willingness to assist the student, or situations that were emotional in nature. As the participants spoke about these encouraging individuals, they described the encouragers as believing in the students' ability to be successful and conveying this through their words and deeds. The people who encouraged the participants were seen as cheerleaders, cheering for the students' success. I noted in my reflexive journaling that these individuals provided a support system for the students as they progressed through their undergraduate studies. This support provided the strength for the participants to continue toward their academic goals.

The participants experienced encouraging support from others in varying ways. For instance, Carlos explained that his family, parents, fraternity brothers, and professors have contributed to his academic success through their willingness to help him with his courses and by their encouraging words. Carlos talked about this in the following way:

> I would really say a lot of it has to do with my family. My local family, my parents, my [fraternity] brothers, they definitely push me. Keeping me going, you've told us what you love, just keep doing it. I would have to say a lot is the Physics department here. The Arts professors are amazing and there have been times when I told them "I don't know if I can finish this class," and they are "just go through it, come to my office, I'm willing to help." I think it would be a combination of both.

Carlos expressed how he valued the opinions of his professors and their encouraging words as he explained, "The situations that I've had with professors have helped definitely, in terms of them pushing me and saying 'you can keep going with this class.' Because I found I value their opinion much more than most of my peers." During the interview Carlos explained that while in high school he had a "romantic view of a physicist." He thought that they knew everything and had a superior knowledge. Since

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then, he has learned that they do not know everything, but he still values what they say and will listen when they speak. Carlos has concluded that physicists have gained wisdom from their experiences.

During the second interview, Carlos seemed to be more relaxed and opened up about his mother's encouraging support. He described her as a typical mother as he stated:

> My mother tended to push me; she's like the typical mother. If you are feeling down, she picks you up a little bit, that's pretty much been her role where it just helps me get over that hump I need to get over at that time. Which there's been billions of humps and she's helped me through all of them.

Carlos also commented on how his mother had a positive influence on him when she expressed her support and displayed her confidence in his ability to do any task even though she had no knowledge of what he was doing at the time. He commented, "In the sense of maybe a positive influence, whether it's my mother just pushing me saying 'you can do it.' She doesn't know what I'm doing, 'but you can do it'."

When talking about encouragement and support, Paul in particular, attributed his support from a strong network of friends and his wanting to fit into this circle of friends as a contributor of his academic success. During his first interview, he explained, "I think a strong network of friends who are interested in grades; they have encouraged me to be interested in grades and to stay focused on that. Make sure that's my number one priority." Also Paul commented on how his friends' interest in performing well in their courses made a difference in his actions to successfully persist in his undergraduate studies. During the interview, Paul described his parents' support as indirect and nonverbal, but supportive in their actions.

The other participants expressed their encouraging support in the following ways. Joe spoke about his family and particularly his uncles encouraging him to continue his education because he was the first to finish high school and to attend college. Another student stated, "I also think it's related to the support I have in school from my teachers and my academic advisors." Another participant, Fabio, discussed how he needed a little push or words of encouragement from his mother and others to do better in school. He recognized that he had the drive, but the support from his parents, girlfriend, and friends were needed too. He received emotional support from his mother and others. They indirectly expressed their confidence in his ability to do better. Such confidence drove Fabio to persist in his academic studies.

The participants received support in varying forms that influenced their persistence in higher education. The transitional support received was also significant to their successful post-transfer experience of persistence. The transitional support was described as the services provided such as the automatic enrollment in the transfer student listserv, assistance in the transfer application process, and transfer student orientation. Specifically, academic and social support provided during transfer student orientation positively contributed to the participants' successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech.

The transfer student listserv provided information about academic and social events targeted specifically for transfer students and all other activities on campus that the students might be interested. The participants in this study utilized the transfer student listserv for information but expressed that once they were Virginia Tech

students, it may not be necessary to have a separate listserv that continues to identify them as "transfer" students.

The transfer students indicated that they had no problem with the transfer process and were able to make a seamless transition to Virginia Tech. The Virginia Tech transfer student orientation program was an added plus to their move. During the orientation process, the students toured campus, registered for fall courses, obtained Virginia Tech student identification cards, met with advisors, and interacted with Hokie Ambassadors. Across all cases, the participants referred to their transfer student orientation experiences. Hosted by the Dean of Students Office during the summer months, Virginia Tech provided one-day orientation sessions for transfer students. Different aspects of the orientation sessions were perceived as helpful in making the participants feel connected to the university rather than strangers to the large campus environment. The orientation sessions provided opportunities for the students to meet other transfer students. During orientation, the students selected their fall courses, which signified that they were now registered Virginia Tech students and a part of the larger student body. Gaining knowledge about the school, the campus buildings, and the school programs and meeting other students all contributed to their initial success because the campus was no longer foreign ground to the participants.

Fabio said, "The transfer student orientation, it made me feel better about coming here, it wasn't just like I showed up on the first day of class and hope for the best." Carlos discussed being treated like an adult during his freshmen orientation. For example, Carlos said,

> Everyone has their own orientation, freshman and transfer students. They split us up, so the freshman get this big deal thing and they treated us more like college

students…They treated us like adults rather than like we're coming from high school. That was nice.

Carlos articulated that his experience of being treated like an adult college student made him feel as though the university understood his needs as an incoming transfer student.

Many of the participants also discussed the opportunity to engage with student ambassadors and other transfer students. This experience provided the participants an opportunity to meet other students who have transferred too. As Joe explained, "The one [orientation] with other people transferring, I listened to their stories. I enjoyed that. It's always good to know that you're not alone." Martin spoke about the ambassadors and articulated learning about the university and its campus navigation. Martin shared:

> The transfer orientation sessions that they [Virginia Tech] do, gives students an idea about the school traditions, values, and academic programs which are some of the transfer student programs that contributed to my success. It was helpful for me in many ways…I had a broad idea of what I should expect socially and academically after I heard from students that served as ambassadors for the school.

During the interview with Paul, he discussed the significant role that transfer student orientation played in helping students feel connected to the university as a Virginia Tech student rather than a transfer student. Paul stated:

> They [university leaders] could probably make sure that a transfer student feels as if they belong at the university. I think Virginia Tech does a very good job of that around the beginning with transfer orientation, given the history behind Virginia Tech... I think that you're not a transfer student anymore; you're a Virginia Tech student. I think that the sooner a university can do that, the sooner the student would stop thinking that maybe this is just temporary or they don't have an attachment, they know they are a student.

All of the participants wanted to become connected to the university and no longer wanted to be identified as a "transfer student," but instead a Virginia Tech student.

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The opportunity to connect with faculty and other students in the university environment and the encouraging support the participants received made a positive difference in their persistence in higher education. The encouraging support communicated to the participants that "you can do it" and "I am here for you" was described as being important. The participants had indirectly gained a support system. Listening to the participants talk about these experiences, I perceived that such support helped to reinforce the participants' confidence in their ability to continue their studies. The participants also established social relationships on campus, which is the topic of theme four.

Theme Four: Building relationships within the campus community influenced transfer students' academic persistence.

Interacting with other students within the campus community influenced transfer students when they befriended people and became involved with extra-curricular activities. All of the participants described a limited social life at the beginning of their residency at Virginia Tech because they wanted to concentrate on their academics. Building relationships within the campus community included peers and faculty. The participants developed social relationships with peers but limited relationships between themselves and professors. As the participants discussed their early social experiences, they described trying to develop an understanding of the Virginia Tech campus community and how they would fit into the environment.

The students spoke about how their community college social experiences differed from those at the university. While attending the community college, they lived in their parents' home and were employed full time. They maintained already

established social networks with friends from high school and their neighborhoods.

When new friendships were established with peer students at the community college,

most were superficial. In fact, many of the participants stated that they did not develop

many close friendships with other community college students because the students did

not have the same aspirations. Paul said it clearly as he stated:

> … I was so focused on moving on that I didn't really develop very close bonds. I made good friends and we talked in class but other than that it was pretty superficial. Beyond that I was focused on my goals and it was hard to make friends with people who are content….which I wasn't content with going to a two-year institution. Some people are content with going to two-year institution for five to six years taking one or two classes; I wanted to do seven classes at a time. I was very motivated, and it's hard to be friends with people who are not motivated.

On the other hand, Paul had a different experience at Virginia Tech. He said:

> Here at Tech, it's a different social experience. There are more people who are motivated, and I tend to be friends with other people who are motivated because I see what they are interested in and it's a great networking opportunity. People who are headstrong and know what they want to do in life.

