

RETENTION STUDY OF BLACK AND WHITE MALE STUDENTS AT  
HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

Sean Carlo Herring

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of Phoenix

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PREVIEW

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May 2007


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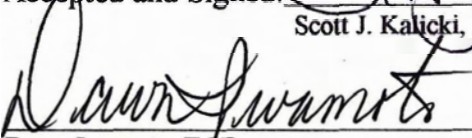
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## ABSTRACT

This quantitative study examined college retention, specifically of Black and White male students, at all five historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in North Carolina's state-supported system. The Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) was used to collect raw data containing enrollment and graduation variables between the years 1989 to 2005. Additionally, chi-square analysis and a research study instrument provided insight into institutional characteristics of retention to suggest a relationship to quantitative data findings in this study. Although many postsecondary institutions have been currently increasing efforts to recruit and to enroll a greater diversity of students, the issues of college retention and graduation for male students, Black students in particular, and socioeconomic lower status students, White or Black, were found to still exist as a cultural integration issue.

## DEDICATION

The dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Carl and Christiana Herring. Their positive influence as role models has made me spiritually, emotionally, and physically prepared for life's challenges. I love Dad and Mom very much. Without them, my professional, personal, and academic achievements would not be possible. My parents, therefore, are a blessing.

PREVIEW

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, there has been an attrition of Black and White male students attending postsecondary institutions and completing degrees according to a report entitled *The Condition of Education*, published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2006). The report, on the other hand, noted that historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) admit a higher percentage of Black male students each year in comparison to undergraduate admissions at predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Similarly, the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO, 2005) reported an increase in enrollment of White male students at HBCUs and additionally noted it was not uncommon for 19 to 50 percent of the population to be White students.

Examining student retention of Black males and comparing White males as a diverse population at HBCUs may seem to be an ironic phenomenon, but only because of the way in which HBCUs have traditionally been conceptualized as consisting of only Black students. In fact, positive outcomes of desegregation in the educational system and a focus on gender mainstreaming in academia may have caused the decline of males which seemed incidental and not an issue when HBCUs admitted students (NAFEO, 2005). The success or failure for retention of Black and White male students may also be reflected in HBCUs' institutional characteristics and changes in them during the 1980's, 1990's, and 2000's.

### Background of the Problem

Although HBCUs were in existence as early as 1837, Black students were not admitted to state-supported, White southern universities until after World War I (Wright,

1987). Hence, minorities were under-represented in higher education prior to the 1940's (Gurin & Epps, 1975). The end of World War II, however, brought about a mass emergence of students aspiring to the goal of higher education after the year 1945. In addition, college enrollment was dominated by White males at that time. Thus, college retention studies later emerged as a means to offer solutions to improve the retention of minority students who were typically classified as female, and/or an ethnic group such as Black males.

HBCUs have traditionally been known for the commitment to provide a quality education for students who have been marginalized elsewhere (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Tinto, 1993). HBCUs, for training teachers, traditionally enrolled fewer males than females (Gurin & Epps, 1975). HBCUs, however, enrolled more Black males compared to PWIs in the 1970's: desegregation led to an increase of Black students into PWIs and White males enrolling at HBCUs. Watson, Terrell, and Wright (2002) noted that in the 1980s, HBCUs were the institutions that awarded 40 percent of their degrees to Black males in postsecondary education. Nevertheless, the latter part of the 1980s began to show a national decline in enrollment and specifically degree completion for male students (Jackson, 2001; Kellom, 2004; NAFEO, 2005; NCES, 2006).

The decline in male students for more than two decades has made this population, specifically Black and White males at HBCUs, an at-risk group. Many at-risk students were believed to be mismatched when enrolled in challenging and/or competitive college situations, where students become demoralized and underperformed leading to failure to graduate (Lerner & Nagai, 2001; Pell, 2003). This theory transfers to models of retention, which suggest that students, particularly male students, have been deficient in areas that



were critically important to student persistence (Small & Winship, 2002; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

Renner (2003) believed that a negative factor has been that students, whether minorities or non-minorities, tend to gravitate toward their respective comfort zones instead of each culture becoming part of a unified mainstream culture. In Renner's theory, male students may not have an academic comfort zone in which to gravitate. Hence, student support services might be basing their model on an approach that is a modified version of those used to promote the success of female students dating back to the 1980s.

Kellom (2004) suggested that postsecondary institutions' failure to introduce retention strategies designed to maintain or increase the number of male students persisting to complete bachelor's degrees may lead to a decline in males at HBCUs. Nora (2005, as cited in Seidman, 2005) believed that male students have "different withdrawal and reenrollment decisions, as opposed to [data shown in] national trends" (p. 145) that do not emphasize the decline in male students. Moreover, at-risk male students have a lack of academic and social experiences that require special attention.