The participants' desire to establish relationships with others who have similar

interests was the same at Virginia Tech. The students talked about being uncomfortable

and overwhelmed on a large university campus. It was difficult to be on campus with

several thousand students around and not know anyone. However, because of their

summer transfer orientation experiences, they were familiar with the campus buildings

and could navigate their way to class and important offices as needed. Yet, socialization

was important and it was essential to find other students with whom they shared

commonalities. In their quest to find such friends, the participants began to talk about

strategies used to become involved in the social arena of campus life, which made them

feel part of the university. The approaches involved looking for students who were of the

same race or ethnicity, had like interests, and had similar backgrounds. One participant described his strategy as follows:

> I took that approach looking for Hispanic people. I actually freaked out a little bit because the first week and a half that I was here I didn't see anybody. I saw one on the bus and I was like, oh my god, are you telling me there's this few of us. I was scared, I was like, oh crap. But then I met this girl Jennifer and then all of a sudden I made like 15 Latino friends.

As I listened to the participants describe their social experiences at Virginia Tech, I began to understand the reasons why they befriended others with whom they had something in common. It was easier to have a conversation with a stranger if you could discuss some common interest. The participants were more comfortable building relationships with like individuals because maybe the new friend could share common experiences and points of view. For example, Fabio said:

> There's so much we can talk about… like if you grew up in Seattle in a certain area and then you find someone from that area, you have something in common and you can talk about things that other people have no idea.

As the participants talked, their statements revealed that by building social relationships with people of similar interests and backgrounds, they gained a connectedness to the university because they no longer felt isolated.

Befriending people like themselves was one strategy used to connect with other Virginia Tech students and the extended community. Later in the year, the participants used another strategy, becoming involved with extra-curricular activities such as sports, organizations, clubs, and fraternities. From the students' statements about their involvement in extra-curricular activities, I perceived that such activities influenced their persistence in undergraduate studies.

The students were involved in a variety of clubs and organizations that benefited each one differently. The participants' involvement in activities helped them become a part of the university campus and the surrounding community. Paul volunteered as an emergency medical technician. In this volunteer position, he viewed himself as a role model. It was important for him to successfully persist in his undergraduate studies so that he could continue to be a role model and to associate with the people in the organization. Paul commented, "I play an EMT, when I go out into the community I have to put on this presence and show that I'm a leader and role model. You as the community could rely on me if you're in need."

As the participants continued to speak, I realized that they had connected to the university. The participants wanted to stay connected to the university because they now had a purpose outside of academics. It was through the clubs and organizations that the participants learned responsibility that produced a mature behavior and attitude in them. This was true of Paul's social experience at Virginia Tech. In addition to his work as an EMT, Paul was involved in many clubs and organizations; he served as a Hokie Ambassador and Honor Court member. Paul reported:

> Being in those organizations, it forces me to be a stronger person and having stronger character and be not just an average person. I can't cheat being I'm on the Honor Court, I can't disrespect the university because I'm a representative of the university. ..It forces me to grow up and assume responsibility and assume higher levels and higher roles in society.

Paul continued saying,

> My social experiences, being involved in different clubs and activities, they motivated me to want to stay around these people. I can't stay involved in these clubs and activities if I'm not a student. So if I flunk out, I can't be a student, I can't join these clubs and activities and so that's definitely helped me to keep my grades up and stay focused on education.

Carlos's social experience was similar to Paul's. During his first year on campus, Carlos discussed being alone most of the time as he immersed himself in mathematics and physics. Eventually, he became friendlier with other students in the Physics Department. Carlos worked as a tutor at the Math Emporium, which has helped him to be more interactive with other students. The Math Emporium is an off-campus Virginia Tech facility that houses 500 computer work stations. It is staffed by faculty, teaching assistants, and undergraduate peer tutors who provide assistance for over 20 mathematic courses. It is through the tutoring experience that Carlos has taken on responsibility for providing a service for peer students. He was also a role model within the campus community. He explained his tutoring experience,

> All my life I've had jobs where, like most of my jobs are construction, show up at the site, dig the ditch, and go home. I don't have to deal with people and I like that. I still do. Being here and tutoring at the Math Emporium, I am giving a service; I have to talk to people every day. I'm talking to people about things that they don't want to do, none of them wants to do math, so I need to keep them motivated and teach them what's going on.

Carlos concluded his discussion stating, "I think just being social is just the most important thing because I know I lacked in that area. I've seen the importance of having a very social life."

Joe talked about the difficulty in making new friends his first semester at Virginia Tech because the university was such a large place. While working and attending the nearby community college, he made a few friends but none were attending Virginia Tech. However, this changed when he decided to pledge a fraternity. Joe stated, "Spring semester I rushed fraternity; it's been great. I've met so many new people. I feel really involved with the institution."

Joe connected to the university by finding brotherhood in a fraternity, Carlos connected through tutoring other students, and Paul connected through his service and leadership roles in many organizations. As I heard these stories, it was apparent that each participant connected to the university in a way that was best for them. Through these experiences the students explained that they had achieved a balanced college life. Martin said, "…the more adapted I am socially, the more I can remain focused on my academic goals. Any social activities starting from going to a concert, playing sports, or whatever it is that helps me keep a balanced life." The participants also displayed an eagerness to remain in good academic standing so that they could continue with non-academic endeavors.

All of the participants said they would advise new transfer students to join clubs and organizations of interest. The reasons for such advice varied, but it was obvious that the participants perceived such activity would benefit other students as it had them. One of the benefits discussed was the opportunity to get involved with non-academic activities that would allow students to learn about different careers. The law enforcement club would be a good example. One participant suggested that involvements in such a club might assist a person to decide if this was the right career path. It was noted that clubs and organizations provide opportunities for students to learn, create networks, and meet new people.

In the previous section, I described the participants' social experiences with other students, which was quite different from that of the social interactions with faculty. Most of the participants stated that they had no social interaction with faculty while at Virginia Tech. Their faculty and student interactions were limited to the classroom and office

visits. The participants said that they would not feel comfortable with their professors in a social setting. Fabio was the only student who encountered one of his professors socially.

> I've seen a couple of my teachers at a bar once and it was very strange…one teacher that I mentioned before,… I saw him at a bar once, he bought me a beer, I bought him a beer. That's pretty much it. I think that I may personally (paused), I don't feel comfortable with the whole social thing with a teacher; I think a teacher is a teacher and you should keep it as that. Because once you get social with them and friends, when do you know that they are actually being an actual buddy and a student? I wouldn't know how to react to that so I try to avoid it. Personally I don't like the whole social scene with the teachers; I would rather keep them as my teachers.

As my conversations continued with the participants, they spoke more about their interactions with faculty. The students perceived positive academic experiences with faculty. They viewed the faculty as master educators and looked up to them. The participants desired to build social relationships with faculty within the classroom or office settings. The participants spoke generally about the importance of getting to know their professors. Joe felt that his professors were approachable but not personable due to the large class sizes.

In contrast, Paul and Carlos interacted with faculty a little differently than the other participants. Paul's experience was different because he came in contact with faculty while working in a small department. As a result, the students and faculty talked often; he addressed several faculty using their first names. Paul compared this experience with the community college as he said, "…at the community college, it was close knit, but here I would have to say it's a bit more close knit because with the Department of Sociology, we're a small department in a larger environment."

Carlos perceived his professors as approachable as well. He found that his professors talked a lot and liked helping students. He said, "You just walk into their office, knock on the door, and they will keep you there even if I have to leave. It's been pretty nice." Carlos continued the discussion,

> In high school, I had this really romantic view of a physicist; in terms of they are going to know everything. Clearly they don't. But there are still a few of them that I talk to that when they talk, I listen.

Carlos looked up to his professors because he valued their opinions and thought they were wise. Although the participants had limited or no social interactions with their professors, their experiences were perceived as positive and they viewed faculty as approachable.

On the other hand, the participants' interactions with other students with similar interests and backgrounds helped them to adapt to college life because of their commonalities. Such socialization helped them to feel a part of the university environment. The participants' experiences in building social networks varied. Their involvement in extra-curricular activities influenced their persistence in undergraduate studies. Besides social activities, learning from life lessons contributed to transfer student persistence, which is the next theme.

Theme Five: Learning from life lessons contributed to the transfer students' persistence.

Although the participants in this study are internally motivated to achieve their goals and to persist in college, their friends and families have contributed to their persistence through life lessons. This theme is different than theme two regarding family expectations because the motivators derived from an internal awareness and individual insight that heightened the understanding of one's world. It is through such guidance

and life experiences that the participants applied what they had learned to their lives and were motivated to move forward in their educational pursuits.