Nora (2005, as cited in Seidman, 2005) noted that college retention and graduation rates have been consistently low for males as reflected across six years of recent studies on post-secondary education. The plethora of research for the past two decades has not resulted in a reversal of the attrition of male students persisting toward bachelor's degrees at HBCUs (Kellom, 2004; Nora, 2005; Seidman, 2005). Other researchers have recommended this area of research be studied to reflect retention factors of gender, race/ethnicity, and type of learning institution.

### Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed was retention in the form of a measurable decline, in enrollment and degree completion, of Black males compared to White males at state-supported HBCUs and a possible nexus in these institutions' retention practices. Although Black and White males were reported as having increased in admissions to HBCUs during the twenty-first century, these students were not re-enrolling and graduating at a rate as high as 17 years ago. This attrition may also be attributable to several HBCUs assumption that the same initiatives may be effective for all students.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study has been to draw attention to the decline of Black males compared to White male students attending and graduating from HBCUs in a centralized state-supported system, which could serve as a type of educational microcosm to suggest institutional relationships in college retention. The growth in minority populations and U.S. demographics over the past 20 years affects academic institutions' approaches to managing student diversity. This type of student diversity has often been in the form of a specific type of institution, gender, race, and/or ethnic background (Tinto, 1975, 1987, and 1993).

This quantitative study examined raw data from the Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the study used a research questionnaire as measurable indicators of college retention for male students. The research specifically focused on the numbers of Black and White male students enrolled and graduated from five HBCUs in North Carolina's state-supported system. The data examined were extracted from January 1989 to December 2005, which allowed a time frame to capture

statistical patterns in college retention of the male population registered at these institutions.

### Significance of the Problem

The significance of the problem was identified in data showing post-secondary institutions to seemingly have a significant increase in the headcount of Black and White male students at HBCUs. However, the proportions based on percentage of these students seem to show a decline of Black males compared to White males in enrollment and degree completion. This study may contribute new knowledge to HBCUs about a population of males that may be at-risk in higher education's system of enrollment and degree completion. Inattention to this problem could lead to decades of insurmountable attrition of male students who neither enroll in college nor complete bachelor's degrees. In addition, it could take decades to overcome the problem if it is not researched and addressed.

### Significance to Leadership

This study may provide research to educational leaders as a means of increasing awareness about college retention of male students and the impact of attrition in that population. Leaders in similar systems of higher education may also find research in this study useful for identifying institutional characteristics related to the retention or non-retention of male students. This research could be important to transformational leadership and effecting change in organizations. In brief, the significance of this research underscored the need for educational leaders to address specifically the retention of male students, who may constitute a population becoming at-risk within the post-secondary system such as Black male students at HBCUs.

### Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was to examine college retention, specifically the measurable decline on Black compared to White male students, at all five historically Black universities in North Carolina's state-supported system between the years 1989 and 2005. Retention was examined using the Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which contained enrollment data and degree completion data. Enrollment data consisted of institutions' total number of students (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, part-timers, and transfers) enrolled for specified years. Completion data represented the total number of bachelor's degrees awarded for specified years.

Enrollment and degree completion have been variables used by researchers and educators to measure retention in the postsecondary environments. According to Seidman (2005), institutional retention is the most basic and understandable of retention measurements based on the proportion of enrolled and/or graduated students each year from the same institution. This study provided analysis into five institutions' commonalities and differences as follows: (a) enrollment data as they pertained to college retention; (b) bachelor's degree completion data as they pertained to college retention; and (c) institutional characteristics as they pertained to retention programs.

### Research Questions

To examine this area of college retention, three research questions were addressed. These questions were the following: (a) what was the measurable decrease of Black male students compared to White male students on enrollment at HBCUs between the years 1989 to 2005?; (b) what was the measurable decrease of White male students

compared to Black male students on bachelor's degree completion at HBCUs between the years 1989 to 2005?; and (c) what was the relationship between HBCUs' institutional characteristics and the measurable decline in retention of Black male students compared to White male students from the years 2001 to 2005?

Criterion variables such as enrollment, bachelor's degree completion, and a 17-year observation period were used to analyze the independent and dependent variables of this study. The independent variables were the numbers of Black and White male students. The dependent variable was the five HBCUs. The measurement of variables for the first two research questions was conducted by nonparametric tests to show the quantity of enrollment and bachelor's degree completion. The third research question was qualitative and it was addressed with a Research Questionnaire designed for this study to identify institutional characteristics as related or unrelated to the retention of Black and White male students between the years 2001 and 2005. The third research question did not require a hypothesis because of its qualitative nature.