Martin, Fabio, Paul, Carlos, and Joe shared their stories about people and the life lessons learned. It was the actions and words of others that made a difference in them. Martin learned about life from his mother. From his statements, I perceived that his mother taught him that life is sometimes difficult, but that he could accomplish his goals. According to Martin, his mother was his biggest fan and because of her, he learned to motivate himself. I asked Martin to explain how or in what ways his mother motivates him. He responded:

> She always explains to me what life is about, what I can find on my way, and how I can overcome them. She supports me economically and appreciates the effort I have made to accomplish my academic goals. She always encourages me to be patient and confident about myself. In other words, she is a big supporter and fan of me. That keeps me motivated.

Although Martin used the word motivated, as he stated above, it was his mother's guidance and sharing of life facts that have inspired Martin's continued effort to succeed academically.

Martin learned about life from his mother, but for Fabio it was different. He talked about two groups of people with whom he learned life lessons, his family and friends. Fabio indicated that because his family held higher education degrees, he wanted the same. As Fabio talked, I realized that it was his understanding that higher education credentials could open opportunities for high paying jobs and higher standard of living. This motivated him to continue to persist toward a college degree.

Fabio began to speak about his experience with friends and their life experiences. Fabio commented about several of his friends who were parents. As he

spoke, I realized that he stayed positively motivated as he witnessed possible unfavorable life situations of his friends who became parents at an early age. I learned that his friends were not progressing in life but were still doing the same thing as when they were in high school. They were not interested in higher education and were just hanging out every day. He explained:

> Then a couple of my friends had kids very young, and I would just look at them and think I don't want to be like that. I want to go to school and get a degree and a good job…a better future…That way with my friends who did not want to attend school made me want to go more.

Paul talked about part of his desire to remain in school as a result of the stories told to him by his parents. Paul's parents shared stories about people who stayed out of school a semester or more and did not finish college because their course credits had expired. I got the impression that his parents shared many of these stories hoping it would persuade him to remain in college. Paul ended his conversation saying, "I just don't want to be that. I'd rather just continue on, stay focused, do the job, and complete it."

The physics professors' willingness to help and an underlying belief in his ability to do physics has motivated Carlos. He talked about his love for mathematics as a motivator, but also mentioned professors motivating him when he said, "Another motivator is my physics professors. I talk to them, they're never condescending, it's always, 'do the work and I'll help if you need help'."

Joe's motivation came from his desire to prove others wrong. When asked about motivators, Joe's initial response was financial in nature. He was definitely motivated by his desire to pay off his financial debts once he graduates from Virginia Tech and secures a good paying position. However, Joe continued to share that he wanted to

prove to his parents, family, and others that he could accomplish his goals. This desire

originated from his experiences with Hispanic stereotypes. He expressed this point by

sharing his experience with his girlfriend's parents. Joe stated:

> I need to prove it to my parents and my family. I have to prove it to anyone who has looked at me and said "you can't make it." I'll mention one experience with my girlfriend. Her parents never really liked me at first. It's always been sort of a racial thing. Obviously they want what's best for their daughter; they want a good life for her. They just didn't think it could be with me because of my ethnicity. Now they sort of like me now, I guess they have finally realized that I've finally got something going for me. They have invited me down to Florida with them before to spend time with them. Her mom is still pushing me to go on, go to law school try to get a law degree being in business and all. All these things have motivated me and the obligations.

From Joe's conversation, I understood that he had experienced some form of

discrimination because of his ethnicity. Joe had been introduced to the stereotypical

portrait of Hispanic people. Joe had the skills and intelligence to perform academically,

and was driven to succeed. It appeared that he wanted others to know that their

stereotypes were incorrect when applied to his life. Later, Joe realized that it was more

important to him to obtain his goals than to prove something to others. As indicated

earlier, Joe was now earning an education because he wanted to accomplish his set

goals.

Contrary to the previous life lessons, the participants' experience with peer

pressure was motivational as well. Peer pressure became more apparent as the

participants discussed different situations in which they interacted with peers. The

participants wanted to be a part of certain peer groups; subsequently they would make

changes in their behaviors to fit in. The changes that were discussed were academic in

nature. For example, Fabio revealed that he was motivated by a peer student's lack of

academic performance. He shared this experience by saying:

> This semester when I was working in groups, one person did not know what he was doing. Then everybody in the group was talking about him because everybody knew what they were doing, but him. So that also motivated me to go home and sit down, read and read until I understood what was going on.

Fabio did not want the students in his group to talk about him; therefore he concealed his lack of knowledge. Subsequently, he took action to improve his academic knowledge.

Just as Fabio took action to improve his academic knowledge, Joe had a similar experience with his peers in a fraternity. Joe wanted to be a part of the fraternity and it was imperative that he maintained a 2.5 GPA. Joe explained that his fraternity involvement has definitely motivated him to continue in his undergraduate studies. He spoke of his brothers' desire to help him achieve the required GPA. In addition, he is motivated to stay in school. He commented:

> The fraternity…They have requirements for grades and if you fall below a certain GPA. You don't get kicked out or anything but they start rushing in and have all my brothers who have taken the class before and they will help me with that.

In addition, he was internally motivated to stay in school as he stated, "Academically, just all the requirements put in place by Virginia Tech, which motivates me also. I don't want to be on suspension or close to it."

During my interview with Paul, he expressed that his need to fit in with his peers has motivated him to achieve academically. He explained:

> I really have to thank my friends for being so grade oriented because it's caused me to say "I didn't do too well on that test." So I want to be a part of my friends' circle and so maybe I should do better on that test next time. It makes me fit in. I'll be cool to have good grades.

The participants understood that in order to fit in with their peers, it was necessary to maintain a certain academic standing, and they were willing to do whatever was

necessary to maintain their goals. In turn, the reward was to continue in a relationship with their chosen peers. The desire to fit in with certain peer groups was only a part of the participants' motivation. They were motivated by the experiences of people in their lives.

The participants learned from their experiences with family, friends, and peers life lessons that are not written in books. It was these experiences combined with their drive to succeed, the family expectations, encouraging support, and building relationships that contributed to their overall academic persistence in higher education.

Summary

College life for these five male participants had both an academic and a social component to it. How students balanced the two components helped to shape their college experiences. The participants in this research study openly discussed their academic and social experiences as well as those factors that served as motivators for their persistence in higher education. The participants defined their academic success as their ability to attain their respective goals.

They described their personal commitment to achieve their academic college and post-college goals, their internal drive to succeed, their satisfaction with their subject of study, and their ability to overcome obstacles. The participants described time management, lack of financial resources, transfer shock, and adjusting to academic rigor of the university as hindrances to their academic success and persistence. Two of the participants discussed experiencing discrimination which has been known to be a distraction to learning for students of color; however, the students were able to prevail over the experiences.

The participants' family influences for gaining a post-secondary education and the encouragement received from others were also factors that contributed to their academic success. They discussed their self-determination to be successful but considered encouraging support from family, friends, faculty, and peer students as contributors to their success and persistence. In addition, these students learned some life lessons that persuaded and confirmed that their decision to persist toward earning a college degree was in their best interest for reaching their predetermined goals.

Building a circle of friends with like interests and participation in social clubs and organizations was described as very important and helped these students to find a balance between their academic and social life. The transitional support provided through the Virginia Tech transfer student orientation was one of the programs that each participant found to be a benefit for them as new students on campus. The orientation also helped to make the students feel a part of the university and no longer a stranger to the large campus. All of the students in this study stated that they had an appreciation for having started their post-secondary education at the community college.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to describe the phenomena of persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transferred from a two-year degree granting community college to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). Five undergraduate students who persisted in their undergraduate studies after transferring to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) were interviewed. The frameworks utilized in this study were Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Hills' (1965) concept of transfer shock. The five-part research question examined in this study was: How do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe the following factors as related to their successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech: (a) academic experiences, (b) social experiences, (c) motivators, (d) personal characteristics, and (e) institutional characteristics?

This chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, a summary of the overall findings is presented. The second section is a discussion of how the findings fit the theoretical framework and the connections of the findings to prior research. Next, answers to the five-part research question are presented. The implications for future practice, research, and policy is fourth. The study conclusions are presented in the final section.

Summary of Findings

Findings from this study revealed that the five Black and Hispanic male transfer students' experiences of persistence at the four-year research institution were primarily

positive and many factors contributed to their persistence. The findings yielded five themes: (a) transfer students had a personal commitment to achieve their academic goals; (b) transfer students' academic performance was influenced by family expectations; (c) encouraging support from family, friends, faculty, and peer students was a factor for transfer students' persistence; (d) building relationships within the campus community influenced transfer students' persistence; and (e) learning from life lessons contributed to the transfer students' persistence.

It is important to mention that three of the five participants were first-generation minority college students, which could position them at a disadvantage when compared to other students. First-generation college students typically come from low-income families, score low on admissions exams, and attend high schools with few resources for college preparation (Hayden, 2008). Thus, they may not be aware of vital information about financial aid, academic rigor, and many other aspects higher education. Moreover, first-generation students are disproportionately attending community colleges and are from Black and Hispanic populations (American Association of Community Colleges, 2008; Laden, 2004). However, it was evident that the participants in this study overcame these and other obstacles in their lives.

Academic success was defined by the students as the achievement of their goals. The participants were highly motivated when they began their higher educational experiences at a community college. Their performance at the community college gained them entrance into Virginia Tech. Consistent with literature on transfer shock (Hills, 1965); the transfer students experienced a drop in their GPAs during their initial year at the senior institution. The participants demonstrated their personal commitment

to achieve their academic goals as they utilized goal-setting techniques and were acutely aware of their career choices. These characteristics are in contrast to literature regarding first-year generation minority students because most students are not aware of the career choices available and the pursuit of higher education is an unfamiliar concept (Hayden, 2008).

The students were influenced by their parents to persist in their undergraduate studies and to earn a degree. They were driven to meet their parents' educational expectations for degree attainment. This degree attainment would provide the credentials for future employment which would yield an income for a higher quality of life.

The results also revealed that encouraging support from family, friends, faculty, and peer students did influence the persistence of these Black and Hispanic male transfer students. The encouragement was given in various forms that made a difference for each student because although they were internally driven, they sometimes needed encouragement to persist in their studies.

Additionally, building relationships with faculty, students, and others within the campus community was described as influencing the persistence of the participants in this study. These relationships were important for their success in college life. The participants took the initiative to meet other students and to become involved in clubs and organizations related to their interests. It was through these actions that they were able to bond with others from similar backgrounds, race/ethnicity, interests, and goals. These forms of relationships also helped the students to alleviate any feelings of isolation and to connect with the university at large.

The participants had established other relationships that provided occasions to learn life lessons. As previously mentioned in chapter four, Fabio learned that parenthood had many challenges. He decided that he would rather attend college than socialize with his high school friends who became parents at an early age. Martin learned life lessons from his mother who taught him that life is sometimes difficult, but quitting is not an option. Lessons about the struggles of life and the importance of education have influenced the students' decisions to continue their educational goals regardless of the circumstances that arose in their lives. The participants described experiencing problems with time management, finances, and academic rigors of the university, but they were proactive in establishing a successfully balanced college life.

<center>Theoretical Framework and Connection to Prior Research</center>

Research pertaining to why students leave college and factors influencing student persistence in higher education has been conducted, yet few studies have focused on minority transfer students' experiences of persistence in higher education. This study addressed the gap in the literature regarding what contributes to Black and Hispanic male transfer students' persistence at a four-year research institution. The relationship of the results of this study to Astin's (1984) student involvement theory and Hills' (1965) concept of transfer shock is discussed next.

Hills (1965) introduced the concept of transfer shock, which suggested that transfer students experienced a drop in their grade point average (GPA) the first or second semester at the four-year institution. He reported that students should expect a drop in GPA after transferring from a community college due to differing academic cultures. The results of this present study are consistent with this concept. Four of the

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five participants experienced transfer shock their first semester at Virginia Tech, yet

based on a 4.0 scale, none of the students' GPA decreased below a 2.50 GPA. All

participants discussed their desire to improve their grades and were confident in their

ability to do so. Each sought academic assistance from professors, classmates,

fraternity brothers, and friends. Four of the participants perceived that the academic

work at Virginia Tech was more rigorous than what they had experienced at the

community college. This supports Hills' concept that transfer students experienced the

drop in GPA due to academic cultural differences between the community college and

the senior institution. In contrast, the fifth participant reported a post-transfer increase in

his GPA at the end the first semester. The increase in GPA was termed as "transfer

ecstasy" (Laanan, 2001; Nickens, 1972) which is the opposite of transfer shock.

Transfer ecstasy occurs when a transfer student experiences an increase in the GPA

the first semester or year at the senior institution. The participant who experienced

transfer ecstasy also agreed that there were differences in the academic work at

Virginia Tech compared to his community college experience.

The participants in this study were involved in extracurricular activities and

interacted with other students and faculty, which supported the student involvement

theory (Astin, 1975; 1977; 1984), the second theoretical framework. As discussed

earlier, Astin's (1975) study of college dropouts revealed that students persist in

colleges in which they relate or have something in common with the institution. The

study results also suggested that positive factors in the college environment affect

student persistence. In Astin's (1977) study, he concluded that the more students are

involved with various college-related activities such as social fraternities, student

government, athletic involvement, and many others, the more likely they will be to persist in higher education. This was certainly true of the participants in this study. All participants were involved in more than one club, organization, and college-related extra-curricular activity. Furthermore, Paul and Carlos specifically indicated that their participation in these activities helped to make them feel connected to Virginia Tech.

Another aspect of Astin's (1984) student involvement theory suggested that involvement of an individual is defined by action and behavior. He noted that motivation was also important. Findings from this study concur with this aspect of Astin's theory. The participants spent time researching and participating in clubs and organizations of interest, developing relationships with others, and studying to achieve their academic goals. They were methodical in their quest for developing relationships with members of the campus community. The participants befriended others who were of the same race or ethnicity and shared similar interests in academics, future employment aspirations, and clubs and organizations. It was evident that the participants found satisfaction with their higher education experiences once they made social connections and built relationships with other students, which helped to balance their academic lives. They described being motivated by their actions.

The students appeared to overcome transfer shock, had a better than average GPA upon transfer, and became involved socially and academically at the senior institution which is consistent with the factors that foster transfer student persistence in higher education (Astin, 1984; Diaz, 1992; Pace, 1980; Townsend, McNerny, & Arnold, 1993).

The five participants in this study spoke about issues that were foremost in the body of student persistence and retention literature. The participants in this study were able to begin their higher education experiences at the community college as do most minority students (AACC, 2008). As previously indicated, Townsend, McNerny, and Arnold's (1993) study revealed that the community college served as a gateway to four-year degree attainment, especially for those students with low academic standing. This was particularly true for the participants in this study who experienced poor academic performance in high school and therefore were not strong candidates for admission to a four-year institution immediately after high school graduation. The participants benefited from other advantages of attending the community college such as the low tuition cost compared to the university, the completion of core courses, and the opportunity to transfer into the university of their choice (Eddy, Christie, & Rao, 2006; Hagedorn, 2004). The participants took advantage of transfer articulation agreements to achieve their academic goals at Virginia Tech.

These five students in this study were motivated to perform academically. They achieved their educational goal to transfer to a four-year institution within a two-year period. This is in contrast to reports by the American Association of Community Colleges (2008) that indicated that the percentage of students who achieve their educational goals within a six-year period at the community college was less than 50%.

Researchers Alba and Lavin (1981) and Dougherty (1992) suggested that community college attendance has a negative influence on students' persistence to graduate with a bachelor's degree. The five participants in this study did not point out any negative influence on their persistence to graduate with a bachelor's degree

resulting from their community college attendance. Although low grades and a lack of financial resources caused the participants to initially choose the community college to start their higher education, they indicated that they were glad to have had the experience. They have persisted past their first year toward graduating student status at Virginia Tech.

Fabio described taking advantage of the transfer articulation agreement between his community college and the Virginia public universities. Falconetti (2009) suggested that the link between the community college and universities helped to bridge four-year degree access for minorities and transfer students. This also confirms the findings of Cohen and Brawer (2003), Floyd (2006), and Floyd and Walker (2003), who indicated that such agreements are necessary for bachelor's degree attainment. Ignash and Townsend (2001) stated that articulation models are most important for transfer students to complete a bachelor's degree. Moreover, Boswell (2004) recommended that such agreements are effective in decreasing the educational disparities low-income and minority students experience in obtaining the bachelor's degree. The participants in this study enrolled in the community college with specific intentions of completing a two-year degree and/or transferring to a specific four-year institution. They also had intentions to secure specific employment after earning a bachelor's degree. Paul intentionally enrolled in the community college and then transferred to Virginia Tech while maintaining his focus on the goal to secure a position with a branch of law enforcement. Joe began at the community college as well, with the intention of transferring to Radford University, but he changed his mind once he secured a scholarship and admittance to

Virginia Tech. Nevertheless, he maintained his goal to earn a bachelor's degree and to gain employment in a corporate environment.