#### Hypotheses for Quantitative Questions

Based on the research questions, two hypotheses were proposed for this study as follows:

1. Between the years 1989 to 2005, there was a significant decrease in enrollment of Black males at HBCUs compared to White males.
2. Between the years 1989 to 2005, there was a significant decrease in bachelor's degree completion of White males at HBCUs compared to Black males.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical area under which this research study falls was college retention. According to Berger and Lyon (2005, as cited in Seidman, 2005), the first 250 years of higher education in this country focused on institutional survival rather than on student college retention. When retention studies first began in the twentieth century, however, minority students were not a critical mass of the population on college campuses and as such, they were often excluded from studies about college retention.

*The Journal of College Student Retention* (2001) recognized retention as a necessary precursor to graduation. In the journal's purpose statement, retention is described as an institutional problem when students fail to reach ultimate education goals. The journal's editor observed that, "In spite of all the programs and services to help retain students, according to the U.S. Department of Education, Center for Educational Statistics, only 50 percent of those who enter higher education actually earn a bachelor's degree" (p. 1). Administrative approaches and institutional approaches to college retention vary in emphasis on strategies to help students persist through the postsecondary environment.

One of the most defining moments for postsecondary education in America and for HBCUs was the signing of the Morrill Land Grant Act in 1862. The Act required at least one college in every state to offer programs in agriculture and engineering (Seidman, 2005). These types of programs appealed to male learners who were the majority of college students until the 1980's (Seidman, 2005). However, a report published by the National Center for Education Statistics, (NCES, 2006) reported male students becoming a minority of learners who have been earning bachelor's degrees in

the United States. In 2006, male students accounted for approximately half of the enrollment in professional programs, and were less than 50 percent of the population earning undergraduate degrees in business, math, physical sciences, and agriculture as contrasted with two-thirds of bachelor's degrees earned in the 1980's (NCES, 2006). This study examined the types of programs being offered at all five HBCUs to assess this institutional characteristic.

Regardless of the type of postsecondary degree goal and institution attended, an integral component seemed to be academic integration, as defined by Tinto (1975). One research gap in Tinto's 1975 research model was its design for traditional teenage, White students who were planning to attend a four-year college immediately after high school. Seidman (2005) noted that these students have continued to be the ones most likely recruited by four-year colleges and universities.

In later work, Tinto (1993) recognized that different groups of students had distinctly different circumstances requiring group-specific retention, policies, and programs. In addition, Tinto reasoned that different types of post-secondary institutions also required different retention policies and programs. The theories of Spady (1971) and Astin (1975) served as the catalyst for Tinto's model. Tinto (1975) has been acknowledged as having the most recognized and applied model in the area of college retention (Seidman, 2005). Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) has continued to be the standard for many universities that implement student diversity services including multicultural and academic programs designed to provide information, at a central location, for successful college-level performance.

Specific to this study, the University of North Carolina (UNC) accepted in the year 1981 what has become known as the UNC Consent Decree to increase minority enrollment at each of its 16 institutions in the state's system (Dentler, Baltzell, Sullivan, 1983). This plan was the action taken by the state to address the criteria for increasing the number of Black students at PWIs and White students at the five HBCUs examined in this study. By employing a statistical formula based on the ethnic composition of the state, the UNC Decree required a collective 10.6 percent Black population at PWIs and a collective 15 percent White population at HBCUs (Dentler et al., 1983). In measuring the effectiveness of the Decree, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) noted that "if a remedy could not be implemented within eight years, its basic feasibility should be challenged" (Dentler et al., 1983, p. 46). The end of this eight-year period, in 1989, was the reason this study examines college retention of Black males compared to White males beginning 1989 to 2005.

In the eight-year period between 1981 and 1989, the percentage of Black students at PWIs in the UNC system increased from 7.42 percent to 8.16 percent. In contrast, the percentage of Whites attending HBCUs increased from 11.78 percent to 17.2 percent (Jackson, 2001). The PWIs were under their student diversity goal of 10.5 percent Black students, while the HBCUs exceeded their goal of integration of White students by more than two percentage points. This student diversity goal also included gender mainstreaming, which included females as minority students based on a 1980's feminist model for retention in higher education from the United Nations (Moghadam, 2001).

In 1992, the HBCUs in North Carolina demonstrated a decline in White student enrollment following the *U.S. v. Fordice* (1992) decision (Jackson, 2001). The *U.S. v.*