Astin (1975), Bean (1982), and Wilder and Kellams (1987) suggested that such individual intentions are important predictors of persistence and degree completion. However, these studies did not specifically focus on the persistence of community college minority transfer students. According to Cejda, Rewey, and Kaylor (1998), both Martin and Fabio had a better chance of persisting at the senior institution because they earned an associate degree, while Paul, Carlos, and Joe did not.

The five participants' transfer GPAs were a 3.2 or higher, which was found to be a good predictor of academic success and persistence at the senior institution (Cedja, Rewey, & Kaylor, 1998). Moreover, Clegg, Shoup, and Liu (1990); Lee, Mackie-Lewis, and Marks (1993); and Townsend, McNerny, and Arnold (1993) found that a 2.5 minimum pre-transfer GPA was necessary for academic success at the senior institution.

Three transfer students in this study maintained an above average GPA and all the students displayed intellectual self-confidence during the interviews, which Laanan (2007) found had a positive impact on student adjustment. They displayed such intellectual self-confidence in their words. The five participants also participated in clubs and organizations, attended cultural events, had social self-confidence and spent hours socializing with friends. Laanan found that transfer students involved in these activities were likely to experience less difficulty adjusting socially. This is closely related to the second theoretical framework for this study, the student involvement theory by Astin (1975; 1977; 1984).

The influence of family expectation of college completion was another finding from this study. More specifically, parental expectation was a topic of discussion for the students and this topic emerged in theme one of the current study. The parents' educational backgrounds varied but their expectations for their children were the same across all participant cases. The participants' were aware of the high expectations that their parents had for their education. Although it was not stated, from our conversations, I concluded that the students understood the struggles their parents faced because of a lack of education or employment opportunities and therefore, it was more important for them to go beyond their parents' accomplishments. Accomplishing more than their parents was in alignment with the findings of Fisher and Padmawidjaja (1999) who found that parental expectations were a major motivator for Black and Hispanic students to surpass the educational and occupational levels of their parents. Next is a discussion of the literature on Black student retention as it relates to the findings within the current study.

Literature on Black student retention suggests that pre-college attributes, goals and commitment, higher education experiences, and personal and normative integration are important for student persistence in higher education (Cope & Hannah, 1975; Gladwell, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Rowley, 2000; Tinto, 1993). The participants were committed to achieving their academic goals, which are pre-college attributes as suggested by Cope and Hannah. The findings of Cope and Hannah's study concluded that personal commitment was the single most important determinant of persistence in college. Paul and Martin, the two Black male participants, were committed to persist in college. Paul stated that he could never quit and Martin indicated

that giving up was not an option. These same commitment traits were also exhibited by the three Hispanic participants. Goals and commitment were also found to be important to Black student retention for persistence in higher education. All five students were goal oriented and committed to achieve academically. Tinto (1993) reported students who have goal commitment and institutional commitment were most likely to persist and graduate. Paul had an institutional commitment to Virginia Tech; he thought it was a prestigious school and was determined to become a Virginia Tech student. Terenzini, Lorang, and Pascarella (1981) found that a person's commitment to graduate from a certain institution may impact that individual's persistence to graduate.

The findings of Abel (1966) suggested that students with commitment to specific career goals were twice as likely to graduate as students without such goals. Four of the participants expressed a commitment to their future careers goals. For example, Martin knew that he wanted to become a medical doctor. Paul knew that he would like to work in some area of law enforcement. Fabio did not specify a career but realized that he wanted a prestigious and well-paying position.

Another retention factor for Black students cited in the literature was that higher education experiences can impact the learning process. Gladwell (2000) found that special support programs, student interaction, and campus involvement were important to students. These factors were important to the participants in this study as well. The participants were highly involved in the campus environment, engaged with other students, and all reported the transfer student orientation as beneficial. The orientation program held for transfer students at Virginia Tech was described as having a positive impact on their persistence. All of the participants were involved in the summer transfer

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student orientation program held on Virginia Tech campus. The transfer orientation program was the first formal on-campus program that provided the incoming students with the chance to interact with other students and faculty. The participants met other transfer students with whom they had at least one characteristic in common, transferring to Virginia Tech. The students were exposed to campus life and programs that offered campus involvement opportunities. The transfer student listserv was another support service that helped the students to connect to Virginia Tech. The students were automatically added to this listserv. The listserv is used to disseminate information about academic support, social activities, and any other pertinent information that may be helpful to the transfer student body.

Rowley (2000) suggested that Black students' institutional experiences such as discrimination, feelings of isolation, and lack of support were distractions to the learning process. The discussion of discrimination arose during the participant interviews as an issue for two Hispanic participants, Joe and Fabio. Joe had experienced discrimination prior to college and in his personal life, but cited no other specific instances at the university. Fabio briefly discussed an incident of discrimination while at Virginia Tech but was able to overcome it. Contrary to Rowley's findings, neither of these participants allowed the discrimination experiences to be a distraction to their educational pursuits. If the two Black participants experienced any discrimination, they did not disclose it during our conversations.

The participants mentioned feelings of isolation, particularly during their first semester at Virginia Tech. The participants seemed to prevail over these feelings as they befriended others who were like them in race, background, and similar interests.

Unlike Rowley's (2000) findings, the lack of support was not an issue or a distraction for these five participants. These five males had informal support teams. Their families, professors, friends, and peers provided support through words of encouragement, assistance with academics, social interactions, and expressions of belief in their abilities to perform academically.

Personal and normative integration are important for Black student persistence in higher education. Such integration has been shown to be a predictor of black student retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1999). The participants were integrated into higher education through their student involvement on campus, establishment of social connections, and becoming acclimated to the university culture and community. The students strategically planned how they would become involved in the social environment of the campus community. Tinto (1993) suggested that interaction does not guarantee persistence, but the absence of interaction increases the likelihood of student departure. The participants' actions led to their integration into the Virginia Tech environment, and through their efforts they became connected to the institution.

The literature regarding Hispanic student retention and those factors that influence persistence in higher education is similar to that for Black students. The Hispanic students in this study had the pre-college attributes that are found to influence persistence: high grade point averages, academic self-concept, family support, and financial resources. The participants' financial resources were limited and were a concern to them as they had to work to support themselves while in college. Their financial discussion was limited and focused on their lack of time management skills due to their work schedules. However, they did not perceive finances as a stumbling

block to their academic and future employment goals. Most of the support that the students received from family was not monetary but in the form of encouragement, which was an important influence in their lives. The participants admitted that they did not apply themselves academically while in high school, but at the community college they demonstrated their academic abilities.

In the literature, a second factor found to influence the retention of Hispanic students was environmental. The feelings of isolation and racial/ethnic climate of the institution was found to be a factor by Harvey (2001). Similar to the Black student retention factors, the feelings of isolation were mentioned by the Hispanic students as stated above. Fabio mentioned his ability to find and connect with a Hispanic community within a predominately White institution, which had a positive impact on his retention (Hernandez, 2000). The participants did not mention the institutional climate during our interviews.

Another aspect of the environmental factors for Hispanic students is nonpersistence decisions. In a review of nonpersistence decisions for Hispanic students, Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, and Rosales (2005) examined three factors: university comfort, social support, and self-beliefs. The researchers reported that social support was the strongest predictor of student academic nonpersistence decisions. Throughout the participant interviews, I gained a sense that their social support was a strong factor in their persistence. The participants described being satisfied once they made social connections in college. As Carlos indicated, his social life was an important part of his college experience. The participants talked about themselves and their abilities to accomplish their goals.

A third factor found to influence Hispanic student persistence and retention was involvement. The involvement factors identified by Suarez-Orozco and Paez (2002), Hernandez and Lopez (2004), and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) support the student involvement theory of Astin (1975, 1977, 1984). These researchers established that involvement factors such as student-faculty interaction, mentoring relationships, and student organization participation influenced Hispanic student persistence. As indicated in Chapter Four, the participants in this study were involved with student organizations and had student-faculty interactions. The students interacted with their professors during office hours and in the classroom. When experiencing problems with course work, the participants would seek assistance from their professors. During the interviews, the participants spoke of the encouragement they received from their professors, which indicated that they had built student-faculty relationships. Although they reported no formally established mentoring relationships, they had professors and friends who acted in the role of a mentor. Studies have shown that mentoring students of color has influenced their persistence in undergraduate studies (Friedman, 1992; Patton & Harper, 2003; Reddick, 2006). Tinto (1993) also suggested that when faculty members advised or helped students of color formally or informally, the students were more likely to become integrated into the college community.

Socio-cultural factors are the last factor to be discussed. These factors include ethnic identity, immigration status, gender roles, community orientation, and religion (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). All have been shown to influence the persistence of Hispanic students. During the participant interviews, religion was not mentioned and gender roles were only mentioned by one Hispanic participant discussing the

encouragement received from his mother. This participant stated that his mother was "acting like a mother" when she provided him with encouragement.

Ethnic identity was important to the Hispanic participants in this study. Fabio's ethnic identity was confirmed through membership in an informal Hispanic group. Fabio deliberately searched for a Hispanic group to socialize with during his initial months at Virginia Tech. Carlos also had built a sense of ethnic identity within his groups of friends. The building of such relationships confirms the Hispanic ethnic identities as defined by Casas and Pytluck (1995).

According to Suarez-Orozco (1991), Hispanics from Central America believed that opportunities were better in the country to which they had moved than in their native country in Central America. This was certainly true of the Hispanic participants in the current study who believed that they had better educational and employment opportunities in the United States as compared to their native country. Hernandez and Lopez (2004) found that differences existed between Hispanic immigrants and native-born high school students regarding educational goals.

Answers to the Five-Part Research Question

The five-part research question for this study was: How do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe the following factors related to their successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech: (a) academic experiences, (b) social experiences, (c) motivators, (d) personal characteristics, and (e) institutional characteristics? While the discussion of the factors for each question somewhat overlap, they can be identified for each question.

Academic Experiences

The factors that contributed to the persistence of these five Black and Hispanic male transfer students at the four-year institution are varied. Six factors were described as contributing academically to the persistence of these transfer students: (a) transfer GPA, (b) professor and student classroom interaction, (c) professors and friends support, (d) parental expectations, (e) academic goals, and (f) their internal drive to succeed. The participants held a 2.5 or better transfer GPA, which proved to be consistent with previous studies in predicting student academic success and persistence at the four-year institution (Cedja, Rewey, & Kaylor, 1998; Clegg, Shoup, & Liu 1990; Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993; Townsend, McNerny, & Arnold, 1993). The participants described positive student/professor interactions in the classroom and office environments. The academic support received from professors and friends made a contribution to their persistence. The educational expectations of the participants' parents motivated the students to perform academically as well. Finally, the participants were internally driven to succeed and were highly motivated. Therefore they were committed to achieve their academic goals.

Social Experiences

The social factors that contributed to these Black and Hispanic male transfer students' experiences of persistence were befriending others with similar interests and participating in clubs and organizations. The establishment of friendships with other students of common interests, backgrounds, and race/ethnicity helped the students to feel a part of the university and diminished feelings of isolation in a large campus environment. This university connection was strengthened by their participation in clubs

and organizations such as sports and Greek life. The participants provided data that was consistent with Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement. The social aspect of university life helped the students to identify their purposes outside of academics. The social life balanced their academic life. It is important to note that most of the social interactions were with students who were not registered in the same courses at the same time as they were. It was the social networks that the participants established for their benefit and social need that made a difference in their persistence. Each participant sought to find a social connection that was unique for him. For example, Fabio wanted a Hispanic social network while Paul sought a social network of student who already had established career goals and were focused on academic achievement.

Motivation

Part three of the research question was: How do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe motivational factors related to their successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies at Virginia Tech? A variety of motivators contributed to the Black and Hispanic male transfer students' persistence. They were identified as learning life lessons, encouraging support from others, future goals, peer pressure, love for learning, and transitional support. Transitional support will be discussed later under part five of the research question.

Learning life lessons from family and friends had an impact on the participants. For example, Fabio seemed to understand the difficulties that young parents experience, especially if they have no education beyond high school. It was from his friends' experiences that he was motivated to continue his education. Besides learning life lessons, these participants had an educational support system.

Family, friends, faculty, and peer students provided a support system. The participants had academic and future employment goals. They experienced pressure from their peers to perform academically. Finally, they were very committed to their chosen subjects.

Personal characteristics

The personal characteristics that contributed to the persistence of these Black and Hispanic male transfer students were self-motivation, goal setting, and an internal drive to succeed. These participants were highly motivated. The transfer students had an internal drive to succeed which was evident prior to their higher education endeavors. They used academic and non-academic goal-setting techniques to assist them. What the participants learned about life, they applied to their academics. They understood that they may experience hindrances but strived to overcome them. The students maintained positive "I can do" attitudes and were not willing to quit. These students were role models within the university, community, and family.

Institutional Characteristics

The last part of the research question focused on the institutional characteristics that influenced the Black and Hispanic transfer students' persistence. The institution's role in providing programmatic opportunities specifically targeted for transfer students proved to benefit the students in their adjustment to the university environment. All of the participants recalled participating in the transfer student orientation and received the emails from the transfer student listserv.

These programs provided transitional support for the participants. The plethora of clubs and organizations at Virginia Tech provided a variety of ways for the transfer

students to get connected to the student body and campus environment. The clubs and organizations were important to these participants' social life and provided a balance to their overall college experience.

<center>Implications for Future Practice, Research, and Policy</center>

The findings of this study revealed important information concerning these five Black and Hispanic male transfer students' experiences of persistence at a predominantly White four-year research institution. The findings may be used to shape future practice, research, and policy that influence minority transfer students' experiences in higher education. Although the results of any qualitative research are not generalized, the results may be used to inform educational leaders, administrators, and faculty of those factors that assisted these transfer students toward graduating student status. These findings suggest that these transfer students made successful academic and social transitions during their post-transfer years, particularly the first year, at the senior institution.

In this study, all but one student reported experiencing transfer shock (Hills, 1965), which is a drop in their GPAs during the first year at the senior institution. Administrators and faculty who develop academic support programs could be proactive in educating the students about the benefits of academic assistance. Unfortunately, many students view academic support programs for at-risk students only. Students who have always performed well tend to perceive that they have no need for academic assistance in higher education. Faculty, advisors, and program managers could assist in debunking this idea by emphasizing that all students utilize academic support services before any academic problems arise. Community colleges are known for

providing remedial courses. Introducing college success strategy courses at the community college level would benefit the transfer students as they transition to the four-year institution.

The students in this study reported their participation in the transfer student orientation as a positive experience. This program provided the initial on-campus contact with faculty and other students. Through the activities in this program, the students began to identify with the four-year institution. They were no longer transfer students but were Virginia Tech students. It is important that educational leaders develop transitional programs that help the students to drop the "transfer" identity.

The transfer students' listserv was another service provided for the transfer students. They are automatically added to this listserv which provided academic and social information for this student population. However, this separate listserv continues to identify the students as "transfer." Therefore, academic support leaders may want to consider other options for disseminating information.

The findings showed that the participants developed relationships with other students and faculty, which allowed them to become attached to the institution. The students described positive relationships with other student and they became involved in clubs and organizations. The students described positive but limited academic and social relationships with faculty outside the classroom or office. Research has shown that student-faculty academic interaction does help students to make better academic transitions (Nora, 1993). Programs should be developed that encourage and support student-faculty interactions outside the classroom. Such programs might include student-faculty collaborations in undergraduate research projects or brown bag lecture

series. These sorts of initiatives might help to increase the student-faculty relationships for Black and Hispanic transfer students.

The results of this study can be used as a source for advisors, student academic services areas, and any other university unit that assists students. Persons working with students could inquire about the persistence factors that were found in this study and suggest that those factors may be applicable to the situations of other students. These results may help to inform university leaders about what services or supports may benefit other groups of students. University personnel might conduct studies surveying students, particularly male minorities, to find out if they have had similar experiences and identify the same persistence factors as necessary for continued academic and social success in higher education.

Suggestions for future research were revealed from the results of this study. Since I investigated the Black and Hispanic transfer students' experiences of persistence at a four-year research, predominantly White research institution, a subsequent study might focus on the experiences of persistence of Black and Hispanic transfer students at a historically Black and Hispanic serving four-year college or university. Researchers can study the experiences of these students to learn the factors that impact transfer students in a dominant minority environment.

Another study might focus on the replication of this study with the inclusion of American Indian students, who are underrepresented in higher education as are the Black and Hispanic student populations. Since research literature is limited pertaining to American Indian transfer students, a study solely focused on the factors that promote

post-transfer persistence for this population would positively add to the body of knowledge in higher education.

A replication of this study to include Black and Hispanic female transfer students would inform higher education leaders as to the persistence factors of female transfer students. This type of study could also be extended to examine whether any differences exist in the persistence factors of Black and Hispanic male and female transfer students.

Another future study might focus on the cultural influences of family, school, and the people within the students' inner circle. It was obvious that these five male participants were impacted by cultural influences within their group of family and friends.

Future researchers might also study the minority transfer students' experience of persistence at the graduate level. This focus would serve to explore if Black and Hispanic male transfer students persistence factors at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Finally, I would suggest extending this current study. A longitudinal study that would focus on the factors that influence the transfer Black and Hispanic or minority students' persistence in higher education through graduate school or first year of employment after graduation. In all of the above studies, it would benefit the academic field if researchers examined those factors that contributed to the successful persistence of all minority populations that are underrepresented in higher education.

This study does add to the body of knowledge about the persistence factors that were necessary for these male minority students in higher education. Little is known about the persistence factors of this male population.

In addition to the implications for future practice and research, there are suggestions for future policy. These five students show that Black and Hispanic male transfer students can be successful in the persistence of undergraduate studies. Thus, policies should focus on and support those factors that contribute to persistence in higher education for these underrepresented populations. Financial aid, housing, college preparation, outreach programs, and other resources that assist these students to persist toward graduating student status should be considered.

When considering articulation agreements, transfer student initiatives, orientation programs, and academic support programs, institutional leaders who consider the needs of Black and Hispanic male transfer students can contribute to their success. University policies should focus on improving the recruitment, retention, and graduation of these student populations.

Conclusions

This study identified factors that contributed to the persistence of five Black and Hispanic male transfer students at a four-year research institution. The personal commitment to succeed, family expectations to attend college, encouraging support from others, building relationships with the campus community, and lessons of life were the factors identified as influencing these students to persist in higher education in the face of some of the barriers they experienced. All of the students were able to successfully adjust to the four-year research university community. They made meaningful academic and social connections that helped them to develop an attachment to the university. It is clear from the results of this study that these five Black and Hispanic males, who graduated from high school with poor grades, triumphed over

their circumstances and are successfully continuing in higher education. All students

have persisted and plan to graduate in 2010, earning a baccalaureate degree from

Virginia Tech.

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Appendix A: Letter Of Support for Gaining Entry

October 22, 2008

Audrey Robinson, EdS
Virginia Tech School of Education
School of Education
226 War Memorial Hall (0313)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

Dear Ms. Robinson,

I was excited to learn about your proposed dissertation research, *"Black and Hispanic Transfer Students Experience of Persistence at a Research Institution."* I expect that your findings will help higher education professional learn more about the factors that facilitate the persistence of African American and Latino students who transfer from community colleges to four -year institutions. I support your request to access the Transfer Student Organization and listserv to help identify potential participants for your study and to move your research project forward. Please contact Ms. Jody Thompson Uodyt@vt.edu, 231-5499), as she coordinates transfer student support services within the Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence.

I fully support your research agenda, Audrey, so please contact me at (540) 231-5499 or kesanders@vt.eduif you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

  ~~

Karen Eley Sanders, Associate Vice President
for Academic Support Services

Appendix B: Email Message To Introduce The Study

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Email Subject Line: Seeking Black and Hispanic Transfer Students to Participate in a Study

February [*Insert date*], 2009

Dear Student:

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project. The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the phenomena of persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transfer from a two-year degree granting community college to Virginia Tech.

The information gathered from this study has implications for improving higher education leaders and educators' understanding of the policies and procedures that impact recruitment, retention, and graduation success for Black and Hispanic/Latino undergraduate students. Additionally, the results from this study may be useful in developing and implementing activities that would improve current programs.

I hope you will agree to participate in two interviews, each of which will be approximately one hour in length. Both interviews will be conducted within a 30-day period. After the each interview is completed, you will receive a $10 Wal-Mart gift card. The Wal-Mart gift cards are not meant to encourage participation but rather to show appreciation for participation in this research project.

If you are interested in participating in this study, there are 4 steps that you will be asked to complete prior to your interviews being scheduled. The steps are:

1. Notify me of your willingness to participate in the study via email.

2. Electronically sign and return the Informed Consent Form via email within one week from the sent date.

3. Complete the Background Questionnaire Form and return it via email within one week from the sent date.

4. Choose interview dates and times and return the completed form via email within one week from the sent date.

If you are willing to participate in this study or have questions, please notify me at arobinso@vt.edu. I am also available at 540-818-3303. Please do not respond to transfer_students@listerv.vt.edu.

Sincerely,
Audrey Robinson, Ed.S.
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech

Seeking Undergraduate Transfer Students

If you are a full time Black or Hispanic undergraduate student

WHO

transferred from a community college

AND

will graduate in Spring, Summer, Fall 2009, or Spring 2010

AND

are willing to provide background information and be interviewed about your experiences after transferring to Virginia Tech

THEN

you have the opportunity to participate in a research study designed to share your experiences in undergraduate studies.

If you are selected to participate, you will receive a $10 Wal-Mart gift card after completing each of two, one-hour interviews.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Audrey Robinson at arobinso@vt.edu or at 540-818-3303 (cell) or at 540-231-0969 (office).

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent for Participants
In Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Title of Project: "Black and Hispanic Transfer Students' Experiences of Persistence at a Four-Year Research Institution."

Investigator(s): Audrey Robinson, Doctoral Candidate at Virginia Tech; Dr. Penny Burge, Professor at Virginia Tech, and Dr. Daisy Stewart, Associate Professor at Virginia Tech.

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the phenomena of the persistence to graduating senior status for Black and Hispanic students who transferred from a two-year degree granting community college to Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). This study will give voice to a student population that has not traditionally been heard and find meaning as students express and describe their post-secondary experiences relevant to persisting in their undergraduate studies. This study will also address the gap in literature and inform leaders in post-secondary education about the experiences of minority students' post-transfer persistence in higher education. A thorough understanding of this phenomenon can be captured through the students' dialogue about their experiences.

II. Procedures

You will be asked to complete a background questionnaire form and two interviews within a four week period. Each interview will be about one hour in length. The interviews will be held in the Counselor Education Conference Room, 303 East Eggleston Hall, Virginia Tech. A tape recorder will be used to record the interviews.

During the first interview you will be asked a set of questions related to the purpose of this study. After each question, you will be given the opportunity to respond in as much detail as you want. After each interview is completed, you will be asked to review each transcript for accuracy.

III. Risks

Your participation in this study should pose minimal risks to you. You will be asked to describe your experiences after transferring to Virginia Tech. You may experience unpleasant thoughts and feelings and/or discomfort. All questions asked will be open-ended and nonjudgmental. You are allowed to answer or not any question(s)

asked of you at anytime. You also have the right to stop the interview at any point without penalty.

IV. Benefits

The possible benefits of participating in this study may include the opportunity to reflect upon your own experiences and/or clarify and define your specific stories. Educators may benefit from the information gathered as a result of the study to assist them in effectively providing support services to students who transfer to four-year universities. No Promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage your participation in this research project.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Confidentiality is very important in any research that involves human subjects. Every reasonable effort will be made to protect your privacy and to mask or change any details that could potentially identify you or anyone else discussed during an interview. For example, pseudonyms (i.e. false names) will be used to identify you in any written or printed materials. The investigator will make every effort not to reveal any of your identifying characteristics in the study. No mention of the community college you attended will be made. Every precaution will be taken to ensure that your confidentiality is maintained. The investigator will be required to break confidentiality if you voice intent to harm yourself or someone else. Confidentiality will also have to be broken to report child/vulnerable adult sexual and/or physical abuse.

The audio-tapes will be labeled with false names and locations. The interview tapes, interview transcripts, interview notes, and reflexive journal entries will be stored in a secure, locked location. The investigators will be the only persons who know where the tapes are kept. The investigators will destroy the audio-tapes one year after the completion of the project. The report will be completed after the researcher analyzes the data, reports the results, and give oral and written presentations.

VI. Compensation

As a participant, you will receive no compensation or pay for participating in this study. Your participation is strictly voluntary. Each participant will receive a $10 Wal-Mart gift card upon completion of each interview. The maximum distribution is $20 per participant. The Wal-Mart gift cards are not meant to encourage participation but rather to show appreciation for participation in this research project.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

As a participant, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any question(s) without penalty. There may be circumstances under which the researcher determines that you, the participant, should not continue to be involved in the study.

VIII. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- o I agree to complete two one-hour interviews.
- o I agree to review each interview transcript for accuracy. I will check for any misinformation and correct or make any change(s) to the transcript. I will check for any information that I would not want to reveal.
- o I agree to respect and maintain the privacy and confidentiality of others.
- o I agree to notify the investigator if I decide not to participate in the interview.
- o I agree to allow the investigator to use non-identifying direct quotations in reports related to this study.

VIII. Subject's Permission

I have read the Informed Consent Form and conditions of this research project. I have had all my questions answered. I agree to allow the investigator to record the interview on audio-tape. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____   _____
Subject's Signature (Electronic via email)   Date

_____I would like a summary of the research results when available.
(initial)

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and who to contact in the event of a research related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Audrey Robinson   540-552-6221/arobinso@vt.edu
Investigator   Telephone/e-mail

Penny L. Burge   540-231-9730/burge@vt.edu
Faculty Advisor   Telephone/e-mail

Daisy Stewart   540-231-8180/daisys@vt.edu
Faculty Advisor   Telephone/e-mail

Dr. David M. Moore   540-231-4991/moored@vt.edu

Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review   Telephone/e-mail
Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research Compliance
1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006
Campus Mail Code (0497)
Blacksburg, VA 24060

I will be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of this signed Informed Consent
Form

Appendix E: Background Information Form

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Email Subject Line: Transfer Student Study Background Information Form

Dear [*Insert participant's first and last name*],

Thank you for being willing to participate in this study. Some background information is needed before interviews can be scheduled. Please take a few minutes to review and respond to each of the statements below.

1. I transferred from a community college. _____Yes _____No

2. I completed an associate degree at my community college _____Yes _____No

3. If you answered yes to question 2, please list your degree _____

4. I am an undergraduate student at Virginia Tech _____ Yes _____full time _____part-time

5. I earned at least 24 credits at: community college_____Yes _____No

6. This is my _____1st _____2nd _____3rd _____4th _____5th _____6th _____7th semester at Virginia Tech.

7. My GPA at the community college was_____. My current GPA is _____.

8. My program of study is _____.

9. I am in the College of (please specify) _____.

10. I currently anticipate graduating from Virginia Tech in
    Spring _____ Summer_____ Fall_____
           (year)   (year)   (year)

11. I live on-campus. _____ Yes _____No

12. My race/ethnicity is _____ Age_____

Return this completed form via email to arobinso@vt.edu within one week from the date sent.

Sincerely,

Audrey Robinson, Ed.S.
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech

Appendix F: Participant Interview Schedule

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Email Subject Line: Transfer Student Study Interview Schedule
Date: [*Insert date*]

Dear [*Insert participant's first and last name*],

Interviews for this study of Black and Hispanic undergraduate transfer students will be conducted during March 2009 and April 2009. Please select one of the following dates for your first and second interviews by writing or typing your name in the box you select as the date and time for your interview. The shaded boxes are no longer available.

Interview one

Day/ Time	Monday [insert date]	Tuesday [insert date]	Wednesday [insert date]	Thursday [insert date]	Friday [insert date]
10 a.m.					
12 noon					
1:30 p.m.					
3 p.m.					
4:30 p.m.					

Interview two

DATE	Monday [insert date]	Tuesday [insert date]	Wednesday [insert date]	Thursday [insert date]	Friday [insert date]
10 a.m.					
12 noon					
1:30 p.m.					
3 p.m.					
4:30 p.m.					

Return this completed form via email to arobinso@vt.edu within one week from the date sent. You will receive an interview schedule confirmation via email.

Appendix G: Participant Interview Confirmation

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Email Subject Line: Transfer Student Study Interview Confirmation

Date: [*Insert date*]

Dear [*Insert participant's first and last name*],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study of Black and Hispanic undergraduate transfer students. Your first interview is scheduled for [*insert day of week, month*] ___, 2009 at [*time*]. The interview will last up to 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted in Counselor Education Conference Room 303, located on the third floor in East Eggleston Hall (not on the dormitory side) on the Blacksburg campus of Virginia Tech.

If you are unable to keep this scheduled appointment please notify the primary investigator, Audrey Robinson at arobinso@vt.edu or 540-818-3303.

I look forward to meeting with you. Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Audrey Robinson, Ed.S.
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech

Appendix H: Participant Reminder To Submit Documents

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Email Subject Line: Transfer Student Study Document Reminder

Date: [*Insert date*], 2008

Dear [*Insert participant's first and last name*],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please remember to email your completed [*insert name of document*] to the researcher no later than [*insert date*]. If you no longer wish to participate in the study, please inform the researcher via email that you wish to withdraw.

Otherwise, please return the completed [*insert name of document*] via email to Audrey Robinson at arobinso@vt.edu or 540-818-3303.

Sincerely,

Audrey Robinson, Ed.S.
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech

Appendix I: Interview Protocol Questions

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Research Question and the Related Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview One Protocol Guide	Interview Two Protocol Guide
1. How do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe their academic experiences?	Probe: What were your academic goals while attending the community college? Probe: What are your academic goals now that you are attending the Virginia Tech? Probe: How would you describe your experiences related to accomplishing your academic goals since you have been at Virginia Tech? Probe: What is your personal definition of academic success? Probe: Describe what you believe has contributed to your academic success toward graduating senior student status. Probe: Describe any experiences that have hindered your academic success toward graduating senior student status. Probe: Describe your academic experience with other students.	Subsequent questions will emerge from the data collection in the first interview.

		Probe: Describe your academic experience with faculty.	
		Probe: What would you advise a new transfer student to do related to academics?	
		Probe: Is there anything else you would like to add?	
2.	How do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe their social experiences?	Probe: Describe your social experiences while attending the community college. Probe: Describe your social experiences at Virginia Tech. Probe: Describe your social experiences with other students. Probe: Describe your social experiences with faculty. Probe: Describe how your social experiences have contributed toward your graduating senior status. Probe: What would you advise a new transfer student to do related to social life? Probe: Is there anything else you would like to add?	Subsequent questions will emerge from the data collection in the first interview.

3. What do Black and Hispanic transfer students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe motivators that contribute to their persistence in undergraduate studies?	Probe: What are some things that have motivated you to continue in your undergraduate studies? Probe: What academic and social experiences have motivated you to continue in your undergraduate studies? Probe: What are some academic and social experiences that have hindered your success in undergraduate studies? Probe: Is there anything else you would like to add? . Probe: Is there anything else you would like to add?	Subsequent questions will emerge from the data collection in the first interview.
4. What do Black and Hispanic students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe personal characteristics that contribute to successful post-transfer persistence in undergraduate studies?	Probe: Describe what personal characteristics you believe contribute to successful undergraduate studies. Probe: Is there anything else you would like to add?	Subsequent questions will emerge from the data collection in the first interview.
5. What do Black and Hispanic students who have persisted to graduating senior status describe as institutional characteristics that contribute to successful post-transfer college persistence in undergraduate studies?	Probe: Describe any transfer student services or programs that you participated in, which you believe contributed to your being successful in undergraduate studies. Probe: Describe any transfer student	Subsequent questions will emerge from the data collection in the first interview.

| | services or programs that you participated in, which you believe hindered your being successful undergraduate studies.

Probe: Describe your experiences with any college activities that have contributed to your being successful in undergraduate studies.

Probe: Describe your experiences with any college activities that have hindered your being successful in undergraduate studies.

Probe: What suggestions do you have for Virginia Tech or other institutions regarding transfer students?

Probe: Is there anything else you would like to add? | |

Appendix J: Email To Participants For Member Check

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Email Subject Line: Interview Transcript for Your Review

Date: [*Insert date*]

Dear *[Insert participant's first and last name]*,

Thank you for your participation in the study of Black and Hispanic undergraduate transfer students. Your input was greatly appreciated. I enjoyed meeting you and hearing your story during the interview on [date]. As previously discussed and agreed upon, I am sending the attached transcript of the interview for your review. Attached is the typed transcript from interview [*one or two*] on [*date*].

Please take time to read the entire transcript. Check for accuracy, misinformation, or any information about you that you do not want to reveal. If you find that changes are necessary, make those changes on the word document in a **different color than black**. You have **two weeks** to review the transcript and make changes as necessary. Please return the transcript to me as an attachment via email at arobinso@vt.edu or mail a printed copy to my office at the School of Education, 226 War Memorial Hall, Campus Mail Code 0313, Blacksburg, VA 24061 no later than[*date*].

If you have any questions, please contact me at arobinso@vt.edu or 540-818-3303.

Sincerely,

Audrey Robinson, Ed.S.
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Tech

Appendix K: Participant Identity List

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Name of Participant	Study ID Number
Example: Pseudonym (false name)	000

Appendix L: Audit Tracking Form – A

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Name (Pseudonym)	Agree to Participate	Informed Consent Form		Background Information Form		First Interview Schedule		Confirmation		Reminder (Documents)	
	Received	Sent	Received	Sent	Received	Sent	Received	Sent	Received	Sent	Received

Appendix L: Audit Tracking Form – B

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Name (Pseudonym)	First Interview Scheduled		Transcribed	Member Check		Second Interview Schedule		Transcribed	Member Check	
	Date	Time	Date	Mailed	Rec'd Back	Date	Time	Date	Mailed	Rec'd Back